

INQAAHE GUIDELINES OF GOOD PRACTICE (GGP)



EXTERNAL REVIEW REPORT



Organisation	Commission for Academic Accreditation, CAA
Place	Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
Date of the visit	Monday 29-March-2021 to Thursday 1-April-2021

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INTRODUCTION

INQAAHE GGP External Review Process

As part of its ongoing goal of continuous enhancement and promoting quality culture in the higher education field at a national and international level, the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) requested and submitted its application to the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) to conduct an external review of its procedures, policies and operations against the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice (GGP) for its re-alignment.

The guidelines are part of INQAAHE's mission and are intended to promote high standards of professional practice by QA agencies (see [Annex 1](#) for reference).

CAA GGP Re-Alignment Process

On the 2nd of October 2020, the CAA submitted its letter of intent in respect to submitting its Self-Evaluation Report (SER) to attain the INQAAHE GGP Re-alignment. After the INQAAHE Recognition committee approved CAA's eligibility, the CAA submitted its SER on 15 November 2020 containing a comprehensive submission portfolio including, CAA's SER main document, 6 main tables, 2 main figures, 6 external links to CAA standards and manuals, 17 appendices with 86 additional supporting document, and a virtual tour video of CAA's offices.

The Review and assessment were carried out against the GGP (as revised in 2016) and following the [INQAAHE Procedural Manual 2018](#) by an independent panel of international experts appointed by INQAAHE (see [Annex 2](#)). The GGP Review Panel (the Panel) composed by:

- **Dr Rolf Heusser (Review Panel Chair):** International Higher Education & QA Expert. University of Zurich, Switzerland
- **Ms Rowena Pelik (Panel Secretary):** Director of H.E. Quality Enhancement Services Ltd (HEQES) Scotland, UK
- **Dr Mark Frederiks (Panel QA Expert):** Coordinator International Policy (Flanders) with NVAO (Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders), based in The Hague

Due to COVID-19 travel constraints in April 2021, it was no longer possible to hold a face-to-face site visit in Abu Dhabi, UAE. In agreement with INQAAHE and CAA, a 4-day virtual site visit was scheduled from Monday 29 March 2021 to Thursday 1 April 2021.

The 4-days of the GGP virtual site visit included a program agenda with 9 Interview sessions, 1 call back meeting and 1 final Oral Exit Report (See [Annex 3](#)). During the virtual site visit, the Panel spoke to 46 interviewees, among the interviewees were:

- Ministry of Education (MoE)
- CAA Management and Leadership
- CAA Commissioners and staff
- HEIs QA Representatives
- CAA International Partners

- CAA External Review Team (ERT) members
- Student Representatives, current students, and alumni

After the virtual site visit concluded, the members of the Panel drafted the first version of the report, which was shared with the CAA for a factual accuracy check, before being submitted to the INQAAHE Board of Directors for final decision.

Refer to [Annex 4](#) for the Summary Assessment of Compliance of INQAAHE Guidelines.

About the Commission of Academic Accreditation (CAA)

The Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) was established in August 2000 and is the UAE Federal Government Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. Working collaboratively with relevant international and local authorities in the Emirates, the CAA has a key leadership role in securing and developing the quality of higher education in the UAE.

As a matter of the highest priority, it sets out to safeguard academic standards and to assure and enhance the quality of learning opportunities provided for students in UAE's higher education institutions (HEIs). It undertakes licensure of HEIs in the UAE and accreditation of their award-bearing academic programs. To be entered in the National Register and receive Federal Recognition any HEIs offering post-secondary education in the UAE must receive institutional licensure and accreditation of their degree, diploma and certificate programs that are of at least one-year study duration. CAA accreditation incorporates recognition of Diploma (Associate Degree), Higher Diploma (Advanced Diploma) bachelor's degree, postgraduate diploma and certificate, master's degree and Doctorate Degree. These degrees range from level 5-10 as per the National Qualifications Framework (QF Emirates) of UAE.

The CAA's mission seeks *"To work collaboratively with stakeholders to assure the quality, effectiveness, and continuous improvement of higher education, safeguard its system, embrace its diversity and foster the quality culture"*. Moreover, the CAA's vision targets *"To provide leadership by upholding quality assurance standards that promote distinction, innovation and academic excellence within higher education"* and aligned to the following strategic goals:

1. Provide institutional licensure and program accreditation services using contemporary and internationally inspired Standards and efficient procedures.
2. Facilitate the reform of Academic Programs to improve their outcomes and graduates' market readiness, and to increase international recognition.
3. Ensure an organizational culture that is based on a robust internal quality assurance system.
4. Foster capacity building activities and a creative work environment within the Commission to further enhance its efficiency and effectiveness.
5. Adopt collaborative practices with other accreditation and education agencies to promote effective quality assurance processes and advance the role of the Commission as a leader of quality enhancement in higher education.

Higher Education in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)

The UAE is a federation of seven Emirates that was established as an independent nation in 1971. The country has experienced considerable development over the last half-century, and its population has expanded from 279,000 in 1971 to approaching 10 million by 2018. When the nation was established, education was provided by 74 schools and there were no higher education institutions (HEIs). There are now more than 1,300 schools and the standard school education model is 6+3+3. On completion of the twelfth year (K-12), students sit for the national Tawjihyya (Secondary School Certificate) examination, which has been used as a criterion for entry into post-secondary education.

The federal government’s commitment to the role of education in national development is recognized in *Article 23* of the UAE Constitution and successive national plans and strategies, including to the present, have prioritized the development of education in the country. The UAE University based in Al Ain was the first university in the UAE and was founded in 1977. This was followed in 1998 by the establishment of both Zayed University, with campuses in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, and the Higher Colleges of Technology, with multiple campuses to offer mainly vocational and technical programs.

These federally funded institutions are referred to as the ‘federal’ or ‘public’ HEIs and provide free education to UAE Nationals and a small number of expats. The large majority of UAE Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are non-federal HEIs and most of these are operated for profit. This sector has undergone rapid expansion over recent years. By the year 2000 when CAA was established, there were 16 licensed HEIs, and this has increased five-fold through to 2019 (Table 1).

This expansion is not inclusive of (41) additional HEIs that do not operate under the Ministry of Education (MoE) licensure. Parallel to the noticeable growth in the number of licensed HEIs, there has been a continuous growth in the number of accredited programs that these institutions offer due to the growth both in the number of institutions and in the number of programs offered by each institution as they establish their presence in the UAE.

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
HEIs	16	18	19	21	24	28	37	41	47	50	54	59	62	64	70	74	74	76	78	81

Table 1 CAA Licensed UAE HEIs 2010-2019.

The total UAE higher education student population, according to government statistics, has remained relatively stable in recent years (Table 2).

Year	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Students	118,193	128,279	139,405	139,559	137,255	136,861	131,448	131,314

Table 2 UAE higher education student population 2012-2020

Some Emirates have established *Free Trade Zones* that are devoted to hosting branch campuses of foreign universities that are accredited in their home countries. Approximately a third of HEIs operating in the UAE are located in these *Free Trade Zones*, although an increasing number of these institutions have applied for and been granted licensure by the

MoE according to the *CAA Standards*. The current list of CAA-licensed institutions and accredited programs can be accessed through the following links:

<https://www.caa.ae/Pages/Institutes/All.aspx>

<https://www.caa.ae/Pages/Programs/All.aspx>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of its continuous commitment to quality enhancement the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) requested INQAAHE to conduct an external review against the GGP of INQAAHE. The assessment was based on written documentation of CAA and a virtual on-site visit end of March 2021. This is the second GGP alignment exercise of CAA, the first one had been successfully passed in 2016. The framework for the alignment exercise are the criteria set out in INQAAHE's 2018 GGP.

The review made clear that CAA is a well-recognised, credible organisation, trusted by the HEIs, the HE stakeholders and the public. CAA has a clear legal basis and is recognised as the federal authority for QA in the UAE. The agency has a clear governance structure and good organisation; the agency is independent in its decision making. The high level of competence of CAA's management, its commissioners, its external reviewers, and its administrative staff enable CAA to carry out its reviews effectively and efficiently. CAA operates with transparency, integrity, and great professionalism. The agency is open to international developments in QA and has a fine attitude of reciprocal learning from and with other QAAs.

CAA is continuing to build up its internal QM system. A priority is certainly the establishment of a Management Information System with basic statistics and information about the achievements of CAA. The results of this can be used for the steering of the QAA as well as for accountability purposes.

The review processes of CAA are very reliable and robust, the clarity of CAA's standards, its guidelines and its manuals make it clear for HEIs what expectations are required to be met to pass a program accreditation or an institutional licensing exercise. All relevant documents concerning CAA's external quality assurance procedures are made public on CAA's website. The agency has introduced a series of measures to assure consistency in its review processes and connected decision-making process. The decisions of CAA are impartial, rigorous, based on internationally comparable standards; there is appropriate follow-up in place for institutions with insufficient performance. CAA has clear and published procedures for handling appeals and complaints. CAA's quality assurance procedures for transborder education are clear and students have access to complete information about awards delivered by institutions licensed by CAA.

During the review the panel detected many commendable areas in CAA's performance. Some of these points concern the extensive international benchmarking of CAA and its fine collaboration with academic and professional QAAs around the globe for mutual benefit. Other positive areas concern the close cooperation with local HEIs and the clarity of CAA's review instruments, which match the highest level of quality. Enhancement areas mainly concern internal QA systems and the publication policies of CAA (experts' reports, reporting on own activities). CAA is certainly in a good position to publish the results of its substantial achievements.

