INQAAHE GUIDELINES OF GOOD PRACTICE ALIGNMENT

EXTERNAL REVIEW REPORT

Organisation	Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial (CEEC)
Place	Online
Date of the visit	15-17/06/2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Structure of the external report

This report begins with an "Introduction" that covers two different areas: the summary of the evaluation process of the *Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial* (CEEC), and a brief description of the context in which the CEEC operates in order to understand why it was created and which kind of assessment procedures it carries out.

In the main section of the report, "Assessment of compliance with INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice" (GGPs), the panel evaluates the fulfilment of each of GGPs standards providing evidences that sustain this assessment.

Thirdly, the "Findings" section conveys some observations or interrogations that the panel wants to highlight, which includes both good practices and elements of improvement. This analytical section is addressed both to the CEEC and to the Minister of Higher Education, and aims to serve as a basis for reflection and for further improvement.

The "Recommendations" section lists the suggestions for improvement following the Findings analysis.

Finally, the "Conclusions" includes the overall evaluation of the CEEC with regard to GGPs.

Summary of the process

The *Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial* (CEEC) requested the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) to conduct an external review of its work, policies and procedures against the Guidelines of Good Practice (GGP). The review was carried out against the 2016 version of the GGP and following the "Procedural Manual 2018" by an independent team of international experts (or review Panel) appointed by INQAAHE and accepted by the CEEC:

- Chair: Dr. Hélène Lamicq, Former Rector of the University Paris-Est Créteil, France; Former member of the Board of the Institutional Evaluation Programme (EUA).
- Dr. Roberto Igarza, Member of Comisión Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación Universitaria (CONEAU), Argentina.
- Dr. Anna Prades, Head of Internationalization and Knowledge generation of AQU Catalunya, Spain.

The CEEC submitted as per protocol a Self-Assessment Report (SAR) with supporting evidence to inform the GGP alignment review. The SAR was comprehensive and accurate, based on evidence and balanced, in terms of including both positive aspects and aspects to be enhanced. Having conducted a detailed analysis of the information

submitted by the CEEC, the Panel met on-line with a range of members of the CEEC and key stakeholders between the 14th and the 16th of June 2021, to pursue lines of inquiry identified during the desk-based analysis and triangulate evidences in support of its evaluation of the CEEC alignment with the GGP. Due to COVID 19 and associated international travel restrictions the meetings were held remotely via Video-Conference.

After the meetings were concluded, the members of the Panel drafted a first version of the report, which was shared with the CEEC for a factual accuracy check and correction of possible misunderstandings, before being submitted to the INQAAHE Board of Directors for final decision.
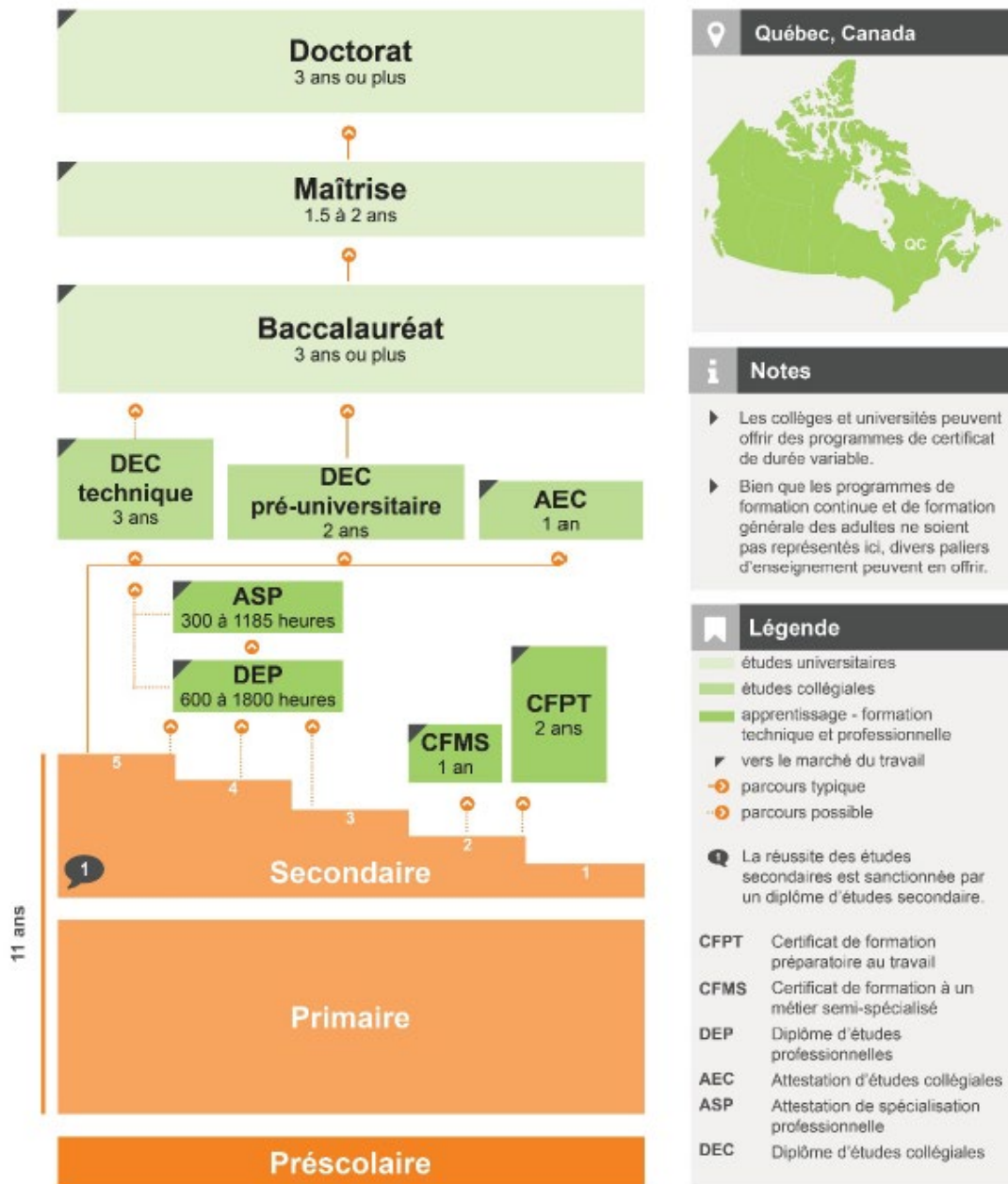
The context

The educational system in Canada and in Québec

Canada is a federation with two levels of government: one federal and one provincial. The responsibility of education relies in its provinces, which means that each province organizes and regulates its own educational framework.

Québec's education system is made up of four educational levels: elementary (six years), secondary (five years), college (two or three years) and university level. Education is compulsory from the age of six (beginning of elementary school) until the student turns 16 or obtains a Secondary School Diploma or a Diploma of Vocational Studies. The first two levels are administered by the *Ministère de l'Éducation* (MEQ), and the last two, college and university, by the *Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur* (MES). Thus, college and university education are the two levels in which higher education is structured in Québec. College education is the first level of higher education.

Figure 1. Québec's education system

Québec college education

Québec's college education system was created in 1967, taking over from several institutions that had until then offered postsecondary education: classical colleges, technology institutes, nursing schools, etc.

College education is offered by various institutions established under the *General and Vocational Colleges Act* and the *Act respecting private education*. There are a total of 121 colleges, which are distributed as follows: 48 are public colleges or *collèges*

d'enseignement général et professionnel (cégeps), 21 subsidized private institutions, 48 non-subsidized private institutions, and 4 institutions affiliated with a ministry or a university. As a sector, the college network covers over 212.000 students. It is worthwhile mentioning that non-subsidized private institutions have grown by 35% in the past four years; however, despite the fact that they represent more than one third of Québec's colleges, they only represent about 4% of college students in 2019-20 (around 10.000 students).

These colleges provide different educational programmes of two or three years, such as the *Diplôme d'études collégiale*s (DEC) which provides access to university or to the labour market, and the *Attestation d'études collégiale*s (AEC), which are technical and vocational studies, mostly labour-market oriented, as well as other educational and training programmes related with their respective competencies, such as upgrading activities, customized training programs for business, etc.

The DEC is issued by the MES on the recommendation of a college, and grants access to university or to the labour market (two years pre-university programmes or three years technical programs); in both cases, the MES establishes all college-level programs, including their general goals, objectives and standards, while colleges are responsible for the local implementation of the programmes, including the corresponding teaching and assessment activities to achieve and certify the objectives and standards set out by the government. To obtain a DEC, students must pass a comprehensive examination for their program set by the college, as well as a uniform language examination determined by the Minister.

 On the other hand, programs leading to an AEC are technical and vocational ones, generally short (about 18 months) and entirely under the responsibility of the colleges, from the definition of the competencies to be acquired to their certification.

Nowadays, there are more than 120 programs leading to a DEC, and 1000 leading to AEC.

In recent years, the college education attracted an increasingly diverse student population, with an increasing number of immigrant, Indigenous and adult students, students with special needs or disabilities, and students whose first language is not French. This new situation obviously challenges the college education in Québec.

The Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial du Québec (CEEC)

The *Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial* (CEEC) is an external quality assurance agency funded in 1993 by the *Act respecting the Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collegial*. The CEEC's mission, as defined by the aforementioned law, is to contribute to the development and demonstration of the quality of college education.

The CEEC was the result from a broader initiative headed by the Minister of Education to modernize and enhance college education. Instead of imposing a detailed curriculum, the the Minister of Education adopted a competency based approach, giving colleges autonomy to its implementation so that they could adapt to the needs of society. In

parallel with the granting of this new autonomy, the CEEC was created as an independent organization charged with evaluating how colleges were managing their new responsibilities, and publishing the results of its evaluation, i.e. to ensure the quality of the programmes developed within this new framework.

The CEEC is under the authority of the *Ministre de l'Enseignement Supérieur*, but determines its own internal rules of procedure and the terms and conditions of its evaluation processes. It develops evaluation criteria and tools, sets ups advisory committees and recruits experts.

The Commission is made up of 23 employees, including 4 commissioners in senior positions, one of them the chair, with a five-year mandate, renewable once. The chair is the Commission's official spokesperson. Commissioners in senior positions are appointed by Cabinet and the Commission only reports to the Assembly. The chair is responsible for administering the Commission's affairs pursuant to the applicable laws and regulations, as well as the Commission's rules and policies. The organization's decisions are made by a majority vote of commissioners present at formal meetings convened by the chair. In addition, the commissioners also form an executive committee, whose role is to advise the chair in matters of evaluation management. Calls for candidates are issued by the *Secrétariat aux emplois supérieurs* (SES). Before a commissioner is appointed, the SES makes sure that all applicable legislative and regulatory provisions are respected. Since 2019, most directors and agency members, including the chair and the commissioners, have been appointed following a recruitment and selection process.

