

ENQA TARGETED REVIEW

**EUROPEAN
UNIVERSITY
ASSOCIATION –
INSTITUTIONAL
EVALUATION
PROGRAMME
(EUA-IEP)**

**ALASTAIR DELANEY,
TERESA SÁNCHEZ CHAPARRO,
TARA RYAN, DAMIR SOLAK**
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European Association for
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CONTENTS

CONTENTS	1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	3
INTRODUCTION.....	5
BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW AND OUTLINE OF THE REVIEW PROCESS	5
BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW	5
SCOPE OF THE REVIEW	5
MAIN FINDINGS OF THE 2018 REVIEW.....	6
REVIEW PROCESS.....	6
CHANGES WITHIN THE AGENCY	8
HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM.....	8
IEP'S ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE.....	8
IEP'S FUNDING.....	8
IEP'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES.....	8
FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF IEP WITH THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (ESG) WITHIN THE SCOPE OF THE REVIEW	9
ESG PART 3: QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES	9
ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE.....	9
ESG PART 2: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE	13
ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE.....	13
ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES	16
ENHANCEMENT AREAS.....	20
ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE.....	20
CONCLUSION.....	24
SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS.....	24
OVERVIEW OF JUDGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	24
SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENT	24
ANNEXES.....	25
ANNEX 1: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT	25
ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW	29
ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY	36

ANNEX 4. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW37
DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY IEP 37
OTHER SOURCES USED BY THE REVIEW PANEL 37

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This targeted review analyses the compliance of the European University Association's (EUA) Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG) following the methodology described in the Guidelines for ENQA Targeted Reviews.

The purpose of the review is to ensure IEP's compliance with the ESG in order to renew the agency's membership in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and its registration in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). The review was conducted in the period from December 2022 and January 2024, with a site visit conducted on 20th and 21st September 2023.

Established in 1994, IEP is a European quality assurance agency that applies an enhancement-oriented and context-focused methodology. IEP does not operate within any single specific higher education system. It is primarily active across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) but also beyond. Since its foundation, IEP has conducted 456 evaluations in 50 different countries, 427 of which have been within the EHEA.

Institutions take part in IEP on a voluntary basis and evaluations do not lead to any judgement or decision by IEP or any other third party. The outcome of IEP's evaluation is an evaluation report which contains a number of recommendations in key areas of institutional activity, which are intended to support the institution's strategic development. In order to avoid problems of legitimacy, IEP only evaluates institutions that are formally recognised within their own national system.

Since 2016, IEP has developed the option of evaluations with a special focus. Two focus areas are currently available: internationalisation, and management of research and use of research results. Additionally, institutions that go through an IEP evaluation can opt to sign up for a follow up evaluation after one to three years after the initial evaluation. Finally, IEP also organizes coordinated evaluations, where multiple or even all institutions in a particular country go through an IEP evaluation.

According to the terms of reference, this targeted review has evaluated the extent to which IEP continues to fulfil the requirements of the ESG. The focus areas addressed include those ESGs with a partial compliance conclusion by the EQAR Register Committee after IEP's previous review in 2018, namely ESG 2.3 (Implementing processes) and ESG 3.3 (Independence). Additionally, the panel has also examined the compliance of IEP regarding ESG 2.1 (Consideration of internal quality assurance), which is compulsory for all agencies. The panel has found IEP compliant regarding ESG 2.1, 2.3 and 3.3. Through the triangulation of evidence, the panel has also confirmed IEP's compliance regarding the ESGs that were not specifically addressed, as no significant changes have been introduced from the last full review of the agency in 2018.

IEP has chosen ESG 3.1 (Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance) as the elective enhancement area, a decision coinciding with the organization's forthcoming revision of its strategic plan. A specific workshop was organized as part of the site visit in order to discuss several key issues relevant to the future development of the agency. The discussion process helped pinpoint various subjects that the IEP community could continue to examine in depth during its strategic reflection; these particularly refer to stakeholder involvement, resources, expertise and innovation, and consideration of new activities.

Summary of agency’s compliance with the ESG (Parts 2 and 3)

ESG	Compliance according to the targeted review ¹	Compliance transferred from the last full review ²
2.1	Compliant	N/A
2.2	Not included in the targeted review	Fully compliant → Compliant
2.3	Compliant	N/A
2.4	Not included in the targeted review	Fully compliant → Compliant
2.5	Not included in the targeted review	Fully compliant → Compliant
2.6	Not included in the targeted review	Fully compliant → Compliant
2.7	Not included in the targeted review	Fully compliant → Compliant
3.1	Not included in the targeted review	Fully compliant → Compliant
3.2	Not included in the targeted review	Fully compliant → Compliant
3.3	Compliant	N/A
3.4	Not included in the targeted review	Fully compliant → Compliant
3.5	Not included in the targeted review	Fully compliant → Compliant
3.6	Not included in the targeted review	Fully compliant → Compliant
3.7	Not included in the targeted review	Fully compliant → Compliant

¹ Compliance refers to the focus areas that were evaluated in depth and are part of the Terms of Reference, i.e., standards that were only partially compliant with the ESG during the last full review, ESG Part 2 for newly introduced or changed QA activities of the agency, ESG 2.1 for all QA activities and any standard affected by substantive changes since the last full review. If any of the standards of Part 2 of the ESG are covered due to the newly introduced or changed QA activities, a remark “for new or changed QA activities only” is added in brackets to the compliance assessment.

² Compliance refers to the last EQAR Register Committee decision for renewal of inclusion on the Register, or in case when an agency is not renewing its registration in EQAR, compliance refers to the last ENQA Agency Review report and should its judgment differ from that of the panel, the judgment of the ENQA Board, as stipulated in the membership decision letter by the ENQA Board. Compliance refers to the QA activities of the agency that were reviewed during the previous full review.

INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of the European University Association's (EUA) Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). It is based on an external review conducted between December 2022 and January 2024, and should be read together with the external review report of the agency's last full review against the ESG.

BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW AND OUTLINE OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

ENQA's regulations require all member agencies to undergo an external cyclical review, at least once every five years, in order to verify that they act in compliance with the ESG as adopted at the Yerevan ministerial conference of the Bologna Process in 2015.

Registration on EQAR is the official instrument established by the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) for demonstrating an agency's ESG compliance. An external review is a prerequisite for registration.

As IEP has undergone three successful reviews against the ESG Parts 2 and 3, it is eligible and has opted for a targeted review. The purpose of a targeted review is to ensure the agency's compliance with the ESG by covering standards that were found partially compliant during the agency's last renewal of registration in EQAR and on standards that could have been affected by substantive changes³ during the past five years while at the same time further strengthening the enhancement part of the review.

SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

IEP is carrying out the following activity within the scope of the ESG:

- Institutional evaluation

According to the *Terms of Reference* (ToR), this targeted review will evaluate the extent to which IEP continues to fulfill the requirements of the ESG. The review covers the following areas:

- Those ESGs with a partial compliance conclusion in the EQAR Register Committee's decision regarding IEP's previous review in 2018, namely ESG 2.3 (Implementing processes) and ESG 3.3 (Independence).
- Selected enhancement area: ESG 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

Additionally, as it is required in a targeted review procedure for all agencies, ESG 2.1 (Consideration of internal quality assurance) will be evaluated. No substantial changes or new activities under the scope of the ESG have been introduced since the last review.

The targeted review may also address any matters that come up during the process and that may affect the agency's compliance with the ESG. In the case of IEP's targeted review, the review panel did not identify any matters regarding ESG compliance that would need to be covered apart from the ones listed above and addressed upon in the ToR.

³ e.g. organisational changes, the launch of new external QA activities.

