



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

**STANDARDS FOR QUALITY ACCREDITATION
OF NEW POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES
OF UNIVERSITY LEGAL ENTITIES**

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PREFACE

I. Scope of Standards' application, concepts and definitions

I.1 Scope of application

These Standards apply for the evaluation and quality accreditation of the new Postgraduate Study Programmes (PSPs) offered by University Legal Entities (ULEs). These Standards set the criteria, indicators and requirements that should be met by the PSPs under review, which are offered on site by ULEs, in order to be compliant and granted with accreditation.

These Standards constitute the basic quality framework used by the ULE under review in order to draft the self-evaluation report (following an **internal evaluation**) and submit its accreditation proposal for the PSP; on the other hand, it serves as the basic framework for the **external evaluation** carried out by independent external experts, who assess the degree of compliance of the ULE with these Standards. The **reference framework** of these Standards is the national legislation, in particular Law 4653/2020 (A'12) and Law 5094/2024 (A' 39) still in force, as well as the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (hereinafter called as ESG).

I.2 Reference framework

1. The National Legislation provides that HAHE “evaluates and accredits the quality of services offered by Higher Education, based on specific, predetermined, internationally accepted quantitative and qualitative criteria and indicators, in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area” (Art. 145, par. 4 of Law 5094/2024).

2. The National Legislation also provides that the object of the accreditation is the assurance of quality in Higher Education as a public and transparent process (Art. 9 of Law 4653/2020, and Art. 145 par. 5 of Law 5094/2024).

3. The term of “quality assurance”, as the object of the accreditation, is used to describe all activities within the “continuous improvement cycle” (i.e. assurance and enhancement activities, [ESG 2015](#), page 7).

4. Similarly, the National Legislation underlines that “quality assurance in Higher Education promotes the optimization of the effectiveness and transparency of the overall operation of Institutions (Art. 9, par. 1 of Law 4653/2020).

5. The ESG set a common framework for quality assurance systems in learning and teaching at European, national and institutional levels. They apply to the entire higher education offered in the EHEA, regardless of the mode of study or place of delivery of the educational services. Thus, the ESG are also applicable to all higher education, including transnational and cross-border provision ([ESG 2015](#), page 7).

6. The ESG provide the criteria at European level against which quality assurance agencies and their activities (like HAHE) are assessed. This ensures that quality assurance agencies in EHEA adhere to the same set of principles, and the processes and procedures are modelled to fit the purposes and requirements of their national contexts ([ESG 2015](#), page 8).

I.3 Definitions

In these Standards, as in the Standards for Higher Education Institutions, each criterion aligns with the European criterion which is included respectively in the ESG and defined by appropriate indicators and requirements for the evaluation of compliance. This evaluation is conducted by the External Evaluation

and Accreditation Panels, consisting of experts who form a documented judgement, as provided by National Legislation.

The use of the term “criterion” in the context of quality assurance, and of these Standards as well, refers to the requirement that needs to be met by a Study Programme in order to be compliant. Each criterion may have a qualitative and quantitative dimension (e.g. high quality of the teaching staff and numerical adequacy of the teaching staff.).

Compliance of the Study Programme with the Standards is achieved primarily through the implementation of policies, procedures, staffing, resources, structures, etc., as specified in the Standards’ criteria in accordance with the principles of quality assurance. Consequently, the assessment of compliance by an external quality assurance agency, i.e. HAHE, is conducted with respect to the policies, procedures, staffing, resources, structures, etc., implemented by U.L.E.

The use of the term “indicator” in these Standards refers to a tool for assessing different qualitative and quantitative dimensions of a criterion. The values assigned to quantitative indicators are numerical, while the values assigned to qualitative indicators are scaled according to the degree of adequacy: adequate - partially adequate - inadequate. The indicators are not evaluated separately but they are co-estimated with other data and findings to form the overall evaluation judgment.

The use of the term “requirement” in these Standards refers to the obligation to provide evidence and documents deemed necessary for the evaluation of each specific criterion.

Consequently, these Standards consist of six (6) specific criteria for a Study Programme’s compliance, which are further specified by a description of their individual qualitative and quantitative elements. Each criterion specifies the requirements for submitting supporting evidence, which are necessary to evaluate the criterion, and the indicators which serve as the evaluative elements for the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of the criterion.

