



AGCAS Membership Quality Standard

Guidance for completion of the Self-Evaluation Document

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The AGCAS Professionalism Working Party has drafted these guidance notes to support the completion of the Self-Evaluation Document (SED) for the AGCAS Membership Quality Standard.

Aims

The aims of the AGCAS Membership Quality Standard are to:

- Encourage and maintain high standards of professional delivery and conduct by AGCAS members.
- Integrate with, not duplicate or replace, other externally verified quality standards, which a service may wish to achieve.
- Offer a developmental opportunity for member services through self-identification of good practice and opportunities for development; alongside peer review in a form that suits individual service needs.

We recommend that engagement with the process of SED completion and peer discussion involves all relevant members of the service.

Alongside an opportunity for service reflection and development, member engagement with the quality standard will enhance AGCAS's ambition to provide support to its member services and their leadership across its strategic themes, most notably Advocacy, Learning and Research and Knowledge.

These notes also provide examples of the evidence you might wish to include to meet the AGCAS Membership Quality Standard.

There are three main parts to the SED:

- i) Setting the context: this part should include key information about your institution to help the reviewers to understand the context of your service.
- ii) Examples of evidence against nine Pillars (P) grouped within the following three Themes (T):
 - Service Leadership and Management
 - Stakeholder Insight and Collaboration
 - Professional Expertise

In order to inform the peer review discussion, and to help services to identify their strengths and opportunities for development, there is space on the form for a red/amber/green (RAG) rating for each pillar.

- iii) Development plan: this is your opportunity to record any personal reflections and recommendations for enhancements that you feel will benefit your service. This will also help to inform the peer review discussion that follows submission of your SED.

RAG rating

Each AGCAS Service and its particular institutional context will be different. Self-evaluation RAG ratings should take account of:

- i. The specific institutional context in which the Service operates
- ii. The resources available to the Service at the time of SED completion and peer review.

While RAG rating classifications are not formally defined, the following gives an indication of the differences between ratings and what a particular RAG rating might mean in practice:

Red: this is an area that currently needs careful consideration and remedial action, most probably within the next 3-6 months.

Amber: this is an area that is functioning well but has some scope for improvement, most probably within the next 6 months to a year.

Green: this is an area, which is currently functioning well.

Follow up

Your SED will be treated as a confidential document and will be only be shared by the staff team with a nominated trained reviewer and the AGCAS Quality Director. Following submission, you will be asked to take part in a peer review discussion. It is recommended that the discussion is held remotely, either by telephone or video conferencing, as this ensures you gain access to all the available reviewers, it ensure we provide parity of peer review support and helps to ensure we reduce our carbon footprints as much as possible.

You may wish to request a reviewer from a particular institution type or region to support your interests and developmental ambitions.

The purpose of this process is to support and encourage professional practice and continuous improvement. We therefore want to support engagement in honest, reflective practice. If at the end of the review, you feel that there are any areas for focus i.e. Pillars that you have rated red, with agreement of your reviewer, you do have the option to request a shorter period before your next review. The AGCAS Quality Director and your reviewer will determine your next review date based on timescales you have confirmed in your development plan.

Your document will also be analysed, along with other SEDs, by the AGCAS Quality Director to identify trends that could inform the AGCAS strategy. Where trends are identified and shared, details will be anonymised and withheld to protect the confidentiality of your institution.

Achievement of the AGCAS Membership Quality Standard

It is your responsibility to ensure that you meet the requirements. You will meet conditions of membership and the AGCAS Membership Quality Standard by:

- Completion of the SED
- Participation in a peer review discussion. The most appropriate method will be agreed between the Head of Service and the reviewer

- Continuing engagement in the process by working towards the objectives within the development plan.
- Demonstrating commitment to the continuous improvement process by agreeing with the reviewer appropriate timescales and actions; in order to address any pillars where a red rating is determined.

Failure to meet these requirements constitute a non-serious attempt. If a service does not meet any condition above, at the discretion of the AGCAS Quality Director and Executive Director, the Service's review outcomes will be discussed with the Board of Directors. The Board will consider appropriate actions. The Head of Member Services will notify the Head of Service with reasons for classifying the submission as a non-serious attempt and a request for actions to address this.

