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**Εθνική Αρχή
Ανώτατης Εκπαίδευσης**
Hellenic Authority
for Higher Education

GUIDELINES FOR ACCREDITATION

ACRONYMS

EAC	Evaluation & Accreditation Council
EEAP	External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
HAHE	Hellenic Authority for Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IQAS	Internal Quality Assurance System
SP	Study Programme
QAU	Quality Assurance Unit

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Hellenic Authority for Higher Education (HAHE) is an independent administrative authority established by Law 4653/2020. HAHE is the continuation of the Hellenic Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency (HQA) which was established and has been operating since 2006.

The **mission** of the HAHE is to ensure high quality in Higher Education. In the context of its mission, the HAHE contributes in the formation and implementation of the national strategy for Higher Education and in the distribution of financing for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), and evaluates and accredits the operational quality of HEIs.

Accreditation is an external evaluation process based on specific, predetermined, internationally accepted quantitative and qualitative criteria and indicators that have been published in advance and are in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015).

This guide is addressed to the Higher Education Institutions and provides a detailed description of the external evaluation and accreditation process, aiming at offering accurate information towards the accreditation of their Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS), Study Programmes of all three cycles, as well as other structures of the Institution (Centre for Training and Lifelong Learning, University Research Institutes, University Centres for Research and Innovation).

2 MAIN FEATURES OF ACCREDITATION

2.1 PURPOSE OF ACCREDITATION

Accreditation aims at ensuring quality in Higher Education and at enhancing the effectiveness and transparency of the overall operation of HEIs. More specifically, accreditation guarantees the quality of the study programmes and the degrees awarded, and that a strategy is developed for the continuous improvement of the services offered by the Institution. The accreditation of a study programme makes sure that the academic study programme offered by the HEI meets all the HAHE Quality Standards and that the performance and skills of the students graduating from this specific course (learning outcomes) are consistent with the intended professional qualifications that are demanded from society and the labour market.

Accreditation, as a quality assurance process, includes: a) internal evaluation carried out by the Institution through its Quality Assurance Unit (QAU/MODIP) b) external evaluation by a Panel of External Evaluation and Accreditation Panel (EEAP) c) accreditation by the Evaluation and Accreditation Council (EAC) of the HAHE. The process is primarily centered on the quality and effectiveness of the entity under review, by shifting to some extent the focus away from evaluating “input” to evaluating qualitative outcomes (“output”), and in particular to achieving the objectives of the related entity.

2.2 PRINCIPLES OF ACCREDITATION

The accreditation process is based on the following principles:

- Accreditation is an evidence-based process carried out by independent experts;
- The information provided by the Institution is assumed to be factually correct unless evidence points to the contrary;
- Accreditation is a process of verification of information provided in the Accreditation Proposal and other accompanying documentation and exploration of any matters which are omitted from that documentation;
- The process is transparent, and outputs are published;
- The level of conformity with the Standards is that of “substantial compliance” with most aspects of the Standards, not rigid adherence.

2.3 REMIT OF ACCREDITATION

The accreditation process covers all quality assurance activities of the entity under accreditation, regardless of whether they are compulsory or voluntary in nature.

The first accreditation of a study programme or a structure will pay specific attention to the policies, procedures, and quality criteria in place. Full evidence of concrete results in all areas may not be required. However, the Institution must be able to document how they are able to achieve results according to the Accreditation Proposal by the next accreditation (review).

The second and subsequent accreditation reviews will require clear evidence of results in all areas of the entity. In addition, further reviews will need to acknowledge progress from the previous accreditation. This is a mandatory element in both the Accreditation Proposal and the Accreditation Report drafted by the EEAP following completion of the review.

In any case, it should be noted that all accreditation reviews – whether first, second, or subsequent – must always have a developmental approach and aim at constant improvement.

N.B: *The Panel is expected to review the current status of the entity under accreditation and not planned or foreseen actions and/or developments which may affect its future operation in a substantive way.*

2.4 THE MAIN STEPS OF THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS

Accreditation is a pre-defined, reliable and useful process. Therefore it should be implemented consistently and published. It includes the following steps:

- Accreditation Proposal (equivalent of self-assessment) to be submitted to the HAHE by the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) of the Institution;
- Review by an External Evaluation & Accreditation Panel (EEAP) including a site visit to the Institution;
- An Accreditation Report resulting from the external evaluation process drafted by the Panel to be submitted to the HAHE;
- Adopting and publishing the HAHE accreditation decision;
- Consistent follow-up of the operation of the accredited study programme or structure by the Institution's QAU.

This section provides a short overview of these steps, while a more detailed description of each one can be found in later sections of this guide.

The HAHE accreditation process is initiated by an accreditation proposal submitted by an Institution that wishes to be granted accreditation for a Study Programme, its Internal Quality Assurance System, or other structure. The Institution should contact the HAHE in time to initiate the accreditation process. From this moment onwards, the process is assigned to a HAHE staff member who will act as the accreditation process Coordinator. This person serves as the main contact person for the Institution and the EEAP throughout the process and will support all those involved during the different stages of the accreditation process.

