

Pursuant to Article 22 and Article 44, Paragraph 2 of the Statute of the Agency for Science and Higher Education and pursuant to Article 4, Articles 19-24 and Article 26 of the Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education (Official Gazette 45/09), and pursuant to Article 30 of the to Article 30, on 14 September 2020, the Acting Director of the Agency for Science and Higher Education, Prof. Jasmina Havranek, Ph.D., adopted the following

## **DECISION ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EXTERNAL EVALUATION PROCEDURES DURING COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) PANDEMIC**

### **I**

This Decision regulates the manner of conducting external evaluation procedures during COVID-19 pandemic, caused by SARS-CoV-2 virus (promulgated by the Decision of the Minister of Health, CLASS: 011-02 / 20-01 / 143, FILE NUMBER: 534-02-01- 2 / 6-20-01, of 11 March 2020), permitted exceptions in the implementation of external evaluation procedures, and additional obligations of higher education institution and / or scientific organisation with regard to the implementation of external evaluation procedure during COVID-19 pandemic caused by SARS- CoV-2.

### **II**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, caused by SARS-CoV-2 virus, the Agency for Science and Higher Education (hereinafter: the Agency) shall regularly conduct external evaluation procedures in the (traditional) manner prescribed by the general act of the Agency, as long the epidemiological circumstances allow it.

The Agency shall individually assess each subject and procedure of external evaluation and decide on whether the conditions for regular i.e. traditional implementation of external evaluation procedure are met.

The decision on whether the conditions for regular implementation of the external evaluation procedure are met in each individual case shall be issued by the Agency's Accreditation Council.

When conducting external evaluation procedures, the Agency will adhere to all anti-epidemic measures of the Civil Protection Headquarters of the Republic of Croatia, and the recommendations of the Croatian Institute of Public Health.

### **III**

If the Accreditation Council decides that the conditions for regular (i.e. traditional) implementation of the external evaluation procedure are not met, a mixed (hybrid) model of implementation of external evaluation procedure shall be applied.

For the purpose of this Decision, a mixed (hybrid) model of conducting external evaluation procedures entails that one part of the external evaluation procedure is carried out via video link (online), while the remaining part of the procedure is carried out in the traditional way, in accordance with the general act of the Agency that regulates individual external evaluation procedures.

The part of the procedure that shall be conducted via video link (online), as referred to in Para. 2 of this Article of the Decision, refers to the training and site visit of the expert panel to the higher education institution and / or scientific organisation.

A mixed (hybrid) model of conducting external evaluation procedures during the pandemic is considered to be a procedure fully implemented in the manner prescribed by the general act of the Agency.

#### **IV**

In case the mixed (hybrid) model referred to in Article III of this Decision is applied, the training of the expert panel members shall be fully conducted via video link (online).

#### **V**

In case the mixed (hybrid) model referred to in Article III of this Decision is applied, a site visit of the expert panel to a higher education institution and / or scientific organisation shall include:

- the preliminary site visit that shall be carried out in a traditional way (lasting 1 to 2 days, to be determined by the Agency depending on the size of the subject of evaluation),
- the main visit that shall be carried out via video link (lasting 1 to 3 days, to be determined by the Agency depending on the external evaluation procedure).

#### **VI**

National members of the expert panel are obliged to personally participate in a preliminary site visit to a higher education institution and/or a scientific organisation, as long as the epidemiological circumstances allow this.

International members of the expert panel may participate in the preliminary visit, if the epidemiological circumstances allow it and if they agree to personally participate in a preliminary site visit, of which they will notify the Agency in writing, by e-mail.

In addition to the expert panel members, the Agency coordinator shall also take part in the preliminary site visit to a higher education institution and/or a scientific organisation.

The preliminary site visit to a higher education institution shall be carried out in accordance with a pre-defined protocol, which shall include a meeting with the management of the higher education institution, a tour of the institution and observation of the teaching process, and a review of evidence and documents prepared by the higher education institution in physical and digital format.

#### **VII**

The main visit to a higher education institution and / or scientific organisation shall be carried out fully online, with the participation of all members of the expert panel and Agency coordinator at the same time.

The main visit shall be carried out in accordance with a pre-defined protocol. The protocol of the site visit shall include meetings with all internal and external stakeholders, as in the traditional site visit.

