

Policy on Cyclical External Quality Assurance and Institutional Review

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1. Introduction

European City University (ECU) is committed to maintaining a robust, transparent, internationally aligned, and continuously improving quality assurance system. This policy formalizes ECU's commitment to systematic external quality assurance activities conducted at

regular intervals and integrated into institutional strategic planning, academic governance, and continuous improvement processes. The policy establishes a structured framework for:

- Institutional external review
- Programme accreditation cycles
- External benchmarking
- Independent academic evaluation
- Stakeholder engagement
- Strategic quality enhancement
- International quality assurance alignment

This policy strengthens and formalizes the quality assurance mechanisms already referenced in the ECU Self-Assessment Report (SAR), particularly:

- SAR Section 2.1 – Policy for Quality Assurance
- SAR Section 2.1.1 – Institutional Vision and the Role of Quality Assurance
- SAR Section 2.1.2 – Strategic Plan 2025–2030: An Integrated QA Mandate
- SAR Section 2.1.5 – Governance and Decision-Making Structure
- SAR Section 2.7 – Information Management
- SAR Section 2.9 – Ongoing Monitoring and Periodic Review of Program
- Appendix 2.1 – Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS)
- Appendix 2.1B – Annual Evaluation Audit Meeting
- Appendix 2.1.1 – Strategic Plan 2025–2030

This policy is aligned with:

- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015)
- European Higher Education Area (EHEA) quality assurance principles
- European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) standards
- Lisbon Recognition Convention principles

- ECU Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS)
- Continuous Improvement principles under ECU's DIECI framework (Determination, Implementation, Evaluation, Control, Improvement)

Through this policy, ECU seeks to ensure that external quality assurance is not treated as a one-time accreditation exercise but rather as an ongoing institutional commitment embedded within long-term planning and governance structures.

2. Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to:

1. Establish a formal cyclical framework for external quality assurance.
2. Integrate external review activities into institutional planning and governance.
3. Ensure regular independent evaluation of institutional and programme quality.
4. Promote continuous improvement and accountability.
5. Strengthen ECU's international academic credibility and recognition.
6. Ensure alignment with European higher education quality assurance standards.
7. Support evidence-based strategic planning and decision-making.
8. Enhance institutional transparency and stakeholder confidence.
9. Facilitate benchmarking against international best practices.
10. Promote sustainable academic quality enhancement.

3. Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to:

- Institutional quality assurance processes
- All academic programs and faculties
- Administrative and student support services
- Internal governance and strategic planning activities

- External accreditation and review activities

The policy applies to:

- Academic Senate
- Board of Governance
- Office of Quality Assurance and Institutional Effectiveness
- Program Directors
- Faculty members
- Administrative units
- External reviewers and accreditation agencies

4. Definition of External Quality Assurance

External Quality Assurance (EQA) refers to the systematic review, evaluation, accreditation, audit, or benchmarking of ECU's academic and institutional quality conducted by independent external bodies or experts. External quality assurance activities may include:

- Institutional accreditation
- Programme accreditation
- External academic audits
- Benchmarking reviews
- Peer review evaluations
- External advisory board reviews
- Professional accreditation reviews

The purpose of EQA is to provide independent validation of ECU's academic standards, institutional effectiveness, and quality assurance systems.

5. Guiding Principles

ECU adopts the following principles for cyclical external quality assurance:

5.1 Continuous Improvement

External quality assurance shall support ongoing institutional enhancement and strategic development.

5.2 Regularity and Sustainability

External reviews shall occur on a planned cyclical basis rather than as isolated activities.

5.3 Independence and Objectivity

External evaluations shall involve independent reviewers with appropriate expertise and no conflict of interest.

5.4 Evidence-Based Review

External reviews shall rely on institutional data, documented evidence, stakeholder feedback, and measurable outcomes.

5.5 Transparency and Accountability

Review outcomes, recommendations, and improvement actions shall be documented and monitored.

5.6 Stakeholder Participation

Students, faculty, alumni, employers, and external experts shall contribute to quality assurance activities.

5.7 Alignment with Strategic Planning

External quality assurance activities shall support ECU's Strategic Plan 2025–2030 and institutional mission.