The Secretary General is responsible for administrative management, and a team of 20 or so employees, members of Québec's public service, assist the Commission in its work. The Secretary General plans, coordinates and oversees the work of these bodies, and prepares reports and minutes of the meetings.

The Commission's evaluation activities

From 1993 to 2013, CEEC focused its evaluation activities on the Institutional Policy on Program Evaluation (IPEP), Institutional Policy on the Evaluation of Student Achievement (IPEA), Strategic Plan (SP), Student Success Plan (SSP) of the colleges, in order to evaluate and improve potential effectiveness of college's institutional policies and plans. They were based on self-evaluations which follows pre-defined criteria established by CEEC (reference frameworks or guidelines) and did not require a site visit.

In 2013, six years after the Commission first announced in its Strategic plan 2007-2011, its intent to make significant changes to its evaluation approach and after consultations and discussions with different stakeholders, the evaluation of the effectiveness of quality assurance system in Québec colleges (*Système d'Assurance Qualité des Colleges*) was launched. It aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance mechanisms of each college, or, in other words, to ensure the effective application of the programs and policies and their results. SAQC is a cyclical evaluation of the

effectiveness of colleges' quality assurance systems, based in a self-report and it includes a site visit. This new approach applies to colleges that have acquired expertise in evaluation over the years (86 colleges out of 121), while the other 35 ones, undergo a preliminary quality assurance review, implemented in 2015, which is intended to guide them towards the maturity needed to implement the SAQC.

The first SAQC audit cycle started in fall 2014 and will continue until fall 2021, while the second audit cycle is scheduled to start in winter 2021 and end in winter 2027. In addition, the Commission will evaluate in this second audit cycle the effectiveness of the action plans developed by colleges at the end of their first self-evaluation process. At this time, the CEEC had already begun this second cycle.

The "Act respecting the *Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial*" invests the Commission with three powers: to verify, to make recommendations and to make its work publicly available. Since the creation of the Commission, its power of verification has led to the evaluation of some 1 300 institutional policies and plans and 840 on-site visits. The Commission has exercised its power of recommendation on more than 1 988 occasions. Finally, its declaratory powers have generated the publication of nearly 3 000 evaluation reports and 24 annual and summary reports. All of these documents are available on the Commission's website.

ASSESSMENT OF COMPLIANCE WITH THE INQAAHE GUIDELINES OF GOOD PRACTICE

I. The structure of the External Quality Assurance Agency (CEEC)

The CEEC is a recognized, credible organization, trusted both by the higher education institutions and the public. It has adequate mechanisms to prevent conflicts of interest in the decisions it makes; its staff has the needed skills to carry out the functions associated to external QA. The CEEC has the needed resources to carry out their mission.

☐ Not compliant   ☐ Partially compliant   ☐ Substantially compliant   ■ Fully compliant

1.1 Legitimacy and recognition

1.1.1. The CEEC has an established legal basis and is recognized by a competent external body. **YES**.

1.1.2. The CEEC takes into consideration relevant guidelines issued by international networks and other and other associations, in formulating its policies and practices. **YES**.

1.1.3. The CEEC has a clear and published policy for the prevention of conflicts of interest that applies to its staff, its decision-making body, and the external Reviewers. **YES**.

The *Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial* (CEEC) is an external quality assurance agency funded in 1993 by the *Act respecting the Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial*. It was created at the same moment that the college education was given a greater autonomy in order to better fulfill the demands of the society. CEEC's mission, as defined by the aforementioned law, is to contribute to the development and demonstration of the quality of college education.

Commissioners in senior positions are appointed by the Cabinet and have a five-year mandate, renewable once. Calls for candidates are issued by the *Secrétariat aux emplois supérieurs*. Since 2019, most directors and agency members in the public administration, including the chair and the commissioners of the CEEC, have been appointed following a recruitment and selection process.

Further proof of its legitimacy is that CEEC reports to the *Ministre de l'Enseignement Supérieur* and to Quebec's National Assembly (*Rapport annuel de Gestion*). During the virtual visit the panel could confirm that the Commission is well trusted both by the Ministry and by the different networks of colleges (public and private networks alike). The reports of the Commission are especially useful for the Ministry to monitor private

colleges (licensing, etc.). Colleges, for their part, recognize the work of the CEEC in helping to ensure their quality assurance systems and, notably, the CEEC's efforts to understand and adapt its procedures taking into account the heterogeneity of the colleges.

With respect to the substandard about if the CEEC takes into consideration relevant international guidelines in formulating its policies and practices, first it must be said that the Commission was pioneer in the external evaluation and consequently, it was source of inspiration to other external quality assurance agencies (EQAs); for instance, in the beginning of the 1990s in Europe only a few countries had (newly) established external quality assurance agencies. Nevertheless, the Commission has been carrying out strategic quality assurance monitoring: thus, in 2015, it published its *Protocole de veille stratégique*, which was a continuation of a work of analysis of other EQAs carried out between 2010-11. The protocol establishes where (quality assurance agencies based in North America, Europe, Asia-Pacifique, and regional or international bodies) and how to collect the information (websites of EQAs, international journals, etc.) and its diffusion mechanisms to its staff, which is mainly the iVeille Bulletin, which is published twice-monthly and is available also in CEECs website.

The CEEC has a clear and published policy for the prevention of conflicts of interest that applies to its staff, its decision-making body, and the external reviewers (named experts). With regard to the experts , all of them must sign the *Code d'éthique et de déontologie à l'intention des personnes agissant à titre d'experts pour la Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial* (2008). Experts are required to list, if any, the colleges with which they could have conflict of interests. With respect to the Commission's governance body, the Quebec government investigates potential conflicts of interest before appointing the commissioners.

In addition, the Commission adopted an Ethic Code in April 2000, *Code d'éthique et de déontologie des membres de la Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial,* which was updated in June 2015. The code establishes the main principles, what constitutes a conflict of interest and how to approach confidentiality, and includes one annex where the member of the Commission must list, if any, the colleges for which he or she would have a conflict of interest.

1.2 Mission and purposes

1.2.1 The CEEC has a written mission statement and a set of objectives that explicitly provide that external quality assurance of higher education is its major concern, describe the purpose and scope of its activities and can be translated into verifiable policies and measurable objectives. **YES**.

The CEEC constitutive act describes its mission and powers, and establishes that its mission shall consist in evaluating college education provided by general and vocational colleges and by any other public or private educational institution to which the College Education Regulations apply. Its power is to verify, to make recommendations and to make its work publicly available. In addition, the CEEC has defined its mission, vision, values and mandate in its Strategic Plan 2020-2025. This plan is monitored each year.

Both mission statements, objectives and policies are written, clearly detailed, and proved their effectiveness through nearly 28 years of improvement.

1.3 Governance and organizational structure

1.3.1 The CEEC has a governance structure consistent with its mission and objectives, and adequate mechanisms to involve relevant stakeholders in the definition of its standards and criteria. **YES**.

1.3.2 The composition of the decision-making body and/or its regulatory framework ensure its independence and impartiality. **YES**.

1.3.3 The CEEC's organizational structure makes it possible to carry out its external review processes effectively and efficiently. **YES**.

1.3.4 The CEEC has a strategic plan that helps assess its progress and plan for future developments. **YES**.

The CEEC is directed by a council of Commissioners (named "The Commission"), one of them being the chair. The chair is responsible for administrating the Commission's affairs, presides over the meetings of the Commission and the executive committee, proposes orientation in the area of evaluation and establish action plans and the budget.

The Secretary is responsible for the administrative management of a team of 19 employees, members of Québec's public service, that assist the Commission in its work. There are 12 research officers directly assigned to evaluation activities, and 3 have a coordinating role in specific evaluation operations. Two of them are responsible for setting up the visiting committees, looking for a balance in the profiles of experts. This group, well-skilled and effectively organized, is an essential element for stabilizing the evaluation system.

On the other hand, with regard to the evaluations' organization, the commissioners evaluate institutional policies, strategic and success plans, as well as colleges' response to the Commission's evaluation. They also chair the visiting committees and collectively adopt the external reports.

The Commission engages external experts to participate in the visiting committees, or in the review or advisory committees. Experts receive no financial compensation for their participation in the Commission's activities, except for travel expenses. Usually a visiting committee is composed by the commissioner-chair, three experts, and a research officer that acts as secretary (compilation of documentation, logistics of the visit, assistance of experts in their analysis of self-evaluation reports if needed, and draft of the preliminary report).

As mentioned, external experts might also participate in advisory or review committees. The advisory committees are set up for each evaluation operation and provide critical appraisal of the reference documents and the guides for conducting evaluations. The review committee of the effectiveness of quality assurance systems (SAQC), verifies the clarity and consistency of SAQCs reports.

The panel believes these three levels of management (governance, administrative management and assessment management) work properly and ensure the consistency of the evaluation. Moreover, discussions with the different stakeholders during the site visit confirmed that the evaluations run smoothly, even after the pandemic forced to change the visit procedure from in presence to virtual.

The Commission has a Strategic Plan (SP) 2020-2025, which is in line with the previous 2018-2020 SP. The plan covers the description of its mission, the context in which it is operating and the main issues it faces , its strategic orientations, objectives, priorities, targeted results and performance indicators used to measure the achievement of these results. The current Strategic Plan defines three main orientations: maintaining the Commission's expertise, adjust the evaluation approaches to colleges' practices and reality, and promote the work of the Commission. The first two ones relate to the strategic issue of continuous improvement of evaluation practices, while the last one is linked to the outreach of the Commission, in order to both increase the participation of a wider range of stakeholders in the Commission but also to increase the Commission's visibility, promoting the Quebec college education. Furthermore, in the annual report to the *Ministre de l'Enseignement supérieur* and the National Assembly, the Commission includes a follow up of the Strategic Plan results.

