

Board for Accreditation and Evaluation of the Higher
Education in the Republic of Macedonia



The Macedonian Quality Assurance System at Crossroads

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ENQA Criterion 1– Activities (ESG 3.1, 3.3)

- “Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.
- The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.”

Present situation

- Presently, HEAB performs only activities of accreditation of study programmes/ faculties/ HE institutions.
- At the moment the accreditation procedure includes:
 - examination of the project proposal for a new programme in view of accreditation; only on paper, no site visit;
 - procedures: report, annexes to support; the accreditation procedures are finalized by Decision of the Board members, and then sent to the Ministry of Education and Science.

Present situation (2)

- The **time interval for accreditation** is very short: 60 days – the opinion was expressed that it does not allow for detailed scrutiny of the documents for so many programmes.
- The **increasing number of submissions** of new programmes is also highly correlated with the low price of the public service (325 EUR per study programme and nearly 1,000 EUR per institutional accreditation)

Present situation (3)

- Frequent changes in the Law on Higher Education regarding modification of structure of study programs (40% elective courses) has led to the process of “re-accreditation”.
- Many complaints about the ignorance of subject-specific character of some study programmes and programmes relating to regulated professions (medicine, law, architecture).

Possible remedies

- The site visit should be performed by HEAEB and should become a current practice for all accreditation/evaluation procedures.
- To this end the groups of standing experts (and “expert committees”) should be nominated as soon as possible.
- Additional experts for different specialisations should be trained

Possible remedies (2)

- Extend the time for accreditation of new programs to **at least 90 days** to allow for site visits.
- The Ministry of Education and Science must scrutinize the lawfulness of the decisions made by the HEAB.
- It would be beneficial to reconsider the legal provision for 40% elective courses for all study fields to make it more flexible and subject specific.

ENQA Criterion 2 – Official status (ESG 3.2)

- “Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis.
- They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.”

Present situation

- HEAEB was established by the Law of Higher Education, which was modified in 2010 and 2011 on several occasions.

ENQA Criterion 3 – Resources

(ESG 3.4)

- “Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance processes) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes, procedures and staff.”

Present situation

- **Lack of adequate administrative support** for the up-coming activities: HEAEB has only 4 permanent staff hired and paid by the MoES.
- HEAEB operates under the constraints of **disorganized archives** and **lack of statistical data** for the quality assurance process.
- **Lack of financial resources** for up-coming activities.
- The Board does not have sufficient financial independence.
- The Board members are occasionally paid with an uncertain timing – usually four times per annum.

Present situation

- The money does not come directly to the agency, sometimes it comes with a delay which might lead to postponement of activities.

Possible remedies

- Provide **adequate administrative support** (the number of staff must be determined taking into account requests from the agency, according to the tasks it shall perform).
- There is an urgent need to revisit the structure of the Board in the sense of creating **standing thematic committees**.
- Address urgently the lack of financial resources. The amount of fees should be revisited.

ENQA Criterion 4 – Mission statement (ESG 3.5)

- “Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.”

Present situation and possible remedy

- The website of HEAEB is still under construction, despite many initiatives by the enthusiastic Board members.
- Finalise the website of HEAEB.
- Define the Mission statement clearly and explicitly and publish it on the website.

ENQA Criterion 5 – Independence (ESG 3.6)

- “Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.”

Present situation

- There is no visible interference or pressure on the agency in terms of taking independent decisions. Independence in the work of the agency is specified in the Law.
- The agency is organized within the Ministry and funded through the ministry; 7 (TBC) members are nominated by the MoES.
- Student participation is limited to participation in the Council. Students are not involved in evaluations. There was no reference to other stakeholders participation up to now.

Possible remedies

- Foreign consultants stress that the involvement of the ministry in nominations of Board members is quite significant and could be subject to different interpretations.
- Selection/Nomination of the Board members should become the prerogative of HEAEB, according to criteria as competence, experience in quality assurance etc., stated in the law.
- The specialists acting as evaluators in the committees or co-opted must be selected by HEAB (develop a “HEAEB evaluators register”).

ENQA Criterion 6i – External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the members (ESG 3.7)

- “The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available.”

Present situation

- Rulebook on the mandatory components of first, second and third studies cycle study programs.
- Rulebook on the organization, operation, manner of decision making, accreditation and evaluation procedure, accreditation and evaluation criteria and standards, including other issues related to the work of the Board for accreditation and evaluation of the higher education

Possible remedies

- Rulebooks and other procedures should be published in Macedonian language in paper form, posted on the website of HEAEB.
- The English translation should also become available.

ENQA Criterion 6ii –External quality assurance criteria and processes (ESG 3.7)

- “These processes will normally be expected to include:
- a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;
- an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency;
- publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;
- a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.”

Present situation

- Self assessment required by the law, for both accreditation and evaluation.
- In practice, insufficient attention is paid to the careful examination of the self assessment activities.

Possible remedies

- In order to deepen the content of quality assurance HEAEB should develop and approve additional subject-wise criteria. The criteria should be developed by experts of HEAEB with participation of universities.
- HEAEB should include in Rulebook 2 follow-up review procedures

ENQA Criterion 7 – Accountability procedures (ESG 3.8)

- “Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.”

Present situation

- There is no evidence of the existence of procedures for the own accountability of the agency.
- Due to the increasing number of the study programmes reviewed, for the sake of efficiency, the Board members cannot exhibit control on the accreditation process, as the reports are only summarized by the expert commission on the day of the Board meeting.
- There is a very high risk of irregularities in the accreditation process, as the HEAEB operates under the *bona fide* assumption.

Present situation and possible remedies

- Transparency must be increased: no web site at the moment; the decisions/ reports are not available on the site (it means they are not public!).
- There is no reference in the Law or in the Rulebooks to this procedure.
- There is no existence of an internal quality assurance procedure of the Agency.

A Summary

of the ***Action Plan for Improving the Quality of the Higher Education*** by the
Ministry of Education and Science
(Adopted in October 2012)

Planning and control

- Introduction of databases/registries of relevant statistical information
 - Registry of Accredited Study Programmes per subject.
 - Registry of Accredited Doctoral Supervisors.
 - Number of students per programme.

Quality assurance

- Re-examination of the duration of the university study programmes
 - E.g., Presently the law studies take three years (3+2+3 model), which is not in accordance with the best European practices.
 - Some Law faculties offer *à la carte* education (3+2 or 4+1)!!!
- Re-examination of student quotas per study programme at the state universities, because the present quota allocation appears to be decoupled from the labour market demand.

Quality assurance

- Introduce a more detailed methodology for evaluation of the study programmes.
- Prepare list of foreign experts available for the evaluation activities.
- Prepare list of domestic experts available for the evaluation activities
- Organize trainings for the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

Quality Assurance

- Examine the possibly overlapping competencies of the State Inspectorate for Education and the Board for Accreditation and Evaluation of the Higher Education.
- Strengthen the capacity of the State Inspectorate for Education.
- Significantly enhance the administrative support to the Board for Accreditation and Evaluation of the Higher Education

Forthcoming Changes in the Legal Framework

- New Law on Higher Education
- New Law on Quality of Higher Education
- New Law on academic and professional titles and degrees
- New Rulebook for criteria for academic career advancement
- New Rulebook for categorization and classification of the scientific articles
- New Rulebook for accreditation of the study programmes at the first-, second- and third-cycle