5.8 International Alignment

ECU shall align external quality assurance activities with European and international higher education standards.

6. Cyclical External Quality Assurance Framework

ECU establishes a structured cyclical framework consisting of:

1. Annual Internal Monitoring
2. Mid-Cycle External Review

3. Periodic Institutional Review
4. Programme Accreditation Review
5. Strategic Quality Enhancement Planning

This cyclical model integrates external quality assurance into ECU's long-term institutional planning.

7. Institutional Review Cycle

7.1 Institutional External Review Frequency

ECU shall conduct a comprehensive institutional external quality review at least once every five years. The review may be conducted by:

- Recognized accreditation agencies
- Independent international quality assurance bodies
- External academic audit panels
- International peer review organizations

7.2 Mid-Cycle External Review

In addition to major institutional reviews, ECU shall conduct a mid-cycle external quality review every two to three years. The purpose of the mid-cycle review is to:

- Evaluate progress on previous recommendations
- Identify emerging risks and opportunities
- Review implementation of quality improvement actions
- Strengthen institutional readiness for accreditation

7.3 Programme-Level External Review

Each academic programme shall undergo external review or accreditation at least once every five years, or according to discipline-specific accreditation requirements. This process complements the Programme Monitoring and Periodic Review Policy described in ECU's internal quality assurance framework.

8. Integration with Institutional Planning

External quality assurance activities shall be integrated into:

- Strategic planning processes
- Budget allocation decisions
- Academic development plans
- Curriculum innovation strategies
- Faculty development initiatives
- Technology investment planning
- Risk management processes

This integration aligns with SAR Section 2.1.2 (Strategic Plan 2025–2030) and ECU’s DIECI continuous improvement framework. External review outcomes shall directly inform:

- Institutional priorities
- Resource planning
- Quality enhancement initiatives
- Policy development
- Governance decisions

9. External Review Procedures

9.1 Preparation Phase

Prior to external review, ECU shall conduct:

- Self-evaluation activities
- Evidence collection
- Stakeholder consultations
- Internal audits
- Data analysis
- Documentation review

A formal Self-Evaluation Report (SER) shall be prepared.

9.2 Review Panel Composition

External review panels may include:

- International academic experts
- Quality assurance specialists
- Industry representatives
- Student representatives
- Professional accreditation experts

All reviewers shall be selected based on expertise, independence, and professional integrity.

9.3 Site Visit and Evaluation

External reviewers may conduct:

- Virtual or physical site visits
- Interviews with stakeholders
- Review of institutional documentation
- Observation of academic processes
- Evaluation of online learning environments
- Review of student support systems

9.4 External Review Report

At the conclusion of the review, the external panel shall provide:

- Strengths identified
- Areas requiring improvement
- Recommendations for enhancement
- Compliance evaluation
- Strategic observations

The report shall be formally reviewed by ECU governance bodies.

10. Action Planning and Follow-Up

ECU shall develop formal action plans in response to external review recommendations. Action plans shall include:

- Identified issues
- Corrective and preventive actions
- Responsible units or personnel
- Implementation timelines
- Resource allocation requirements
- Performance indicators

Progress shall be monitored through:

- Annual quality reports
- Management review meetings
- Internal audits
- Academic Senate oversight
- KPI monitoring

This process aligns with the Annual Evaluation Audit Meeting process described in SAR Appendix 2.1B.

11. Roles and Responsibilities

11.1 Office of Quality Assurance and Institutional Effectiveness

Responsible for:

- Coordinating external review activities
- Maintaining external review schedules
- Supporting self-evaluation processes
- Monitoring implementation of recommendations
- Preparing institutional quality reports

11.2 Academic Senate

Responsible for:

- Reviewing external review outcomes
- Monitoring institutional quality enhancement
- Approving strategic academic improvements
- Ensuring policy compliance

11.3 Board of Governance

Responsible for:

- Strategic oversight of institutional quality
- Supporting long-term quality assurance planning
- Monitoring institutional risk and sustainability

11.4 Program Directors and Academic Units

Responsible for:

- Participating in review processes
- Implementing improvement plans
- Monitoring programme-level quality indicators

11.5 Students and Stakeholders

Responsible for:

- Providing feedback during review activities
- Participating in consultations and surveys
- Supporting continuous improvement initiatives

12. Stakeholder Engagement

ECU recognizes stakeholder participation as essential for effective external quality assurance.