1.4 Resources

1.4.1 The CEEC has a well-trained, appropriately-qualified staff, able to conduct external evaluation effectively and efficiently in accordance with its mission statement and its methodological approach. **YES.**

1.4.2 The CEEC has the physical and financial resources needed to fulfil its goals and carry out the activities that emerge from its mission statement and objectives. **YES.**

1.4.3 The CEEC provides systematic opportunities for the professional development of its staff. **YES.**

The CEEC staff is recruited through open competition, according merit and ensuring equal access to public service. Research officers receive training on different issues such as the competency-based approach, evaluation of student achievement, high impact teaching practices, etc. Moreover, new research officers benefit from a mentoring program by being accompanied by a peer for a period of one year (*Rapport annuel de gestion* 2019-20: 34). The turnover rate (which includes retirement) has been around 10% the last two years. The panel could verify in the meetings with staff members that staff is not only competent, but also fully committed to the achievement of CEEC's mission.

The Commission's annual budget is approximately CA$2.5 million. In 2020 there were 156 evaluation reports issued, 7 external visits, 1 reference framework was updated, the annual summary report of the audit was published, plus trainings for staff, new members of staff and external reviewers, and meetings with colleges were carried out. The budget has been stable in the last years, even though the number of private non subsidized colleges has grown by 35% in the last four years. Thus, the CEEC can only develop its functions because they prioritize (for instance the methodology of PIEA was just reviewed, last version was from 2012, and the SAQC was implemented before the Preliminary approach), they lengthen the timelines of the cycles (7 years for the 1st SAQC cycle), and relies heavily on the voluntary collaboration of recognized external experts, both in review and advisory committees. It means that the CEEC must constantly balance evaluation, updating, and public-oriented actions.

Lastly, and concerning material resources, the Commission's information system, which is key to the smoothly running of its operations, was fully updated and endowed with new features in 2019, making it possible to extract all the final evaluation reports and follow-up reports, deadlines, recommendations, notes written by research officers, etc.

II. Accountability of the CEEC

The CEEC has in place policies and mechanisms for its internal quality assurance, which demonstrate a continuing effort to improve the quality and integrity of its activities, its response to the changes to the context in which it operates and its links to the international community of QA.

☐ Not compliant   ☐ Partially compliant   ☐ Substantially compliant   ■ Fully compliant

2.1 Quality assurance of the CEEC

2.1.1. The CEEC operates with transparency, integrity and professionalism and adheres to ethical and professional standards. **YES**

2.1.2. The CEEC has in place mechanisms that enable it to review its own activities in order to respond to the changing nature of higher education, the effectiveness of its operations, and its contribution towards the achievement of its objectives. **YES**

2.1.3. The CEEC periodically conducts a self-review of its own activities, including consideration of its own effects and value. The review includes data collection and analysis, to inform decision-making and trigger improvements. **YES**.

2.1.4. The CEEC is subject to external reviews at regular intervals, ideally not exceeding five years. There is evidence that any required actions are implemented and disclosed. **YES**.

With regard to transparency, it should be noted that the Commission's reference frameworks are public and accessible via its website. The CEEC also publishes all its evaluation reports in their entirety on its website.

The CEEC has a team of high level professionals who act in accordance with an ethical code, with accuracy and integrity. Evidence of this rigor is the critical analysis developed in the self-report, as well as in the continuous improvement throughout the years of their evaluation processes.

The Commission uses different mechanisms for internal quality assurance purposes, i.e. to plan and review its own activities. The Commission is now in its Strategic Plan 2020-2025 and follow an annual planning (Plan de travail), which monitors the Strategic Plan implementation. Besides the SP implementation, the CEEC elaborates every year the *Rapport annuel de gestion* which is submitted to Québec's National Assembly. Furthermore, the Commission must present a *Plan pluriannuel d'évaluation de programmes,* which will be focused in the SAQC*:* in 2022 it will present the evaluation report, in 2025 the implementation evaluation, and the complete evaluation of the SAQC will be in 2029, after the 2nd SAQC audit cycle.

The CEEC also collects systematically, through questionnaires, college and experts satisfaction with evaluation visits and training and support provided. These indicators are used in the annual SP monitoring. In addition, the CEEC involves colleges through the liaison committee, made up of representatives of all types of colleges (cégeps, subsidized private colleges, etc.), which meets four times a year. As a result of these mechanisms, adjustments are made to the reference frameworks, guidelines and supporting documents. Proof of this dynamism is the fact that in 2019 the CEEC released a first version of the SAQC 2nd cycle reference framework, and in 2020 there was already a second version.

Finally, as part of the external evaluation of its activities, the Commission has applied for a second time in 2020 for the alignment with INQAAHE's GGP. The first application in 2016 concluded with the development of an Action Plan, which was sent to INQAHHE for the follow up and that included 13 actions that were incorporated into the annual plans of the Commission.

All in all, there are plenty of evidences of a well-established quality culture in the Commission, and its large diffusion among Québec college education.

2.2 Links to the QA community

2.2.1. The CEEC is open to international developments in quality assurance and has mechanisms that enable it to learn about and analyze the main trends in the field. **YES**.

2.2.2. The CEEC collaborates with other QA agencies where possible, in areas such as exchange of good practices, capacity building, and review of decisions, joint projects, or staff exchanges. **YES**.

As explained in Guidelines 1, the CEEC established in 2015 a strategic monitoring in order to be updated in matters of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (*Protocole de veille stratégique*). Its results are disseminated to all staff via an electronic newsletter and are published on line, gathering news about QA events, new methodology developments from QAAs, summaries and references of papers and books related to QA. Based on this work, for example, the Commission formulated proposals to foster greater student involvement in its work, proposals that are addressed in the SP of the Commission (2020-25).

Besides the newsletter, the Commissioners and the chair has participated in meetings with other QAAs, such as the Belgian, Swiss, French, Senegalese and Moroccan agencies, among others. The panel has noticed a real increase in the international activity compared to the visit of 2016.

III. The CEEC's framework for the external review of quality in higher education institutions

The main concern of the CEEC is the promotion of quality education and student achievement. In doing this, it recognises that quality is primarily the responsibility of the higher education institutions themselves, and, supports this principle in its criteria and procedures. These promote internal quality assurance (IQA) and provide higher education institutions with clear guidance on the requirements for self-assessment and external review.

☐ Not compliant   ☐ Partially compliant   ☐ Substantially compliant   ■ Fully compliant

3.1 The relationship between the CEEC and Higher Education institutions

3.1.1. The CEEC recognizes that institutional and programmatic quality and quality assurance are primarily the responsibility of the Higher Education institutions (HEIs) themselves, and respects the academic autonomy, identity and integrity of the institutions and programmes. **YES.**

3.1.2. The CEEC promotes the development and appropriate implementation of IQA processes in accordance with the understanding that the primary responsibility for assuring quality resides with the institutions and its programmes. **YES**.

3.1.3. The CEEC bears in mind the level of workload and cost that its procedures will place on institutions, and, strives to make them as time and cost effective as possible. **YES**.

From the outset, the Commission opted for a strategy aimed at gradually increasing the capacity of evaluation of the colleges to ensure continuous improvement in the quality of teaching. Consequently, the Commission directs all of its efforts to support and collaborate with colleges, respecting and preserving their autonomy. Discussion during the virtual site visit with representatives of the different college networks not only confirmed this predisposition, but colleges observed that the CEEC has increased its efforts to take into account the particularities of the different types of colleges . In conclusion, the Commission has promoted since the beginning the quality assurance culture, that now is very well spread throughout the college community.

The CEEC's external quality assurance evaluations are focused on the assessment of the Internal quality assurance processes. If we use ENQA's definition of "audit" (ENQA Occasional papers 14, 2008), which states that it is "an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the quality mechanisms established by an institution itself to continuously monitor and improve the activities and services of either a subject, a programme, the whole institution or a theme", we could reach the conclusion that the CEEC is an expert external provider in this kind of procedure. As described in the

Introduction, there are two different approaches, one, which has to do with the evaluation and improvement of internal quality assurance mechanisms and involves the evaluation of institutional policies (on programme evaluation, student achievement), strategic plans or student success plans, and a second approach, which implies the evaluation of the efficiency of implementation of these policies, plans and internal quality assurance mechanisms, and requires external site visit.

Lastly, thanks to the feedback mechanisms with colleges, the Commission is well aware of the level of workload that evaluation procedures involve for colleges. One evidence of this awareness can be found in the revision of the framework for the second audit cycle following colleges comments, where the section titled "*Perspectives d'allègement*" describes all that has been done in order to streamline the process and support colleges in the evaluation. A second evidence is the fact that the preliminary quality assurance review was broken down in two steps (one for the programme evaluation and the evaluation of the application of the policy on the evaluation of programmes, and the other for the evaluation of the application of institutional policy on student achievement), aiming to spreading out the workload required for the evaluation. Both examples show the Commission responsiveness to college demands and its willingness to modify its procedures in order to facilitate the evaluation process in colleges, even in the smaller ones, where resources for evaluation are scarce. Nonetheless, during the virtual visit some colleges pointed out that the information required by the Commission was sometime also required by the Ministry, and suggested a better communication among the administrations in order to decrease the requests for information.

3.2 The definition of criteria for external quality review

3.2.1   The CEEC recognizes and values institutional diversity and translates this valuation into criteria and procedures that take into account the identity and goals of Higher Education institutions. **YES**.

3.2.2.   The standards or criteria developed by The CEEC have been subject to reasonable consultation with stakeholders and are revised at regular intervals to ensure relevance to the needs of the system. **YES**.

3.2.3.   Standards or criteria take into consideration the specific aspects related to different modes of provision, such as transnational education, distance or online programmes or other non-traditional approaches to HE as relevant to the context in which they operate. **YES**.

3.2.4.   Standards or criteria explicitly address the areas of institutional activity that fall within CEEC's scope, (e.g., institutional governance and management, programme design and approval, teaching and learning, student admission, progression and certification, research, community engagement) and on the availability of necessary resources (e.g., finances, staff and learning resources). **YES**.

3.2.5. Criteria or standards and procedures take into account internal follow up mechanisms, and, provide for effective follow up of the outcomes of the external reviews. **YES**.

3.2.6. The CEEC procedures specify the way in which criteria will be applied and the types of evidence needed to demonstrate that they are met. **YES**.

First of all, it must be mentioned, since Québec colleges are very heterogeneous (from very large public colleges to very small private non subsidized colleges), that they do not have the same human and material resources to develop a quality assurance system. However, the Commission strives to ensure an equivalent treatment of colleges, using the same criteria and standards, while adjusting its evaluation to the reality of each one. The preliminary quality assurance review is a good example of this understanding, since it is addressed to the 35 colleges (out of 121) which have not yet developed their own quality assurance system, and it intends to guide them in this process to enable them in the future to be included in the SAQC evaluation. Another evidence of how the Commission takes into account the diversity of colleges is in the profile of the experts of the visiting committee; in recent years, as was stated by the colleges participating in the virtual visit, committees are more diversified in order to better understand the specific needs of the colleges.

