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Responsible bodies

Agency of Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Quality assurance in higher education in Albania is carried out through the [Agency of Quality Assurance in Higher Education](#) (^[1]AQAHE)^[1] ^[2] and the [Accreditation Board](#) (AB ^[1]).

AQAHE is the one and only institution in the country which oversees and assesses the quality in higher education. It's a central public institution sponsored by state budget and its own revenues. AQAHE is independent in composing and consenting its own procedures, criteria and review forms, in selecting review experts and teams, composing the content and results of academic quality review reports.

AQAHE is guided by internal instructions and the Quality Code of Higher Education, which is being updated with the European quality standards and instructions in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Its goal is a) quality assurance in higher education through external, objective and independent review, b) safeguarding of quality standards, c) promotion and enhancement of quality in HEIs and their study programmes.

AQAHE's main competences include:

- external quality review for the first and recurring accreditation of HEIs and the study programmes they offer;
- supervision, review of academic quality and its compliance with the quality standards of HEIs and study programs offered by them previous to the first accreditation and subsequently;
- initial review in the framework of setting up and/or reshuffle of HEIs and study programmes enquired by the ministry responsible for education;
- initial review and recognition of study programmes offered in Albanian accredited HEIs by foreign HEIs from countries of European Union, United States of America, Canada and Australia;
- regular - once in three years - review of the teaching quality in HEIs and its unceasing examination through the National Students' Survey in line with its instructions;
- review of internal quality systems (auditing) in HEIs in compliance with the standards for quality assurance in the EHEA;
- thematic, analytical and comparative reviews of HEIs and/or study programmes in the context of higher education policies, autonomously or by demand of the ministry responsible for education.

The Accreditation Board

In addition to AQAHE the Accreditation Board (AB) is set up and performs as a collegiate decision-making body and impartial in its activity. The Accreditation Board is made up of eleven members out

of which three between five are foreign citizens. The Chair and all members of AB have at least ten years' experience in academic and research institutions in the country and beyond, along with scientific grade/academic title or at least five years' experience in the field of quality assurance in higher education.

The Accreditation Board is the successor of the Accreditation Council established for the first time according to previous Law 9741 date 21.05.2007 "On Higher Education".

Based on the relevant decision of Council of Ministers the Accreditation Board is composed by 11 members from which a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 11 shall be foreign experts. The head and members of this board shall have an experience of at least 10 years on academic research institutions both national and foreign ones and are selected and appointed to duty by the Prime Minister based on proposal of the Minister responsible for Education [2] [3]

The new Law on higher education and scientific research no 80/2015 provides the AB the power to reach the final decision on the accreditation of HEIs and the programs they offer, contrarily to the law of 2007 which stipulated the final decision power to the minister of education [3] [4]

The duties and responsibilities of the Accreditation Board as stipulated in the relevant Decision of Council of Ministers are:[4] [5]

- Examination of final external review reports towards first and cyclic accreditation, institutional accreditation and study programmes accreditation, and takes the definitive (positive or negative) decision for their accreditation. Duration and terms of accreditation validity are subject to the level of compliance with the quality standards and could not be longer than six years. Official accreditation certificate is issued within one month after final decision has been taken.
- Scrutiny of preliminary review reports when opening and/or reshuffling of HEIs and their study programmes, and suggests to the minister responsible for education final positive or negative decisions to this regard.
- In case of joint study programmes being offered jointly by Albanian and foreign HEIs, or offered by branches of foreign HEIs performing their activities in the Republic of Albania, the AB when deciding on their accreditation, considers the foreign accreditation in its origin country.
- The AB decisions are governed by the Code of Administrative Procedures in the Republic of Albania. AB decision is final and to be respected. The decisions of AB may be appealed by the affected party in accordance with the deadlines provided for in the legislation in force.
- Approval of the specific selection criteria for national and international review experts, as well as consent of those experts' annual listing to be engaged in particular and short-term teams according to their academic fields based on AQAHE and ENQA's/EQAR's listings.
- Assessment of instructions about internal and external quality processes, compiled and proposed by AQAHE in addition to AQAHE's internal performing guideline.
- Acknowledgement of National Students' Survey (NSS) approach and tools about the teaching quality submitted by AQAHE besides the analysis of NSS final statements ahead of their publication.
- Consent of accreditation certificate model and form prepared by AQAHE, etc.
- Upon HEI's request, the AB indorses the external quality review by a foreign agency, member of ENQA (Article 15/3 Law 80/2015)
- AQAHE and AB are financed by the state budget and the revenue resulting from AQAHE's doings: review fees, trainings income, earnings from services offered, as well as any other legal sources. External quality review fees to be paid by HEIs are settled on by decision of Council of Ministers. AQAHE may utilise up to 90% of its earnings and the income using scheme is endorsed by the Ministry of Finance.

