

PROTOCOL

The Protocol set out below is based upon the Code of Practice for the members of the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA)).

The Protocol is divided into three sections

- A EAALS as an accreditation organisation
- B EAALS accreditation procedures
- C EAALS accreditation standards

A EAALS as an accreditation organisation:

Standard	1. EAALS has an explicit mission statement
Question	What is the organisation's mission statement?
Reference points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The accreditation organisation has an explicit mission statement, aims and set of objectives • The mission statement is coherent in scope and content, and is revised on a cyclical basis • The mission statement is communicated publicly • The statement makes clear that accreditation is a major activity of the accreditation organisation • The accreditation organisation has a strategic plan enabling to implement its mission statement
Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mission Statement: To enhance the quality of degree programmes and higher educational institutions in life sciences and the rural environment, through quality assurance and international accreditation. • Aim: To award the European Accreditation Agency for Higher Education in the Life Sciences (EAALS) quality label to degree programmes in higher education institutions that have achieved the appropriate quality and standards in their educational provision. In addition to provide recommendations for the continuing enhancement of their educational provision. • Objectives:

	<p>1. To establish and regularly review the EAALS framework of quality benchmarks and indicators for the quality assurance of degree programmes</p> <p>2 To undertake independent quality assurance and accreditation not limited by national boundaries, in the spirit of Bologna, Lisbon and subsequent communiqués</p> <p>3 To review and assess educational provision according to best European practice, as represented by the EAALS framework through a transparent, rigorous and consistent quality assurance and international accreditation procedure.</p> <p>4 To assure the sustained quality and credibility of the EAALS label by periodic evaluation of EAALS's procedures and operations by independent peer review.</p> <p>The mission statement, aims and objectives are communicated publicly on the EAALS website</p>
Standard	2. EAALS is recognised as an accreditation body by the competent public authorities.
Question	What is the official status and the legal basis of the accreditation organisation?
Reference points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The accreditation organisation has been established by law as a corporate body based on agreements with national authorities • Accreditation is regulated in the relevant legislation/rules
Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EAALS will be established as an association under Belgium law as a not-for-profit European organisation. • EAALS will apply in due course for full registration by ENQA or under the proposed European Register. Currently EAALS is an Associate member of ENQA. However, as the registrations are voluntary this does not imply mutual recognition of EAALS by all quality assurance agencies in Europe. Even registration on the ENQA or European Register does not imply mutual recognition. • The EAALS Board responds to the General Assembly of the Association for European Life Science Universities (ICA) which represents the interests of Life Science higher education in Europe
Standard	3. EAALS must be sufficiently independent from government, from higher education institutions as well as from business, industry, professional associations, and national and international interests
Question	How does the accreditation agency demonstrate its independency?
Reference points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The accreditation organisation is carrying out its operations independently (setting up of the accreditation framework, carrying out accreditation procedures, etc) • Independency of the decision making process is guaranteed; there is evidence that no party has unjustified influence on the outcome of the decision

Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The EAALS Board responds to the General Assembly of the Association for European Life Science Universities (ICA) • The ICA Board proposes the members of the EAALS Board and the EAALS Committee of Appeal to the ICA General Assembly • The ICA General Assembly appoints the EAALS Board and the EAALS Committee of Appeal • The EAALS Board and the EAALS Committee will each appoint their own Chair • The EAALS Board and EAALS Committee of Appeal will act in their own right independent of the home institution or organisation, and of ICA • The EAALS Board will make an annual report to the ICA General Assembly • The EAALS Board will appoint the EAALS Executive Secretary <p><u>Article Eight of the EAALS Statutes</u> sets out the basis for the independence in the relationship between the ICA General Assembly and the Board of EAALS.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Neither the General Assembly of the Association of European Life Science Universities (ICA) nor the ICA Board nor any other associated body linked with ICA has the right to question, overturn or strike out any decision of the EAALS Board relating to the quality assurance and accreditation of any individual degree programme. ■ The only occasion when a decision of the EAALS Board will be changed is on the instruction of the EAALS Committee of Appeal <p>The EAALS Board of 5 members will be representative of the life science universities stakeholders, university, society and students. The EAALS Board will comprise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 university representatives drawn from ICA member institutions at the level of Rector/Head of School/Dean, • 1 student proposed by the International Association of Students in Agricultural and Related Sciences (IAAS) or other appropriate student body • 1 independent representative from the employment sector • In attendance the EAALS Executive Secretary who will provide expertise in the management of the quality assurance process <p>The role of the EAALS Board will be to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversee the work of the EAALS secretariat • Oversee the process for the quality assurance review and accreditation of a degree programme • Decide on the eligibility of an application for quality assurance review and accreditation • Appoint the Peer Review Team to undertake a quality assurance review • Review and evaluate the Peer Review Report and recommendation for the award of the EAALS Label • Decide on whether or not to award the EAALS label, and approve or amend the recommendations in the Peer Review Report • Communicate the outcome of the peer review and accreditation to the applicant
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accept recommendations of EAALS Appeals Committee • Make an annual report to the ICA General Assembly <p>The EAALS Appeal Committee of three members will comprise two at the senior management level and one with responsibility for the management of quality assurance and accreditation.</p>
Standard	4. EAALS must be rigorous, fair and consistent in decision-making.
Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are decisions taken within the accreditation agency? • How are decisions on assessment taken and how are they communicated?
Reference points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rules leading to the accreditation decision are transparent and warrant equal treatment • Decisions on accreditation must be based on predefined quality standards and have to be comprehensible
Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A quality assurance review will be conducted against the EAALS framework of benchmarks, indicators and verifiers. The EAALS framework for quality assurance is published on the EAALS website • The standards required for the award of the EAALS (accreditation) Label are published on the EAALS. • For a particular quality assurance review, the EAALS Board will make the decision as to whether to accept the Peer Review Report and accreditation recommendation of the Peer Review Team. The EAALS Quality Assurance process is outlined in detail under Standard 12. • The EAALS Board communicates their decision to the applicant. • The outcomes of all quality assurance reviews are communicated publicly in the annual report of the EAALS Board to the ICA General Assembly and on the EAALS website
Standard	5. EAALS has adequate and credible resources, both human and financial.
Question	What are the financial and human resources of the accreditation organisation: actual situation and future perspectives?
Reference points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The accreditation organisation has adequate human and financial resources to achieve its objectives and fulfil its mission in an effective manner • There is sufficient evidence for a secured financing of the organisation • Human resources development for its staff is provided
Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The EAALS Business Plan and annual report are presented to the ICA General Assembly

Standard	6. EAALS has its own internal quality assurance system that emphasises its quality improvement.
Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which quality assurance mechanisms does the accreditation agency routinely use? • Are the organisation's procedures being evaluated (on process and effect)?
Reference points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The accreditation has a functioning system for assuring the improving quality which is embedded in the organisations overall strategy • Quality assurance covers all operations of the accreditation organisation • Responsibilities for quality assurance are defined and documented • The quality policy of the accreditation organisation is published, including the organisations goals, processes and methods • The accreditation organisation has internal feedback mechanisms that include procedures for reflections and subsequently revision of processes and methods • The accreditation organisation has mechanisms that provide feedback from expert panels and external stakeholders (e.g. institutions/programmes that have been accredited); results of such feedback are used for improvements • Process and effect of accreditation are systematically reviewed by the accreditation organisation; the results are used for quality enhancement
Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This document identifies the benchmarks (standards) and indicators (reference points) against which EAALS will respond with an internal self assessment report produced on a periodic basis, annually in the first instance • The EAALS Board will seek the views of the applicant institution, the peer review teams and the EAALS Appeal Committee on the EAALS processes for the quality assurance and accreditation of degree programmes • The outcome of the periodic internal self assessment report will be used by the EAALS Board for the quality enhancement of EAALS
Standard	7. EAALS has to be evaluated externally on a cyclical basis.
Question	How and how often is the accreditation organisation evaluated externally?
Reference points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External evaluations of the accreditation organisation have to be carried out • These external evaluation committees control if the code of good practice is fulfilled by the accreditation organisation • The results of the external assessment must be made public
Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EAALS will submit to external evaluation by ENQA or other quality assurance agency on a five year cycle, or such periodic review as required for registration by ENQA or the European Register • The result of such external evaluation will be reported to the ICA General Assembly and made available on the EAALS and ICA websites