Great engagement and commitment at all levels of CAA were noticed by the panel. This fact and the good support the agency has from HEIs, students and the international community, are the foundations to move ahead and to reach all stated goals. The recommendations of

the 2016 GGP expert team have been taken up well, with a variety of enhancement measures implemented by CAA since the last GGP alignment test.

Based on all these findings, the panel concludes that CAA is compliant with the GGP of INQAAHE and recommends to the INQAAHE board to confirm the continuous alignment of CAA with these international best practice guidelines.

ASSESSMENT OF COMPLIANCE WITH THE INQAAHE GUIDELINES OF GOOD PRACTICE

I. The structure of the External Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA)

The EQAA is a recognised, credible organisation, trusted by the higher education institutions and the public. It has adequate mechanisms to prevent conflicts of interest in the decisions it makes; its staff has the needed skills to carry out the functions associated to external QA. The EQAA has the needed resources to carry out their mission.

Not compliant Partially compliant Substantially compliant Fully compliant

1.1 Legitimacy and recognition

The panel **affirms** that CAA has a sound legal basis as it is an entity of the Ministry of Education, established by Ministerial Decree, and is recognised by law as the federal authority for QA in the UAE.

CAA has an active international collaboration policy that fits its profile, strives for joint procedures, and seeks alignment with networks such as INQAAHE, Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE), and those in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). In 2019 the Ministry commissioned the QAA in the UK to carry out an independent assessment of the alignment of CAA with international best practice, using the INQAAHE GGP as a reference. The international composition and experience of the Council of Commissioners and external review teams further contribute to CAA's alignment with international best practice. The 6th revision of CAA standards was highly influenced by the work of QAA and the advice from international experts associated with renowned QA agencies.

The agency is to be **commended** for its extensive international benchmarking that has informed the renewal of its 2019 Standards. The bilateral cooperation outside the Arab States has been particularly aimed at QA agencies in the USA, UK, Australia, New Zealand, and Hong Kong. The panel **suggests** CAA to further enlarge its possibilities for cooperation and benchmarking with QA agencies in other regions (Asia, Latin America, Europe, Africa).

CAA has a clear and comprehensive policy on conflict of interests and confidentiality. This policy applies to both Commissioners and reviewers who have to signal potential conflicts of interest to the Director. The panel **affirms** that CAA has a conflict of interest management system in place as is also evidenced through its employment contracts for staff and in the conflict of interest declarations for reviewers.

1.2 Mission and purposes

In 2020 CAA agreed on a new mission statement and strategic plan. The previous mission statement was revised in 2016, demonstrating a regular updating of the mission statement. The current mission and vision are clearly formulated and lead to the identification of five strategic goals which are underpinned by nine core values to which CAA commits to adhere. Each of these five strategic goals are supported in the Strategic Plan 2020-2024 by strategic

objectives that are made measurable by specifying the initiatives that should be taken and associated key performance indicators (KPIs). These KPIs contain both long-term as short-term (“one-time”) indicators.

The revision of the strategy was carried out in consultation with staff and stakeholders, as was confirmed by them in the interviews. CAA is aware that it must put more effort into following up on the progress made on the strategic plan and its ensuing actions. The panel considers that acting on progress would be highly facilitated if the current relatively high number of KPIs (23 “regularly maintained KPIs”) would be reduced to a more manageable number.

The panel, therefore, **recommends** CAA to reduce the number of KPIs and agree on a limited set of KPIs that have the highest priority for the agency.

1.3 Governance and organisational structure

CAA can be characterised as a semi-independent entity within the Ministry, as it is independent in its operations and decision-making but relies for its financial and staff policies to a large extent on the Ministry. The agency is led by the Executive Director who reports to the Minister of Education. Decisions and recommendations on CAA’s procedures, standards, the composition of external review teams, activities and associated policies are made by the Council of Commissioners.

Stakeholders are involved through engaging HEIs in the discussions on the revisions of standards, as well as their feedback on CAA’s procedures through regularly conducted surveys. The large pool of external reviewers from international and UAE HEIs who give feedback regarding the procedures and standards in which they participate adds an additional layer of stakeholders’ involvement. The panel **suggests** CAA to consider how students (or student representatives at UAE HEIs) could be involved as well in future revisions of standards and feedback on CAA procedures.

In 2020, a Strategic Advisory Committee was established to further involve stakeholders and provide CAA with strategic advice related to the main activities, goals, and objectives of CAA. This committee consists of at least seven experts from UAE’s (higher) education sector who are not affiliated with CAA and meet at least once a year, communicating in between meetings through electronic means. The minutes of the committee meetings show that the advice, comments, and questions of this committee are indeed relevant for CAA.

The panel **affirms** that CAA has a clear governance structure that is consistent with its mission and objectives and allows it to involve stakeholders from HEIs.

The Council of Commissioners, which is the decision-making body of CAA, consists of the Director, the Deputy Director of Academic Affairs, and all Commissioners. There are currently eleven Commissioners with wide-ranging, senior experience, both internationally and in the UAE or its region. The Commissioners are independent of the institutions that are reviewed, and adequate measures are in place to prevent potential conflicts of interest. The independence of the external reviewers that make recommendations to the Council is also safeguarded by their Council appointment and conflict of interest statements. The decisions of the Council are final, i.e. these do not have to be approved by another body. Only in the

case of newly established HEIs does the Minister take the final decision on the approval of the licensure.

The panel **affirms** that CAA is independent in its decision-making.

The reviews are carried out by a large pool of some 1,000 independent external reviewers, most of them are international experts but increasingly also UAE experts are trained to join review teams. The Commissioners and external reviewers are supported by CAA staff for the administrative and logistical aspects of the reviews.

Based on the formal requirements, CVs and interviews the panel concludes that Commissioners, external reviewers, and CAA staff are highly competent in carrying out their responsibilities in an effective manner.

Meeting the expected timelines for reviews has been a challenge in recent years but CAA has addressed this issue by increasing the number of Commissioners. The introduction of a risk-based approach is also anticipated to relieve pressure as it should decrease the total number of reviews. Moreover, the panel heard in the interviews that the plans that are made for a new IT system will contribute to the digitalisation of processes and increasing the efficiency of the procedures.

The panel **affirms** that CAA's organisational structure, and especially the high competencies of its Commissioners, external reviewers, and administrative staff, make it possible to carry out the reviews effectively and efficiently.

The panel **affirms** that CAA has a strategic plan that helps to assess its progress and plan for future developments, especially if the large set of KPIs will be reduced (see section 1.2).

1.4 Resources

CAA has good recruitment policies in place, specifying clear and appropriate recruitment criteria for staff, reviewers, and Commissioners. The panel noted from the interviews that new Commissioners report that they receive an excellent induction and are mentored by experienced Commissioners. CAA staff are able to follow training courses offered by the Ministry or other organisations. The panel **affirms** that CAA has well-trained, appropriately qualified Commissioners, reviewers and staff, who are able to conduct external evaluation effectively and efficiently in accordance with its mission statement and its methodological approach.

CAA shares its office space with the MoE. The panel took a virtual tour through the offices and concluded that CAA has good, modern facilities and sufficient office space and equipment. The CAA budget is provided by MoE and mainly covers the employment of Commissioners, conference and travel costs. Employment costs of the Director and administrative staff, as well as operational expenses, are covered by other MoE accounts. Although these constraints imply that CAA has limited autonomy over its total budget the panel was assured that additional MoE resources are available if this is needed, e.g. for the implementation of the IT system and the recent expansion in the number of Commissioners.

The honoraria and travel costs of reviewers are borne by the reviewed institutions. External reviewers who have worked for CAA for many years told the panel that the remuneration had changed little over time. The panel **suggests** CAA to update its remuneration policy for reviewers, taking into account annual inflation.

The panel **affirms** that CAA has the physical and financial resources needed to fulfil its goals and carry out the activities that emerge from its mission statement and objectives.

Professional development activities of Commissioners are paid from the CAA budget; training courses for CAA staff are provided by the MoE. The agency provided a list of professional development activities followed by staff. Although administrative staff confirmed in the interviews that they have sufficient opportunities for following specific training according to their and CAA's requirements it is important that CAA is able to plan and shape the agenda for the development of its staff.

The panel **affirms** that CAA provides systematic opportunities for the professional development of its staff. The panel **suggests** CAA move beyond its current statement on staff development to develop a fuller policy in line with strategic priorities and available staff competences in order to support a long-term vision on staff development and the required resources.

Commendations

1. The panel **commends** CAA for its extensive international benchmarking that has informed the renewal of its standards.

Affirmations

1. The panel **affirms** that CAA has a sound legal basis as it is an entity of the Ministry of Education and is recognised by law as the federal authority for QA in the UAE.
2. The panel **affirms** that CAA has a conflict management system in place as is also evidenced through its employment contracts for staff and in the conflict of interest declarations for reviewers.
3. The panel **affirms** that CAA has a clear governance structure that is consistent with its mission and objectives and allows it to involve stakeholders from HEIs.
4. The panel **affirms** that CAA is independent in its decision-making.
5. The panel **affirms** that CAA's organisational structure, and especially the high competencies of its Commissioners, external reviewers, and administrative staff, make it possible to carry out the reviews effectively and efficiently.
6. The panel **affirms** that CAA has a strategic plan that helps to assess its progress and plan for future developments.
7. The panel **affirms** that CAA has well-trained, appropriately qualified Commissioners, reviewers, and staff, who are able to conduct external evaluation effectively and efficiently in accordance with its mission statement and its methodological approach.
8. The panel **affirms** that CAA has the physical and financial resources needed to fulfil its goals and carry out the activities that emerge from its mission statement and objectives.
9. The panel **affirms** that the CAA provides systematic opportunities for the professional development of its staff.

