IEP
EUA-Institutional Evaluation Programme

EUA'S INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION PROGRAMME
Self-evaluation report

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EUA-Institutional Evaluation Programme

1. Introduction

EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) is currently a full member of ENQA and listed in the EQAR. In order to retain this status, it needs to undergo a cyclical external review that examines its compliance with the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). The last external review report of the IEP dates from April 2009. With this in mind, the Programme asked ENQA to coordinate a review to take place in 2013-2014.

This report presents the results of IEP's self-evaluation exercise. It aims to provide an analysis of how IEP complies with the ESG and ENQA membership criteria, as well as a self-reflection on possible ways to further develop and improve the Programme. This self-evaluation takes place in the framework of a type A external review, defined in ENQA's *Guidelines for external reviews of quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area.*

The self-evaluation process was launched in October 2012 with the IEP Steering Committee appointing a self-evaluation group (SEG). This group is composed of members of the IEP pool of experts and a representative of the IEP secretariat, and was designed to reflect the diversity in the IEP pool. The members of this group are:

- Tove Bull, former Rector, University of Tromsø, Norway, and IEP team chair
- Derin Ural, Vice-President, Istanbul Technical University, Turkey, and IEP team member
- Fernando Miguel Galan Palomares, student of medicine, University of Cantabria, Spain; IEP team member and member of the IEP Steering Committee until August 2013
- Dionyssis Kladis, Professor Emeritus, University of the Peloponnese, Greece, and IEP team coordinator
- Padraig Walsh, Chief Executive, Quality and Qualifications Board, Ireland; IEP team coordinator, and member of the IEP Steering Committee until August 2013
- Tia Loukkola, Head of Unit, IEP secretariat

Thérèse Zhang, Programme Manager at the IEP secretariat, acted as secretary to the group.

In addition to this group, the IEP Extended Steering Committee,[1] members of the IEP pool of experts and the IEP secretariat contributed to the self-evaluation process. The main steps of this process were:

- The IEP Steering Committee set up the self-evaluation group in October 2012;
- The SEG met twice between January and September 2013, with continued exchanges on various documents and drafts through e-mail;
- In parallel, the IEP secretariat conducted its own SWOT analysis that contributed to the work of the SEG;
- A draft self-evaluation report was prepared by the SEG and discussed by the Extended Steering Committee on 25 September 2013;

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[1] The Extended Steering Committee includes the current IEP Steering Committee and all the evaluation team chairs who took part in at least one evaluation in the most recent round/academic year.

- The IEP pool contributed to the SWOT exercise during the 2013 annual seminar (26 September);
- The SEG met to adapt the draft self-evaluation report following the feedback received during the annual seminar (27 September);
- The final version of the self-evaluation report was sent to the review panel and to the ENQA secretariat (October 2013).

IEP took the self-evaluation process as an opportunity to foster internal discussions on its processes, improve self-knowledge through data analysis, introduce changes into existing procedures based on the analysis performed during the process, and as community-building within the pool.

The structure of this report is as follows:

- Section 2 presents a short history of IEP: its main characteristics and principles, recent developments, and a summary SWOT analysis;

- Section 3 summarises the findings of the IEP's self-evaluation process against each standard and the ENQA membership criteria;

- The Conclusions provide indications for the future direction of the Programme.

2. IEP in its context

2.1. History

In 1994, the Association of European Universities (*Conférence des Recteurs européens*, CRE) launched the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) as an activity for its member institutions. CRE represented universities from 1957 to 2001 when it was succeeded by a new organisation – the European University Association (EUA) – which has continued IEP as part of its larger portfolio of activities related to quality assurance and to the development of institutional capacity.

The launch of IEP was triggered by a proposal from the Ministers of Education and the Council of the European Communities, under the Dutch Presidency, to have a European quality evaluation system. CRE launched IEP in order to: i) demonstrate that universities could regulate themselves; ii) propose a peer-review evaluation model that was seen as adequate to meet university requirements; and iii) prepare CRE members for the national evaluation procedures that were starting to be put in place.[2]

Since then, the European higher education landscape has undergone considerable changes: the Bologna Process has contributed to the rise of quality assurance in the policy discourse leading to the introduction of external quality assurance agencies in practically all countries in the newly established European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Following the Berlin Communiqué in 2003 and the adoption of the ESG in 2005, higher education institutions have strengthened their internal quality assurance systems.

In the course of the last two decades, IEP has also continued to adapt and develop, and offer evaluations that are not related to national accountability or funding purposes. In 2009 IEP's full membership of ENQA was re-confirmed and in 2011 it was listed in EQAR. It was the first quality assurance body created with a broad European-wide mandate to be listed in the Register and to be an ENQA member.

2.2. Profile

Today, IEP is an independent service of EUA that is in line with the mission of the Association to strengthen Europe's higher education institutions. IEP is managed by an independent Steering Committee that has full responsibility for the development and operation of the Programme. The IEP organigramme presented in Annex A demonstrates the division of responsibilities of the various actors within the Programme.

The following core principles of the Programme have remained constant:

- IEP's main activity is to offer institutional evaluations to higher education institutions.

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[2] For further details, see Amaral, A. & Sursock, A., 2009, 'Self-Regulation in Europe: The Institutional Evaluation programme', in Amaral, A. et al. (Eds.), *Essays on Supportive Peer Review* (New York, Nova Science Publishers) pp. 35-37.

- IEP evaluations are improvement-orientated, resulting in evaluation reports identifying good practices and providing recommendations for improvement. Its evaluations do not lead to any summative judgement or accreditation.

- IEP is not related to national accountability purposes; the starting point of any evaluation is that institutions register for an evaluation on a voluntary basis. IEP does not replace the role of national quality assurance agencies unless otherwise specifically agreed with the national authority (See Sections II.3, II.6 and II.7).

- IEP applies a peer-review approach in its evaluations. The focus of the evaluations is the institution as a whole and its strategic management and thus one key target audience of the evaluations is the institutional leadership. As a consequence, the majority of IEP evaluation teams consist of persons with institutional leadership experience (See Section II.4).

- IEP is a European evaluation programme, with teams that represent the European higher education landscape and its diversity, offering their experiences to the service of the institution under evaluation.

Furthermore, the methodology of the Programme has remained stable since the early years of the Programme:

- Because IEP is designed with the intention of evaluating institutions anywhere in Europe or beyond and is improvement-orientated, it uses the institution's vision, mission and quality standards as starting points.

- Rather than using a standardised, externally defined set of criteria, IEP evaluations are based on four key questions, which are a form of the "Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA)" cycle:

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

These questions form the basis of the evaluations that embrace all aspects and missions of a higher education institution (teaching and learning, research, and service to society), and include the scope and purpose of the ESG part I (see Sections II.2 and II.3). This methodological approach is consistent with the principle that the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself, as acknowledged by the European Ministers for higher education of the EHEA in the Berlin Communiqué, in 2003.