During the initial phase, the HAHE and the Institution agree on the terms of reference of the accreditation process, including the activities to be subjected to the review as well as the overall timeline.

Accreditation Proposal

The first stage of the accreditation process is the production of the Accreditation Proposal (self-assessment report) by the Institution. In order to be accepted by the HAHE, the Proposal shall be drawn up in accordance with the requirements of the relevant Standards and the HAHE's guidelines and should cover all indicated elements. Otherwise, the HAHE shall return it back as unacceptable, along with the appropriate justification.

Furthermore, in the case of a second or subsequent review, the Institution is also expected to make explicit reference to the recommendations from previous Accreditation Reports, underlining the related developments that have occurred meanwhile.

Review

The HAHE will commission the Panel composed of independent experts and one student to carry out the external evaluation process. The EEAP members will review all areas of activity of the entity and provide their view on whether it is acting in substantial compliance with the HAHE Standards. The Panel will make a judgement on the operation of the study programme or structure by conducting a thorough assessment of the Accreditation Proposal, a study of additional material (such as information available on the Institution's website or submitted to the Panel by the Institution upon request), and a site visit to the Institution. The purpose of the site visit is to verify information provided in the Accreditation Proposal and to gain new knowledge about the entity under review. It is also an opportunity for the Institution to engage in a constructive discussion and an exchange regarding the activities and its

development in the near future. It should be noted that the review can be conducted entirely remotely, by the use of electronic means. In this case, all meetings are held through an appropriate teleconference platform, while a virtual tour of the Institution's facilities is performed via remote transmission or video.

Accreditation Report

Based on the information collected through the documentation of the Accreditation Proposal and the site visit, the EEAP draws up the draft Accreditation Report using the relevant HAHE template and sends it to the HAHE. The Panel's judgement on compliance of the entity is provided for each criterion separately. Then, the draft Accreditation Report is checked by the HAHE for completeness, consistency, clarity and language, and is forwarded to the Institution for potential factual corrections.

After completing the above steps, the EEAP finalises the Accreditation Report, which is then submitted to the HAHE. Finally, the HAHE Evaluation & Accreditation Council (EAC) takes the decision on the accreditation of the study programme or the structure based on the Panel's judgement and the recommendations given in the Accreditation Report. The accreditation decision is then notified to the Institution and published on the internet.

Follow-up

All Institutions are required to submit a follow-up report two years after the accreditation decision. The purpose of this report is to engage the Institution in a constant process to assess and enhance the quality of its study programme or structure. The report will address all criteria on which the Panel and/or the EAC have made recommendations and describe the steps it has taken or is willing to take in order to address them. In addition, any significant changes or developments should be described briefly.

Finally, an optional visit to the Institution is provided for by a group of experts in order to assess the progress that has been made, two years after the accreditation decision. The visit is usually carried out, whenever possible, by two members of the original EEAP. The specific objective of the progress visit is to generate a dialogue aimed at further improving the operation of the study programme or structure.

3 TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS

After the Accreditation Proposal has been checked, the basic outline of the review process is formed. The Authority drafts the terms of reference and preliminary timetable for the process and sends it to the host Institution. The terms of reference are as follows:

- It is clearly identified that the purpose of accreditation is confirmation on compliance of the entity with the HAHE Standards for Quality Accreditation;
- They clearly identify the specific issues to be reviewed during the accreditation process. All activities of the Institution related to the operation of the study programme or structure that fall under the scope of the Standards, whether they are of obligatory or voluntary nature, should be included in the review (each of the activities needs to be described in detail in the Accreditation Proposal and in the Report drafted by the EEAP);
- They should clearly outline how the accreditation process is going to be carried out: the number of the EEAP members, administrative arrangements, timetable, language issues, etc.;
- They should mention any relevant information on preceding events regarding accreditation.

The terms of reference and the timetable form the basic outline of the accreditation process.

4 PRODUCTION OF THE ACCREDITATION PROPOSAL

4.1 FORM AND CONTENT OF THE ACCREDITATION PROPOSAL

An essential component of the accreditation process is the preparation of the Accreditation Proposal. At this stage the Institution evaluates to what extent the study programme or the structure is in compliance with the relevant HAHE Quality Accreditation Standards and gathers the key documentation which supports its claim of compliance. As the Accreditation Proposal normally provides a substantial portion of the evidence which the EEAP draws on in forming its conclusions, it is important that the report provides clear information, sufficient reflections, critique, and analysis and that its contents can be corroborated by relevant evidence. This allows the EEAP to prepare lines of enquiry in advance of the site visit.

