



# **GUIDELINES OF GOOD PRACTICE**

2016 revised edition



**Global network of quality assurance agencies in higher education**

## FOREWORD



It is our pleasure to introduce the revised edition of the *INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice* (GGP) which incorporated newly developed approaches to the GGP alignment.

The GGP originated as a response to the growing massification, internationalisation and diversification of higher education (HE) as a tool to support the systems in safeguarding standards of HE provisions in general and quality assurance (QA), in particular.

The GGP are part of the mission of INQAAHE and are intended to promote high standards of professional practice by QA agencies. The creation of the original GGP in 2003, along with its subsequent revision in 2006, demonstrates that QA in HE self-regulates through a code of conduct developed by and for members of the profession. This is done

by encouraging the INQAAHE members to review themselves against these good practices to improve their operations and interactions with higher education institutions (HEIs) and programmes. Further, QA agencies can request a formal review of their practices against the INQAAHE GGP by a panel of international reviewers for alignment purposes and as a guarantee of credibility.

Since 2006, considerable changes have taken place in HE and QA globally due to advanced technology and, strongly related to the latter, increased diversification of HE and QA provisions. Considering the recent trends and in our pursuance to maintain relevance and effectiveness of the GGP, an INQAAHE Committee, led by the Past President Carol Bobby, was established in 2014-2015 to review the GGP. Among other nuances, the new Guidelines:

- have a special emphasis on QA of cross-border higher education;
- promote links with the QA community.

Additionally, the procedure for alignment itself was revised to make it more user-friendly and accommodative of the diversity of needs of our members. The revised procedures offer a range of opportunities through an alignment review, joint review and mutual recognition procedures.

The revision included broad consultation with the INQAAHE stakeholders, founding members of INQAAHE as well as key implementers. I take this opportunity to convey my heartfelt gratitude to the Committee for their valuable contributions which resulted in the development of this revised edition to the INQAAHE Board for approval by the General Assembly in Fiji in 2016.

It is our hope that the fundamental principles of good practices in the external quality assurance conveyed through the GGP will provide a firm platform for QA agencies in their daily operations, encourage and support good practices amongst member agencies, and safeguard their systems from bogus providers, thus benefiting HEIs, their students and societies at large.

With all best wishes,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Susanna Karakhanyan'.

Susanna Karakhanyan  
INQAAHE VII President

# Table of Contents

FOREWORD.....	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	4
INTRODUCTION.....	5
CONTACT .....	5
Section I: The External Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA) .....	6
1. The structure of the External Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA) .....	6
1.1 Legitimacy and recognition .....	6
1.2 Mission and purposes.....	6
1.3 Governance and organisational structure.....	6
1.4 Resources.....	6
2. Accountability of the EQAA.....	7
2.1 Quality assurance of the EQAA .....	7
2.2 Links to the QA community .....	7
Section II: Institutions of Higher Education and the EQAA .....	8
3. The EQAA’s framework for the external review of quality in HEIs .....	8
3.1. The relationship between the EQAA and HEIs.....	8
3.2 The definition of criteria for external quality review .....	8
3.3 The external review process .....	8
3.4 The requirements for self-evaluation .....	9
Section III: EQAA Review of Institutions .....	10
4. The EQAA and its relationship to the public .....	10
4.1 Public reports on EQAA policies and decisions.....	10
4.2 Other public reports.....	10
5. Decision making.....	10
5.1 The decision-making process.....	10
5.2 The EQAA’s process for appeals and complaints.....	10
Section IV: External Activities: Collaboration with Other Agencies and Transnational/Cross-Border Education.....	12
6. The QA of cross-border higher education .....	12
6.1 Criteria for cross-border higher education.....	12
6.2 Collaboration between agencies .....	12
INQAAHE GGP Alignment Service .....	13

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INQAAHE expresses its deepest appreciation to all those who contributed to the revision of the GGP, thus, promoting their relevance to the higher education (HE) system needs.

A special gratitude is extended to Carol Bobby, INQAAHE President (2013-2015), whose contribution in stimulating in-depth discussions around promoting relevance and effectiveness of the GGP supported the Committee in successfully completing the task.

