IEP strategic priorities 2020 – 2025

Background

The Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) has been designed to ensure that higher education institutions gain maximum benefit from a comprehensive evaluation conducted by a team of experienced higher education leaders. By the end of 2019, IEP evaluation teams had carried out 436 evaluations of diverse higher education institutions in 50 countries worldwide. Upon request, IEP also conducts coordinated evaluations at the national or regional level. These are usually commissioned by ministries, national rectors' conferences or non-governmental organisations.

The European higher education landscape has evolved in recent years. One important change is that in many countries national quality assurance systems are shifting toward institutional approaches. IEP needs to ensure its place in this landscape by diversifying its offer and introducing more flexibility into its operations, while still ensuring the high quality of its services and maintaining its profile as a robust quality assurance agency that meets the expectations of its stakeholders and operates in line with the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

This document sets out the mission, values and strategic priorities of IEP for the period 2020-2025.

Mission

Consistent with institutional autonomy, the mission of IEP is to support higher education institutions and systems in developing their strategic leadership and capacity to manage change through a process of voluntary institutional evaluations.

IEP evaluates higher education institutions in the context of their specific goals and objectives with the aim of improving quality. The Programme emphasises an inclusive self-evaluation process and institutional self-knowledge. This supports improved strategic leadership and efficient internal governance and management, as well as contributes to external accountability.

Therefore, IEP evaluations focus on the effectiveness of quality culture and the degree to which the outcomes of internal quality processes are used in decision-making and strategic management, as well as on identifying any gaps in these internal mechanisms. The evaluation methodology is based on a peer-review approach. IEP is committed to continuous improvement of its own processes and operates in a manner consistent with good European and international practice, including the ESG.

Values

The following organisational values underpin and guide IEP's activities and the work of its staff and experts.

- **Collegiality:** IEP pool members and staff respect their colleagues as experienced peers and take collective responsibility for conducting the activities of the programme. Cooperation and communication with evaluated institutions is conducted on a collegial basis.

- **Openness:** IEP staff and pool members conduct their work with an open-minded attitude and are respectful of and receptive to other opinions and approaches.

- **Supportiveness:** IEP teams conduct all evaluations with the ultimate goal of providing support and encouragement to higher education institutions for their further development. IEP staff and pool members support one another in achieving this goal.

- **Honesty:** IEP applies the "critical friend" approach to its evaluations, providing constructive criticism from an external perspective. The team communicates its views with professionalism and diplomacy. IEP staff and pool members act with integrity at all times.

Aims and strategic goals

Aim I: To maintain and enhance IEP's role in supporting higher education institutions and systems in their strategic leadership and capacity for change

Strategic goals:

1. **To maintain the core features of the IEP methodology**

   The core of the methodology is based on an improvement philosophy IEP covering the key areas of institutional activity (governance and institutional decision-making, quality culture, management of research and use of research results, teaching and learning, service to society and internationalisation), the peer-review approach, context sensitivity, and the four key questions. The evaluation phases are: self-evaluation followed by self-evaluation report; site visit(s), the latter finishing with oral report; delivery and publication of the final evaluation report; and a follow-up procedure. This core will remain unchanged.

   The four key questions addressed by IEP are:

   - What is the institution trying to do?

   - How is the institution trying to do it?

   - How does the institution know it works?

   - How does the institution change in order to improve?

2. **To further develop the range of IEP evaluations offered**

   IEP will continue to evaluate higher education institutions in the context of their own mission and goals and provide analysis of and recommendations on the institutions' policies,

structures, processes, and culture in order to support them to develop their strategic leadership and build capacity to manage change. Within this framework, IEP will continue to explore options to expand its range of evaluations, including through evaluations with a special focus and to cater for special focus requests in the context of coordinated evaluations.

In response to the Covid-19 crisis, in 2020, IEP moved to carry out evaluations online. IEP will collect systematically lessons learnt from this methodology and observe practices of other quality assurance agencies so to analyse and draw conclusions for further development of its activities.

3. **To strengthen the institutional follow-up and cyclical nature of the evaluation process**

The IEP process does not end when the evaluation report is delivered to the institution. Significant benefits of an evaluation come afterwards, as the university community examines the findings of IEP and addresses its recommendations.

IEP will actively support institutions in these processes by:

- Conducting a post-evaluation videoconference

- Requesting a progress report

- Promoting follow-up evaluations, including through the "combined package" option at registration.

- In the case of coordinated evaluations, organising a post-evaluation workshop.

IEP will also explore how institutions can be further supported after a follow-up evaluation beyond the current option of starting another full evaluation cycle.

4. **To continue to promote the coordinated evaluations**

IEP will actively promote coordinated evaluations to national and sectoral authorities, building on successful past experiences. In conducting such exercises, IEP will maintain the principle of the voluntary nature of the evaluation process and the application of the standard IEP methodology.

Aim II: To develop IEP as a robust and credible quality assurance agency

Strategic goals:

1. **To ensure that IEP is registered on EQAR thus confirming that it operates in compliance with the ESG**

IEP will continue to operate in compliance with the ESG and undergo periodic external reviews in order to be registered on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

2. **To ensure the quality of IEP operations**

The Programme ensures and enhances fitness-for-purpose of its processes through an internal quality assurance system as outlined in the IEP Internal Quality Procedures.

3. **To maintain and safeguard the independence of IEP**

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 IEP Steering Committee plays a pivotal role in managing all aspects of the Programme, from defining the Programme's policies to planning and monitoring its activities. For certain administrative and other support services and expertise IEP will continue to rely on European University Association (EUA); however, this is an arms-length relationship that does not affect the choice of experts, the evaluation process or the reports.

4. **To ensure the sustainability of IEP**

IEP will continue to ensure the financial sustainability of its activities. Appropriate planning and management of human resources is considered an important element of IEP's operations. This includes maintaining a professional and knowledgeable secretariat and an experienced and committed pool of international experts, with the relevant skills to implement IEP's activities.

5. **To maintain the wide geographical scope of IEP evaluations**

The main geographical area of IEP operations will remain Europe, but the Programme will also continue to seek opportunities to work outside Europe, building on previous experience and the global interest in European higher education. The core IEP methodology will remain unchanged regardless of the location of the institution being evaluated.

6. **To continue to improve the visibility of IEP, its offer and its impact**

To support the sustainability and visibility of the Programme, IEP will maintain and develop its communication activities using a range of channels to promote awareness of IEP's services and activities among relevant stakeholders and consolidate its position in the external quality assurance sector.

Implementation, monitoring and evaluation

The strategic goals will be operationalised through annual work plans, adopted by the Steering Committee.

The Steering Committee will also monitor and evaluate the progress made in its bi-annual meetings, where it will discuss reports and feedback on various activities, and through the adoption of the annual report. In monitoring IEP's activities, particular attention will be paid to:

- Number of evaluations conducted in each evaluation round (including uptake of follow-up evaluations, evaluations with a special focus, the combined package, and coordinated evaluations)

- Percentage of evaluated institutions that submit a progress report

- Size and composition of the pool of experts

- Feedback received from evaluated institutions and pool members.

Furthermore, IEP will periodically conduct thematic analysis of particular aspects of the evaluation process or evaluation outcomes, in order to provide an evidence base for the further development of the programme.