The Accreditation Proposal should normally be 40 - 50 pages in length (excluding annexes). The contents of the Proposal may vary depending on the range of activities of the entity under review and its specific features. However, the Institution must make sure to include a description and assessment of all the activities related to the accreditation of the entity under review by the Panel, covering for each type of activity each of the principles in the Standards. For each principle the Institution should explain how they interpret and comply with it, including sufficient documentation. It must also provide an analysis on the effectiveness (efficiency) of the Institution's approach.

Where in previous external evaluations of the entity, areas for development have been identified and recommendations have been expressed, these are expected to be taken into consideration by the Institution and any progress made in these areas should be mentioned in the Accreditation Proposal.

Further documents may be requested by the Panel before and/or during the site visit.

N.B.: *The Accreditation Proposal should be self-standing and self-explanatory. The main purpose of the annexes is to provide further background to the issues described in the Proposal. So the annexes should not be necessary for the understanding of the Proposal, but should constitute elements of its documentation.*

4.2 SCRUTINY OF THE ACCREDITATION PROPOSAL

The HAHE checks the Accreditation Proposal prior to sending it to the EEAP, to ensure that it conforms to the HAHE guidelines and includes all the necessary elements. The

scrutiny of the Proposal is of a technical nature, refers to its formal parts and will not include any assessment on the compliance of the entity with the HAHE Standards. Should the Proposal be lacking information, the HAHE will notify the Institution that will be allowed for a period of ten days to submit a revised Accreditation Proposal.

5 APPOINTMENT OF THE EEAP

5.1 COMPOSITION OF THE EEAP

At least three members of the EEAP are drawn from the HAHE Register of Independent Experts.

The HAHE Register of Independent Experts includes 4,000 experts and is constantly revised with new inclusions, following an open call for expression of interest published by the HAHE. It is further expanded based on recommendations made by HEIs and affiliated organisations to include more experts. The experts are Greek or foreign scientists of an established reputation, professors in universities of similar status abroad, researchers or experts preferably experienced in matters concerning the evaluation, accreditation and quality assurance in Higher Education. One member of the EEAP is a HEI student, drawn from the Register of Students which is kept and updated by the EAC.

5.2 TRAINING OF THE EEAP MEMBERS

The HAHE organises short training sessions aimed at experts and students interested in becoming members of an EEAP. Based on the feedback and the lessons learned from the evaluation of HEIs, the training sessions provide experts with the necessary knowledge and guidance on the HAHE Quality Accreditation Standards, the ENQA Standards and Guidelines (ESG) and the accreditation process. In addition, during the training sessions the participants are briefed on the expectations of the HAHE on the Accreditation Report and the recommendations submitted by the Panel following completion of the review.

Only experts and students who have attended the short training session organised by the HAHE may be appointed to an EEAP. However, attendance of a training does not automatically guarantee an invitation to join a Panel, as this is done on the basis of the needs of each accreditation process (expert profile, nationality, language competences, gender, expertise etc.).

5.3 APPOINTMENT OF EXPERTS

The selection and appointment of experts for an EEAP is carried out by the HAHE, so as to avoid conflicts of interest and to preserve the integrity of the process.

When appointing a member to an EEAP, the key requirement is that the members of the Panel should have a sufficient level of knowledge, experience, and expertise to conduct the review to a high standard and be totally independent of the HEI or the study programme under review. Experts are required to notify the HAHE in writing of

any connection with the HEI/SP which could result in a potential conflict of interest. Furthermore, experts are required to notify the HAHE Coordinator as soon as possible of any changes which occur during the process.

The EEAP consists of five (5) members according to the provisions of article 13 of Law 4653/2020. In case of study programmes leading to the exercise of legislatively regulated professions, one member of the Panel comes from the relevant professional association or chamber.

In addition, when appointing a Panel, the following selection criteria are applied:

- All Panel members must have been trained by the HAHE;
- At least two Panel members come from foreign countries;
- The Panel Chair must come from a foreign country, have previous experience taking part in a HAHE External Evaluation Committee/EEAP and be fluent in English, as this is the main working language of the review, and/or of Greek;
- At least one member of the Panel has good knowledge and understanding of Higher Education in Greece;
- At least two members of the Panel must be fluent in English;
- Gender balance is taken into consideration to the greatest extent possible;
- Current members of the HAHE Supreme Council and the EAC are not eligible to join the EEAP.

The QAU of the host Institution must notify the HAHE in writing of any potential conflict of interest of one or more members of the Panel with the HEI/SP under review. The QAU is also given the opportunity to comment on the members selected to join the EEAP.

The EEAP must be approved by the EAC. To grant its approval, the EAC should take into consideration the CVs of all Panel members, and that all selection criteria are met.

After the EEAP has been established, the HAHE Coordinator notifies the experts of its composition and facilitates contact between the members and the Panel Chair and with the contact person appointed by the QAU of the host HEI for the accreditation process.