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE 2018 REVIEW

According to the decision of the EQAR Register Committee based on the previous full review conducted in 2018 IEP was found to be in compliance with the following ESG standards:

ESG Part 2: 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7

ESG Part 3: 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7

IEP was found to be in partial compliance with ESG 2.3 (Implementing processes) and ESG 3.3 (Independence).

The panel confirms, through the triangulation of evidence, that no substantial changes occurred within the agency affecting the agency's compliance with the ESGs, and thus acknowledges the status of the following ESG standards from the last full review:

ESG Part 2: 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7

ESG Part 3: 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7

REVIEW PROCESS

The 2023 external targeted review of IEP was conducted in line with the process described in the *Guidelines for ENQA Targeted Reviews*, the EQAR Procedures for Applications, and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference. The panel for the targeted review of IEP was appointed by ENQA and composed of the following members:

- Alastair Delaney (Chair), Executive Director of Operations and Deputy Chief Executive at QAA, UK, quality assurance professional - ENQA nominee;
- Teresa Sánchez Chaparro (Secretary), Professor, Engineering management department, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Spain, academic - ENQA nominee;
- Tara Ryan, Quality assurance professional, Registrar at Irish Management Institute (IMI), Ireland - EURASHE nominee;
- Damir Solak, PhD student in Financial Law and Financial Sciences, Masaryk University, Czech Republic, Member of the European Students' Union Quality Assurance Student Experts Pool - ESU nominee.

Alexis Fábregas Almirall (ENQA Project Officer), acted as the review coordinator. The panel wishes to express their gratitude to Alexis Fábregas Almirall for his expertise and valuable support throughout the review process.

This targeted review of IEP began with the tripartite agreement on the Terms of Reference, followed by the agency's preparation and submission of its self-assessment report (SAR). The ENQA review panel received the SAR on 10th July 2023. The briefing meeting with the review coordinator, including input from EQAR, was organised on the 1st of August 2023. Furthermore, the review panel held a preparatory meeting with the agency on 4th September 2023 and internal preparatory meetings on 4th and 19th September 2023.

The review panel studied the SAR and all the relevant documentation, and conducted a site-visit to interview IEP's internal and external stakeholders, to add further evidence and clarify various details, as well as to deepen their understanding of the agency. The site visit was conducted in IEP's premises and at the Warwick hotel meeting facilities in Geneva on 20th and 21st September 2023.

Based on all the collected information, and the review panel members' internal deliberation during and after the site visit, the panel jointly and unanimously produced this review report in the period between the site visit and November 2023. As part of the report writing process, the panel provided an opportunity for IEP to comment on the factual accuracy of the draft report.

Self-assessment report

As described in IEP's self-assessment report (SAR), the process of preparing the SAR started with the appointment of a Self-Assessment Group (SAG) in November 2022 composed by two members of IEP Steering Committee, an IEP team coordinator, an IEP student member and the IEP Director. The IEP Project Officer acted as secretary of the SAG.

The SAG held several meetings during 2023, during which a SWOT analysis was conducted. An initial draft version of the SAR was produced in May. The SAR was commented on and approved through an email consultation by the IEP Steering Committee. The final version was sent in June 2023 to the ENQA secretariat. The list of members of the SAG as well as the detailed procedure are included in Section 2 of the SAR.

The SAR described the particular IEP approach to external QA and the main changes since the last ESG review. The SAR also included a list of key documents related to the programme.

The SAR subsequently focused on the areas for compliance (ESG 3.3 and ESG 2.1, ESG 2.3) as well as in the chosen enhancement area (ESG 3.1). A SWOT analysis followed by suggestions for future perspectives were included as part of the reflection. The SAR also included links to all relevant additional documentation and information and a number of Annexes with relevant information.

The panel commends the SAR for its exceptional clarity and conciseness. Alongside the supplementary documentation requested by the panel, the SAR served as a robust foundation for facilitating the targeted review process.

Site visit

The visit took place at IEP's premises and at the Warwick hotel meeting facilities in Geneva on 20th and 21st September 2023. In readiness for the site visit, the review panel thoroughly reviewed the SAR and the agency's prepared documentation. The panel made additional documentation requests, all of which were consistently and efficiently fulfilled by IEP.

During the site visit, the review panel conducted ten meetings with the governing and evaluation bodies of IEP as well as with EUA representatives. In particular, these meetings included sessions with:

- The Director and the Secretariat of IEP
- The Steering Committee of IEP
- The EUA Secretariat
- Representatives of the evaluated institutions
- IEP coordinators and pool members
- ESU QA pool coordinator and student experts
- The Governing Board and the Advisory Commission of AQU

As part of the site visit, a workshop session was organized in collaboration with the agency in order to explore the selected enhanced area, a strategic reflection around the evolution of IEP's activities (ESG 3.1).

The meetings with the evaluated institutions, IEP experts and coordinators, student representatives and EUA secretariat were conducted online using Zoom provided by ENQA. All information related to the schedule of the visit as well as the position of the interviewed participants can be found in Annex I.

The site visit took place in a welcoming and open environment. The panel wishes to thank the IEP Secretariat, the IEP Steering Committee and all other involved stakeholders for their candid and supportive attitude throughout the review process. In particular, the panel wishes to acknowledge the proactive and collaborative attitude of the participants to the workshop as well as the quality of the exchanges.

CHANGES WITHIN THE AGENCY

HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

No significant changes have been reported or noted by the panel.

IEP'S ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE

No significant changes have been reported or noted by the panel.

IEP'S FUNDING

No significant changes have been reported or noted by the panel.

IEP'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES

Some changes were introduced in the organization of the site visits after the Covid-19 pandemic. In particular, it was explained that a set of online meetings replaces in part the first site visit, traditionally made as part of the two-site visit model implemented by IEP. This measure intends to reduce the overall cost of the evaluation for IEP and the incumbent institutions as well as its carbon footprint. At the same time, the duration of the visit has been extended from three to four days to ensure proper coverage of all relevant topics and target groups. An additional element has also been incorporated to the follow-up phase, in particular, a follow-up video conference with the evaluated HEIs around three months after the end of the evaluation.

FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF IEP WITH THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (ESG) WITHIN THE SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

ESG PART 3: QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE

Standard:

Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

2018 review recommendation

The 2018 review panel found the agency to be fully compliant regarding this standard and did not formulate any recommendations.

However, the EQAR Register Committee did not follow the panel's conclusion and considered that IEP complies only partially with ESG 3.3. The EQAR Register Committee decision stated the following:

In its last decision of renewal, the Register Committee noted that IEP's independence remains an issue for continuing attention, since IEP is closely integrated within and dependent on EUA, at least at the formal level. The Register Committee has therefore flagged this matter for further attention at that time.

The review panel's findings show that EUA discontinued the practices of formally endorsing the appointment of IEP's Steering Committee members and of appointing a member of the EUA Board as an ex-officio member of the IEP Steering Committee.

While IEP's Steering Committee has full responsibility for the development of strategies and policies, the Register Committee noted that the Steering Committee ensures the strategic development of the IEP in the context of EUA's development priorities.

Moreover, EUA provides the overall support, including physical infrastructure and financial management through separate accounts; both entities have a shared staff and EUA appoints the Director of the IEP Secretariat.

Despite the panel's view that no benefits would come from legally separating the two entities, the Register Committee considered that IEP continues to be part of EUA and, as such, its organizational independence continues to be constrained by the close link and dependency in both legal and practical terms, even if less so than at the time of the previous review.

The Committee concurred with the panel's analysis that IEP operates and undertakes its evaluations independently and that the Steering Committee has full responsibilities for the operations of IEP and its evaluation results. The Committee thus considered that the constrained organisational independence bears a residual risk of a perceived lack of independence, elements of which should be closely considered in IEP's next renewal of inclusion.

