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Conducting external evaluation of programmes with TLQAA+
Tools and experiences from Europe

The content of this presentation is entirely based on the Guidelines drafter in the framework of the TLQAA+ project

Key principles for external evaluation of programmes

- **Expert at the service of the method developed by the agency**

  Clear and transparent criteria and processes – fit-for-purpose
- **Evaluation that supports the constant development of the evaluated programme**

  Balancing accountability and enhancement; neutral and benevolent approach taking context into account; detecting development
- **Centrality of the self evaluation**
- **Evidence based**

  SAR, additional documentation, publicly available information and site visit; **cross-checking information (reliability). BUT at the same time: trust-based!**
- **Concistency of final judgement**

  Justifiably **follows from the evidence and analysis**
- **Professionalism and independence of the review panel**

  No conflict of interest, confidentiality, **respectful attitude** towards HEI, respect for timelines and duties

Preparing for the site visit

- **Analysis of the self assessment report and its annexes**
  - A global analysis of of the self-assessment report: development oriented? Consistent? Clear and well organised?
  - Cross-reading to idenfity questions for the site visit (**use of mapping grids**)
  - A good use of the annexes
  - First findings and analysis – **site visit mostly for verification purposes**!
  - **Identify additional documentational evidences: ask and read before the visit!**

Preparing for the site visit

- **Developing the site visit programme**
  - Consider the **duration of the visit and the number of interviewees to find a good compromise and not to overload the experts →** negotation
  - Careful selection of interviewees to ensure **the right balance and representation of all stakeholders** (not too many – only the necessary ones – only people you plan to ask questions!)
  - Clever **separations of groups**
  - **Integration of brief internal meetings** and moments dedicated to panel's discussion: debriefing and taking stock
  - Fundamentally important: **final debriefing meeting** of the panel to ensure a good common understanding of the main findings for the final evaluation report

Preparing for the site visit

- **Preparing the interviews**
  - Preparing questions: **rank by importance**, and limit the questions to the most important ones (**not everything can be asked in every session**)
  - Plan **simple questions, on specific issues**: **open vs. directive questions** ("do you think the programme meets its objectives?" vs. "to what extent do you think the programme meets its objectives?" – "don't you think there is a need for more lab equipment?" vs. "what lab equipment is essential for your programme?"
  - **Ask only what you don't know already**, or in case of doubt or contradictions
  - Sharing preparatory tasks between experts

The site visit

- **Professional conduct during the site visit**
  - **Keep the agreed timelines, interview schedules, and sharing of tasks** and roles between panel members!
  - All expert to be present from the first meeting to the last (no late arrivals, early departures, etc.)
  - Commitment to confidentiality – **breaks and lunches private to the panel to allow for exchanges** (and remember: everything remains confidential also after!!)
  - **Forget your own university and your emails – total immersion**
  - "Leave your package home" – avoid comparing to your own and try rather to **really understand the place you are visiting**
  - **Frustration for lack of time: accept to cover the essential** ("need to know vs. nice to know") → **balance between investigation and trust**

The site visit

- **Interview sessions**
  - A short presentation of the process and the team at the beginning of each session
  - Then: going straight to the point with the identified questions
  - Neutrality of the experts: **no judgement, no advice, no opinion expressed (no funny faces!!)**
  - If you don't get an answer, **try re-formulating the question**
  - Give a chance at the end for **the interviewees to add if they felt something was missing**
  - **Take good notes** of facts, of questions that arise/need to be cross-checked, and your impressions (may divide tasks between members)
  - **Good practice: not only chair asks the questions**

Writing of the report

- **Experts' contribution**

  - Simple and direct style
  - The sequence of evidence, analysis, and conclusion (one has to logically follow from the former!)
  - **Anonymity** (no individuals mentioned by name)
  - **Respect of the mandate** and of the guidelines
  - Taking into consideration the spcificities of the context
  - Recommendations: **related to standards and evidence, not on opinions only (sharing of good practice happens elsewhere)**
  - Respecting deadlines

Writing of the report

- **Finalisation of report - the Chair's responsibility**

  - Collecting and harmonising expert contributions
  - Managing the length of the report (more is not necessarily better!) → **concise but complete**
  - Coherence of the report overall (and ideally: consistency of style with other similar reports!)
  - Verification of appropriate language and the right "spirit" of the report

Writing of the report

- **The agency's role in finalising the report:**
  - Verify respect for the principles of evaluation
  - Verify respect for the framework
  - Verify coherence of the report
  - Verify that the report is evidence-based
  - Eventually improve the readibility of the report

- **Correction of factual errors by the evaluated institution:**
  - Only factual errors or grave misunderstandings
  - NOT a negotiation, or re-writing of the report!

Overview of the steps and tasks :

- Setting up expert panel (verification of conflicts of interest)
- Verification against the national QF
- Preparation of the site visit (possibly: a meeting between panel members)
- The site visit
- Elaboration of the review report (possibly meeting of the panel; necessarily checking of factual errors by the evaluated entity)
- Support of a review officer (not a panel member, but ensures consistency, resepct of the processes etc.)

Use the TLQAA+ tools!