6 THE SITE VISIT

6.1 OBJECTIVES

The site visit of the EEAP has a number of key objectives. In particular, it allows the Panel to:

- share with the Institution the impressions gained from the Accreditation Proposal and on-the-spot findings;
- explore the compliance with the HAHE Standards during meetings and interviews with the Institution's representatives;
- explore the compliance with the Standards through additional documentation;
- engage in a dialogue with the Institution on its operations and compliance with the Standards;
- formulate the Panel's preliminary findings regarding compliance with the Standards;
- produce a first draft of the Accreditation Report as a solid basis for further development and completion of the Report after the site visit.

To reach these objectives, it is essential that the visit is well prepared and that the process is carried out efficiently and effectively. It is also necessary that the Panel conduct their interviews and meetings in a room that ensures privacy. It is furthermore the responsibility of the Institution to ensure that the Panel may enjoy its breaks, including all meals, privately.

The length of the visit should be determined at the beginning of the accreditation process. In most cases, a visit duration of two or three days is necessary to validate the information contained in the Accreditation Proposal, as well as to clarify any points at issue.

In some cases, and with the consent of both the Institution under review and the Chair of the EEAP, an external observer may attend the site visit (the conditions regarding the participation of observers are specified in the relevant HAHE Decision).

N.B.: *The EEAP should receive the Accreditation Proposal as soon as possible after their appointment. It is important to leave at least two weeks available to the Panel between the date of receipt of the Proposal and the date of the site visit.*

6.2 BEFORE THE SITE VISIT

6.2.1 PREPARATION AND REVIEW OF AVAILABLE INFORMATION

Well ahead of the site visit, the Institution has submitted the Accreditation Proposal and related annexes to the HAHE for distribution to the EEAP according to the aforementioned procedure.

The Panel should carefully study all material available before the site visit and use it to determine the main lines of enquiry for the site visit and to draft an outline of the Accreditation Report. The Institution should facilitate the Panel's access to such material so that the review is carried out in an accurate and effective manner.

N.B.: *It is recommended that the Panel Chair, with input from the other Panel members, request additional documentation where deemed necessary in advance of the visit. Eventual additional documents, for which the need arises in the meeting or which may not be available electronically, may be requested and should be provided to the Panel before the review.*

6.2.2 PANEL'S PREPARATORY TELECONFERENCE BRIEFING

A preparatory teleconference briefing will be organised by the HAHE Coordinator with the Panel Chair and the members of the EEAP to discuss the entire accreditation process. More specifically, the issues of this briefing will be as follows:

- purpose of the review;
- roles and responsibilities of Panel members;
- information on the current legal framework of the Greek HEIs;
- use and understanding of the Quality Accreditation Standards;
- link between evidence and information, analysis and conclusions in the Accreditation Proposal;
- timeline and management of the site visit;
- drawing up the draft Accreditation Report;
- submission of the final Accreditation Report and decision-making process regarding accreditation.

The above briefing is compulsory and usually takes place two or three weeks before the site visit and lasts about 60-90 minutes. It also presents an important opportunity for the Panel members to be introduced to each other prior to the site visit.

In addition to the preparatory briefing, the members of the EEAP are expected to be in regular contact both among them and with the HAHE Coordinator as the need arises.

6.2.3 PREPARATION OF MATERIAL AND SETTING THE PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

For the purpose of organising the site visit and of developing well-structured lines of enquiry during the meetings with the Institution's representatives, it is strongly advised that the Panel members fill-in the mapping grid, based on the HAHE template. The site visit programme will be prepared by the HAHE, in cooperation with the Panel Chair and the Institution's QAU.

It is also advised that the Panel draft an outline version of the Panel's Accreditation Report prior to the site visit. This will save time during the review and will make it easier for the Panel to identify areas that will require further examination or clarification and to ensure that no gaps remain after completion of the review.

6.3 DURING THE SITE VISIT

6.3.1 EEAP KICK-OFF MEETING

The whole EEAP meets on the day before the site visit to discuss the schedule of the visit. More specifically, the Panel members discuss the schedule of the site visit (meetings/interviews, private panel meetings and time to study documentation), the specific roles of each member during the site visit, their impressions gained from the pre-visit information, and any highlighted lines of enquiry on which the Panel wishes to focus during the visit. Although the Panel needs to address all the criteria contained within the HAHE Standards, by developing "lines of enquiry" the Panel is able to target its efforts where there is greatest concern about the level of compliance with some of the accreditation criteria, or where information provided in the material available provides less comprehensive evidence. In addition, where necessary, the Panel might also identify any additional documentation to which it would like to have access during the site visit. However, it may be evident from the information available before the site visit that some of the criteria are clearly met, and these areas may warrant only a briefer exploration and verification during the site visit.

During the kick-off meeting, the Panel decides on the agenda for the first meetings or interviews as well as on procedural issues, e.g. who will ask the questions and in what order.