II. Evaluation Procedure

II.1 General Principles

The evaluation procedure is defined by Law (Article 145, par. 4–6 of Law 5094/2024, Articles 9–13 of Law 4653/2020) and it is based on the specialized, detailed and evidence-based assessment of external experts, following a review of the accreditation proposal and the conduct of an onsite visit, which includes interviews and discussions with the staff of the institution under review. These elements are evaluated based on the object, features and mission of each PSP, allowing for a documented adaptation to the specific nature of the academic field.

The assessment of each criterion is based on a comprehensive evaluation of the academic documentation, indicators, and findings of the external evaluation, in accordance with the methodological guidelines presented in Section A of the chapter entitled “Judgement of the External Evaluation and Accreditation Panel” below. The assessment of each criterion constitutes a process of substantive judgement by the experts and not a mere numerical addition or verification of individual elements or indicators. In making this judgement, the Panel does not merely examine whether a numerical or qualitative goal is met, but also assesses whether the educational processes are appropriate, coherent, sufficiently documented, and capable of leading to the intended learning and academic outcomes. The final evaluation judgement regarding the overall compliance of the Postgraduate Study Programme with the Standards is formed after taking into account the degree of compliance with each criterion, in accordance with the

methodological rules presented in Section B of the chapter entitled “Judgement by the External Evaluation and Accreditation Panel” below.

This approach meets the fundamental objectives of (a) quality assurance, which consists of the systematic assurance and continuous improvement of quality and is not limited to a fragmentary or occasional compliance with individual requirements, and (b) accreditation, which consists of providing assurance that an Institution, an academic unit, a study programme, or an internal quality assurance system complies with the minimum quality criteria set by HAHE, which are in line with the Standards and Guidelines of the European Higher Education Area, as currently in force. Quality assurance in higher education promotes the optimization of the effectiveness and transparency of the overall operation of Institutions (see Art. 9, par 1 of Law 4653/2020).

II.2 Judgement of the External Evaluation and Accreditation Panel

A. Judgement of the Panel regarding the compliance with individual criteria

The degree of compliance with each Criterion of these Standards is structured into the following three levels:

1. Compliance:

The Programme meets the Criterion overall. Shortcomings may occur, but they do not significantly undermine the Programme’s ability to effectively comply with the Criterion.

2. Partial compliance:

The Programme meets some parts or aspects of the Criterion, but others are not met. These shortcomings limit the programme’s compliance with the Criterion.

3. Non-compliance:

The Programme does not meet the Criterion. There are significant shortcomings which prevent the programme’s ability to comply with the Criterion.

B. Overall judgment of the Panel regarding the compliance of the PSP

To form the overall judgement, i.e. the Programme’s degree of compliance, the External Evaluation and Accreditation Panel considers the following:

- To achieve overall “compliance”, the Programme must not be characterized as non-compliant with none of the criteria; however, it may be “partially compliant” with up to two (2) criteria utmost.
- The Programme is overall characterized as “partially compliant”, if it is “partially compliant” with at least three (3) criteria; however, it must not be “non-compliant” to none of the Criteria.
- The Programme is overall characterized as “non-compliant”, if it is “non-compliant” with at least one Criterion.

III. Accreditation Decision

The decision of the Evaluation and Accreditation Council of HAHE may be positive, positive under conditions or negative, pursuant to Art. 12, par 1 of Law 4653/2020.

STANDARDS FOR QUALITY ACCREDITATION OF NEW POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES OF UNIVERSITY LEGAL ENTITIES

CRITERION 1. STRATEGY, QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY AND QUALITY GOALSETTING FOR NEW POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES (PSPs)

University Legal Entities (ULEs) should include in their strategic management the development, organisation and implementation of new Postgraduate Study Programmes (PSPs) in specific scientific fields, after investigating their feasibility and sustainability.

University Legal Entities should apply a quality assurance policy for the new PSPs as part of their strategic management.

The quality assurance policy should expand and aim (with the participation of external stakeholders) to the PSPs of the University Legal Entity and of the academic unit. This policy should be published and implemented by all stakeholders.

