



INQAAHE GUIDELINES OF GOOD PRACTICE ALIGNMENT

EXTERNAL REVIEW REPORT



Organisation National Commission for University Evaluation and Accreditation (CONEAU)

Date of the visit October 26th-28th, 2022

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GLOSSARY

CONEAU	THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR UNIVERSITY EVALUATION AND ACCREDITATION
HE	HIGHER EDUCATION
HEIS	HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS
HEL	HIGHER EDUCATION LAW
SIACES	IBERO-AMERICAN SYSTEM FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION
SIED	INSTITUTIONAL DISTANCE EVALUATION SYSTEMS
UCMC	QUALITY UNIT FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

INTRODUCTION

About CONEAU's external review process

The National Commission for University Evaluation and Accreditation (Spanish Acronym: CONEAU) requested INQAAHE an external evaluation of its performance in accordance with the Guidelines of Good Practice (GGP) 2015. This is the third institutional evaluation of CONEAU (first one following INQAAHE's GGPs); the last one was carried out in 2015 by a panel of international experts from Mexico, Ecuador and Spain.

For this process CONEAU prepared and submitted to INQAAHE the following documents:

1. CONEAU Self-evaluation Report (English version)
2. CONEAU Self-evaluation Report (Spanish version)
3. Supporting evidence in English and Spanish

The external evaluation of CONEAU was developed in accordance with INQAAHE's GGP and was carried out by the external panel appointed by INQAAHE.

- President.- Francisco Xavier Cadena (Ecuador): Principal professor at the Escuela Politécnica Nacional.
- Secretary.- María Eugenia Bolaños Vargas (México): Accreditation System Coordinator, Federation of Mexican Private Higher Education Institutions, FIMPES.
- Expert.- Martí Casadesús Fa (Spain): Full professor in Business Management at the Universitat de Girona.

The panel started the revision of the documents sent by CONEAU in August 2022 and held the on-site visit for three days (October 26th-28th, 2022). During the on-site visit, the panel conducted 15 interviews (98 interviewees) with the Ministry of Education, authorities, and staff members of CONEAU, presidents of higher education institutions, peer evaluators, students, and quality assurance leaders of HEIs (Higher Education Institutions).

On October 28th the panel presented the conclusions of the review to CONEAU's authorities.

About Argentina's Higher Education System

According to the Higher Education Law, the university system in Argentina is composed of Universities (HEIs that develop activities in a variety of disciplinary areas) and University Institutes (HEIs that deliver programs in a single disciplinary area). The term HEIs used in this report only includes Universities and University Institutes.

Argentina has 135 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs): 50% are private and 50% are state-run (61 national universities and 6 provincial with national recognition for awarding degrees).

In 2020 the total undergraduate and short-cycle programs enrollment reached 2,343,587 students, 80% were in state-run HEIs and 20% in private. In the same year the total graduate enrollment reached 156,295 students, 73% in state-run HEIs and 27% in private institutions.

During 2020, the HES (Higher Education System) offers in Argentina included:

- 2,631 short-cycle programs
- 5,327 undergraduate degrees
- 3,287 graduate level programs (48% specialities, 36% master's degrees and 15% doctorates)

According to data from the Ministry of Education¹, there is at least one state-run university in every province. In the metropolitan area, including the capital, Buenos Aires, there is a concentration of state-run and private HEIs.

As regards the size of HEIs, CONEAU classifies institutions in large (more than 50,000 students), medium sized (between 10,001 and 50,000 students) and small (up to 10,000). In the case of private institutions, 77% are small, 21.3% are medium-sized and 1.7 (1 University) is large. In the case of state-run HEIs, 37.3% are small, 50.7% are medium-sized and 12% are large.

The tradition of HE in Argentina began with the establishment of the National University of Cordoba in 1613, followed by the creation of the University of Buenos Aires in 1821. In 1958 private higher education was allowed, leading to the first university expansion. In the years to follow, due to several laws and expansion was observed in the state-run HEIs. The number of private HEIs increased until 1996, with the passing of the Higher Education Law that created CONEAU and a quality evaluation mechanism. Since then, a regulated expansion has been observed. According to CONEAU data the decrease in the private sector expansion has been remarkable. Since its creation, CONEAU has evaluated 143 projects for creation of private HEIs and only 26 have obtained a favorable result.

About CONEAU

The National Commission for University Evaluation and Accreditation (Spanish Acronym: CONEAU) was created in 1996 with the passing of the Higher Education Law 24,521 (HEL). It was founded as a quality evaluation mechanism, a new regulatory framework where evaluation and quality assurance were established as a new axis of university policy. CONEAU is, since then, a decentralized body under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education.

According to law and within its functions, the agency carries out evaluation at two levels: institutional (external evaluations, analysis of institutional projects and evaluation of Institutional Distance Evaluation Systems – SIED) and programmatic (undergraduate degree programs of public interest and all graduate programs, including distance learning programs). It also covers ex-ante and ex-post evaluations for quality assurance;

¹ Síntesis de información de estadísticas universitarias. Reporte 2019-2020.

at the institutional level it draws up the reports required to recommend the granting of provisional authorization to private institutions before they are put into operation; as well as the analysis of institutional projects of new national universities created by law.

Between 1996 and 2019 the agency has carried out the analysis of viability and consistency of 143 private HEIs (both national and foreign), of which 26 received a favorable report, 48 unfavorable, 55 were withdrawn and 9 returned to the Ministry of Education since they did not meet the evaluation requirements. Private institutions must wait six years before applying for definitive recognition to operate as a private university institution.