- AQAHE works together with all stakeholders of the European area of quality assurance, particularly with QAA (Quality Assurance Agency) and CHE (Centre for Higher Education), it is associated member of ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education), full rights member of CEENQA (Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education) and of INQAHE (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education).

Approaches and methods for quality assurance

Since 2013 Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth (MoESY) undertook a profound institutional reform in the higher education and scientific research of the Republic of Albania beginning with a scrutinizing process of lawfulness control. In December 2014, MoES signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Quality Assurance Agency of the United Kingdom (QAA-UK) aiming at quality review and quality certification of all HEIs operating nationwide, as well as capacity building of HEIs themselves and national institutions which review and assure quality in the higher education. Since then AQAHE and QAA-UK started a successful cooperation and in February 2016 MoES and QAA-UK signed an Overall Project Contract for the provision of quality assurance expertise to support the external review of 35 HEIs in Albania.

As a first step, AQAHE has compiled the succeeding approach with the backing of QAA-UK taking into consideration the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The external institutional review of HEIs is being carried out during 2016-2017 in order to determine to what extent the Albanian HEIs meet the State Quality Standards, entered into force in 2011, upon which subsequently the accreditation decree will be based. The external institutional review is an evaluation process by exterior experts, selected and nominated by both AQAHE and QAA-UK. Final review reports will serve up not only for the institutional accreditation of HEIs, but also to enlighten the entire community, Albanian students, the Albanian Government how exactly HEIs satisfy the state standards. This review aims as well to embolden HEIs to perform better for the constantly increasing quality of academic offer and enhancing students' teaching and studying conditions.

The Quality State Standards are classified into five review areas:

- HEI's Organization and management
- Resources
- Curricula
- Teaching, learning, assessment and research
- Students and their assistance

The institutional review is a multi-steps course of action comprising self-evaluation, preliminary evaluation based on documentation, review visit and preparation of evaluation report.

The process starts with the HEI's self-evaluation by preparing the self-evaluation set of documents delivered to AQAHE. AQAHE brings together HEI's self-evaluation documents with additional information to set up the self-evaluation dossier. Additional information embraces evidences gathered

from AQAHE's data base and HEI's staff and students' questionnaires, which are managed, stored and elaborated by AQAHE. Review experts may ask for further information during the visit on site in case it is deemed necessary for the review process.

After that, a group of external reviewers of AQAHE and QAA start off the evaluation process by scrutinizing the papers of self-evaluation dossier.

The third step is the visit at the HEI during which experts come together with HEI's staff, students and other HEI's representatives. The visit intention is check-up and confirmation of data, facts and information in diverse areas which have been spotted by the experts during the second phase (experts scrutinize the papers of self-evaluation dossier). This visit enables the experts to get to the evaluation findings and respective conclusions, each for every review area, as well as to the overall conclusion about the fulfilment extent of state standards by the HEI. The conclusions along with the reasoning behind them are particularised in the review report.

Following the onsite visit, the experts assess the accrued information and conclude their findings combined with reasoning for each review area. Subsequently, the review team of experts compile the draft review report. The conclusion for each review field is based on a four scale scheme and is articulated in one of the following ways: i. Standards of [name of field] are fully met, ii. Standards of [name of field] are mostly met, iii. Standards of [name of field] are partly met, iv. Standards of [name of field] are not met. Based on the findings and conclusions for every single review area, the review experts' team brings about an overall estimation for the institutional review, which is stated in one of the subsequent manners: i. Quality state standards are fully met, ii. Quality state standards are mostly met, iii. Quality state standards are partly met, iv. Quality state standards are not met.

