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National action plan on quality assurance of higher education in the Republic of Moldova for the period 2021-2023

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Republic of Moldova, Chisinau, 2021

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1. Introduction

The national action plan on quality assurance of higher education in the Republic of Moldova for the period 2021-2023 was developed by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (hereinafter - ANACEC) within the project “Supporting European Quality Assurance Agencies in meeting the ESG ”(SEQA-ESG).

A working group of representatives of the following stakeholders has been set up to develop this action plan:

- 1) representatives of ANACEC:
 - Andrei Chiciuc, President
 - Elena Petrov, Vice President
 - Sergiu Baci, Secretary General
 - Alexandr Cauia, member of the Governing Board
 - Lilian Şaptefraţi, member of the Governing Board
 - Stela Guvir, Head of the Public Relations and International Cooperation Office
 - Felicia Banu, Head of the Department of Evaluation in Higher Education
 - Natalia Danila, Main Specialist, Department of Evaluation in Higher Education
 - Mihaela Balmuş-Andone, senior specialist, Department of Evaluation in Higher Education
- 2) representatives of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research:
 - Nadejda Velişco, Head of the Department of policy in the field of higher education
- 3) Representatives of the profile committee in higher education:
 - Petru Todos, PhD, university professor, Chairman of the Profile Committee
- 4) representatives of the Council of Rectors of the Republic of Moldova:
 - Grigore Belostecinic, President
- 5) representatives of academia:
 - Irina Tutunaru, Technical University of Moldova (Deputy Head of the Academic Management and Quality Assurance Department)
 - Lucia Cebra, Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova (Head of the Department of Studies and Curriculum Development)
- 6) student representatives:
 - Irina Carauş, PhD student, State University of Moldova
- 7) representatives of the business environment:
 - Sergiu Bobu, director of “Lafarge Ciment Moldova” SA
 - Silvia Prunici, Human Resources specialist, “BPO East” SRL
 - Constantin Chilian, judge, Ungheni District Court

The team members were involved both in the elaboration and in the consultation level of this action plan, between April 1 and May 25, 2021.

2. Country's higher education system

Higher education is a key factor for the cultural, economic and social development of an increasingly knowledge-based society and a promoter of human rights, sustainable development, democracy, peace and justice.

The mission of higher education is to create, preserve and disseminate knowledge at the highest level of excellence; training of highly qualified specialists competitive on the national and international labor market; creating lifelong learning opportunities; preserving, developing and promoting national cultural-historical values in the context of cultural diversity.

Higher education in the Republic of Moldova is achieved in two fields: advanced academic and professional, being structured on three cycles:

- a) cycle I – bachelor's degree studies (ISCED level 6);
- b) cycle II – master's degree studies (ISCED level 7);
- c) cycle III - doctoral degree studies (ISCED level 8).

Within the doctoral and postdoctoral degree studies, research, development and innovation activities are carried out.

The training of specialists in higher education institutions is achieved through study programs on all three levels. Thus, the bachelor's and master's degree studies are organized in the following forms of education: full-time and part-time, institutions also having the possibility of organizing distance learning, and doctoral degree studies: full-time and part-time.

The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) applies to the higher education system in the Republic of Moldova, where study credits express the amount of work required of the student in an academic module / discipline over a unit of time to achieve the study objectives / pre-established learning outcomes and are allocated as follows: for one academic semester - 30 transferable study credits; for one academic year - 60 transferable study credits.

Higher education is organized in 24 universities, academies of studies, institutes, and the like. The system of governing bodies of higher education institutions consists of the senate, the council for institutional strategic development, the scientific council, the faculty council, the administration council and the rector of the institution.

Higher education institutions have the status of university autonomy. University autonomy consists in the right of the university community to organize and self-manage, to exercise academic freedoms without any ideological, political or religious interference, to assume a set of competencies and obligations in accordance with national policies and strategies for the development of higher education. University autonomy covers the areas of management, organisational structure and operation of the institution, teaching and scientific research, administration and funding.

Higher education is regulated by the *Nomenclature of the fields of professional training and specialties*, which is a component part of state educational standards and determines the fields and specialties on the basis of which professional training is carried out in higher education. It is approved by the Government, at the proposal of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research (hereinafter - MECR) in agreement with the relevant ministries.

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Higher education is organized and carried out on the basis of content standards, competence standards, national reference standards and accreditation standards.

Quality management in higher education is ensured at national level - by MECR and ANACEC, and at institutional level - by internal quality assurance structures.

The National Qualifications Framework in higher education ensures the transparency of higher education, academic mobility and the recognition of diplomas at the international level. It is elaborated for each cycle of studies and field of professional training, in accordance with the European Qualifications Framework and the necessary qualifications on the national and European labor market. The qualifications awarded in higher education are introduced in the National Register of Qualifications in Higher Education, administered by MECR.

3. Quality assurance of higher education in the country

3.1 Legal framework

In the Republic of Moldova, in 2014, in accordance with the provisions of the [Education Code](#) no. 152/2014, the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Professional Education (ANACIP) was established, an administrative authority of national interest, autonomous from the Government, with distinct responsibilities in the field of quality assurance in education. In 2018, as a result of the absorption of the National School Inspectorate and the National Council for Attestation and Accreditation by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Professional Education, the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC) was established, which is the successor of the rights and obligations of the absorbed legal entities. As a result of that reform, the Statute of the Agency has changed. Thus, **from an organizational point of view**, in accordance with the provisions of the [Education Code](#) of the Republic of Moldova no. 152/2014 and of the [Regulation on the organization and operation of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research](#) no. 201 of 28.02.2018, ANACEC is an administrative authority subordinated to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research, established by the Government, financed from the state budget and from its own revenues.

ANACEC carries out its activity in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, the Education Code of the Republic of Moldova, the Code on Science and Innovation of the Republic of Moldova, the laws of the Republic of Moldova, decrees of the President of the Republic of Moldova, decisions of Parliament, ordinances, provisions and decisions of the Government, other regulatory acts, with the international treaties to which the Republic of Moldova is a party and with its own Regulation of organization and operation.

The Agency consists of the Governing Board, the profile committees, the administrative apparatus and the departments.

The *Governing Board* is the collective management body that ensures the elaboration and implementation of the Agency's strategy. It consists of 15 members: 13 academic staff with scientific, and didactic and scientific titles, a representative of the students and a representative of the business environment. The members of the Governing Board are selected through an open competition, judged internationally, organized by MEQR, from among all those interested, for a term of 4 years. The competition for the selection of members of the Governing Board is organized and conducted by a competition committee, consisting of 5 international experts, delegated by quality assurance authorities from the European Union. At the end of the competition, MEQR confirms, by order, the members of the Governing Board.

The President, the Vice-President and the Secretary General of the Governing Board are elected from among its members for a term of 4 years, following a public competition, organized according to the provisions of [Law no. 158-XVI of July 4, 2008 on the civil service and the status of the civil servant](#).

The person who has been designated as the winner of the competition for the position of President is appointed by the Government.

The persons who have been designated winners of the competition for the position of Vice-President and Secretary General are appointed by the MEQR.

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The activity of the President, Vice-President and Secretary General of the Governing Board also falls under the provisions of *Law no. 158-XVI of July 4, 2008 on the civil service and the status of civil servant*.

The executive management of the Agency is carried out by the President of the Governing Board, appointed by the Government, who is assisted by the Vice-President and the Secretary General.

The *profile committees* are established in accordance with the Regulation elaborated by the Agency ([*Regulation on the organization and operation of the profile committees of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research*](#), GD no. 327/2019). They operate in accordance with their own rules of organization and operation and are organized for each of the Agency's areas of activity: general education, vocational education and training, higher education, continuing professional training, research and innovation.