CONEAU also takes part in the implementation of national university institutions, as well as the authorization for the operation of the Public Registry of Research Centers and Higher Vocational Training Institutions.

The HEL establishes that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) must be externally evaluated at least every six years, according to the objectives defined by each institution in its project. As of December 2019, CONEAU has carried out a total of 153 external evaluations.

According to HEL enactment, accreditation is mandatory for undergraduate degree programs that may involve the public interest (posing a risk to the health, safety, rights, property or training of inhabitants); and for all graduate courses). Since 1998, 1,400 undergraduate and 7,289 graduate degree programs have been evaluated through one and up to four accreditation processes.

Undergraduate and graduate programs must be accredited according to the standards established by the Ministry of Education after consultation with the Council of Universities.

CONEAU's resolutions of the evaluation of undergraduate and graduate programs state accreditation for a period of three or six years, according to the demonstration of accomplishment of the standards.

CONEAU also has a process of university evaluation on an institutional level (external evaluation) which focuses on the analysis of the HEIs institutional project dimensions and achievements according to their missions and objectives. This self-evaluation process leads to quality enhancement actions.

For its operation, CONEAU has its own budget and divides its functions within four directorates: Programme Accreditation; Institutional Evaluation; Development, Planning and International Relations; and Administration.

ASSESSMENT OF COMPLIANCE WITH THE INQAAHE GUIDELINES OF GOOD PRACTICE

1. 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
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1.1 Legitimacy and recognition

CONEAU was established in 1996 by the HEL (Law 24.521 passed in 1995). According to article 46 of the HEL, CONEAU is a decentralized body that operates within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture and Education in consultation with the Council of Universities. According to the same article, the agency has its own budget. In addition, CONEAU is also ruled by National Executive Power Decree 173/96 and its modification 705/97.

CONEAU has its own internal regulation and a Code of Ethics. This Code (CONEAU Ordinance No. 27/2000) regulates the prevention of conflicts of interest by rules that guide the activities of members of the Agency, Directors, members or the technical team and advisory review committees of CONEAU. This Code states the obligation of refraining from participating in evaluation of accreditation processes in case of incompatibility.

CONEAU has considered in the formulation of its policies and practices the guidelines issued by the Council of Universities, as well as the SIAES Principles of Good Practice.

In the interviews celebrated with the Ministry of Education, the President, Vice president, the Secretary General, peer reviewers and personnel of CONEAU the previous was confirmed.

1.2 Mission and purposes

CONEAU's mission is "to develop and promote the policies and programs of evaluation and accreditation of the Argentinian University System, within the framework of the HEL". A commitment to this mission is appreciated in the different interviews held with authorities, staff and stakeholders, as well as in the reports of the different activities the Agency develops.

CONEAU's Quality Unit for Continuous Improvement (UCMC) is currently developing a framework to put together in a document its Mission, Vision, purposes and scope of its

activities. It is advised that objectives must be formalized, and actions documented. The agency does not yet have verifiable policies nor a strategic plan with effectiveness indicators.

According to the information provided in the self-assessment report, this unit will also be responsible for the development of the strategic plan of the Agency. To this date, CONEAU has only been operating with an annual plan, projects and operative plans of the different areas.

CONEAU's contribution to the improvement of quality of HEIs is positively valued by the different groups interviewed during the in-situ visit. However, according to the peer reviewers CONEAU'S scope of evaluation does not include the whole HE system.

1.3 Governance and organizational structure

CONEAU is run by a board of twelve members of renowned academic and scientific backgrounds, appointed by the National Executive Power at the proposal of the National Inter-University Council (3), the Council of Private University Presidents (1), the National Academy of Education (1), the Ministry of Culture and Education (1), and 3 by each of the Chambers of the Honourable Congress of the Nation for a term of four years and are partially renewed. In the interviews held during the on-site visit it was noted that this mechanism of election of board members is considered a virtuous process since it develops consensus and has regional recognition.

The President and Vice President of CONEAU are elected within the members of the board. The Secretary General is elected from the members or former members of CONEAU. All the appointments are annual.

The Board holds plenary and subcommittee meetings. In the plenary sessions the resolutions of institutional evaluation, accreditation of degree programs and validation of SIEDs are issued.

The four sub commissions are coordinated by a member of the board and are supported by CONEAU's directorates and coordinators of the technical areas of the Agency.

Since CONEAU is a law enforcement body, under the regulation of the Ministry of Education, it does not participate in the definition of the standards of programme accreditation. Those are defined by the Ministry of Education. In the report of the 2015 evaluation an area of opportunity was identified since several stakeholders (employers and professional organisations) declared their opinion is not considered for this matter. However, it is noted that higher education institutions participate in the process represented by the councils of public and private HEIs. CONEAU is regularly consulted and invited to design new standards, no matter its scope is focused on the interpretation and application of the standards. The participation of stakeholders (students, employers etc) in the definition and interpretation of quality could contribute to the culture of educational quality that CONEAU promotes.

CONEAU has developed a report of advances since the 2015 evaluation. It also states that its first development plan (strategic plan) will be developed when INQAAHE's

evaluation is over based on the recommendations arising from this institutional evaluation process. In the interviews held during the on-site visit, with authorities and the Quality Unit for Continuous Improvement, the panel confirmed the latter.

The members of the board develop annual work plans. In an interview with the Director of Administration it was confirmed that CONEAU has a financial plan that harmonizes the resources of the agency with its needs. This exercise allows it to determine the number of call-ups per year.