This criterion aligns with ESG 1.1

Specifically, the following should be fulfilled:

By decision/s of the authorized body, the University Legal Entities should adapt their strategy to include issues regarding the provision of postgraduate study programmes, in line with the profile, vision, mission and strategic objectives of the ULE. In this strategy, the University Legal Entities should anticipate the potential benefits, difficulties or threats from the implementation of new postgraduate study programmes and plan all the necessary actions to achieve their goals. The strategic choices of the University Legal Entity should be documented through specific feasibility and sustainability studies, especially for new postgraduate study programmes.

In case a PSP is delivered using distance learning methods, the University Legal Entity prepares and applies an e-learning strategy. The e-learning strategy of the University Legal Entity is integrated into its overall strategy and identifies educational goals, while keeping up with the rapid technological changes and the developments in pedagogical models. The University legal Entity should include in its strategy justification and feasibility as to why e-learning has been selected as the appropriate learning strategy for the particular programmes of study where it is applied.

In the context of e-learning, innovation strategies, the possibility of programme revision, the linking between learning and research (requiring knowledge of the latest innovations in order to select the most appropriate means to achieve the learning outcomes) should be taken into account. In the instance of offering the said PSP using distance learning methods, the Ministerial Decision No 18137/Z1/2023 applies accordingly.

The quality assurance policy of the academic unit for postgraduate study programmes should be in line with the ULE strategy and it should be formulated in the form of a public statement implemented by all stakeholders. It focuses on the achievement of special goals related to the quality assurance of the postgraduate study programmes offered by the academic unit. Indicatively, the quality policy statement

of the academic unit includes its commitment to implement a quality policy that will promote the academic profile and orientation of the postgraduate study programme, its purpose and subject area; it will implement the programme's goals and determine the means and ways for attaining them; it will apply appropriate quality procedures, aiming at the programme's continuous improvement.

To implement this policy, the academic unit commits itself to put into practice quality procedures that will demonstrate:

- a) the suitability of the structure and organisation of postgraduate study programmes*
- b) the pursuit of learning outcomes and qualifications in accordance with the European and National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education - level 7*
- c) the promotion of quality and effectiveness of teaching at the PSP*
- d) the suitability of qualifications and the availability of the teaching staff for the PSP*
- e) the drafting, implementation, and review of specific annual quality goals for the improvement of the PSP*
- f) the level of demand for graduates' qualifications in the labour market*
- g) the quality of support services, such as administrative services, libraries, and student support services for the PSP*
- h) the efficient utilisation of the PSP's financial resources that may be drawn from tuition fees*
- i) the conduct of an annual internal review and audit of the quality assurance system for the PSP in the context of its internal quality assurance system*

Criterion Evaluation Requirements

To be submitted:

- M1.1 The ULE strategy for postgraduate studies, which includes a special strategy for e-learning, if it is applied to the PSP of the University Legal Entity
- M1.2 Feasibility and sustainability studies for the new PSP
- M1.3 Quality Policy of the academic unit for the development and improvement of the PSP
- M1.4 Quality Goalsetting of the academic unit for the PSP (using the S.M.A.R.T. methodology)

Quantitative / Qualitative Indicators

- 1. Compatibility of the new PSP with the ULE's strategy (in terms of education and research)
- 2. Adequacy of the feasibility study
- 3. Adequacy of the sustainability study
- 4. Publication of the quality policy statement and related procedures on the Academic Unit's website
- 5. Comprehensiveness of the PSP's quality policy (connection with the Institution's strategy, quality goals, structures and procedures of quality assurance, participation of stakeholders, monitoring and continuous improvement).
- 6. Adequacy of quality goalsetting, monitoring and responsiveness procedures
- 7. Number of countable targets in the annual goalsetting of the PSP (indicatively 10 targets)

8. Completeness of quality data recorded in the National Information System For Quality Assurance (100% of fields of the Institutions Registry in the initial accreditation)

CRITERION 2. DESIGN AND APPROVAL OF NEW POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES

University Legal Entities should design their Postgraduate Study Programmes following a defined written process which will involve the participants, the information sources and the approving bodies for the PSP. The objectives, the specific subject area, including any study streams or specialisations, the expected learning outcomes and the employment prospects are set out in the programme design. During the implementation of the PSP, the degree of achievement of the learning outcomes should be assessed. The above details, as well as the information on the programme's structure, are published in the Student Guide.