Recommendations

1. The panel **recommends** CAA reduces the number of KPIs and agrees on a limited set of KPIs that have the highest priority for the agency.

Conclusion of the Panel's assessment

The panel concludes that CAA is **substantially compliant** with the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practices in examination section 1 “The structure of the External Quality Assurance Agency”.

II. Accountability of the EQAA

The EQAA has in place policies and mechanisms for its internal quality assurance, which demonstrate a continuing effort to improve the quality and integrity of its activities, its response to the changes to the context in which it operates and its links to the international community of QA.

Not compliant Partially compliant Substantially compliant Fully compliant

2.1 Quality assurance of the EQAA

Transparency, integrity and professionalism are incorporated in the operation and regulations of CAA, e.g. the federal code of ethics and professional conduct. Adherence to ethical and professional standards are also incorporated in CAA's values, strategy and transparency of processes as included in the Policies and Procedures Manual. The latter manual and the Handbook for External Review Teams also articulate the expectations on confidentiality. The panel found additional evidence in the professional conduct of Commissioners, staff and reviewers as witnessed in the interviews. The fact that in the last five years no complaints or appeals have been lodged for perceived lack of integrity, professionalism or ethical behaviour gives further credibility to the professionalism of CAA. The panel **affirms** that CAA operates with transparency, integrity and professionalism and adheres to ethical and professional standards.

CAA has taken important steps in the last years to develop an internal QA system, most notably by the development of measurable strategic objectives and associated KPIs. A next step should be to continuously monitor the achievement of the objectives and KPIs. The feedback that is gathered from stakeholders following the reviews is currently not sufficiently linked to CAA's strategic objectives.

The management information system does not yet enable monitoring functions effectively. The efforts to develop a new IT system are therefore much needed. Once this system is in place it should deliver the data that are needed for both the strategic and operational steering of the agency.

The panel **suggests** CAA's continues with the implementation of the Management Information System (MIS) at pace and to includes it as part of its wider Internal Quality Management (IQM).

The panel **recommends** CAA acts to ensure that the MIS will deliver data that enable the monitoring of the achievement of its strategic and operational objectives as well as the effectiveness of its operations.

CAA acknowledges that it currently does not undertake a periodic internal review of its own activities and that data collection and analysis in support of self-improvement has been limited. Such periodic reviews of the activities, as well as analyses and reflections on the outcomes of procedures are important for continuous improvement of the agency. Thematic analyses across HEIs could provide better insights in causes and possible remedies for quality shortcomings of some HEIs, which is a recurring challenge according to interviewed reviewers.

The outcomes of such analyses could also lead to reflections on what CAA can do to encourage quality improvement in HEIs, for instance by providing seminars on good practices or focusing CAA's processes more effectively on addressing improvement in those areas where shortcomings and challenges are most common.

The panel **recommends** that CAA follows up on its intention to establish a process for regular internal review, and that it considers data collection and analyses on themes that are most relevant for addressing shortcomings of quality in HEIs.

In 2019 the CAA has been externally reviewed by WFME and previously by the QAA, PwC and, in 2016, by INQAAHE. It is clear from the documents provided that any recommendations arising from these reviews have been considered and addressed. The agency commits itself to new external (INQAAHE) reviews on a 5 years cycle.

The panel **affirms** that CAA is subject to external reviews at regular intervals, not exceeding five years, and that there is evidence that required actions are implemented and disclosed.

2.2 Links to the QA community

The agency is aware of international developments in quality assurance through its collaboration agreements with other QA agencies and its participation in the relevant international and regional QA networks. Moreover, the international expertise and network of its Commissioners and reviewers create an environment in which knowledge of international QA developments is constantly updated and shared within CAA. The significant changes in the 2019 Standards, such as the adoption of a risk-based approach and updated expectations for e-learning and experiential learning, provide further evidence of the influence of international trends and QA practices on the operations of the agency. The panel **affirms** that CAA is open to international developments in quality assurance and has mechanisms that enable it to learn about and analyse the main trends in the field.

In the past five years CAA has collaborated, or is in the process of setting up collaboration, with several QA agencies overseas: ACPE (USA), QAA (UK), the government of Uzbekistan, TEQSA (Australia), AACSB (USA), and HKCAAVQ (Hong Kong). Cooperation has taken place in various areas such as exchange of good practices, capacity building, joint visits and projects.

The panel **commends** CAA for its collaboration with other QA agencies, CAA's policy of seeking joint visits, and consideration of two-ways capacity-building as evident in the assistance provided in Uzbekistan, and CAA's support and information-sharing activities with ANQAHE and neighbouring countries.

Commendations

1. The panel **commends** CAA for its collaboration with other QA agencies, policy of seeking joint visits, and consideration of capacity-building as evident in the assistance provided in Uzbekistan, and CAA's support and information-sharing activities with ANQAHE and neighbouring countries.

Affirmations

1. The panel **affirms** that CAA operates with transparency, integrity and professionalism and adheres to ethical and professional standards.
2. The panel **affirms** that CAA is subject to external reviews at regular intervals, not exceeding five years, and that there is evidence that required actions are implemented and disclosed.
3. The panel **affirms** that CAA is open to international developments in quality assurance and has mechanisms that enable it to learn about and analyse the main trends in the field.

Recommendations

1. The panel **recommends** CAA acts to ensure that the MIS will deliver data that enable the monitoring of the achievement of its strategic *and operational* objectives as well as the effectiveness of its operations.
2. The panel **recommends** that CAA follows up on its intention to establish a process for regular internal review, and that it considers data collection and analyses on themes that are most relevant for addressing shortcomings of quality in HEIs.

Conclusion of the Panel's assessment

The panel concludes that CAA is **substantially compliant** with the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practices in examination section 2 "Accountability of the EQAA".

III. The EQAA's framework for the external review of quality in higher education institutions

The main concern of the EQAA is the promotion of quality education and student achievement. In doing this, it recognises that quality is primarily the responsibility of the higher education institutions themselves, and, supports this principle in its criteria and procedures. These promote internal quality assurance (IQA) and provide higher education institutions with clear guidance on the requirements for self-assessment and external review.

Not compliant Partially compliant Substantially compliant Fully compliant

3.1 The relationship between the EQAA and higher education institutions

CAA standards provide clear evidence that HEIs are expected to be responsible for the quality and quality assurance. HEIs are asked to systematically monitor, review, and evaluate the effectiveness of all their operations and educational programs. Since the last GGP review process of INQAAHE in 2016 CAA has made considerable efforts to slim down its QA framework thus contributing to a lower level of workload on the side of HEIs and increasing the effectiveness of its system. Some of these commendable steps concern the separation of licencing and accreditation processes, the introduction of a risk-based approach, joint procedures with other QAAs and more.

The panel, therefore, **affirms** that CAA recognizes that the main responsibility for quality and quality assurance lies with the institutions. And that CAA promotes the establishment of strong internal QA systems on the institutional and program level. The efforts of CAA to reduce the workload and bureaucracy on the side of the assessed institutions and programs are seen as a positive development. A good balance of rigour and efficacy has been reached. Nevertheless, it is **suggested** to continue to reflect on how best to slim down the external QA system of CAA and to find the optimal relationship between the rigour of assessment and flexibility for HEIs.

3.2 The definition of criteria for external quality review

CAA standards are outcome-oriented and recognize institutional diversity, mixed teams of external reviewers and commissioners safeguard this diversity. Thus, the panel **affirms** that CAA recognizes and values institutional diversity. The standards and criteria developed by CAA are revised regularly, the last revision took place in 2019.

The consultation process took its time, but it involved all relevant stakeholders and also international experts. The panel **commends** this inclusive approach for the revision of the standards and encourages CAA to follow this participative approach in the future, too. CAA standards take specific learning and teaching situations into account; specific standards and regulations are available for online teaching, transnational education etc. The panel, therefore, **affirms** that the CAA assessment framework takes specific aspects related to different modes of provisions into account. The panel also affirms that CAA is operating according to best international practices in these respects and that the CAA standards address all relevant areas of examination, both at the institutional and program level.

They allow HEIs to improve and structure their operational work. Detailed descriptions of CAAs follow up procedures are published in the supplementary guidelines to the standards and the procedural manual. The panel, therefore, affirms that effective follow up mechanisms do exist. They provide an effective follow up of the outcomes of the external reviews. Finally, the panel commends CAA for its clear and detailed information on how criteria are applied and what evidence is expected to fulfil the standards. CAA standards are precise, unambiguous, understandable, robust, and measurable.

3.3 The external review process

According to CAA rules, external procedures follow an international format: SER, external review (mostly on-site visit), structured follow up. Moreover, the panel **affirms** that CAAs external review processes are very reliable. They are based on published criteria and clear information. Expectations of CAA concerning the review process are outlined in a very clear and detailed way, it's clearly stated what it expects from HEIs. The agency has to be **commended** for this clarity. The **commendations have to be extended** to the fact that CAA provides very qualified commissioners and carefully selected external experts for its reviews.

The panel also wants to specially **commend** CAA for the implementation of special training for domestic external reviewers. This will enhance quality and consistency in the review teams and foster the relationship and trust between CAA and the expert team members. The panel **affirms** that CAA provides mechanisms to prevent conflicts of interests in its external assessments: a declaration of "no conflict of interest" has to be signed by all external team members, the decision-making process is very robust and formal appeal and complaints systems are in place.