The Register Committee concluded that the flag has been partially addressed given the steps taken in further separating IEP from EUA, while the constraints to its organisational independence discussed above remain.

Evidence

The panel had a close look at this matter, reviewed all documentary evidence and triangulated the information during the site visit. While the three forms of independence outlined in the ESGs - organisational independence, operational independence, and independence of outcomes - were all analysed, the panel placed special emphasis on scrutinizing IEP's organisational independence due to EQAR's specific concerns.

Organisational independence

In terms of organisational independence, EUA serves as the legal supporting body of IEP and provides all necessary staff and infrastructure. However, IEP is governed by its Steering Committee (SC), which is composed of a subset of members of the IEP pool. The SC is composed of eight members (seven academic members and a student), one of whom is elected as chair. Academic members are appointed for a renewable period of four years upon proposal by the chair. The student member is appointed upon a proposal made by the European Students Union (ESU) for a mandate of two years. EUA has absolutely no involvement in or influence over the composition of the SC or the appointment of its chair.

The mandate of the Steering Committee is specified in the *IEP's Terms of Reference*, which were last updated in March 2023, and were provided to the panel as part of the additional information requested during the site visit.

In this document, it is stated that the IEP SC has full responsibility for the development and operation of the evaluation programme. In particular, it is specified that the role of the Steering Committee is to:

- Ensure the strategic development of IEP;
- Develop policy priorities and guidelines, including adopting the annual IEP work programme;
- Provide oversight to the IEP Secretariat in the implementation of the IEP work programme;
- Monitor IEP activities, including the approval of the IEP annual report and taking note of the accounts of the Programme;
- Appoint the chair and new Steering Committee members according to pre-established guidelines.

In this same document, it is stated that the EUA Board receives the IEP annual report for information but does not formally endorse it.

The panel also had access to the EUA document *Rules of procedure governing the role, composition and functioning of EUA expert groups*, where it is explicitly stated that IEP is an external service which is independent from EUA.

The panel confirmed throughout the site visit that the infrastructure provided by EUA includes:

- Human resources: the IEP Secretariat is formally employed by EUA.
- Physical infrastructure, including facilities and information systems.
- Financial management: IEP's accounts are managed through EUA's Geneva office, although IEP has a separate budget line.

The panel noted that since 2018 IEP has a new website and a new corporate identity, different and separate from EUA's.

Operational independence

In terms of the evaluation process, evaluations are conducted by an evaluation team designated by the Secretariat. The management of the IEP pool experts is described in the *Guidelines for managing the IEP pool*. New members are recruited when the need arises taking into account factors such as gender, geographical balance or necessary expertise. They are normally co-opted based on proposals from National Rectors Conferences, expert bodies or SC members. Student members are appointed by ESU on the basis of a memorandum of understanding. The final decision regarding the recruitment of new experts lies with the SC.

The roles of the different members of the evaluation team are specified in the *Guidelines for evaluation teams*. Furthermore, in this same document, the expectations towards pool members with regards to professionalism and the avoidance of conflict of interest are set out.

Regarding the internal organization of the agency, the IEP Secretariat is currently composed of three people: An *Administrative Officer*, a *Policy and Project Officer* and the *IEP Director*. The management of the IEP Secretariat, including operational, human resources and financial management, is under the responsibility of the Director, who is appointed by the Secretary General of EUA. The everyday activities of IEP are managed by the IEP Secretariat, who work for IEP on a part-time basis, spending the rest of their time on EUA activities. IEP uses EUA's IT systems, but all documents and records are properly protected and accessible only to IEP's Secretariat.

The panel confirmed during the site visit that both officers only report to the IEP Director. The Director herself is only accountable to the IEP Steering Committee for all tasks related to the IEP Secretariat. The panel could also confirm that a process for setting priorities and distributing workload between IEP and EUA was in place. In particular, the time spent by the Secretariat on EUA and IEP activities is reported in a management system. For each IEP staff member, an approximate indication of the amount of work to be spent on IEP activities is established in the annual work plan.

In terms of finances, EUA handles the financial operations of the agency, allocating resources on an annual basis in alignment with IEPs work plan, always with a focus on preserving the organization's financial sustainability. The panel was made aware during the site visit that, while IEP has historically sustained itself through its activities, EUA has also provided supplementary resources in specific situations.

Independence of formal outcomes

The only outcome of IEP's review process is the evaluation report, which is enhancement-oriented and has no formal consequences or impact over formal outcomes of any third party.

While the Secretariat reviews all reports for consistency and quality, the evaluation team is solely responsible for the findings and recommendations. The chair of the evaluation team signs off on the final report and has the ultimate authority in cases of team disagreement or if the Secretariat suggests editorial changes. Before finalization, the institution is given an opportunity to fact-check the report, but no provision exists for influencing the team's conclusions. Importantly, the reports do not require approval from the Steering Committee or any other body within or outside the agency.

Analysis

As mentioned in the previous section, the panel placed special emphasis on the examination of IEP's organisational independence as this dimension had been particularly flagged by EQAR. Through this process of analysis, and based on the evidence provided, the panel believes that EUA has no role

whatsoever in the governance of IEP. The panel acknowledged that the connection between EUA and IEP serves as a matter of administrative convenience. EUA has no involvement in decision-making processes within IEP. The panel arrived at this conclusion after triangulating multiple pieces of evidence, including the perceptions of the different stakeholders interviewed as well as official documents of EUA and IEP. The panel, however, observed that the documents confirming IEP's organizational independence from EUA were not publicly available. Making these documents accessible to the public could be beneficial to avoid any residual risk of perceived lack of independence.

The panel noted that EUA offers resources and infrastructure, and allocates an annual budget to IEP. Additionally, EUA can be viewed as fulfilling a 'social' role by offering employment opportunities to IEP staff during periods of decreased workload. Furthermore, this arrangement allows IEP to remain faithful to its enhancement-oriented and developmental mission and increases in fact the agency's independence from market forces.

Regarding the possibility of formally separating IEP from EUA, based on the evidence provided regarding IEP organisational independence which was described above, it was straightforward to the panel that it would be unlikely that IEP could survive as a truly separate body, at least without changing its nature. Moreover, through the interviews held, the panel understood that IEP currently benefits from being integrated in a wider ecosystem of higher education actors at the European level. In connection with this discussion, it is worth noting that, in certain national contexts, IEP's level of organizational independence may even be comparable or exceed that of agencies situated within Ministries.

The panel is thus convinced that the current organisation and governance model of IEP ensures full organisational independence as expected in the ESG, and that separating IEP from EUA would pose financial and practical difficulties.

Regarding the operational independence and the independence of formal outcomes, the panel acknowledged that no significant changes had been introduced in the evaluation process or in the internal operation of the agency since the last review. The panel positively valued the dedicated website recently developed and the efforts made by IEP to differentiate from EUA in terms of branding. As a conclusion, the panel affirms that IEP operates with complete independence from external bodies and ensures the independence of outcomes.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

- The panel suggests that the *IEP Terms of Reference* or some other official document stating the organizational independence of IEP from EUA are made publicly visible, as this could be beneficial to avoid any residual risk of perceived lack of independence.

Panel conclusion: compliant

ESG PART 2: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard:

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part I of the ESG.

2018 review recommendation

During the 2018 review, the panel found the agency to be compliant regarding this standard, while making the following suggestion for further improvement:

When IEP publishes a sufficient number of reports based on the 2015 ESG, it would be useful to create a commission to elaborate a follow-up study on the way they address ESG part I.

The EQAR board expressed its agreement with this decision and underlined the suggestion for further improvement made by the panel.