The main visit shall be carried out by using a system / platform determined by the Agency. All necessary documentation and evidence shall be available to the expert panel members via One Drive document sharing tool.

## VIII

In case the mixed (hybrid) model referred to in Article III of this Decision is applied, the Agency undertakes to send to the higher education institution and / or scientific organisation all necessary instructions for preparation for a mixed (hybrid) model of external evaluation.

The Agency shall take all necessary measures to check all necessary accreditation conditions in this mixed model of evaluation, as well and to ensure the reliability and relevance of the results and outcomes of external evaluation procedures conducted in this way.

## IX

In case the mixed (hybrid) model referred to in Article III of this Decision is applied, and in order to ensure the implementation of the external evaluation procedure, the higher education institution and / or the scientific organisation shall undertake to:

- record and submit to the Agency additional video material proving the fulfilment of the conditions of appropriate space and equipment, in order for the Agency to submit it to international members of the expert panel. - the video material shall show all the facilities and equipment referred to in the report submitted by the higher education institution and / or scientific organisation. The video shall be in a format suitable for digital distribution (mp4, avi, mpeg, mov, wmv, etc)
- ensure appropriate space for the preliminary site visit of the present expert panel members, while complying with all epidemiological measures.
- provide appropriate equipment when holding meetings, in order for the expert panel members who are not physically present to participate in the meeting via video link (online).
- if necessary, ensure that the stakeholders who cannot physically attend the meeting with the expert panel, join and participate via video link (online).
- at the request of the Agency, submit additional materials via a document sharing tool determined by the Agency, i.e. the additional supporting evidence that would otherwise be available to the expert panel members upon their request during the regular site visit, in order to make them available to the expert panel members who participate in the meetings via video link (online).
- ensure that the external evaluation procedure at a higher education institution and / or scientific organisation is carried out in compliance with all the anti-epidemic measures of the Croatian Civil Protection Headquarters and the recommendations of the Croatian Institute of Public Health, which, among others, entail the cleaning and disinfection of rooms in which the

expert panel works, and providing rooms of adequate size so as to ensure a proper physical distance between the participants.

- ensure that meetings with members of the expert panel held via video link (online) are attended by the stakeholders whose presence is required in the meeting.

## **X**

In case of particularly difficult circumstances, and if the epidemiological situation so requires, the entire visit to a higher education institution and / or scientific organisation may be conducted via video link (online).

## **XI**

The decision referred to in Article X or Article XI of this Decision, shall be left to the discretion of the Accreditation Council.

In case none of the described methods of conducting external evaluation procedure can be applied, the external evaluation procedure shall be postponed, which will be decided by the Accreditation Council.

## **XII**

In the event that an individual member of the expert panel who is scheduled to participate in an on-site visit suddenly develops a fever or any of the symptoms associated with COVID-19, he/she shall notify the Agency of it and the Agency shall immediately exclude that panel member from the site visit, and act in accordance with the instructions of the Croatian Civil Protection Headquarters and the Croatian Institute of Public Health.

In the event referred to in Para. 1 of this Article and for as long as possible, the visit shall be carried out without the excluded member of the expert panel.

## **XIII**

The Agency will conduct and adjust all its activities in accordance with the recommendations and decisions of the Civil Protection Headquarters of the Republic of Croatia, the Croatian Institute of Public Health and other competent bodies.

## **XIV**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, caused by SARS-CoV-2 virus, the Accreditation Council may decide on the application of other measures deemed appropriate for each individual case, in order to enable the implementation of the external evaluation procedure.

## **XV**

Until the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in cases when an exception is required to the traditional way of conducting external evaluation procedures, as prescribed by the general act,

a higher education institution and / or scientific organisation may not in any circumstance claim that the external evaluation procedure has not been conducted in accordance with the general act regulating individual external evaluation procedure.

## **XVI**

This Decision shall enter into force on the date of its adoption by the Accreditation Council, and shall apply until revoked.

This Decision shall be published on the Agency's website, and communicated to all higher education institutions and / or scientific organisations.

Acting Director of the Agency

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Prof. Jasmina Havranek, Ph.D.

Zagreb, 14 September 2020

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FILE No.: 355-01-20-0045

The Accreditation Council adopted this Decision at its 119th session held on 15 September 2020.