ACCREDITATION AND NOSTRIFICATION BUREAU (ANB)

HANDBOOK ON METHODOLOGIES AND REQUIREMENTS FOR STUDY PROGRAMMES EVALUATIONS

2019

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Introduction

The methodology shall regulate the external evaluation of study programes organised by ANO. The methodology was developed in accordance with the Accredition rules of higher education institutions and study programmes approved by the Cabinet of Ministers and in line with the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and other Bologna process recommendations.

# European context

The Bologna Process is a process of cooperation and reform in the field of higher education bringing together 48 countries. It established and seeks to consolidate the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) with comparable and compatible systems of higher education in order to facilitate mobility, increase employability, allow equitable student access and progression and strengthen Europe’s attractiveness and competiveness worldwide.

The Bologna Process Declarations and Communiqués contain both structural or systemic reforms and more general policy dimensions.

Diploma supplement: The Diploma Supplement is a document issued to each graduate in addition to the qualification and describes the education system of the country, the education institution attended, the programme followed along with the main areas studied as part of the programme.

ECTS: The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System is based on the student workload and learning outcomes of a programme. It aims at facilitating mobility through credit transfer across institutions and countries.

Degree structure: Countries agreed to establish a common three-tiered degree structure of Bachelor (first cycle), Master (second cycle) and Doctorate (third cycle) with the possibility of a short cycle qualification forming part of the first cycle.

Qualifications framework: Besides a common degree structure, countries committed themselves to establish National Qualifications Frameworks. These explain qualifications in an education system in terms of level descriptors based on the knowledge,, skills and competences obtained upon completion. Moreover, they provide information on the level of qualifications and on the transition between them to allow for flexible learning pathways and to facilitate recognition of qualifications.

Quality Assurance: Cooperation on quality assurance in higher education at European level is aimed at developing common criteria and methodologies that will promote mutual trust and facilitate recognition of qualifications.

# Azerbaijani achievements in implementation of Bologna reforms

(TO BE COMPLETED BY ANO)

# Information about the agency

(TO BE COMPLETED BY ANO)

The section should include – mission, main activities etc.

# Legal basis

The legal basis that is important for higher education institutions and experts.

(TO BE COMPLETED BY ANO)

The section should include information about the accreditation rules and standards

# Terminology

(TO BE COMPLETED BY ANO)

# METHODOLOGY

## Aim of the programme accreditation/ Objectives and scope

(TO BE COMPLETED BY ANO)

The purposes of the external evaluation of a study programme shall be the following:

- to facilitate the improvement of the study programme and to create a culture of study programme quality assurance;

- to ascertain how the quality of the study programme provision meets the relevant legal requirements, the provisions of the European Higher Education Area and the commitments of the higher education institution.

## Involved parties and thigher education institutionr roles

The main participants of the study programme evaluation process are:

* the higher education institutions whose study programme is being evaluated;
* ANO;
* Expert group composed by ANO.
* Accreditation Council.

The higher education institution:

* in compliance with Accreditation rules of higher education institutions and study programs No..., submits the self-evaluation report to ANO at least three months before the site visit;
* may request the rejection of the experts by submitting a justified written application;
* takes part in the coordination and organisation of the site visit of the experts group;
* upon the request by ANO or the experts group, provides access to informative support/infrastructure of the study programme, including library resources, material and technical provision, final theses (if any), examination materials, and other resources;
* is responsible for provided information;
* ensures adequate conditions, premises, and equipment during the site visit;
* during the site visit of the experts group, is prepared to demonstrate to the experts group evidences which substantiate the information provided in the self-evaluation report.

The overall responsibility for the external assessment procedure lies with the ANO. The ANO:

* designs and uses in its operation the Methodology and procedures complying with the ESG and publishes them on ANO’s website;
* reviews the submitted documents to assess the conformity of the study programme with the requirements of regulatory enactments;
* establishes and approves an experts group and appoints the chair of the group;
* provides all necessary documents and information to the expert group to perform thigher education institutionr task;
* organises the work of the experts group, including its site visits to the higher education institutions, participate in these, as well organises the training of the experts;
* ensures the documentation and archiving of the accreditation process;
* publishes the results of the accreditation of study programmes on ANO’s website;
* provides information and advice on issues of quality assurance of study programmes.