Evidence

The panel noted that IEP's evaluation standards have not undergone any changes since the last review of the agency against the ESG in 2018. As it was made evident to the panel through the SAR and during the visit, the IEP evaluation approach is context-driven and enhancement oriented. It covers all areas of institutional activity, including governance and decision-making, teaching and learning, research, quality culture, service to society and internationalisation. IEP applies four guiding questions throughout the evaluation process:

- What is the institution trying to do?
- How is the institution trying to do it?
- How does the institution know it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

The panel noted that the ESGs are included as an annex in the *Guidelines for Institutions*. Moreover, in this same document, it is recommended that a chapter of the self-evaluation report is dedicated explicitly to institutional quality culture.

Numerous references to the different ESGs are made in the *Handbook for writing evaluation reports* addressed to the evaluation teams, and a clear mapping between IEP guiding questions and the ESGs is included in the *Evaluation report template*. The panel reviewed several IEP evaluation reports and noted that while ESG considerations are explicitly mentioned at various points and integrated naturally into the text, there is no systematic signposting or dedicated chapter specifically addressing them.

During the site visit, the panel learned that team coordinators bear the responsibility for ensuring comprehensive coverage of all ESG aspects. It was also observed that these coordinators are expected to possess extensive knowledge and awareness of the ESGs. The panel also noted that the IEP secretariat conducts formal checks on evaluation reports without a specific focus on evaluating ESG coverage.

The table below, extracted from IEP's SAR, outlines the coverage of the ESG Part I in the IEP guiding questions for institutions (part of the *IEP Guidelines for Institutions*) and the IEP report template for evaluation teams (part of the *Handbook for writing IEP evaluation reports*):

Standard	Guiding questions for the self-evaluation process as outlined in the IEP Guidelines for institutions	Points to be addressed by evaluation teams in their report as outlined in the Handbook for writing IEP evaluation reports
1.1 Policy for quality assurance	What does the institutional quality assurance policy consist of?	Chapter 3: Quality culture. Quality assurance policies for all aspects of institutional activity (cf. ESG 1.1, also ESG 1.9)
1.2 Design and approval of programmes	How does study programme design and approval function in the institution? Who does what?	Chapter 4: Teaching and learning. Design and approval of study programmes (cf. ESG 1.2)
1.3 Student centred learning teaching and assessment	How and to what extent does the institution implement a student centred approach implemented to teaching and learning?	Chapter 4: Teaching and learning. Approaches to student-centred learning, teaching and assessment (cf. ESG 1.3)
1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	What are the policies and processes covering the various phases of the student life-cycle?	Chapter 4: Teaching and learning. Policies and processes for all phases of the student life-cycle (cf. ESG 1.4)
1.5 Teaching staff	How does the institution ensure the competences of its staff? What kind of staff development structures and processes are in place?	Chapter 2: Governance and institutional decision-making. Issues related to funding and human resources, including staff recruitment and development (cf. ESG 1.5) Chapter 4: Teaching and learning. Support for teaching staff (cf. ESG 1.5)
1.6 Learning resources and student support	Is the organisation and content of student support services adequate to meet the goals set? How effective are student support services in	Chapter 4: Teaching and learning. Student support services and resources (cf. 1.6)

	enhancing the achievement of students?	
I.7 Information management	The question “How does the institution know it works?” refers to the internal monitoring processes and practices (sometimes also referred to as institutional research activities) in place in the institution and the information collected feeds into the strategic management of the institution	Chapter 3: Quality culture. Collection and use of information (cf. ESG 1.7)
I.8 Public information	How does the institution communicate information about its activities to its internal and external stakeholders?	Chapter 2: Governance and decision making: Communication of information about institutional activities to the internal and external stakeholders (cf. ESG 1.8) Chapter 4: Teaching and learning. Availability of information (cf. ESG 1.8)
I.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	What are the tools used to monitor and evaluate the institution’s different activities? Specifically related to teaching and learning mission: how are programmes monitored and reviewed?	Chapter 3: Quality culture. Quality assurance policies for all aspects of institutional activity (cf. ESG 1.1, also ESG 1.9) Chapter 4: Teaching and learning. Monitoring and review of study programmes (cf. ESG 1.9)
I.10 Cyclical external quality assurance	<i>Institutions are asked to include information about their status with regards to external quality assurance requirements in the ‘Institutional Context’ section of the self-evaluation report.</i>	Chapter 3: Quality culture. External quality assurance of the institution (cf. ESG 1.10)

Analysis

After a comprehensive analysis of the available evidence, the panel found a commendable balance in the implementation of evaluations, effectively addressing Part I of the ESG while accommodating the flexible, enhancement-oriented approach embraced by IEP.

Specifically, the panel noted that stakeholders interviewed advised that ESG compliance is a necessary element in IEP evaluations, but that it is a starting point rather than an end point. While the quality culture and the quality enhancement are clearly key elements of the IEP methodology, the evaluation approach is organic in nature, which enables an understanding of an institution's integrated approach to its mission.

The panel thus concluded that ESG Part I considerations are integral to the IEP evaluation methodology as expected in ESG 2.1. Should IEP seek to broaden the applicability of its model, a potential enhancement could involve the explicit signposting or dedicated referencing of each of the ESG Part I criteria within the reports. This could be especially beneficial for higher education institutions that aim to utilize IEP reports also in a compliance context.

Panel commendations

- The panel commends IEP for its flexible approach, as it not only allows for the effective addressing of Part I of the ESG but also remains adaptable and enhancement-focused, qualities appreciated by higher education institutions.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

- IEP could consider systematic signposting of ESG Part I criteria in evaluation reports, especially where an institution may use the report in view of local accreditation or any other compliance context.

Panel conclusion: compliant

ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

Standard:

External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include:

- a self-assessment or equivalent
- an external assessment normally including a site visit
- a report resulting from the external assessment
- a consistent follow-up

2018 review recommendation

The 2018 panel found this standard to be compliant while stating the following recommendation:

IEP should continue its efforts to increase and promote the usefulness of progress reports and encourage all evaluated institutions to submit them.

However, the Register Committee concluded that IEP complies only partially with ESG 2.3, due to the fact that the current follow-up model does not allow for a consistent follow-up for all evaluated institutions. In particular, the Register Committee stated:

The Committee considered that a progress report, which is a relatively light requirement, could possibly be a feasible follow-up for all evaluated institutions. The Committee took note of the panel's concern that making the requirement more stringent would pose a risk of turning progress reports into a purely formal requirement, but considered that such a risk had not necessarily to become true. Moreover, the same argument could be used against any obligatory element in quality assurance, or obligatory quality assurance as such.

The Register Committee therefore concluded that the flag was partly addressed and could not follow the review panel's judgment of compliance, but concluded that IEP complies only partially with ESG.

Evidence

While the panel considered all elements regarding this standard, special focus was placed in analysing the follow-up mechanisms, in order to address EQAR's particular concerns.

The panel learnt through the SAR and IEP's key reference documents, that IEP adheres to the four-stage procedure mandated by ESG 2.3 for all its evaluations: self-evaluation by the HEI; external assessment including a site visit; an evaluation report; follow-up phase. All details of the procedure are explained in the *Guidelines for Institutions*, the *Handbook for writing evaluation reports*, and the *Evaluation report template*.

The panel noted that no significant changes had been introduced in the self-evaluation phase or regarding the preparation of the evaluation report. However, as explained in the SAR, some slight changes have been introduced in the organization of the site visits after the Covid-19 pandemic. In particular, a set of online meetings replaces in part the first site visit, traditionally made as part of the two-site visit model implemented by IEP. This measure intends to reduce the overall cost of the evaluation for IEP and the incumbent institutions as well as its carbon footprint. At the same time, the duration of the visit has been extended from three to four days to ensure proper coverage of all relevant topics and target groups. The panel noted that these changes were positively appraised by interviewed stakeholders. Various additional structural and management elements had also been introduced in the follow-up phase as it is explained below.