1.4 Resources

CONEAU's staff is made up of 140 agents, 53.2% of whom work directly in activities related to evaluation and accreditation. In its 2008 external evaluation it had 111 and it reached 173 in 2014. Due to its nature, their salaries are determined by the Ministry of Education. During the panel review it was noted that the Agency could benefit from an increase on the budget in order to expand its scope of accreditation, diminish the times of response as well as the workload on its personnel, and increase their salaries, which is also a demand of the technicians.

In interviews, the staff recognised the leadership and success of the President in his role for obtaining the necessary resources for CONEAU. He has managed to obtain the extra funding the agency has received since 2018, considering the agency had not received an increase in its budget.

The technical staff of the Agency, made up of professionals from different disciplines, has been trained for the development of its functions. The rest of the staff works in management and coordination tasks (7%), professional support tasks (9.4%), assistance and administration (19.5%), and general services (10.9%).

CONEAU's selection mechanism includes the revision of the profile of the candidates to ensure compliance.

In previous external evaluation processes (2007, 2015 and 2020) the training of the technical team has been recognised, but the turnover of the staff has been noted. CONAES recognizes this problem as an area of opportunity since it has worsened due to different factors including law decrees that have prevented the agency from hiring staff to replace those who have resigned, a generation of new young technicians that have few opportunities of development or stability within the agency, the workload, the low salaries and the lack of incentives for progress among others.

Since the pandemic a turnover decrease has been perceived, because of the advantages of teleworking. This was confirmed in the interviews held with members of the staff of the Agency. Considering this, CONEAU has opened a mixed work modality allowing its staff to continue developing its functions in a hybrid working model.

The HEL establishes that the Agency has its own budget. This budget was raised significantly considering the recommendations issued in previous evaluation processes. In addition, CONEAU has been given the faculty to raise its own resources (Source 12) that come from Training School. However, this last source of resources is not yet significant.

Following the recommendation of the 2015 external evaluation process, CONEAU centralized its operations into a headquarters building on lease (previously it worked in three different buildings). CONEAU has also developed informatic systems that have allowed the digitalization of its information through web applications. These systems can be accessed remotely from any computer with different levels of access for different profiles. CONEAU Global also allows teachers' access to update their profiles; this system is an important source of information.

CONEAU offers training opportunities to its staff. Nevertheless, the systematization of actions for the staff professional's development is a pending issue, according to the agency, which is developing a Comprehensive Training Plan for the technical team through the Area of Development, Research and Statistics with the support of the Training School. A strategic plan for strengthening human resources is also a matter needed.

In the different sessions of interviews, this panel confirmed that CONEAU'S staff members show a deep commitment with their functions; technicians are highly appreciated by HEIs representatives in charge of accreditation and evaluation processes, due to their knowledge, expertise and attitude of service.

Commendations

1. Development and implementation of the code of ethics at all levels of the organisation.
2. Creation of the new system coordination unit in the organizational structure of the institution (Quality Unit for Continuous Improvement).
3. Creation and promotion of the Training School, with a very good acceptance of the HEIs.
4. Structured and progressive promotion of teleworking, ensuring quality.
5. Excellent evaluation of the technical team by all interested parties.
6. Continuous support policy for HEIs, over time, with strong legitimacy and independence from political cycles.
7. Participation of technicians in research or other projects, beyond the evaluation process itself.

Critical recommendations for meeting the criteria

1. Establish and publish the verifiable policy of the agency, which includes the vision and mission of the CONEAU. (Criteria 1.2.1.)
2. Establish a strategic plan from which verifiable objectives are derived in line with CONEAU policy, including the different established development plans, as well as the processes for their continuous monitoring. (Criteria 1.3.4.)
3. Promote the participation, through feasible and timely mechanisms, of CONEAU's expertise in the definition of evaluation standards. (Criteria 1.3.1.)

4. Promote the participation of interested parties (students, employers, etc.) in the definition and interpretation of quality criteria for the evaluation. (Criteria 1.3.1.)
5. Promotion of the new Quality Unit for Continuous Improvement for the proper implementation and monitoring of the CONEAU strategy and systematization of all improvement processes (for example, data collection and analysis). Reflect on its correct location in the organisation chart of the agency. (Criteria 1.3.3.)
6. Preparation of a policy and a strategic human resources plan, with performance indicators, which will allow the future development of the necessary actions for better management and information on activities for all agency personnel (recruitment, training, recognition, etc.) including a comprehensive training plan (detection of annual training needs, training evaluation, etc.) that enables, in a systematic way, a better integration of all workers in the CONEAU and a better professional development. (Criteria 1.4.1.; 1.4.2. and 1.4.3.)
7. Ensure the provision of financial and human resources in case the scope of the agency's powers is increased. (Criteria 1.4.2.)

Additional recommendations for consideration

1. Promotion of the Training School, expanding the scope of its activities even for the training of the technical team itself.
2. Promote that the pertinent instances consider the evaluation of the venues and sub-venues within the scope of CONEAU's evaluation competencies in order to ensure delivery throughout the higher education system.

2. 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

CONEAU operates with transparency and integrity. All its decisions are public, including reports and resolutions, as well as procedures and activities, through web-based systems that can be accessed by the public. These has been ratified by the 2020 evaluation process of SIACES (Best Practices of the Ibero-American System for Quality Assurance in Higher Education).

CONEAU's Code of Ethics is duly followed by all the Agency members, staff members and peer reviewers. This was recognised by the stakeholders (Presidents, HEIs' staff and peer reviewers) interviewed during the on-site visit.