The staff of the Agency's *administrative apparatus* is strictly regulated at a maximum of 55 units / posts, most of them having the civil servant status.

The Agency is financed from the state budget, from collected revenues and resources related to projects financed from external sources, and the expert-evaluators are remunerated for their activity from the Agency's sources, according to the normative framework.

From an operational point of view, ANACEC implements state policies in the field of quality assurance in education at all levels (general education, vocational education and training, higher education, and continuing education), as well as in research and innovation.

The attributions of ANACEC regarding the quality assurance in higher education provide for:

- elaboration of the methodology and external evaluation criteria in order to authorize the provisional operation and accreditation of study programs and higher education institutions and their submission to the MECR to be promoted for approval by the Government;
- elaboration of the methodology for approving the right to conduct doctorates and its submission to the MECR to be promoted for approval by the Government;
- approval of the methodology regarding the ranking of higher education institutions;
- approval of the procedure for authorizing the provisional operation and accreditation of joint study programs in higher education;
- evaluation of higher education institutions and study programs for the purpose of their authorization for provisional operation or their accreditation;
- external evaluation of doctoral schools and their programs;
- approving or rejecting the application to become a doctoral supervisor following the evaluation of the files submitted by the interested candidates;
- exercising other attributions deriving from the provisions of the normative framework in the field of activity of the Agency.

The external evaluation is performed by ANACEC in accordance with the [*Methodology of external quality evaluation for the authorization of the provisional operation and accreditation of VET, higher education and continuing education study programs and institutions*](#), approved by Government Decision no. 161 of 18.05.2016, with the subsequent completions and modifications and with the Guidelines for external evaluation of the study programs on university cycles and of the higher education institutions, approved by the Governing Board of ANACIP, minutes no. 9 from 23.06.2016. During 2020, the [*Guidelines for external evaluation of bachelor's degree programs \(cycle I\) and integrated higher education*](#) and the [*Guidelines for external evaluation of master's degree programs*](#)

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[\(cycle II\)](#) were revised and updated taking into account educational standards at national and European level, the results and findings made following the first cycle of external evaluations carried out in the period 2016-2020, good national and international practices in the field. In order to ensure the quality of the documents developed, the opinions of the evaluated higher education institutions, the ANACEC Profile Committee in Higher Education, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research, the Agency's evaluators and other stakeholders were consulted. For example, in the process of updating the *Guidelines for external evaluation of master's degree programs (cycle II)*, 3 webinars were organized in which about 45 beneficiaries of the process were actively involved and formulated proposals to improve the evaluation standards: representatives of higher education institutions (teachers, program managers, institutional managers in the field of Quality Management Systems) and expert-evaluators of ANACEC. After consulting the opinion of all interested actors, the updated guidelines were approved by the Governing Board (Decision no. 27 of 25.09.2020).

In accordance with the updates made in the mentioned documents, the working tools of the external evaluation panel were also revised: the *Site visit record sheet* and the *External evaluation report for bachelor's degree, integrated higher education study programs, master's degree study programs*.

During 2019-2020, ANACEC also started the process of updating the *Guidelines for the external evaluation of doctoral degree study programs*. Subsequently, the activity on this document was partially stopped considering the provisions of the "Higher Education" project, financed by the World Bank, which will contribute decisively to the elaboration / updating of the normative framework for doctoral studies.

At the same time, although existing, but never applied, the *Guidelines for the external evaluation of higher education institutions* also needs to be revised on the basis of the best practices of European quality assurance agencies and the own experience gained during the evaluation of study programs.

In carrying out the external evaluation activities, ANACEC involves expert evaluators that the Agency selects based on its own [Methodology for selecting the expert evaluators](#). The selection of the expert evaluators is made through an open competition announced by ANACEC on its website. The examination and acceptance of the file, the evaluation and selection of the expert evaluators is done by the Department of Evaluation in Higher Education and the profile committee in higher education. The selected candidates are included in the Register of ANACEC's expert evaluators on general fields of study. External evaluation panels must include expert evaluators representing academia, students and the business environment / employers. At the same time, the composition of the external evaluation panels includes, as the case may be, international experts from the partner quality assurance agencies.

Independence of ANACEC in terms of formal outcomes, following the result of the external quality assessment, the members of the external evaluation panels, based on the findings and analyzes, formulate by mutual agreement a series of strengths, recommendations, mandatory areas for improvement, proposals for decisions on the evaluated study program, which they subsequently present at the meetings of the profile committee for examination and validation. The decision of the external evaluation panel, validated by the profile committee, is submitted for approval to the ANACEC Governing Board. The final decision on the authorization for provisional operation / accreditation, non-accreditation or withdrawal of the right of activity of a higher education institution or organization of a study program is adopted by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research, based on the results of the evaluation performed by the Agency.

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Therefore, the operation of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research, the attributions of the president, vice-president, secretary general and of the profile committees, conditions, procedures for their selection and appointment, structure and staff of the administrative apparatus, methodology of calculation of fees, as well as fees charged for evaluation procedures, remuneration of members of the Governing Board, profile committees, administrative apparatus and expert evaluators, are established by regulatory acts approved by the Government, in coordination with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research.

The strict regulation of the staff, including the positions and functions, conditioned by the statute of ANACEC as a subordinate structure of the MECR, caps the salaries for employees and practically makes impossible the interventions of adapting the staff to the current needs of the Agency. For example, the position of lawyer is missing, even if the accomplishment of the entity's attributions requires even two specialists in law. On the other hand, this situation regarding the strictly regulated remuneration of civil servants negatively influences the level of attractiveness of the positions put up for competition.

Another challenge refers to the staff of the Department of Evaluation in Higher Education. The conceptualization activities, updating of the normative and methodological framework, the organization of the process of external evaluation of study programs and higher education institutions, elaboration of thematic studies, as well as other activities in the field of competence are carried out within the Department of Evaluation in Higher Education by 4 employees: head of department (1), main specialist (1), senior specialist (1), specialist (1). The number of employees of the Department according to the regulated staff number of the administrative apparatus of the Agency is of maximum 5 persons. However, even in the case of completing the staff number of the Department with 5 people, this low number of employees and the amount of their workload is not sufficiently related to the number of study programs and higher education institutions subject to external evaluation. Thus, in order to solve to some extent this deficiency, it is necessary to review and adapt the normative-regulatory framework in this regard.

3.2 QA activities and their methodologies

Quality assurance in higher education is achieved through a set of actions to develop the institutional capacity to develop, plan and implement study programs, which forms and strengthens the trust of beneficiaries that the institution providing education meets and improves quality standards in accordance with its mission.

The fully functional national quality assurance system involves two successive stages:

- a) the authorization for provisional operation, which represents the act of establishing the institution and grants the right to carry out the educational process and to organize the admission to studies;
- b) accreditation, which grants, in addition to the rights provided above, the right to organize the final exam, as well as the right to issue diplomas, certificates and other study documents recognized by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research.

Quality evaluation in higher education consists in the multi-criteria examination of the extent to which an educational institution and its study programs meet national reference standards.

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Quality evaluation in higher education is a complex set of self-evaluation, internal evaluation and external quality evaluation activities, in accordance with approved accreditation standards, criteria and indicators.

Self-evaluation of quality in higher education is carried out by the institutional structures responsible for quality assurance, in accordance with the national standards in force.

External quality evaluation in higher education is carried out by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research or another quality assurance agency, registered in the European Quality Assurance Register in Higher Education (EQAR).

Quality evaluation in higher education aims at:

- a) institutional capacity;
- b) educational efficiency, including academic results;
- c) the quality of the initial and continuous professional training programs;
- d) institutional quality management;
- e) the results of scientific research and / or artistic creation;
- f) the concordance between the internal evaluation and the real situation.

