



INQAAHE

Since 1991

ISG and ISG Review 2025



www.inqahe.org



@inqahe

A Global Reference Point for Quality and Trust

The ISGs provide a shared international language for quality assurance, enabling agencies and institutions to communicate expectations clearly across borders. They strengthen mutual trust by offering a transparent, principles-based framework recognised across regions and systems.

Global Alignment

Support comparability and recognition, helping national QA systems align with global norms while respecting local context and diversity.

Stakeholder Confidence

Signal that an agency operates with credibility, integrity, and professionalism, reinforcing confidence in qualifications and institutional performance.



A Catalyst for System Maturity and Continuous Improvement

The ISGs guide agencies in building robust internal systems, from governance to evaluation methodologies, ensuring consistency and fairness. They encourage evidence-based decision-making, embedding learning, reflection, and improvement into QA processes.

Agencies use the ISGs as a self-assessment and developmental tool, identifying strengths, gaps, and opportunities for capacity building. By promoting transparency, stakeholder engagement, and ethical practice, the ISGs help QA bodies demonstrate sector maturity and accountability.



Enabling Innovation, Collaboration, and Global Mobility



Supporting Innovation

Offer flexibility for diverse models, emerging modalities, and evolving educational ecosystems.



Cross-Border Collaboration

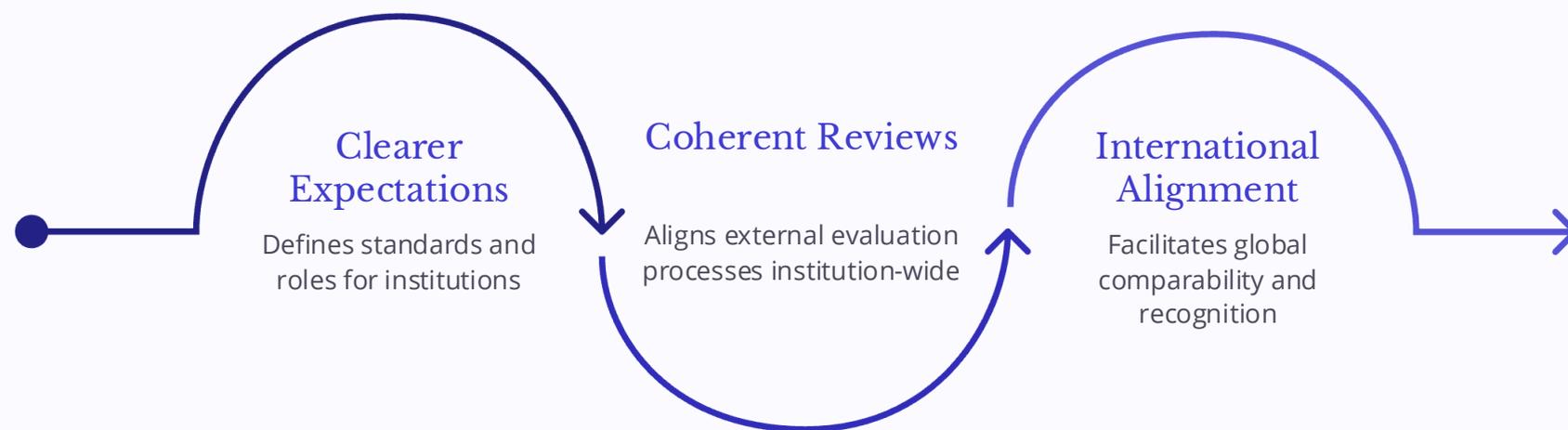
Create a foundation for joint reviews and regional harmonisation initiatives.



Enhanced Mobility

Strengthen learner mobility and qualification recognition across the global higher education landscape.

Benefits for Institutions and Learners



This progression demonstrates how the ISGs create a pathway to excellence for institutions worldwide.

The Ultimate Impact

Institutions benefit from clearer expectations, more coherent external reviews, and improved alignment with international good practice.

The ISGs enhance learner mobility and qualification recognition, strengthening the global higher education landscape and supporting equitable access to quality learning.