This criterion aligns with ESG 1.2, 1.3.

The academic units develop their postgraduate study programmes following a well-defined procedure.

Specifically, the following should be fulfilled:

- a) *The academic profile and orientation of the programme, the research character, the scientific objectives, the specific subject areas, the specialisations, the expected learning outcomes, the structure, the courses, the teaching and assessment methods, the teaching staff and the necessary resources are described at this stage.*
- b) *The structure, content and organisation of courses and teaching methods should be oriented towards deepening knowledge and acquiring the corresponding skills to apply the said knowledge (e.g. course on research methodology, participation in research projects, thesis with a research component).*
- c) *The expected learning outcomes of the PSP should be determined based on the European and National Qualifications Framework (EQF, NQF), and the Dublin Descriptors for level 7. During the implementation of the programme, the degree of achievement of the expected learning outcomes should be assessed with the appropriate tools and the feedback of the learning process. In particular, for each expected learning outcome that is designed and made public, it is necessary to design and publish the evaluation criteria.*
- d) *The teaching method, along with the student's assessment methods, should be applied with respect to the student-centred learning approach.*
- e) *In addition, the design of the PSP should consider the following: the strategy of the University Legal Entity, the active involvement of students, the experience of external stakeholders from the labour market, the anticipated student workload according to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) for level 7, the option of providing work experience to students, the linking of teaching with research, the relevant regulatory framework and the official procedure for the approval of the PSP by the University Legal Entity.*

Criterion Evaluation Requirements

To be submitted:

M2.1 Decision of the authorised body for the establishment of the PSP

- M2.2 Structure of the PSP curriculum: courses, course categories, ECTS awarded, expected learning outcomes according to the NQF, internship, mobility opportunities
- M2.3 Labour market data regarding the employment of graduates, international experience in a relevant scientific field
- M2.4 PSP Student Guide
- M2.5 Course and thesis outlines
- M2.6 Teaching staff: teaching assignments per subject area and per course

Qualitative / Quantitative Indicators

1. Comprehensiveness, fitness for purpose and documentation of the design and approving procedures of the PSP (with reference to the participants, information sources, stages and authorized approving bodies)
2. Fitness for purpose of the expected learning outcomes for level 7 and the awarded degree.
3. Total ECTS credits of the PSP as per the standard duration of studies
(60 ECTS for an annual PSP, 90 for a 3-semester PSP, 120 for a 4-semester PSP)
4. Student workload per ECTS credit (25–30 hours per ECTS credit)
5. Existence and fitness for purpose of the procedures concerning the degree of achievement of the expected learning outcomes
6. Rate of participation of students and external stakeholders in the PSP design and review

CRITERION 3. REGULATIONS FOR STUDENT ADMISSION, PROGRESSION, RECOGNITION OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES AND DEGREE AWARD

University Legal Entities should develop and apply published regulations covering all aspects and phases of studies (admission, progression, thesis writing, recognition of studies and degree award).

This criterion aligns with ESG 1.4.

Specifically, the following should be fulfilled:

- a) *All issues from the beginning to the end of the studies of the Postgraduate Study Programmes (PSP), should be governed by the internal regulation and the regulation of studies of the University Legal Entity. Indicatively:*
 - *The students' admission, registration procedures and documents required*
 - *The student rights and obligations, and students' progress monitoring*
 - *Internship issues and granting of scholarships*
 - *The procedures and terms for writing the assignments and thesis*
 - *The procedure for the award and recognition of degrees, duration of studies, conditions for progression and for assuring the students' academic progress*
 - *The terms and conditions for enhancing student mobility.*
- b) *In case the PSP is offered through distance learning methods, the University Legal Entity should have in place a regulation for e-learning, including in particular the following issues:*
 - *Services of the University Legal Entity to support e-learning*
 - *Methodology for the development and implementation of courses*
 - *Ways of providing teaching and variety of teaching and assessment methods*
 - *General standards for the course structure*
 - *Student support system*
 - *Support of teaching staff with mandatory (e-learning) training for new staff members*
 - *Technological infrastructures made available by the University Legal Entity*
 - *Student identity confirmation system (student identity check, assignment submission and examination process, security and certification issues)*
 - *The University Legal Entity should establish rules for providing appropriate access and assuring the participation of students affected by disability, illness, and other special circumstances*
 - *Ethical issues, such as those concerning data protection, intellectual property rights and rules for protection against fraud should also be governed by the e-learning regulation.*
- c) *All the above must be made public within the context of the Student Guide.*