The panel closely analysed the existing follow-up mechanisms in place and collected additional evidence throughout the site visit. Through the SAR and several IEP key documents, the panel was made aware that IEPs follow-up system comprises various elements:

- *Follow-up video conference*

All institutions are requested to participate in a follow-up video conference with the IEP secretariat around three months after the end of the evaluation in order to discuss their experience and provide feedback on the process. This modality was incorporated into the process during the Covid-19 pandemic.

- *Progress report*

All institutions are also requested to send a progress report to IEP one year after the completion of the initial evaluation since 2012. This progress report is examined by the evaluation team who provides feedback on the implementation of the recommendations.

- *Follow-up evaluation*

Evaluated institutions are offered the option to undergo a follow-up evaluation conducted by IEP within one to three years following the initial assessment. Upon the institution's request,

IEP assembles a team of four evaluators, typically including two members from the original evaluation team. This follow-up evaluation aims to assess the impact of the initial evaluation, delve into changes that have occurred during the interim period, and provide additional motivation for subsequent improvements.

The panel noted that all evaluated institutions currently go through the follow-up video conference. However, despite the obligatory nature of the progress report, only 40% of evaluated institutions have submitted their progress reports since the last ENQA review in 2018, which nonetheless represents an improvement over the 13% rate achieved in the previous period.

Regarding follow-up evaluations, since the last external review, around 27% of regular evaluations (excluding coordinated evaluations) were follow-up evaluations. Since IEP's establishment, around 16% of all regular evaluations have been follow-up evaluations. In a bid to further incentivize follow-up evaluations and underscore the significance of completing the entire evaluation cycle, in 2015, IEP introduced a 'combined package' option. This allows institutions to commit to a follow-up evaluation at the time of their initial evaluation registration.

During the site visit, the panel investigated the relevance and usefulness of the current follow-up system for higher education institutions. Based on the interviews, the panel believes that the institutions being evaluated viewed follow-up as a significant and value-adding component of the evaluation process. Institutions cited various instances where follow-up visits and progress reports had proven instrumental in facilitating and even catalysing change management processes.

The panel also probed the factors that deter institutions from engaging in the IEP follow-up process. One potential explanation suggested was the loss of continuity or impetus for change stemming from leadership transitions within the evaluated institutions. Another hypothesis hinted at the challenge posed by evaluation reports containing a substantial volume of recommendations and improvement suggestions, which some higher education institutions may find overwhelming. Nevertheless, the panel observed that the agency had not conducted a formal investigation into this matter.

The panel also delved into the strategies employed by the IEP secretariat to enhance the rate of submission for follow-up reports by the institutions. Notably, the panel observed that the obligation to submit a progress report is explicitly outlined in the initial contract that institutions sign. Additionally, IEP's *Guidelines for Institutions* emphasize both the significance and mandatory nature of the progress report.

Furthermore, under the stewardship of the new IEP secretariat, a more comprehensive timeline management system has recently been introduced. This includes the issuance of multiple reminders regarding crucial deadlines, particularly directed towards the institutions undergoing evaluation.

Lastly, the panel observed that IEP is currently contemplating the introduction of a structured follow-up webinar for institutions that underwent evaluation in the preceding year. This webinar would serve as a platform for sharing experiences regarding the review's impact and its subsequent implementation within the institutional context. IEP is aiming to incorporate this initiative starting from the 2023-2024 evaluation round.

Analysis

As mentioned in the previous section, the panel placed special emphasis on the examination of IEP's follow-up phase in order to address the concerns raised by EQAR.

After reviewing all available evidence, the panel acknowledged the efforts made by IEP to increase the rate of submission of progress reports since the last review. The communication about the significance and the obligatory nature of the follow-up report contained within various key IEP

documents was found to be effective and clear. Furthermore, the panel positively assessed the proactive attitude of the IEP secretariat towards reminding institutions of key submission dates and believes that this recently-introduced measure should naturally lead to further improvements of the submission rate. The follow-up video-conference was well received by institutions and assisted IEP to maintain contact with institutions after a review.

However, the panel could not overlook the fact that a 40% submission rate is still considerably low and that further efforts should be deployed by IEP in order to improve in this regard. Indeed, the panel is of the opinion that the submission of a progress report or another form of lighter follow-up mechanism should be feasible for all evaluated institutions. The low submission rate was somewhat perplexing to the panel because the IEP evaluation process is voluntary, implying a certain level of commitment from the outset. Furthermore, the evaluation process is centered on enhancement, which should naturally motivate institutions to assess their progress and actions after a specific period.

While various hypotheses have been suggested as potential explanations for the low submission rate, the panel believes that a systematic study should be undertaken to gain a deeper understanding of the issue. A more comprehensive diagnosis would empower IEP to make an informed decision regarding whether to continue with the current form of its follow-up system, perhaps while incorporating additional incentivizing approaches, or to explore alternative mechanisms to ensure systematic follow-up. During this period of reflection and within the broader scope of IEP's strategic deliberations, the panel encourages IEP to embrace a strategic and forward-thinking perspective. Indeed, the follow-up process presents an opportunity for IEP to engage with institutions in a unique manner, one that can foster further collaboration and initiatives.

On balance, the panel felt that IEP had taken positive action to address this issue and that, whilst it had not yet achieved complete involvement of all reviewed institutions in follow-up activity, it had improved since they were last reviewed and they had taken further actions that were likely to improve this further.

Regarding the other stages of the evaluation process, the panel was assured of their adherence to ESG 2.3 by thoroughly scrutinizing the SAR and pertinent documents, such as the *Guidelines for Institutions*, the *Handbook for writing evaluation reports*, and the *Evaluation report template*. Furthermore, the panel's confidence was reinforced by the testimonies collected during the site visit, all of which confirmed the consistent alignment with ESG 2.3.

Panel commendations

- The panel commends the proactive attitude of IEP at implementing different measures for increasing the rate of submission of follow-up reports.

Panel recommendations

- The panel recommends that IEP conducts a systematic study to gain a deeper understanding of the reasons behind the low submission rate of follow-up reports by higher education institutions, and elaborates an improvement plan based on the findings.

Panel conclusion: compliant

ENHANCEMENT AREAS

ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

IEP chose ESG standard 3.1 as the elective enhancement-oriented standard for this process, a decision coinciding with the organization's forthcoming revision of its strategic plan. Within this framework, IEP considered the external review as an opportunity to gather external input on its mission and undertakings. As Europe's quality assurance landscape continues to evolve, with an increasing number of agencies offering enhancement-oriented reviews at the institutional level and engaging in cross-border quality assurance, IEP recognizes the importance of clarifying its specificity and added value to ensure clear understanding by potential programme users.

Moreover, IEP aspires to elevate the number of evaluations conducted annually and eventually expand its geographical reach and the scope of its activities. In particular, the possibility of evaluating European University Alliances offers potential avenues for broadening the organization's scope of activities. IEP communicated to the panel a number of key questions currently under consideration in the context of their strategic deliberation:

- To what extent and through which kind of processes could and should IEP involve a larger set of stakeholders in shaping the design of IEP? Which stakeholders and at which levels (European or national) could bring added value to the process?
- How is its mission and objectives translated into the activities of IEP, and specifically, its review model?
- What approaches could IEP adopt in a new context of more agencies offering institutional level evaluation and/or enhancement focused QA?
- How better to communicate IEP's uniqueness in its mission and objectives to the HE sector in Europe (and beyond)?

IEP conveyed to the panel that they did not anticipate receiving definitive answers to these questions. Instead, they expressed their hope that the evaluation could help them in further articulating their reflection process while potentially introducing new perspectives and dimensions they had not previously considered.