What is ISG Review?



The ISG Review is INQAAHE's voluntary peer-evaluation process, assessing how well quality assurance agencies meet international standards (ISG) for higher education.

Main Purposes

Enhancement

Supports continuous improvement in quality assurance practices.

Reassurance

Builds international confidence in QA agencies and their oversight of higher education, supporting global recognition.

Revision of the ISG and ISG Review: Purpose and Outcomes

The ISG framework was comprehensively revised to create a more efficient, transparent, and accessible quality assurance system. These changes streamline processes while maintaining rigorous standards globally.



Less Burden

Streamline standards and processes for agencies and review teams, boosting efficiency.



Clearer Standards

Establish measurable expectations, removing ambiguity in quality assurance.



No Redundancies

Remove inconsistencies and overlapping requirements from the framework.



Defined Review Stages

Distinct phases of the review process are now clearly documented.



Clear Recognition

Clarify different recognition pathways, especially Recognition of Prior Review.



Formal Outcomes

Objective criteria for determining ISG Review outcomes and compliance status.



Enhanced Guidance

Practical templates and resources support agencies and reviewers.

Revised International Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Previous Framework

6 themes containing 17 standards and 58 overarching guidelines

Guidelines were often ambiguous, repetitive, and lacked clear expectations for compliance.

New Framework

6 themes containing 18 standards and 53 minimum requirements

Minimum requirements are clear, concise, and define how standards are met and assessed.

Narrative Guidance

Rationale and examples for each standard to aid understanding and implementation.

Evidence Examples

Examples of evidence agencies can submit to demonstrate standard compliance.

Equivalence of Content

Content preserved and mapped to new standards. Changes enhance clarity, organization, and presentation.

Fundamental Principles

The ISG Review process is built on six foundational principles. These principles ensure fairness, transparency, and global relevance, guiding every stage with INQAAHE's commitment to excellence.



Peer Review

Evaluations are conducted by international QA experts, ensuring diverse global best practice. All reviewers receive INQAAHE training for the ISG Review scheme.



Evidence Based

Findings are solely evidence-based, provided by the agency and gathered by the review team. This ensures fairness and objectivity.



Principles Based

This principle recognizes diverse international QA practices and contexts. It outlines broad principles, allowing agencies flexibility in compliance.



Fit for Purpose

It applies to all international QA activities, covering diverse Higher Education provision and QA systems with varied regulatory and enhancement functions.



Enhancement Oriented

The primary purpose is to enhance external QA practice internationally. It enables agencies to benchmark against global best practice, without serving a regulatory function.



Transparency

Committed to transparency, INQAAHE makes its standards, processes, and review findings publicly available. This ensures fairness and public confidence in its findings.

ISG 2025 at a Glance

The revised ISG framework comprises six themes and 18 standards, comprehensively covering quality assurance agency operations and effective practice.

1	Legitimacy, Mission, and Governance <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Legal basis & recognition• Mission• Organizational structure• Governance
2	Organizational Capacity and Strategic Planning <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resources & capacity• Strategic planning
3	Quality Assurance Framework <ul style="list-style-type: none">• QA procedures• QA standards
4	Evaluation and Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evaluation & decision-making• Fit for purpose & autonomy• Peer-reviewers• Transparency of outcomes
5	Quality Culture <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Internal QA• External agency review
6	Sector Engagement and Enhancement <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stakeholder engagement• Integrity & transparency• International engagement• Thematic analysis & guidance

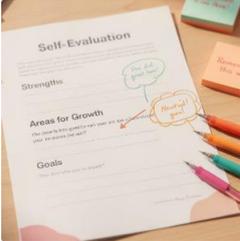
Revised ISG Handbook

The revised ISG Handbook offers comprehensive support for agencies undergoing review. It features enhanced templates, clearer procedures, and detailed guidance, ensuring consistent, fair, and efficient reviews while maintaining the highest quality standards.



Clarified Process Phases

Each stage is clearly documented, from pre-application to final decision. Agencies will understand expectations at every phase.



Self-Evaluation Support

Templates and guidance for the Self-Evaluation Document are provided, including initial briefings and concrete examples of evidence.