The experts group:

* takes part in the experts training organised by ANO;
* divides tasks between the members of the experts group;
* analyses beforehand the self-evaluation report and other documents;
* identifies the issues to be looked into during the site visit and prepares questions for the site visit;
* takes part in the preparatory meetings;
* takes part in the site visit according to the agreed agenda;
* may request additional information or documents that are necessary for evaluation of study programme;
* discusses the findings of the site visit;
* compiles the final report;
* takes into account the remarks provided by the higher education institution on factual errors;
* adheres to the agreed deadlines.

The Accreditation Council:

* reviews the final report submitted by ANO;
* listens to the opinion of the representatives of the higher education institution which study programme is being evaluated;
* obtains advice from the experts group, if necessary;
* takes the decision to accredit the study programme or to refuse to accredit the study programme according to the Accreditation rules of higher education institutions and study programmes.

## Ethical principles for HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONs and experts

The ethical principles:

* **unbiased and fact-based findings** - the experts shall act in an honest and unbiased manner in thigher education institutionr efforts to reach the aim of the evaluation. When expressing thigher education institutionr opinion, formulating conclusions or taking decisions, the expert shall rely on the facts, observations, and his/her personal competence;
* **objectivity** – within the evaluation process of the study programme, the expert shall act independently. The expert shall not represent the interests of the higher education institution or other party;
* **respect for diversity** – within the assessment process, the expert shall act in good faith as a professional. The expert shall not exceed his/her powers as specified in his/her tasks. The expert shall treat the parties involved in the assessment process as persons capable of taking responsibility for thigher education institutionr actions, therefore he/she shall rely on facts and observations when referring to the strengths and weaknesses of the study programme;
* **confidentiality** – all information related to the evaluation (opinions of the interviewees, the self-evaluation report, and additional information provided by the higher education institution) shall be used exclusively for the evaluation process;
* **collaboration** – each expert, as a member of the experts group, shall be open to collaboration with other members of the experts group. The collaboration of the experts shall be coordinated by the chair of the experts group. The experts group shall develop mutual understanding with the representatives of the higher education institution and make efforts to assist the higher education institution to enhance quality culture.

Any expert performing the task must complete the Confirmation of Absence of Conflict of Interest presented by the ANO and indicate a potential conflict of interests if there is a situation that could hinder the expert to be impartial and objective while fulfilling the task.

A conflict of interest may be considered if:

* the expert or someone among the expert’s close relatives (spouse, cohabiting partner, the partner where partnership is registered in the manner established by laws as well as thigher education institutionr parents (adoptive parents), children (adopted children), brothers (step brothers), sisters (step sisters), grandparents, grandchildren and thigher education institutionr spouses, cohabitants or partners - (hereinafter referred to as the close persons) in the last 5 years worked in the institution which programmes are being evaluated;
* the expert or someone among the expert’s close relatives during the last 3 years studied in the institution which programmes are being evaluated;
* the expert or someone among the expert’s close relatives during the last 2 years participated in the evaluative activities of the institution (acted as a member of the Senate, the Academic Council, the Committee of the Final Thesis Defence, the Committee of Doctoral Studies, a member of the management bodies, shareholder or similar);
* the expert or someone among the expert’s close relatives participates in any ongoing project or other joint activity with the institution he works for, with the institution which programmes are being evaluated;
* other circumstances which are unspecified herein and are related to the expert or his close relative and which may prevent the expert from being objective (i.e., he has publicly expressed a negative attitude towards the institution which programmes are being evaluated; has terminated work relations after the conflict with the institution which programmes are being evaluated).

If the expert declares a potential conflict of interests in the declaration, ANO shall take one of the following decisions:

* remove the expert and replace him by another expert;
* remove the expert from the part of the task in relation of which the expert has declared a potential conflict of interests, retaining a possibility to participate in execution of the part of the task as an observer;
* do not remove the expert from execution of the task if, in ANO’s opinion, the declared conflict of interests will have no substantial impact on the performance of the task.