- The evaluation process itself consists of the following steps:

  o A self-evaluation process by the institution, which results in a self-evaluation report that serves as a background document for the work of the IEP team;
  o Two site visits (a two-day visit and a three-day visit) by the IEP team, concluding with an oral report with key findings and recommendations delivered by the team at the end of the second visit;
  o A final evaluation report prepared by the IEP team.

In addition to individual institutional evaluations that are performed at the request of institutions,[3] IEP carries out coordinated evaluations. These evaluations are typically initiated at the joint request of institutions and public authorities, and involve all or most higher education institutions in a given country or region. Each institution receives its own IEP evaluation report; whenever it is appropriate, IEP also produces a system-wide analysis report that highlights shared issues and challenges and facilitates a fruitful dialogue among all key actors and stakeholders, including governments. To date, about one third of all evaluations carried out by IEP have been undertaken in the framework of such coordinated evaluations (see Section II.8). IEP has evaluated all universities in Serbia (2001/2002), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2003/2004), Ireland (2003/2004), and Slovakia (2005/2007), and a number of institutions in Macedonia (FYROM) (2002/2005), Catalonia (2004/2005), Portugal (2006/2010) and Turkey (2007/2008). Currently IEP is carrying out such coordinated evaluations in Romania and Montenegro (see Annex L).

In recent years, IEP has undergone changes that have aimed at further developing and ensuring the quality of the Programme's activities, its adaptability to the changing higher education landscape, and the consistency of the evaluation reports. These changes will be detailed in the next sections of the report.

2.3. SWOT analysis

In the framework of the self-evaluation, IEP conducted a SWOT analysis that involved the SEG, the Extended Steering Committee, the IEP pool and the secretariat. The results are summarised in the table below.

While the overall SWOT exercise was conducted as an improvement-orientated activity for the Programme, the strengths and weaknesses listed below are to be understood as strengths and weaknesses against the purpose of complying with the ESG.

The opportunities and threats are to be understood in the context of maintaining and developing sustainability, content and quality of the Programme. The core challenge is to ensure quality while still addressing sustainability; an issue that was raised already at the launch of the Programme nearly 20 years ago and continues to guide the work of the IEP steering committee.

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[3] Before agreeing to evaluate an institution, the IEP secretariat will check its status in order not to be placed in the situation of evaluating a diploma mill, for which IEP's improvement-orientated approach is not suited.

Strengths	• The philosophy of IEP: an improvement-orientated process with institutions' mission and goals as the starting point of the evaluations. • A European perspective, due to the composition of the IEP pool of experts. • Voluntary peer-review nature: the institutions sign up voluntarily and are motivated to undergo an evaluation (open and honest discussions with institutional representatives during the site visits, etc.). • Consistency and stability of the IEP philosophy and methodology over 20 years. • Impact on the European quality assurance landscape beyond the individual evaluations carried out by IEP: an increasing number of European agencies have demonstrated interest towards IEP methodology or have been inspired by it.[4] • International outreach: IEP has a record of evaluations outside Europe and has demonstrated that its methodology is able to address various institutional profiles and national contexts worldwide.[5] • Two site visits, which allow the teams to collect further evidence to verify the preliminary observations made during the first visit, thus reinforcing the evidence-based character of its conclusions' recommendations. • Demonstrated capacity to conduct system-wide analysis. • The IEP pool of experts: stability, presence of rectors and vice-rectors, diversity of profiles (esp. coordinators), background and strong commitment to the Programme. • IEP has shown ability to manage the pool in an efficient way, by contracting or extending it as required by the number of upcoming evaluations. There is a good collaboration between the IEP secretariat and the pool. • The well-organised and well-functioning cooperation with ESU in organising student involvement. • A high quality, professionally organised and mandatory two-day annual seminar for pool members.
Weaknesses	• Inability to enforce the follow-up of its recommendations and follow-up evaluations due to the voluntary nature. • Lack of systematic feedback from the evaluated institutions and information on impact of the evaluations. • Consistency of recommendations may be reduced because of the diversity within the IEP pool, and because the methodology does not use standardised criteria but a fitness for purpose approach. This point will be further

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[4] One example is the IUQB methodology (http://www.iuqb.ie/GetAttachmenta734.pdf?id=c095e8f1-9b2d-4ad4-be36-b7b121d8b458).

[5] See Annex K for the percentage of evaluated institutions that are located outside the EHEA.

Weaknesses	commented under Section II.5. • The teams do not always receive comprehensive and accurate background information on the higher education systems. • The budget planning is uncertain because IEP budget depends on fees, and the voluntary nature of the evaluation process means that the number of institutions registering for evaluations is unpredictable year to year. • IEP offers evaluations in English, French and Spanish. Where none of these languages are the language of the institutions, the efficiency of the communication may be hindered. • Despite interest in IEP, current rectors find it difficult to find time to take part in the work of the evaluation teams. • IEP is considered expensive in some countries and/or for some institutions.
Opportunities	• Institutional autonomy reforms across Europe have resulted in increased importance given to strategic management capacity and internal quality processes; these are the core issues that are evaluated and supported by IEP. • Growing importance of internationalisation and the creation of the European higher education and research areas have given momentum to IEP as a genuinely European programme. • Offering a complementary evaluation process in countries where a programme evaluation or accreditation approach is dominating. • Recent significant recruitment of new pool members has demonstrated that there is interest among European institutional leaders to take part in this kind of activity and that IEP enjoys a good reputation among them. This is an opportunity both in terms of potential future recruitment for the IEP pool, and of more institutions registering for evaluations. • Following a series of successful coordinated evaluations, the reputation among governmental bodies is growing. • ENQA full membership and EQAR listing contribute to reinforcing IEP's "credibility" in the external quality assurance arena.
Threats	• The rise of "evaluation fatigue" in many countries and institutions. • In countries where the national framework includes institutional evaluations, IEP's added value is less obvious to institutions. • The results of the evaluations may be misunderstood or misused by institutions or governments. • In their attempts to show that they are accountable, institutions may be tempted by approaches offering results that are simpler to read than an improvement-orientated evaluation report (i.e. rankings). • More competitors, as an increasing number of agencies in Europe adopt parts of

	the IEP methodology or are inspired by it.
	• More competitors, as more actors in the external quality assurance field are able to compete for trans-border quality assurance provision.
Threats	• The financial crisis impacting on the capacity of institutions to pay for an additional, voluntary evaluation.

3. Compliance with the ESG and ENQA membership criteria

This section follows the structure of ESG parts II and III as well as the ENQA membership criteria, focusing on how IEP has changed since the last external review took place. The Annex P offers a summary of these recommendations and indicates where in this report it is explained how IEP has addressed them.