The panel **commends** CAA for its efforts to assure consistency of its decisions: consistency measures include standards and guidelines, training and briefing of experts, homogeneous template, and timetables, 4 eyes-principle before proposals for decision are brought to the council of commissioners. Delays in the completion of the external assessments have occurred in the past but CAA has taken corrective measures on this point. One of the measures taken concerns the doubling of the numbers of commissioners working for CAA. In addition to that, the relationship between CAA and the HEIs has been improved so that a good level of trust is visible today.

3.4 The requirements for self-evaluation

The process of an external review by CAA is described in all details in the procedural manuals, the panel **affirms** that there is clear guidance to the program or institution undergoing an external review by CAA.

Commendations

1. The panel **commends** CAA for the inclusive and participative approach it has taken for the revision of the standards.
2. The panel **commends** CAA for the clarity of its instruments with regard to the external reviews.
3. The panel **commends** CAA for its clear and detailed information on how quality criteria are applied and what evidence is expected from HEIs to fulfil the standards.
4. The panel **commends** CAA for the high quality of its commissioners and its large pool of qualified and diverse external experts.
5. The panel **commends** CAA for the implementation of special training for domestic external reviewers.
6. The panel **commends** CAA for the measures it has taken to assure consistency in the external review processes and the decision making.

Affirmations

1. The panel, therefore, **affirms** that CAA recognizes that the main responsibility for quality and quality assurance lies with the institutions
2. The panel **affirms** that CAA recognizes and values institutional diversity
3. The panel, therefore, **affirms** that the CAA assessment framework takes specific aspects related to different modes of provisions into account
4. The panel **affirms** that CAAs external review processes are very reliable
5. The panel **affirms** that effective follow up mechanisms do exist
6. The panel **affirms** that CAA provides mechanisms to prevent conflicts of interests in its external assessments
7. The panel **affirms** that there is clear guidance to the program or institution undergoing an external review by CAA

Recommendations

1. None

Conclusion of the Panel's assessment

The panel concludes that CAA is **fully compliant** with the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practices in section III "The EQAA's framework for the external review of quality in higher education institutions"

IV. The EQAA and its relationship to the public

The EQAA makes public its policies and decisions about institutions and programmes, discloses the decisions about its own performance and disseminates reports on outcomes of QA processes.

Not compliant

Partially compliant

Substantially compliant

Fully compliant

4.1 Public reports on EQAA policies and decisions

CAA publishes its standards, procedural manuals, and additional guidelines on its website. The last update was provided in December 2020. The panel **affirms** that CAA provides full and clear disclosure of all relevant documentation for external reviews. While decisions of accreditation and licensure procedures have always been published by CAA it was not the agency's past practice to add reasons for these decisions or put the experts' reports (or parts of them) in the public domain. Cultural elements and the historic development of the HEI sector in the UAE are part of the explanation for this.

The panel **acknowledges** these reasons. During the on-site visit, the CAA leadership showed commitment to re-think its publication policies. This has been seen as a positive signal by the expert panel. The panel **recommends** CAA rethink its publication policy and evaluate if a publication of the experts' reports or a part of them (e.g. summary) is possible. The panel is convinced that such openness would be of major benefit for students and their parents. HEIs can also benefit from such transparency measures, which are a good starting point for internal developments and quality enhancement (start point for next review cycle).

4.2 Other public reports

So far CAA has not placed the results of external reviews of its own performance in the public domain. In the eyes of the panel, CAA is among the leading EQQA's worldwide and independent information about its (great) performances would add to the credibility and visibility of the agency. The panel **recommends** the results of the external reviews of CAA are made public and CAA finds an adequate format for such information.

Finally, the panel also **recommends** CAA periodically inform the public and its partners and stakeholders about its activities and achievements. Such information might be based on the internal Management Information System of CAA or come from other available sources of quality information.

Commendations

1. None

Affirmations

1. The panel **affirms** that CAA provides full and clear disclosure of all relevant documentation for external reviews.

Recommendations

1. The Panel **recommends** CAA rethink its publication policy and evaluate if a publication of the experts' reports or a part of them (e.g. summary) is possible.
2. The panel **recommends** to make the results of the external reviews of CAA public and to inform its partners and the public periodically about its activities and achievements.

Conclusion of the Panel's assessment

The panel concludes that CAA is **partially compliant** with the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practices in section IV "The EQAA and its relationship to the public".

V. Decision making

The EQAA has policies and procedures in place that ensure a fair and independent decision-making process in the final review of the institution or the programme. It provides effective procedures to deal with appeals and complaints.

Not compliant Partially compliant Substantially compliant Fully compliant

5.1 The decision-making process

Self-study, as the self-assessment is termed, is central to CAA’s approach. CAA’s decisions take into account the self-study, the activities that are part of the external review visit, additional evidence that may be provided by the HEI during the visit and through the subsequent response stage of its processes. The panel, therefore, **affirms** that CAA takes the self-study, the work of the external peer review team and other relevant information into account in its decision-making.

The panel **affirms** that CAA decisions are impartial, they are rigorous and are consistently made with reference to the published standards. As the HE system in the UAE has matured CAA has begun to introduce External Reviewers from within the country alongside its extensive pool of international External Reviewers. Thorough training and shadowing ensure that impartiality and rigour are maintained. The standards, and the accompanying detailed stipulations, are at the heart of all licensure and accreditation assessments and the consequent decision-making.

CAA does not base decisions on the reports of other quality assurance bodies although joint activities with professional accreditation organisations have recently begun. The panel considered this a very **positive development** and encourages CAA to continue to progress joint activities. More generally, HEIs in UAE are strongly encouraged to seek international accreditation, be it at the programme or institutional level, this may be used as evidence by an HEI as part of CAA’s procedures. It also helps to confirm the international comparability of the provision in the UAE.

Two other features contribute to consistency in decision-making. Draft reports from External Review Teams are read by a second Commissioner, this fulfils a moderation function and offers fresh eyes to check the requirements, suggestions, and draft recommendation against the evidence. Secondly, the Commissioner who was a member of the External Review Team (ERT) writes an executive summary. This is considered by the full Council of Commissioners, which then comes to a collective decision as to whether or not to accept the recommendation of the ERT.

CAA undertook a full and detailed review of its standards and its suite of procedural manuals, publishing the revised set of documentation in December 2019. The documentation embraces CAA Standards for Institutional Licensure and Program Accreditation connected Supplementary Guidance and four procedural manuals (those on Initial and on the Renewal of Licensure and those on Initial and Renewal of Accreditation).

The standards and the connected stipulations act as clear, detailed and precise criteria against which institutions and programmes are assessed and judged. The procedural manuals are detailed, providing clear descriptions of processes and constructive guidance for providers.

The panel **affirms** the consistent use of the published standards (criteria) and the procedures set out in published manuals in decision making.

A particular feature of CAA's approach is the iterative aspect of the process. The finalised report of the ERT, which includes requirements and suggestions against all relevant standards, is sent to the institution. The institution has a specified time in which to submit a response to each requirement and show how it has considered the suggestions. This is then re-evaluated, and an updated report sent to the institution. There are up to three rounds of responses allowed for licensure and up to two rounds for accreditation.

This iterative approach ensures that institutions take action and institute changes rapidly to meet requirements. It should contribute significantly to ensuring that no institution or programme is failing to meet expected standards at the point of approval/re-approval. The opportunity to consider and act on suggestions builds the achievement of improvement into the system. The panel considered that this iterative approach is particularly well suited to the UAE context and **commend** it and the way in which it contributes to ensuring timely follow-up action.

The introduction of a risk-based approach has not only lessened the demands on HEIs assessed as low-risk but has enabled the systematic follow-up of those classed as high-risk. A system of 'special' or 'inspection' audits is used to follow up those HEIs deemed high risk. Risks may be financial, strategic, legal, or operational or be linked directly to the standards. The framework of decision-making for the risk classification is clear and detailed. There is less information on the process used for inspection audits and the panel **suggests** that more information could usefully be published both to support audit teams and institutions; it **affirms** that there is an appropriate follow-up system in place for high-risk institutions and any discovered to be failing to meet the standards.

CAA's reports are clear, they are detailed and are precise. At present reports are not published with decisions implicit through categorisation on CAA's website. Institutions are listed as *active, inactive, or currently on probation*; the main list of programmes is active programmes with an advanced search function enabling access to those that are inactive or currently on probation. There is no obvious explanation of the categories, at least on the English language version of the website, thus it is not clear how they relate to some of the potential outcomes of review processes, such as deferral or warning notice, nor when revocation places the provider/program into the inactive category.

It is **suggested** that it would be helpful if the meaning and implications of the categories were made explicit and readily accessible to the public.

5.2 The EQAA's process for appeals and complaints

CAA has an appeals procedure that would embrace aspects of potential complaints, it does not have a separate complaints process. Complaints about the integrity of individual CAA staff fall under the procedures of the Ministry as the technical employer of CAA staff.

CAA's appeal process includes an informal stage after which a formal appeal may be submitted. Appeals can be made against the decisions to place an institution/program on probation and to deny or revoke Institutional Licensure or Program Accreditation. Institutions are not able to appeal the outcome of the CAA's risk-based assessment.

The grounds for appeal are appropriate, they cover the failure to follow due process; decisions that are contrary to statements within the ERT Report or significant inaccuracies in the report; judgements that are not based on the evidence of the findings; and the emergence of a conflict of interest not evident earlier.

The panel **affirms** that CAA has clear and published procedures for handling appeals with clear grounds for appeal. There has only been one appeal in recent years. The iterative nature of the procedures for licensure and accreditation provides the opportunity for action to be taken by institutions prior to the final decision on their application reducing the likelihood of cause for appeal.