6.3.2 MEETING WITH INSTITUTION REPRESENTATIVES

During the site visit, the EEAP will meet Institution representatives. An indicative list of representatives that the Panel is strongly advised to meet includes:

- the Rector;

- the QAU President and any QAU members who have contributed to writing the Accreditation Proposal;
- the President of the Department/academic unit and representatives of the Internal Evaluation Group (OMEA) (for SP accreditation);
- representatives of teaching and research staff (DEP/EP);
- representatives of special teaching staff (EEDIP/EEP) etc.;
- student representatives;
- alumni;
- administrative staff representatives;
- social partners from the public and private sector and from social bodies and associations involved in the HEI/SP

In order to ensure that fruitful and constructive discussions take place during the meetings, the following should also be taken into consideration:

- A room must be available for the EEAP to hold all its sessions with Institution representatives as well as its private meetings.
- The number of participants should not be more than eight (8) persons per session, except for students who sometimes prefer larger groups. In this case participants cannot be more than ten (10) people.
- The duration of each session cannot exceed forty five (45) minutes (unless decided otherwise by the Panel).
- The EEAP must hold private meetings with the various groups. For example, during the Panel's meeting with the students only students can participate without teaching or administrative staff members being present. Meetings must be handled with confidentiality by the Panel. In addition, the Panel should refrain from citing separately each person's statements in detail in the Accreditation Report to be drafted during and after the site visit.
- All meetings are interactive. The Panel must have prepared a list of enquiries in advance in order to engage in a constructive dialogue with the participants. It is deemed appropriate therefore that both the enquiries and the meetings be based on the HAHE guidelines.
- Institution representatives should be well prepared in the subject matters under review. Participants should avoid any formal presentations so that there is adequate time for discussion between the representatives and the Panel.
- It is important that additional time be provided for the Panel's private meetings. The Panel members should have 15 minutes in between two sessions for discussion regarding the last meeting and to prepare for the next one. These short breaks can also be used as an opportunity to catch up in case some sessions last longer than expected.

At the beginning of each meeting, the Panel Chair should:

- Introduce the Panel members to the Institution representatives and ask for introductions from those present;
- Outline the areas to be covered during the meeting and in what order;
- Declare the meeting closed.

After each meeting, the Panel discusses the evidence and information provided, what still needs to be investigated and notes the main conclusions of the meeting for future reference. The Panel should have around 10-15 minutes in between scheduled meetings for private conversation. Typically, the Panel would hold an additional meeting at the end of the day to map areas still to be covered and adjust, if needed, the interview questions for the following day.

It is helpful for the Panel to reserve the last interview slot for the leadership of the Institution to clarify any remaining issues after the other interviews or to give answers to questions that have arisen during the interviews.

Distance interviews might be conducted when the direct participation of some representatives is not possible. However, this is an option for limited cases, not for the majority of interviews to be held. If any distance interviews are needed, the Institution should inform the HAHE Coordinator before the site visit schedule is finalised. Those interviews should be clearly indicated in the schedule. The Institution must make sure that a room is available which is appropriately equipped for distance interviews.

Finally, the EEAP must visit the Institution's facilities: teaching rooms, laboratories, secretariat, libraries, sporting facilities, student services etc. If the Institution has many facilities scattered around outside the campus it should be considered whether such a visit is deemed necessary. Any unnecessary visits should be avoided in order to reduce as much as possible the time needed for the Panel to move around and provide sufficient time for an exchange of views.

N.B.: *During the meetings the Panel may request from the Institution representatives eventual additional documents which may not be available electronically.*

6.3.3 FINAL PANEL MEETING

Just before the end of the site visit, the Panel meets to draw together its conclusions based on the information presented. At this point it is useful to take time to work through each aspect of the Accreditation Standards and confirm the Panel's key findings and any areas of concern.

6.3.4 FINAL MEETING WITH THE INSTITUTION

The site visit concludes with a final de-briefing meeting involving the EEAP members and the Institution representatives. The Panel Chair can outline the Panel's overall impressions but not its final decision. The Panel Chair can also explain the next steps in the accreditation process.

6.4 AFTER THE SITE VISIT

After the site visit the Institution may not submit new information to the Panel on the entity under review. All relevant information should be provided to the Panel either before or during the site visit. In addition, once the Institution receives the draft Accreditation Report by the HAHE, it can only make factual comments. It is imperative that the Institution refrain from contacting the Panel members on matters related to the content of the Report prior to its completion.

6.4.1 PROCESS ASSESSMENT

After completion of the review, the HAHE sends to the Panel members and the Institution representatives an evaluation questionnaire on the process in order to gather useful feedback.

6.4.2 PRODUCTION AND PUBLICATION OF THE ACCREDITATION REPORT

The main outcome of the process is the Accreditation Report by the EEAP. The drafting of the Report is based on the Accreditation Proposal, the site visit and the EEAP's findings. The purpose of the Report is to:

- Provide the EAC with sufficient and clear information on the compliance of the entity under review with the Standards and to enable the EAC thus to reach a sound conclusion regarding accreditation;
- Be perceived by the Institution as a reliable/fair and relevant document for its consolidation and further development;
- Serve as a source of reliable information for other bodies and other interested stakeholders.