3.1.   Part II of the ESG

II.1 Use of internal quality assurance procedures

> <u>Standard:</u> *"External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines."*

Consistent with its membership of ENQA and listing in EQAR, IEP asks its evaluation teams to assess the effectiveness of internal quality assurance procedures. It assigns high priority to promoting and nurturing the quality culture to which the EHEA aspires. The internal quality assurance processes for teaching and learning are examined as part of IEP's holistic approach to the quality management, which covers all aspects of an institution. The four questions used by IEP constitute a "Plan-Do-Check-Act" cycle, which is used to cover these aspects: governance, research, teaching and learning, service to society and internationalisation activities.

All IEP reports include sections on quality assurance and quality culture, and teaching and learning. IEP's improvement-orientated approach leads the teams to address issues raised by the ESG Part I during all evaluations, while the reports typically address topics where the team has specific recommendations to put forward.

Following the observations of the last review panel in 2009 (see Annex P), IEP has made efforts to increase the consistency in covering the ESG Part I throughout all evaluations, as well as to raise awareness of the ESG among the pool members. Among the concrete steps taken are:

- Specifying in the introductory text of the *Guidelines for Institutions* that IEP evaluations address the questions brought up by the ESG, as part of the larger framework of quality management.
- Encouraging the institutions taking part in IEP evaluations to consider the ESG Part I in their self-evaluation process, by including the full text as an Annex to the *Guidelines for Institutions* (Annex F, pp. 31 *sq.*).
- In the IEP annual seminars (i.e., expert training), sessions were organised to draw the pool's attention to the more explicit focus on the ESG:
    - o In October 2009: a presentation "Addressing the ESG during the site visits and in the evaluation reports" by Padraig Walsh followed by discussion, and a case

study exercise (in small working groups) on addressing the ESG as part of the evaluation process;

- o In October 2010, Henrik Toft Jensen presented the first results of the "Examining Quality Culture" project, which surveyed the state of play with regard to internal QA processes in European higher education institutions, and how they comply to ESG Part I;
- o In October 2012, a presentation "Trends on QA at European level" by Tia Loukkola included a section on the revision of the ESG.
- Including a separate section on quality culture in the report structure adopted by the IEP Steering Committee in March 2013. All reports from the Romanian coordinated evaluations also include such a section, as from 2012.

II.2 Development of external quality assurance processes

> *Standard: "The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used."*

As explained in the introduction, the IEP process and approach to evaluations has remained fundamentally the same since 1994. The aim and the evaluation process of IEP are defined in the IEP *Guidelines for Institutions* (Annex F), which are publicly available on the IEP website.[6]

The IEP approach and methodology were originally developed by institutional leaders. The Guidelines are revised annually in the light of discussions in the Steering Committee and during the annual seminar to take into account the changing higher education landscape. The composition of the pool – institutional leaders, higher education specialists (e.g., researchers, senior administrators, etc.) and students – ensures that a variety of perspectives are taken into account, when further refining the methodology.

When conducting coordinated evaluations, IEP negotiates terms of reference with the commissioning party and representatives of the institutions, and in line with the Programme's key values and methodology. This discussion includes defining the scope of the evaluations to be conducted by IEP (see Annex L). Specific set of guidelines are prepared for the institutions and the teams, when there is a specific focus for the evaluations.

II.3 Criteria for decisions

> *Standard: "Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently."*

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[6] http://www.eua.be/iep/about-iep/guidelines.aspx

The IEP evaluations are mission-driven; therefore, the standards and criteria to assess quality levels are determined in the context of each institution's mission and objectives. Thus, IEP does not apply externally defined standards and criteria but imposes a range of reference points and questions (see the checklist in the *Guidelines for Institutions*, Annex F, p. 19). In addition, the evaluations do not result in summative judgements: the recommendations formulated in the context of each evaluation are formative. IEP teams use a set of *Guidelines for the Evaluation Teams* (see Annex H) that together with the *Guidelines for Institutions* provide reference points for the work of all IEP teams.

These criteria, which form the basis for grounding IEP recommendations, are predefined, clearly communicated, and above all, fit for purpose. In this regard, they meet the objective of identifying the institutional ability to administer itself in a way which assures quality of its outcomes in teaching and learning, research, and outreach to society, by steering its operations to that end. IEP implements these criteria by using the "PDCA" cycle, formulated as four key questions:

- o *What is the institution trying to do?*
  This translates into examining the institution's mission, aims, objectives and their appropriateness, and how the university sees itself locally, nationally, and internationally.
- o *How is the institution trying to do it?*
  The team will examine the processes, procedures and practices in place and analyse their effectiveness.
- o *How does the institution know it works?*
  The team will assess feedback and monitoring systems in place, in particular internal QA mechanisms.
- o *How does the institution change in order to improve?*
  The team will address the institution's strategic planning, capacity and willingness to change.

Results of surveys (listed under Annex E) conducted by IEP with the evaluated institutions and with the pool indicate that this approach has been well understood and acted upon.

Following the last external review of IEP and the feedback received from the ENQA Board and EQAR Register Committee (see Annex P), this fundamental principle of IEP has been thoroughly discussed within the Programme. The conclusion is that this is appropriate and in accordance with IEP's improvement-orientated, institutional evaluation approach. It is similar to agencies with the same QA approach and in line with the fitness for purpose principle underlined by the ESG, which acknowledge that quality assurance processes carried out for different purposes may require different approaches.

Consistency in how IEP teams carry out their work is ensured by having a stable pool that undergoes training every year and by changing team composition for each evaluation in order to ensure the sharing of expertise and cross learning. (For consistency in the IEP evaluation reports, see Section II.5). In particular, the report template reminds all teams of the underpinning philosophy by stating under each pre-defined heading that *"The team may wish to keep in mind the four key questions of the Programme when presenting the results"*.

II.4 Processes fit for purpose

> *Standard:* "All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them."

The IEP evaluations are improvement-orientated: the core of the IEP philosophy lies in the principle that this peer-review evaluation should help the institution to change in order to improve. The evaluation process includes a self-evaluation report, two site visits, an oral and a written report. The institution is also strongly encouraged to submit a progress report within the year following completion of the evaluation process. Further, the institution can register for a follow-up evaluation between one and three years after the initial evaluation has taken place (see Section II.6).

The sample schedule for the visits that is provided in the *Guidelines for Institutions* (see Annex F, pp. 25-30) is used as a template and may be adjusted by the evaluation teams in order to fit the specific profile of the institution.

The IEP reports are evidence-based: the team's findings and subsequent conclusions are supported by what they learn from the self-evaluation reports, additional background information and the interviews during the site visits. The written report is published by IEP and the institution is also encouraged to disseminate it.

