

Harmonisation, Quality Assurance
and Accreditation in Africa



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HAQAA3 Methodology for External Reviews of Quality Assurance Agencies (2026)

Abridged Review Guidelines

This document has been produced under a contract with the European Union (HAQAA3). The opinions expressed are those of the contractor only and do not represent the contracting authority's official position.

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1. Background

The HAQAA3 initiative supports the harmonisation of higher education quality assurance across Africa through the implementation of the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA). The methodology provides a structured approach for evaluating Quality Assurance Agencies (QAAs), promoting transparency, accountability, continuous improvement, and alignment with continental quality standards.

2. Key terms in the context of these Guidelines

The methodology uses the following key concepts:

- Accreditation
- African Standards and Guidelines (ASG-QA)
- Agency under Review
- Coordinating Body
- Decision-making Body
- External Quality Assurance
- External Review
- External Review Report
- Higher Education Institution
- Review Expert
- Review Panel
- Self-Assessment Report (SAR)
- Site Visit
- Terms of Reference (ToR)

2.1 Review options under HAQAA3

The methodology provides three review pathways:

- a) Full Agency Review
 - Comprehensive review against ASG-QA Parts B and C.
 - Intended for established agencies.
- b) Consultancy Visit
 - Designed for newly established agencies or ministries responsible for QA.
 - Covers selected essential ASG-QA standards.
- c) Follow-up Visit
 - Evaluates implementation of recommendations from previous reviews.

3. Principles of HAQAA3 external reviews of Quality Assurance Agency

External reviews are:

- Based on the ASG-QA.
- Independent and evidence-driven.
- Transparent and objective.
- Conducted by qualified peer reviewers.
- Focused on improvement while assessing compliance.
- Supported by verified evidence gathered from documents, interviews, and observations.

3.1 Responsibilities of the Agency under review

The agency should:

- Allocate sufficient human and logistical resources.
- Appoint a review contact person.
- Prepare a comprehensive Self-Assessment Report.
- Provide requested evidence.
- Organise the site visit with the Coordinating Body.
- Demonstrate openness throughout the process.
- Publish the review outcome.

3.2 Responsibilities of the coordinating body

The Coordinating Body should:

- Develop the Terms of Reference.
- Select and appoint reviewers.
- Designate the Chair and Secretary.
- Contract reviewers.
- Organise reviewer training.
- Coordinate logistics.
- Monitor timelines and quality of the review.

3.3 Responsibilities of the panel members

Reviewers are expected to:

Before the Site Visit

- Participate in orientation.
- Study the SAR and supporting documents.
- Hold preparatory meetings.
- Identify evidence gaps.

During the Site Visit

- Follow the Code of Conduct.
- Collect evidence objectively.
- Conduct interviews.
- Review documentation.
- Prepare preliminary findings.
- Provide verbal feedback to the agency.

After the Site Visit

- Prepare the review report.
- Reach consensus on findings.
- Finalise commendations, recommendations, suggestions
- Respond to requests for clarification.

4. Main Characteristics of the Review Process

4.1 Formulation of the Terms of Reference (ToR)

The ToR are signed between the agency and the coordinating body (the PAQAA technical unit) and defines:

- Purpose of the review
- Scope

- Timeline
- Review procedures
- Panel composition
- Language
- Financial arrangements

4.2 Production of the Self-Assessment Report (SAR)

The SAR should:

- Be analytical and evidence-based.
- Describe the agency and national context.
- Demonstrate compliance with ASG-QA.
- Include critical self-reflection.
- Be approximately 40–60 pages (excluding annexes).

4.3 Nomination, Appointment and Training of the Review Panel

Panel members should possess:

- QA expertise
- Higher education leadership experience
- Teamwork and communication skills
- Language proficiency
- Independence from the reviewed agency

Training introduces reviewers to:

- ASG-QA
- Review methodology
- Roles and expectations

4.4 Data Collection

Evidence is gathered using three complementary methods.

4.4.1 Observation

Observation focuses on:

- Infrastructure
- Resources
- Facilities
- Operational practices

It may be:

- Guided observation
- Random observation

4.4.2 Review of Documents

Reviewers examine:

- Self Assessment Report (SAR)
- Policies
- Legislation
- External review reports
- Decisions
- Strategic documents
- Internal QA documents

Attention should be given to authenticity, relevance and consistency.

4.4.3 Interviews

Interviews are conducted with:

- Agency leadership
- Board members
- Staff
- Students
- Higher education institutions
- Government representatives
- Other stakeholders

Good practice includes:

- Preparing questions in advance.
- Limiting group size.
- Ensuring confidentiality.
- Encouraging open discussion.
- Keeping accurate records.

4.5 Site Visit by the Review Panel

The site visit normally lasts:

- 3–4 days
- 2 days for follow-up visits

Objectives include:

- Verifying SAR information.
- Observing facilities.
- Meeting stakeholders.
- Reviewing additional evidence.
- Formulating preliminary findings.

4.6 Preparation of the External Review Report

The report should:

- Be evidence-based.
- Present findings for every standard.
- Include strengths and areas for improvement.
- Provide recommendations.
- Be written collectively by the panel.

4.7 Judgements on Compliance and Formal Outcomes

Compliance is assessed at three levels:

- Full/Substantial Compliance
- Partial Compliance
- Non-Compliance

Overall recommendations are based on cumulative compliance across ASG-QA standards.

4.8 Follow-up of the Review

The agency should:

- Develop an improvement plan.
- Address recommendations.
- Submit a follow-up report where applicable.
- Continue strengthening compliance.

5. Appeals and Complaints Procedures

(Not applicable to current HAQAA3 reviews but retained in the methodology.)

5.1 Appeals Procedure

Agencies may:

- Appeal within specified timelines.
- Submit supporting evidence.
- Have appeals reviewed by an independent committee.
- Receive a final decision.

5.2 Complaints Procedure

Complaints may concern:

- Review process misconduct.
- Deviation from agreed procedures.
- Agency non-compliance reported by stakeholders.

Possible outcomes include:

- Dismissal of complaint.
- Suspension.
- Withdrawal of recognition.

6. Financial Guidelines

Normally, review costs include:

- Reviewer training
- Air travel
- Visa expenses
- Accommodation
- Local transport
- Per diem
- Honoraria
- Coordinating Body overhead

Under HAQAA3, travel and reviewer costs are funded by the project, while agencies provide local logistics and venues.