

Class: 003-08/11-02/0007**Register number: 355-01-12-12****September 25th 2012**

Based on Conclusion of the Accreditation Council to amend the document Procedure for re-accreditation of higher education institutions at its 31th session held on September 24th 2012, regarding the Article 22 of the Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education („Official Gazette“, 45/09), Article 17 of the Ordinance on the content of license and conditions for issuing license for carrying out activities of higher education, carrying out study programmes and re-accreditation of higher education institutions („Official Gazette“, 24/2010), Article 7 of the Ordinance on the Content of a Licence and Conditions for Issuing a Licence for Performing Scientific Activity and Re-Accreditation of Scientific Institutions („Official Gazette“ 83/10) and on the basis of the Article 44, section 2 of the Agency for Science and Higher Education Statute, the Agency director issued

PROCEDURE FOR RE-ACCREDITATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

- revised text -

1. INTRODUCTION

Re-accreditation of higher education institutions (universities, higher education institutions within universities, polytechnics and colleges) is carried out by the Agency for Science and Higher Education (hereinafter: Agency) on the basis of Article 22 of the Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education (OG, 45/09 ; hereinafter Act) and Ordinance on the content of license and conditions for issuing license for carrying out activities of higher education, carrying out study programmes and re-accreditation of higher education institutions (OG 10/2010; hereinafter Ordinance), in line with the

European standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG) and good European and international practice.

2. DOCUMENTS FOR RE-ACCREDITATION

Documents used in the re-accreditation procedure are the following:

- a) Ordinance on the Content of a Licence and Conditions for Issuing a Licence for Performing Higher Education Activity, Carrying out a Study Programme and Re-Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions (OG 10/2010);
- b) Ordinance on the Content of a Licence and Conditions for Issuing a Licence for Performing Scientific Activity Re-Accreditation of Scientific Institutions (OG 83/10);
- c) Instructions for self-evaluation of higher education institutions within universities, Instructions for self-evaluation of polytechnics and colleges. Criteria for re-accreditation of higher education institutions within universities and Criteria for re-accreditation of polytechnics and colleges.

The documents mentioned are published at the Agency website (www.azvo.hr).

3. RE-ACCREDITATION PROCEDURE

3.1. Adopting plan of re-accreditation

In general by 30th June the Agency shall create plan of re-accreditation for the next academic year, publish it on its official website and inform all involved higher education institutions about it. A HE institution may request the deferral of evaluation for the next academic year within 15 days, provided it has valid reasons. The Accreditation Council shall make the final decision.

Outside the annual plan, the re-accreditation of HE institution may be requested by the minister responsible for higher education or a HE institution itself.

3.2. Appointment of the expert panel

Based on public call for experts published on the Agency website, the re-accreditation procedure is carried out by the expert panel headed by the chair and appointed by the Accreditation Council. The panel consists of 5 members (including chair), but may exceptionally consist of more members if a HE institution carries out study programmes in two or more scientific fields. One or more substitute members are also appointed for the case of unforeseen circumstances.

Composition of the expert panel:

- 4 university professors or scientists appointed into scientific-teaching grade, or artistic-teaching grade (assistant professor, associate professor and full professor) and/or scientists from institutes (in case of re-accreditation of a university or a HE institution within university), or at least 2 college professors (in case of re-accreditation of a polytechnic or a college) from the scientific field covered by the study programmes at the HE institution to be evaluated. Senior lecturers with a PhD or MSc title are also eligible.

At least one, and in general two of the above mentioned university professors and/or scientists from institutes or college professors must be employed at a foreign higher education institution or scientific institute. Instead of one university professor or college professor, there may be appointed one prominent expert from the industry or field closely related to the study programmes of the HE institution to be evaluated.

- 1 student from a scientific field covered by the study programmes at the HE institution to be evaluated.

Criteria for selection of expert panel members

Members of the expert panel must have appropriate competences in the field covered by the activities of HE institution to be evaluated and be recognised for teaching excellence at their own HE institution or research excellence with international reputation.

Chair of the panel must be versed in the system of quality assurance in higher education and have experience in carrying out QA procedures as well as appropriate experience at the management positions in a HE institution. Student member must be recognised for his/her study excellence (high grade average), continuity of full-time studying and have basic knowledge in the field of QA in higher education, with preferable involvement in student organisations.

Members of the expert panel must have a good knowledge of English, good oral and written communication and teamwork skills and must respect all agreed protocols, procedures and deadlines.

Members of the expert panel are independent in the course of their work and do not represent their own institutions. During re-accreditation they will be led by principles of non-bias and objectivity. Members of the expert panel may not be in the conflict of interest nor have direct relations with HE institution which is evaluated (members of the expert panel and their relatives up to the 2nd degree may not be employed full-time or part time at a HE institution which is evaluated, carry out teaching duties or cooperate with it in the status of part-time employee for the last 12 months, they may not be involved in the projects carried out by that institution nor have personal ties with its management).