CONEAU also complies with Law 27275 on Access to Public Information which promotes transparency in public administration.

Prior to this INQAAHE process (2021-2022), CONEAU has participated in three international external processes (2007, 2015 and 2020). For each of these, the Agency has developed a self-assessment report and has developed continuous improvement plans based on the recommendations of each exercise.

CONEAU also created the Quality Unit for Continuous Improvement with the purpose of systematizing the information collected by surveys as well as developing a plan for working on improvement guidelines and projects.

CONEAU has carried out different surveys among its staff, Presidents and reviewers among others to obtain information that allows it to improve quality in its actions. The critical spirit of the Agency and value of these instruments is recognised by the member of the panels, however it is advised of the importance of making these evaluations a periodic practice, including the documentation of results and actions derived from them.

2.2 Links to the QA community

CONEAU participates in different agencies and projects within the Latin-American region, playing an active role, including ARCU-SUR and the Ibero-American System for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (SIACES). It has also been a member of INQAAHE's Board for two periods.

CONEAU collaborates in different projects and programs and encourages the participation of technical staff in exchange opportunities. The increase in participation

in international activities has been possible to comply with the challenge stated in its 2015 External Evaluation Report.

CONEAU has a good relationship with quality assurance agencies, such as ANECA (Spain), HCÉRES (France), ANVUR (Italy), CACES (Ecuador) and German, Uruguayan and Peruvian agencies or ministries.

In the interview held with Presidents of HEIs it was noted that they have an open attitude towards the role that CONEAU plays in the international context and how it can bring different opportunities to Argentinian higher education institutions. It is clear that in the last years CONEAU has earned the recognition of the HEIs, however, it is still yet to be obtained the recognition of other stakeholders, such as students and employers.

Commendations

1. Relevant consideration of international policies and practices (INQAAHE, SIACES, WFME, etc) in the development of the agency's activities.
2. Completeness and accuracy of the collection of information from external agents during the external evaluation processes.
3. Determined commitment to the periodic external evaluation of CONEAU, and promotion of continuous improvement.
4. Promotion of the relationship with international networks and entities through CONEAU international.

Critical recommendations for meeting the criteria

1. Systematization, periodically, of the collection of information from external agents, especially peer reviewers and university managers; and analysis of it. (Criteria 2.1.3)
2. Systematization of the monitoring of improvement actions detected through external evaluations or internal processes. (Criteria 2.1.4)

Additional recommendations for consideration

1. Promote the orientation of public reports and other information systems, to the different external agents of the institution (for example, reports aimed at students, employers, government, etc.) to improve their visibility and impact on the quality of higher education.
2. Continue promoting the exchange of experiences between institutions, especially with agencies with similar international characteristics (joint projects, exchanges of personnel, etc.).

3. 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

Since it was created in 1996, CONEAU has developed its activities of programmatic accreditation, institutional evaluation, analysis of viability and consistency of private HEIs and worked in the start up of national university institutions, as well as the authorization for the operation of the Public Registry of Research Centers and Higher Vocational Training Institutions, respecting the autonomy and academic freedom of HEIs.

CONEAU understands the importance that institutions undertake the principle that the main responsibility for quality assurance relies on them, and is beginning to promote the establishment of internal quality assurance systems in the institutions according to international guidelines on the quality of higher education and the HEL provisions of article 44, that states that HEIs must ensure operation of internal institutional evaluation bodies.

In order to support this efforts, CONEAU has developed a Training School for training human resources of university institutions in the processes of evaluation and accreditation; it is also developing with CAF a study on Quality Assurance Systems in university institutions in Argentina; and it participates in an Erasmus+ project together with 19 Latin American and European Institutions seeking an advance in internationalization processes linked to quality assurance systems in higher education. Nevertheless, no formal actions have been taken by the agency to promote internal quality assurance systems within the HEIs, nor are they understood by their personnel responsible for quality assurance processes.

CONEAU has been working to favor institutions in terms of time and costs involved in quality evaluation and accreditation processes costs. To help HEIs, the external evaluation and accreditation processes carried out by CONEAU do not entail the payment of fees (including the payment and mobility of peer reviewers), whether state or privately managed. In terms of time, the agency has implemented several actions such as: focused evaluation at the graduate level, unification of national accreditation and ARCU-SUR, simplification in the distance education programme submission when they were previously taught on-site, the establishment of digital tools to help

institutions access to information for making the evaluation and accreditation processes easier and reducing the time it takes to upload information.

3.2 The definition of criteria for external quality review

In Argentina institutional evaluation is carried out from the perspective of the institutional project, the general regulatory framework, and actions of improvement; unlike other QA systems it does not have previously established standards.

In the case of accreditation of undergraduate programs, it is carried out according to the standards approved by the Ministry of Education in agreement with the Council of Universities, as a result of a process of analysis, debates and agreements among different actors involved. In the case of graduate programs, the standards are designed after a process of analysis, debates and agreements among different actors, the agreement of the Council of Universities and the resolution of approval by the Ministry of Education. All the standards must be reviewed after a completion of a cycle of accreditation.

Even though CONEAU does not participate in the definition of the standards for external review, the agency does have a leading role in the interpretation of them and works closely with HEIs and the peer review teams. Presidents of HEIs recognize the leadership of CONEAU. The consistency meetings held with the participation of peer reviewers at the end of a cycle of accreditation processes gives a view of diversity and equalizes the recommendations.