Considering this, the panel suggested hosting a 90-minute workshop on the topic. As for the participants, IEP had the freedom to select the individuals for the discussion, with the panel offering guidance on the recommended minimum and maximum number of attendees. Six individuals participated in the workshop, comprising two members of the IEP secretariat, including the director, and four members of IEP SC. SC representatives included the incoming and outgoing presidents, another SC member, and the student representative.

During the workshop the panel proposed a particular discussion dynamic with the following objectives:

- Present a range of viewpoints and perspectives concerning the degree of change needed within IEP and the specific direction of that change.
- Discern the primary areas of consensus and the key issues that required further discussion within the organization.

In order to open the discussion, participants were initially asked to position themselves in a continuum between the following extremes:

1. IEP is well respected, strategic and of great value to institutions. They like what it does and how it is managed. Any lack of take-up is purely down to marketing and so can be solved easily. Once people understand the value they will want it.
2. IEP is losing relevance in the current environment and we need to radically transform the product or its target market and its management or replace it with something else.

After a brief discussion where participants were asked to explain their reasons for choosing a particular position, two discussion groups were formed incorporating a diversity of attitudes toward change.

Subsequently, the two groups worked in parallel around four discussion topics. As a strategy for stirring the discussion, the panel enunciated the following four claims positioned as “provocations”:

1. Is your SC in the right place to take forward a new vision for IEP - are the people the right ones, are they thinking forward not simply backwards, are they willing to take risks?
2. Engaging in new review models such as the review of a university alliance would involve cost - how would IEP resource this?
3. Is IEP in a position to offer sufficient challenge to universities to adapt to their changing context (e.g. ESDG, corporate academies, micro-credentials, University Alliances etc.), or just evaluate what they already do?
4. If IEP did not exist, would you create something that is the same as IEP is currently? Is IEP a quality assurance method or is it really a consultancy, training programme, advisory service for Universities to go from Good to Great or Excellent?

As a final step, the two groups exchanged their respective conclusions on an open format.

The discussion process was altogether very rewarding for the panel, as the six members involved in the discussion showed a high degree of involvement and enthusiasm. They not only presented diverse viewpoints but also effectively built upon each other's ideas and positions. The panel incidentally observed that IEP's organizational culture appeared to be one of consensus, embodying the essence of democracy and open dialogue. It was made evident to the panel that while different views were exposed, there was an essential core of agreement among IEP members around the value of the IEP enhancement-led and context-specific approach.

At the same time, the discussion process helped pinpoint various subjects that the IEP community could continue to examine in depth, with the aim of reaching a consensus and shaping a potential future strategy for the agency. These are:

- *Stakeholder involvement*

While the current IEP governing body incorporates a wealth of expertise, it came out as a result of the discussion that the agency should consider carefully how to involve other perspectives, both in the evaluation teams and in the Steering Committee.

During the discussion, the possibility of establishing new advisory bodies was raised as a viable option. Two specific concepts garnered significant attention: first, the involvement of early career professionals in a formal capacity, possibly in an advisory body, and second, the incorporation of specialist reviewers in specific circumstances. These ideas were underscored as noteworthy avenues for consideration.

- *Resources*

During the discussion, it became apparent that a strategic conversation regarding how to secure the necessary resources for planning and developing potential new activities in IEP (i.e. the evaluation of European University Alliances) had yet to be initiated. These resources might potentially be obtained from EUA or other European-level funding bodies, necessitating proactive discussions with them by IEP.

- *Expertise and innovation*

The participants in the discussion unanimously agreed that the current approach of the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) places significant emphasis on institutions conducting self-assessments as a central component. Indeed, the evaluation process is designed to assist institutions in formulating a coherent strategy aligned with their unique objectives.

During the workshop, there was an open dialogue regarding the potential of IEP to foster innovation within higher education institutions that undergo evaluation. It was evident that if IEP intends to play a more prominent role in promoting innovation, experts involved should remain well-informed about the evolving landscape and trends within the higher education sector. This knowledge is crucial for them to deliver valuable insights to higher education institutions.

This could necessitate the introduction of training or reflective activities for experts. However, the specifics of such initiatives require further exploration and discussion among stakeholders.

- *Consideration of new activities*

During the discussion, participants weighed the advantages and disadvantages of adhering to an ESG compliant review approach versus viewing the work as more akin to consultancy or support. There was a consensus among participants that various critical questions should be explored further in this context. These questions include:

- What does it mean for IEP to provide a premium service?

- What kind of impact does IEP aim to achieve within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and higher education institutions?
- What is the impact of current IEP evaluations?

In this regard, it was suggested that undertaking an impact assessment of IEP evaluations could assist in clarifying the fundamental value proposition of the Institutional Evaluation Program (IEP). Such an assessment would provide valuable insights, facilitating a deeper understanding of IEP's impact and aiding in the ongoing reflection on potential new activities or services.

As a final word, the panel expresses its hope that the suggested seminar has proven to be beneficial for the agency and has contributed to enhancing its strategic deliberations.

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

ESG 2.1

The panel commends IEP for its flexible approach, as it not only allows for the effective addressing of Part I of the ESG but also remains adaptable and enhancement-focused, qualities appreciated by higher education institutions.

ESG 2.3

The panel commends the proactive attitude of IEP at implementing different measures for increasing the rate of submission of follow-up reports.

OVERVIEW OF JUDGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ESG 3.3: Compliant

ESG 2.1: Compliant

ESG 2.3: Compliant

The panel recommends that IEP conducts a systematic study to gain a deeper understanding of the reasons behind the low submission rate of follow-up reports by higher education institutions, and elaborates an improvement plan based on the findings.

In light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the review panel is satisfied that, in the performance of its functions, IEP is in compliance with the ESG.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENT

ESG 3.3

The panel suggests that the *IEP Terms of Reference* or some other official document stating the organizational independence of IEP from EUA are made publicly visible, as this could be beneficial to avoid any residual risk of perceived lack of independence.

ESG 2.1

IEP could consider systematic signposting of ESG Part I criteria in evaluation reports, especially where an institution may use the report in view of local accreditation or any other compliance context.

ANNEXES

ANNEX I: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

TIMING/ TYPE OF MEETING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
10.00 - 11.00 60 min Online	Review panel's kick-off meeting and preparations for site visit	<i>Internal meeting</i>
15.30 - 17.30 120 min Online	An online clarifications meeting with the agency's resource person to clarify the agency's changes since the last full review against the ESG and to understand the background and motive of the agency's choice of the self-selected ESG standard for enhancement (next to the overall HE and QA context of the agency)	<i>Director, IEP Policy and Project Officer, IEP Chair, IEP Steering Committee (SC) Former Chair, IEP Steering Committee (SC)</i>
60 min (16h30) In person	Review panel's pre-visit meeting and preparations for day 1	<i>Internal meeting</i>
[20.10.2023 – Day 1]		
09.00-09.30 30 min	Review panel's private meeting	
09.30 – 10.15 45 min In person	Meeting with Self-Assessment Group	<i>ESU student expert in QA IEP pool of experts Former member, IEP SC Member, IEP SC</i>
15 min	Review panel's private discussion	
10.30 – 11.15 45 min In person	Meeting with representatives of IEP secretariat	<i>Administrative Officer, IEP Policy and Project Officer, IEP</i>
15 min	Review panel's private discussion	
11.30 – 12.15 45 min Online	Meeting with EUA secretariat	<i>Secretary general, EUA Director of Finance and Administration, EUA</i>