If it turns out that the expert has incompletely declared his interests or in the event of a conflict of interests occurs or is detected and he has failed to inform ANO thereof, ANO shall take one of the decisions specified above.

Experts who do not comply with the requirements of the task, with the principles of good behaviour and ethics, and whose action or inaction discredits ANO shall be excluded from the evaluation.

**The higher education institution must not influence the experts decision in anyway and any situations of possible influence should be eliminated (presents, participation in dinners of the experts group).**

## Main steps of accreditation

The timeline of the study programme evaluation process is enclosed in the Annex XX.

### Description of each step

#### Before the visit

##### Preparation for accreditation

Accreditation of study programmes is carried on in line with the schedule approved by the Ministry of Education which is published on the website of ANO.

ANO sends a letter to the higher education institution notifying about the start of the accreditation procedure and naming the programmes to be evaluated at least 6 months before the site visit.

ANO organises trainings for higher education institutions on how to draft the self-evaluation report.

##### Development and submition of self-evaluation report

The higher education institution develops the self-evaluation report according to the guidelines provided in part “Preparation of the self-evaluation report”of this methodology. The higher education is responsible for the proper conduct of its self-evaluation and the timely production of the self-evaluation report. The head of the higher education institution approves the self-evaluation report. The institution has to submit the self-evaluation report 3 months prior to the site-visit.

##### Familiarization of the Bureau with the self-evaluation report

The ANO verifies the self-evaluation report for compliance with the requirements of the methodoloy and notifies the higher education institution of the necessary amendments within a month of the self-evaluation report received. The higher education institution should submit the amended self-evaluation report within 10 days of the receipt of ANO’s notification of its irregularities.

##### Establishment of the experts group

The expert group is set up upon acceptance of the self-evaluation report by ANO. The experts are selected according to the expert selection procedure approved by ANO and published on the website of ANO. The size of the expert group could vary depending on the number of study programmes to be evaluated but it could not be less than 5 persons. ANO informs all the members of the experts group about the composition of the experts group.

ANO appoints the chair of the expert group whose tasks are as follows:

* to divide the tasks among the members of the expert group;
* to facilitate the work of the experts group;
* to chair the meetings during the site visit or nominate another expert group member;
* to keep to the time schedule during the site visit;
* to be responsible for the preparation and timely submission of the final report.

The tasks of the experts are:

* to be equaly involved in the expert group work;
* to analyse the self-evaluation report and other documents related to accreditation process;
* to draft preliminary comments or report before the site visit;
* to participate in the preparation of the agenda;
* to participate in compilation of the list of persons for interviews;
* to identify additional materials that should be requested from the higher education institution;
* to prepare questions for the site visit.

ANO nominates the coordinator who is a staff member of ANO. The tasks of the coordinator are:

* to ensure smooth functioning of the evaluation process on the basis of the requirements and the timeframe provided in this document;
* to create the mailing group for the expert group;
* to outline the compliance of the study programme with the state standards on higher education, prepare the compliance statement and present it to the expert group;
* to prepare the agenda of the site visit in cooperation with the HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION and the expert group;
* to prepare in cooperation with the expert group the list of people whom they would like to interview;
* to prepare and request the additional materials that the experts need from the institution;
* to participate in the site visit together with the expert group.

**The coordinator does not act as a member of the expert group. All the communication between the higher education institution an expert group regarding evaluation process must be proceeded only through the coordinator.**

**After the visit the higher education institution is expected to provide additional information and documents only upon request of ANO.**

##### Training of the experts group

ANO carries out the training of the experts before the site visit. The aim of the training is to provide updates on the legislation, methodology and rules of accreditation, ethical principles and to improve skills that are necessary for expert work. The duration of the training is half a day.

##### Preparation for the visit

The purpose of the preparatory meeting is to get the experts working together as a team, to divide the tasks between expert group members, to prepare the list of questions and comments for the site visit, to highlight the topics to be focused on in the course of evaluation, to list additional materials to be requested and to list the persons whom the experts would like to meet during the site visit.

