



QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

**CODE OF ETHICS FOR EXPERTS ENGAGED BY THE QUALITY
ASSURANCE AGENCY IN HIGHER EDUCATION (ASCAL)**

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Article 1

Purpose

This Code of Ethics establishes the principles, standards, and rules of professional conduct to be observed by experts engaged by the Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education (ASCAL) in the performance of their duties within external evaluation processes, institutional accreditation and/or study programme accreditation, as well as in any other professional, technical, advisory, analytical, monitoring, training, or support activities carried out within the scope of ASCAL's mandate.

The purpose of this Code is to ensure the integrity, impartiality, objectivity, transparency, and credibility of the work performed by experts engaged by ASCAL; to safeguard the quality and integrity of the Agency's institutional processes; and to strengthen the confidence of higher education institutions, students, the public, and other stakeholders in the higher education quality assurance system.

Article 2

Scope of application

This Code applies to all national and international experts engaged by ASCAL, including members of external evaluation groups, experts engaged to conduct analyses, studies, monitoring activities, training, technical assistance, professional consultancy, or any other person engaged by ASCAL within the framework of its institutional activities. The provisions of this Code shall apply to each expert to the extent that they relate to the nature, scope, and duties of their engagement with ASCAL.

The provisions of this Code apply throughout the entire period of the expert's engagement, including the preparatory phase, the review of documentation, communications with ASCAL and third parties, participation in meetings, site visits, interviews, training, monitoring activities, or other related activities, the preparation of reports, analyses, recommendations, methodological materials, or other professional outputs, as well as any other action related to the assignment for which the expert has been engaged, insofar as such activities form part of the expert's specific engagement.

Article 3

Fundamental principles

Experts engaged by ASCAL shall be guided by the following principles:

Professional integrity, by acting with honesty, responsibility, and professionalism throughout every stage of their engagement.

Impartiality and objectivity, by avoiding any personal, institutional, political, economic, or professional influence that could compromise their independent judgment.

Independence, by carrying out their duties free from pressure, interference, or influence from third parties.

Confidentiality, by safeguarding all data, documents, information, discussions, and materials received or produced during the course of their engagement.

Transparency and accountability, by acting in accordance with ASCAL's procedures, methodologies, and requirements, and by ensuring that all evaluations, analyses, recommendations, and professional outputs are clearly documented, evidence-based, and verifiable.

Institutional and professional respect, by communicating in a professional, ethical, and cooperative manner with ASCAL, higher education institutions, students, academic and administrative staff, fellow experts, and all other parties involved in the process.

Article 4

Independence and avoidance of conflicts of interest

Experts shall declare any circumstance that may constitute an actual, potential, or perceived conflict of interest in relation to the institution, study program, project, activity, document, process, or matter for which they have been engaged.

Experts are required to notify ASCAL immediately of any conflict of interest before accepting an assignment or as soon as such circumstances become known during the course of the engagement. ASCAL shall assess the situation and determine whether the expert's engagement should continue, be restricted, or be terminated.

For experts serving as members of external evaluation groups, the following situations shall constitute conflicts of interest:

- The expert has been employed, either full-time or part-time, by the higher education institution (HEI) within the previous five years;
- The expert has been involved in legal proceedings with the HEI within the previous five years;
- The expert has served as an external examiner at the HEI within the previous three years;
- The expert has applied for employment at the HEI within the previous three years;
- The expert is a member of any governing or decision-making body of the HEI;
- The expert has family and/or marital relationships with individuals employed by or studying at the HEI;
- The expert has provided consultancy services to the HEI within the previous three years;
- The HEI or study program under evaluation is a direct competitor of the institution where the expert is employed;

- The expert has received remuneration from the HEI for any other professional engagement within the previous three years (excluding participation in doctoral dissertation defence committees);
- The expert or members of the expert's immediate family are shareholders or partners in the legal entity operating the HEI;
- The expert holds one of the following positions: Rector, Dean, or Institutional Coordinator.

Article 5

Objectivity in evaluation, analysis, and professional advice

Experts shall base their evaluations, analyses, recommendations, professional opinions, and other professional outputs exclusively on documented, verifiable evidence directly related to the applicable standards, criteria, objectives, terms of reference, or assignment for which they have been engaged.

Any conclusion, recommendation, or professional judgment shall be well-reasoned, balanced, and supported by objective evidence. Experts shall not rely on personal perceptions, prejudice, unverified information, or subjective opinions.

Experts shall avoid any offensive, biased, overly general, or evidence-free statements in the performance of their duties.

Article 6

Confidentiality

Experts are required to maintain the confidentiality of all information, documents, data, materials, and communications received or produced during their engagement with ASCAL.

Experts shall not publish, disclose, distribute, use, or discuss information obtained during the engagement for personal, academic, professional, media-related, commercial, or any other purpose outside the scope of the assignment without the prior authorization of ASCAL.

This obligation shall remain in force after the expert's engagement has ended.

Article 7

Professional conduct

In carrying out their duties, including institutional visits, meetings, interviews, training sessions, public events, or official communications, experts shall conduct themselves with professionalism, integrity, courtesy, and respect towards all participants involved in the process.

Experts shall refrain from any behavior that may be perceived as exerting undue pressure, demonstrating bias or favoritisms, creating conflict, showing disrespect, or undermining the dignity of individuals or institutions involved.

