

## Code of Good Practice for Cross-Border Quality Assurance (CBQA)

### *Preliminary remarks*

All international accreditation activities undertaken by ACQUIN and AQAS refer to the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*, a set of standards for internal and external quality assurance in higher education. The main objective is defined as contributing to a common understanding of quality assurance for learning and teaching across borders and among all stakeholders. Working across borders is thus not only a key concern of the *European Higher Education Area (EHEA)* but is also enshrined in the statutes of AQAS and ACQUIN. Promoting the quality of higher education training courses, study programmes and institutions is therefore the central task of both agencies. The aim of promoting the quality of teaching and learning at all levels is closely linked to the idea of enhancing the diversity and comparability of education, creating transparency and facilitating the recognition of achievements.

In cases where countries do not require the quality assurance agency to be aligned with their national standards and practices, there is usually no common understanding of how cross-border quality assurance (CBQA) should be carried out at a practical level. This sometimes leads to different views on how these international assessments should be conducted.

For this reason, ACQUIN and AQAS have committed themselves to minimum standards for their cross-border activities in order to provide confidence to their clients and partners, as well as to third parties such as ministries and national authorities.

### **1. The objectives of international accreditation procedures**

One of the main objectives of the ESG is to contribute to a common understanding of quality assurance in learning and teaching across borders and among all stakeholders. Their policy is: *“The ESG are not standards for quality, nor do they prescribe how the quality assurance processes are implemented, but they provide guidance, covering the areas which are vital for successful quality provision and learning environments in higher education.”* In line with this intention, both our agencies adopt an approach that is non-prescriptive, placing responsibility for the quality of programmes in the hands of the higher education institutions (HEIs) or tertiary education providers (TEPs).

Both agencies agree with the main aims of the ESG:

- To provide a common framework for quality assurance systems for learning and teaching;
- To enable the assurance and improvement of the quality of higher education in the EHEA and beyond;
- To promote mutual trust, thereby facilitating recognition and mobility within and across national borders;
- To provide information on quality assurance.

Institutions outside the EHEA should also be given the opportunity to link to these criteria in order to promote international exchange and transnational cooperation in higher education.

## 2. Commitment to good practice

### 2.1 The agencies

- Both agencies have undergone **regular external reviews by ENQA**, the *European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education*, and both are **listed in EQAR**, the *European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education* which acts as a whitelist of credible agencies working in line with the ESG. ACQUIN and AQAS are recognised as national quality assurance bodies by the German public authorities and the German Accreditation Council (GAC). Our recognition by German and European organisations confirms that our processes and practices comply with national and European requirements and regulations.
- The agencies ensure by their structure and policies that there is no **interference in their work by third parties**, whether from government, HEIs, industry or professional associations.
- The agencies ensure that there are **appropriately qualified staff members and material resources** available to carry out the procedures.
- Both agencies have their own **internal quality assurance systems** in place to monitor their activities, including feedback from their stakeholders.
- Our key policies, criteria and procedures are **publicly available**.

### 2.2 Procedural good practice

- AQAS and ACQUIN take a **non-prescriptive approach to external reviews**, placing responsibility for programme quality in the hands of HEIs.
- By working with external panels of experts drawn from academia, the labour market and the student body, the aim is to support HEIs in implementing best practice at different levels and in **developing their own culture of quality**.
- Each **panel of experts is individually selected** to meet the requirements of the specific procedure. The qualification profile of the panel of experts is appropriate for the assessment task. It is a prerequisite that the panel has adequate country-specific knowledge.
- To avoid any **conflict of interest**, each member of the panel must sign a declaration of independence to ensure that the panel's judgement is not biased.
- The panels of experts are **prepared by the agency** on key aspects of the individual procedure and the application documents. This is done through handouts for experts provided by the agency and through online or face-to-face meetings prior to the site visit.
- The agencies are constantly working to ensure that the decisions taken by their commissions are **rigorous, fair and consistent**.
- **Appeals and complaints procedures** are in place and publicly available.
- The agencies operate in accordance with all **applicable and actual criteria and guidelines**.

### *2.3 Cooperation, transparency and mutual trust*

- Both agencies see themselves as a **part of the global higher education community** and cooperate with other national, international and/or professional accreditation organisations.
- When working outside their own country, they **inform the national agency or national authorities** in the area in which they are working.
- The **criteria and processes** used in each procedure are known by the HEI and published by the agency.
- It is also important that the organisation seeking accreditation is fully informed of the **legal status** of an international accreditation before the procedure begins.
- Each report summarising the outcomes is published in the **EQAR database** and on the agency's website so that the results, including the names of the panel members, are available to the public.

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