#### During the visit

The site visit is an integral part of the evaluation process. The visit usually lasts one day for one study programme in one higher education institution. The visit shall be deemed effective when at least 2/3 of the expert group members attend the visit.

The site visit consists of the following:

1. interviews with:

* the management staff of the institution or its unit;
* the self-evaluation group of the study programme;
* members of the teaching staff of the study programme;
* students;
* graduates;
* representatives of employers.

It is important that each of these meetings takes place completely confidentially. During site visit a member of the institution’s community may participate only at one meeting with the expert team, except the case agreed separately and in advance with the representative of ANO. The meetings with graduates and employers may not be attended by persons who study and/ or are employed at the higher education institution whose programme is being evaluated.

2) the visit to the higher education institution's facilities (classrooms, laboratories, library etc.)

3) the learning resources of the study programme (including digital ones), students’ term papers and final thesis, examination material, methodologies developed by the higher education institution and other documents;

4) the observation of educational activities (lectures, seminars, practical training etc.).

It is recommended that all expert group members take notes during interviews. In general, after every interview the expert group has time for reflection. All coffee breaks and lunches are held separately from the staff of higher education institution and can also be used for expert group reflection.

At the end of the visit, the members of the expert group shall discuss the outcomes of the site visit, formulate joint opinion on the assessment criteria and aspects thereof, as well as discuss the findings and main conclusions made during the site visit.

The chairman presents the overview of the preliminary observations to the community of the higher education institution. **During the final meeting expert group does not give assessments or make recommendations to the institution and does not discuss the observations.**

#### After the visit

Development of the final report

Within a month from the visit the expert group should draft the report according to the template provided in Annex XX and submit it to ANO by e-mail.

Evaluation report presents evaluation of the study programme and its implementation in line with accreditation standards according to the evaluation areas and criteria provided in this methodology, part.

The joint report shall be prepared by the experts group:

* according to the template provided in the Annex XX, justifying the made statements and providing references and evidences from the self-evaluation report or the site visit;
* in accordance with the literary and grammar rules of language, legal and academic terminology;
* providing recommendations for improvement of study programme and its implementation.

Preparing the report, the experts group shall assess all evaluation criteria according to the evaluation areas specified in the methodology.

Each assessment criterion is followed by aspects which are to be taken into account when assessing the relevant criterion. The experts group may assess other aspects which are significant for assessment of the relevant criterion. Assessing each criterion, the experts group shall analyse the information available for the experts group, giving concrete examples and references to the self-evaluation report prepared by higher education institution and information obtained during the visit. The experts group shall analyse each criterion and make conclusions, specifying strengths and weaknesses of the higher education institution with regard to meeting the assessment criterion in the study programme.

Preparing its joint report about the study programme, the experts group shall agree on the assessment of criteria and evaluate each criterion as follows: “compliant”, “mostly compliant”, “partially compliant”, “non-compliant”. If the opinion of experts regarding any of the criteria differs, the different opinion shall be specified in the joint report.

In the evaluation report, the experts group shall provide recommendations for elimination of the deficiencies found, as well as long-term recommendations for further improvement of the study programme.

At the end of the report the experts could present recommendations for amendment of state standards.

Coordinator analyses the draft report and could ask expert group to amend the report if needed within 5 working days from receiving the comments of the coordinator. ANO sends the report to the higher education institution for considering factual errors. The higher education institution may submit to ANO its comments on factual errors within 10 working days. ANO forwards the higher education institution’s comments on factual errors to the expert group. The expert group should consider the higher education institution’s comments on factual errors within 10 working days and submit the final report to ANO.

ANO submits the final report to the Accreditation Council for decision making.

##### Decision making on accreditation

On the basis of external evaluation report of the study programme Accreditation Council takes a decision to accredit study programme either for 5 or for 2 years. If the programme is accredited for 2 years the study programme is required to undergo reaccreditation during this period. If the programme evaluation is negative such programme is not accredited and the students are transferred to other programmes determined by the Ministry of Education.