We extend our deepest gratitude to our colleagues on the Committee:

- María José Lemaitre, Centro Interuniversitario de Desarrollo (CINDA), Chile
- Gemma Rauret, Universitat de Barcelona (UB), Spain
- Mark Frederiks, De Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie (NVAO), The Netherlands
- Tim Klassen, Former Director of Ontario College Quality Assurance Service, Canada who provided deep insights and expertise that greatly assisted the revision process. The outstanding contribution of the Committee is an asset in promoting the INQAAHE mission and vision.



Carol Bobby



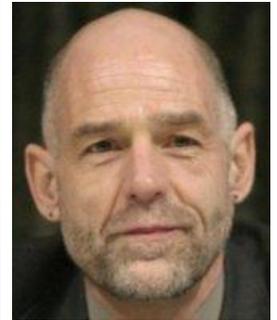
María José Lemaitre



Gemma Rauret



Mark Frederiks



Tim Klassen

## INTRODUCTION

One arm of INQAAHE’s mission is to develop and promote standards of professional practice in QA. The professional practices that INQAAHE believes should be embedded in all quality agencies are set out in the Guidelines of Good Practice in Quality Assurance (commonly referred to as GGP). Thus, the purpose of the GGP is to promote good practice for internal and/or external quality assurance. Specific goals include:

- Creating a framework to guide the creation of new EQAAs
- Providing criteria for use in the self and external evaluations of EQAAs
- Promoting professional development among EQAAs and their staff
- Promoting public accountability of EQAAs

The original Guidelines of Good Practice were published in 2003 and were revised in 2006 and in 2016. This revision reflects the experience of the institutions, programmes and reviewers, who have used the 2003 version. It is intended to continue the INQAAHE process of ongoing improvement. Comments on the Guidelines may be sent to the INQAAHE Secretariat at any time.

## CONTACT

For more information on INQAAHE GGP please visit <http://inqaah.org/guidelines-good-practice> or contact the Secretariat ([secretariat@inqaah.org](mailto:secretariat@inqaah.org)).

## INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practices

The *INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice* (GGP) evolve around four key headings:



## Section I: The External Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA)

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

The EQAA is a recognised, credible organisation, trusted by the HEIs 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 recognised 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 it assess its progress and plan for future developments

#### 1.4 Resources

- 1.4.1 The EQAA has a well-trained, 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.

## 2. 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 (5) 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.

## Section II: Institutions of Higher Education and the EQAA

### 3. The EQAA's framework for the external review of quality in HEIs

**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 HEIs themselves, and supports this principle in its criteria and procedures. These promote internal quality assurance and provide HEIs with clear guidance on the requirements for self-assessment and external review.**

#### 3.1. The relationship between the EQAA and HEIs

- 3.1.1 The EQAA recognises that institutional and programmatic quality and quality assurance are primarily the responsibility of the 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 internal quality assurance 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 HEIs.
- 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 higher education 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 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 HEIs, 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 resources and training 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 judgements 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 HEIs 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.

## Section III: EQAA Review of Institutions

### 4. 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 HEIs 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 provide 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.

### 5. 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 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 HEIs.
- 5.1.2 EQAA decisions are impartial, rigorous, and consistent even when they are based on the reports of other quality assurance bodies.
- 5.1.3 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.

## Section IV: External Activities: Collaboration with Other Agencies and Transnational/Cross-Border Education

### 6. 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 (where the EQAA is based) 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.

## INQAAHE GGP Alignment Service

As a service to its members, INQAAHE, at a member's request, conducts a GGP alignment service. Member agencies that have found to be comprehensively adhering to the INQAAHE *Guidelines of Good Practice* (GGP) will be acknowledged and profiled on the [INQAAHE Alignment website](#).

There are three pathways INQAAHE offers (see the flowcharts below) for any member agencies to demonstrate their adherence to the GGP:

### 1. Procedure for REVIEW

The first pathway is for the agency to apply for an external review by a team of experts selected by INQAAHE. In this process, the agency will prepare a self-assessment report and host an on-site team of reviewers who will submit a report to INQAAHE for the final decision regarding the agency's alignment with the GGP.