Use of the guidance notes

The guidance notes recommend information you may wish to include in your introduction and overview; as well as examples of evidence which you may wish to draw upon in completing the SED. This has not been designed to be an exclusive or prescriptive list - please use any examples you feel address the Pillars appropriately for your service.

We expect appropriate examples of evidence that demonstrate the ways in which individuals within your service meet the Code of Ethics will be included. The values and behaviours are set out in the Code to help you identify compliance with relevant equality, diversity and inclusion legislation; as well as give your internal and external stakeholders confidence and trust in their dealings with your service and the higher education careers profession.

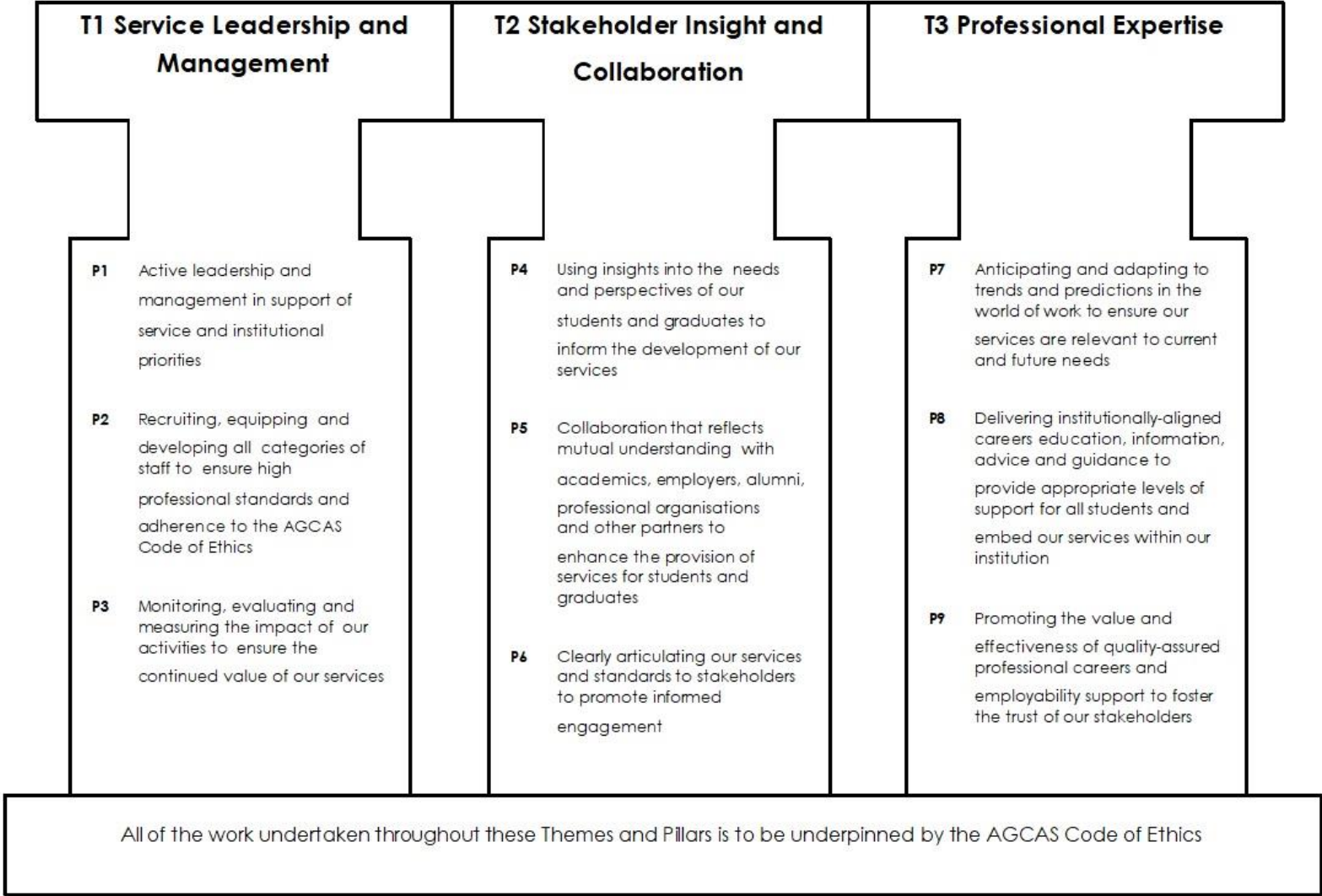
In line with the role of a professional association, AGCAS has developed a concerns and complaints process for any party who feels that they have experienced unethical conduct when interacting with an AGCAS member service. Further details are available on our website.