6.4.2.1 *Writing up findings*

When writing up findings, it is important that these are written in a way that reveals both the evidence for and the reasoning/analysis behind the Panel's conclusions, to enable the EAC to make an assessment on the compliance with accreditation criteria and reach a sound conclusion. Under each criterion the Panel should carefully describe the relevant evidence which led them to this specific conclusion and provide an assessment of compliance of the study programme with this criterion. The

Accreditation Report must be written in English and particular care should be taken to use correct terminology for compliance with accreditation criteria.

Furthermore, when drafting the Accreditation Report, the following should be kept in mind:

- All criteria need to be fully covered.
- Each criterion should be discussed separately.
- Under each criterion, the Report should include:
 - a. **Evidence:** short description of the evidence gathered -making reference to meetings or documentation explored.
 - b. **Analysis:** a consideration of how far, based on the evidence available, the entity does (or does not) meet the accreditation criterion in question and eventual reasons for lack of compliance.
 - c. **Conclusion:** explanation of how compliant the entity is in the opinion of the Panel with each criterion: *
 - (i) Fully compliant: The entity is entirely in accordance with the accreditation criterion which is implemented in an effective manner.
 - (ii) Substantially compliant: The entity is to a large extent in accordance with the accreditation criterion, the principle/spirit of which is followed in practice.
 - (iii) Partially compliant: Some aspects or parts of the criterion are met while others are not. The interpretation of the criterion is correct, but the manner of implementation is not effective enough.
 - (iv) Non-compliant: The entity fails to comply with this criterion.

The ranks (i) and (ii) could -in certain Standards- merge into a single one ("compliance").

- d. **Recommendations** for improvement and for rectifying weaknesses.

N.B. 1: *The direct link between evidence, analysis, and conclusions should be evident in the Accreditation Report and provide the EAC members, who make the final decision on accreditation, with clear information on how the Panel reached its conclusion on compliance with the accreditation standards and criteria. Any recommendations should follow from the judgement on compliance. In other words, the judgement must clearly follow from the evidence and analysis provided, and statements such as "the Panel is convinced that the SP is fully compliant" or "it was clear from the interviews that the SP fully complies" are not sufficient, if not supported by evidence and analysis.*

N.B. 2: The role of commendations, in addition to recommendations, is important and the Panel needs to highlight and promote good practice and excellence in quality assurance.

6.4.2.2 Panel judgement on compliance

The Panel is expected to comment on the overall compliance of the entity with the Standards but not to take the final decision. This is the duty and responsibility of the EAC. Full or substantial compliance with the Standards is necessary in order to decide in favor of accreditation. Where partial or non-compliance with the Standards is observed, the reasons that led the Panel to this conclusion should be explained.

6.4.2.3 Drafting the Accreditation Report

For the sake of both completeness and accuracy, it is important that the Accreditation Report is drafted throughout the process rather than solely after the site visit. Several of the sections may be written in an outline form before the site visit takes place, based on the material and other information available to the EEAP during the review. It is further advised to add notes to the draft Report during the course of the site visit, building on the outcomes of the meetings and further scrutiny of documentary evidence. All Panel members will contribute to the drafting of the Report.

After the Panel members reach an agreement on the final version of the draft Report, this is finalised and submitted to the HAHE. The HAHE checks that the draft Report is in line with the HAHE relevant Standards and sends it to the Institution without the Panel's final judgement. The Institution is given two weeks to read the Report and to comment on factual accuracy and any possible grave misunderstandings. At this stage the Institution's QAU should not submit any additional material or documentation. The HAHE Coordinator, after receiving the Institution's comments on the draft Report, will forward them to the Panel. Subsequently, the Panel reviews the Institution's comments, drafts the final Report and submits it to the HAHE. The Accreditation Report should normally be around 25 pages in length.

N.B.: The Accreditation Report is not final and may not be used by the Institution until the HAHE has completed the process.

6.4.3 DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

It is the responsibility of the EAC to assess the Accreditation Report and to decide on whether accreditation can be granted. The EAC uses the Report to reach a conclusion on the degree of compliance of the entity under review with the Standards and whether the necessary conditions are met for the entity to be granted accreditation. In order to facilitate its decision making, the EAC relies on the recommendation of the

competent EAC member, for the initial scrutiny of the Accreditation Report. In particular, the main steps of the process are the following:

1. The Accreditation Report is distributed by the responsible service of the HAHE to the competent EAC member.
2. The competent EAC member studies the report and produces a recommendation to the EAC in the format of a scrutiny form.
3. The EAC makes a decision on the basis of the Accreditation Report and the EAC member's recommendation. The EAC is not, however, obliged to follow the recommendation of the EEAP nor that of the competent EAC member. The EAC takes its final decision in light of the gathered evidence.
4. Should the EAC deviate from the recommendation of the EEAP and/or the recommendation of the EAC member, the reasons shall be specified in the EAC letter to the Institution.