With regard to the revision of the CEEC's reference frameworks, as mentioned, in 2013 the Commission shifted from evaluating the actual effectiveness of colleges' quality assurance mechanisms toward the evaluation of the quality assurance systems. It however continued to evaluate the potential effectiveness of institutional policies and plans. The Commission has dedicated lots of efforts to tune its audit processes, which includes 3 new procedures: SAQC, preliminary quality review, and the design of 2nd cycle of SAQC. All these methodologies have been designed involving colleges, through the advisory Committees and using the surveys collected systematically after each site visit. Due to this change, the revision of the reference frameworks related to potential effectiveness has been somewhat slowed down, as shown in the table below, but the Commission states in its self-report its commitment to ensure the regular revision of reference frameworks, based on the expectations associated with the SAQC audit and the preliminary quality assurance review, i.e. to ensure their internal alignment.

Current evaluation operations	Launching year	Reviews
PIEP IPEP - Institutional Policy on Program Evaluation	1994	2011, 2020
PIEA IPESA - Institutional Policy on the Evaluation of Student Achievement	1994	2006, 2012, 2021
PLANS DE RÉUSSITE Student success plan	2000	2008
PS (cégep) Stratégic plan	2004	2007, 2008
SAQC-01 Québec college quality assurance systems	2013	2015, 2017
APPROCHE PRÉABLE à SAQC Preliminary quality assessement review	2015	2019
SAQC-02 Québec college quality assurance systems	2019	2020
Modalités de suivi	2018	2019

Concerning the standard 3.2.3, it is important to highlight that the CEEC carries out audits, which means that it focuses on quality assurance mechanism. The Commission is interested in making sure that colleges ensure the quality of all of their study programs, regardless of where and how they are delivered (in person, synchronously, asynchronously). Thus, the reference frameworks are valid whatever the modalities, and still remain high level ones. During the site visit, none of the participants mentioned the need to adapt the Reference frameworks to the mode of provision. It is important to point out that few colleges have a license to offer virtual training (private colleges do not have it), and the colleges interested must ask the MES.

The revision of the CEECs reference frameworks shows that they address the areas of institutional activity that fall within the CEEC's scope. For instance, PIEP (Institutional Policy on Program Evaluation) addresses the following areas: relevance and coherence of the program of study, suitability of pedagogical methods and student supervision and support, alignment of human, material and financial resources, effectiveness of the program, and quality management of the program. The efficiency of PIEP is addressed in the SAQC evaluation , where in its first component it is assessed whether the policy its implemented, and the ability of this mechanism to ensure continuous quality improvement related to relevance and coherence of the programs, suitability of teaching methods, etc. The other components of the SAQC audit deal with the implementation of the Evaluation of Student achievement, Strategic Planning and Student success planning (all of them have its corresponding evaluative procedures ex-ante).

Regarding the criteria 3.2.5, since the CEEC carries out audits, this is the purpose of their evaluation. For instance, the third criteria of all the four SAQC components is the review and updating of the main mechanisms in place to ensure continuous improvement (in programme evaluation, student achievement, strategic planning..). Besides, the CEEC has two documents that describe in a very detailed way how colleges should report to the CEEC about the implementation of the recommendations made in the external assessment reports. One of this documents refers to an evaluation that deal with potential efficiency of quality assurance mechanisms, and the other one details how to demonstrate the implementation of the recommendations made in the SAQC evaluation.

Finally, all Reference frameworks analyzed (PIEP, PIEA, SAQC, *Modalités de suivi…)* contain examples or illustrations of how colleges can demonstrate the achievement of the standards and criteria. Moreover, there was no doubt or complaint raised during the virtual site visit about the completeness of the Reference frameworks.

3.3 The external review process

3.3.1   The CEEC carries out an external review process that is reliable and based on published criteria and procedures. It follows a self-assessment or equivalent, and, includes an external review (normally including a site visit or visits), and a consistent follow up of the recommendations resulting from the external review. **YES.**

3.3.2   The CEEC has published documents, which clearly state what it expects from Higher Education institutions, in the form of quality criteria, or standards and procedures, for self-assessment and external review. **YES**.

3.3.3   The external review process is carried out by teams of experts consistent with the characteristics of the institution/programme being reviewed. Experts can provide input from various perspectives, including those of institutions, academics, students, employers or professional practitioners. **YES**.

3.3.4   The CEEC has clear specifications on the characteristics and selection of external Reviewers, who must be supported by appropriate training and good supporting materials such as handbooks or manuals. **YES**.

3.3.5   External review procedures include effective and comprehensive mechanisms for the prevention of conflicts of interest, and, ensure that any judgments resulting from external reviews are based on explicit and published criteria. **YES**.

3.3.6   The CEEC's system ensures that each institution or programme will be evaluated in a consistent way, even if the external Panels, teams, or committees are different. **YES**.

3.3.7   The CEEC carries out the external review within a reasonable timeframe after the completion of a self-assessment report, to ensure that information is current and updated. **YES**.

3.3.8 The CEEC provides the Higher Education institutions with an opportunity to correct any factual errors that may appear in the external review report . **YES**.

All CEEC evaluation procedures are published online, and the SAQC external evaluation is based on a self-evaluation report elaborated by the colleges themselves based on the standards and criteria published. Concerning procedures established before 2013, audits of the potential effectiveness (policies and plans that still have not been implemented), no site visit is carried out, while for SAQC, audits of the efficacy of internal quality assurance mechanisms, the external assessment includes a site visit. All these evaluations include a corresponding follow up procedure to ensure that the recommendations are implemented.

The Reference frameworks (*cadres de référence*) are the documents or guidelines that detail the procedure of evaluation, standards and criteria, all of them are published online.

The external visit involved in the SAQC and in the Preliminary quality assurance review, is carried out by a team of experts mainly comprising peers with different areas of expertise (expert in PS, in student assessment, etc.), and coming from different types of colleges (public, subsidized, etc.). In some cases, especially for evaluations of non-subsidized private colleges that offer vocational educational programmes, the committees include experts from the professional sector (employers profile). In spite of the fact that the CEEC does not include students in these visiting committees at the moment, the *Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec* explained about its preparation for a possible participation: the Federation elaborated in 2020 a *Mémoire sur l'évaluation de l'enseignement et la révision des programmes*; mainly arguing about that, since students are at the heart of *cégeps* mission, their point of view is essential to improve the college network.

The CEEC coordinators are in charge of composing the team of experts, ensuring that the team has in whole enough expertise to cover the different sections of the framework and will be able to understand the quality culture of the colleges, even if this requirement is not yet formalize. External experts receive training before the assessment, and supporting documents to carry out their evaluation in addition to the Reference frameworks. As mentioned, all experts teams are led by a CEEC Commissioner and assisted by a research officer as secretary. Thus, the support of the expert team is really thorough.

As described in Guidelines I, all external reviewers must sign the *Code de d'éthique et de déontologie à l'intention des personnes agissant à titre d'expert pour la Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignent collégial* (2008), and are required to list, if any, the colleges which they could have conflict of interests.

The consistency of the evaluation is ensured, primarily, by the exhaustive and detailed Reference frameworks. In addition, the SAQC reports are first approved by the experts of the visiting committee, then reviewed by the review Committee (*Comité de lecture*), and at last adopted by the Commission which finally ensures its consistency. For the

preliminary quality assurance review, the reports are reviewed by the visiting Committee before being adopted by the Commission.

With regard to the time-frame for the external review report, according to the indicators included in the Annual report to the *Ministre de l'Enseignement supérieur* and the National Assembly, most of them are on time (according to the *Plan travail* 2019-20, around 75% of PIEA, PIEP, PS, Success plans and Follow up reports were assessed 6 months following its reception). There were no complaints during the virtual site visit about this issue, monitored, if necessary, by the *Plan de travail.*

The correction procedure for factual errors in reports takes place when the Commission sends a preliminary version of the report to the college, which is invited to comment its contents. The Commission takes note of the college's comments and makes any changes to the reports that it deems appropriate. The final version of the report includes a section containing the college's comments, is adopted by the Commission and posted on the Commission's website. Colleges have access to an appeal mechanism, that will be described in Guideline 5.

3.4 The requirements for self-evaluation

3.4.1   The CEEC provides clear guidance to the institution or programme in the application of the procedures for self-evaluation, the solicitation of assessment/feedback from the public, students, and other constituents, or the preparation for external review as necessary and appropriate. **YES**.

Reference frameworks are the mechanism that chiefly ensures the guidance to each of CEEC evaluative procedures. As described, reference frameworks are comprehensive, detailed, and valued by all stakeholders concerned. The Commission also established several feedback mechanisms to collect stakeholders opinion about the development of its functions.

Furthermore, considering that each college is linked with a referent CEEC research officer who supports the institution between the evaluation cycles, in addition to its information system that collects the history of evaluations, including recommendations, it results that the CEEC has a very vast and detailed knowledge of each and every Quebec's colleges.

IV. The CEEC and its relationship to the public

The CEEC makes public its policies and decisions about institutions and programmes, discloses the decisions about its own performance and disseminates reports on outcomes of QA processes.

☐ Not compliant   ☐ Partially compliant   ☐ Substantially compliant   ■ Fully compliant

4.1 Public reports on EQAA policies and decisions

4.1.1 The CEEC provides full and clear disclosure of its relevant documentation such as policies, procedures and criteria. **YES**.

4.1.2 The CEEC reports its decisions about Higher Education institutions and programmes. The content and extent of reporting may vary with cultural context and applicable legal and other requirements. **YES**.

4.1.3 The CEEC has mechanisms to facilitate the public a fair understanding of the reasons supporting decisions taken. **YES.**

As described , the CEEC publishes all of its Reference documents and evaluation reports on its website, as well as its institutional documents such as its Strategic plan or the *Rapport annuel de gestion*.

The Commission is aware that the specialized nature of the content it deals with makes it difficult to capture the public's interest and this is why Commission made promoting its work the third orientation in its *Plan Stratégique 2020-2025*. By implementing and monitoring this plan, the Commission intends to increase its outreach by promoting its work among stakeholders in the college community, as well as among government departments and agencies interested in Higher Education.