With regard to how IEP addresses guidelines related to standard II.4, the functioning of the IEP pool deserves further explanation.

The Steering Committee makes all decisions regarding IEP pool recruitment. The criteria and the processes used for recruiting pool members and managing the pool are defined in the *Guidelines for Managing the IEP Pool*, adopted by the Steering Committee in 2011.

The IEP pool includes three categories of experts: team chairs, regular team members (including students), and team coordinators. IEP teams are composed of one team chair, three regular team members (including a student), and one team coordinator.[7]

The main body of the IEP pool consists of current or former rectors or vice-rectors, with demonstrated leadership and interest in quality development and in bringing about change in their own institutions. The suggestion by the ENQA review panel in 2009 to expand the recruitment base of the Programme led to intensive discussions over the criteria for selecting new pool members and the need for enhanced transparency of the criteria and procedures. It created momentum for addressing the issue and resulted in developing the guidelines referred to above. However, IEP continues to limit the recruitment of non-student regular team members to current or former rectors and vice-rectors. The fact that most of the team is composed of institutional leaders was found to be a particular strength of the Programme that makes it different from other evaluation exercises. The

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[7] In the case of follow-up evaluations or evaluations in institutions that count less than 3 500 students, the team is composed of a team chair, a team coordinator, and two regular team members (including a student).

combination of institutional leaders, a higher education professional and a student makes the teams balanced in terms of profiles and experience.

Regular team members who are rectors or former rectors can be appointed as team chairs after a few years of experience in the Programme and when they have demonstrated the skills required to be team chairs. The Steering Committee examines possibilities for such appointments on a yearly basis. The role of team chairs is essential for the success of the evaluations. They are responsible for ensuring the smooth running of the site visits, evaluations as a whole and the quality of the evaluation reports.

After a pilot period of two years, it was decided in spring 2008 that all IEP evaluations would include a student as a regular team member. As in the pilot phase, IEP continues to cooperate with the European Students' Union (ESU) in organising student participation in the Programme. This cooperation was formalised in July 2009 when a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the two organisations was signed. Following the signing of the MoU, the IEP Steering Committee's mandate was updated and it was agreed that a student representative would also serve as a member of the Steering Committee. Currently, ESU proposes students from ESU's QA pool to the IEP Steering Committee each year to take part in IEP evaluations. These students are selected for contributing to IEP's evaluation work with a student perspective, and do not represent ESU's point of view within evaluation teams or Steering Committee.

Team coordinators (called secretaries until 2009) are selected mostly on the basis of their experience in and knowledge of higher education. Their role is crucial because they are responsible for liaising with the institution on behalf of the team and ensuring that the evaluation process runs smoothly. As part of their responsibilities, they discuss the site visit programme with the institution, take notes during the visits, compile an interim report for the team's internal use after the first visit, and draft the final evaluation report. They are also responsible for liaising with the IEP secretariat regarding the evaluation process.

The *Guidelines for the Evaluation Teams* (Annex H), which should be read together with the *Guidelines for Institutions* (Annex F), provide specific details about the roles of each team member and the pool is gathered every year for a two-day annual seminar in order to provide training for conducting evaluations (see Annex N for a sample programme). Attendance is mandatory, and the seminar is of particular importance for first-time pool members. Pool members only miss the seminar in exceptional circumstances. In October 2009, the IEP Steering Committee decided that missing two consecutive annual seminars would lead to dismissal from the pool, unless very good reasons are presented to the Steering Committee. The IEP secretariat monitors participation in the annual seminars.

The format of the seminars is interactive and aims to ensure that pool members are able to evaluate institutions consistently according to the philosophy and the methodology of the IEP. Efforts are made to update the pool about major policy changes and trends in order to ensure that its perceptions and understanding of higher education stays current. In addition, breakout sessions, gathering team chairs, coordinators and regular team members separately allow discussions to take place within the different groups.

The IEP pool receives a newsletter prepared by the IEP secretariat, informing pool members about the latest developments in the Programme, such as major Steering Committee decisions, updates on the upcoming round of evaluations, or recent publications of interest. The IEP newsletter is usually issued three times a year, in spring, summer, and winter.

A particular feature of IEP is the stability of its pool, with the exception of students who are nominated on a yearly basis.[8] Thus, IEP relies on a relatively small number of very committed pool members who carry out evaluations on a regular and voluntary basis.

While the pool's stability is considered an asset, special attention is also paid to pool renewal. Due to the increase in the number of evaluations as a result of the coordinated evaluations in Romania, which were launched in January 2012, IEP went through an intensive recruitment period in the spring of 2012, with the pool growing from about 70 members to about 100 members (not counting student members, whose number vary by year, depending on needs). This growth was the most significant of its kind since the beginning of the Programme,[9] and required particular attention for maintaining the level of quality for all evaluations in the past year. In order to ensure the induction of the new pool members in the Programme's philosophy and processes, much effort was put into:

- A more extensive induction programme for the new pool members (see Annex N).

- Training the 15 new coordinators who were recruited during that year. A special session was organised for them during the newcomers' training at the 2012 annual seminar and they were offered mentoring for the drafting phase of both the interim and final evaluation report. An experienced team coordinator was available to go through their drafts, and provide comments and advice whenever needed. The training emphasised the importance of consistency across the reports and of providing evidence-based conclusions. These topics were also the focus of a breakout session for all coordinators at the 2013 annual seminar.

- Community-building for integrating the newcomers in the pool: through short biographical notes of all pool members circulated to the pool before the annual seminar, presentation of all teams for the upcoming year during the first plenary session at the seminar and opportunities to network and gather with teammates during the event.

Finally, it should be underlined that IEP teams are international: on a team, there is no more than one team member from the same country and no one from the country where the evaluation takes place. Teams are also composed in such a way to ensure that they offer a mix of experience and profiles; are geographically, gender- and discipline-balanced; care is taken to avoid any conflict of interest or potential conflict of interest as stipulated in the IEP *Charter of conduct for pool members*

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[8] It should be noted, however, that 52% of all students who have participated in IEP evaluations took part in more than two evaluations, meaning that they were present for more than one academic year (see Annex M).

[9] Another significant growth in the pool took place in 2004-2006, in the course of the Portuguese and Slovakian coordinated evaluations.

(see Annex H, pp. 13-14). In order to ensure cross-learning, team members are constantly rotated, avoiding duplication of the same team composition year after year.

II.5 Reporting

> *Standard*: *"Reports should be published and should be written in a style, which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find."*

Further to a decision of the IEP Extended Steering Committee in April 2008, all evaluation reports since the evaluation round in 2008/2009 have been published on the IEP website.[10] Evaluation reports from before this date can also be communicated upon request.

