

# Terminology Principles

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ISQua's International Accreditation Programme  
(IAP)



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# Introduction

It has been evident to the members of the ISQua Accreditation Council (AC), for some time, that different terms, language and wording is used in the field of external evaluation and that even within the AC, members each define the terms used differently. In addition, ISQua continues to receive requests for official definitions of the terms used in external evaluation.

Therefore, ISQua's AC decided to undertake a project to produce a set of definitions of selected key terms in the domain of external evaluation in health and social care to promote understanding and consistent use of terms among providers and researchers in the domain of external evaluation.

## Methodology

A brief literature review was undertaken to inform the development of draft definitions. The approach adopted in the project was to develop definitions of the terms or concepts as opposed to descriptions. Definitions should capture the essentials of the concept, allowing readers to determine if something "is" what the concept defines. The definitions should make clear the underlying hierarchic relations. For example, accreditation is a form of external evaluation. A matrix was also developed to highlight the relationships and differences between the different forms of external evaluation.

The draft definitions were then circulated to a range of stakeholder groups for feedback between March and April 2015. An online questionnaire was developed to capture stakeholders' views on each of the draft definitions and the proposed matrix. The draft definitions and a link to an on-line questionnaire were circulated to 95 contacts including organisations involved in ISQua's International Accreditation Programme (IAP), members of the European Partnership for Supervisory Organisations (EPSO) and other contacts in health and social care external evaluation organisations around the world. A total of 39 completed responses were received representing a response rate of 41%.

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The consultation exercise indicated that there was broad support for the proposed definitions but identified several opportunities for improvement. The exercise also highlighted that defining each of the terms and obtaining buy-in and consensus in relation to them may have been an overly ambitious objective. In addition, it emphasised that while definitions will help to put names on the different approaches, they do not per se provide much insight into the nature of the phenomena behind the definitions. Therefore, following the consultation process, the overall aim of the project was reviewed. A decision was made that identifying and defining the principles of external evaluation and each of the different forms might be a more realistic and practical approach than developing definitions of each approach per se. The principles of external evaluation are presented in this document.

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External evaluation is an overarching term which includes and encompasses several specific forms and types such as accreditation, certification, regulation and licensing.

## External Evaluation

- Is a formal assessment process undertaken by an external, independent third party
- The third party may have specific authority (e.g. legal recognition) to undertake assessments
- The object being assessed may be an organisation, system, process, programme or individual person
- Assessment is against available pre-determined requirements
- The pre-determined requirements may be set out in standards, guidelines, indicators or other measures
- The assessment process is designed to determine the degree to which the requirements are met or not
- Objective mechanisms are in place to make or render a decision
- The assessment process results in a defined output such as a specific status or an award which is valid for a specific and defined period.

## Accreditation

- Is a form of external evaluation of an organisation, system or programme
- The performance of an organisation, system or programme is assessed against pre-determined requirements
- The pre-determined requirements are generally set out in standards
- The pre-determined requirements provide a service wide approach to quality improvement focusing on both operational and clinical aspects of service provision
- The standards may address more than legal requirements

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- Assessment is undertaken by a team of reviewers from an external, independent, third party who have specific knowledge and experience of the organisation, system or programme being assessed
  - The aim of accreditation is continuous quality improvement
  - A report is generated summarising the findings from the survey; identifying areas of good practice; and providing recommendations and opportunities for improvement
  - The output of accreditation is accreditation status, namely whether accreditation has been granted or not and the level of accreditation which has been granted
  - Accreditation status is valid for a specific and defined period.

## Certification

- Is a form of external evaluation of an organisation, system, programme or individual person
- The performance of an organisation, system, programme or person is assessed against pre-determined requirements
- The pre-determined requirements may be set out in standards, guidelines, indicators or other measures
- The pre-determined requirements may focus on specific aspects of performance or may relate to a service or function only
- The pre-determined requirements may address more than legal requirements
- Assessment is undertaken by an individual auditor or team from an external, independent, third party
- A report is generated summarising the findings from the audit / assessment outlining if the service / individual is compliant with the specified requirements and highlighting areas of non-compliance / non-conformity
- The output of certification is certification status, namely whether the organisation, system, process or person has been certified or not
- Certification status is valid for a specific and defined period.