Direct communication between HEI and members of the expert panel outside of site visit is forbidden, and reviewers have to inform agency coordinator about such incidents.

Members of the expert panel must guarantee confidentiality of information received during the re-accreditation procedure. For that purpose, members of the panel will sign the confidentiality and non-conflict of interest statement.

Objections of the higher education institution to the composition of the expert panel

Agency will deliver decision on the appointment of the expert panel to the higher education institution to be evaluated. The HE institution may give its opinion on the composition of the expert panel and object within 7* days from the receipt of the notification.

If a HE institution objects to the composition of the expert panel, and the Accreditation Council finds the objection valid, the council will appoint other members of the expert panel within 30 days.

An objection to the members of the expert panel doesn't change the deadline for delivery of self-evaluation and other material.

3.3. Delivery of self-evaluation

90* days after receiving notification on re-accreditation, a higher education institution shall make self-evaluation in line with Instructions for self-evaluation of HE institution, Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education and Ordinance on the content of license and conditions for issuing license for carrying out activities of higher education, carrying out study programmes and re-accreditation of higher education institutions.

A HE institution shall place on its notice board and its homepage information about re-accreditation as well as instructions, delivered by the Agency, which will explain the procedure for confidential communication about the issues concerning HE institution to be evaluated. Access to the information is given only to the re-accreditation coordinator, and members of the panel who signed confidentiality agreement shall get them on a need-to-see basis.

Self-evaluation must be adopted by the authorized body of the HE institution.

Self-evaluation, signed by the head of the institution, is delivered in paper and electronic form (CD) in Croatian and English to the Agency which shall check completeness of the documentation and ask for its changes and/or additions if necessary.

HE institution shall enter the information about quantitative criteria, required by the above mentioned regulations, into the information system used by the Agency in order to calculate whether a HE institution complies with the minimum criteria stated in the Ordinance.

The Agency shall forward the self-evaluation to all members of the expert panel. They are obliged to study self-evaluation and prepare comments about advantages and disadvantages of the HE institution to be evaluated, as well as possible unanswered issues that should be discussed during the site visit. If an institution was previously involved in thematic evaluation or another type of evaluation, the Agency shall deliver the report to the expert panel. After delivery of the self-evaluation, Agency will define details, including the visit schedule, with the HE institution and members of the expert panel.

3.4. Training

Before the site-visit, all members of the panel have to undergo training where they are informed on tasks, procedure and purpose of the initial accreditation of study programmes.

At least 3 days before arriving to the training, the panel members are obliged to submit their preliminary report in which they will briefly comment on each criterion in line with the available evidence (the self-evaluation and other documents submitted by the HE institution) and list the evidence which they find is missing to come to an objective opinion. The coordinator collects the submitted preliminary reports for panel to discuss before the site visit.

The day before the visit to the HE institution, the expert panel shall meet in the room selected by the Agency. Its employees will provide additional information to the members of the expert panel about their tasks and explain basic Croatian and European documents relevant for carrying out procedures for assuring quality in science and higher education. Main lines of inquiry during the site visit are also defined.

3.5. Site visit

Visit of the expert panel to the HE institution may last 1-3 days, exceptionally longer which is defined by the Agency in agreement with the members of the expert panel and HE institution. The visit is carried out according to the schedule that was delivered to HE institution and members of the expert panel at least 7 days prior to the site visit.

Apart from the members of the panel, the site visit is also carried out by the Agency coordinator and, if necessary, one representative of the Agency with the role of translator (only in exceptional cases may the role of translator be assigned to persons who are not Agency employees). In accordance with the Agency decision, impartial observers may also be involved in the visit.

Obligatory part of the visit schedule are meetings with the management of HE institution, representatives of teaching and non-teaching staff, students as well as tour of facilities (lecture rooms, libraries, laboratories, student office, IT classrooms, external facilities).

During the meetings members of the expert panel shall make notes about their observations. HE institution shall provide documents regulating its activities (for example, regulations, decisions and agreements). The site visit ends with the meeting with the

management where president of the panel or another member designated by the president shall inform the participants of the meeting about the observations. There is no allocated time for discussion about observations. It is prohibited to give gifts to members of the expert panel before, during and after the visit.

3.6. Report

During the last day of the visit all members of the panel participate in writing report, with the president of the expert panel delivering the final report to the Agency within 30 days from the end of the visit, in accordance with the Instructions for Final Report. If the same panel visited two or more HE institutions, the deadline for the submittal of the reports can be set to 60 days. The report contains the grade for quality of the higher education institution that is evaluated, and which is based on the material filled in by higher education institution and on the information gained during the visit. Quality grade is given by each member of the expert panel on a separate template, which serve to calculate the average grade. At the end, the panel adopts a common grade for each standard.

The expert panel may recommend to the Accreditation Council to launch a procedure of checking compliance with minimum requirements stated in the ordinances for specific study programmes. It is possible to make the final quality grade after this check.