TIMING/ TYPE OF MEETING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
12.15 – 13.15 60 min	Lunch (panel only)	
13.15 – 14.15 60 min Online	Meeting with representatives of evaluated institutions	<p>Brno University of Technology, Czech Republic Rector Vice-rector</p> <p>Charles University, Czech Republic Member of the Rector's Board for strategy, analysis and transfer Head of Analysis and Strategies Department</p> <p>University of Medicine and Pharmacy Grigore T. Popa, Romania Rector</p> <p>Pan-European University, Slovakia Vice-rector (with interpreter) Dean of the Faculty of Law Dean of the Faculty of Informatics</p> <p>University College Cork, Republic of Ireland Director of Quality Enhancement</p>
15 min	Review panel's private discussion	
14.30 – 15.00 30 min Online	Meeting with IEP team coordinators	<p>Professor Emerita, Academic Quality and Enhancement, University of Chester</p> <p>Senior Researcher, University of Jyväskylä</p> <p>Dean Accreditation & Quality Management, Vienna University of Economics and Business</p>
15 min	Review panel's private discussion	
15.15 – 15.45 30 min Online	Meeting with IEP pool members	<p>Team member and Vice-Rector of Research and Innovation, Universitat Internacional de Catalunya</p> <p>Team member and Vice-President for Q. Management, University of Alcalá</p> <p>Team member and retired Professor</p>

TIMING/ TYPE OF MEETING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
		<i>Team chair and Rector, University of Music and Performing Arts, Graz</i>
15 min	Review panel's private discussion	
16.00 – 16.30 30 min Online	Meeting with ESU QA pool coordinator and student experts	<i>ESU student expert and former member of IEP SC ESU student expert ESU student expert</i>
16.30 – 17.30 60 min	Wrap-up meeting among panel members and preparations for day 2	
	Dinner (panel only)	
[21.09.2023] – Day 2		
09.00 – 10.00 60 min	Review panel's private meeting	
10.00 – 10.45 45 min In person	Meeting with the IEP leadership	<i>Director, IEP Chair, IEP Steering Committee (SC) Former Chair, IEP Steering Committee (SC)</i>
15 min	Review panel's private discussion	
11.00 – 11.45 45 min In person	Meeting with the Steering Committee	<i>Nine members of the SC including the former and current president</i>
15 min	Review panel's private discussion	
12.00 – 13.00 60 min	Lunch (panel only)	
13.00 – 14.30 90 min	Session/workshop to discuss chosen enhancement area ESG 3.1	<i>Director, IEP Policy and Project Officer, IEP</i>

TIMING/ TYPE OF MEETING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
In person		<i>Former Chair, IEP Steering Committee Chair, IEP Steering Committee Member, IEP Steering Committee ESU student expert</i>
14.30 – 15.30 60 min	Meeting among panel members to agree on final issues to clarify	
15.30 – 16.15 45 min In person	Meeting with IEP leadership to clarify pending issues	<i>Director, IEP Policy and Project Officer, IEP Chair, IEP Steering Committee (SC) Former Chair, IEP Steering Committee (SC)</i>
16.15 – 17.15 60 min	Private meeting between panel members to agree on the main findings	
17.15 – 17.45 30 min In person	Final de-briefing meeting with staff and Board members of the agency to inform about preliminary findings	<i>Director, IEP Policy and Project Officer, IEP Administrative Officer, IEP IEP Steering Committee members</i>

ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW

Targeted review of Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) against the ESG

Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE

The present Terms of Reference were agreed between IEP (applicant), ENQA (coordinator) and EQAR.

December 2022

1. Background

Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) has been registered on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) since 2009 and is applying for renewal of EQAR registration based on a targeted external review against *the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* coordinated by - The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

IEP has been a member of ENQA since 2000 and is applying for renewal of ENQA membership.

IEP is carrying out the following activity within the scope of the ESG:

- Institutional evaluation

All these activities will be included on the agency's profile on the EQAR website and linked to DEQAR database. NB: The agency may not upload reports from other activities to DEQAR.

Should anything change between the time of application and the review i.e. any type of changes that may affect the registered agency's substantial compliance with the ESG, the agency is expected to inform EQAR at the earliest convenience⁴.

2. Purpose and scope of the targeted review

This review will evaluate the extent to which IEP continues to fulfil the requirements of the ESG. The targeted review aims to place more focus on those parts that require attention and provide sufficient information to support IEP's application to EQAR.

The review will be further used as part of the agency's renewal of membership in ENQA.

⁴ See EQAR's policy on reporting changes <https://www.eqar.eu/register/guide-for-agencies/reporting-and-renewal/>

2.1 Focus areas

- A) Standards with a partial compliance conclusion in the Register Committee's last renewal decision:
 - a. 2.3 Implementing processes
 - b. 3.3 Independence
- B) Standards 2.1 to 2.7 for the following activities:
 - a. not applicable
- C) Standards affected by other types of substantive changes:
 - a. not applicable
- D) ESG 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance;
- E) Selected enhancement area: ESG 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance
- F) Other matters regarding ESG compliance that come up during the targeted review and that may affect the agency's compliance with the ESG (if any).

These issues should be investigated by the review panel as far as possible, providing an analysis and conclusion on the ESG standard(s) concerned.

3. The review process

The review will be conducted in line with the requirements of *the EQAR Procedures for Applications* and *the Policy on Targeted Reviews*, and following the methodology described in the *Guidelines for ENQA Targeted Reviews*.

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

- Agreement on the Terms of Reference between EQAR, IEP and The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA);
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel by The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA);
- Self-assessment by IEP including the preparation and publication of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to IEP;
- Preparation and completion of the final review report by the review panel;
- Scrutiny of the final review report by ENQA's Agency Review Committee;
- Analysis of the final review report and decision-making by the EQAR Register Committee;
- Decision on ENQA membership by the ENQA Board;

- Attendance to the online follow-up seminar.

3.1 Independence of the review coordinator

The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) has not provided remunerated (e.g. consultancy) or unremunerated services to IEP during the past 5 years, and conversely IEP has not provided any remunerated or unremunerated services to The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

3.2 Nomination and appointment of the review team members

The review panel consists of four members including an academic employed by a higher education institution, a student member and one other expert. At least one of the members is from another country.

The fourth panel member should be a quality assurance professional that is currently employed by a QA agency and has been engaged in quality assurance within the past five years. When requested by the agency under review or when considered particularly pertinent, a second quality assurance professional or other stakeholders (for example, a representative of the labour market) may be included in addition to the four panel members. In this case, an additional fee is charged to cover the reviewer's fee and travel expenses.

One of the members serves as the chair of the review panel, and one as the review secretary. At least one of the reviewers is an ENQA nominee (most often the QA professional[s]). At least one of the reviewers is appointed from the nominees of either the European University Association (EUA) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), and the student member is always selected from among the ESU-nominated reviewers. If requested, the labour market representative may come from the Business Europe nominees or from ENQA. At least two panel members come from outside the national system of the agency under review (if relevant).

The panel will be supported by the ENQA Review Coordinator (an ENQA staff member) who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA's requirements are met throughout the process. The Review Coordinator will not be the secretary of the review and will not participate in the discussions during the site visit interviews.

Current members of the ENQA Board are not eligible to serve as reviewers.

ENQA will provide the agency with the proposed panel composition and the curricula vitae of the panel members to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The reviewers will have to agree to a non-conflict of interest statement that is incorporated in their contract for the review of this agency.

Once appointed, The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) will inform EQAR about the appointed panel members.

3.3 Self-assessment by IEP, including the preparation of a self-assessment report

IEP is responsible for the execution and organisation of its own self-assessment process and shall take into account the following guidance:

- Self-assessment includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;

The self-assessment report is expected to contain:

- a description of the self-assessment process and the production of the SAR;
- a description of changes occurred within the agency since the last full review, including any eventual changes in the higher education system and quality assurance system in which the agency predominantly operates, the agency's structure, funding, its list of external quality assurance activities within the scope of the ESG, as well as the changes in the agency's quality assurance activities abroad (where relevant);
- a section that addresses the focus areas of the review, including standards that were considered to be partially compliant with the ESG in the last full review as well as ESG 2.1 and one self-selected ESG standard for enhancement (see 2.1 Focus areas);
- a SWOT analysis of the agency as a whole;
- for each of the individual standards enlisted above (see section 2) a consideration of how the agency has addressed the recommendations as noted in the previous EQAR Register Committee decision of inclusion/renewal (if applicable).