As discussed above, the level of consistency across IEP reports is related to the stability of the IEP pool: the same experts stay with the Programme, and participate in different evaluations over the years, while team composition changes for each evaluation. As also discussed above, the consistency and quality of IEP reports benefit from the stability of the IEP expert pool and from the evaluation themes being regularly discussed in IEP annual seminars.

Following the 2009 ENQA review panel's observations regarding the lack of consistency throughout reports and internal reflection (see Annex P), IEP has reinforced its internal quality management and introduced new practices in recent years:

- In October 2009, the Steering Committee mandated the secretariat to make minor changes itself to reports, when needed. The secretariat was also expected to contact the team coordinators in case of failure to address the issues to be covered by the report as specified in the *Guidelines for the Evaluation Teams*. This internal quality assurance practice has evolved throughout time, and nowadays, the IEP secretariat reads all evaluation reports to ensure that they are clear to a readership that was not involved in the evaluation process, and follow IEP's standard evaluation practices in terms of providing evidence-based conclusions. Whenever a report needs to be clarified, the IEP secretariat liaises with the team coordinator to find ways to ensure a satisfactory quality of the reporting.

- The IEP report templates (for both oral and written reports) were introduced in the beginning of 2010. The templates defined how the Programme should be introduced and the layout of the reports, without making a pre-determined structure mandatory. A standard report structure was piloted in the framework of the coordinated evaluations in Romania, where it also served the purpose of making the drafting of a system report easier. Following the first eleven evaluations in Romania that used the standard structure, the Steering Committee decided in March 2013 to introduce a standard report

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[10] http://www.eua.be/iep/who-has-participated/iep-evaluation-reports.aspx

structure for all IEP evaluations, starting from the 2013/2014 round (see Annex H, pp. 10 *sq.*).

- In March 2012, the Steering Committee decided that, as of the 2012/2013 round, teams will be required to conclude the evaluation report with a list of recommendations for easy reading and facilitating a future follow-up evaluation.

II.6 Follow-up procedures

> *Standard: "Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently."*

The issue of follow-up has been discussed intensively in several Steering Committee meetings and annual seminars in recent years. Due to its voluntary nature, the Programme cannot force institutions to commit themselves to a follow-up. However, IEP is aware of the importance of institutional follow-up and has addressed the issue.

As of 2012/2013, a new section on follow-up was included in the *Guidelines for Institutions* (see Annex F, pp. 15 *sq.*). It underlines the importance of institutional follow-up, but also introduces the concept of a Progress Report, which the institutions are recommended to send to the IEP secretariat. This replaced the previous request to institutions to submit an action plan, which had been included in the cover letter of the final evaluation report but which did not yield the desired results, as very few action plans reached the IEP secretariat. The new emphasis on the follow-up phase will be implemented for the first time at the end of the 2012/2013 round and its outcomes will be closely monitored by the Steering Committee.

While recognising the importance of institutional follow-up as a crucial part of an external quality assurance exercise, IEP finds that, in line with the autonomy of the institutions and the nature of the Programme, it should pay particular attention to making it clear that it is up to the institution to decide to implement the recommendations made by an IEP team. In brief, IEP expects them to consider all the recommendations, but not necessarily to implement all of them.

In the case of coordinated evaluations, IEP processes regularly include elements that aim at encouraging the institutions to address the recommendations of IEP teams or follow-up with the lessons learnt from the evaluation process in general. For instance:

- A post-evaluation workshop was organised with the Irish universities to discuss how they would take the recommendations forward. In addition, for the first three years after their IEP review, the Irish universities had to report annually to the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) on how they followed up on the IEP recommendations. IUQB also issued three follow-up reports to the Irish Higher Education Authority (HEA).[11]

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[11] Available under http://www.iuqb.ie/info/quality_reviews_ introduction.html.

- Similarly, a concluding conference involving the Slovak Ministry of Higher Education and the Slovak Rectors' Conference gathered all Slovak institutions and interested stakeholders to discuss the contents of the system analysis and the implementation of recommendations. A similar event was organised in Serbia after the Serbian evaluations, and in Turkey following the publication of the system report.

- In Romania, post-evaluation workshops have also been an intrinsic part of the IEP procedure. The aims of these workshops are:
    o To support the higher education institutions in implementing the recommendations and to provide an additional push for taking them forward.
    o To explore policy issues at the level of the Romanian higher education system.
    o To provide feedback to IEP on the quality of its work and ideas for further improvement.

- In Montenegro, a post-evaluation workshop is planned as part of the IEP process agreed with the Ministry of Education.

IEP actively promotes its follow-up evaluations to those institutions that have undergone an evaluation and the percentage of institutions registering for an IEP follow-up evaluation has steadily increased in recent years (see Annex K). Moreover, the Steering Committee decided in March 2012 that, in the case of a high number of requests for evaluations exceeding IEP's operational capacity within one academic year, priority should be given to follow-up evaluations.

The Programme has also introduced changes to its follow-up evaluation procedure in 2012, in order to make it more useful for institutions. In the past, institutions could sign up for a follow-up between two and four years after the initial evaluation. They can now sign up between one to three years after the initial evaluation. The change was introduced to ensure the continuity of the process and the quality of the follow-up. On the one hand, while some institutions were already requesting follow-up evaluations before the two-year period, less than one year would have been too short a period for implementing any change. On the other hand, beyond three years the environment and the institution itself could have changed so much that a new full evaluation, reassessing a renewed mission and subsequent action plans, might be needed. It should be noted that after three years have passed, institutions can sign up for a new full evaluation.[12] Finally, institutions that already had a follow-up cannot register for a second follow-up, even within four years since the initial evaluation. Should an institution wish to be evaluated again by IEP after a follow-up, it can register for a new full evaluation. There is no time period defined between the follow-up and a second full evaluation.

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[12] In the history of IEP, 20 institutions have undergone a second full evaluation (following a first full evaluation and its follow-up). One institution has had a second follow-up, following its second full evaluation.

II.7 Periodic reviews

> <u>Standard</u>: *"External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance."*

Due to its voluntary nature, IEP does not have the authority to impose periodic reviews on any institution, since it is unenforceable in many contexts, and from a legal point of view only national legislation can impose evaluations on an institution and ensure that there is a periodicity. Therefore, the periodicity of reviews is seen as the responsibility of institutions (and higher education authorities in the case of coordinated evaluations).

II.8 System-wide analyses

> <u>Standard</u>: *"Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments etc."*

IEP has conducted coordinated evaluations in different countries and regions over the years and produced crosscutting reports on higher education systems at national level, providing recommendations for improvement. The most recent ones are the report on evaluations undertaken in Portugal in the academic years 2006/2007 and 2007/2008, and the cluster reports from the first and second evaluation rounds in Romania, in 2013. The latter are considered as preparatory material for the final Romanian system review report (scheduled to be finalised in autumn for 2014), which will set the ground for gaining a better understanding of the Romanian higher education system, and pinpoint areas that deserve special attention in the future.

