

Briefing note for experts: HAQAA3 agency reviews

March 2024

1. INTRODUCTION

The principal aim of HAQAA3 Agency Reviews is to support the development of quality assurance agencies in line with [the African Standards for Quality Assurance \(ASG-QA\)](#) and to enhance the implementation of external quality assurance, with the following general goals:

- Enhancement-led review to evaluate the extent to which the agency/ministry meets the expectations of the ASG-QA.
- Supporting the development/establishment of national QA agencies in line with the ASG-QA.
- Raising awareness of ASG-QA and [Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework \(PAQAF\)](#).
- Facilitating discussion with stakeholders.
- Increasing visibility, trust and transparency.

An external review of a quality assurance agency is an evidence-based process carried out by independent experts. In the review, gathered information (through the self-assessment report by the agency and other information) is verified and crosschecked by a Review Panel, whose main task is to produce a review report that indicates whether the agency complies with each individual ASG-QA and as a whole.

2. REVIEW OPTIONS UNDER HAQAA3

(Full) agency reviews: A thorough evaluation conducted at a quality assurance agency of higher education by a qualified team of people that are not employed at the agency, covering all standards of Parts B and C of the ASG-QA. A judgement about the agency's compliance with the ASG-QA will be made by the expert panel.

Consultancy visit: An evaluation conducted at a recently established quality assurance agency of higher education or a relevant ministry holding such a competence (for countries where there is not an agency yet) by a qualified team of people that are not employed at the agency. The following standards will be covered as a minimum: Part B standard 2, Part C standards 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7. Other standards may be covered in addition if feasible and relevant.

Follow-up visit: A thorough evaluation conducted at a quality assurance agency of higher education by a qualified team of people that are not employed at the agency, covering the recommendations from the last agency review undergone by the agency, including all

standards of Parts B and C of the ASG-QA. To be eligible for a follow-up visit, the agency must have undergone an agency review under one of the previous HAQAA phases.

3. NOMINATION, APPOINTMENT AND TRAINING OF THE REVIEW PANEL

The HAQAA3 agency reviews follow best practice for peer review, using experts with a wide range of expertise and experiences. Panel members are drawn from senior staff from external quality assurance agencies, higher education and academic leadership, and international experts on quality assurance.

The panel for full agency reviews consists normally of four external reviewers, appointed by the HAQAA3 implementing team. The panel shall include at least one former or current senior staff of a quality assurance agency, one representative of higher education leadership and one student. Student panel members are treated as full and equal members of the panel, with the same rights and obligations.

For consultancy visits, the panel will consist of three external reviewers, including at least one former or current senior staff of a quality assurance agency and one representative of higher education leadership.

For follow-up visits, the panel will consist of two external reviewers with experience in external quality assurance and higher education leadership.

Criteria for Nomination and Appointment:

- a) The reviewers are nominated from countries other than the country of the agency under review. For HAQAA3, the reviewers are selected on the basis of a call for nominations specific to the HAQAA3 exercise. Please note that being nominated does not necessarily imply that you will be appointed to be a panel member in the short term.
- b) The members of the Panel shall possess the following expertise and experience:
 - Good knowledge and understanding of external quality assurance.
 - Be able to work effectively in a multicultural team.
 - Possess good communication, writing, and IT skills.
 - At least one member is fluent in the working language of the country in which the agency under review operates. For HAQAA3, the working languages considered are English, French, Portuguese and Arabic.
 - Commit to attend training or orientation/induction session in preparation for the review process and to fulfil the responsibilities and tasks set out in the contract; and
 - Have no conflict of interest with the agency under review and agree to sign Confidentiality and Non-conflict of Interest form.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PANEL MEMBERS

Panel members are advised to ensure that they have adequate time to participate in the review. Overall, the reviewers should:

- Have a spirit of cooperation and show mutual respect between the members of the team and towards the agency under review.

- Participate in a balanced distribution of work roles within the team and commit to the specific role within the team.
- Attend physically or virtually all coordination meetings between team members (before or during and after the site visit) and adhere to punctuality.
- Inform the rest of the team of all the evidence and review related information that they learn of during the review process, to be considered when taking the decision.
- Participate actively in the discussions to reach a collective view of the status of the QAA under review in light of the results of the review process.

For full agency reviews and consultancy visits, one of the experts will be designated by the HAQAA3 implementing team as a chair and one as a secretary. These two roles come with additional specific responsibilities:

- The chair has overall responsibility for the review, the assessment of the agency against the ASG-QA, and the production and quality of the report. The chair is also in charge of ensuring that the terms of reference of the review are respected.
- The review secretary acts as chief liaison for the panel with the HAQAA3 implementing team and the agency, keeps record of all meetings and produces the first draft of the review report.

All reviewers are advised to carefully consider their workload before accepting the assignment.

5. THE REVIEW PROCESS FROM THE EXPERTS' PERSPECTIVE

The preparation and finalisation of the review process will take place online. However, experts must participate in a 3-day in-person site visit to the QA agency, whose dates are to be agreed between the agency, the experts and the HAQAA3 implementing team. Exceptionally, a hybrid scenario for the remote participation of some panel members can be foreseen if duly justified and online site visits can be implemented in case of force majeure.

A ca. 10-month timeline is to be foreseen by the experts from their appointment. Experts will be invited to join the panel after the agency has registered for a review. The full panel is confirmed c. 5 months before the expected month of the site visit, and they will receive the self-assessment report c. 2 months before the site visit. The panel will examine the self-assessment report, prepare the main topics and lines of enquiry to be addressed during the site visit, and agree on the schedule for it in collaboration with the agency and the HAQAA3 implementing team. The panel will prepare the review report within 2 months after the site visit. The final version of the report after exchanges with the HAQAA3 implementing team and the agency will be finalised 4 months after the site visit at the latest.

For HAQAA3 full agency reviews, the Panel is expected to make an indicative judgement on the QAA's compliance with parts B and C of the ASG-QA recommended by the Panel. This is not applicable for the HAQAA3 consultancy visits and follow-up visits, for which there will be no formal judgement at the end of the process.

A summary of the activities to which experts commit are outlined below.

Before the site visit:

- Attend training or orientation/induction session(s) (face-to-face or online).
- Study materials submitted by the agency (self-assessment report and any supporting documents, review guidelines and code of conduct).

- Hold a provisional meeting/e-meeting to discuss the preliminary findings (raise deficiencies in the SAR, extra evidence or documents needed, discuss and agree on review activities and plan for site visit).

During the site visit:

- Collect evidence according to the data collection guidelines.
- Hold panel meeting to discuss findings and draft an exit debriefing statement.
- Debrief the agency leadership on the findings of the review without declaration of any possible judgement.

After the site visit:

- Draft the external review report.
- Reach a consensus on the recommendation about the state of compliance of the agency.
- Be available for any clarifications or discussions that may be required regarding the external review report.

6. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Appointed experts are entitled to a fixed fee of 3,000 EUR for the entirety of the review process. An additional compensation of 500 EUR will be applicable for experts appointed as Chair and Secretary. The honorarium is paid after a satisfactory presentation of the external review report by the panel. The expert is responsible for the declaration and payment of any taxes or similar due in their home country.

Additionally, the following travel expenses for the experts' participation in the site visit will be covered: flight tickets (in economy class) and hotel bookings will be organised for the experts by the HAQAA3 implementing team. Meals during the site visit will also be included.

Panel members are responsible for having an adequate equipment and internet connection (unless *force majeure* can be demonstrated) to respond to emails on a regular basis, access collaborative documents and take part in online meetings.