Prior Review Recognition

The process ensures consistent assessment while reducing administrative burden for agencies with prior regional reviews.



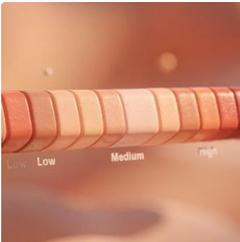
Flexible Review Formats

Hybrid or online review visits are available based on track record, reducing financial burden without compromising quality.



Clear Decision Criteria

Objective criteria and compliance categorization provide transparency in the final determination process.



Nuanced Compliance Levels

Clearer, more granular compliance levels offer incentives and opportunities for enhancement.



Standardized Reporting

Templates and guidance ensure consistency and comprehensiveness in review findings reports.



Appeals Process

Clearly defined procedures protect agency rights and maintain the integrity of the review system.



Review Manager Role

Expanded responsibilities for Review Managers ensure consistent support throughout the process.

Eligibility Requirements



- Legal Status
- Track Record
- Network Membership

Quality assurance agencies must meet three fundamental eligibility criteria before applying for ISG Review. These ensure agencies have the necessary foundation, experience, and professional connections.

- 

Legal Status

Legally established and regulated.
- 

Operational Track Record

Minimum two years of active quality assurance.
- 

Network Membership

Current membership in INQAAHE or recognized regional network.

Three Routes to Alignment

INQAAHE offers three distinct pathways to ISG certification, acknowledging the diverse contexts and external reviews quality assurance agencies undergo.



Full Review

Comprehensive assessment against all ISG standards, including a full Self-Evaluation Document (SED) and an on-site review visit.



Recognition of Prior Review

Direct recognition or focused review, with or without a visit, based on alignment with regional network standards.



Joint Review

A joint review panel assesses the agency against two sets of standards, producing distinct reports for each.

Recognition of Prior Review



This pathway acknowledges prior quality work by regional networks, reducing redundancy and administrative burden while upholding international standards.

Full Mapping of Standards

If a regional network's review fully assures compliance with ISG standards, agencies can obtain direct ISG certification.

Partial Mapping of Standards

For partial mapping, the ISG review focuses only on standards not covered by the regional network. Agencies submit a Self-Evaluation Document (SED) for these specific areas.

Possible Waiving of Review Visit

After reviewing the SED, the Review Panel may waive an on-site visit if compliance can be verified through documentation.

Validity Period

ISG certification validity will not exceed the prior regional review's term, nor the maximum ISG review validity of five years.

Joint Review

Coordinated Excellence

Joint reviews combine regional and international assessments into a single, coordinated process, reducing agency burden.

A single panel evaluates evidence against both sets of standards, producing two distinct reports for respective decision-making.

Standard ISG Review processes apply, but specific procedures and financial terms are defined case-by-case, in consultation with the agency and network.



The ISG Review Process at a Glance

The ISG Review follows a structured, transparent process. Each phase builds upon the previous one, ensuring a thorough yet efficient pathway to certification.

01

Preliminary Phases

Application, Service Agreement, Review Manager appointed, Agency briefed.

02

Review Panel Formation

Three international experts, including one regional, are carefully selected.

03

Self-Evaluation Document

Agency prepares SED using template, submitted within six months.

04

Desk-Based Review

Thorough analysis of documentation within 30 working days post-submission.

05

Review Visit

Two to three-day site visit with stakeholder meetings to validate evidence.

06

Findings Report

Draft report submitted to Recognition Committee within 20 working days of visit.

07

Finalization

Draft report shared for factual accuracy check, then submitted for final decision.

Review Panel Formation

Rigorous panel selection ensures fair, thorough, and credible evaluations. INQAAHE assembles panels with diverse expertise and independence.

Panel Composition

Three international experts are selected by the Recognition Committee. Selection balances workload, geography, expertise, and diversity.

Reserve Reviewers

Three reserve reviewers are selected for continuity, covering potential conflicts or unavailability.

Conflict Clearance

The Review Manager checks availability and clears any conflicts of interest with the Agency.