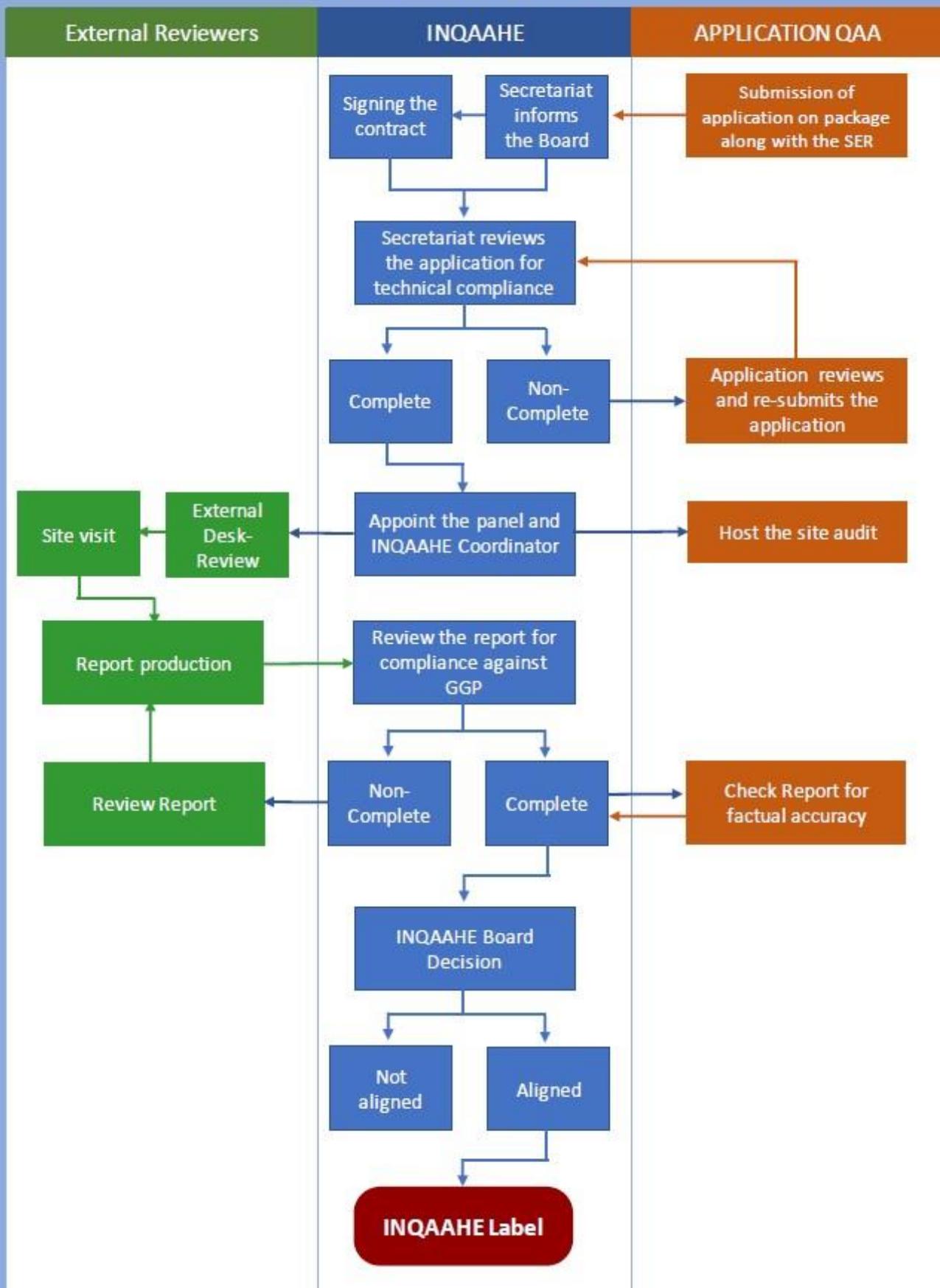
### 2. Joint Review Procedure

The second pathway is for the agency to apply simultaneously for an external review by INQAAHE and another QA body specialised in comparable practices. In this case, the INQAAHE Secretariat, in coordination with the counterpart QA body will set up an international expert panel to conduct the joint review procedure. The standards/criteria/guidelines of both the QA bodies will be aligned to ensure elimination of potential duplication. While the procedure for review will be a joint one, the decision on alignment/recognition will be taken at the level of both the QA bodies responsible for the review, thus granting double labels to successful applicants.