Both self-evaluation and external evaluation are carried out in accordance with the procedure described in the [Methodology for external quality evaluation for the authorization of the provisional operation and accreditation of vocational education and training, higher education and continuing education study programs and institutions](#), with the *Guidelines for the external evaluation of bachelor's degree programs (cycle I) and integrated higher education, master's degree programs (cycle II), doctoral study programs* and the *Guidelines for the external evaluation of higher education institutions*.

Thus, the external quality evaluation procedure is initiated at the request of the higher education institution / consortium / partnership / subsidiary / founder / Ministry of Education, Culture and Research together with the submission of the application and the evaluation dossier to the specialized department within the Agency.

Following the approval of the dossier, which also includes the *self-evaluation report*, the Agency's specialized department proposes for approval in the Governing Board the composition of the *external evaluation panel* and the evaluation coordinator within the department. The members of the external evaluation panel analyze the dossier and the self-evaluation report; performs the evaluation *site visit* to the educational institution / institutions and completes the *Site visit record sheet* with the findings made during the visit (the completed Site visit record sheet is analyzed and countersigned by the educational institution); prepares the *external evaluation report* which is sent to the educational institution to analyse it and formulate comments if any. The results of the evaluation will be presented to the profile committee for validation and to the meeting of the Agency's Governing Board for decision-making.

According to the *Methodology for external quality evaluation* applied by ANACEC, the post-evaluation monitoring (follow-up) is performed in the external evaluation process for re-accreditation, when the external evaluation panel examines what concrete actions the educational institution has taken to achieve the mandatory improvement areas and recommendations formulated at the previous external evaluation (accreditation standard 10, performance indicator 10.1.2. Implementing

observations, recommendations and decisions formulated based on the external evaluation by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research / other quality assurance agencies).

If the study program or institution subject to external evaluation does not fully meet the requirements of the accreditation standards, ANACEC requests the educational institution to undertake and implement improvement measures in accordance with the [Post-evaluation monitoring procedure of study programs and vocational education and training, higher education, and continuous training institutions](#), approved at the meeting of the Governing Board of ANACEC on March 15, 2019. The post-evaluation monitoring procedure is mainly applied in case of impossibility to make the accreditation decision.

The external evaluation procedures and the decision of the Governing Board of the Agency regarding the authorization / non-authorization for provisional operation, accreditation / non-accreditation of the study program / educational institution may be challenged, if they do not correspond to the *Methodology for external evaluation*, in accordance with the provisions of the [Regulation on the settlement of petitions submitted to the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research](#), approved by the Board of ANACEC, Decision no. 58 of March 26, 2021.

At the end of the appeal periods, the decisions of the Governing Board are submitted to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research. The final decision regarding the authorization for provisional operation / non-authorization / accreditation / non-accreditation of the study program or of the educational institution is approved by the Ministry based on the decision of the ANACEC Governing Board.

The application of the [Methodology for external quality evaluation for the authorization of the provisional operation and accreditation of vocational education and training, higher education and continuing education study programs and institutions](#) (GD no. 616/2016) is a permanent challenge for the Agency, given the changes made, without the prior consultation and agreement of ANACEC, in the text of the Methodology by GD no. 1270 of December 26, 2018 and, in particular, point 62 concerning decisions made based on the results of external evaluation, by excluding two types of decisions without changing the adjacent score, which generated a regulatory vacuum.

3.3 National/agency criteria in external quality assurance

The Methodology for external quality evaluation for the authorization of the provisional operation and accreditation of vocational education and training, higher education and continuing education study programs and institutions was elaborated by ANACEC, in accordance with the national and European normative framework (international recommendations) in the field, in particular:

- Education Code of the Republic of Moldova no. 152/2014;
- Regulation on the organization and operation of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research, approved by Government Decision no. 201/2018;
- Nomenclatures of fields of professional training, of specialties and qualifications, trades / professions for the training of staff in higher education institutions, vocational education and training, and continuous training;
- **Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015), developed by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA);**

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- Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European reference framework for quality assurance in education and training (2009 / C 155/01);
- The European Quality Assurance Framework in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET Framework), developed by the European Quality Assurance Network in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET).

The external evaluation of the quality for the authorization of the provisional operation and the accreditation of study programs and educational institutions is performed based on the accreditation standards, criteria and performance indicators, established in the annexes to the *Methodology for the external evaluation*, as well as the evaluation standards and the mandatory minimum evaluation standards set out in the *Guidelines for the external evaluation*.

In Annex 1, we present a table for connecting the accreditation standards, criteria, performance indicators and evaluation standards, applied by ANACEC in the process of external evaluation of the quality of bachelor's degree programs (cycle I) and integrated higher education (as an example), to the recommendations formulated in the ESG 2015 guidelines.

The 10 accreditation standards, criteria and performance indicators, as well as evaluation standards are developed in accordance with the recommendations of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015), part I* and national standards in the field of education, promoted by various documents (laws, regulations, Government decisions and decisions of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research).

Accreditation standards represent a transposition, direct translation of the standards set out in the ESG, and the criteria, performance indicators and evaluation standards transpose the ESG guidelines for each standard, adapted to the national context.

3.4 Peer review experts

The Agency's expert evaluators are recruited under open competition conditions in a transparent way through an electronic platform (online), based on the methodology approved by the ANACEC Governing Board ([Methodology for the selection of expert evaluators](#)) and the criteria related to professional and scientific competencies, knowledge of the national legislation on quality assurance and evaluation in education, the methodology, accreditation standards, and performance indicators used in the external evaluation of quality in higher education applied by the Agency, the ability to apply this knowledge and also taking into account their moral integrity.

The *Methodology for the selection of expert evaluators* describes in detail the procedure and requirements for entering the competition, the selection process, the management of the Agency's Register of Experts, the rights and rules of conduct of experts.

The expert evaluators have the following rights:

- to participate, at the request of ANACEC, in the evaluation of general education, vocational education and training, higher education and continuous training institutions and / or study programs;
- to act, within the external evaluation missions, based on their own values and according to the provisions of the legislation in force;

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- to use, in a professional manner, with dignity and honor, the academic expertise and professional competencies they have, in order to objectively evaluate the institutions providing educational services and / or study programs;
- to participate, at the request of ANACEC, as a member in the panels / groups of experts / of evaluation and / or to carry out the expertise of the dossiers and papers submitted to ANACEC;
- to participate in professional training programs organized by ANACEC.

The work of expert evaluators must be governed by the fundamental principles and rules of conduct presented in Annex 2.

ANACEC verifies the observance of the provisions regarding the professional conduct and initiates corrective measures if necessary. If the expert evaluator does not observe or neglect the rules of conduct, they will be excluded from the Register, without the right to re-register. If the committed deeds meet the constitutive elements of a crime, ANACEC will notify, in accordance with the law, the competent bodies and institutions.

In general, the members of the external evaluation panel (which must include representatives of the academic environment, specialists in the evaluated field; representatives of students, who are students at the time of the external evaluation process; and representatives of employers, who carry out their professional activity in the field subject to evaluation, but also foreign experts) must be independent, not represent the interests of the organization to which they belong or of other third parties, confirm the absence of conflicts of interest and have the obligation to keep confidentiality of information.

A challenge in the selection and involvement of expert evaluators, however, lies in the fact that the Republic of Moldova is a small country where the entire academic community forms a "family" and, respectively, everyone knows each other. Thus, in order to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest of any kind, the Agency places great emphasis on involving experts for peer reviews and raising awareness of this fact.

The training of expert evaluators is a mandatory part of the external quality evaluation process for the authorization of the provisional operation and accreditation of study programs and higher education institutions. It aims to develop and ensure the necessary competencies of external experts to promote the objectivity and consistency of the Agency's decisions in the field of external quality assurance in higher education.