Criterion Evaluation Requirements

To be submitted:

- M3.1 Internal regulation for the Operation of the Postgraduate Study Programme
- M3.2 Special regulation for the implementation of e-learning, in case the PSP is delivered using distance learning methods
- M3.3 Code of Ethics in Research
- M3.4 Regulation of studies, internship, student mobility and theses
- M3.5 Students Complaints and Appeals Policy
- M3.6 Regulation for the operation of the academic advisor status
- M3.7 Degree and diploma supplement template

Quantitative / Qualitative Indicators

1. Comprehensiveness of the Internal Regulation for the Operation of Postgraduate Study Programme
2. Comprehensiveness of the special regulation for the implementation of e-learning, in case the PSP is delivered using distance-learning methods
3. Clear, objective, fit-for-purpose and published criteria for student admission
4. Clear and fit-for-purpose framework for scholarship granting
5. Clear and fit-for-purpose framework for part-time attendance, suspension of studies, postgraduate degree award and student deletion.
6. Diploma Supplement in both Greek and English (to 100% of graduates) which should be granted under no fees and without request.
7. Clear and published procedures and criteria regarding the preparation, supervision and assessment of the postgraduate thesis
8. Fit-for-purpose regulations regarding equal access and participation of students affected by disability, illness, and other special circumstances

CRITERION 4. TEACHING STAFF OF NEW POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES

University Legal Entities should assure themselves of the level of knowledge and competence of their teaching staff, and apply fair and transparent processes for their recruitment, training, and further development

This criterion aligns with ESG 1.5

The University Legal Entity should attend to the numerical adequacy and scientific competence of the PSP's teaching staff, the appropriate staff-student ratio, the proper staff categories, the appropriate subject areas, the fair and objective recruitment process, the high research performance, the training, the staff development policy (including participation in mobility schemes, conferences and educational leaves).

More specifically, the academic unit should:

- a) set up and follow clear, transparent, and fair processes for the recruitment of properly qualified staff for the PSP and offer them conditions of employment that recognise the importance of teaching and research*
- b) offer opportunities and promote the professional development of the teaching staff*
- c) encourage scholar activity to strengthen the link between education and research, innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies*
- d) promote the increase of the volume and quality of the research output within the academic unit; follow quality assurance processes for the teaching and other staff (with respect to attendance requirements, performance, self-assessment, training, etc.)*
- e) develop policies to attract highly qualified academic staff*

Criterion Evaluation Requirements

To be submitted:

- M4.1 Procedures and criteria for teaching staff recruitment, policy for attracting highly qualified staff, and PSP Obligation Regulation
- M4.2 List of the intended for recruitment teaching staff including subject areas, employment relationship, academic unit of origin and relevant individual achievements.

Qualitative / Quantitative Indicators

1. Fit-for-purpose procedure for staff selection and development
2. Adequacy of the teaching staff who will cover the subject areas of the PSP and support the student-centred learning approach
3. Quality of research and teaching work of the teaching staff
4. Rate of teaching staff with documented proficiency in the programme's language of instruction (100%)
5. The extent of connection between the research activity of the teaching staff with the educational work of the PSP

CRITERION 5. LEARNING RESOURCES AND STUDENT SUPPORT

University Legal Entities should have adequate funding to cover the teaching and learning needs of the Postgraduate Study Programmes. On the one hand, they should provide adequate facilities and services for learning and student support and, on the other hand, they should facilitate direct access by establishing internal rules (e.g. lecture rooms, laboratories, libraries, networks, career and social policy services etc.).