Within the framework of the Strategic Plan 2020-2025, the CEEC has approved in June 2020 a Communication Plan whose purpose is to make the various agents of the system have a better knowledge of their activities and their impact on improving the system quality. It clearly establishes its objectives, increasing participation, especially of some of the actors in the system, facilitating exchange and cooperation with these actors, collecting information and gathering general perceptions to improve practices. It specifically defines the direct audiences (representatives, directors and counsellors of the schools, teachers and students, as well as their representatives, the Ministry and other government agencies, international partners) and indirect (experts). The activities are defined, have been planned and are specific in terms of means and modes of interaction, taking into account the different target audiences.

4.2 Other public reports

4.2.1   The CEEC discloses to the public the decisions about the CEEC resulting from any external review of its own performance. **YES**.

4.2.2   The CEEC prepares and disseminates periodically integrated reports on the overall outcomes of QA processes and of any other relevant activities. **YES**.

The disclosure of its public decisions has already been mentioned: all external reports are published in their entirety.

The Commission publishes each year an assessment (*Bilan de résultats du premier cycle d'audit)*, where it summarizes the main findings resulting, on one hand, from audits carried out in the colleges and, on the other hand, from consultation on the audit process carried out with colleges and experts. This report highlights the main strengths and problems it has observed in each college (audited in the year, or college who followed up on recommendations issued by the Commission), as well as in the college' network as a whole.

The wealth of information held by the Commission raises new demands, of interest for both institutional and public areas : the Ministry asking the Commission to draw a map of the college education in Quebec, the colleges asking for more transversal reports, both for decision-making support. One more proof of the credibility of the CEEC when disseminating its knowledge on college education in the Province.

V. Decision making

The CEEC has policies and procedures in place that ensure a fair and independent decision–making process in the final review of the institution or the programme. It provides effective procedures to deal with appeals and complaints.

☐ Not compliant   ☐ Partially compliant   ☐ Substantially compliant   ■ Fully compliant

5.1 The decision-making process

5.1.1   The CEEC decisions take into consideration the outcomes of both the institution's self-assessment process and the external review; they may also consider any other relevant information, provided this has been communicated to the HEIs. **YES**.

5.1.2   The CEEC decisions are impartial, rigorous, and consistent even when they are based on the reports of other quality assurance bodies. **YES**.

5.1.3   The CEEC decisions are based on published criteria and procedures, and, can be justified only with reference to those criteria and procedures. **YES**.

5.1.4   Consistency in decision-making includes consistency and transparency in processes and actions for imposing recommendations for follow-up action. **YES**.

5.1.5. The CEEC's reported decisions are clear and precise. **YES**.

Each Reference document contains a section where it is explained how the Commission will rule either on the policy or plan evaluated or on the effectiveness of the Quality assurance. The Commission renders a ruling on each of the components evaluated, issues messages for improvement, where applicable, and provides an overall ruling. The rulings and opinions contained in the evaluation reports take into consideration both the self-evaluation report submitted by the college and the observations of the visiting committee during the audit.

Consistency is ensured through different mechanisms already discussed in previous sections: its orientations and evaluation criteria in orientation documents, analysis frameworks, reference frameworks, training of experts, the role of the Commissioner and the research officer in the visiting committee, the review committee, etc. The stakeholders interviewed in the virtual site visit assessed this measures as effective. The CEEC evaluations are also considered as fully consistent by the Ministry, and especially used to allow private colleges to open new programmes.

Under section 17 of its Constituting Act, the Commission may recommend that a college enhances the quality of its evaluation policies, its programs of study, or the means it uses to implement these programs. The advices issued by the Commission may take the form of invitations, suggestions or recommendations. The bases for the Commission's recommendations are always explained in its reports. In addition, since 2018, the Chair

contacts all colleges for which the Commission has made a recommendation under the SAQC audit or the preliminary quality assurance review to explain the follow-up process and to set a deadline, so that the colleges can demonstrate the actions they have taken or the effectiveness of the quality assurance mechanisms in place. If the follow-up measures taken by the college are deemed satisfactory, the Commission withdraws the recommendation in question. The follow-up reports produced by the Commission are then posted on its website.

5.2 The CEEC's process for appeals and complaints

5.2.1   The CEEC has procedures in place to deal in a consistent way with complaints about its procedures or operation. **YES**.

5.2.2   The CEEC has clear, published procedures for handling appeals related to its external review and decision-making processes. **YES**.

5.2.3   Appeals are conducted by a Panel that was not responsible for the original decision and has no conflict of interest; appeals need not necessarily be conducted outside the CEEC. **YES**.

As described in Guideline 3, the colleges may correct any factual errors that may appear in the external review report. Colleges are invited to comment on the content of the preliminary reports, including the conclusions and opinions they contain. The Commission decides whether to incorporate changes or not, but in any case, the final report includes a section containing the college's comments to the preliminary report.

There is no official complaint process, since the Commission's evaluations are part of a continuous improvement process, since its work is not related to the granting of subsidies or funding, and since it does not serve as a base for sanctions. But, in 2017, following INQAAHE's recommendation, the Commission set up an appeal mechanism as part of the SAQC audit: the definitive right of reply.

This mechanism allows colleges to independently express their point of view concerning the rulings and opinions issued by the Commission in its evaluation reports. Within two months following receipt of a final report, the Director General can submit the college's reaction by sending a letter to the Commission. The reply made by the college must relate to the conclusions of the report and the opinions and rulings issued, the facts having been dealt with in the college's initial reaction to the preliminary report. The Commission undertakes to publish the letter in its entirety in the Publications section of its website. This new step in the Commission's audit process, the definitive right of reply, aims to ensure transparency in the dissemination of evaluation results. The definitive right of reply took effect on March 29, 2017, retroactively, for all institutions having undergone the first audit cycle. So far, two colleges have exercised this right. The Commission believes that the definitive right of reply should also be available to colleges undergoing a preliminary quality assurance review.

During the site visit, colleges' representatives asked for a more systematic procedure for appeals, as it exists in their own internal evaluations, preferably led by an independent committee (half commission / half college representatives, for instance).

VI. The QA of cross border Higher Education

The CEEC has policies relating to both imported and exported Higher Education. These policies take into account the characteristics of the providers and the receivers, and, refer to all types of transnational Higher Education.

☐ Not compliant   ☐ Partially compliant   ☐ Substantially compliant   ■ Fully compliant

6.1 Criteria for cross border Higher Education

6.1.1   The CEEC in a sending country makes clear that the awarding institution is responsible for ensuring the equivalent quality of the education offered, that the institution understands the regulatory frameworks of the receiving countries, and that the institution provides clear information on the programmes offered and their characteristics. **YES**.

6.1.2   Students and other stakeholders receive clear and complete information about the awards delivered. **YES**.

6.1.3   The rights and obligations of the parties involved in transnational education are clearly established and well known by the parties. **YES**.

The CEEC's evaluation procedures are addressed to quality assurance mechanisms for programs of study (PIEP), evaluation of student learning (IPEA), success planning (*Plans de réussite),* for Strategic planning *(PS),* and the efficacy of its implementation (SAQC, preliminary review). Neither the Commission, nor the colleges perceive the need of changing the standards and criteria for cross-border Higher Education. As stated in the self-report and expressed in the on-line meetings with the Commission, the Commission is interested in making sure that colleges ensure the quality of all of their programs of study, regardless of where and how they are delivered (in person, synchronously, asynchronously). No concerns were raised during the virtual visit about the rights and obligations of the parties involved in transnational education, following the logic that if the quality assurance mechanisms work properly, the information about the awards delivered and the rights and obligations will work properly.

It must be noted that very little cross-border education has been developed by the colleges of Québec, with a few examples of education offered in another Canadian region or country. As a consequence, the issue of a possible specificity of their evaluation has never been raised as such. However, since the Commission set up in 2018 a task force charged with documenting colleges' international activities, and since colleges will be asked to provide an up-dated portrait of their distance education and education offered outside Québec in the second cycle of the evaluation of the effectiveness of their quality assurance systems, one more step will be taken to know whether cross-border education in Québec colleges should be an issue in the evaluation of their quality assurance mechanisms.

6.2 Collaboration between agencies

6.2.1   The CEEC cooperates with appropriate local agencies in the exporting and importing countries and with international networks. This cooperation is oriented to improve mutual understanding, to have a clear and comprehensive account of the regulatory framework and to share good practices. **YES**.

6.2.2   The CEEC seeks ways to cooperate in the external quality assurance in transnational education provision, for example through mutual recognition. **YES**.

In Guidelines 1 and 2 it has been described the *Protocole de veille stratégique.* This procedure is key in maintaining the Commission updated about the development of QA worldwide. The protocol establishes which countries or agencies should be periodically monitored.

Besides, the Commission has participated in the FrAQ-Sup Conference in Paris in June 2018. It also held bilateral meetings with representatives of the Belgian, Swiss, French, Senegalese and Moroccan agencies, and discussions with representatives of the Tunisian and Romanian agencies in development. The panel recognises that the Commission has broadened and diversified its external relationships since the last INQAAHE assessment. The Commission indicates that establishing international partnerships is a challenge since it has to be done at the same time that its usual activities of evaluation. This greater openness to the international scene must find its place within the Commission' overall activities.

FINDINGS

1. POSITIVE FINDINGS

* The CEEC presents a strong organizational structure (governance, administrative management, evaluation organization) and is equipped with a large range of good management tools (PS, etc.) to ensure the smooth and efficient development of its responsibilities.

* The CEEC is held in high regard by the Ministry and enjoys prestige among Higher Education community. It is well trusted by the different networks of colleges, as well as among representatives of professional and students associations, and seen as a reliable institution. There is no doubt that CEEC's activities and policies are well suited to the institutions that were at the core of its foundation and evolve together, namely a set of colleges that want to improve its quality development and the Ministry of Higher Education. It enlarged this audience to the socio-economic professional networks concerned by the college education.

The Commission has put in place several mechanisms that ensure the implication of its different stakeholders: Liaison Committee, questionnaires, consultation of the evaluation procedures, etc., building from years close partnership. In recent years, the Commission has redoubled its efforts to further improve its relationship with colleges making exchanges as fluid as possible, as it was acknowledged by colleges themselves in the virtual visit, which shows a mutual adherence to the jointly established mechanisms.

* The Commission has been elaborating and reviewing its Reference frameworks since 1994. The Reference frameworks are clear, thorough and complete, and contain examples of how to provide evidence of the fulfilment of the different criteria. The terms of reference and its operating instructions have been constantly and consistently polished, leaving no doubt about how to proceed. All Reference frameworks are published online and easily accessible.

* The change of paradigm, from evaluating the actual effectiveness of specific mechanism to the audit of the quality assurance system, has been a success and the Commission is now beginning the implementation of its 2nd SAQC cycle. Moreover, the Reference frameworks for the evaluation of potential effectiveness are being reviewed, to ensure the coherence among all the Reference frameworks, including the SAQC operation.

