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Zagreb, 11<sup>th</sup> April 2025

Pursuant to the provisions of Article 31 Paragraph 2 Item 8 of the Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Science (Official Gazette, 151/22) and the provisions of Article 32 Paragraph 1 Sub-paragraph 15 of the Statute of the Agency for Science and Higher Education (CLASS: 003-05/13-01/0001; FILE NUMBER: 355-01-23-29), and at the proposal of the Director of the Agency for Science and Higher Education, Prof. Danijela Horvatek Tomić, PhD, at its 22<sup>nd</sup> regular session held on 10<sup>th</sup> April 2025, the Accreditation Council adopted the following

## **ORDINANCE ON THE EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH INSTITUTE ABROAD**

### **I. GENERAL PROVISIONS**

#### **Article 1**

- (1) This Ordinance on the Evaluation of the Research Institute Abroad (hereinafter: the Ordinance) shall govern the implementation of the procedure of external evaluation of the research institute abroad, the role and status of the Agency for Science and Higher Education (hereinafter: the Agency) in evaluation procedures conducted abroad, as well as the framework for the implementation of the procedure.
- (2) In the procedure of evaluation of the research institute abroad the Quality Standards in the Procedure of Evaluation of the Research Institute Abroad (hereinafter: Quality Standards) adopted by the Accreditation Council shall apply. Quality Standards are published on the Agency's website.
- (3) The procedure of evaluation of the research institute abroad is generally conducted in English.
- (4) The Agency conducts the procedure of evaluation of the research institute abroad as an economic market activity, generating its own revenue from this service. The Agency obtains the funds for conducting external evaluation procedures outside the territory of the Republic of Croatia from other sources, in accordance with the Act, the Agency's Statute, the Ordinance on generating and allocating own and earmarked revenue, incentives and salary bonuses, a decision of the Management Board of the Agency and the cooperation agreement between the Agency and the client.



## **II. PROCEDURE OF EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH INSTITUTE ABROAD**

### **1. Initiation of evaluation of the research institute abroad**

#### **Article 2**

(1) The procedure of evaluation of the research institute abroad is initiated upon a request of the research institute. The request is submitted to the Agency, which, upon receiving the request for evaluation of the research institute abroad, shall seek the consent of the Management Board to move forward with the procedure.

(2) Along with the request, the research institute is required to submit the following:

1. Self-evaluation report,
2. Evidence of fulfilment of the quality standards.

(3) The research institute shall inform the Agency of any changes that occur during the evaluation procedure or during the follow-up period.

### **2. Self-evaluation report**

#### **Article 3**

(1) The research institute shall produce a self-evaluation report in English for the purpose of conducting the evaluation procedure abroad, and shall submit the necessary information.

(2) The self-evaluation report, for the purpose of conducting the evaluation of a research institute abroad, is prepared using the template provided by the Agency.

(3) In the self-evaluation report, the research institute shall provide evidence for meeting each quality standard so that the expert panel may have sufficient information to formulate an opinion, i.e. the research institute shall provide evidence of compliance with each quality standard and shall submit evidence to that effect along with the self-evaluation report.

(4) The self-evaluation report must also include information about the national framework within which the research institute operates, providing members of the expert panel with useful context, primarily regarding the positioning of the research institute within the national system.

#### **Article 4**

- (1) The self-evaluation report shall be adopted by the competent body of the research institute and signed by the head of the research institute. With their signature, the head of the research institute guarantees that the information contained in the self-evaluation report is true and accurate.



### **3. Composition of the expert panel and conditions for the selection of expert panel members**

#### **Article 5**

- (1) In the procedure of evaluation of the research institute abroad, the Accreditation Council shall appoint an expert panel composed of at least five members, from the ranks of researchers.
- (2) The expert committee must be composed in such a way that at least one member of the expert committee is from the country in which the higher education institution operates.
- (3) Prior to the site visit, the Agency shall organise training for expert panel members, to introduce them to the specifics of the procedure, their role and obligations in the procedure, and deadlines.
- (4) Expert panel members are entitled to remuneration for their work, in accordance with a general act of the Agency.

### **4. Conflict of interest and data confidentiality**

#### **Article 6**

- (1) The expert panel members shall not have a conflict of interest.
- (2) An expert panel member shall have a conflict of interest if:
  1. A panel member has signed an employment contract or other cooperation agreement with the research institute, or has had an employment contract or other cooperation agreement with the research institute in the last three years;
  2. A panel member participates in publications with employees of the research institute and/or projects which the research institute is involved in or carrying out, or if they have participated in publications and/or such projects in the last three years;
  3. A panel member is part of governing, professional or advisory bodies of the research institute or has participated in these bodies in the last three years;
  4. A panel member has a personal connection to the head of the research institute or persons performing management positions at the research institute;
  6. A panel member is involved in court proceedings against the research institute.
- (3) A conflict of interest also exists if the above-mentioned relations refer to a panel member's immediate family (spouse or partner, first-degree relative, siblings, adoptive parent or adopted child).
- (4) Expert panel members shall safeguard the confidentiality of the information obtained during the procedure of evaluation of the research institute abroad.
- (5) All expert panel members shall sign a confidentiality and non-conflict of interest statement.