A message from AGCAS Quality Director, Dr Nalayini Thambar:

"Thank you for investing the time in completing the Self-Evaluation Document. It is important that as a professional association, AGCAS defines the standards for higher education careers services and has evidence of each member service's approach to quality-assured expert delivery, reflective practice and continuous improvement. This enables us to maintain our standards of practice and to represent member services nationally and internationally as the experts in our field"

If you have any questions in relation to completion of the AGCAS Quality Membership Standard, please contact AGCAS's Head of Member Services.

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Setting the context

Suggested word count: 500 – 750 words

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of your service within its institutional context. It will act as a preface to your chosen examples of service delivery and management evidence against the nine Pillars. You may find it useful to provide appendices to this section, for example an organisational chart of your service or of the relevant section of your institution. Possible items for inclusion include:

- Institutional size, student body, key features and mission group (if relevant)
- Institutional positioning in the national context, e.g. league table ranking, Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) or Research Excellence Framework (REF) position, reputational priorities
- The organisational position of the service within the institution
- Service's structure and statement of services
- Service's delivery model
- Existing or imminent externally verified quality standards.

The Pillars

Suggested word count: 200 – 500 words per Pillar

Theme one: Service Leadership and Management

Pillar one (P1) – Active leadership and management in support of service and institutional priorities

Examples may include:

- Undertake strategic and operational planning to support delivery of service
- Belong to senior management teams and / or boards across the institution to lead and contribute to employability-related objectives and targets
- Make a significant contribution to a range of institutional strategies in addition to employability, including employer engagement, widening participation, etc
- Keep abreast of sector and institutional priorities and shape strategies accordingly
- Consult with, and communicate to, your team regularly and effectively.

Pillar two (P2) – Recruiting, equipping and developing all categories of staff to ensure high professional standards and adherence to the AGCAS Code of Ethics

Examples may include:

- All person specifications in recruitment literature insist upon appropriate qualifications for their role
- New staff are given a thorough induction of the service, and introductions to key stakeholders within and external to the institution
- Staff are encouraged to engage with AGCAS or their own particular profession's membership body to keep up to date with sector developments and attend relevant training
- Staff have annual appraisals or development reviews to discuss and monitor their contribution and training needs
- The service enables staff to attend training and development courses
- All staff are encouraged to learn from good practice and share their ideas through AGCAS forums, liaison groups and working parties.

Pillar three (P3) – Monitoring, evaluating and measuring the impact of our activities to ensure the continued value of our services

Examples may include:

- The range and type of targets set in strategic or operational plans including an explanation of why these are used
- The use of destination statistics at institutional and subject level to measure outcomes
- Responses to feedback received at institutional level, e.g. National Student Survey (NSS), or after specific activities or services
- The use of activity statistics, such as number of employer events on campus, visits to website etc, to measure outputs
- Systems in place to support the provision of information for ongoing planning and review
- How the service demonstrates its impact and value to the wider institution through input to a range of strategies.

Theme two: Stakeholder Insight and Collaboration

Pillar four (P4) – Using insights into the needs and perspectives of our students and graduates to inform the development of our services

Examples may include:

- How the service monitors the changing needs of students, through feedback, consultation with the Students' Union or other student groups and/or any type of market research
- Effective relationships with academic staff to support curriculum delivery of employability by staff or employers
- Ensuring the service is aligned with institutional and senior management priorities such as league table position, TEF
- Engagement with employers to ascertain their changing needs and priorities, either individually or through employers' consortia
- Any research activity to support the planning of new services.

Pillar five (P5) – Collaboration that reflects mutual understanding with academics, employers, alumni, professional organisations and other partners to enhance the provision of services for students and graduates

Examples may include:

- Strategic objectives and operational practices informed by collaborative work for the benefit of stakeholders
- Service level agreements or evidence of formal and informal agreements of collaborative working and partnerships
- Mechanisms within the service which actively encourage the development, monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of partnerships, e.g. annual reports, appraisals, case studies
- Informal and formal stakeholder feedback activity used to gather views of the effectiveness and areas for development
- Services primarily delivered by alumni, employers, professional organisations, strategic external partners
- Employer, alumni, professional organisation and other partner involvement in the service's strategic planning, e.g. groups/forums that feed into service management decisions.