Appeals are considered by an Appeals Committee. This is independently chaired by one of CAA's International External Advisors and includes a second International External Advisor and at least one Commissioner. None of the Appeals Committee members will have had prior involvement in the review being appealed and confirm they have no conflict of interest. The independent chair leads the process and relays the outcome of the appeal to the Minister of Education for approval.

Given the fact that the Council of Commissioners has collective responsibility for decisions, even if not directly responsible for the review under consideration in an appeal, a question could be raised about absolute independence. The panel **suggests** that CAA considers if independence could be better assured if appeals committees either only comprised external advisors or if the role of the Commissioner was advisory only; further, it is **suggested** that CAA should confirm in its procedure that appeals committees must always have more external members than internal to ensure independence.

Nevertheless, the panel **affirms** that appeals are conducted by a panel not directly responsible for the original decision, with the final decision approved by the Ministry i.e. outwith CAA.

Commendations

1. The panel considered that the iterative approach of requiring responses to initial reports and the revaluation of requirements and suggestions in light of the actions taken in response is particularly well suited to the UAE context and **commend** it and the way in which it contributes to ensuring timely follow-up action.

Affirmations

1. The panel **affirms** that CAA takes the self-study, the work of the external peer review team and other relevant information into account in its decision-making.
2. The panel **affirms** that CAA decisions are impartial, they are rigorous and are consistently made with reference to the published standards.
3. The panel **affirms** the consistent use of the published standards (criteria) and the procedures set out in published manuals in decision making.
4. The panel **affirms** that there is an appropriate follow-up system in place for high-risk institutions and any discovered to be failing to meet the standards.

5. The panel **affirms** that CAA has clear and published procedures for handling appeals with clear grounds for appeal.
6. The panel **affirms** that appeals are conducted by a panel not directly responsible for the original decision.

Recommendations

1. None

Conclusion of the Panel's assessment

The panel concludes that CAA is **fully compliant** with the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practices in section 5 "Decision making".

VI. The QA of cross border higher education

The EQAA has policies relating to both imported and exported higher education. These policies take into account the characteristics of the providers and the receivers, and, refer to all types of transnational higher education.

Not compliant Partially compliant Substantially compliant Fully compliant

6.1 Criteria for cross border higher education

The UAE is a major importer of transnational higher education (TNE). CAA is not responsible for the licencing or accreditation of all TNE situated in the UAE, with a significant proportion being situated in Free Trade Zones (FTZ) within individual Emirates. Providers operating in the FTZ may choose to apply to CAA for licensure and program accreditation but are not required to. The procedures for approval of new providers are clear, including the point at which providers fall within the remit of CAA. The panel, therefore, **affirms** that institutions delivering TNE within UAE should be clear about the procedures to be followed. CAA's procedures are clear, providers may apply for licensure and accreditation and the procedure for doing so is clear.

The UAE does not have a profile as a sending country; however, CAA has procedures to cover provision for any activity that is delivered outside its borders, be it through a physical or online presence. The panel, therefore, **affirms** that CAA has appropriate procedures covering both imported and exported higher education.

The panel **affirms** that students have access to clear and complete information about the awards delivered by institutions licenced by CAA. However, CAA's website is not the only source of official information, other sources include the International Program Accreditation Portal (IPAP) maintained by the Ministry of Education. In addition, imported higher education can be approved at the Emirate's level with information on it maintained by the relevant authorities (ADEK, KHDA and RAKEZ).

The panel **suggests** that CAA, on behalf of the student interest, considers seeking to liaise with the Ministry and the authorities of individual Emirates to work towards establishing a single source of information on the official status of institutions and programmes for students and prospective students. CAA could lead on this by ensuring that it provides clear links on its own website to these other sources of information i.e. to act as a route to the key sources of information.

This is a suggestion only as the panel recognises that it is not fully within CAA's remit or control but would be in the interest of all higher education students studying in UAE, including international students and non-UAE citizens.

6.2 Collaboration between agencies

CAA is active in cooperating with external quality assurance in TNE and more broadly. It has added procedures for joint processes and has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with a number of organisations that accredit subject level provision internationally. It closely cooperates with other international agencies and actively encourages providers to gain international recognition at the institution and subject level.

CAA is **commended** for the ways in which it actively cooperates with the quality assurance bodies in leading exporting countries. It has established relationships with both the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in the UK and the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency in Australia (TEQSA). CAA and QAA have worked effectively together on a number of projects, including supporting the revision of CAA's standards, a report on the operating environment for TNE in the UAE (published March 2021), the delivery of a bespoke International Quality Assurance programme, alongside wider information sharing and opportunities to observe review activity. One of the main aims of the relationship with TEQSA is to support professional recognition with the Australian Dental Council. CAA also has an MoU with the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (Hong Kong being a major importer of TNE). All of these relationships are about mutual benefits, mutual understanding, quality improvement and enhancement, including cross-border education.

CAA is actively involved in the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE) as the regional quality assurance network. It was a founder-member of ANQAHE and a valued member of it, contributing to the development of quality assurance in the region and learning from others. CAA is engaged with INQAHE and the wider quality assurance community.

A particular feature of recent activity by CAA has been building relationships and developing activity with professional organisations offering international accreditation. This is strategically important for UAE in establishing the quality of professional provision in health, business, engineering and technology. CAA has MoUs with a series of such bodies including the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) as one of the three major accrediting bodies in Business education; the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET); and the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE).

Also in the area of health CAA is working with the Australian Dental Council and has achieved formal recognition by the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME). CAA has begun to undertake joint activity with ACPE and AACSB. CAA is to be **commended** for its strategic approach towards, and practical activity in conjunction with, accrediting professional organisations. This activity serves to strengthen the quality and standards of provision in UAE and its international recognition; it also strengthens CAA as an agency extending and deepening its insight into a range of recognition and accreditation practices.

Commendations

1. CAA is **commended** for the ways in which it actively cooperates for the purposes of mutual benefit, mutual understanding, quality improvement and enhancement, including cross-border education, with the quality assurance bodies in leading exporting countries (the UK and Australia) and Hong Kong as a major importer of TNE.
2. CAA is to be **commended** for its strategic approach towards, and practical activity in conjunction with, accrediting professional organisations.

Affirmations

1. The panel **affirms** that institutions delivering TNE within UAE should be clear about the procedures to be followed. CAA's procedures are clear, providers may apply for licensure and accreditation and the procedure for doing so is clear.
2. The panel **affirms** that CAA's procedures for the licensure and accreditation of imported HE and that it has procedures to cover the provision of higher education activity that is delivered outside its borders.
3. The panel **affirms** that students have access to clear and complete information about the accredited awards delivered by institutions licenced by CAA

Recommendations

1. None

Conclusion of the Panel's assessment

The panel concludes that CAA is **fully compliant** with the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practices in section 6 "The QA of Cross border higher education".

CONCLUSIONS FROM THE REVIEW PANEL

CAA is a well-established quality assurance agency; it has continued to develop since the original GGP alignment exercise in 2016. It has been instrumental in moving what is still a relatively young higher education system to a point where, at its best, it can compete effectively on an international stage and in ensuring that all provision it approves meets the standards it sets. It has kept its standards under review and developed its methods to reflect many aspects of international best practice, nuancing them effectively for the particular nature of provision in the UAE.

The CEO, backed by a sound governance and management structure, provides clear and strong leadership. The quality assurance standards and manuals are supported by the internal quality assurance that continues to be developed and improved. The ways in which stakeholders are involved has been extended and deepened, especially in the most recent revision of Standards and with the establishment of a Strategic Advisory Committee. CAA is an outward-looking agency, reflected through its Commissioners and expert panel members, its relationships with leading quality assurance networks and agencies, and the ways in which it is working with accrediting bodies in core professions.

It is evident that CAA has itself matured, that higher education in UAE has matured and that this is appropriately reflected in the ways in which the agency now works. Examples of this maturity include the successful introduction of local experts to the pool of expert reviewers and the introduction of a risk-based approach to accreditation. CAA is a reflective agency, seeking to learn and to enhance its approach.

Based on the evidence in the SER, the supporting documentation and from the virtual site visit, the panel concludes that overall CAA is compliant with the GGP and recommends that the INQAAHE Board confirms its continuing alignment with the Guidelines of Good Practice.

SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS, AFFIRMATIONS, AND RECOMENDATIONS

I. Commendations

Section 1: The structure of the External Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA)

1. The panel **commends** CAA for its extensive international benchmarking that has informed the renewal of its standards.

Section 2: Accountability of the EQAA

2. The panel **commends** CAA for its collaboration with other QA agencies, policy of seeking joint visits, and consideration of capacity-building as evident in the assistance provided in Uzbekistan, and CAA's support and information-sharing activities with ANQAHE and neighbouring countries.

Section 3: The EQAA's framework for the external review of quality in higher education institutions

3. The panel **commends** CAA for the inclusive and participative approach it has taken for the revision of the standards.
4. The panel **commends** CAA for the clarity of its instruments with regard to the external reviews.
5. The panel **commends** CAA for its clear and detailed information on how quality criteria are applied and what evidence is expected from HEIs to fulfil the standards.
6. The panel **commends** CAA for the high quality of its commissioners and its large pool of qualified and diverse external experts.
7. The panel **commends** CAA for the implementation of special training for domestic external reviewers.
8. The panel **commends** CAA for the measures it has taken to assure consistency in the external review processes and in the decision making.

Section 5: Decision making

9. The panel considered that the iterative approach of requiring responses to initial reports and the revaluation of requirements and suggestions in light of the actions taken in response is particularly well suited to the UAE context and **commend** it and the way in which it contributes to ensuring timely follow-up action.