Standard	8. EAALS can demonstrate public accountability, has public and officially available policies, procedures, guidelines and criteria.
Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the accreditation agency include the public in its activities? • How is the public informed? • How are the higher education institutions informed?
Reference points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information about the accreditation organisation's policies, procedures, guidelines and criteria are available • The information must be up to date • The accreditation organisation's public accountability is demonstrated by reporting regularly on the outcomes and the effects of accreditation procedures and activities • The accreditation organisation provides higher education institutions with a clear documentation about the accreditation framework and the accreditation procedures (guidelines for self-evaluation, external evaluation)
Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All EAALS policies, procedures, guidelines and criteria will be publicly available from the EAALS website • The Annual Report of the EAALS Board will be submitted for approval by the ICA General Assembly • The EAALS Annual Report will be presented publicly on the EAALS and ICA websites
Standard	9. EAALS informs the public in an appropriate way about accreditation decisions.
Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the public informed about accreditation decisions? • Do legal documents or other documents regulate the publication of reports?
Reference points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The outcome of the accreditation must be made public • The format of publication refers to standardised European templates • Expert reports and the reports of the accreditation organisation must be published according to national regulations
Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All quality assurance Peer Review Reports will be published on the EAALS website and the decisions on the award of the EAALS Quality Label • The EAALS Board will Inform relevant national bodies, including relevant national agencies, of the outcomes of quality assurance and accreditation reviews

Standard	10. A method for appeal against EAALS Board's decisions is provided.
Question	What is the accreditation organisation's method for appeal?
Reference points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a possibility to appeal against accreditation decisions • Procedures of appeal are specified • Equal and fair treatment of all applicants is guaranteed
Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An EAALS Appeals Committee will be established, see standard 3 • The EAALS Appeals Committee will act independently of the EAALS Board and EAALS secretariat • EAALS will make publicly available its processes and procedures for Appeal via the EAALS website • The EAALS secretariat will inform an applicant for accreditation of the right of appeal at the time of the acceptance of the application for accreditation by the EAALS Board • An appellant will appeal to the ICA Board who will refer the appeal to the EAALS Appeals Committee • The grounds for appeal will only be allowed to proceed by the EAALS Appeals Committee where the appellant can justify that incorrect or inappropriate processes and procedures had been followed. On the acceptance that the correct processes and procedures have been followed there will be no grounds for appeal of the accreditation decision of the EAALS Board • The applicant, the EAALS Board and the ICA Board will be informed of the decision of the EAALS Appeals Committee. The decision of the EAALS Appeals Committee will be final and will not be made public without the permission of the applicant. • The EAALS Board will accept the decision of the EAALS Appeals Committee and take appropriate action
Standard	11. EAALS collaborates with other national, international and/or professional accreditation organisations.
Question	With which European networks or agencies in the field of quality assurance and accreditation does the accreditation organisation collaborate on a regular basis?
Reference points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The accreditation organisation collaborates actively with other national/professional accreditation agencies • The accreditation agency acts conformly with overarching European frameworks in the field of quality assurance
Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EAALS will seek membership of ENQA and registration on the European Register. Currently EAALS is an Associate member of ENQA • EAALS will inform other relevant Agencies of its quality assurance reviews and accreditation decisions

B EAALS accreditation procedures:

Standard	12. Accreditation procedures and methods must be defined by EAALS
Question	Is the accreditation organisation independent in defining its terms of procedures?
Reference points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Processes and methods of accreditation are in the responsibility of the accreditation organisation and are not defined by other bodies
Response	<p>EAALS Process Flowchart for the quality assurance and accreditation of a degree programme:</p> <p>Stage 0 Enquiry</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> First contact with the EAALS Secretariat Documentation for the quality assurance review and accreditation provided by the EAALS Secretariat, including Application Datasheet The general timetable for the peer review process and timetable of EAALS Board meetings provided Contract and costs outlined Questions answered by the EAALS Secretariat <p>Stage 1 Application</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal letter of application submitted with Application Datasheet to the EAALS Secretariat by the Dean or equivalent responsible for the degree programme The EAALS Secretariat informs the respective national accreditation agency(ies) of the application <p>Stage 2 Clarification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identification by EAALS Secretariat of possible difficulties and key issues Telephone conference to clarify application details Possible visit to discuss the peer review process and to agree the timetable. Possible amendment of the application by applicant <p>Stage 3 Eligibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examination of the application by the EAALS Board and declaration of eligibility to enter the EAALS quality assurance and accreditation

process

- Decision reported to the applicant within 5 working days of the EAALS Board meeting
- Contract signed between the applicant and the EAALS Board
- Appointment of the Peer Review Team by the EAALS Board

Stage 4 Self Assessment

- Drafting of Self-evaluation Report for the degree programme with supporting documentation. The self evaluation report will address the benchmark and indicators in the appropriate EAALS Framework for the Quality Assurance and Accreditation of degree programmes in the Life Sciences.
- The self evaluation report should be self critical in the spirit of addressing points for future enhancement of the degree programme, thus in effect a SWOT analysis.
- The self evaluation report must be page limited.

Stage 5 Peer Review

- EAALS Secretariat will screen the self-evaluation report to ensure that it is complete
- Preparation of the Peer Review Team for Peer Review visit by the EAALS secretariat
- 1 day Peer Review Visit with preparatory and post review meetings.
- Peer Review Team prepare draft Peer Review Report of assessment, recommendations, and development objectives for the accreditation period (maximum 5 years) within one month of the visit
- EAALS secretariat reviews Peer Review Report and discusses it with the Chair of the Peer Review Team
- Peer Review Report submitted to the applicant by the Chair of the Peer Review Team for correction of factual inaccuracies – one month is allowed for a response
- Applicant has the opportunity of withdrawing its application for accreditation at this stage on payment of the full accreditation costs, in which case the Peer Review Report will not be made public
- Peer Review Team agree the final version of the Peer Review Report and Recommendation for the award or otherwise of the EAALS Quality Label within one month
- Chair of Peer Review Team submits the Peer Review Report and Recommendation for the award or otherwise of the EAALS Quality Label to the Chair of the EAALS Board

Stage 6 Accreditation

- Examination of the Peer Review Report by the EAALS Board
- Decision whether or not to award the EAALS Label (accreditation)
- Agreement of enhancement objectives to be submitted to the applicant

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report by the EAALS Board of the accreditation decision to the university that made the application with notification of right of appeal • Report by the EAALS Board to the respective national accreditation agencies • Publication of the accreditation decision and Peer Review Report on the EAALS website <p>Stage 7 Follow up procedures</p> <p>For degree programmes which are awarded the EAALS label</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication of recommendations for enhancement to the applicant and agreement of the EAALS secretariat with the applicant of the follow up procedures during the accreditation period (normally five years) • Receipt of mid term report by the EAALS Board on progress in addressing enhancement objectives <p>For degree programmes which are NOT awarded the EAALS label</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication of development objectives to the applicant • Reapplications will not be allowed within 12 months of the decision of the Board
Standard	13. EAALS must undertake accreditation at institutional and/or degree programme level on a regular basis.
Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the accreditation agency active in programme or institutional accreditation? • What are the regulations for re-accreditation?
Reference points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The accreditation organisation has regular accreditation activities at institutional and/or programme level • Re-accreditation and validity of accreditation decisions are regulated
Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be proven
Standard	14. EAALS accreditation procedure must include evaluation of self-assessment report prepared by the higher education institution and external review (as a rule on site).
Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the accreditation procedure structured?
Reference points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self documentation/evaluation and external review are part of the accreditation process • External reviews encompass on site visits at the higher education institutions • The external review team is instructed clearly about its tasks