The report is well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which IEP fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and continues to meet the ESG and thus the requirements for EQAR registration.

The self-assessment report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat, which has two weeks to carry out a screening. The purpose of a screening is to ensure that the self-assessment report is satisfactory for the consideration of the panel. The Secretariat will not judge the content of information itself but rather whether or not the necessary information, as outlined in the *Guidelines for ENQA Targeted Reviews*, is present. If the self-assessment report does not contain the necessary information and fails to respect the requested form and content, the ENQA Secretariat reserves the right to ask for a revised version within two weeks.

The final version of the agency's self-assessment report is then submitted to the review panel a minimum of eight weeks prior to the site visit. The agency publishes the completed SAR on its website and sends the link to ENQA. ENQA will publish this link on its website as well.

3.4 A site visit by the review panel

The review panel will draft a proposal of the site visit schedule considering the aspects included under the focus area (as defined under point 2.1 of the Terms of Reference).

The schedule will include an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review panel during the site visit. The approved schedule shall be given to IEP at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

The site visit should enable the review panel to explore how the agency has addressed the standards where it has been found to be partially compliant (if the case), aspects of substantive change, consideration of internal quality assurance (ESG 2.1) and the self-selected ESG standard(s) for enhancement. The panel will include extra time during the site-visit to address any other arising issues (if the case) that might have an impact on the agency's compliance with the ESG.

The site visit will close with a final de-briefing meeting outlining the panel's overall impressions but not its judgement on the ESG compliance of the agency.

Prior to the physical site visit, the panel attends a joint briefing call between the panel, The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and EQAR to clarify the review expectations and address any possible arising matters.

In advance of the site visit (at least two weeks before the site visit), the panel will organise an obligatory online meeting with the agency. This meeting is held to ensure that the panel reaches a sufficient understanding of:

- The specific national/legal context in which the agency operates;
- The specific quality assurance system to which the agency belongs;
- The key characteristics of the agency's external QA activities.

3.5 Preparation and completion of the final review report

The review report will be drafted in consultation with all review panel members and correspond to the purpose and scope of the review as defined under articles 2 and 2.1. In particular, it will provide a clear rationale for its findings concerning each ESG. When preparing the report, the review panel should bear in mind the *EQAR Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG* to ensure that the report will contain sufficient information for the Register Committee for application to EQAR⁵.

The external report will present the facts and analysis reflecting the reality at the time of review. This will form the main basis for the Register Committee's decision making.

⁵ See here: <https://www.eqar.eu/about/official-documents/#use-and-interpretation-of-the-esg>

A draft will first be submitted to the ENQA Review Coordinator who will check the report for consistency, clarity, and language. After panel has considered coordinator's feedback, the report will go to the agency for comment on factual accuracy. If IEP chooses to provide a position statement in reference to the draft report, it will be submitted to the chair of the review panel within two weeks after the receipt of the draft report.

Thereafter, the review panel will take into account the statement by IEP and submit the document for scrutiny to ENQA's Agency Review Committee and then to EQAR along with the remaining application documents (self-evaluation report, Declaration of Honour, statement to review report-if applicable). The report is to be finalised normally within 2-4 months of the site visit and will normally not exceed 30 pages in length. All panel will sign off on the final version of the external review report. The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) will provide to IEP the [Declaration of Honour](#) together with the final report.

4. Publication and use of the report

IEP will receive the expert panel's report and publish it on its website once the ENQA Agency Review Committee has validated the report. Prior to the final validation of the report, the ENQA Agency Review Committee may request additional (documentary) evidence or clarification from the review panel, review coordinator or the agency if needed. The review report will be published on ENQA website regardless of the review outcome. The report will also be published on the EQAR website together with the decision on registration, regardless of the outcome.

ENQA will retain ownership of the report. The intellectual property of all works created by the review panel in connection with the review contract, including specifically any written reports, will be vested in ENQA. In the case of an unsuccessful application to EQAR, the report may also be used by the ENQA Board to reach a conclusion on whether the agency can be admitted/reconfirmed as a member of ENQA.

5. Decision-making on EQAR registration and ENQA membership

The agency will submit the review report via email to EQAR before expiry of the agency's registration on EQAR. The agency will also include its self-assessment report (in a PDF format), the Declaration of Honour and any other relevant documents to the application to EQAR (i.e. annexes, statement to the review report).

EQAR is expected to consider the review report and the agency's application at its Register Committee meeting in (February/March 2024). The Register Committee's final judgement on the agency's compliance with the ESG as a whole can either be substantially compliant (approval of the application) or not substantially compliant (rejection of the application). In case of a positive decision (substantially compliant

with the ESG), the registration is renewed for a further five years (from the date of the review report).

The decision on ENQA membership by the ENQA Board will take place after EQAR Register Committee decision.

To apply for ENQA membership, the agency is requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation for applying for membership and the ways in which the agency expects to contribute to the work and objectives of ENQA during its membership. This letter will be considered by the Board together with the confirmation of EQAR listing when deciding on the agency's membership. Should the agency not be granted the registration in EQAR or the registration is not renewed, the decision on ENQA membership will be taken based on the final review report, the application letter, and the statement from the Agency Review Committee. The decision on membership will be published on ENQA's website.

6. Indicative schedule of the review

Agreement on Terms of Reference	December 2022
Appointment of review panel members	February 2023
Self-assessment report (SAR) completed by IEP	2 June 2023
Screening of SAR by ENQA Review Coordinator	June 2023
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	July 2023
Briefing of review panel members	July 2023
Review panel site visit	September 2023
Submission of the draft review report to ENQA Review Coordinator	November 2023
Factual check of the review report by the IEP	December 2023
Statement of IEP to review panel (if applicable)	December 2023
Submission of review report to The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)	January 2024
Validation of the review report by the Agency Review Committee	February 2024
EQAR Register Committee meeting and decision on the application by IEP	February/March 2024
Decision on ENQA membership by the ENQA Board	Spring 2024

ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY

EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
ESG	<i>Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015</i>
EUA	European University Association
HE	higher education
HEI	higher education institution
IEP	Institutional Evaluation Programme
QA	quality assurance
SAR	self-assessment report
SC	Steering Committee

ANNEX 4. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW

DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY IEP

- Governance of IEP: Roles and Responsibilities
- Pool Management Guidelines
- Guidelines for the IEP Secretariat
- Guidelines for the Evaluation Teams
- Handbook for writing IEP reports (2022)
- Handbook for writing IEP reports (2023)
- Annual Report 2021-2022
- IEP Evaluations Survey Results Analysis
- Work Programme 2022-2023
- Overview of the IEP Pool
- Overview of the IEP Evaluations
- Evaluations since 2018-2019
- Strategic Priorities 2020-2025
- IEP Steering Committee Meeting Minutes- March 2023
- EUA Board Meeting Minutes- April 2023
- EUA Board Meeting Minutes- June 2023
- Rules of Procedures for EUA Expert Bodies
- IEP Survey to Institutions 2022

OTHER SOURCES USED BY THE REVIEW PANEL

- IEP website
- IEP evaluation reports

ENQA TARGETED REVIEW 2024

THIS REPORT presents findings of the ENQA Targeted Review of the European University Association – Institutional Evaluation Programme (EUA-IEP), undertaken in 2023.