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# Regulation

- Is external evaluation of performance, when a component of a regulatory framework, i.e. a framework intended to influence or enforce behaviour of an organisation or persons, as described by laws, rules or authoritative orders
- The performance of an organisation or person is assessed against pre-determined requirements
- The pre-determined requirements are set out in a legal framework
- The pre-determined requirements may relate to general performance of an organisation or person or may focus on a specific aspect(s) of performance
- These requirements may not always be externally evaluated. In some systems, the requirements may be proactively assessed whereas in others, the requirements may be used to determine if there has been a breach of legislation
- Where external evaluation takes place, it may be undertaken by an external body which has been authorised by law to undertake such assessments; an external body which has been delegated legal responsibility for undertaking such assessments; or a body which has been contracted to undertake them on behalf of the body with overall legal responsibility for assessment
- The pre-determined requirements are designed to protect public health and safety and may or may not be minimum requirements
- There may be consequences for non-compliance with the pre-determined requirements
- A regulatory body may or may not act in the event of non-compliance with the requirements.

# Licensing

- Is a component of a regulatory framework, i.e. a framework intended to influence or enforce behaviour of an organisation or persons, as described by laws, rules or authoritative orders
- Is a form of external evaluation, the purpose of which is to assess an organisation or a person against pre-determined requirements to ascertain if

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they are suitable or appropriate to provide a specific service. In the context of this principle licensing relates to organisations only

- The pre-determined requirements are set out in a legal framework
- The pre-determined requirements are designed to protect public health and safety and may be minimum requirements
- The outcome or result of licensing is the awarding of a document or licence allowing an organisation to provide a specific service (s) within a defined scope for a defined period of time.

Each of the specific forms and types of external evaluation in turn are distinguished from one another by several features including the following:

- The assessor: Those undertaking the external evaluation or providing the external evaluation service and whether they have specific authority (e.g. legal recognition) to provide or undertake such services.
- The object of the assessment: Whether it is an organisation, object, programme or individual person that is being assessed.
- The origin of the pre-determined requirements: Whether the pre-determined requirements are derived from legislation.
- The specification of the pre-determined requirements for use in assessment: The format that they are set out in for the purposes of assessment e.g. standards, guidelines, indicators or other measures.
- The aim or purpose of the pre-determined requirements e.g. are they assessing fitness to operate or provide a service, or do they focus on continuous quality improvement
- The defined output of the assessment process

Each of the different forms or types of external evaluation are distinguished from one another by these features as follows:

Distinguishing feature	Accreditation	Certification	Regulation	Licensing
Assessor	Recognition may be derived from other sources than law	Recognition may be derived from other sources than law	Authorised by law	Authorised by law
Object of assessment	Organisation, system or programme	Organisation, system, programme or person	Organisation or person	Organisation
Origin of requirements	Can go beyond law	Can go beyond law	Law	Law
Specification of requirements for use in assessment	Standards developed specifically for the purpose of assessment	May be set out in standards, guidelines, indicators or other measures	May be set out in legislation and / or standards, guidelines, indicators or other measures.	May be set out in legislation and / or standards, guidelines, indicators or other measures
Aim of requirements	Continuous quality improvement (CQI)	May concern specific aspects of performance	May assess fitness to operate or provide a	May relate to the structures and processes required to

Distinguishing feature	Accreditation	Certification	Regulation	Licensing
		or a particular service or function only. May or may not include CQI as an aim	service or may focus on a specific aspect of performance. May or may not be minimum requirements.	provide a specific service (s) within a defined scope. May or may not be minimum requirements.
Defined output	Accreditation status, namely whether accreditation has been granted and the level of accreditation. Report summarising the findings from the assessment	Certification status, namely whether certification has been granted. Report summarising the findings from the audit / assessment.	Non-compliance with the pre-determined requirements may or may not result in action by the regulatory body.	Award document or licence allowing organisation to provide a service within a specified scope

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It must be acknowledged that there is a lack of published research relating to the language and terminology which is used in the external evaluation arena. However, a couple of key papers (listed below) were used to inform the development of the questionnaire which was circulated to stakeholder organisations as part of this study.

ISQua would also like to take the time to thank all individuals and organisations who took the time to participate in the consultation exercise in 2015 and to provide their views. These included organisations involved in ISQua's International Accreditation Programme (IAP), members of the European Partnership for Supervisory Organisations (EPSO) and other contacts in health and social care external evaluation organisations around the world.

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# References

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