The Accreditation Council takes one of the following decisions:

* to accredit (when all evaluation areas are evaluated as “compliant” or “mostly compliant”);
* to accredit conditionally (when none of the evaluation areas was evaluated as “non-compliant” and at least one evaluation area was evaluated as “partially compliant”);
* not to accredit (when at least one evaluation area was evaluated as “non-compliant”).

The final evaluation report and the decision on accreditation made by the Accreditation Council are sent to the higher education institution and published on the website of ANO and the higher education institution.

##### Follow-up procedures

Within three months since the decision on the accreditation of a study programme has been taken, a higher education institution shall prepare and submit to ANO the plan on the implementation of recommendations given by the experts’ group for a study programme.

While preparing the plan, if necessary, a higher education institution may request advice on drafting up the plan from the ANO employee (assessment coordinator) who has participated in the coordination of the accreditation process of the study programme.

A higher education institution shall submit to ANO the report on the implementation of recommendations given by the experts’ group for a study programme according to the following deadlines:

- if a study programme is accredited for two years – within the six-month period since the decision on the accreditation of a study programme has been taken;

- if a study programme is accredited for five years – within the twelve-month period since the decision on the accreditation of a study programme has been taken;

The plan and the report are published on ANO website together with the final report.

##### Appeals procedure

In case it objects to the Accreditation Commission’s decision on evaluation, the higher education institution may lodge a motivated appeal to the Appeals Commission within the Ministry of Education within 20 days of the dispatch of the decision.

The appeal shall be dealt with within 60 days of its receipt by the Appeals Commission acting according to its regulations approved by the Ministry of Education. The ANO shall notify the higher education institution of the Appeals Commission decision by letter.

The higher education institution has the rights to submit to ANO a complaint of any matter related to the evaluation process and ANO has to consider the complaint according to its internal procedure.

##### Evaluation areas and criteria

There are six evaluation areas presented in the Annex XX together with the assessment criteria and indicators.

##### Assessment scale

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Evaluation | Evaluation explanation |
| Compliant | A regulatory framework is created within the relevant study programme in order to meet the criterion to be assessed; it is documented, implemented and the staff of the higher education institution and involved parties are informed about it. Regulatory framework, procedures, processes, etc. are regularly revised and improved. Methods that develop the study programme and improve its quality are used for meeting the criterion. Insignificant deficiencies, that can be easily eliminated, are found upon meeting the criterion to be assessed within the study. |
| Mostly compliant | A regulatory framework is created in order to meet the criterion to be assessed, but this framework is not fully implemented and the staff of the higher education institution and/or involved parties are not informed about it and do not take part in its implementation, provision, improvement and other stages. Though, in general, the study programme formally complies with the criterion to be assessed. The deficiencies in its implementation are not significant and the higher education institution is able to improve the quality of study programme in a short period. Long-term activities should be planned. |
| Partially compliant | A regulatory framework is created but it needs further improvement in order to fully meet the criterion to be assessed. The framework is partially implemented and the staff of the higher education institution and/or involved parties are not informed about it and do not take part in its implementation, provision, improvement and other stages. The deficiencies in the implementation of study programme are significant and affect its quality. Urgent activities, support of the interested parties and additional resources are required to eliminate the deficiencies. |
| Non-compliant | The higher education institution does not meet the criterion to be assessed within the study programme or meets it at a low level, without a clear aim, structure and implementation strategy. The management principles and processes are not clearly defined, implemented and known to the higher education institution and/or involved parties. The study programme does not meet the good practice in Azerbaijan.  The existing provision of the study programme within the specific criterion is assessed as critical; it does not promote the quality of studies and even pose a threat to it. |

##### Decision taking rules

Proposal for accreditation by expert group should be made based on the following principles:

- to accredit (when all evaluation areas are evaluated as “compliant” or “mostly compliant”)

- to accredit conditionally (when none of the evaluation areas was evaluated as “non-compliant” and at least one evaluation area was evaluated as “partially compliant”)

- not to accredit (when at least one evaluation area was evaluated as “non-compliant”).

Practical issues

Participation in evaluation procedures is a non-salaried and voluntary activity. The travel and acommodation outside the city of residence of expert is covered by ANO. The subsistence allowance for expert group is paid by ANO.