Following the recommendation of the external evaluation process of 2015, CONEAU has become a central actor in the quality assurance of distance education through SIEDs (defined by a Ministerial resolution). In an interview, CONEAU's staff noted that the experience with SIEDs made a difference in the way institutions faced the pandemics.

CONEAU's criteria and standards for undergraduate and graduate programs, as well as the peer reviewers guide include the evaluation of institutional framework, curriculum, academic staff, students, infrastructure, resources available, etc.

The agency has been promoting the establishment of internal systems of quality in HEIs to make them reflect and follow-up recommendations and commitments. Nevertheless, a systematic effort on the matter is not yet documented. It is advised by the members of this panel to encourage the reflection and development of plans of continuous improvement from the results of accreditation and evaluation processes.

CONEAU has developed guides and materials (available in CONEAU Global System) in order to provide institutions with aids to analyze criteria. In the workshops they offer the procedures, standards, instruments, and evidence for demonstrating compliance with the standards are explained. CONEAU is developing a series of audiovisuals on these subjects to make them permanently available on its website for HEIs.

3.3 The external review process

CONEAU's institutional evaluation and accreditation processes of graduate and undergraduate programs involve a self-evaluation and an external evaluation process based on public criteria and procedures. All the information regarding evaluation and accreditation is public. To help HEIs in the uploading of the self-evaluation information to its electronic system (CONEAU Global), the Agency has developed several applications. The platform that is also available for peer reviewers responsible for the external evaluation stage, includes the guide of peers that interacts with the electronic submission of information of institutions and its compliance with standards, allowing experts to make a judgment on the compliance. This instrument is the input for the preparation of the evaluation reports. The external review processes involve offsite and on-site visits, depending on the case.

The Agency has approved regulations and developed guides to help HEIs and peer evaluators to understand what is expected in the accreditation (graduate and undergraduate) and institutional evaluation processes. During the interviews held with peer reviewers, HEIs' staff responsible for the processes and technicians of CONEAU this statement was confirmed.

To this date, CONEAU has a register of 14,240 experts who collaborate as peer reviewers integrated in committees for external evaluation, SIED evaluations and accreditations of undergraduate and graduate programs. The database of experts includes professionals, academics, researchers, and administrators with experience in management in the education field.

The Agency has a well-established process for the approval of shortlists of each committee, following its regulations of integration and prevention of conflicts of interest. All the peer review committee (PRC) members must accept to participate and comply with CONEAU's Code of Ethics. HEIs have the right to make observations to the shortlist and even challenge it. According to the data provided during the on-site evaluation, 4.5 out of ten peers do not accept to participate; for this reason, on each committee substitutes are assigned on the shortlist.

The register of experts is administered by an area of the Directorate of Development, Planning and International Relations, which works permanently in the updating and elimination of profiles that have not been used and have reached their assigned date of obsolescence. All the process has been revised and is a matter of interest to the Agency.

CONEAU has approved an ordinance (No. 60/2022) for including student experts to serve in evaluation and accreditation committees. In order to prepare them, training processes have been developed and the authorities are working on the definition of requirements and conditions. However, Presidents have expressed their concerns and doubts of the project.

The prevention of conflict of interest in evaluation and accreditation is a matter of consideration for CONEAU, therefore, beside the Code of Ethics, other mechanisms have been installed for the selection and challenge of peer reviewers as well as for the

consistency meetings in the degree programme accreditation processes and institutional evaluation processes.

CONEAU's consistency meetings in the programs accreditation processes are held to have several peer review committees on the same date, to simultaneously evaluate subgroups of the degree programs submitted in the same call. At these meetings, experts share all cases to adjust the criteria for standard application, internal coherence and consistency. The evaluation reports sent to HEIs is a product of consensus reached at these meetings.

All the processes are accompanied by a CONEAU technician. The calendar of calls is programmed based on the number of evaluations that CONEAU'S technician team can manage per year, as well as the budget of the agency. This ensures a reasonable timeframe for HEIs and that information is up to date. Even though CONEAU has regulations and deadlines, Presidents have expressed their concern on the response times of the accreditation of graduate programs, and detriment on the dynamism the level should have. CONEAU is aware of the concerns and is working on the development of strategies. For this reason, CONEAU will be advised to review the roles, functions and workload of technicians, as well as revise its mechanisms of communication with University Presidents.

The agency has clear established processes for HEIs to correct factual errors, submit clarifications, new information and documents, as well as improvement plans to address observations and judgements included in the evaluation reports. In degree programs accreditation, the peers of the appointed committee review the case and only then CONEAU can make an accreditation decision on the programme. HEIs can submit an appeal for reconsideration on the final decision.

3.4 The requirements for self-evaluation

CONEAU has clear and explicit self-evaluation processes. It provides diverse opportunities for dialogue and training of institutions. This is recognised by HEIs' Presidents and staff.

Technicians are highly appreciated by the responsible of evaluation and accreditation processes of HEIs. They guide, consult, provide accompaniment, and clarify the processes.

Commendations

1. Rigor and consistency of the peer review process.
2. Promotion of quality assurance in online education.
3. Support materials, in different formats, for the dissemination of evaluation criteria and other CONEAU activities.
4. Emerging strategic promotion of student participation in evaluation processes.
5. Training of peer reviewers.

Critical recommendations for meeting the criteria

1. Promotion and impulse of the internal quality systems as part of the development of the own responsibility of the HEIs as a support to the external accreditation processes. (Criteria 3.1.2.)
2. Improve the evaluation processes that allow a reduction of the bureaucratic load (in the HEIs and in the agency itself), especially in the extensive evaluation of postgraduates. With this objective, analyze the possibility of reducing the workload, especially in second and subsequent evaluations of the same program or institution, and in accreditation processes of programs in institutions previously institutionally evaluated. (Criteria 3.1.3.)
3. Harmonious reference framework to ensure that the demand levels are similar between the different programs. (Criteria 3.3.6.)