Formal Appointment

Appointed reviewers sign an engagement form, including conflict of interest and confidentiality statements.

Timeline

The Review Panel is appointed at least 20 working days before SED submission for adequate briefing.

Findings

Findings Report

Comprehensive report covering Commendations, Suggestions for improvement, and Recommendations to meet minimum requirements.

Guidance: Clearly indicate each point by stating, 'the Panel **commends/suggests/recommends** the Agency (for/to)' in the report.



Possible Outcomes

ISG Compliant

Fully or substantially compliant. Validity period of 5 years.

Mid-Term Follow-Up

Required review ensures continued compliance and quality enhancement.

Compliant with Conditions

Limited compliance for 2 years, or conditional on meeting requirements within 1 year.

Not Compliant

Appeals process available for procedural concerns.

Writing of the Findings Report (I)

The findings report is central to the ISG Review process, guided by structured protocols to ensure consistency, transparency, and fairness.

Assessment Approach

For each standard, the Review Panel assesses compliance (**Fully, Substantially, Partially Met, or Not Met**) based on a holistic, evidence-based evaluation of minimum requirements (max two pages).

Structured Feedback

The panel highlights **Commendations** (good practice), **Recommendations** (necessary actions), and **Suggestions** (improvement opportunities).

Consistent Phrasing

Use consistent phrasing:

- The Review Panel **commends/recommends/suggests** [name of Agency] for/to
- [Name of Agency] is **commended/recommended/suggested** for/to

Writing of the Findings Report (II)

Non-Applicable Standards

If a standard is deemed not applicable, the Review Panel must provide a clear, justified explanation, especially for Standard 11 (Peer Reviewers).

Cross-Referenced Compliance

Compliance for some standards, like Standard 16 (Stakeholder Engagement), may be demonstrated through other fulfilled standards.

Overall Judgment

The final section presents the Panel's overall compliance judgment for the ISG framework:

- **ISG Compliant** (Fully or Substantially Met)
- **ISG Compliant with Conditions** (limited validity or contingent on specific actions)
- **Not Compliant**

The ISG Review Outcomes

The ISG Review outlines five possible outcomes, each with distinct criteria and validity periods for agency compliance.

Full Compliance (5 years)	Achieves full compliance across all standards.
Substantial Compliance (5 years)	Meets at least partial compliance for all standards, with substantial compliance for over 50%.
Compliance for Limited Validity Period (2 years)	No non-compliance; partial compliance for >50% of standards, with expected improvement within 2 years.
Compliance Contingent on Conditions (reassess in 1 year)	Non-compliance with up to two standards; expected partial compliance for these and substantial compliance for >50% of standards within 1 year.
Non-Compliance (reassess no earlier than 2 years)	Non-compliance with more than two standards, or failure to meet conditions for conditional compliance.

Quality Mark and Register

ISG Quality Mark



Compliant agencies receive the ISG Quality Mark, a visible symbol of international quality assurance alignment, indicating the validity period and agency name.

☐ [Agency Name]

[Validity Period]

ISG Review Register

All compliant agencies are listed in the official ISG Review Register until expiry, providing transparency for stakeholders to verify ISG compliance.

It serves as an authoritative source for institutions, governments, and students seeking information on agencies meeting international quality standards.

Timeline: Key Stages for a Full ISG Review

The ISG Review process takes 7 to 11 months from formal commencement to final decision, balancing thoroughness and efficiency.

Service agreement signed	Day 0
Agency briefing	Within 10 days of commencement
SED submission	Within 6 months of commencement
Desk analysis & info requests	Within 30 days of SED submission
Review visit	Within 2 to 3 months of SED submission
Review findings for accuracy check	Within 35 days from end of review visit
Factual accuracy check	Within 10 days
Final decision	Within 10 to 20 days from factual accuracy check
Total duration	11 months (maximum) – 7 months (expected average)

Thank You

Thank you for your interest in the ISG Review process. Visit our website or connect with us on social media for more information and to apply.



www.inqaahe.or

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Together, we enhance global higher education quality and build confidence in its systems.