The ANO signs a contract with the experts for participation in evaluation procedure. The contract contains a statement of confidentiality and a statement of not-existance of a conflict of interest.

After the evaluation visit the experts shall fill in the feedback questionnaire sent by ANO and provide feedback on evaluation procedure.

## Preparation of self-evaluation report

*To be elaborated by the mission 3.3.2.*

## Preparation of the final report

The expert group should draft the final report using the template provided in the Annex XX.

# Annex 1- Information about the Azerbaijani higher education system

(SHOULD BE PROVIDED BY ANO)

# Annex 2– The list of reference documents

(SHOULD BE PROVIDED BY ANO)

# Annex 3– Timeline for the assessment procedure

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ANO informs the higher education institution about the start of the study programme accreditation procedure and nominates ANO coordinator | Month 0 |
| ANO organises training for higher education institution | Month 0-1 |
| Higher education institution starts to produce its self-evaluation report | Month 1 |
| Higher education institution submits the initial draft of the self-evaluation report | Month 3 |
| ANO checks the compliance of the self-evaluation report and requests amendments, if needed | Month 3 |
| Higher education institution submits amended self-evaluation report, if requested | Month 4 |
| ANO establishes expert group | Month 4 |
| ANO notifies the higher education institution about the composition of expert group | Month 5 |
| Training of the expert group by ANO | Month 5 |
| Preparatory meeting of expert group | Month 5 |
| Site-visit | Month 6 |
| Expert group submits the draft evaluation report to ANO | Month 7 |
| ANO coordinator analyses the draft report and requests amendments | Month 7-8 |
| Expert group submits amended evaluation report to ANO | Month 7-8 |
| ANO sends the evaluation report to higher education institution | Month 8 |
| Higher education institution may submit the comments on facual errors | Month 8-9 |
| ANO forwards the comments to the expert group | Month 9 |
| Expert group adresses the comments of higher education institution and submits the final report to ANO | Month 9 |
| ANO submits the final report to the Accreditation Council | Month 9 |
| Accreditation Council takes decision on accreditation | Month 10 |
| ANO sends the accreditation decision together with the final report to the higher education institution | Month 10 |
| ANO publishes the evaluation report | Month 10 |
| ANO asks the higher education institution and the expert group for feedback | Month 11 |
| Higher education institution submits to ANO the plan for implementing the recommendations of expert group | If the programme was accredited for 5 years – 12 months after the decision on accreditation |
| If the programme was accredited for 2 years – 6 months after the decision on accreditation |

# Annex 4– Example of agenda

**AGENDA OF THE VISIT**

|  |
| --- |
| **Assessment of study programme “XXX”**  **in XXX university**  **DD.MM.GGGG, BAKU** |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Team chair: | ... |
| Team members: | ... |
|  | ....  ... |
| Evaluation coordinator: | … |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **20 November, Monday** | |
| 13.00  13.30 – 16.00 | *Meeting at ANO*  Preparatory meeting, discussion about the self-evaluation report, preparation for the visit etc. |
| **21 November, Tuesday** | |
| 9.00 – 9.40  9.40 – 10.40 | Meeting with management staff of the institution or its unit  Meeting with self-evaluation group of the study programme |
| 10.40 – 10.50 | *Break* |
| 10.50 – 11.50 | Meeting with teaching staff |
| 11.50 – 12.50  12.50 – 13.30 | Meeting with students  Review of students’ term and final papers (theses), examination material |
| 13.30 – 14.30 | *Lunch* |
| 14.30 – 15.10  15.10 – 16.00  16.00 – 16.50 | Visiting classrooms, lecture halls, libraries, other facilities (studios, teaching spaces, computer rooms, etc.)  Meeting with graduates  Meeting with representatives of employers |
| 16.50 – 17.20 | Private Team discussion and finalisation of the visit |
| 17.20 – 17.30 | Introduction of general remarks of the visit to the university |
| **22 November, Wednesday**  **Working at ANO office / Departure** | |
| 9.00 | Discussion and work on the drafts of the review reports in ANO |

# Annex 5– Template of self-evaluation report

# Annex 6 – Template of the final report