The training of the expert evaluators is carried out through training sessions, which are organized periodically by the Agency, in accordance with the training methodology of the expert evaluators of ANACEC. The calendar of training sessions for expert evaluators is established according to the needs of the Agency. In particular, the training of expert evaluators shall take place systematically, before each external evaluation mission, with regard to:

- the provisions of the external evaluation methodology;
- the rights and obligations of expert evaluators, including ethical conduct;
- the use of external evaluation tools - Site visit record sheet, External evaluation guidelines;
- the elaboration of the external evaluation report.

As a result of the analysis of the opinion of the interested parties (evaluators, higher education institutions, MEQR), the interest for solid training with a longer duration was found, with the certification of trainees based on a final assessment. In this regard, the Department of Evaluation in

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Higher Education has developed a training course for evaluators, designed with a duration of 90 hours (3 ECTS credits). The target group is represented by the following categories of trainees: teachers with scientific / scientific-didactic and / or managerial titles, students and employers. The course will allow trainees to participate in the competition for the selection of expert evaluators and their inclusion in the Register of expert evaluators by fields and to apply correctly the working tools in the external evaluation process.

3.5 Stakeholder engagement

The categories of stakeholders actively involved in quality assurance activities in higher education are higher education institutions, teachers, students, and business representatives, the Council of Rectors, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research. Thus, in the composition of the Governing Board of the Agency, which is the collective management body that ensures the elaboration and implementation of the Agency's strategy, there are representatives of teaching staff (13), students (1) and employers (1).

At the same time, the external evaluation panels are constituted on principles of representativeness, obligatorily including the following categories of stakeholders: representatives of the academic environment, representatives of the students and representatives of the employers / businesses.

In the following table, we present the stakeholders involved in the external quality assurance processes carried out by ANACEC, their frequency and level of involvement:

Stakeholder categories	Number of meetings	Formal / informal activities	Level of involvement
Teachers, students, business representatives	2-3 sessions per year; Monthly (after the appointment by the ANACEC Governing Board of the composition of the external evaluation panels).	Formal	Training sessions for expert evaluators; Training sessions with external evaluation panels; Updating the legal framework.
MECR	2 times a year	Formal	Approval of decisions for external evaluation of study programs; Dissemination of evaluation results (dissemination seminars); Updating the legal framework.
National Council of Rectors	1-2 times a year	Informal	Dissemination of evaluation results (dissemination seminars)
Civil society	Permanently	Informal	Dissemination of evaluation results (seminars)

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Higher education institutions	3 times a year	Informal	Information sessions Dissemination sessions of the results Updating the normative framework in force
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At the same time, training sessions are planned and carried out for institutional representatives (responsible for quality assurance, study program coordinators) in order to complete the self-evaluation dossiers, explain the working tools used by ANACEC in the external evaluation process, scheduled periods for submitting applications for external evaluation of study programs.

In order to motivate experts to participate in the external evaluation process, the Agency encourages the activities of evaluators and evaluated institutions by awarding diplomas of recognition and the Quality Crystal distinction, systematic involvement of evaluators in external evaluation missions, expert training sessions, dissemination on social media pages (e.g. Facebook, Agency website), encouraging / motivating / recognizing their expertise in order to continuously improve the quality of education and the higher education system.

In order to identify potential evaluators in various fields of training and involve them in the Agency's external evaluation activities, several information seminars and training sessions are organized, which explain the evaluation procedure, stages, rights and responsibilities of expert evaluators etc. In order to ensure the dissemination of good practices regarding the external evaluation process, as well as to intensify the inter-institutional collaboration, ANACEC aimed to identify and involve experts from as many higher education institutions as possible.

At the same time, in the conditions of applying the external evaluation procedure of the quality of some study programs, which are provided by only one higher education institution (State University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Technical University of Moldova, Agrarian State University of Moldova, State University of Physical Education and Sports), it was a real challenge to identify potential evaluators considering the fact that the market of educational services in the Republic of Moldova is very limited.

Also, in the process of selecting the evaluators, ANACEC pays special attention to students and employers' representatives, whose involvement contributes to increasing the connection between the contents offered in the national higher education system and labor market requirements, to the development of the practical-applicative nature of the study programs. In this regard, representatives of employers from several institutions were identified, selected and trained, such as: State Chancellery, Ministry of Economy and Infrastructure, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Health, Labor and Social Protection, Research Institutes subordinated Ministry of Education, Culture and Research, state and private enterprises, etc.

Analyzing the composition of the external evaluation panels from the perspective of the higher education institution where the evaluators work, we can conclude that in the external evaluation process organized by ANACEC were trained, as experts, teachers with scientific degrees and students from 20 universities, and employers' representatives - from over 40 profile institutions in the country, including international experts from ARACIS. The main objective of the Department of Evaluation in Higher Education, in this segment of activity, was to strengthen the database of expert evaluators,

diversify evaluators according to areas of training, so that they can cover as many study programs, motivation and promoting the involvement of students with an active role in the external evaluation process, setting up ad-hoc evaluation panels to avoid possible prior agreements or litigation, promoting professionalism, objectivity and the spirit of collegiality in external quality evaluation activities.

Another important aspect is the feedback provided to the experts. The members of the evaluation panels are given feedback in relation to their activity, e.g. how they behaved during the site visit, but also what topics were not discussed. Institutions are required to provide feedback in the form of a post-evaluation questionnaire on the work of experts. However, the experts are not informed about the feedback that ANACEC receives from institutions.

In the context of capitalizing on collaboration agreements with partner quality assurance agencies, continuously updating the register of evaluators, as well as in order to strengthen the composition of external evaluation panels, ANACEC involves both external evaluators of ARACIS in the process of external evaluation of study programs, as well as citizens of the Republic of Moldova abroad, who work in higher education and / or research institutions.

3.6 Thematic analysis

In order to align with the requirements set out in the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*, the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research has initiated the process of developing thematic studies. In this sense, ANACEC following the external evaluations of the bachelor's degree programs in the general field of study *Arts* elaborated the thematic study *The external evaluation of the quality of the bachelor's degree study programs in the general field of study 02 Arts and Humanities*. The study is an analysis of the field of training *Arts and humanities* and contains a series of recommendations for various categories of beneficiaries.

At the same time, in order to disseminate the results of the external evaluation to the evaluated study programs ANACEC plans the elaboration of thematic studies on general fields of study, at the end of each evaluation cycle, the publication of these studies on the Agency's website, the presentation of study results within dissemination activities (conferences, seminars, workshops, round tables, meetings).

4. Priority actions

In developing the Methodology for external evaluation, the active and effective involvement of higher education institutions and other relevant stakeholders, such as students, potential employers, ministries, is an important way to increase their commitment to external quality assurance and quality assurance activities, and to develop the level of trust between ANACEC and other stakeholders. Their involvement is also very important from the perspective of raising awareness among all stakeholders about the expectations and perspectives that the Agency must take into account and accept in a balanced and reasonable manner.

However, although all stakeholders need to be actively involved in the development of methodology, regulations, guidelines and other documents for the application of quality assurance procedures, the Agency has the highest expertise in making the right decisions based on the various opinions presented.

At the same time, it should be borne in mind that updates and changes should normally be made at the end of a cycle of activities (e.g. external evaluation of bachelor's and master's degree study programs) and that stakeholders should be involved in the continuous improvement of the methodology.

The accreditation standards, 10 in number, implemented by ANACEC comply with the recommendations of the Standards and guidelines (ESG), part 1: Standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance, containing criteria, performance indicators and evaluation standards that higher education institutions must perform in order to demonstrate the level of quality of the services provided.