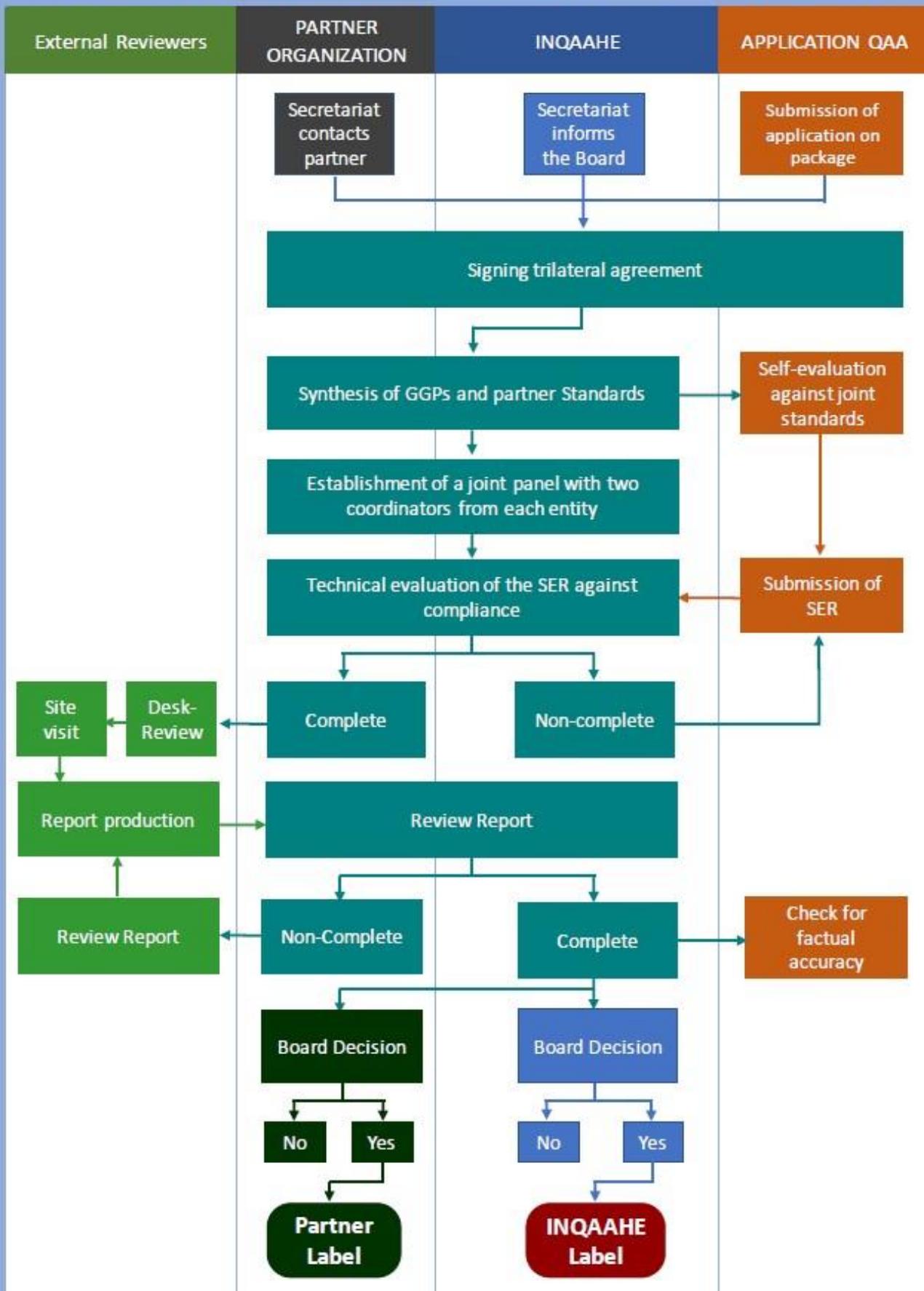
### 3. Procedure for RECOGNITION

The third pathway is for the agency to apply for acceptance of the agency's adherence to the GGP by demonstrating that the agency has been reviewed against a set of standards or criteria set by a reputable, external organisation (e.g., CHEA, ENQA) that are considered to be substantially equivalent to or exceed the requirements set forth in the GGP. This pathway requires INQAAHE to review the standards or criteria set by the external organisation to determine if equivalency exists. The agency must provide evidence of the outcome of this review, including any report issued by the external organisation. This pathway includes the possibility of requesting a joint review by both INQAAHE and another external agency (e.g., ENQA) simultaneously.

