

Proposal for the selection of experts

The choice of criteria to be used for the selection of experts needs to be made after some preliminary choices with regards to principles and general scheme of activities are made. This offers robust and clear foundations to build on the selection process and to design the selection criteria.

1. Terminology: Expert – evaluator – peer

The terminology is of some importance. It offers the opportunity to clarify the philosophy of the evaluation promoted by the agency.

The word “expert” is often used because it is convenient and because it is part of the usual accepted jargon of quality assurance. But this word carries in its within few assumptions that are problematic in terms of communication and transparency. One of them is that the expert is a single person. This is certainly acceptable with regard to focused subjects like the ones found in research or in specific aspects related to programmes. But most of the evaluation activities bear on complex issues. In addition, the notion of individual expertise goes, to a certain extent, against the notion of collegiality that is at the core of what peer review is. There is here a crucial issue because peer review is part of what make evaluation in higher education acceptable by the academic world. The idea that higher education in general shouldn't be assessed by people who are not participating directly to it is a principle that is widely shared even if not always explicitly stated.

Peer review is also strongly relying on the principle of academic collegiality. In peer review decisions, judgments, recommendations and all the outcomes are the results of a collective activity of a group of academics debating in personal capacity. Collegially means that the team brings the expertise together. That being said, in the case of an evaluation or accreditation agency, the evaluation processes don't rely on pure peer review. The panels have to use and follow the standards, the criteria and the methods decided, designed or approved by the agency. This is crucial for the credibility of the agency and the trust its publics will put in it. The definition of what a peer is also a question that should be debated. The strict definition is that peers should only be university professors. Looking at the way agencies operate today, the situation is in fact diversified. Panels can be made of different types of members, some of them being academics, researchers, professionals, students... The composition of the panel may vary according to the kind of evaluation. For example, in the case of a VET programme, it may be useful to have a professional of the sector in the panel, like having, in the case of an institutional evaluation a member coming from university administration.

The participation of students is a specific case. In the Bologna process countries the participation of students to evaluation processes is a goal promoted by the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

If neither the terms “expert” nor “peer” correspond exactly to the activity or to the background of the members of an evaluation panel it is necessary to find another one. The term “evaluator” may be flexible enough to express the idea of panels' members chosen according to explicit but diverse criteria and in charge to collectively assessing situation on the behalf of an agency.

Decisions to make:

- a. The report of the panels and the decisions or recommendations should be the outcome of a collegial activity. Yes/No
- b. As consequence, there should be no possibility for minority report. Yes/No
- c. The panels should be made only of academics. Yes/No
- d. Participation of students. Yes/No
- e. Participation of non-academic could be considered according to the type of evaluation. Yes/No
- f. The members of evaluation panels should be called evaluator, rather than expert or peer. Yes/No
- g. The panels' members should understand well the background system of the evaluated institution/programme/object. Yes/No
- h. The panels' members should fairly be able to evaluate aspects related to teaching, research and services. Yes/No

2. Composition of the panel

If the decision is that panels should be made of different types of evaluators with different background, the composition of the panel become a question. The composition of the panel may be different in the case of an institutional evaluation and in the case of the evaluation of a programme.

The presence of students and foreigners in evaluation panels is a good practice worldwide accepted.

Decisions to make:

- a. What should be the number or the proportion of academics, professionals, students, and foreigners?
 - In the case of the evaluation of an institution:
 - In the case of the evaluation of a programme:
- b. How should be the panel organised? Should the role of the different type of members be different? Should the panel be chaired by one of the participant? If yes, who should it be?

3. Decision making-process

If it is decided that the panel should work respecting the principle of collegiality:

Decisions to make:

- a. What should be the role of the chair of the panel with regards to decision-making?

4. Reporting

Whatever the kind of outcomes the panel are asked to provide (assessments, decisions, recommendations...), the outcomes of its activities should be based on evidences gathered in a report.

Decisions to make:

- a. Who should write and finalise the report?
- b. Should a secretary in charge of preparing the report support the panel?

5. Two levels selection process

In its normal activities the agency will need two sets of criteria. One set should be used in order to feed a pool of experts and the other should be used in order to set up a particular panel in charge of a specific evaluation/task.

The first set of criteria should address the generic features corresponding to the different of evaluators needed by the agency's operations.

The second set of criteria should help to make the best decision as regard the specificities of a case.

We have to separate between selection criteria and information. For example, the fact that an academic has a management/leadership experience in an institution is a piece of information with regard to the integration in the pool of experts but could be a criterion with regard to the participation to a panel in charge of the evaluation of the governance of an institution. The working language of the evaluation has also to be decided on. This acquires a particular importance with the possible participation of foreigners.

The decision-making processes have to be clarified beyond the choice of criteria. A specific committee with explicit regulations should be set up for this purpose.

The criteria and processes for the feeding of the pool have also to be addressed.

Decisions to make:

- a. Should institutions propose potential evaluators? Or should they be volunteers?
- b. Should a public call be made?
- c. What should be the decision-making process with regard to the list of criteria and information?
- d. Who should be in charge of selecting evaluators for the pool?
 - a. In case it is a committee that is in charge, what should be its composition?

- e. Who should be in charge of selecting experts from the pool for an evaluation?
 - a. In case it is a committee that is in charge, what should be its composition?

6. Proposed criteria and information for the pool

National academic evaluator

Criteria

Lebanese nationality

Academic position in a higher education institution. How long?

Doctorate

Information

Discipline

Teaching activities (types and level of programmes). How long?

Leadership/Management activities (responsibilities...) How long?

Research (field, publications...)

Code of ethics - Evaluators should accept to commit themselves with regards to:

Non conflict of interest statement

Confidentiality agreement

Support of agency' objectives, standards, ethics and methods

Foreign academic evaluator

Criteria

Academic position in a higher education institution. How long?

Doctorate

Languages (depending of the working language of the evaluation)

Information

Discipline

Teaching activities (types and level of programmes). How long?

Leadership activities (responsibilities...) How long?

Research (field, publications...) How long?

Experience in the field of evaluation and accreditation

Code of ethics (Evaluators should accept to commit themselves with regards to)

Non conflict of interest statement

Confidentiality agreement

Support of agency' objectives, standards, ethics and methods

Professional

Information

Field of activities
Proximity to higher education
Teaching activities (types and level of programmes) How long?
Leadership activities (responsibilities...) How long?
Research (field, publications...) How long?
Experience in the field of evaluation and accreditation
Languages (depending of the working language of the evaluation)

Code of ethics (Evaluators should accept to commit themselves with regards to)

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Students

Information

Discipline
Degrees
Studies (field, level...)
Teaching activities (types and level of programmes). How long?
Leadership activities (responsibilities...) How long?
Research (field, publications...)
Languages (depending of the working language of the evaluation)

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7. Proposed criteria and information for the specific evaluation

The criteria used will be the information gathered during the application process.

8. Participation to trainings

The selection of experts that would be trained in Europe should rely on a specific choosing mechanism. As regards their characteristics they should:

- a. Be proposed by institutions (TLQAA members plus others);

- b. Respect the criteria for national academic evaluators;
- c. Be proficient in Spanish or French and English;
- d. Commit themselves to participate to the dissemination and trainings activities organised by the TLQAA project and then the agency;

The European partners will make the final choice. They will take into account the necessity to have gender balance and the best diversity of discipline and evaluation strengths within the group (diversity in evaluation strengths in teaching, research and services...) and knowledge of the background systems (American, Egyptian, French, German...)