

External evaluation of a QA agency Lessons from experience

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Maria Jose Lemaitre





What we expected to gain?

- ◆ Feedback: Self assessment and external review provided a good opportunity to focus on the impact of the work, the view of HEIs, an international perspective
- ◆ Accountability: Assessment made it possible to offer the Government, HEIs and the public with an external report on the way the work had been carried out.
- ◆ Improvement: Need to learn in a systematic way about strengths and weaknesses, and how to do things better.



Who should evaluate us?

- Need for an international perspective
- Legitimacy
- Clear guidelines
- The decision was made to ask INQAAHE
- A report about alignment with the Guidelines of Good Practice
- The report would be accepted by the INQAAHE Board



Framework for the evaluation

- INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice
- The agency's own purposes and objectives:
 - Program accreditation
 - Institutional accreditation
 - Capacity building



Role of the GGP

- ◆ GGP provided the outline for the assessment and for the self evaluation report
- ◆ They cover most of the main issues, making it easier to organize the assessment process
- ◆ The examples of sources of evidence not only help with information gathering, they also clarify the meaning of the guidelines



Self evaluation process

Participation:

- ◆ Board members
- ◆ Technical staff
- ◆ Representatives from programs and HEIs
- ◆ Reviewers for program and institutional accreditation (national and international)



Self evaluation process (2)

Evidence:

- ◆ Questionnaires answered by representatives from HEIs and reviewers
- ◆ Statistics on performance (time taken to complete different tasks, number of accreditation decisions, response from HEIs)
- ◆ Review of documents, handbooks, guidelines, forms



Self evaluation process (3)

Writing the report:

- ◆ Self evaluation proved to be as difficult as the institutions have always said it is:
 - Difficult to get adequate involvement and participation from stakeholders
 - Difficult to recognize strengths
 - Difficult to identify weaknesses without explaining them away
- ◆ It also proved as useful as they have reported



Preparation for the external review

- ◆ Availability of supporting materials (decision on translation)
- ◆ Organization of meetings and interviews
 - Identification of people to be interviewed and institutions to be visited
 - Invitations
 - Agenda (on the basis of requests from review team)
- ◆ Logistic organization (contracts, hotel, travel, food, translations, interpretation)



Reading the external review report

- ◆ A wide range of important and significant information
- ◆ A different look at familiar chores
- ◆ Important insights into the work of the agency
- ◆ The feeling that things were not completely understood
- ◆ Significant suggestions and recommendations
- ◆ Partial agreement with recommendations
 - **Overall, great contribution to improvement**



Lessons learned

- ◆ Essential to assess against standards and the agency's own purposes
- ◆ Self evaluation is a powerful tool for learning, for reflection, for 'making urgent what we know is important'
- ◆ External review is essential to put self evaluation in perspective
- ◆ External review makes it possible to learn about the way in which the agency is seen, not only by reviewers but also by other stakeholders



Lessons learned

- ◆ The external review provides important feedback on the improvement plan and makes it easier to plan for the future
- ◆ A balanced review team provides wide ranging and significant feedback to the agency
- ◆ The self assessment report and the external report become essential tools for future development



Lessons learned

- ◆ The need to complete and improve the GGP
 - They do not cover the whole range of issues to be addressed (e.g., no guidelines on procedures)
 - Some issues are covered in more than one guideline
 - They could be more explicit in terms of what is expected
- ◆ Based on this experience, RIACES prepared a handbook and a form with basic information



Lessons learned: some difficulties

- ◆ The issue of language:
 - Spanish vs English (translation of materials, interpretation during the visit, readability of reports and materials)
 - Different ways of understanding common concepts – the issue of a common QA language



Lessons learned: comments from the perspective of an external reviewer

The guidelines:

- Minimum standards or guidelines for improvement
- Open or prescriptive
- Level of compliance
- Conceptual issues



Lessons learned: comments from the perspective of an external reviewer

The review process:

- Clear terms of reference
- Division of labour between panel and agency
- Understanding of context and language
- Process guidelines

Taking part in a review is a significant learning experience, both for reviewers and reviewed