

REVIEWING AN AGENCY

SOME HOPEFULLY HELPFUL HINTS

ON RECEIVING THE SELF-ASSESSMENT

- A solid reading of the self-assessment (+ annexes) is vital
- Challenges: Much information; unfamiliar system; unfamiliar organisation of the agency; unfamiliar terminology; confusing presentation (?)
- Try to find the overall coherent picture; try to understand **their** intentions and priorities. It is easier to assess their performance in this light.
- Make notes of what strikes you as odd, or as potential weaknesses in system/agency
- Common experience: Reviewers are often more negative after first reading the self-assessment than they are at the end of the whole process! How explain?

BETWEEN FIRST READING AND SITE VISIT

- Panel members' notes from reading are «pooled» and discussed in video conference
- Ideally, the chair and secretary should start structuring what came up in the conference into a more coherent view of:
 - what seems to be the most pertinent topics (potential weaknesses/shortcomings),
 - What seems to be strong points
 - what will need further clarification
 - where more information/documentation is needed

AN INTERVIEW MATRIX?

- A good tool for preparing the interviews might be to work with a matrix:
 - *Column A*: all standards, from 2.1 to 3.7
 - *Column B*: Interviewees/groups where this standard should be addressed
 - *Column C*: Some (3 – 4) key questions, based on findings in material
- Check if certain groups are overloaded; (and others perhaps lacking in topics)
- Ideally, a tentative filled-in matrix should be set up by the chair and circulated to panel members before the pre-meeting, where the matter is discussed and the matrix is finalised.

THE CHAIR – SECRETARY – AGENCY LIAISON

- The secretary usually takes care of running contact with the agency and the assigned ENQA coordinator, consulting the chair when necessary.
- Purpose:
 - Practical arrangements; the interview programme; forwarding requests that have come up in the review panel.
- Make sure that you discuss if sufficient authentic documentation is given
This particularly concerns **evaluation/accreditation reports**
- The question of language hib / translations of authentic materials

THE PRE-VISIT MEETING

- Getting to know each other; to become a group!
- Exchange of general impressions; what seems to be the crucial questions?
- From analysis so far (and matrix), develop questions more in detail
- What questions to whom? (Although several groups may be addressed on a particular standard, the questions may differ somewhat from one group to another)
- Who asks about what? Roles? Rough plans of the interviews as sequences

DURING THE «RUN» OF INTERVIEWS: *DISCIPLINE!*

- Make judgements as you go; modify and clarify your assessments continuously
- As a collective, make small assessments between interview rounds

In order to secure continuous reflection, the interview programme needs frequent **breaks** (15 min,) where the panel can sum up what was heard in the last one or two sessions, and where you consider whether there are «white patches», i.e. standards where you still do not have a good picture. Is more documentation needed?

- There must be an opportunity for some «personal time», but necessary discussions come first. (*How tempting it is to just relax after a tense interview session!*)



A FINAL INTERVIEW WITH LEADERSHIP

- You probably started the visit with an interview with the leadership
- After having heard all the other groups, what you heard then may now stand in a different light. So it may be time for:
 - Last clarifications
 - Leadership's response to non-consensual views heard in other interviews
 - Leadership's assessment of strong and weak points – and current development plans

BEFORE GOING HOME

- At the end of the visiting programme time must be allotted for a longer panel meeting (2 – 3 hours) where you consider what should go into the report, including:
- Degree of compliance on each standard, with core (key word) argumentation
- Commendations and recommendations; (and improvement suggestions – if you have them.)
- Last item: Feed-back to the agency. (Main points, in a positive tone, highlight strengths and indicate some weaker points)
Make sure you do not say something that may be contradicted in the final report!

TO CONSIDER

- Evidence and trust; what is «evidence» in our context?
- Room for holistic assessments in the straitjacket of standard compliance?
- Why are we doing this? - The primacy of standard 2.1?