At the same time, ANACEC follows the requirements of ESG standards, part 2: Standards and guidelines for external quality assurance. Thus, higher education institutions conduct an internal evaluation and prepare the self-evaluation report in accordance with the requirements set out in the Guidelines for external evaluation applied by ANACEC; external evaluation panels are set up independently by the Agency; the experts in these panels are trained on the whole external evaluation procedure; the expert evaluators analyze the self-evaluation reports of the institutions, visit the institutions subject to evaluation (interview the institution's management, teaching staff, students, graduates, employers, analyze the relevant documentation), complete the Site visit record sheet, prepare the external evaluation report formulating strengths, recommendations and mandatory areas of improvement to the evaluated study program; the external evaluation report is sent to the institution for comments which are subsequently discussed in the panel and the corresponding decision is made; the next step of analyzing the external evaluation report and approving the decision is made within the profile committee and only then the ANACEC Board takes the decision which is sent to the educational institution, but also to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research for the final approval and decision making.

The Methodology for external evaluation, modified in 2018, without the Agency's consent, generates a series of ambiguities regarding the final results of the external evaluation. In the current version, the Methodology describes two types of decisions (compared to four options in the initial version of the Methodology):

- If all accreditation standards "meet the requirements", the Agency's Governing Board proposes to accredit the study program or educational institution for a period of 5 years. An

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accreditation standard is considered to "meet the requirements" if more than 90% of the performance indicators correspond to the mandatory minimum level set by the Agency;

- If three or more accreditation standards "do not meet the requirements" or at least one mandatory minimum evaluation standard is not met, the Agency's Governing Board proposes not to accredit the study program or educational institution. An accreditation standard is considered "non-compliant" if less than 50% of the performance indicators meet the mandatory minimum level set by the Agency.

The current situation with a "vacuum" between 50% and 90% creates impediments, because no decisions can be made if such situations are found. The ANACEC Governing Board uses, as an "emergency solution" included in the post-evaluation (follow-up) procedure, the possibility to postpone the accreditation decision and to offer the institution the possibility to improve the situation and demonstrate the improvement, initially presenting an Action Plan with corrective measures, and subsequently a Report on the implementation of this plan, on the basis of which the final decision is taken. Although a second visit to the institution is legally allowed, this is not done due to the lack of financial resources and the small number of Agency staff. The "emergency solution" used by ANACEC undermines the consistency and reliability of the entire external quality evaluation process. Thus, the criteria for making final decisions need to be clarified. The solution could be to return to the previous formula with four possible decision options or, a compromise option could be to supplement it with a third conditional accreditation option.

In the case of accreditation decisions as a result of the external evaluation, a post-evaluation monitoring procedure (follow-up) is not currently applied to all evaluated institutions / study programs in the period until the next accreditation, which means that the existing procedure is not consistent and complete in terms of achieving the full quality cycle, but also compliance with ESG requirements. Thus, the concept, the form of follow-up may be different (e.g. reports, seminars, conferences, etc.), but it is also important that it includes the Agency's feedback.

In the external evaluation activities ANACEC involves expert evaluators included in the Register of expert evaluators of the Agency whose basic activity consists in carrying out a peer evaluation. The evaluators who are part of the external evaluation panels always represent the academic environment, students and employers / business environment. The experts are trained by ANACEC and their training is mandatory. As perspective actions, we aim to test professional competencies and certify expert evaluators, continuously completing the Register of expert evaluators.

Considering the fact that in the Republic of Moldova there are study programs belonging to quite specific fields of professional training (e.g.: medicine, horticulture, agronomy, sports, veterinary medicine, architecture, etc.), these being provided only by a single higher education institution (e.g. State University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Technical University of Moldova, State Agrarian University of Moldova etc.), it is a real challenge to identify potential expert evaluators given that the market for educational services in our country is very small. In this sense, but also in other cases, the involvement of international experts is a solution, and the regulatory framework allows this. An impediment in achieving this goal is the fact that the entire external evaluation process is conducted in Romanian, experts must know the legal framework and national context of higher education, and the involvement of international experts involves higher costs from institutions. However, the co-opting practices of foreign experts require development and expansion.

The mission of the Agency is established by the Government, with tasks and attributions (e.g. control) that are not compatible with those of an independent quality assurance agency and oriented towards

continuous quality assurance and improvement in education. The independence of the Agency is greatly affected by the changes made in 2018 in the *Education Code*, the *Methodology for External Evaluation* and in the *Regulation on the organization and operation of ANACEC*. Thus, with regard to:

- **Organizational independence:** The ANACEC Governing Board is elected by a committee of independent experts appointed by the agencies registered in EQAR at the request of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research; the president and vice-president are elected and appointed by the Government and the Ministry of Education. The agency does not define its structure and number of employees. The Agency recruits its staff members according to the rules of the public competition, and they carry out their activity within the limits provided by the Law on the civil service and the status of the civil servant. The government defines the level of staff salaries, hence the reluctance of specialists to work within the Agency.
- **Operational independence:** the selection, recruitment of experts takes place without any influence from third parties; the evaluation processes are carried out independently, but, in terms of defining its own procedures, there is a limitation of the agency's independence, even if the law says that ANACEC "develops, in accordance with European standards in the field, and makes public its own methodology for the evaluation and accreditation of institutions providing professional training and their study programs, which it proposes for approval to the Government" (e.g. modification in 2018 of the Methodology for external evaluation without consulting the Agency).
- **Independence of formal outcomes:** although the Governing Board makes the decision of authorization / non-authorization for provisional operation, accreditation / non-accreditation, the final decision is still adopted by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research.

The elaboration and continuous development of the normative and methodological framework in order to develop and consolidate a positive orientation of the academic community regarding the process of external quality assurance in higher education is a priority for ANACEC. In view of the above, several actions need to be taken. Priority would be the changes of the existing regulatory framework in the field with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders (MECR, ANACEC, higher education institutions, business representatives, students, teaching staff, etc.) to ensure the independence of ANACEC from third parties, to exclude various interference in its activity and to increase its level of credibility and trust, but also of the entire higher education system both at national and European / international level.

Also in this order of ideas, the active and effective involvement of stakeholders in ensuring the quality of studies, must be strengthened and oriented towards creating a community and a culture of quality in our country. At institutional level, the Agency aims to establish such a stakeholder involvement procedure in order to strengthen its position and bring everyone to the same table of dialogue.

Last but not least, the post-evaluation monitoring procedure currently applied by ANACEC needs to be revised and supplemented in accordance with the ESG recommendations to ensure its consistency and relevance in order to continuously increase and improve the quality of studies offered by higher education institutions in the country, with their active involvement.

5. Summary table

Note. When reading this action plan, it should be taken into account that many of the priority actions cannot be really limited in time as they are being implemented on a permanent basis (updating the register of expert evaluators, of the Agency’s website, training of experts and strengthening the human resource capacity etc.).