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The accreditation organisation provides specific regulations in case of ex ante-accreditations (accreditations before the degree programme has started)
Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The EAALS quality assurance and accreditation process and procedures are outlined in Standard 12 <p>1) The applicant will produce a Self-Evaluation Report according to the following structure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Introduction to the degree programme (mission, outline). max. 500 words B Summary facts and figures C Self-Evaluation assessment, to address the indicators in each benchmark of the appropriate EAALS Framework for the Quality Assurance assessment of degree programmes in the Life Sciences.. This confidential report should be critically self-evaluative, indicating strengths and weaknesses in the degree programme. It should indicate elements of good practice and where enhancement is possible. max. 10,000 words. D Future perspectives, indicating opportunities for enhancement and threats facing the degree programme. max 1000 words <p>2) A Peer Review Team for verification site visit will be established along EAALS defined criteria. The peer review team will be instructed in their role and tasks through an EAALS training, guidance brief and the support of the EAALS Secretariat.</p> <p>3) The remit of the Peer Review team will be to make:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> judgements of the validity of the Self-Evaluation Report against the appropriate EAALS Framework for the Quality Assurance and Accreditation of degree programmes In the Life Sciences identify good practice and recommendations for enhancement, a recommendation for the award of the EAALS Label (accreditation) <p>4) A follow up procedure will be established to review actions taken by the degree programme team in light of recommendations in the report</p>
Standard	15. EAALS must guarantee the independence and competence of the external panels or teams.
Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How is the independence of external panels guaranteed? Are there selection criteria for setting up the Peer Review Teams?
Reference points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Selection criteria for external panels/expert committees are set up and published by the accreditation organisation Selection criteria assure competence and independence of external experts Independence of the experts is assured by a written statement The decision about the composition of the expert team is made by the accreditation organisation in a transparent way

Response	<p>A Peer Review Team will be appointed by the EAALS Board and will comprise 4 persons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair – Dean or Head of School or equivalent (either in post or within two years of retirement) • One or more subject area specialist – Professorial level (In the UK eligible to act as an external examiner) • Quality assurance expert – person responsible for quality assurance within an ICA member institution • Student – proposed by the President of IAAS or other appropriate body • Supported by a member of the EAALS Secretariat <p>Each member of the Peer Review Team will sign a declaration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • of independence in respect of the degree programme to be evaluated and will declare any previous involvement with the subject area at the university under review • of confidentiality to protect the confidentiality of all the documents and discussion with staff and students during the Peer Review Visit. <p>The EAALS secretariat will establish a register of persons who could act as members of a Peer Review Team</p>
Standard	16. EAALS must be geared to the enhancement of quality.
Question	Which elements and mechanisms within the accreditation process are used to enhance quality at the higher education institution?
Reference points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The accreditation process contains elements that promote quality development and improvement of the higher education institution • The accreditation process should respect autonomy, identity and integrity of the higher education institutions
Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Peer Review team will identify good practice and identify opportunities for the quality enhancement in the Peer Review Report. • Follow up procedure will be established by the EAALS Board to review actions taken by the degree programme team in light of recommendations in the report during the accreditation period (normally 5 years) • The EAALS Board will publish a lexicon of good practice on a two to three year basis.

C EAALS accreditation standards:

Standard	17. The EAALS accreditation standards must be made public and be compatible with European practices taking into account the development of agreed sets of quality standards.
Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which are the quality standards and criteria used for accreditation procedures? • Do they meet international standards?
Reference points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality standards and criteria used in the accreditation procedures correspond to European good practices • The quality standards and criteria are made public • The process and formulation of the quality standards and criteria is transparent and involves important stakeholders
Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The EAALS quality standards and criteria for the accreditation procedures are defined in the appropriate EAALS Framework for the Quality Assurance and Accreditation of degree programmes in the Life Sciences • These quality standards are made public on the EAALS website • The EAALS framework has been developed through consultation in academic community of the European life science universities and will be subject to periodic review