These reports take into account individual evaluation reports as well as a range of other background material, and typically include recommendations for further improvement of the higher education system. All system review reports that have been finalised are available online.[13]

It should be noted that these coordinated evaluations with cross-cutting reports represent a significant percentage of all IEP evaluations: out of 336 evaluations,[14] 121 were part of coordinated evaluations (with cross-cutting reports produced for Serbia in 2002, Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2004, Ireland in 2005, Slovakia in 2007, Turkey in 2008, Portugal in 2009, Romania expected in 2014, and Montenegro expected in 2014), thus contributing to analysis of each national system.

Cross-cutting analysis provided at the level of IEP reports beyond national or regional boundaries are also available:

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[13] http://www.eua.be/iep/types-of-evaluations/coordinated-evaluations.aspx.

[14] Completed in October 2013.

- In 2005, IEP published a report entitled *Lessons Learned from the Institutional Evaluation Programme*, authored by Stefanie Hofmann.[15] This report analyses the main questions and recommendations contained in the first 60 IEP reports.

- In 2008, Alberto Amaral, Airi-Rovio-Johansson, Maria João Rosa and Don Westereijden edited a book entitled *Essays on Supportive Peer Review*, which offers different perspectives on IEP, how it had been operating since its creation, and analysis through both theoretical concepts and study cases. Three contributions are based on cross-cutting analysis of IEP reports.[16]

- The IEP provided access to its material to the Portuguese Centre for Research in Higher Education Policies (CIPES), and CIPES published several articles on the IEP methodology and outcomes. Two articles recently published in international reference journals on quality assurance are based on an analysis of IEP reports.[17]

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[15] http://www.eua.be/Libraries/IEP/Lessons_Learned_from_the_Institutional_Evaluation_Programme.sflb.ashx

[16] Rosa, M. R., and Amaral, A., 2008, "Evaluation Reports: Do They Contribute to Quality Improvement?" in Amaral, A. *et al* (eds.). *Essays on Supportive Peer Review* (New York, Nova Science Publishers), pp. 73-86; Rovio-Johansson, A., 2008, "What Was Evaluated in Terms of Teaching and Research?" in *ibidem*, pp. 87-100; and Rovio-Johansson, A., 2008, "Follow-Up Processes and Analysis of the Recommendations in Follow-Up Reports", in *ibidem*, pp. 101-120.

[17] Rosa, M.J., Cardoso, S., Dias, D., and Amaral, A. (2011), "The EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme: an account of institutional best practices" in *Quality in Higher Education*, 17(3), pp. 369-386; and Tavares, D.A., Rosa, M.J., and Amaral, A. (2010), "Does the EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme Contribute to Quality Improvement?" in *Quality Assurance in Education*, 18 (3), pp. 178-190.

3.2. Part III of the ESG

III.1 Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education

> Standard: *"The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines."*

The compliance of IEP's external QA activities with Part II of the ESG has been analysed in Section 3.1 above.

III.2 Official status

> Standard: *"Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate."*

IEP is established in Switzerland through EUA's registration in this country. IEP does not hold any legal status by itself and therefore EUA is the legal entity engaging IEP in contractual assignments, whenever needed.

IEP has achieved formal recognition by competent public authorities in several European countries through contracts signed with national or regional authorities responsible for higher education to fund the evaluations of some or all of their universities and other types of institutions. These have included Ireland, Catalonia, Slovakia, Portugal, Romania, and Montenegro.

III.3 Activities

> Standard: *"Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis."*

The Programme carries out institutional evaluations at the request of individual institutions. The number of evaluations varies from year to year. Between 1994 and 2013, IEP carried out 336 evaluations (290 full and 46 follow-up evaluations) across 46 countries worldwide (see Annex K).

In addition to individual requests, IEP also conducts coordinated evaluations at the national or regional level in which all higher education institutions or a sample of institutions are evaluated (see Section 2.2). The coordinated IEP evaluations have a bottom-up approach to the extent that they build on the basic IEP methodology and philosophy, which examines each institution in the light of its own mission and strategic goals, and in its own contextual environment, with the objective of encouraging and supporting the institution to improve.

III.4 Resources

> *Standard*: *"Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures."*

The Programme functions on a full-cost, non-profit basis and is funded through income generated by the fees from participating institutions or authorities commissioning coordinated evaluations. In addition, international organisations, such as the Council of Europe, the European Commission, the World Bank, and the Open Society Foundation in Macedonia, provided funding for supporting coordinated evaluations conducted by IEP (see Annex L).

This income covers the following costs:

- Travel of pool members to site visits

- Honorarium for team coordinators

- Annual seminars and Steering Committee meetings (travel, subsistence, organisation)

- Annual introductory workshop for institutions undergoing evaluations

- Salary costs of IEP secretariat staff and other EUA staff assigned to IEP-related tasks (e.g., language editor, accounting and communication officers)

- ENQA and INQAHEE memberships, EQAR listing and registration and travel to ENQA meetings

- Any other costs related to the running of IEP.

The IEP budget and accounts are managed as separate items in the EUA budget and appear as such in the financial accounts of the association. Particular attention has been paid to improving the efficiency of managing IEP accounts and promoting transparency in this regard. Since 2010, the IEP Steering Committee has been provided with an overview of the finances. Since 2012, the principle has been that the Steering Committee is presented with the statement of income and expenditure at the closing of an evaluation round (e.g., in March 2012: statement on the 2010/2011 round and estimation of 2011/2012).

Following the increase in the number of evaluations, the IEP secretariat has also increased its staff to six members, two of whom are working full-time for the Programme and four part-time.

Due to the unpredictable number of evaluations, there have been periods in the past couple of years when the workload of the secretariat has momentarily been higher than desired. At the moment it is estimated that the number of IEP staff is sufficient for the tasks of developing and coordinating the Programme activities, and that through the increase of staff, the Programme has managed to handle the workload increase following the increase of evaluations.

When considering the size of the IEP secretariat, it should be noted that team coordinators are considered as an extension of the secretariat staff. Their responsibilities include liaising with the institutions to organise the site visits, preparing an interim report and the final evaluation report, and

liaising with their teams. This allows IEP to operate efficiently with a small number of secretariat staff. As mentioned earlier, the team coordinators receive an honorarium for this extensive work.