Recommendations for improvement should be included in the report. Re-accreditation coordinator (Agency employee) will also submit to the Accreditation Council the report on compliance with quantitative criteria generated from the IT system.

Prior to reaching conclusion, the Agency will send the final report of the expert panel to the evaluated HE institution which has 15 days* to reply and state comments and necessary explanations related to possible formal or factual errors.

The Agency shall deliver the final report of the expert panel and optional reply of the HE institution to the Accreditation Council.

3.7. Opinion of the Accreditation Council

On the basis of completed re-accreditation procedure and final report of the expert panel, reply of the HE institution as well as report on compliance with quantitative criteria, the Accreditation Council will pass independent opinion about:

- Issuing confirmation on compliance with conditions for continued activity of higher education or part of activity; if HE institutions also perform scientific activity, this will be noted in the confirmation
- Denial of license for higher education or part of activity and/or scientific activity or part of activity;
- Issuing a letter of expectation with the deadline for resolving deficiencies up to 3 years.

If the Accreditation Council passes opinion that a HEI should be issued recommendation or a letter of expectation, the Accreditation Council will set a follow-up period, stating the deadline for institution to implement recommendations contained in the report. This deadline can be set at up to three years, depending on the identified deficiencies. The issued letter of expectation may include a prohibition of admitting additional students in the period set by the letter.

If part of the letter of expectation is also decision to check compliance with minimum criteria from the Ordinance related to one or more specific study programmes, the Accreditation Council shall inform the institution and appoint a new expert panel. If this check results in the recommendation by the Accreditation Council to deny a license for a study programme, all programmes of that institution will be subject to a check of minimum criteria.

3.8. Appeal

If the Accreditation Council decides to pass opinion on denial of license, it shall inform the HE institution which has the right to appeal or object to the Agency recommendation within 15 days* from the date when the Agency recommendation was delivered. After appeal is received, appeal committee of the Accreditation Council shall make decision within 1 month* on the basis of all documentation from the re-accreditation procedure.

Members of the appeal committee are composed of the three members of the Accreditation Council, elected by the Accreditation Council.

The Accreditation Council discusses the decision of the Appeals Committee, reaches a new opinion and forwards it to the Agency.

3.9. Accreditation recommendation of the Agency

Following re-accreditation procedure and with the previous opinion of the Accreditation Council, the Agency shall make accreditation recommendation recommending to the minister responsible for higher education and science to:

- Issue confirmation on compliance with conditions for continued scientific activity and higher education or part of activity; in case of HEIs carrying out scientific activity, it will be noted in the confirmation
- Deny license for scientific activity and/or higher education or part of activity;
- Issue a letter of expectation with the deadline for resolving deficiencies up to 3 years.

Accreditation recommendation sent to the minister also contains quality grade of HE institution with recommendations for quality improvement. Final quality grade of the re-accreditation is public. All documents originating from the re-accreditation procedure (report of the expert panel in Croatian and English, report on compliance with quantitative criteria, opinion of the Accreditation Council and accreditation recommendation of the Agency) are public and are published on the Agency website.

3.10. Follow-up

After follow-up deadline set by the Accreditation Council is passed, a HE institution shall submit report about the measures taken to the Agency. On the basis of this report, the Accreditation Council shall analyse to what extent has a HE institution implemented recommendations for improvement and will publish its report. If necessary, the Accreditation may schedule a repeated site visit by the complete previous expert panel or by some of its members in order to determine the extent to which deficiencies have been resolved. If a HE institution was issued a letter of expectation, the Accreditation Council shall send its opinion to the Agency about:

- Issuing confirmation on compliance with conditions for continued activity of higher education or part of activity; if HE institutions also perform scientific activity, this will be noted in the confirmation
- Denial of license for higher education or part of activity and/or scientific activity or part of activity;

On the basis of the opinion of the Accreditation Council, the Agency will deliver to the minister responsible for higher education and science the accreditation recommendation on issuance or denial of license for carrying out activities or part of activities. The accreditation recommendation is public and is published on the Agency website.

In case the re-accredited institution was issued a confirmation on fulfilling the criteria for carrying out the activity or part of activity of higher education and/or science (only for higher education institutions which perform scientific activity; in the remainder of the text: confirmation), in addition to the recommendations for quality improvement, the follow-up procedure includes the following activities:

- within 6 months* after receiving the confirmation, the re-accredited institution adopts an action plan aimed at quality improvement, and submits it to the Agency,
- once a year, the re-accredited institution sends a report to the Agency on the implementation of the action plan, and, accordingly, updates the data on the conditions in the information system used by the Agency.

3.11 Feedback

At the end of every re-accreditation, the Agency shall collect feedback from the re-accredited HE institution and members of the expert panel. The information is collected for the purpose of improving the Agency procedures.

*The periods between 15/07-31/08 and 24/12-06/01 are not counted towards the time limits stated in this document.

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