## REVIEW PROCEDURE (SIX MONTHS)



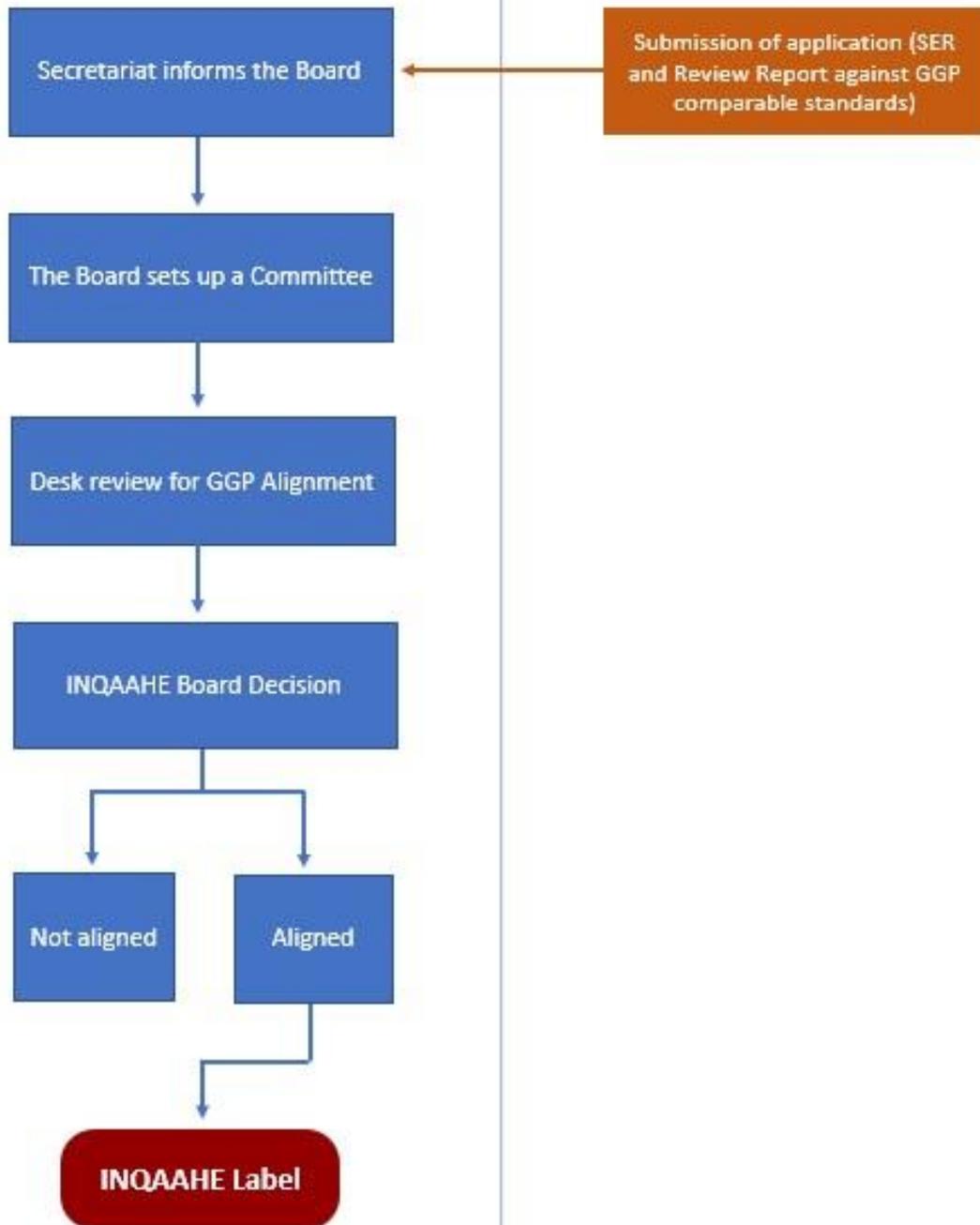
JOINT REVIEW PROCEDURE (DURATION 1 YEAR INCLUDING SELF-EVALUATION PRODUCTION)



REVIEW RECOGNITION PROCEDURE/MUTUAL RECOGNITION  
(MAXIMUM DURATION – 2 MONTHS)

INQAAHE

APPLICATION QAA





**INQAHE Secretariat**  
**C. dels Vergós 36 -42, 08017 Barcelona, Spain**  
**E: [secretariat@inqahe.org](mailto:secretariat@inqahe.org)      W: [www.inqahe.org](http://www.inqahe.org)**