Section 6: The QA of cross border higher education

10. CAA is **commended** for the ways in which it actively cooperates for the purposes of mutual benefit, mutual understanding, quality improvement and enhancement, including cross-border education, with the quality assurance bodies in leading exporting countries (the UK and Australia) and Hong Kong as a major importer of TNE.
11. CAA is to be **commended** for its strategic approach towards, and practical activity in conjunction with, accrediting professional organisations.

II. Affirmations

Section 1: The structure of the External Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA)

1. The panel **affirms** that CAA has a sound legal basis as it is an entity of the Ministry of Education and is recognised by law as the federal authority for QA in the UAE.
2. The panel **affirms** that CAA has a conflict management system in place as is also evidenced through its employment contracts for staff and in the conflict of interest declarations for reviewers.
3. The panel **affirms** that CAA has a clear governance structure that is consistent with its mission and objectives and allows it to involve stakeholders from HEIs.
4. The panel **affirms** that CAA is independent in its decision-making.
5. The panel **affirms** that CAA's organisational structure, and especially the high competencies of its Commissioners, external reviewers, and administrative staff, make it possible to carry out the reviews effectively and efficiently.
6. The panel **affirms** that CAA has a strategic plan that helps to assess its progress and plan for future developments.
7. The panel **affirms** that CAA has well-trained, appropriately-qualified Commissioners, reviewers and staff, who are able to conduct external evaluation effectively and efficiently in accordance with its mission statement and its methodological approach.
8. The panel **affirms** that CAA has the physical and financial resources needed to fulfil its goals and carry out the activities that emerge from its mission statement and objectives.
9. The panel **affirms** that the CAA provides systematic opportunities for the professional development of its staff.

Section 2: Accountability of the EQAA

12. The panel **affirms** that CAA operates with transparency, integrity and professionalism and adheres to ethical and professional standards.
13. The panel **affirms** that CAA is subject to external reviews at regular intervals, not exceeding five years, and that there is evidence that required actions are implemented and disclosed.
14. The panel **affirms** that CAA is open to international developments in quality assurance and has mechanisms that enable it to learn about and analyse the main trends in the field.

Section 3: The EQAA's framework for the external review of quality in higher education institutions

15. The panel, therefore, **affirms** that CAA recognizes that the main responsibility for quality and quality assurance lies with the institutions
16. The panel **affirms** that CAA recognizes and values institutional diversity
17. The panel, therefore, **affirms** that the CAA assessment framework takes specific aspects related to different modes of provisions into account

18. The panel **affirms** that CAAs external review processes are very reliable
19. The panel **affirms** that effective follow up mechanisms do exist
20. The panel **affirms** that CAA provides mechanisms to prevent conflicts of interests in its external assessments
21. The panel **affirms** that there is clear guidance to the program or institution undergoing an external review by CAA

Section 4: The EQAA and its relationship to the public

22. The panel **affirms** that CAA provides full and clear disclosure of all relevant documentation for external reviews.

Section 5: Decision making

23. The panel **affirms** that CAA takes the self-study, the work of the external peer review team and other relevant information into account in its decision-making.
24. The panel **affirms** that CAA decisions are impartial, they are rigorous and are consistently made with reference to the published standards.
25. The panel **affirms** the consistent use of the published standards (criteria) and the procedures set out in published manuals in decision making.
26. The panel **affirms** that there is an appropriate follow-up system in place for high-risk institutions and any discovered to be failing to meet the standards.
27. The panel **affirms** that CAA has clear and published procedures for handling appeals with clear grounds for appeal.
28. The panel **affirms** that appeals are conducted by a panel not directly responsible for the original decision

Section 6: The QA of cross border higher education

29. The panel **affirms** that institutions delivering TNE within UAE should be clear about the procedures to be followed. CAA's procedures are clear, providers may apply for licensure and accreditation and the procedure for doing so is clear.
30. The panel **affirms** that CAA's procedures for the licensure and accreditation of imported HE and that it has procedures to cover the provision of higher education activity that is delivered outside its borders.
31. The panel **affirms** that students have access to clear and complete information about the accredited awards delivered by institutions licenced by CAA.

III. Recommendations

Section 1: The structure of the External Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA)

1. The panel **recommends** CAA reduces the number of KPIs and agrees on a limited set of KPIs that have the highest priority for the agency.

Section 2: Accountability of the EQAA

2. The panel **recommends** CAA acts to ensure that the MIS will deliver data that enable the monitoring of the achievement of its strategic and operational objectives as well as the effectiveness of its operations.
3. The panel **recommends** that CAA follows up on its intention to establish a process for regular internal review, and that it considers data collection and analyses on themes that are most relevant for addressing shortcomings of quality in HEIs.

Section 4: The EQAA and its relationship to the public

4. The Panel **recommends** CAA rethink its publication policy and evaluate if a publication of the experts' reports or a part of them (e.g. summary) is possible.
5. The panel **recommends** to make the results of the external reviews of CAA public and informing its partners and the public periodically about its activities and achievements.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Review Panel extends its appreciation to the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA), for the quality of the Self-Evaluation Report and robust review portfolio, the virtual tour video and other supporting documentation provided, and the prompt attention to the requests made by the Review Panel.

The Review Panel also extends its appreciation to CAA Director, Prof. Dr. Mohamed Yousif Baniyas for his continuous interest and commitment in promoting a culture of quality in higher education not only in the UAE but also across borders and to the CAA Team who facilitated and supported the arrangements for the review and virtual site visit.

Finally, the Review Panel also wishes to thank all CAA's internal and external stakeholders including the Ministry of Education in UAE, CAA Commissioners and Staff, as well as the HEIs Representatives from the different Universities, the External Review Team (ERTs) members, CAA international partners, and student representatives who participated in the virtual site visit. Their feedback and insights during the interview sessions contributed significantly to the CAA GGP Review.

ANNEX 1. INQAAHE GUIDELINES OF GOOD PRACTICE

I. The structure of the External Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA)

The EQAA is a recognised, credible organisation, trusted by the higher education institutions and the public. It has adequate mechanisms to prevent conflicts of interest in the decisions it makes; its staff has the needed skills to carry out the functions associated to external QA. The EQAA has the needed resources to carry out their mission.

1.1. Legitimacy and recognition

- 1.1.1 The EQAA has an established legal basis and is recognized by a competent external body.
- 1.1.2 The EQAA takes into consideration relevant guidelines issued by international networks and other associations, in formulating its policies and practices.
- 1.1.3 The EQAA has a clear and published policy for the prevention of conflicts of interest that applies to its staff, its decision-making body, and the external Reviewers.

1.2 Mission and purposes

- 1.2.1 The EQAA has a written mission statement and a set of objectives that explicitly provide that external quality assurance of higher education is its major concern, describe the purpose and scope of its activities and can be translated into verifiable policies and measurable objectives.

1.3 Governance and organisational structure

- 1.3.1 The EQAA has a governance structure consistent with its mission and objectives, and, adequate mechanisms to involve relevant stakeholders in the definition of its standards and criteria.
- 1.3.2 The composition of the decision-making body and/or its regulatory framework ensure its independence and impartiality.
- 1.3.3 The EQAA's organisational structure makes it possible to carry out its external review processes effectively and efficiently
- 1.3.4 The EQAA has a strategic plan that helps assess its progress and plan for future developments

1.4 Resources

- 1.4.1** The EQAA has a well-trained, appropriately-qualified staff, able to conduct external evaluation effectively and efficiently in accordance with its mission statement and its methodological approach.
- 1.4.2** The EQAA has the physical and financial resources needed to fulfil its goals and carry out the activities that emerge from its mission statement and objectives.
- 1.4.3** The EQAA provides systematic opportunities for the professional development of its staff.

II. Accountability of the EQAA

The EQAA has in place policies and mechanisms for its internal quality assurance, which demonstrate a continuing effort to improve the quality and integrity of its activities, its response to the changes to the context in which it operates and its links to the international community of QA.

2.1 Quality assurance of the EQAA

- 2.1.1 The EQAA operates with transparency, integrity and professionalism and adheres to ethical and professional standards.
- 2.1.2 The EQAA has in place mechanisms that enable it to review its own activities in order to respond to the changing nature of higher education, the effectiveness of its operations, and its contribution towards the achievement of its objectives.
- 2.1.3 The EQAA periodically conducts a self-review of its own activities, including consideration of its own effects and value. The review includes data collection and analysis, to inform decision-making and trigger improvements.
- 2.1.4 The EQAA is subject to external reviews at regular intervals, ideally not exceeding five years. There is evidence that any required actions are implemented and disclosed.

2.2 Links to the QA community

- 2.2.1 The EQAA is open to international developments in quality assurance and has mechanisms that enable it to learn about and analyse the main trends in the field.
- 2.2.2 The EQAA collaborates with other QA agencies where possible, in areas such as exchange of good practices, capacity building, and review of decisions, joint projects, or staff exchanges.

III. The EQAA's framework for the external review of quality in higher education institutions

The main concern of the EQAA is the promotion of quality education and student achievement. In doing this, it recognises that quality is primarily the responsibility of the higher education institutions themselves, and, supports this principle in its criteria and procedures. These promote internal quality assurance (IQA) and provide higher education institutions with clear guidance on the requirements for self-assessment and external review.

3.1 The relationship between the EQAA and higher education institutions

- 3.1.1 The EQAA recognises that institutional and programmatic quality and quality assurance are primarily the responsibility of the higher education institutions (HEIs) themselves, and respects the academic autonomy, identity and integrity of the institutions and programmes.
- 3.1.2 The EQAA promotes the development and appropriate implementation of IQA processes in accordance with the understanding that the primary responsibility for assuring quality resides with the institutions and its programmes.
- 3.1.3 The EQAA bears in mind the level of workload and cost that its procedures will place on institutions, and, strives to make them as time and cost effective as possible.