## **5. Appointing members of the expert panel**

### **Article 7**

- (1) The expert panel shall be appointed by the Agency's Accreditation Council.
- (2) The Agency shall deliver the decision to appoint an expert panel to the research institute.

## **6. Request for the exclusion of expert panel members**

### **Article 8**

- (1) A research institute may submit to the Accreditation Council a request for excluding an expert panel member within 7 days from the day of submission of the decision to appoint an expert panel.
- (2) In that case, the Accreditation Council shall decide on the request for exclusion and shall, if it considers the request justified, appoint another expert panel member.

## **7. Site visit of the expert panel**

### **Article 9**

- (1) The Agency shall inform the research institute about the date of the expert panel's site visit no later than 30 days prior to the site visit.
- (2) Site visit is either conducted online, in a hybrid manner (partly online and partly by visiting the research institute) or as a site visit to the research institute ("on site").
- (3) The expert panel shall, in agreement with the research institute, visit one or more sites where the research institute performs its activities.
- (4) The site visit shall take place in accordance with a planned protocol which shall be submitted to the research institute prior to the conducting of the procedure. The obligatory part of every site visit protocol shall be meetings with RI representatives (RI management, representatives of research staff and others); a tour of the facilities (library, laboratories, space for conducting scientific research and other premises), a meeting with representatives of employers, the business sector and representatives of professional services, if necessary. If necessary, representatives of the civil society and/or professional associations may be invited to a meeting with the expert panel.
- (5) In case a site visit to a research institute is organized, the research institute shall ensure adequate premises for all the meetings planned in the protocol, wireless internet access and a separate room where the expert panel may have their internal meetings, breaks and lock away any personal belongings.



(6) The research institute shall provide the expert panel with access to documents governing its activities (such as rules of procedure, agreements, copies of employment contracts for their employees and copies of employment contracts for external associates, etc.).

(7) The expert panel members are independent in their work and do not represent their home institutions. In the evaluation of a research institute abroad, the expert panel members shall adhere to principles of impartiality and objectivity.

(8) In the evaluation of the research institute abroad, expert panel members may not give to nor accept gifts from the research institute or any of its research or professional staff, or external associates.

(9) The expert panel's site visit shall conclude with a meeting with the research institute's management, when the expert panel shall inform the management of their observations during the evaluation. This meeting shall not include time for discussion regarding these observations. The expert panel shall not provide the management of the research institute with their opinion on the outcome of the procedure in question.

## **8. The report**

### **Article 10**

(1) After the site visit, the expert panel shall draw up a report.

(2) The report shall be submitted to the Agency within 30 days of the day of the conclusion of the site visit.

(3) The report shall include relevant evidence, analyses and conclusions with a view to the Quality Standards, quality grades, recommendations for improvement and/or further development, and a final recommendation on the outcome of the conducted procedure.

## **9. The manner of passing a grade in accordance with the Quality Standards and the final recommendations of the expert panel**

### **Article 11**

(1) Taking into account the descriptions of individual standards, the expert panel shall grade each standard on the basis of the submitted evidence and available indicators. Grades at the level of the standard are as follows:

- The standard is not fulfilled,
- Minimal fulfilment of the standard,
- Satisfactory fulfilment of the standard,
- The standard is completely fulfilled.





(2) The grade *the standard is completely fulfilled* implies that the research institute fully complies with the standard and that it has been successfully implemented. The grade *satisfactory fulfilment of the standard* implies that the research institute complies with the standard for the most part, and that its principles and spirit are observed in practice. The grade *minimal fulfilment of the standard* implies that some elements of the standard have been implemented, while others have not, and that its implementation is not sufficiently efficient. The grade *standard is not fulfilled* implies that the research institute does not comply with the standard.

(3) Based on the grade assigned to the standards within an assessment area, the expert panel shall evaluate each assessment area. Grades at the level of assessment areas are as follows:

- The assessment area not fulfilled,
- Minimal fulfilment of the assessment area,
- Satisfactory fulfilment of the assessment area,
- The assessment area completely fulfilled.

(4) In evaluating a particular assessment area, the expert panel does not rely solely on a mathematical calculation, but also takes into account the extent to which individual standards and their level of fulfilment affect the overall quality of an assessment area, i.e., the grade assigned to the assessment area. Likewise, an assessment area may be graded as *the assessment area completely fulfilled* if most of the standards included in this area have been graded as *completely fulfilled* and no standard has been assigned grade *the standard is not fulfilled* or *minimal fulfilment of the standard*.