The following stakeholders shall contribute:

12.1 Students

Students shall participate through:

- Surveys
- Focus groups
- Student representation during reviews
- Feedback on academic experience

This aligns with SAR Section 2.3.11 (Student Voice and Participatory Governance).

12.2 Faculty Members

Faculty shall participate through:

- Self-evaluation activities
- Academic reflection processes
- Programme improvement initiatives
- Review interviews and consultations

12.3 Alumni

Alumni feedback shall support:

- Graduate outcome evaluation
- Career relevance analysis
- Programme improvement recommendations

This supports the Alumni Relations Engagement Framework referenced in SAR Section 2.1.6.

12.4 Employers and Industry Representatives

Industry stakeholders shall contribute insights regarding:

- Workforce readiness
- Emerging industry trends
- Skill expectations
- Graduate competencies

13. Data Management and Evidence Collection

External quality assurance processes shall utilize:

- Student performance data
- Graduate employability statistics
- Student satisfaction surveys
- LMS analytics
- Faculty performance indicators
- Academic integrity records
- Benchmarking studies
- Institutional KPI reports
- Complaints and appeals data
- Previous accreditation findings

This evidence-based approach aligns with SAR Section 2.7 (Information Management).

ECU shall ensure:

- Data accuracy
- Confidentiality
- Ethical use of information
- Secure digital storage

14. Benchmarking and Internationalization

ECU shall regularly benchmark its academic and institutional performance against:

- European higher education standards
- Comparable international online universities
- Accreditation best practices

- EHEA quality assurance principles

Benchmarking activities may include:

- Comparative curriculum analysis
- External peer review participation
- International academic partnerships
- Participation in quality assurance networks

15. Risk Management and Sustainability

External quality assurance activities shall support institutional risk management.

Risks monitored may include:

- Academic quality decline
- Student retention challenges
- Technological disruption
- Regulatory non-compliance
- Reputation risks
- Resource limitations

Risk identification and mitigation strategies shall be integrated into institutional planning.

16. Staff Development and Capacity Building

ECU shall provide training related to:

- Quality assurance methodologies
- Accreditation standards
- Self-evaluation techniques
- Data analysis and reporting
- Evidence collection

- Continuous improvement practices
- International quality assurance standards

This aligns with SAR Section 2.5.2 (Staff Development and Support).

17. Documentation and Reporting

ECU shall maintain documentation related to:

- External review reports
- Accreditation outcomes
- Self-evaluation reports
- Action plans
- Follow-up reports
- Quality assurance audits
- Governance decisions
- KPI monitoring reports

Documentation shall support:

- Institutional transparency
- Accreditation readiness
- Strategic planning
- Continuous improvement

18. Policy Review

This policy shall be reviewed every three years by the Office of Quality Assurance and Institutional Effectiveness. Policy review shall consider:

- Accreditation feedback
- ESG updates
- Institutional strategic priorities

- Stakeholder feedback
- Technological developments
- International best practices

All revisions shall require Academic Senate approval.

19. Conclusion

European City University reaffirms its commitment to institutional excellence, accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement through this Policy on Cyclical External Quality Assurance and Institutional Review. By embedding external quality assurance into institutional planning and governance structures, ECU ensures that quality enhancement is systematic, sustainable, evidence-based, and internationally aligned. This policy strengthens ECU's Internal Quality Assurance System.

Through regular external evaluation, stakeholder engagement, strategic planning integration, and continuous monitoring, ECU demonstrates its commitment to maintaining high academic standards and fostering a culture of quality enhancement across all institutional activities. ECU recognizes that external quality assurance is not merely a compliance requirement but a strategic institutional mechanism that supports innovation, accountability, academic credibility, and long-term institutional sustainability.

Document Type: Institutional Quality Assurance Policy

Policy Owner: Office of Quality Assurance and Institutional Effectiveness

Approved By: Academic Senate, European City University

Applies To: All Academic and Administrative Units

Effective Date: May 2026

Review Cycle: Every Three Years