This criterion aligns with ESG 1.6, 1.8

Specifically, the following should be fulfilled:

- a) *University Legal Entities and their academic units should have sufficient resources and means, on a planned and long-term basis, to support learning and academic activity in general, so as to offer PSP students the best possible level of studies. The above means include facilities such as the necessary general and more specialised libraries, and accessibility of electronic databases, study rooms, educational and scientific equipment, IT and communication services, support and counselling services.*
- b) *When allocating the available resources, the needs of all students should be taken into consideration (e.g., whether they are full-time or part-time students, employed or international students, students with disabilities), in addition to the shift towards student-centered learning and the adoption of flexible modes of learning and teaching. Support activities and facilities may be organised in various ways, depending on the internal Institutional context. However, the internal quality assurance proves -on the one hand- the quantity and quality of the available facilities and services, and -on the other hand- that students are aware of all available services.*
- c) *In delivering support services, the role of support and administration staff is crucial; therefore this staff needs to be qualified and provided with opportunities to develop its competences.*

Criterion Evaluation Requirements

To be submitted:

- M5.1 Detailed description of facilities and services provided by the University Legal Entity to the academic unit regarding the PSP to support learning and academic activity (human resources, facilities, services, etc.) and the firm commitment of the University Legal Entity to financially cover these facilities and services from specific resources
- M5.2 Administrative support staff of the PSP (job descriptions, qualifications, responsibilities)
- M5.3 Information material for students, with reference to the available services
- M5.4 Tuition utilization plan

Quantitative / Qualitative Indicators

- 1. Adequacy of available learning resources and services for the new PSP, considering the use by other USPs or PSPs of the ULE as well, until the Programme is fully operational
- 2. Availability and suitability of a digital educational platform to support the educational process

3. Adequacy and suitability of administrative, technical and supporting staff for all students in the PSP
4. Capacity for required laboratory, clinical or practical activities, where applicable (100% coverage of students required to attend)
5. Access to digital literature and scientific resources relevant to the PSP for 100% of students and teaching staff
6. Accessibility to learning resources, facilities and services by students with disability or/and special education needs, and provision for appropriate adaptations
7. Adequacy and fitness-for-purpose of academic, counselling, social and professional support services for students

CRITERION 6. INITIAL INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL EVALUATION AND MONITORING OF NEW POSTGRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES

University Legal Entities and academic units should have in place an internal quality assurance system, for the audit, internal and external evaluation of the new postgraduate study programmes, thus ensuring compliance with the quality requirements of these Standards. Any actions taken in the above context should be communicated to all parties concerned.

**This criterion aligns with ESG 1.7, 1.9, 1.10
Specifically, the following should be fulfilled:**

The internal evaluation of the new PSP includes the assessment of the accreditation proposal, as well as the documentation in accordance with the requirements of the present Standards and the quality procedures of the internal quality assurance system of the University Legal Entity. The internal evaluation of new postgraduate study programmes also aims at maintaining the level of educational provision and creating a supportive and effective learning environment for students. In the context of its quality assurance system, the University Legal Entity, and the relevant academic units, organize and support the external evaluation procedures of the new PSP, according to the specific guidelines and directions provided by HAHE.

This includes the assessment of:

- a) the objectives, content and structure of the curriculum, the knowledge offered and the state of the art in the given subject area, thus ensuring that the PSP is up to date, according to the relevant documentation listed in the decisions of the authorized bodies*
- b) the students' workload for the progression and completion of postgraduate studies*
- c) the satisfaction of the students' expectations and needs in relation to their study programme*
- d) the learning environment, supporting services, and their fitness for purpose for the PSP concerned*

Criterion Evaluation Requirements

To be submitted:

- M6.1 Procedure for the internal evaluation, potential adaptation and update of the PSP
- M6.2 Feedback mechanism for the quality goalsetting of the new PSP and relevant decision-making procedures (students, external bodies)
- M6.3 Procedure for the organization and preparation of the external evaluation

Qualitative / Quantitative Indicators

- 1. Adequacy of the internal evaluation procedure of the PSP
- 2. Comprehensiveness, clarity and accuracy of the Accreditation Proposal of the PSP
- 3. Adequacy of the feedback mechanism and the stakeholder's participation
- 4. Adequacy of the external evaluation procedure