No.	Priority action	Was the priority action already identified in BFUG TPG C-QA? (YES/NO)	Activity steps (including status of implementation in case the activity was already identified in BFUG TPG C-QA)	Actors	Timeline	Desired outcome
Development of the normative and methodological framework						
1.	Amendment of the Education Code on the dimension of quality assurance in order to strengthen the independence of the national quality assurance agency	No	MECR initiated the process of amending the Education Code on the dimension of higher education. ANACEC has formulated proposals for amending the Education Code on the quality assurance component	MECR ANACEC	2022	Law approved
2.	Updating the Regulation on the activity and operation of ANACEC in accordance with the amendments of the Education Code	No	Following the amendment of the Education Code	MECR ANACEC	2022	Regulation approved by Government Decision
3.	Updating the Methodology for external quality evaluation	Yes	ANACEC formulated and sent to MECR several letters of request regarding the necessary changes to be operated in the	MECR ANACEC	2021	Methodology for external quality evaluation updated

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			Methodology in order for it to meet the ESG. They are currently being examined by the Government.			
4.	Elaboration of the Guidelines for external evaluation of the quality of doctoral study programs	No	The Department of Evaluation in Higher Education of ANACEC has started the process of updating the Guidelines for external evaluation of doctoral study programs. Subsequently, the activity on this document was stopped considering the provisions of the “Higher Education” project, financed by the World Bank, which will contribute decisively in the elaboration / updating of the normative framework for the doctoral education.	ANACEC HEIs Profile Committee in Higher Education	2022	Guidelines for external evaluation of the quality of doctoral study programs elaborated
5.	Updating the Guidelines for institutional external evaluation	No	At the moment, a series of good practice exchange activities with ENQA agencies are being initiated within the project “Enhancement of Quality Assurance in Higher Education System in Moldova - QFORTE”	ANACEC HEIs MECR EU project partners Profile Committee in Higher Education	November, 2023	Guidelines for institutional external evaluation updated

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6.	Review of the post-evaluation monitoring procedure	No	Draft	ANACEC Profile Committee in Higher Education HEIs	September, 2021	Post-evaluation monitoring procedure reviewed
7.	Development of the external quality evaluation procedure for joint study programs	No	To be initiated	ANACEC	2022	Procedure developed
8.	Development of the procedure for the effective involvement of stakeholders in external quality assurance activities	No	ANACEC carried out (within the project "ESQA - Effective involvement of stakeholders in quality assurance activities") an analysis of needs, accompanied by an action plan on the needs for change at Agency level.	ANACEC HEIs MECR Student representatives Representatives of the business environment / employers National Council of Rectors, etc.	November, 2021	The procedure for the effective involvement of stakeholders in external quality assurance activities developed
9.	Elaboration of the ANACEC Development Strategy for the period 2024-2029	No	To be initiated	ANACEC	December, 2023	Strategy developed
Ensuring quality and transparency in the Agency's activity						
10.	Consultation of stakeholders	No	In order to continuously improve the external evaluation process, ANACEC	ANACEC	At the end of each process of external	Stakeholders consulted

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			conducts questionnaires with both the evaluators and the evaluated educational institutions. Following the collection of feedback, analyzes are carried out, improvement measures are taken and recommendations are made to improve the processes.		evaluation of the study programs	
11.	Elaboration of thematic studies / analyses	No	ANACEC evaluates master's degree programs on general fields of study	ANACEC	2021-2023	Thematic studies elaborated for the general fields of study evaluated
12.	Expanding the practices of co-opting and involving foreign evaluators	No	ANACEC involves international experts from partner quality assurance agencies in the process of external evaluation of study programs	ANACEC Other Quality Assurance agencies	In the process of setting up external evaluation panels	International experts involved in the external evaluation process
13.	Updating the Agency's website with relevant information	No	In order to ensure the transparency of the results of the external evaluation, the Agency places on the official website www.anacec.md the external evaluation reports for the evaluated study programs and the decisions of the Governing Board	ANACEC	Permanently	Agency's website updated
Quality evaluation in higher education						

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14.	External evaluation of the quality of study programs in higher education	No	ANACEC organizes the process of external evaluation of the quality of study programs taking into account the intentions of higher education institutions, as well as the priorities of MECR	ANACEC HEIs	Upon request	Study programs evaluated
15.	External evaluation of the quality of higher education institutions for the purpose of international institutional accreditation	Nu	The action will be carried out within the ERASMUS + project "Enhancement of Quality Assurance in Higher Education System in Moldova - QFORTE"	ANACEC MECR 5 HEIs	2023	Five higher education institutions accredited
16.	Strengthening the capacities of higher education institutions in the field of internal quality assurance	Yes	3 workshops for 7 universities carried out within the ERASMUS + project "Enhancement of Quality Assurance in Higher Education System in Moldova - QFORTE"	ANACEC MECR 5 HEIs	2022	3 workshops organized for about 70 people
17.	Maintaining and completing the Register of expert evaluators	No	ANACEC conducts training for various categories of beneficiaries in order to identify the expert evaluators	ANACEC	2021-2023	Register of expert evaluators completed
18.	Maintaining a database on the results of external quality	No	In progress	ANACEC MECR	2021-2023	Database completed

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	evaluations in higher education					
Strengthening human resource capacities						
19.	Organizing information and training sessions for potential ANACEC evaluators by areas and categories of evaluators	No	ANACEC organizes information sessions for potential ANACEC evaluators by fields / categories of evaluators. ANACEC conducts training sessions for potential evaluators in training courses	ANACEC	2021-2023	Information sessions organized. Potential evaluators trained in organized courses
20.	Permanent consolidation of the capacity of ANACEC and MECR employees on quality assurance issues	Yes	The action will also be supported by the "Higher Education" project, funded by the World Bank and other projects.	ANACEC MECR	2021-2022	ANACEC and MECR employees trained
International collaboration						
21.	Development of ANACEC cooperation activities with various entities	No	ANACEC concludes partnership agreements and carries out joint activities with various entities interested in the field of quality assurance in education	ANACEC	2021-2023	Partnership agreements concluded. Joint activities performed. Involvement in projects
22.	Methodological and financial support of ANACEC in the registration process in ENQA / EQAR	No	In progress	MECR	2021-2022	ENQA / EQAR member

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6. Conclusions

The Republic of Moldova is still in the process of integration into the European Education Area and considerable efforts are being made to support higher education institutions in the process of complying with European values. At the same time, meeting the recommendations of European standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education is one of the cornerstones of the Bologna Process and ensures coherence and better comparability between Europe's higher education systems. It supports the mobility of staff and students and ensures the recognition of qualifications obtained in higher education in the country in higher education in Europe. To achieve this goal, ANACEC aims to become a full member agency of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and to be registered in the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (EQAR), stipulated in the *Education Code of the Republic of Moldova* (art. 115, p. (2), letter n)). Full membership of ENQA and registration in EQAR is based on a quality assurance agency's compliance with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*, which established a common framework for quality assurance systems for learning and teaching at European, national and institutional level.

ANACEC is already recognized in the Republic of Moldova as a body of competence and expertise in the field of external quality assurance of studies. Since its establishment and to date, the Agency has made great progress in developing and improving its activities in line with the ESG recommendations. The recognition that ANACEC will obtain through ENQA membership and registration in EQAR would strengthen the reliability and credibility of ANACEC's external quality assurance activities in the field of higher education, and the implementation of this action plan would considerably increase the chances of the Agency and the whole higher education system in the Republic of Moldova to embrace European values in this regard and to successfully integrate into the European Education Area.

Connection table

Accreditation standard 1. Policy for quality assurance

Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.

Criteria	Performance indicators	Evaluation standards	ESG - guidelines
1.1. The legal-normative framework for the operation of the program	1.1.1. The legal status of the institution vs. the realization of the study program	The framework for the operation / provision of the study program is in accordance with the normative framework in force.	Policies and processes are the main pillars of a coherent institutional quality assurance system that forms a cycle for continuous improvement and contributes to the accountability of the institution. It supports the development of quality culture in which all internal stakeholders assume responsibility for quality and engage in quality assurance at all levels of the institution. In order to facilitate this, the policy has a formal status and is publicly available. Quality assurance policies are most effective when they reflect the relationship between research and learning & teaching and take account of both the national context in which the institution operates, the institutional context and its strategic approach. Such a policy supports - the organisation of the quality assurance system; - departments, schools, faculties and other organisational units as well as those of institutional leadership, individual staff members and students to take on their
1.2. Strategies, policies and internal quality management	1.2.1. Quality assurance strategy and educational policy	The institution has educational strategies and policies for quality assurance and the study program is fully connected to their provisions.	
	1.2.2. Organization, application and effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system	Institutional quality assurance structures are functional and efficient.	
	1.2.3. Internationalization of the study program	The aspects of internationalization are complexly reflected and are fully realized within the study program.	