3.2 The definition of criteria for external quality review

- 3.2.1 The EQAA recognises and values institutional diversity and translates this valuation into criteria and procedures that take into account the identity and goals of higher education institutions.
- 3.2.2 The standards or criteria developed by the EQAA have been subject to reasonable consultation with stakeholders and are revised at regular intervals to ensure relevance to the needs of the system.
- 3.2.3 Standards or criteria take into consideration the specific aspects related to different modes of provision, such as transnational education, distance or online programmes or other non-traditional approaches to HE as relevant to the context in which they operate.
- 3.2.4 Standards or criteria explicitly address the areas of institutional activity that fall within the EQAA's scope, (e.g., institutional governance and management, programme design and approval, teaching and learning, student admission, progression and certification, research, community engagement) and on the availability of necessary resources (e.g., finances, staff and learning resources).
- 3.2.5 Criteria or standards and procedures take into account internal follow up mechanisms, and, provide for effective follow up of the outcomes of the external reviews.

- 3.2.6** The EQAA procedures specify the way in which criteria will be applied and the types of evidence needed to demonstrate that they are met.

3.3 The external review process

- 3.3.1** The EQAA carries out an external review process that is reliable and based on published criteria and procedures. It follows a self-assessment or equivalent, and, includes an external review (normally including a site visit or visits), and a consistent follow up of the recommendations resulting from the external review.
- 3.3.2** The EQAA has published documents, which clearly state what it expects from higher education institutions, in the form of quality criteria, or standards and procedures, for self-assessment and external review.
- 3.3.3** The external review process is carried out by teams of experts consistent with the characteristics of the institution/programme being reviewed. Experts can provide input from various perspectives, including those of institutions, academics, students, employers or professional practitioners.
- 3.3.4** The EQAA has clear specifications on the characteristics and selection of external Reviewers, who must be supported by appropriate training and good supporting materials such as handbooks or manuals.
- 3.3.5** External review procedures include effective and comprehensive mechanisms for the prevention of conflicts of interest, and, ensure that any judgments resulting from external reviews are based on explicit and published criteria.
- 3.3.6** The EQAA's system ensures that each institution or programme will be evaluated in a consistent way, even if the external Panels, teams, or committees are different.
- 3.3.7** The EQAA carries out the external review within a reasonable timeframe after the completion of a self-assessment report, to ensure that information is current and updated.
- 3.3.8** The EQAA provides the higher education institutions with an opportunity to correct any factual errors that may appear in the external review report

3.4 The requirements for self-evaluation

- 3.4.1** The EQAA provides clear guidance to the institution or programme in the application of the procedures for self-evaluation, the solicitation of assessment/feedback from the public, students, and other constituents, or the preparation for external review as necessary and appropriate.

IV. The EQAA and its relationship to the public

The EQAA makes public its policies and decisions about institutions and programmes, discloses the decisions about its own performance and disseminates reports on outcomes of QA processes.

4.1 Public reports on EQAA policies and decisions

- 4.1.1 The EQAA provides full and clear disclosure of its relevant documentation such as policies, procedures and criteria.
- 4.1.2 The EQAA reports its decisions about higher education institutions and programmes. The content and extent of reporting may vary with cultural context and applicable legal and other requirements.
- 4.1.3 The EQAA has mechanisms to facilitate the public a fair understanding of the reasons supporting decisions taken.

4.2 Other public reports

- 4.2.1 The EQAA discloses to the public the decisions about the EQAA resulting from any external review of its own performance.
- 4.2.2 The EQAA prepares and disseminates periodically integrated reports on the overall outcomes of QA processes and of any other relevant activities.

V. Decision making

The EQAA has policies and procedures in place that ensure a fair and independent decision-making process in the final review of the institution or the programme. It provides effective procedures to deal with appeals and complaints.

5.1 The decision-making process

- 5.1.1 The EQAA decisions take into consideration the outcomes of both the institution's self-assessment process and the external review; they may also consider any other relevant information, provided this has been communicated to the HEIs.
- 5.1.2 The EQAA decisions are impartial, rigorous, and consistent even when they are based on the reports of other quality assurance bodies.
- 5.1.3 The EQAA decisions are based on published criteria and procedures, and, can be justified only with reference to those criteria and procedures.
- 5.1.4 Consistency in decision-making includes consistency and transparency in processes and actions for imposing recommendations for follow-up action.
- 5.1.5 The EQAA's reported decisions are clear and precise.

5.2 The EQAA's process for appeals and complaints

- 5.2.1 The EQAA has procedures in place to deal in a consistent way with complaints about its procedures or operation.
- 5.2.2 The EQAA has clear, published procedures for handling appeals related to its external review and decision-making processes.
- 5.2.3 Appeals are conducted by a Panel that was not responsible for the original decision and has no conflict of interest; appeals need not necessarily be conducted outside the EQAA.

VI. The QA of cross border higher education

The EQAA has policies relating to both imported and exported higher education. These policies take into account the characteristics of the providers and the receivers, and, refer to all types of transnational higher education.

6.1 Criteria for cross border higher education

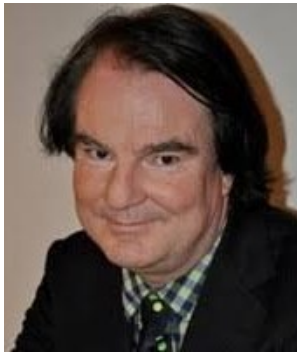


- 6.1.1 The EQAA in a sending country makes clear that the awarding institution is responsible for ensuring the equivalent quality of the education offered, that the institution understands the regulatory frameworks of the receiving countries, and that the institution provides clear information on the programmes offered and their characteristics.
- 6.1.2 Students and other stakeholders receive clear and complete information about the awards delivered.
- 6.1.3 The rights and obligations of the parties involved in transnational education are clearly established and well known by the parties.

6.2 Collaboration between agencies

- 6.2.1 The EQAA cooperates with appropriate local agencies in the exporting and importing countries and with international networks. This cooperation is oriented to improve mutual understanding, to have a clear and comprehensive account of the regulatory framework and to share good practices.
- 6.2.2 The EQAA seeks ways to cooperate in the external quality assurance in transnational education provision, for example through mutual recognition.

ANNEX 2. APPOINTMENT AND COMPOSITION OF THE GGP REVIEW PANEL

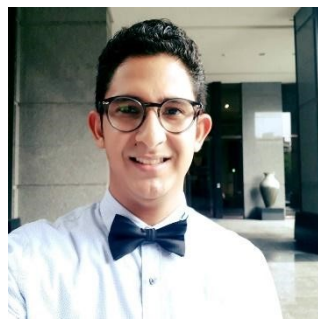
INQAAHE GGP Review Panel

		
<p>Dr Rolf Heusser Review Panel Chair</p> <p>International Higher Education & QA Expert University of Zurich Switzerland</p>	<p>Ms Rowena Pelik Review Panel Secretary</p> <p>Director of H.E. Quality Enhancement Services Ltd (HEQES) Scotland, UK</p>	<p>Dr Mark Frederiks Review Panel Member</p> <p>Coordinator International Policy (Flanders) with NVAO (Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders), based in The Hague</p>

Report signed off by INQAAHE GGP Review Panel

Date: 17 May 2021

INQAAHE GGP Project Coordinator

	<p>Mr Dewin Justiniano</p> <p>INQAAHE GGP Project Coordinator</p> <p>Project Coordinator at The Higher Education and Evaluation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT)</p>
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ANNEX 3. VIRTUAL SITE VISIT AGENDA

Day 1: Monday, 29-March-2021		
UAE Time	Interview Session	Number of Participants
1:30 pm - 1:50 pm	Session 1: Welcome & Opening of Virtual Site Visit CAA Director & representatives from CAA Council of Commissioners	5
2:10 pm - 3:00 pm	Session2: CAA Commissioners with QA experience in Program and Institutional Accreditation	6
3:20 pm - 4:10 pm	Session 3: Ministry of Education (MOE)	3
4:10 pm - 5:10 pm	Afternoon Tea / Lunch or Dinner Break	
5:10 pm - 6:00 pm	INQAAHE GGP Panel Meeting	
Day 2: Tuesday, 30-March-2021		
UAE Time	Interview Session	Number of Participants
1:00 pm - 1:50 pm	Session 4: CAA Staff	4
2:10 pm - 3:00 pm	Session 5: CAA International Collaborators / QA agencies and Partners	5
3:20 pm - 4:10 pm	Session 6: Program and Institutional accreditation - HEIs senior QA	5
4:10 pm - 5:10 pm	Afternoon Tea / Lunch or Dinner Break	
5:10 pm - 6:00 pm	Internal Meeting: INQAAHE GGP Panel Meeting	
Day 3: Wednesday, 31-March-2021		
UAE Time	Interview Session	Number of Participants
1:00 pm - 1:50 pm	Session 7: Student, Alumni, Student bodies/Student Representative	7
2:10 pm - 3:00 pm	Session 8: Program and Institutional accreditation - HEIs senior QA	5
3:20 pm - 4:10 pm	Internal Meeting: INQAAHE GGP Panel Meeting	
4:10 pm - 5:10 pm	Afternoon Tea / Lunch or Dinner Break	

5:10 pm - 6:00 pm	Session 9: External Reviewers (External Review Team – ERT)	
Day 4: Thursday, 1-April-2021		
UAE Time	Interview Session	Number of Participants
1:00 pm - 1:50 pm	Session 10: Call back - CAA Director and/or Commissioners	5
2:00 pm - 4:00 pm	Finalise report (2 hours) – INQAAHE GGP Review Panel	
4:00 pm - 5:00 pm	Afternoon Tea / Lunch or Dinner Break	
5:00 pm – 5:30 pm	INQAAHE GGP Panel Oral Exit Report and Closure of the Virtual Site Visit	

ANNEX 4. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT OF COMPLIANCE OF INQAAHE GUIDELINES.