Pillar six (P6) – Clearly articulating our services and standards to stakeholders to promote informed engagement

Examples may include:

- Use of a range of channels that are relevant and accessible to drive engagement, including;
 - Social media
 - In person
 - Peer to peer
 - Wider university communication channels
 - Campaigns, e.g. "you said, we did"
- Accessible statements of service for stakeholders
- Activities which demonstrate an active approach to seeking feedback, and making changes as a result of that feedback
- Staff and clients can give examples of the promotions including benefits of format/s used
- Schedule of stakeholders' journeys to ensure promotion in line with needs and expectations
- The matrix Standard, Customer Service Excellence or another appropriate accreditation.

Theme three: Professional Expertise

Pillar seven (P7) – Anticipating and adapting to trends and predictions in the world of work to ensure our services are relevant to current and future needs

Examples may include:

- The provision of material in a range of formats that demonstrate understanding of changing labour markets and opportunity structures, their impact on stakeholders, and how this is disseminated
- Evidence of the impact of information on stakeholders e.g. Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) / Graduate Outcomes trends
- Staff at all levels are able to demonstrate an understanding of labour market information (LMI) changes and opportunity structures relevant to their institution and stakeholders
- Evidence of active engagement and collaboration with businesses, employers, professional organisations; in order to keep information up to date
- Staff engagement with sector, UK and global networks, training and information sources to actively demonstrate efforts to keep labour market information (LMI) current
- Evidence of staff sharing their LMI expertise via presentations, training sessions to stakeholders and other sector professionals.

Pillar 8 (P8) – Delivering institutionally-aligned careers education, information, advice and guidance to provide appropriate levels of support for all students and embed our services within our institution

Examples may include:

- Take responsibility for employability-related objectives within institutional strategies such as employability, employer engagement, access and participation plans
- Lead or contribute to the institution's planning and preparation for the employability section of the TEF
- Maintain the website and library providing the institution's requirements for careers information and LMI
- All information, advice and guidance (IAG) staff within service hold recognised qualifications relevant to their role, and the service holds a quality award for IAG
- Be the main provider for academic departments and courses to deliver curriculum-based employability
- Analyse and respond to NSS feedback related to employability on behalf of the institution.

Pillar Nine (P9) – Promoting the value and effectiveness of quality-assured professional careers and employability support to foster the trust of our stakeholders

Examples may include:

- Existence of an employability strategy detailing the range of employability services across the institution both within and outside the curriculum
- Service level agreements or other type of contract outlining provision within the curriculum over an academic year
- Service's contribution to an employability module ranging from design to implementation
- Evidence of impact such as feedback from students, graduates and staff following employability service delivery
- Use of award scheme or other initiative to encourage students and graduates to develop transferable skills
- Collaboration with a range of stakeholders to plan, design and implement employability education or other types of activity.

Code of Ethics

The Code of Ethics outlines the values and behaviours required of all members of AGCAS Services when fulfilling their roles, alongside compliance with relevant legislation. It also aims to give your internal and external stakeholders confidence and trust in their dealings with the Higher Education (HE) careers profession.

Members will adhere to the following core principles and standards of professional practice:

1. **Equity and diversity** – design, delivery and promotion of accessible services to meet the needs of all, irrespective of their age, disability, gender identity, race (including colour, nationality and ethnic or national origin), political or religious beliefs, and sexual orientation
2. **Achievement for all** – dealing with each individual fairly and with respect for their life experiences, abilities and potential. To address and challenge inequities where we encounter them
3. **Impartiality** – embedding the principle of impartiality into the design and delivery of career development services so that students and graduates have the freedom to develop their own career paths. Any conflicts of interest will be declared as soon as they are known
4. **Confidentiality** – the protection of client confidentiality and the right to privacy, acting in accordance with laws that govern the sharing of data, including personal information
5. **Integrity** – acting with trustworthiness and transparency in the provision of services, the management of expectations and the honouring of promises and arrangements
6. **A spirit of commitment through AGCAS to maintain and enhance high standards across the HE careers profession** – by fostering good practice across the profession by initiating and contributing to the sharing of knowledge and discussion of professional issues with members of the AGCAS community and adhering to the AGCAS Membership Quality Standard.

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