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			<p>responsibilities in quality assurance;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - academic integrity and freedom and is vigilant against academic fraud; - guarding against intolerance of any kind or discrimination against the students or staff; - the involvement of external stakeholders in quality assurance. <p>The policy translates into practice through a variety of internal quality assurance processes that allow participation across the institution. How the policy is implemented, monitored and revised is the institution's decision. The quality assurance policy also covers any elements of an institution's activities that are subcontracted to or carried out by other parties.</p>
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Accreditation standard 2. Design and approval of programs

Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programs. The programs should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a program should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

Criteria	Performance indicators	Evaluation standards	ESG - guidelines
2.1. Design and approval of the study program	2.1.1. General framework for designing the study program	The study program is designed and approved in accordance with the requirements of the regulatory framework in force.	Study programs are at the core of the higher education institutions' teaching mission. They provide students with both academic knowledge and skills including those that are transferable, which may influence their personal development and
	2.1.2. Connecting the study program to the National Qualifications Framework	The study program is connected to the National Qualifications Framework / European	

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		Qualifications Framework.	may be applied in their future careers.
2.2. Content of the study program	2.2.1. Mission and objectives of the study program	The mission and objectives of the study program are connected to the national strategies, realities and trends in the field, to the strategic development plan of the institution, department / chair.	Programs - are designed with overall program objectives that are in line with the institutional strategy and have explicit intended learning outcomes; - are designed by involving students and other stakeholders in the work;
	2.2.2. The study plan	The study plan corresponds to the requirements of the Framework Plan and ensures the achievement of learning outcomes and the formation of professional competences.	- benefit from external expertise and reference points; - reflect the four purposes of higher education of the Council of Europe (cf. Scope and Concepts); - are designed so that they enable smooth student progression;
	2.2.3. Discipline curricula	The content of the curricula contributes to the achievement of the learning outcomes.	- define the expected student workload, e.g. in ECTS;
	2.2.4. Relevance of the study program	The study program fully reflects the needs of the labor market, trends in the field and has a significant social and economic impact.	- include well-structured placement opportunities where appropriate; - are subject to a formal institutional approval process.

Accreditation standard 3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

Institutions should ensure that the programs are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.

Criteria	Performance indicators	Evaluation standards	ESG – guidelines
3.1. The teaching-learning process	3.1.1. Forms of organizing the teaching-learning process	The forms of organization of the teaching-learning process are carried out in accordance with the provisions of the normative framework in force and contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the study program.	Student-centred learning and teaching plays an important role in stimulating students' motivation, self-reflection and engagement in the learning process. This means careful consideration of the design and delivery of study

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	3.1.2. Student-centered teaching-learning methods	The teaching-learning methods used are entirely student-centered.	<p>programs and the assessment of outcomes. The implementation of student-centred learning and teaching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - respects and attends to the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths; - considers and uses different modes of delivery, where appropriate; - flexibly uses a variety of pedagogical methods; - regularly evaluates and adjusts the modes of delivery and pedagogical methods; - encourages a sense of autonomy in the learner, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the teacher; - promotes mutual respect within the learner-teacher relationship; - has appropriate procedures for dealing with students' complaints. <p>Considering the importance of assessment for the students' progression and their future careers, quality assurance processes for assessment take into account the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assessors are familiar with existing testing and examination methods and receive support in developing their own skills in this field; - The criteria for and method of assessment as well as criteria for marking are published in advance; - The assessment allows students to demonstrate
	3.1.3. Use of ICT tools in the teaching-learning-assessment process	ICT tools, educational platforms are used in the teaching-learning-assessment process in over 90% of the course units / modules of the study program.	
	3.1.4. Academic calendar and study process schedule	The university calendar and the schedule of the didactic activities are elaborated in accordance with the provisions of the study plan of the study program.	
3.2. Internships	3.2.1. Organizing internships	The organization of the internships is carried out in accordance with the normative framework in force and allows the achievement of the learning outcomes.	
	3.2.2. Collaboration agreements to carry out internships	The institution has collaboration agreements for the conduct of internships and ensures 100% of the needs of the study program.	
3.3. Assessment of academic results	3.3.1. Organizing the process of assessing academic results	The process of assessing the academic results is organized in accordance with the normative framework in force and ensures the achievement of the learning outcomes of the course units / modules.	
	3.3.2. Organizing the process of assessing internships	The assessment process of the internships is carried out in accordance with the provisions of the normative framework in force and ensures the achievement of the learning outcomes.	

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			<p>the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. Students are given feedback, which, if necessary, is linked to advice on the learning process;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Where possible, assessment is carried out by more than one examiner; - The regulations for assessment take into account mitigating circumstances; - Assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students and carried out in accordance with the stated procedures; - A formal procedure for student appeals is in place.
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Accreditation standard 4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student “life cycle”, e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification.

Criteria	Performance indicators	Evaluation standards	ESG – guidelines
4.1. Admission of students	4.1.1. Recruitment and admission of students	The recruitment and admission of students to the study program is carried out in accordance with the normative framework in force.	Providing conditions and support that are necessary for students to make progress in their academic career is in the best interest of the individual students, programs, institutions and systems. It is vital to have fit-for-purpose admission, recognition and completion procedures, particularly when students are mobile within and across higher education systems.
	4.1.2. Access for disadvantaged groups to studies	The recruitment and admission of students from disadvantaged groups is carried out in accordance with the regulatory framework in force.	
4.2. Student progress	4.2.1. Student promotion	The promotion of students from the study program is carried out in accordance with the normative framework in force.	It is important that access policies, admission processes and criteria are

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	4.2.2. Academic mobility	The academic mobility of students from the study program is achieved in accordance with the normative framework in force and includes periods of studies / internships of students in an educational institution in the country / abroad.	implemented consistently and in a transparent manner. Induction to the institution and the program is provided. Institutions need to put in place both processes and tools to collect, monitor and act on information on student progression.
4.3. Recognition and acquisition of certifications	4.3.1. Awarding the title and issuing the diploma	The awarding of the title and the issuance of the diploma, the diploma supplement and the academic certificates are carried out in accordance with the normative framework in force.	Fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, are essential components for ensuring the students' progress in their studies, while promoting mobility. Appropriate recognition procedures rely on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - institutional practice for recognition being in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention; - cooperation with other institutions, quality assurance agencies and the national ENIC/NARIC centre with a view to ensuring coherent recognition across the country. Graduation represents the culmination of the students' period of study. Students need to receive documentation explaining the qualification gained, including achieved learning outcomes and the context, level, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed.

Accreditation standard 5. Teaching staff

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Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the staff.