Within EUA, the IEP staff is clearly identified and there is a staff member in the finance unit in charge of dealing with IEP-related payments. Whenever needed, IEP uses EUA resources for marketing and communication (EUA newsletter, database, mailing tool), but always with material clearly identified as IEP's. The fact that some of the IEP staff members also work on EUA's quality assurance related activities contributes to their in-depth knowledge in quality assurance and thus the quality of the Programme's activities (for instance for planning the training and updating the pool on key HE developments in Europe and internationally).

III.5 Mission statement

> Standard: *"Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement."*

IEP's mission statement is presented in Annex B and is also available on the IEP website.[18]

In order to put emphasis on the crucial role of the IEP mission in its activities and to apply to itself the principle of fitness for purpose as promoted by the Programme's philosophy, the *Internal Quality Procedures* document (Annex E) follows the logic of the IEP mission statement, thus recapitulating how IEP aims to ensure that it works in line with its stated mission.

III.6 Independence

> Standard: *"Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders."*

IEP is self-governed: it is a non-governmental evaluation programme that is independent of national higher education authorities, higher education institutions and other stakeholders. The conclusions offered in the evaluation reports are the responsibility of the teams, with the IEP secretariat monitoring the consistency of the reports and ensuring that they are evidence-based. The evaluated institutions receive a final draft once the report is written and agreed upon by the team, and have the possibility to offer comments on factual errors, but with no influence on the team's conclusions.

The *Charter of conduct for pool members* seeks to avoid conflicts of interests at the level of individual pool members (see Annex H, pp. 13-14).

The independence of IEP operations from EUA has been a clear practice since the beginning of the Programme, even if this was not explicitly addressed at that time. With the increased focus on

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[18] http://www.eua.be/iep/about-iep.aspx.

demonstrating the independence of external quality assurance in Europe, a specific mandate for the IEP Steering Committee was first developed in 2005 in order to make the boundaries between IEP and EUA's governance and decision-making structures explicit. This mandate, consolidating the IEP Steering Committee's role in running the Programme autonomously, has since been confirmed and endorsed through practice and the latest document defining IEP's status within EUA dates from 7 June 2013. As part of IEP's constant efforts to make its governance more transparent, following the EUA Board definition regarding IEP's status within EUA, the IEP Extended Steering Committee discussed and approved in September 2013 a document defining how IEP is governed and the terms of reference for the IEP Steering Committee (see Annex C).

In practice these documents provide an accurate picture of the state of affairs at the time of their adoption (in 2013). They do not include significant changes to the Programme's procedures. But they aim to ensure that all parties concerned (the EUA Board, EUA secretariat staff, the IEP Steering Committee, the IEP pool and the IEP secretariat staff) share the same view as to how IEP is governed and how decisions related to the Programme are reached, which ensures the independence of IEP management and evaluations. In this context, the pivotal role of the IEP Steering Committee in managing the Programme cannot be underestimated as it covers all aspects of the Programme from defining the Programme's policies to planning and monitoring the activities (see Annex C for the functioning of the Steering Committee, and Annex D for a sample agenda of an IEP Steering Committee meeting). Finally, it should be noted that there is no link between EUA membership criteria and IEP evaluations.[19] The IEP evaluations are not limited to EUA members or members-to-be, and outcomes from the IEP evaluations are not used in the examination of membership candidacies to EUA.

Records and working documents of the daily activities conducted by the IEP secretariat staff are stored in a restricted area of the EUA computer server, and cannot be accessed by the EUA secretariat staff who are not involved in IEP.

As mentioned under Section II.2, when IEP is involved in coordinated evaluations, a specific contract (in some cases accompanied by Terms of Reference) is signed to define the role of IEP in the process, thus guaranteeing the independence of the evaluation results with respect to the authority that commissions the evaluations.

Recently the Programme has worked on its corporate identity, as part of its internal needs to develop and improve. The *Annual Report* and the adoption of a yearly *Work Programme* have reinforced the identity of the Programme and its specific nature within EUA (see Annexes I and J). "Institutional Evaluation Programme" has been registered as a trademark since January 2013. Since the 2011/2012 round, evaluated institutions receive an "evaluated by IEP" icon after the report is published, thus reinforcing the use of IEP as an independent brand.

Finally, the most decisive factor of both corporate identity and independence has always been the IEP pool itself. The stability of the IEP pool has been essential to building up a shared sense of

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[19] Existing EUA members benefit from a reduced fee (see http://www.eua.be/iep/participating-in-IEP/costs.aspx).

III.7 External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies

> *Standard*: *"The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include:*
>   - *a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;*
>   - *an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency;*
>   - *publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;*
>   - *a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report."*

The IEP evaluation process and criteria are presented in the *Guidelines for institutions* (see Annex F), which are available on the IEP website.[20] This section will focus on the IEP process, while the criteria used have already been discussed in further detail under Section II.3 above. The evaluations consist of a self-evaluation report, two site visits, an oral and a written report. In addition, institutions are strongly urged to undertake follow-up activities as discussed in Section II.6.

IEP stresses the self-evaluation process as the most important phase of the evaluation process. To this end, and to clarify any doubt that may exist with respect to the process and the criteria used in the evaluations, an introductory workshop for participating institutions is organised at the beginning of each evaluation round. The workshop also serves to establish a more personalised contact with IEP staff that can be useful should the institutions encounter problems during the self-evaluation or any other evaluation phase.

One of the strengths of IEP is the use of two site visits (five days in total), which allows for an in-depth examination of the issues, which can be cross-checked. The agenda for the first visit (two days) is set by the institution, following the *Guidelines for Institutions* (Annex F) and under the supervision of the team coordinator and the team chair.

After the first visit, the team usually asks for additional documentation to complement the self-evaluation report.

The second visit (three days), the schedule of which is set by the evaluation team based on the key issues identified in the course of the first visit, concludes with an oral report on the third day. The institution is encouraged to invite as wide an audience as possible to this oral report in order to demonstrate its accountability and to promote an internal change process.

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[20] http://www.eua.be/iep/about-iep/guidelines.aspx.

The oral report is then followed by a written evaluation report that is sent to the institution for factual checking before finalising. Once finalised, paper and electronic copies of the report are sent to the institution and evaluation teams and reports are published online (see Section II.5 for further explanation on reports).

Since 2012, the Chair of the Steering Committee, in his letter accompanying the final report, asks the institution to submit a progress report within one year following completion of the evaluation. The new procedure has not produced results as yet, as the first institution that received such a request completed its evaluation in May 2013.

III.8 Accountability procedures

> *Standard:* "*Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.*"

A formal statement on the IEP internal quality policy was first adopted in 2007; since then, it has been revised and is now called *Internal Quality Procedures* (see Annex E and available also at http://www.eua.be/iep/about-iep/quality-assurance-and-accountability.aspx).