Additional recommendations for consideration

1. Continue promoting orientation towards the evaluation of student learning results in the evaluation process, ensuring their adequate training / graduate results.
2. Design of processes for the participation of students in the evaluation: selection, training, follow-up, evaluation, recognition, etc.
3. Consolidation of the registry of experts and the process linked to their follow-up, including the verification of their competences as well as a better update of the CVs and their evaluation.
4. Continue advancing in the integration of information systems to improve data consistency between institutions, mainly state institutions, reducing deadlines and workload during the accreditation process and later in the overall analysis of the results obtained.
5. Carry out specific meta-evaluations, aimed at continuous improvement, systematically and periodically of the evaluation processes implemented.
6. Improvements in the process, procedures and adjust the payments to the reviewers according to the expected dedication and the Argentinian economic situation.

4. The EQAA and its relationship to the public

The EQAA makes public its policies and decisions about institutions and programs, 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

CONEAU's website is the main channel to disseminate its relevant documentation, policies and regulations. All the information regarding evaluation and accreditation is available, including the criteria and calls for application. All the reports are available, including resolutions, evidencing transparency in the different processes managed by CONEAU.

The agency also has a help desk (telephone and email based) for contact with every area. It also responds to private enquiries via social media (Facebook and LinkedIn). These actions were established in consideration of the recommendation received in its 2015 external evaluation. However, the agency is aware of an area of opportunity in the development of communication strategies for enhancing the visibility and recognition of its scope by students and society. In the interview held with students, they expressed their interest in the activities the agency develops including the possibility of having students serve as experts in peer review teams. It was confirmed that even though the agency's work is recognised within faculty members and University's leaders, students and social society have a limited knowledge of the work CONEAU makes to promote quality assurance in Argentina.

4.2 Other public reports

CONEAU has published the different reports on its own evaluation, as well as a report on the activities it carried out after its first institutional evaluation. The Unit of Quality has the mandate of producing management reports from the follow-up of CONEAU's development plan, once it is completed.

CONEAU has made an important effort to make information available for different stakeholders, including studies, researches and statistics, as well as an annual statistical report on the evaluation processes carried out by the agency. It also publishes an Annual Graduate Degree Programme Guide and is working on a graduate search engine to make access agile and keep information updated.

Nevertheless, it is advised that an effort of communication of the efforts of the agency is required in order to reach students and other stakeholders.

Commendations

1. Adequate publication of detailed, consistent and complete accreditation and evaluation reports, and associated procedures.

Critical recommendations for meeting the criteria

1. Gradual establishment of the publication of periodic cross-sectional reports (quality of degrees, job placement...), based on all the information collected in the individual accreditation and evaluation processes, which may be useful for the government, HEIs, potential students and employers. (Criteria 4.2.2.)
2. Improvement of communication, through the web page, in orientation to the community (students, employers, etc.) that allows them to be an input for decision-making. (Criteria 4.1.3.)

Additional recommendations for consideration

1. Promotion of projects that allow periodic quantitative data to be obtained on relevant aspects in improving the quality of the programs (labor insertion, occupants, student satisfaction, graduate satisfaction, etc...)
2. Definition of an effective and versatile communication strategy that makes CONEAU's work visible to potential users.

5. 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

CONEAU has clear regulation and processes for decision making at different stages of institutional evaluation and programs accreditation. The Plenary of the agency has an important part in the final stage. Peer reviewers are also a key part of the process.

The consistency process is recognised as a good practice to ensure that decisions are diverse, coherent, consistent and made transparently.

All the decisions are publicly accessible on CONEAU's website; including the minutes of the Plenary members that are also public.

Decisions are communicated to HEIs and other stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Education through formal channels, allowing institutions to file complaints if needed.

5.2 The EQAA's process for appeals and complaints

CONEAU has different mechanisms for HEIs to clarify or complain in the different stages of the processes. All of them are included in regulations and are fairly widespread.

In the very first stage, a HEI can challenge the experts list of peers approved by CONEAU. As mentioned before, they can also make observations, submit missing information or suggest corrections, if necessary, to the peer review committee reports. They also have the right to present an appeal on the resolution for reconsideration purposes.

Reconsideration, clarification and review complaints are clearly defined in the corresponding regulations, which are also public.

However, all appeals are reviewed by CONEAU itself. In interviews, it was confirmed that along its existence only two cases of appeals have been filed. The panel advises that according to the standards and even though very few appeals have been filed, there should be an independent committee to revise the cases.

A judiciary appeal is also stated in ordinances. These cases are managed by the Ministry of Education and the Federal Courts of Justice with jurisdiction in Administrative Litigation. Only one case has been brought to the Ministry of Education since CONEAU's creation.

Commendations

1. Rigorous, transparent evaluation system aimed at continuous improvement.

Critical recommendations for meeting the criteria

1. To comply with the standard strictly and completely, the agency can find the mechanisms that allow that appeals are conducted by a Panel that was not responsible for the original decision and has no conflict of interest observing (Criteria 5.2.3.).