Besides, the CEEC has in place a commendable monitoring system that checks whether the recommendations of each of their evaluation procedures are being implemented, which is a really efficient follow up system. All the stakeholders involved in the meetings agreed that the evaluations work properly, and the indicators included in the Strategic Plan (deadlines, satisfaction with the process, etc.) are confirmation of its proper functioning.

In all its activities, the Commission demonstrates a high level of professionalism and involvement. Its concern about its mission, college education, quality of programmes or students future is obvious and seem to constantly irrigate all its practices.

* In its almost 30 years of existence, the CEEC has demonstrated its capacity to improve and to innovate in its evaluation process.

All evaluation procedures have been subject to revisions, and new procedures have been devised and implemented over the years (SAQC, preliminary review, SAQC-2nd cycle). In order to adjust these procedures, the Commission uses an increasing range of feedback mechanisms (Liaison Committee, questionnaires, Communication plan, etc.), that have demonstrated their effectiveness.

This adaptability has also enabled the Commission to take over an increasing number of increasingly diverse colleges, while developing relationships with its outside world.

* The Commission has a clear vision of the future. Its feedback mechanisms allow it to be aware of stakeholders opinions and needs regarding the evaluation procedures and their desirable development to support colleges in continuously improving their activities. The Strategic Plan it's the main tool for CEEC's projection, and it is closely monitored. Finally, the CEEC's *Protocole de veille* ensures that the CEEC is keeping in touch with QA developments around the world.

* A special mention must be made regarding the CEEC's system, seen as a good practice since it includes all CEEC assessment procedures and is highly tailored to colleges. The CEEC collects and monitors 3 different categories of recommendations: recommendations prior to the SAQC audit, recommendations issued during the SAQC audit and recommendations as part of the Preliminary quality assurance review. For each of these categories, the Commission guides the colleges in the follow up process, providing a "*document d'orientation*", developing forms to help colleges to address the recommendations and contacting them once a year to ensure that colleges follow up the recommendations within the set timelines. This follow-up is made not at regular externally established periods, but taking into account the reality and pace of each college, since it takes time to be able to evaluate the efficacy of a change introduced in a quality assurance system. Furthermore, CEEC's monitoring system places the CEEC in a privileged position to measure what has been one of the main issues concerning the relevance and efficiency of External Quality Assurance (EQA): the evaluation of its impact, since the overarching objective of EQA in Higher Education institutions is to make a contribution to the quality of Higher Education. The CEEC's monitoring system is, in fact, a check of the impact of the previous assessments, and therefore, it allows to demonstrate what has changed and the efficiency of those changes due to the external evaluation.

2. ENHANCEMENT POINTS.

* The CEEC solid structure is partly a result of the fact that its structure is made of very homogeneous profiles. As it was stated in the INQAAHE report from 2016: "clearly the focus, but also the main external partner, for the CEEC's QA activities are the colleges, and respectively their representatives". This homogeneity, in the profiles of the Commissioners but also among the experts involved in the different committees, ensures the smooth operation of CEEC's activities, but it also demonstrates difficulty in associating different profiles. The panel noticed "winds of change" with the recruitment of non-academic experts in some of the visiting committees, but wonders how the CEEC could benefit of its marge for improvement in using a larger range of competences at all levels of its structure, broadening perspectives and opening the way for new partnerships with other segments of the society. Thus, the system would benefit from more diversity, especially including representatives of the labour market, universities and students. It could also be helpful for the CEEC to be supported in its efforts toward a better recognition in larger social and economic areas.

* Regarding the CEEC resources, the panel highlighted not only the quality but also the amount of work done. Setting priorities, lengthening timelines of the reviews cycle, the Commission could provide more colleges evaluations and develop new activities. Given the stability of resources, this mainly relies on the voluntary collaboration of recognized external experts, both in visiting committees, as well as on review and advisory committees, mostly from academic background. If this voluntary participation allows to carry on more college evaluations, it inhibits the involvement of more diverse profile among the pool of experts, and over all masks the actual cost of the commission activities.

The panel wonders how far this situation could go, considering that the number of non-subsidized colleges is constantly increasing, accounting now for more than a third of college institutions (for 4% of college students). Rightfully, the CEEC devotes an equivalent energy for each of the colleges evaluated, regardless of the number of its students, in order to ensure a fair evaluation of all institutions, whatever their status. Far from seeming disproportionate, this effort is legitimate and necessary, but has a real cost, whose amount could be used as one of the basis for reallocation of budget resources.

* The CEEC' knowledge of college system is really impressive, but seems to be somehow underused when it could be better valorized, valorizing the Commission itself. It could be of special relevance for the Ministry, since the Ministry grants licenses to private colleges or to offer virtual education, and its representatives expressed their interest in having a better panoramic of the system. It could be helpful for the colleges, asking for transversal reports as decision-making supports, and could also be of interest for other types of stakeholders like students or employers. While maintaining its autonomy, the Commission could find a better balance in managing and disseminating this information.

While it is true that the Commission enjoys a high recognition, due to its professionalism and technical nature, it remains little known in some collectives concerned with college

education quality. Given the CEEC's vast knowledge of Quebec's college system, the CEEC and the Quebec's college education system itself would benefit from diversifying the presentation and dissemination of its results in order to better inform the various audiences concerned by its work. The Strategic Plan 2020-2025 reveals the interest in increasing interaction with different audiences. The Communication Plan informs, in turn, an emphasis on actions that use media and messages aimed at favoring greater participation by the main actors in the system, recognizing that participation represents a challenge for the CEEC. It is remarkable the relative number of the actions included aimed at teachers and students and its corresponding representatives, as well as the degree of specificity or precision of these actions. Among public bodies, there is room for a review and greater precision to segment the different messages; and among "indirect audiences", the scope criteria could be revised to include other social stakeholders that influence or may be influenced by the CEEC activities, such as representatives of the organizations, business and social actors.

* While most of stakeholders are involved in the CEEC's procedures, public college teachers unions remain a difficult stakeholder. They stressed their positions declining to participate in the external virtual site visit, asserting their ideological rejection of external quality assurance evaluation. However, as most of the teachers are effectively involved in the internal quality assurance mechanisms, in their respective colleges as at the CEEC level, the commitment of the academics with the quality in college education is fully efficient and assumed, despite this opposition in principle.

* Regarding the student participation in the evaluation procedures the panel noticed an improvement compared with the last INQAAHE assessment but wonders why their participation to the external evaluations and the higher levels of the CEEC remains incomplete. The Commission has analyzed internationally how students are involved, and has exchanged with student representatives aiming to better associate them to the QA processes. The students seem to really take part of the evaluations in their respective colleges. The next steps seem to meet some resistance, when they could benefit the whole system.

As to better prepare their participation, the *Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec*, elaborated a *Mémoire sur l'évaluation de l'enseignement et la révision des programmes in 2020*. The document contains a definition of what is quality and what role has internal and external quality assurance, reviews the existing procedures to assess the quality assurance mechanism and proposes how the students should be involved, finishing by setting up recommendations. The document argues that since students are at the heart of college mission, their point of view is essential to improve the college network. This document is evidence that the college students are prepared to be fully involved in the external evaluations.

Given that college students are short-term ones (18 months to 3 years), defining their desirable profile could be challenging, but student participation in evaluations is now widely exercised at all levels of the evaluation decision-making process, which allows to draw inspiration from many foreign experiences.

* Regarding virtual education, the panel wonders if the statement of CEEC (same Reference framework regardless of the teaching and training modality) can be maintained under current actual conditions. The virtuality imposed by the pandemic has required adjusting internal and external processes in relation to the activity, in collaboration with all stakeholders. The need to introduce ultra-fast solutions as efficient alternatives has left little time for the setting of criteria and the elaboration of an organizational strategy on the possible hybrids that would both ensure the smooth development of routine activities and allow the full potential of technologies to improve CEEC's processes and activities. In the Reference framework developed and implemented for the SAQC-2nd cycle, no specific consideration has been established about the virtual teaching modality or aspects likely to affect the quality management systems of schools operating partially or totally in that modality. The specific aspects relating to the evaluation of quality mechanisms in virtual training programs have not yet been developed. The potential increase in the transnationality of programs due to an increase of virtual educative offer will require greater attention from the CEEC in the coming years, which will be need to be addressed with adequate resources and depending on the state of development of the virtual modality within the diversity of colleges.

* Regarding the appeal procedure, CEEC made an important step by establishing a new process. The decision-making process is clear, combining the work of the colleges, the conclusions of the visiting committee, the comments of the review committee on the rulings and opinions issued, the decisions of the Commission, and allowing the college a written answer and the possibility of appealing. Logically, the appeal can be addressed to the Commission, that hears the appeal and publishes it in its entirety . This last point may be considered in two dimensions and can be improved. On one hand, it is not in the interest of the higher governance body, the Commission, in hearing appeals that could be numerous, weighing down its work, nor in reconsidering frequently its judgements, as it could weaken its credibility and consequently affect its legitimacy. On the other hand, colleges addressing appeal await some kind of recognition to what they consider to be the merit of their approach. Better said, they expect exactly what the Commission itself can hardly grant them in the present procedure.

Different ways for improvement can be imagined to complete and lighten this process, one of them establishing an appeal committee, composed of Commission and colleges representatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering that the CEEC is a solid quality assurance Agency, dealing efficiently from years with the statements and practice of evaluation in order to support the colleges, fully compliant with the INQAAHE criteria, our recommendations consist only to raise a few points the panel considers that could be improved.

1. The CEEC could benefit from combining more diverse profiles and skills at different levels of its structure and activities. Two types of stakeholders seem to be priorities to open to a broader range of views, both at the governance level such as in concrete evaluation processes : representatives of the socio-economic environment, and students.

    It could be fruitful to associate one representative of the social and economic partners to the higher governance body (the Commission), by profiling in this sense a position of Commissaire, in order to link their concerns to the core of the system.

    In the same spirit, it would certainly be an excellent mechanism to associate a student representative with the work of the Commission, to make their voices officially heard at the core of the evaluation system and not just at the college level, where they are represented without any problems whatsoever. As the law does not yet allow their formal representation, a permanent invitation or a consultative participation in the work of the Commission could be considered.

    Involving representatives of employers and students on the visiting committees would also expand perspectives on college activities and could make assessments less strictly academics, what could be of interest for all colleges and, especially for those offering professional-oriented programs.