#	INQAAHE GGP	REVIEW PANEL ASSESSMENT
1	THE STRUCTURE OF THE EQAA	Substantially
1.1	Legitimacy and recognition	
1.1.1	The EQAA has an established legal basis and is recognized by a competent external body.	Fully
1.1.2	The EQAA takes into consideration relevant guidelines issued by international networks and other associations, in formulating its policies and practices.	Fully
1.1.3	The EQAA has a clear and published policy for the prevention of conflicts of interest that applies to its staff, its decision-making body, and the external Reviewers.	Fully
1.2	Mission and purposes	
1.2.1	The EQAA has a written mission statement and a set of objectives that explicitly provide that external quality assurance of higher education is its major concern, describe the purpose and scope of its activities and can be translated into verifiable policies and measurable objectives.	Substantially
1.3	Governance and organisational structure	
1.3.1	The EQAA has a governance structure consistent with its mission and objectives, and, adequate mechanisms to involve relevant stakeholders in the definition of its standards and criteria.	Substantially
1.3.2	The composition of the decision-making body and/or its regulatory framework ensure its independence and impartiality.	Fully
1.3.3	The EQAA's organisational structure makes it possible to carry out its external review processes effectively and efficiently	Fully
1.3.4	The EQAA has a strategic plan that helps assess its progress and plan for future developments	Substantially
1.4	Resources	

1.4.1	The EQAA has a well-trained, appropriately qualified staff, able to conduct external evaluation effectively and efficiently in accordance with its mission statement and its methodological approach.	Fully
1.4.2	The EQAA has the physical and financial resources needed to fulfil its goals and carry out the activities that emerge from its mission statement and objectives.	Substantially
1.4.3	The EQAA provides systematic opportunities for the professional development of its staff.	Substantially

2	ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE EQAA	Substantially
2.1	Quality Assurance of the EQAA	
2.1.1	The EQAA operates with transparency, integrity and professionalism and adheres to ethical and professional standards.	Fully
2.1.2	The EQAA has in place mechanisms that enable it to review its own activities in order to respond to the changing nature of higher education, the effectiveness of its operations, and its contribution towards the achievement of its objectives.	Partially
2.1.3	The EQAA periodically conducts a self-review of its own activities, including consideration of its own effects and value. The review includes data collection and analysis, to inform decision-making and trigger improvements.	Partially
2.1.4	The EQAA is subject to external reviews at regular intervals, ideally not exceeding five years. There is evidence that any required actions are implemented and disclosed.	Fully
2.2	Links to the community	
2.2.1	The EQAA is open to international developments in quality assurance and has mechanisms that enable it to learn about and analyse the main trends in the field.	Fully
2.2.2	The EQAA collaborates with other QA agencies where possible, in areas such as exchange of good practices, capacity building, and review of decisions, joint projects, or staff exchanges.	Fully
3	THE EQAA'S FRAMEWORK FOR THE EXTERNAL REVIEW OF QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS	fully
3.1	The relationship between the EQAA and higher education institutions	

3.1.1	The EQAA recognises that institutional and programmatic quality and quality assurance are primarily the responsibility of the higher education institutions (HEIs) themselves, and respects the academic autonomy, identity and integrity of the institutions and programs.	fully
3.1.2	The EQAA promotes the development and appropriate implementation of IQA processes in accordance with the understanding that the primary responsibility for assuring quality resides with the institutions and its programs.	fully
3.1.3	The EQAA bears in mind the level of workload and cost that its procedures will place on institutions, and, strives to make them as time and cost effective as possible.	fully
3.2	The definition of criteria for external quality review	
3.2.1	The EQAA recognises and values institutional diversity and translates this valuation into criteria and procedures that take into account the identity and goals of higher education institutions.	fully

3.2.2	The standards or criteria developed by the EQAA have been subject to reasonable consultation with stakeholders and are revised at regular intervals to ensure relevance to the needs of the system.	fully
3.2.3	Standards or criteria take into consideration the specific aspects related to different modes of provision, such as transnational education, distance or online programs or other non-traditional approaches to HE as relevant to the context in which they operate.	fully
3.2.4	Standards or criteria explicitly address the areas of institutional activity that fall within the EQAA's scope, (e.g., institutional governance and management, program design and approval, teaching and learning, student admission, progression and certification, research, community engagement) and on the availability of necessary resources (e.g., finances, staff and learning resources).	fully
3.2.5	Criteria or standards and procedures take into account internal follow up mechanisms, and, provide for effective follow up of the outcomes of the external reviews.	fully
3.2.6	The EQAA procedures specify the way in which criteria will be applied and the types of evidence needed to demonstrate that they are met.	fully

3.3	The external review process	
3.3.1	The EQAA carries out an external review process that is reliable and based on published criteria and procedures. It follows a self-assessment or equivalent, and, includes an external review (normally including a site visit or visits), and a consistent follow up of the recommendations resulting from the external review.	fully
3.3.2	The EQAA has published documents, which clearly state what it expects from higher education institutions, in the form of quality criteria, or standards and procedures, for self-assessment and external review.	fully
3.3.3	The external review process is carried out by teams of experts consistent with the characteristics of the institution/program being reviewed. Experts can provide input from various perspectives, including those of institutions, academics, students, employers or professional practitioners.	fully
3.3.4	The EQAA has clear specifications on the characteristics and selection of external Reviewers, who must be supported by appropriate training and good supporting materials such as handbooks or manuals.	fully
3.3.5	External review procedures include effective and comprehensive mechanisms for the prevention of conflicts of interest, and, ensure that any judgments resulting from external reviews are based on explicit and published criteria.	fully
3.3.6	The EQAA's system ensures that each institution or program will be evaluated in a consistent way, even if the external Panels, teams, or committees are different.	fully

3.3.7	The EQAA carries out the external review within a reasonable timeframe after the completion of a self-assessment report, to ensure that information is current and updated.	fully
3.3.8	The EQAA provides the higher education institutions with an opportunity to correct any factual errors that may appear in the external review report	fully
3.4	The requirements for self-evaluation	
3.4.1	The EQAA provides clear guidance to the institution or program in the application of the procedures for self-evaluation, the solicitation of assessment/feedback from the	fully

	public, students, and other constituents, or the preparation for external review as necessary and appropriate.	
4	THE EQA AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE PUBLIC	Partially
4.1	Public reports on EQAA policies and decisions	
4.1.1	The EQAA provides full and clear disclosure of its relevant documentation such as policies, procedures and criteria.	fully
4.1.2	The EQAA reports its decisions about higher education institutions and programs. The content and extent of reporting may vary with cultural context and applicable legal and other requirements.	partially
4.1.3	The EQAA has mechanisms to facilitate the public a fair understanding of the reasons supporting decisions taken.	partially
4.2	Other public reports	
4.2.1	The EQAA discloses to the public the decisions about the EQAA resulting from any external review of its own performance.	partially
4.2.2	The EQAA prepares and disseminates periodically integrated reports on the overall outcomes of QA processes and of any other relevant activities.	partially
5	DECISION MAKING	Fully
5.1	The decision-making process	
5.1.1	The EQAA decisions take into consideration the outcomes of both the institution’s self-assessment process and the external review; they may also consider any other relevant information, provided this has been communicated to the HEIs.	Fully
5.1.2	The EQAA decisions are impartial, rigorous, and consistent even when they are based on the reports of other quality assurance bodies.	Fully
5.1.3	The EQAA decisions are based on published criteria and procedures, and, can be justified only with reference to those criteria and procedures.	Fully
5.1.4	Consistency in decision-making includes consistency and transparency in processes and actions for imposing recommendations for follow-up action.	Fully

5.1.5	The EQAA's reported decisions are clear and precise.	Fully
5.2	The EQAA's process for appeals and complaints	
5.2.1	The EQAA has procedures in place to deal in a consistent way with complaints about its procedures or operation.	Substantially
5.2.2	The EQAA has clear, published procedures for handling appeals related to its external review and decision-making processes.	Fully
5.2.3	Appeals are conducted by a Panel that was not responsible for the original decision and has no conflict of interest; appeals need not necessarily be conducted outside the EQAA.	Fully
6	THE QAA OF CROSS-BORDER HIGHER EDUCATION	Fully
6.1	Criteria for cross-border higher education	
6.1.1	The EQAA in a sending country makes clear that the awarding institution is responsible for ensuring the equivalent quality of the education offered, that the institution understands the regulatory frameworks of the receiving countries, and that the institution provides clear information on the programs offered and their characteristics.	Fully
6.1.2	Students and other stakeholders receive clear and complete information about the awards delivered.	Fully
6.1.3	The rights and obligations of the parties involved in transnational education are clearly established and well known by the parties.	Fully
6.2	Collaboration between agencies	
6.2.1	The EQAA cooperates with appropriate local agencies in the exporting and importing countries and with international networks. This cooperation is oriented to improve mutual understanding, to have a clear and comprehensive account of the regulatory framework and to share good practices.	Fully
6.2.2	The EQAA seeks ways to cooperate in the external quality assurance in transnational education provision, for example through mutual recognition.	Fully