The EAC may, where appropriate, amend the applicable methodology for the external evaluation and accreditation of each type of academic entity, as well as the scale used for the determination of the degree of compliance, for each of the Standards (see also 6.4.2.1).

The possible outcomes of the EAC decision on whether a study programme or an entity is in substantial compliance with the Accreditation Standards– and thus can be granted accreditation – are the following:

1. The entity under review is considered to be in full/substantial/partial compliance with the Standards and is granted accreditation for five (5) years.
2. The entity under review is considered as not sufficiently in compliance with the Standards.

The minimum period before a second accreditation process of the entity, following to an unsuccessful one, is two years. The decision of the EAC is based on a holistic assessment and is not the result of a mathematical equation.

6.4.4 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

If the contents of the Accreditation Report, or the way in which the entire process was conducted, do not, in the EAC opinion, allow it to come to a conclusion, the EAC may decide what additional information is required. This may comprise further documentary evidence, additional information from the EEAP or the Institution itself, or information to be acquired during an additional visit to the Institution (lasting normally one day), carried out by the EEAP Chair and one Panel member, to complete the assessment on compliance.

The procedures followed by the HAHE in respect to accreditation for HEI study programmes or other structures, and the rules relating to appeals against a decision of the HAHE, are decided by the EAC and contained in the HAHE Statutes.

After completion of an accreditation process, the final Report, together with the EAC decision and the related recommendations, are published on the websites of the HAHE and the host Institution.

6.5 FOLLOW-UP

In order to provide the best possible support for the development and improvement of the operations of the SP and the other structures, it is obligatory for the Institution to draft a Follow-up Report. Whenever possible this may be complemented by a small-scale progress visit to the Institution conducted by two members of the original EEAP. This visit which will be used to discuss issues regarding the Accreditation Standards is considered of particular importance as it may be viewed as a challenge leading to the improvement of the Institution or academic unit offering the SP under review. As such a conversation is carried out separately from the discussion on compliance with Accreditation Standards, the benefits are expected to be greater.

6.5.1 FOLLOW-UP REPORT

The host Institution is requested to submit a Follow-up Report usually within two years of the HAHE's positive decision on accreditation. This may be reduced to one year in cases where urgent action is considered necessary. The purpose of this follow-up is to engage the Institution in a continuous reflection on improving the quality. The Follow-up Report is expected to address the recommendations from the HAHE following the accreditation process. In addition, through the Follow-up Report the Institution may also highlight other developments or changes in the Institution's activities and processes that may be relevant in view of its compliance with the Accreditation Standards. The Follow-up Report is sent to the HAHE and will be published on the HAHE website as additional material to the Accreditation Report, as soon as it has been considered by the EAC.

N.B.: *The Follow-up Report should be self-standing and self-explanatory without further documents annexed.*

6.5.2 PROGRESS VISIT

The accreditation of an entity includes a voluntary progress visit to the Institution by two members of the EEAP of the entity under review (when possible). The progress visit will not have the objective of checking the compliance with the Accreditation

Standards, but rather to generate a stronger enhancement-oriented dialogue that might be difficult to truly integrate in the ordinary site visit. The Institution may suggest specific areas of interest to be discussed with the Panel members and may focus on areas in which the entity is struggling to meet the requirements of the Standards. The two experts who attend the progress visit must not participate in the Panel during the following accreditation process of the entity to avoid possible conflicts of interest.

The additional voluntary site visit will take place two years after completion of the accreditation process and will last one day. The Institution may request the HAHE to have a voluntary visit performed at least ten months before its approximate timing. Although it is not a mandatory part of the accreditation process, most Institutions are likely to benefit greatly from a progress visit.

7 EEAP MEMBERS' ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The EEAP is composed of five (5) members, of which one is assigned the specific duties of the Panel Chair.

Each member of the Panel is expected to actively contribute to the work of the team. Therefore, experts are advised to carefully consider their workload before accepting the assignment. Failure to actively contribute to the Panel and its duties is deemed a breach of the Code of Conduct. The EAC will assess the need for intervention on a case-by-case basis and will take the feedback of the Panel Chair into account.

7.1 EEAP CHAIR

The EEAP Chair has overall responsibility for the assessment of the entity and the production and submission of a comprehensive Accreditation Report. The Chair must also ensure that the terms of reference of the review are respected. More specifically, the EEAP Chair shall:

Before the site visit

- Liaise with the HAHE to establish the timetable of activities for the site visit;
- Review the documentation, including the Accreditation Proposal, and any other information available prior to the site visit, to ensure it is complete and adequate for the needs of the Panel;
- Request additional documentation from the Institution, in agreement with the other Panel members, prior to the site visit where necessary;
- Agree on the lines of enquiry to be pursued during the site visit with contributions from the rest of the Panel;
- Work with the Panel members to produce an outline Accreditation Report.