    The association of students with the work of the Commission should be recommended in the relatively short term, as it tends to become an international standard. A large part of the process of associating the students with the evaluation work has already been done in Québec. Their participation to the CEEC activities would complement their full implication in the quality assurance processes of which they are the first concerned.

    Both socio-economic and student representatives are skilled and willing to participate in these processes, and by making these advances a reality, the Commission would demonstrate its openness.

2. The Commission would gain to highlight the existing gap between the resources at its disposal, both human and financial, and the activities it carries out, to reassess the resources required for future activities given the increase in new colleges on the one hand and the diversification of its activities on the other.

3. The Commission is encouraged to implement the Communication plan in all its dimensions with emphasis on the target audiences or groups of stakeholders whose participation is necessary to increase, mainly teachers, students and representatives of both, establish the evaluation criteria of the plan and proceed with it with impact indicators within the Strategic Plan.

4. With regard the relationship with the Ministry, it is suggested to evaluate the value and feasibility of a common data and information platform. It is obvious that the missions of each one and the independence of the Commission must remain fully preserved, but it could avoid duplicates in the collect of data and also partially relieve the work of each institution, and especially of the colleges. Joint to its expertise, the information collected by the CEEC could be key to provide the Ministry a transversal map of the state and development of the college system, while increasing the visibility of the CEEC and the college environment as a whole.

5. The pandemic has highlighted the sudden explosion of teaching and training modalities, with a great expansion of virtual education, even when this modality already existed on a smaller scale. This new reality may induce some changes in the way the CEEC faces the challenge of its assessment.

Regarding the *Plan Stratégique* 2020-2025, it is suggested to take into account these recent pandemic-issued changes in teaching and training modalities, to explicitly integrate the issue of virtuality in the evaluations, by establishing institutional criteria and strategies to incorporate the virtual modality into internal and external evaluation processes.

In the same line, it is recommended to design a strategy concerning virtual education, and devise concrete actions to monitor the extent and impact of the virtual modality. In this respect, two actions seem advisable:

- Review the Reference frameworks in order to identify specific dimensions for the treatment of virtuality, in agreement with the various stakeholders in the system.
- Encourage schools to incorporate in their quality evaluation monitoring system, specific indicators, adequate collection and measurement tools to monitor the development of the virtual modality.

6. In order to avoid incomprehension and resentment among the colleges, the Commission should complement the process for appeals by considering the definition of a light structure that could decide on appeal about possible disputes concerning the evaluation of college. Different ways can be imagined to improve the actual process, one of them establishing a permanent appeal committee, composed of Commission and colleges representatives, or it could be an ad hoc joint commission for each appeal, including representatives of the Commission non involved in the previous decisions and representatives of the same type of colleges. The main issue is to preserve both the credibility and legitimacy of the higher governance body (the Commission) and those of the appealing colleges.

CONCLUSIONS

The CEEC is an external quality assurance with an outstanding level of activity, long experience and well-oiled mechanisms that ensure its subsequent enhancement and development.

It demonstrates a high level of professionalism and expertise, implemented by a skilled and committed staff. The evaluation process is accurate, clear and transparent, based on an efficient set of tools centred on a strong reference framework and involves a large range of stakeholders. Its experience led it, moreover, to an outstanding monitoring of follow-up. The integrity of the whole structure is shown by its continuous self-reflexion.

The CEEC is recognized as a reliable institution both by the networks of the different types of colleges, the Ministry of Higher Education, and its others stakeholders. Notably, colleges representatives express high degree of satisfaction. The recent effort on communication targeting specific audiences will make the Commission's work known to wider audiences and its achievements valorised.

"Challenging to maintain expertise, support staff in carrying out its activities and making human resource available : a key element of the stability and efficiency of the commission", as said in the self-evaluation report, is even more challenging in the context of increasing number of new colleges and profound changes in Higher Education. Resources must be re-evaluated to maintain this level of activity and quality.

The panel observed that all GGP's standards are largely achieved, and consequently concludes that the *Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial* (CEEC) fully meets the six INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice.

ANNEX 1. SITE VISIT AGENDA

15 Juin 2021

Heure	Activité	Groupes /Description	Participants
7h45 à 8h00	Accueil dans la salle de réunion	Comité de visite de l'INQAAHE	Membres du comité de visite : • Présidente • Expert • Secrétaire
8h00 à 9h00 **S1.1**	Rencontre avec le président de l'agence	Gestion de la Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial / Instance composée du président et des trois commissaires qui adopte les rapports d'évaluation et rend les jugements	Président Secrétaire générale Membres de la Commission et du comité de régie interne : • Président • Commissaires
9h00 à 10h00 **S1.2**	Rencontre avec le conseil de l'agence		
10h15 à 11h15 **S1.3**	Rencontre avec des représentants d'associations professionnelles	Comité de régie interne : comité consultatif auprès du président au regard de la gestion des opérations Syndicats : • Enseignants : Fédération des enseignantes et enseignants des cégeps (FEC) • Professionnels : Fédération du personnel professionnel des collèges (FPPC) • Syndicat des professionnels du gouvernement du Québec (SPGQ)	Greffière de la Commission et secrétaire du comité de régie : • Secrétaire générale Membres de l'exécutif de : La FEC • Présidente • 1er Vice-Président La FPPC • Président par intérim • 1er Vice-président (CP) aux communications Le SPGQ • La présidente • Le secrétaire
11h15 à 12h15 **S1.4**	Rencontre avec des étudiants et des représentants d'associations étudiantes	Délégation d'étudiants : • Représentants de la Fédération étudiante collégial du Québec (FÉCQ) • Étudiants de collèges rencontrés lors de	Représentants de la FECQ : • Président • Vice-présidente • Coordonnateur 4 étudiants d'un collège visité à l'automne 2020 :

Heure	Activité	Groupes /Description	Participants
12h15 à 13h15	Rencontre de travail	visites d'évaluation SAQC Comité de visite de l'INQAAHE	• Institut supérieur d'informatique Membres du comité de visite

16 Juin 2021

Heure	Activité	Groupes /Description	Participants
7h45 à 8h00	Accueil dans la salle de réunion	Comité de visite de l'INQAAHE	Membres du comité de visite
9h00 à 10h00 **S2.1**	Rencontre avec des cadres	Comité de liaison : • Membres de la Commission *(ne participeront pas à la rencontre)* • 9 membres provenant du réseau (5 des collèges publics 2 des collèges privés subventionnés, 1 des collèges privés non subventionnés et 1 des écoles gouvernementales)	Membres externes du Comité de liaison : • 3 des collèges publics + 2 • 2 des privés subventionnés • 1 des privés non subventionnés • 1 des écoles gouvernementales
10h15 à 11h00 **S2.2.1**	Rencontre avec des dirigeants (et col) de collèges ayant vécu le 1er cycle de l'opération d'évaluation des systèmes d'assurance qualité des collèges (SAQC) et débuté le 2e	Directions générales de collèges des vagues A et B et C : • Collège Dawson (public) • Collège Laflèche (PS) • Collège Brébeuf (PS) • Cégep de Saint-Jérôme(public) • Collège Shawinigan (public) • Cégep Limoilou (public) • Cégep André-Grasset (PS)	Directeurs généraux : • Collège Dawson • Collège Laflèche • Collège Brébeuf • Cégep de Saint-Jérôme • Collège Shawinigan • Cégep Limoilou • Cégep André-Grasset
11h00 à 11h45 **S2.2.2**	Rencontre avec des dirigeants (et col) de collèges ayant vécu le 1er cycle de l'opération d'évaluation des systèmes d'assurance	Directions des études et responsables de l'évaluation des collèges des vagues A et B et C : • Collège Dawson (public) • Collège Laflèche (PS) • Collège Brébeuf (PS)	Directeurs des études : • Collège Laflèche • Collège Brébeuf • Cégep de Saint-Jérôme • Collège Shawinigan • Cégep Limoilou • Cégep André-Grasset

Heure	Activité	Groupes /Description	Participants
	qualité des collèges (SAQC) et débuté le 2ᵉ	• Cégep de Saint-Jérôme(public) • Collège Shawinigan (public) • Cégep Limoilou (public) • Cégep André-Grasset (PS)	Responsables évaluation : • Collège Dawson • Collège Brébeuf • Cégep de Saint-Jérôme • Cégep de Limoilou • Collège André-Grasset
12h00 à 12h45 **S2.3**	Rencontre avec le personnel administratif de l'agence	Personnel de l'administration et des communications de la Commission	• Agente d'information 1 • Analyste informatique1 • Techniciens 3 • Secrétaire 1
12h45 à 14h00	Rencontre de travail	Comité de visite de l'INQAAHE	Membres du comité de visite

17 Juin 2021

Heure	Activité	Groupes /Description	Participants
7h45 à 8h00	Accueil dans la salle de réunion	Comité de visite de l'INQAAHE	Membres du comité de visite Coordonnateurs (3)
8h00 à 9h00 **S3.1**	Rencontre avec le personnel professionnel de l'agence	Coordonnateurs et agent(e)s de recherche contribuant aux opérations d'évaluation activités de développement	Agent (e) s de recherche (9)
9h00 à 10h00 **S3.2**	Rencontre avec des représentants du ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur Et de la Commission consultative de l'enseignement privé	Représentants ministériels concernés par le secteur de l'enseignement collégial	Personnel de la Direction générale des Affaires collégiales : • Directrice générale • Directeur de la gestion de l'offre de formation • Directrice des programmes de formation collégiale • Directeur de la formation continue et de l'enseignement privé

			Personnel de la Direction générale du financement pour le volet direction des contrôles financiers et de la conformité • Directeur général
10h15 à 11h15 **S3.3**	Rencontre avec des représentants de comités de visite formés par l'agence	Experts membres de comités de visite d'évaluation des systèmes d'assurance qualité des collèges (SAQC)	Personnel de la Commission consultative de l'enseignement privé : • Secrétaire générale • 7 experts membres des comités de visite : • DG (cégep) • DÉ (Cégep) : • DÉ (PS et PNS) : • Professeur (Cégep) : • Professionnels • Retraitée (hors réseau)
11h15 à 11h45	Rencontre de travail	Comité de visite de l'INQAAHE	Membres du comité de visite
11h45 à 12h45 **S3.4**	Retour avec le conseil de l'agence	Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial / Instance composée de la présidente et des trois commissaires qui rend les jugements suite aux évaluations	Membres de la Commission et du comité de régie interne : • Président • Commissaires
12h45 à 13h15	Rencontre de travail	Comité de régie interne : comité consultatif auprès de la présidente au regard de la gestion des opérations Comité de visite de l'INQAAHE	Greffière de la Commission et secrétaire du comité de régie : • Secrétaire générale Membres du comité de visite

ANNEX 2. COMPOSITION OF THE PANEL

Name	Role	Expertise
Dr. Hélène Lamicq	Chair	Former Rector of the University Paris-Est Créteil, France. Former member of the Board of the Institutional Evaluation Programme (EUA).
Dr. Roberto Igarza	Expert	Expert in Communication and Education. Member of the Comisión Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación Universitaria (CONEAU), Argentina.
Dr. Anna Prades	Secretary	Expert in Quality assessment. Head of Internationalisation and Knowledge generation of AQU Catalunya, Spain.