Activities of other agencies

External quality assessment can be also performed by other assessment agencies, which are members with full rights of the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) or the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAR). External evaluation conducted by these agencies is done in order to accreditate, rate or rank the study program/s or institutions of higher education. The external evaluation conducted by these agencies is done in accordance with standards and procedures adopted by the MES. External evaluation can also be carried out in cooperation with a foreign agency, part of the ENQA or EQAR's Room, and the Public Accreditation Agency for Higher Education. An accreditation agency, a member of ENQA or EQAR's, during the external quality assessment can also use local evaluation experts from the approved list of experts, according to their areas of expertise. The evaluation reports of these agencies are made public on the official website of the Public Accreditation Agency for Higher Education. Upon the institution's request, or the Ministry of Education and Sport, or Public Accreditation Agency for Higher Education, other agencies could perform the instruction, training and supervision of assessment activities of the internal quality insurance units in a higher education institution. The activity of these agencies in the Republic of Albania may be temporary or permanent. When they exert a permanent activity, they must acquire legal personality according to the Albanian law, for commercial companies or nonprofit organizations.

[1] [6] Decisiono of Council of Ministers No. 109, date 15.02.2013 @For the organization and functioning of the Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and the Accrediation Borad and the drafting of the quality assurance process in higher education@ Vendim I Kwshillit tw MInistrave Nr.109, datw 15.02.2013 @Për organizimin dhe funksionimin e Agjencisë së Sigurimit të Cilësisë në Arsimin e Lartë e të Bordit të Akreditimit dhe për përcaktimin e tarifave për proceset e sigurimit të

cilësisë në Arsimin e Lartë@

[2] [7] Decsiono of Council of Ministers No. 109, date 15.02.2013 @For the organization and functioning of the Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and the Accrediation Borad and the drafting of the quality assurance process in higher education@ Vendim I Kwshillit tw MInistrave Nr.109, datw 15.02.2013 @Për organizimin dhe funksionimin e Agjencisë së Sigurimit të Cilësisë në Arsimin e Lartë e të Bordit të Akreditimit dhe për përcaktimin e tarifave për proceset e sigurimit të cilësisë në Arsimin e Lartë@

[3] [8] Article 15 of Law 800/2015).

[4] [9] Decsiono of Council of Ministers No. 109, date 15.02.2013 @For the organization and functioning of the Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and the Accrediation Borad and the drafting of the quality assurance process in higher education@ Vendim I Kwshillit tw MInistrave Nr.109, datw 15.02.2013 @Për organizimin dhe funksionimin e Agjencisë së Sigurimit të Cilësisë në Arsimin e Lartë e të Bordit të Akreditimit dhe për përcaktimin e tarifave për proceset e sigurimit të cilësisë në Arsimin e Lartë@

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[3] https://C:/Users/Egest.Gjokuta/Desktop/Eurydice%202017/Euridyce_Final_dhjetor%202016_2017_me%20te%20gjithe%20ndryshimet%20e%20integruara%20date%2031%20dhjetor%20etj..docx#_ftn2

[4] https://C:/Users/Egest.Gjokuta/Desktop/Eurydice%202017/Euridyce_Final_dhjetor%202016_2017_me%20te%20gjithe%20ndryshimet%20e%20integruara%20date%2031%20dhjetor%20etj..docx#_ftn3

[5] https://C:/Users/Egest.Gjokuta/Desktop/Eurydice%202017/Euridyce_Final_dhjetor%202016_2017_me%20te%20gjithe%20ndryshimet%20e%20integruara%20date%2031%20dhjetor%20etj..docx#_ftn4

[6] https://C:/Users/Egest.Gjokuta/Desktop/Eurydice%202017/Euridyce_Final_dhjetor%202016_2017_me%20te%20gjithe%20ndryshimet%20e%20integruara%20date%2031%20dhjetor%20etj..docx#_ftnref1

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