Additional recommendations for consideration

1. Promote the orientation of public reports and other information systems, to the different external agents of the institution (for example, reports aimed at students)

6. 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
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6.1 Criteria for cross border higher education

CONEAU declares it does not have jurisdiction to evaluate programs offered by HEIs within other regulatory frameworks or for Argentinian HEIs operating in other countries, therefore it does not include any criteria or indicators to promote the quality and evaluation of cross-border education in any of its evaluation and accreditation processes.

Considering this, section 6.1 does not apply to CONEAU and cannot be assessed.

6.2 Collaboration between agencies

As described previously, CONEAU has a prolific collaboration at the international level, with other quality assurance agencies as well as international networks. These participations include the exchange of good practices, staff exchange experiences, international research projects, degree recognition agreements and different mobility initiatives, among many others. University Presidents recognize the role CONEAU plays in the international arena and the benefits it brings to Argentinian HE System.

Commendations

1. Participation and involvement of CONEAU in the Ibero-American higher education system.

Critical recommendations for meeting the criteria

None

Additional recommendations for consideration

1. Continue promoting international relations with entities of recognised prestige, with the aim of continuing to strengthen higher education in Argentina.
2. Explore the possibility of carrying out recognition of the accreditations for those international inter-university degrees with independent accreditations in each country.
3. Promote training to support the internationalization of HEIs (knowledge of international standards, international inter-university degrees, etc.).
4. Explore the possibility, with the respective instances, to carry out transnational accreditations in those states in which Argentina and/or its HEIs have a special interest.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

After completing the revision of the report, evidences and interviews held during the on-site visit, the panel wants to share the level of completion of the GGP for helping the agency in the development of its strategic plan.

	Compliance
1. THE STRUCTURE OF THE EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY (EQAA)	SC
1.1. Legitimacy and recognition	
1.1.1	FC
1.1.2	FC
1.1.3	FC
1.2 Mission and purposes	
1.2.1	PC
1.3 Governance and organisational structure	
1.3.1	SC
1.3.2	FC
1.3.3	FC
1.3.4	PC
1.4 Resources	
1.4.1	FC
1.4.2	SC
1.4.3	PC
2. ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE EQAA	FC
2.1 Quality assurance of the EQAA	
2.1.1	FC
2.1.2	SC
2.1.3	FC
2.1.4	FC
2.2 Links to the QA community	
2.2.1	FC
2.2.2	FC
3. THE EQAA'S FRAMEWORK FOR THE EXTERNAL REVIEW OF QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS	FC
3.1 The relationship between the EQAA and higher education institutions	
3.1.1.	FC

3.1.2.	PC
3.1.3.	FC
3.2 The definition of criteria for external quality review	
3.2.1	FC
3.2.2	FC
3.2.3	FC
3.2.4	FC
3.2.5	PC
3.2.6	FC
3.3 The external review process	
3.3.1	FC
3.3.2	FC
3.3.3	FC
3.3.4	FC
3.3.5	FC
3.3.6	FC
3.3.7	FC
3.3.8	FC
3.4 The requirements for self-evaluation	
3.4.1	FC
4. THE EQAA AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE PUBLIC	SC
4.1 Public reports on EQAA policies and decisions	
4.1.1	FC
4.1.2	FC
4.1.3	PC
4.2 Other public reports	
4.2.1	FC
4.2.2	SC
5. DECISION MAKING	SC
5.1 The decision-making process	
5.1.1	FC
5.1.2	FC
5.1.3	FC
5.1.4	FC
5.1.5	FC

5.2 The EQAA's process for appeals and complaints	
5.2.1	FC
5.2.2	FC
5.2.3	NC
6. THE QA OF CROSS BORDER HIGHER EDUCATION	FC
6.1 Criteria for cross border higher education	
6.1.1	N.A.
6.1.2	FC
6.1.3	N.A.
6.2 Collaboration between agencies	
6.2.1	FC
6.2.2	FC

CONCLUSIONS

CONEAU is a well-established quality assurance agency that has shown a commitment to its main purpose as the sole quality assurance agency in Argentina. It has continued to develop following the recommendations of previous external evaluation exercises. The agency not only is responsible for the external evaluation and program accreditation, but it also offers workshops and training programs to HEIs. The Training School is recognized as an important effort.

The agency has developed coherent and transparent processes of institutional evaluation, programmatic accreditation, and distance education systems evaluation. The processes have clear criteria and standards that are well known by HEIs. CONEAU has a website and mechanisms that ensure that information is available for HEIs and stakeholders. Reports and decisions are made public.

The Ministry of Education recognizes the value of the organization, as well as its leadership. University Presidents agree that CONEAU has helped in the construction of a higher education space of quality in the region. The high degree of satisfaction of the staff and HEIs with regard to the support offered by CONEAU and its impact on the improvement of quality is commendable.

CONEAU's leaders and board members have shown their commitment to the continuous improvement of the agency, as well as increasing its relationships with leading quality assurance networks and foreign agencies.

The Agency still faces the challenge of consolidating its mission and objectives in a strategic plan that should contemplate new ways of communicating with its staff and stakeholders. It should also develop a clear process to include students in peer review committees and regulations to consolidate institutional quality assurance systems in HEIs.

The critical spirit and prospective state evidenced in its self-assessment report is also commended by the panel. The panel also wants to acknowledge the work developed by the agency, its commitment to the process and the integrity demonstrated. The panel expresses its gratitude to President Nestor Pan, Secretary General Martin Strah, board members, directors, staff, HEIs' Presidents and representatives, peer reviewers and students that participated in all the interviews.