IEP constantly reflects on how to improve the collection of feedback: by improving ways to collect feedback, its use, and the way the Programme reports back on feedback provided. Thus, the Steering Committee revised the surveys that IEP administers routinely in spring 2013. The major change consisted in reducing the number of regularly conducted surveys from three to two by eliminating the short questionnaire to each team after each evaluation. This decision was based on the observation that no concrete improvement could be based on such limited results.

Consequently, the IEP secretariat administers two annual surveys: one for the pool, which includes feedback on the annual seminar, IEP processes in general and an open question allowing those who wish to do so to comment on specific evaluation experiences; and one to institutions after they received their final evaluation report.

The *Work Programme* (see Annex J) for the following year, which is approved by the Steering Committee together with the *Annual Report* from the previous year (see Annex I), includes a section on improvements based on feedback received. Both the *Work Programme* and *Annual Report* were introduced following Steering Committee discussions triggered by the results of the last external review of the Programme in 2009. At the time it was concluded that while a considerable amount of self-reflection and reporting took place in the Steering Committee meetings, the process may not have been very visible and could be made more transparent. It was also considered that having its own Work Programme adopted by the Steering Committee would be in line with the Programme's independent profile. Key information from the Work Programme is also included in the EUA Work Programme. The *Annual Report* and *Work Programme* are disseminated to the IEP pool and discussed during the annual seminar.

IEP is also internally evaluated at the annual seminar. Lively discussions concerning the state of the Programme and how to improve it take place during the sessions and outside the meeting rooms during the seminar. These meetings provide opportunities to discuss changes to the guidelines. It is

an internal monitoring exercise that has contributed greatly to the development of the objectives of the Programme, the *Guidelines* and the *Code of Conduct* and to strengthening the sense of ownership that the pool feels towards these.

Based on these discussions, the IEP staff annually review the guidelines, the annual seminar programme and the workshop offered to participating institutions in order to improve them. Any changes are made in a dialogue with the Steering Committee.

Since 2010, the IEP secretariat has prepared its own yearly SWOT analysis. This analysis is usually done simultaneously with the update of the IEP secretariat guidelines. This has become a comprehensive handbook aimed at introducing new staff members to the IEP processes and as an aide-memoire for more experienced staff members.

IEP has been externally reviewed regularly since the beginning of the Programme:

- CHEPS Monitoring (1995-1998)

- Review of the pilot phase (1995)

- Review of the experimental phase (1996)

- Review of the follow-up evaluations (1998)

- Review of the evaluation reports by Peter Williams (1999)

- External review by an international panel (2003)

- An analysis of 60 evaluation reports by Stefanie Hofmann (2005)

- External review conducted by a panel appointed by ENQA (2009)

3.3 ENQA *criterion 8 – Miscellaneous*

Professionalism and consistency

> *"The agency pays careful attention to its declared principles at all times, and ensures both that its requirements and processes are managed professionally and that its judgments and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even if the judgments are formed by different groups."*

As discussed in previous sections, IEP aims to ensure consistency in the implementation of its philosophy and methodology through maintaining a steady pool of experts, training them regularly and fostering a sense of community and ownership among the pool members.

Within the IEP secretariat, professionalism is secured through careful staff recruitment and induction procedures as well as pre-defined procedures for coordinating the evaluations and other related activities (as described in the IEP secretariat guidelines).

Following internal changes in the secretariat and an identified need to do so, the IEP secretariat has further streamlined its guidance and the coherence of instructions to IEP staff. Key improvements include:

- Regular updates of *Guidelines for Secretariat*, including adaptations based on comments by the Steering Committee whenever needed.
- Streamlined management of pool-related information, including statistics and record of past members.
- Weekly meetings of the secretariat staff for updates on activities and discussion of current issues.
- Yearly self-evaluation: the timing of the feedback surveys was changed (from end of civil year to immediately after the annual seminar) in order to take advantage of the momentum created by the annual seminar discussions for eliciting feedback from the IEP pool, thus optimising the response rate from the pool.
- Training for incoming staff: new secretariat members are given the opportunity to join an IEP visit in order to get a concrete view of the Programme in action.
- The more experienced secretariat members serve as mentors to the more junior members, transmitting to them the IEP philosophy and working methods.

Appeals procedure

> *"If the agency makes formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences, it should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of the agency."*

As IEP does not make summative judgements, it does not have an appeals procedure. IEP, however, has a formal complaints procedure adopted by the Steering Committee. It includes both an external

part, which is available on the IEP website,[21] informing institutions how and on what grounds to submit an appeal, and an internal part that defines how IEP would deal with an appeal.

Since the adoption of the complaints procedure in spring 2008, it has not been used by any institution.

Willingness to contribute to ENQA's aims

> *"The agency is willing to contribute actively to the aims of ENQA."*

IEP secretariat staff regularly participates in ENQA events and discussions. As a genuinely European evaluation programme, IEP can certainly very easily associate itself with ENQA's aims to promote the European dimension of quality assurance.

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[21] http://www.eua.be/iep/about-iep/quality-assurance-and-accountability.aspx.

Conclusions: Ways forward

This self-evaluation report has highlighted the state of IEP's development as it stands in 2013 vis-à-vis the ESG, taking account of the recommendations provided both by the ENQA review panel and EQAR Register Committee following the last external review of IEP in 2009 (see summary in Annex P).

In conclusion, the good practices in the IEP process can be summarised as follows:

- Institutional mission and goals as a starting point for evaluations

- Professional, regular training of the experts (annual seminar)

- Steady IEP pool of experts with a wealth of experience

- Fully international teams

- Successful incorporation of student participation in the Programme

- Increased systematisation of the internal management and quality assurance procedures of IEP in recent years.

The changes implemented in IEP over the recent years have increased the transparency of the Programme and provide a sound basis for its further development. Following the Programme's philosophy of supporting the continuous improvement of higher education institutions and systems, the IEP Steering Committee is committed to exploring ways to ensure the quality and continued relevance of IEP's evaluations in the future. One priority will be to continue to pay careful attention to the quality and currency of the expert pool because they are the ambassadors of the Programme and the key of its success.

Both the higher education and the quality assurance landscapes are changing in significant ways. Across Europe, national authorities are interested in promoting a diversified higher education system to respond to the need of a diversified student body. Such policies require quality assurance instruments that can support different institutional missions. Similarly, the size and shape of higher education systems are changing (e.g. through mergers and consortia); new teaching and learning approaches are being introduced; the focus on research and innovation has increased; internationalisation has been strengthened. These trends put the IEP at the forefront as a transnational QA provision that can support and accompanies the significant change required as institutions seek to respond to societal demands.

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[22] A better view of this document is available under http://www.eua.be/Libraries/Publications _homepage_list/EUA_Annual_Report_2012.sflb.ashx, pp. 29-31.