(5) In adopting the final recommendation on the outcome of the conducted procedure, the expert panel shall adhere to the following rules:

- If any assessment area is graded as *not fulfilled*, the outcome of the evaluation procedure of the research institute abroad is the denial of the accreditation certificate.
- If the grade assigned to an area is *minimal fulfilment*, the outcome of the evaluation procedure of the research institute abroad may be the issuance of a conditional accreditation certificate for a specified period, up to a maximum of three years.
- If all areas are graded as *Satisfactory fulfilment of the assessment area* or *The assessment area completely fulfilled*, the outcome of the procedure is the issuance of an accreditation certificate.

(6) The grades for all standards and assessment areas shall be decided by a consensus of the expert panel.

(7) If no consensus has been reached, grades of standards and assessment areas shall be decided by a majority vote of expert panel members.

(8) If a member of the expert panel disagrees with the consensus reached over a grade for a given standard or assessment area, or if he/she disagrees with an explanation or the analysis of a standard or assessment area, he/she may write a dissenting opinion.



(9) A dissenting opinion has to be justified by the expert panel member, and submitted in the form of a signed document to the Agency staff member providing support to the work of the expert panel.

(10) The reasoned separate opinion shall be annexed to the expert panel's final report, and shall be an integral part thereof.

## **10. Research institute's comments on the expert panel report**

### **Article 12**

(1) The research institute may comment on the expert panel report within 15 days of the receipt of said report.

(2) The comments referred to in Paragraph 1 of this Article refer only to a request for the correction of obvious factual inaccuracies or obvious errors in writing and/or figures in the expert panel's report.

(3) The research institute's comments may not address the views and conclusions of the expert panel.

(4) The Agency shall submit the research institute's comment to the expert panel, which shall correct the report insofar as it considers the corrections justified, and shall submit the final report to the Agency within 15 days. In this case, the final report shall be submitted to the research institute by way of information.

(5) If the research institute does not comment on the report within the prescribed time frame, the report shall be considered final.

## **11. Expert opinion of the Accreditation Council**

### **Article 13**

(1) The final report of the expert panel in the procedure of evaluation of the research institute abroad is submitted to the Agency's Accreditation Council, which issues an expert opinion on the issuance of an accreditation certificate for the research institute abroad, the issuance of a conditional accreditation certificate, or the denial of the certificate.

(2) If it deems it necessary, the Accreditation Council may request additional clarification from the expert panel.

## **12. Research institute's complaint against the expert opinion of the Accreditation Council**

### **Article 14**





- (1) The opinion of the Accreditation Council shall be submitted to the foreign research institute, which is entitled to lodge a complaint with the Complaints Committee within 30 days of receipt of the opinion.
- (2) The complaint shall be reasoned and accompanied by relevant evidence.
- (3) The Complaints Committee shall investigate the validity of the complaint and respond to each claim made in the complaint no later than 15 days following its receipt.

### **13. Accreditation certificate**

#### **Article 15**

(1) Based on the expert opinion of the Accreditation Council and the comments of the Complaints Committee, if a complaint has been submitted, the Agency decides on the issuance of a certificate to the research institute regarding the procedure of evaluation abroad in one of the following ways:

1. issuing an accreditation certificate for a period of five years or
2. issuing a conditional accreditation certificate for a specified period, up to three years or
3. denying an accreditation certificate.

(2) The decision to issue a conditional certificate shall define the measures that a research institute should take, as well as the deadline for taking said measures.

(3) The decision referred to in Paragraph 1 of this Article shall be made no later than 30 days from the date of receipt of the opinion or the comments of the Complaints Committee.

### **14. Follow-up in case of issuance of a conditional certificate**

#### **Article 16**

(1) In the event of the issuance of a conditional certificate, the Follow-up Committee shall follow up on the operations of the research institute for a period of three years.

(2) A research institute that has been issued a conditional certificate is obligated, within no later than six months from the date of issuance of the conditional certificate, to adopt an action plan specifying the activities, deadlines, and indicators necessary for implementing the measures prescribed by the conditional certificate.

(3) If the research institute fails to carry out the activities in accordance with the established deadlines, the Agency may revoke the conditional certificate for the operation of the research institute.





(4) In cases where it is determined, based on the provided evidence, that the research institute has remedied the deficiencies for which the conditional certificate was issued, the Agency shall issue an accreditation certificate.

## **15. Public information**

### **Article 17**

The final report, the research institute's comments and the Agency's certificate on the outcome of the evaluation procedure conducted abroad are public documents, which shall be published on the Agency website.

## **16. Feedback**

### **Article 18**

Upon completion of the evaluation of the research institute abroad, the Agency shall collect feedback from the research institute and the expert panel members by means of a questionnaire. Feedback is collected in order to improve the work of the Agency.

## **III. TRANSITIONAL AND FINAL PROVISIONS**

### **Article 19**

(1) The Agency shall submit a certificate regarding the outcome of the procedure of evaluation of the foreign research institute to the research institute itself and, if applicable, to the competent national authorities in the country where the research institute operates.

(2) This Ordinance shall be published on the website of the Agency and shall enter into force on the day of its publication on the website.



President  
of the Accreditation Council

Prof. Mirjana Hruškar, PhD