From the evidence gathered in this external review, CONEAU’S alignment with INQAAHE’s Guidelines of Good Practice is substantial; therefore, **the review panel recommends to the INQAAHE Board of Directors to certify CONEAU’s compliance with the GGPs.**

GGP Sections	NOT COMPLAINT	PARTIALLY COMPLAINT	SUBSTANTIALLY COMPLAINT	FULLY COMPLAINT
1			✓	
2				✓
3				✓
4			✓	
5			✓	
6				✓

ANNEX 1. SITE VISIT AGENDA

October 26th, 2022

Hour (Argentina)	Session	Number of interviewees
9:30-10:00	Session 1: Welcome meeting and presentation with President and Secretary General	2
10:00-11:30	Session 2: Meeting with CONEAU's Board Members and Consultants	15
11:45-13:15	Session 3: Meeting with University Presidents	10
14:30-15:30	Session 4: Meeting with Unity of Quality	9
15:30-16:30	Internal meeting of the GGP Review Panel	
17:00	Session 5: Meeting with the Ministry of Education	1

October 27th, 2022

Hour (Argentina)	Session	Number of interviewees
9:00-10:30	Session 6: Meeting with Directorate of Institutional Evaluation	4
10:45-12:15	Session 7: Meeting with Directorate of Accreditation	13
12:15-13:15	Session 8: Meeting with staff of the Direction of Development, Planning and International Relations	4
14:15-15:00	Session 9: Meeting with staff of the Area of Systems	3
15:00-15:45	Session 10: Meeting with Directorate of Administration	2
16:00-17:00	Session 11: Meeting with CONEAU'S staff	10
17:00	Session 12: Internal meeting of the GGP Review Panel	

October 27th, 2022

Hour (Argentina)	Session	Number of interviewees
9:00-10:30	Session 13: Meeting with staff responsible of quality in HEIs	9
10:45-12:15	Session 14: Meeting with peer reviewers	8
12:15-13:15	Session 15: Meeting with students	6
14:15-16:00	Internal meeting of the GGP Review Panel	
16:00-17:00	Session: Feedback to CONEAU's Secretary General, Board Members and Directors	

ANNEX 2. COMPOSITION OF THE PANEL

- President.- Francisco Xavier Cadena (Ecuador): Principal professor at the Escuela Politécnica Nacional (Ecuador)
- Secretary.- María Eugenia Bolaños Vargas (México): Accreditation System Coordinator, Federation of Mexican Private Higher Education Institutions, FIMPES.
- Expert.- Martí Casadeus Fa (Spain): Full professor in Business Management at the Universitat de Girona (Spain)

ANNEX 3. 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

- I.1.1 The EQAA has an established legal basis and is recognised by a competent external body.
- I.1.2 The EQAA takes into consideration relevant guidelines issued by international networks and other associations, in formulating its policies and practices.
- I.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.

I.2 Mission and purposes

- I.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.

I.3 Governance and organisational structure

- I.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.
- I.3.2 The composition of the decision-making body and/or its regulatory framework ensure its independence and impartiality.
- I.3.3 The EQAA's organisational structure makes it possible to carry out its external review processes effectively and efficiently
- I.3.4 The EQAA has a strategic plan that helps assess its progress and plan for future developments

I.4 Resources

- I.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.
- I.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.
- I.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.

II.1 Quality assurance of the EQAA

- II.1.1 The EQAA operates with transparency, integrity and professionalism and adheres to ethical and professional standards.
- II.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.
- II.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.
- II.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.

II.2 Links to the QA community

- II.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.
- II.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.

III.1 The relationship between the EQAA and higher education institutions

- III.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.
- III.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.
- III.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.

III.2 The definition of criteria for external quality review

- III.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.
- III.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.
- III.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.
- III.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).

III.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.

III.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.

III.3 The external review process

III.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.

III.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.

III.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.

III.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.

III.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.

III.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.

III.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.

III.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

III.4 The requirements for self-evaluation

III.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 programs, discloses the decisions about its own performance and disseminates reports on outcomes of QA processes.

IV.1 Public reports on EQAA policies and decisions

- IV.1.1** The EQAA provides full and clear disclosure of its relevant documentation such as policies, procedures and criteria.
- IV.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.
- IV.1.3** The EQAA has mechanisms to facilitate the public a fair understanding of the reasons supporting decisions taken.

IV.2 Other public reports

- IV.2.1** The EQAA discloses to the public the decisions about the EQAA resulting from any external review of its own performance.
- IV.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.

V.1 The decision-making process

- V.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.
- V.1.2** The EQAA decisions are impartial, rigorous, and consistent even when they are based on the reports of other quality assurance bodies.
- V.1.3** The EQAA decisions are based on published criteria and procedures, and, can be justified only with reference to those criteria and procedures.
- V.1.4** Consistency in decision-making includes consistency and transparency in processes and actions for imposing recommendations for follow-up action.
- V.1.5** The EQAA's reported decisions are clear and precise.

V.2 The EQAA's process for appeals and complaints

- V.2.1** The EQAA has procedures in place to deal in a consistent way with complaints about its procedures or operation.
- V.2.2** The EQAA has clear, published procedures for handling appeals related to its external review and decision-making processes.
- V.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.

VI.1 Criteria for cross border higher education

- VI.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.
- VI.1.2** Students and other stakeholders receive clear and complete information about the awards delivered.
- VI.1.3** The rights and obligations of the parties involved in transnational education are clearly established and well known by the parties.

VI.2 Collaboration between agencies

- VI.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.
- VI.2.2** The EQAA seeks ways to cooperate in the external quality assurance in transnational education provision, for example through mutual recognition.