Article 8

Institutional communication

Official communication with institutions, entities, or other parties involved in the process shall be conducted exclusively in accordance with the procedures and communication channels established by ASCAL. Experts shall not engage in independent, unofficial, or unauthorised communications concerning matters related to the process or assignment for which they have been engaged.

Any request for additional information, clarification, documentation, or interaction with third parties shall be made through ASCAL or in accordance with the instructions provided by ASCAL.

Article 9

Cooperation with the working group and ASCAL

Experts shall cooperate constructively with other members of the evaluation group, working group, technical team, or the responsible ASCAL structures, while respecting the allocation of responsibilities, deadlines, and assigned tasks.

Discussions within the group shall be conducted in a spirit of professional respect and shall be based on evidence and reasoned arguments. Experts shall contribute to the preparation of clear, coherent, and jointly agreed professional outputs in accordance with the methodology, format, or terms of reference approved by ASCAL.

Article 10

Reporting and professional outputs

Experts are responsible for contributing to the preparation of accurate, comprehensive, well-reasoned, and useful reports, analyses, recommendations, methodological materials, training materials, and other professional outputs that support quality enhancement and the achievement of ASCAL's objectives.

Reports and professional outputs shall objectively reflect the findings, strengths, good practices, weaknesses, shortcomings, recommendations, and relevant conclusions. The language used shall be professional, neutral, clear, and evidence-based.

Experts shall not include unsupported personal opinions, unverified information, or assessments unrelated to the scope of their assignment in any report or other professional output.

Article 11

Prohibition of improper benefits

Experts shall not request, accept, or receive any financial, material, professional, or personal benefit from institutions, entities, or parties involved in the process for which they have been engaged by ASCAL.

Experts shall not use their engagement with ASCAL to obtain personal advantages, secure employment, consultancy opportunities, academic cooperation, financial benefits, or any other direct or indirect benefit.

Article 12

Use of information and intellectual property

Documents, reports, data, analyses, materials, and any other information made available to or produced during the course of the engagement shall be used exclusively for the purposes determined by ASCAL.

Experts shall not copy, reproduce, distribute, or use such materials for any other purpose without the prior authorization of ASCAL.

When preparing reports, analyses, methodological materials, presentations, or other professional outputs, experts shall comply with the principles of academic and professional integrity and shall avoid any form of plagiarism, unauthorized copying, or misrepresentation of sources.

Article 13

Respect for diversity and non-discrimination

Experts shall uphold the principles of equality, diversity, and non-discrimination in all interactions during their engagement with ASCAL.

Experts shall not engage in discriminatory behaviour, comments, or attitudes on the grounds of gender, age, nationality, language, religion, disability, personal orientation, social background, academic status, or any other personal or institutional characteristic.

Article 14

Responsibility towards ASCAL

Experts shall comply with all applicable laws, secondary legislation, regulations, guidelines, methodologies, duties, and deadlines established by ASCAL.

Experts shall promptly inform ASCAL of any circumstance that may affect the quality, objectivity, impartiality, or timely completion of their assignment.

Article 15

Violations of the Code of Ethics

The following, among others, shall constitute violations of this Code:

- Failure to declare, inaccurate declaration of, or concealment of a conflict of interest;
- Breach of the duty of confidentiality;
- Unauthorized publication, disclosure, distribution, or use of documents, data, or information obtained during the engagement;
- Acceptance or solicitation of gifts, favors, or direct or indirect benefits from parties involved in the process;
- Unauthorized communication with higher education institutions, evaluated entities, or third parties regarding matters related to the process;
- Conducting evaluations, analyses, recommendations, or professional judgments that are biased, unsupported by evidence, or influenced by personal interests;
- Use of information or the expert's position for personal, professional, or financial gain;
- Failure to comply with ASCAL's procedures, methodologies, guidelines, terms of reference, or assigned duties;
- Failure to comply with established deadlines without justified reasons;
- Submission of professional outputs of inadequate quality, containing repeated deficiencies or lacking supporting evidence;
- Any form of plagiarism, manipulation, or misrepresentation of information;
- Unprofessional, offensive, discriminatory, or otherwise inappropriate conduct during site visits, meetings, training sessions, monitoring activities, official events, or communications;
- Failure to cooperate with ASCAL or with other members of the working group in carrying out assigned responsibilities;
- Any act or omission that undermines the integrity, credibility, or reputation of ASCAL or of higher education quality assurance processes.

Article 16

Measures in the event of a violation

In the event of a violation of the provisions of this Code, ASCAL shall have the right to terminate the expert's engagement contract, in accordance with the terms of the contract and the applicable legislation.

Article 17
Follow-up and monitoring

Follow-up and monitoring of the implementation of this Code shall be carried out by the Ethics Adviser at ASCAL, in cooperation with the unit responsible for administering expert engagements. Suspected cases of non-compliance shall be reviewed by the Ethics Adviser and submitted to the General Director for the adoption of the appropriate measures, pursuant to Article 16 of this Code.

Article 18
Entry into force

This Code of Ethics shall enter into force upon its approval by the General Director of ASCAL and shall apply to all external evaluation processes and to any other expert assignments carried out by ASCAL.

The Code of Ethics shall be published on ASCAL's official website immediately after its entry into force.