INQAAHE GGP Project Director: Concepción Herruzo Fonayet, AQU Catalunya

Report signed off by INQAAHE GGP Project Director in Barcelona, 2 November 2021

ANNEX 3. INQAAHE GUIDELINES OF GOOD PRACTICE

I. The structure of the External Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA)

The EQAA is a recognised, credible organisation, trusted by the Higher Education institutions and the public. It has adequate mechanisms to prevent conflicts of interest in the decisions it makes; its staff has the needed skills to carry out the functions associated to external QA. The EQAA has the needed resources to carry out their mission.

1.1. Legitimacy and recognition

1.1.1 The EQAA has an established legal basis and is recognized by a competent external body.

1.1.2 The EQAA takes into consideration relevant guidelines issued by international networks and other associations, in formulating its policies and practices.

1.1.3 The EQAA has a clear and published policy for the prevention of conflicts of interest that applies to its staff, its decision-making body, and the external Reviewers.

1.2 Mission and purposes

1.2.1 The EQAA has a written mission statement and a set of objectives that explicitly provide that external quality assurance of Higher Education is its major concern, describe the purpose and scope of its activities and can be translated into verifiable policies and measurable objectives.

1.3 Governance and organisational structure

1.3.1 The EQAA has a governance structure consistent with its mission and objectives, and, adequate mechanisms to involve relevant stakeholders in the definition of its standards and criteria.

1.3.2 The composition of the decision-making body and/or its regulatory framework ensure its independence and impartiality.

1.3.3 The EQAA's organisational structure makes it possible to carry out its external review processes effectively and efficiently

1.3.4 The EQAA has a strategic plan that helps assess its progress and plan for future developments

1.4 Resources

1.4.1 The EQAA has a well-trained, appropriately-qualified staff, able to conduct external evaluation effectively and efficiently in accordance with its mission statement and its methodological approach.

1.4.2 The EQAA has the physical and financial resources needed to fulfil its goals and carry out the activities that emerge from its mission statement and objectives.

1.4.3 The EQAA provides systematic opportunities for the professional development of its staff.

II. Accountability of the EQAA

The EQAA has in place policies and mechanisms for its internal quality assurance, which demonstrate a continuing effort to improve the quality and integrity of its activities, its response to the changes to the context in which it operates and its links to the international community of QA.

2.1 Quality assurance of the EQAA

2.1.1 The EQAA operates with transparency, integrity and professionalism and adheres to ethical and professional standards.

2.1.2 The EQAA has in place mechanisms that enable it to review its own activities in order to respond to the changing nature of Higher Education, the effectiveness of its operations, and its contribution towards the achievement of its objectives.

2.1.3 The EQAA periodically conducts a self-review of its own activities, including consideration of its own effects and value. The review includes data collection and analysis, to inform decision-making and trigger improvements.

2.1.4 The EQAA is subject to external reviews at regular intervals, ideally not exceeding five years. There is evidence that any required actions are implemented and disclosed.

2.2 Links to the QA community

2.2.1 The EQAA is open to international developments in quality assurance and has mechanisms that enable it to learn about and analyse the main trends in the field.

2.2.2 The EQAA collaborates with other QA agencies where possible, in areas such as exchange of good practices, capacity building, and review of decisions, joint projects, or staff exchanges.

III. The EQAA's framework for the external review of quality in Higher Education institutions

The main concern of the EQAA is the promotion of quality education and student achievement. In doing this, it recognises that quality is primarily the responsibility of the Higher Education institutions themselves, and, supports this principle in its criteria and procedures. These promote internal quality assurance (IQA) and provide Higher Education institutions with clear guidance on the requirements for self-assessment and external review.

3.1 The relationship between the EQAA and Higher Education institutions

3.1.1　The EQAA recognises that institutional and programmatic quality and quality assurance are primarily the responsibility of the Higher Education institutions (HEIs) themselves, and respects the academic autonomy, identity and integrity of the institutions and programmes.

3.1.2　The EQAA promotes the development and appropriate implementation of IQA processes in accordance with the understanding that the primary responsibility for assuring quality resides with the institutions and its programmes.

3.1.3　The EQAA bears in mind the level of workload and cost that its procedures will place on institutions, and, strives to make them as time and cost effective as possible.

3.2 The definition of criteria for external quality review

3.2.1　The EQAA recognises and values institutional diversity and translates this valuation into criteria and procedures that take into account the identity and goals of Higher Education institutions.

3.2.2　The standards or criteria developed by the EQAA have been subject to reasonable consultation with stakeholders and are revised at regular intervals to ensure relevance to the needs of the system.

3.2.3　Standards or criteria take into consideration the specific aspects related to different modes of provision, such as transnational education, distance or online programmes or other non-traditional approaches to HE as relevant to the context in which they operate.

3.2.4　Standards or criteria explicitly address the areas of institutional activity that fall within the EQAA's scope, (e.g., institutional governance and management, programme design and approval, teaching and learning, student admission, progression and certification, research, community engagement) and on the availability of necessary resources (e.g., finances, staff and learning resources).

3.2.5 Criteria or standards and procedures take into account internal follow up mechanisms, and, provide for effective follow up of the outcomes of the external reviews.

3.2.6 The EQAA procedures specify the way in which criteria will be applied and the types of evidence needed to demonstrate that they are met.

3.3 The external review process

3.3.1 The EQAA carries out an external review process that is reliable and based on published criteria and procedures. It follows a self-assessment or equivalent, and, includes an external review (normally including a site visit or visits), and a consistent follow up of the recommendations resulting from the external review.

3.3.2 The EQAA has published documents, which clearly state what it expects from Higher Education institutions, in the form of quality criteria, or standards and procedures, for self-assessment and external review.

3.3.3 The external review process is carried out by teams of experts consistent with the characteristics of the institution/programme being reviewed. Experts can provide input from various perspectives, including those of institutions, academics, students, employers or professional practitioners.

3.3.4 The EQAA has clear specifications on the characteristics and selection of external Reviewers, who must be supported by appropriate training and good supporting materials such as handbooks or manuals.

3.3.5 External review procedures include effective and comprehensive mechanisms for the prevention of conflicts of interest, and, ensure that any judgments resulting from external reviews are based on explicit and published criteria.

3.3.6 The EQAA's system ensures that each institution or programme will be evaluated in a consistent way, even if the external Panels, teams, or committees are different.

3.3.7 The EQAA carries out the external review within a reasonable timeframe after the completion of a self-assessment report, to ensure that information is current and updated.

3.3.8 The EQAA provides the Higher Education institutions with an opportunity to correct any factual errors that may appear in the external review report

3.4 The requirements for self-evaluation

3.4.1 The EQAA provides clear guidance to the institution or programme in the application of the procedures for self-evaluation, the solicitation of assessment/feedback from the public, students, and other constituents, or the preparation for external review as necessary and appropriate.

IV. The EQAA and its relationship to the public

The EQAA makes public its policies and decisions about institutions and programmes, discloses the decisions about its own performance and disseminates reports on outcomes of QA processes.

4.1 Public reports on EQAA policies and decisions

4.1.1 The EQAA provides full and clear disclosure of its relevant documentation such as policies, procedures and criteria.

4.1.2 The EQAA reports its decisions about Higher Education institutions and programmes. The content and extent of reporting may vary with cultural context and applicable legal and other requirements.

4.1.3 The EQAA has mechanisms to facilitate the public a fair understanding of the reasons supporting decisions taken.

4.2 Other public reports

4.2.1 The EQAA discloses to the public the decisions about the EQAA resulting from any external review of its own performance.

4.2.2 The EQAA prepares and disseminates periodically integrated reports on the overall outcomes of QA processes and of any other relevant activities.

V. Decision making

The EQAA has policies and procedures in place that ensure a fair and independent decision–making process in the final review of the institution or the programme. It provides effective procedures to deal with appeals and complaints.

5.1 The decision-making process

5.1.1 The EQAA decisions take into consideration the outcomes of both the institution's self-assessment process and the external review; they may also consider any other relevant information, provided this has been communicated to the HEIs.

5.1.2 The EQAA decisions are impartial, rigorous, and consistent even when they are based on the reports of other quality assurance bodies.

5.1.3 The EQAA decisions are based on published criteria and procedures, and, can be justified only with reference to those criteria and procedures.

5.1.4 Consistency in decision-making includes consistency and transparency in processes and actions for imposing recommendations for follow-up action.

5.1.5 The EQAA's reported decisions are clear and precise.

5.2 The EQAA's process for appeals and complaints

5.2.1 The EQAA has procedures in place to deal in a consistent way with complaints about its procedures or operation.

5.2.2 The EQAA has clear, published procedures for handling appeals related to its external review and decision-making processes.

5.2.3 Appeals are conducted by a Panel that was not responsible for the original decision and has no conflict of interest; appeals need not necessarily be conducted outside the EQAA.

VI. The QA of cross border Higher Education

The EQAA has policies relating to both imported and exported Higher Education. These policies take into account the characteristics of the providers and the receivers, and, refer to all types of transnational Higher Education.

6.1 Criteria for cross border Higher Education

6.1.1 The EQAA in a sending country makes clear that the awarding institution is responsible for ensuring the equivalent quality of the education offered, that the institution understands the regulatory frameworks of the receiving countries, and that the institution provides clear information on the programmes offered and their characteristics.

6.1.2 Students and other stakeholders receive clear and complete information about the awards delivered.

6.1.3 The rights and obligations of the parties involved in transnational education are clearly established and well known by the parties.

6.2 Collaboration between agencies

6.2.1 The EQAA cooperates with appropriate local agencies in the exporting and importing countries and with international networks. This cooperation is oriented to improve mutual understanding, to have a clear and comprehensive account of the regulatory framework and to share good practices.

6.2.2 The EQAA seeks ways to cooperate in the external quality assurance in transnational education provision, for example through mutual recognition.