



Agência de Avaliação
e Acreditação
do Ensino Superior

Guidelines for External Experts Participating in European Approach Reviews – A3ES

1. Introduction

The [European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes \(EA\)](#) provides a single framework for evaluating and accrediting joint degrees delivered collaboratively by higher education institutions in different European countries. Under the principle of mutual recognition, one quality assurance review conducted by an EQAR-registered agency is sufficient for programme recognition in all participating countries.

The Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES) implement these procedures in accordance with:

- The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (2014);

And

- [The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area](#) (ESG, 2015).

This document sets out the working guidelines for external experts appointed by A3ES to participate in reviews conducted under the European Approach.

2. Composition of the Review Panel

Each review panel consists of four or five members, including a Chair, 2/3 panel members, and one student. A project review coordinator will be appointed by A3ES, to support panel's work.

Panels are designed to ensure:

- A combination of profiles: at least one academic, one professional representative, one quality assurance expert, and one student member.

- International representation, with at least one expert from each country represented in the joint programme (whenever feasible).
- Gender balance, in line with A3ES's equality and diversity principles.

Experts are selected by A3ES from its database of evaluators and/or based on recommendations from other national quality assurance agencies in the countries involved in the joint programme.

3. The Role of External Experts

External experts contribute their independent, professional, and international perspectives to the review process. Their role includes:

- Assessing the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and supporting documentation;
- Participating in meetings and discussions with programme representatives and stakeholders (institutional visit);
- Contributing to the collective formulation of findings and final recommendations;
- Reviewing and validating the preliminary and final reports.

All experts are expected to act with **independence, impartiality, confidentiality, and integrity**, ensuring a fair and evidence-based evaluation.

4. The Evaluation Process

The evaluation process follows a structured sequence comprising document analysis, site visit, and report finalisation. It normally spans four to six months from the appointment of the panel to the submission of the final report.

Steps of the procedure include:

1. *Appointment and Preparation* – Experts receive formal appointment and attend a kick-off meeting.
2. *Individual documental analysis* – Experts analyse the documentation and prepare self-individual analysis to be discussed in the pre-visit meeting.
3. *Pre-Visit Meeting* – Panel meets online to share assessments and plan the visit.
4. *Site Visit* – Conducted on-site (as a principle). Remote or hybrid formats are exceptional. Meetings are held with academic staff, students, employers, etc.
5. *Reporting* – The team drafts the preliminary and final reports, reviewed by all experts before submission to A3ES.

5. Expected Commitment

Experts are expected to:

- Dedicate sufficient time to read materials and prepare reports;
- Participate in all meetings and visits;
- Contribute constructively to discussions;
- Respond promptly to communications and review drafts within deadlines.

6. Confidentiality and Ethical Standards

Panel members must:

- Treat all documents and discussions as confidential;
- Refrain from disclosing information about institutions or evaluations;
- Declare potential conflicts of interest immediately;
- Act with professionalism, fairness, and independence.

7. Training and Support

A3ES provides preparatory material and an introductory/training session covering:

- Principles and standards of the European Approach;
- Introduction to the programme under assessment
- A3ES methodology and expectations;
- Use of templates and working tools.

The A3ES project review coordinator offers continuous support throughout the process.

8. Compensation and Logistics

A3ES offers a fixed honorarium for participation, varying by role (Chair, Panel Member). Travel and accommodation related to on-site visits are covered according to A3ES's internal financial regulations.

9. Transparency and Publication

Upon completion of the review, the final report validated by A3ES is shared with the higher education institutions concerned. When the procedure is completed, the Panel Report and the A3ES decision are published on the A3ES website and included in the EQAR database of European Approach cases.

10. Contact

For any clarification or assistance, please contact:

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Annex II – Structure of the Review Report

The European Approach Review Report follows the A3ES standard template and includes the following sections:

1. Cover Page – Title, institutions, panel composition, date of visit and submission.
2. Executive Summary – Description, main findings, and overall conclusion.
3. Introduction – Context, objectives, and methodology.
4. Compliance with the Standards of the European Approach – For each of the eight standards: description, analysis, judgement, recommendations.
5. Final Panel Judgement – Overall compliance and recommendations.
6. Annexes – List of meetings, documents reviewed, and declarations of independence.