During the site visit

- Chair all meetings and discussions;
- Ensure that all lines of enquiry identified are satisfactorily covered;
- Ensure that all Panel members participate in the visit actively and in a balanced way, following the agreed sharing of tasks;
- Ensure that the HAHE guidelines are respected throughout the accreditation process.

After the site visit

- Ensure that the draft Accreditation Report is produced in cooperation with the Panel members;
- Review any changes or additions suggested by the HAHE in view of respecting the requirements of the guidelines;
- Review any changes suggested by the Institution after it has commented on the draft Accreditation Report;
- Submit the final report to the EEAP and the HAHE;

At all times

- Identify and remedy any possible misunderstandings of concepts within the EEAP;
- Inform the HAHE Coordinator about any eventual breach of the procedure by the Institution or any of the Panel members and alert without delay the Coordinator to any concerns regarding the integrity of the accreditation process.

7.2 EEAP MEMBERS

It is the responsibility of all members of the EEAP to:

Before the site visit

- Review the documentation, including the Accreditation Proposal and any other information available prior to the site visit;
- Indicate to the Panel Chair if any essential documentation should be requested from the Institution in addition to that which was provided with the Accreditation Proposal;
- Respond swiftly to emails from the HAHE Coordinator or the Panel Chair regarding the process in question;
- Make appropriate travel arrangements, ensuring that the most economic and feasible option is used and inform the Panel Coordinator of the planned arrival and departure dates and times;
- Contribute to developing the lines of enquiry to be pursued during the site visit.

During the site visit

- Actively participate in all meetings and discussions and contribute to pursuing the lines of enquiry as agreed in the Panel kick-off meeting;
- Take occasional notes during the meetings in order to be able to constructively contribute to the Panel's judgement on the compliance with the Accreditation Standards.

After the site visit

- Contribute to the drafting of the Report as agreed by the Panel in accordance with the HAHE guidelines;
- Carefully read and comment on the initial draft Report and give any comments or amendments within the set deadline;

7.3 ACCREDITATION PROCESS COORDINATOR

The HAHE assigns a trained and experienced staff member as a Coordinator of the accreditation process. The main tasks of the Coordinator are to:

- Draft the necessary correspondence between the HAHE and the Institution according to the relevant template;
- Prepare the EEAP's composition, relevant CVs and all information necessary for the EAC to take its decision;
- Draft the non-conflict-of-interest declarations of the Panel members following the EAC decision on the Panel's composition and to gather the documents duly signed by the Panel members;
- Serve as a liaison between the EEAP and the host Institution;
- Support the Panel in the practical arrangements for accommodation of the Panel during the site visit and liaise on these with the contact person at the QAU;
- Discuss with the Institution the review and accreditation process and its practical arrangements;
- Monitor the entire accreditation process to assure the HAHE that its expectations are met;
- Check the completeness of the draft Accreditation Report according to the HAHE's template for the Accreditation Report;
- Receive the final Accreditation Report from the EEAP;
- Forward the final Accreditation Report to the EAC;
- Make sure that the EEAP members receive reimbursement of their expenses by the competent HAHE Finance Department;

- Receive feedback on the accreditation process and forward it to the competent service of the HAHE;
- Inform the EEAP and the host Institution on the EAC decision;
- Forward the final Accreditation Report to the Institution and ensure that it is published on the HAHE website.

N.B.: *The HAHE Coordinator is not a member of the EEAP. He/she will thus not participate in the interviews during the site visit and will not contribute to the drafting of the Report by the EEAP.*

8 FINANCIAL ISSUES

The HAHE fully covers the costs of the accreditation process. These include travel and accommodation expenses, and a daily allowance (flat rate per diem) for each member of the EEAP.

The financial terms and conditions are stated in detail in the contract signed between the HAHE and each member of the EEAP. Detailed information and clarifications on expenses reimbursed to EEAP members can be found in the relevant HAHE document.

9 APPEALS AND COMPLAINTS

According to the procedure provided for, the Institution may submit an appeal or a complaint and question the formal outcome of the accreditation process, where it can demonstrate that the outcome is not based on sound evidence, that criteria have not been correctly applied or that the procedures have not been consistently implemented. The appeal/ complaint is submitted to the HAHE secretariat, according to the procedure provided in the Appeals and Complaints Regulation.

On receipt, an appeal or complaint shall be preliminary reviewed by the competent HAHE service (appeals or complaints pursued in an abusive language will be ignored), and then is forwarded to the EAC. Subsequently, the appeal/complaint is examined by the Appeals and Complaints Committee which considers all information and suggests to the EAC its acceptance or rejection. Following to that, the EAC decides upon the matter, and the Institution is notified accordingly.

The HAHE reserves the right to modify the present Guidelines at its discretion.