Criteria	Performance indicators	Evaluation standards	ESG – guidelines
5.1. Recruitment and administration of academic staff	5.1.1. Planning, recruitment and administration of academic staff	<p>The planning, recruitment and administration of the academic staff from the study program is carried out in accordance with the normative framework in force.</p> <p>Over 80% of the number of teachers who ensure the realization of the study program represent tenured staff and by internal cumulation.</p>	<p>The teacher's role is essential in creating a high quality student experience and enabling the acquisition of knowledge, competences and skills. The diversifying student population and stronger focus on learning outcomes require student-centred learning and teaching and the role of the teacher is, therefore, also changing. Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their staff and for providing them with a supportive environment that allows them to carry out their work effectively. Such an environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - sets up and follows clear, transparent and fair processes for staff recruitment and conditions of employment that recognise the importance of teaching; - offers opportunities for and promotes the professional development of teaching staff; - encourages scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research; - encourages innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies.
	5.1.2. Professional qualification of academic staff	<p>Over 90% of the number of teachers have professional qualification according to the study program.</p> <p>Over 80% of the number of teachers, who ensure the teaching of theoretical courses from the study program, hold scientific / scientific-didactic / honorary degrees.</p>	
5.2. Academic staff development	5.2.1. Academic staff development strategies / policies / measures	The institution has strategies / policies for the development of academic staff and fully implements them.	
	5.2.2. Planning and carrying out the methodical activity of the academic staff	<p>The institution plans, monitors and fully supports the methodical activity of the academic staff.</p> <p>The academic staff fully performs the planned methodical activity.</p>	
	5.2.3. Evaluation of academic staff	The academic staff of the study program is periodically evaluated by	

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		the managers of the educational institution and effective measures are taken to continuously improve their performance.	
5.3. Scientific research and innovation activity of academic staff	5.3.1. Planning and supporting the scientific research and innovation activity of the academic staff	The institution effectively plans and supports the scientific research, innovation and technology transfer activity (of the academic staff) that covers the needs of the study program.	
	5.3.2. Carrying out and monitoring the scientific research and innovation activity of the academic staff	Academic staff carry out scientific research, innovation and technology transfer activities that cover the needs of the study program. The institution monitors the achievement of scientific research, innovation and technology transfer of the academic staff involved in the study program.	
	5.3.3. Capitalization of the results of the scientific research and innovation activity of the academic staff in the context of the study program	The results of the scientific research, innovation and technological transfer activity of the academic staff are capitalized within the study program.	

Accreditation standard 6. Learning resources and student support

Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided.

Criteria	Performance indicators	Evaluation standards	ESG – guidelines
6.1. Administrative and auxiliary staff	6.1.1. Planning and coordinating the activity of administrative and auxiliary staff	The planning, recruitment and coordination of the administrative and	For a good higher education experience, institutions provide a range of resources to

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		auxiliary staff at the study program is carried out in accordance with the normative framework in force.	assist student learning. These vary from physical resources such as libraries, study facilities and IT infrastructure to
6.2. Material and learning resources	6.2.1. Existence and use of educational and research spaces	The institution fully provides adequate spaces for the study and research process of the study program. The institution provides areas for a student, as follows: classrooms - not less than 2.0 m ² ; seminar rooms - not less than 2.0 m ² ; laboratories - not less than 3.0 m ² .	human support in the form of tutors, counsellors and other advisers. The role of support services is of particular importance in facilitating the mobility of students within and across higher education systems. The needs of a diverse student population (such as mature, part-time, employed and international students as well as students with disabilities), and the shift towards student-centred learning and flexible modes of learning and teaching, are taken into account when
	6.2.2. Endowment and accessibility of educational and research space	The institution is endowed with educational and research spaces that fully ensure the achievement of the objectives of the study program.	allocating, planning and providing the learning resources and student support. Support activities and facilities may be organised
	6.2.3. Endowment, development and accessibility of the library fund for the study program	The library fund is properly endowed, developed periodically and accessible to students and academic staff.	in a variety of ways depending on the institutional context. However, the internal quality assurance ensures that all resources are fit for purpose, accessible, and that
	6.2.4. Students assurance and access to curricular support	Over 90% of the curricular support from the study program is accessible and adequate for the training of competencies and the achievement of the learning outcomes.	students are informed about the services available to them. In delivering support services the role of support and administrative staff is crucial and therefore they need to be
6.3. Financial resources	6.3.1. The financial means allocated to the educational and research process of the study program	The financial means for teaching and research are allocated in accordance with the regulatory framework in force and are sufficient for the conduct of the study program.	qualified and have opportunities to develop their competences.
	6.3.2. Tuition fees and scholarships for the study program	Procedures for setting tuition fees, scholarships and other forms of	

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		material support are applied in accordance with the regulatory framework in force.	
6.4. Social insurance for students	6.4.1 Providing students with dormitory	Over 50% of the student-applicants from the study program are provided with a dormitory, in accordance with the rules in force.	

Accreditation standard 7. Information management

Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programs and other activities.

Criteria	Performance indicators	Evaluation standards	ESG – guidelines
7. 1. Access to information	7.1.1. Information management and access of students and employees to information on the study program	The institution has a system / mechanism for collecting information relevant to the management of the study program, which is accessible to students and employees.	Reliable data is crucial for informed decision-making and for knowing what is working well and what needs attention. Effective processes to collect and analyse information about study programs and other activities feed into the internal quality assurance system.
7.2. Databases	7.2.1. Establishment and access to the study program database	The institution has functional electronic databases and provides secure access to them for students and employees.	The information gathered depends, to some extent, on the type and mission of the institution. The following are of interest: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Key performance indicators; - Profile of the student population; - Student progression, success and drop-out rates; - Students' satisfaction with their programs; - Learning resources and student support available; - Career paths of graduates. Various methods of collecting information may be used. It is important that students and staff are

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			involved in providing and analysing information and planning follow-up activities.
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Accreditation standard 8. Public information

Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programs, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible.

Criteria	Performance indicators	Evaluation standards	ESG – guidelines
8.1. Transparency of information of public interest regarding the study program	8.1.1. Website of the institution / study program	The information of public interest regarding the study program is accessible and updated on the web page of the institution / faculty / department / chair.	Information on institutions' activities is useful for prospective and current students as well as for graduates, other stakeholders and the public.
	8.1.2. Transparency of information regarding the activity of the department / chair / study program	The institution shall ensure full transparency of the information of public interest regarding the study program.	Therefore, institutions provide information about their activities, including the programs they offer and the selection criteria for them, the intended learning outcomes of these programs, the qualifications they award, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used, the pass rates and the learning opportunities available to their students as well as graduate employment information.

Accreditation standard 9. On-going monitoring and periodic review of programs

Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programs to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the program. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.

Criteria	Performance indicators	Evaluation standards	ESG – guidelines
9.1. Procedures for regular monitoring, evaluation and	9.1.1. Monitoring and reviewing the educational offer and the study program	The institution has procedures for monitoring and reviewing the educational offer and applies them consistently and efficiently.	Regular monitoring, review and revision of study programs aim to ensure that the provision remains appropriate and to create a supportive and effective

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review of the study program	9.1.2. Monitoring the teaching-learning-assessment processes	The teaching-learning-assessment processes are monitored consistently and effective measures are taken to improve them.	learning environment for students. They include the evaluation of: - The content of the program in the light of the latest research in the given discipline thus ensuring that the program is up to date; - The changing needs of society; - The students' workload, progression and completion; - The effectiveness of procedures for assessment of students; - The student expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to the program; - The learning environment and support services and their fitness for purpose for the program. Programs are reviewed and revised regularly involving students and other stakeholders. The information collected is analysed and the program is adapted to ensure that it is up-to-date. Revised program specifications are published.
	9.1.3. Existence and application of self-evaluation procedures of the study program	The institution has and effectively implements self-evaluation procedures of the study program.	
	9.1.4. Evaluation of the study program by students, graduates, employers and other beneficiaries	The study program is evaluated by all categories of beneficiaries (students, employees, graduates, employers) and measures are taken to continuously improve it.	
9.2. Employment	9.2.1. Mechanisms for recording the employment and evolution of graduates from the study program in the field of work	The institution has institutional mechanisms to record the employment and professional development of graduates and applies them consistently.	
	9.2.2. Career guidance activities and the competitiveness of graduates on the labor market	The institution consistently carries out effective career guidance activities. The employment rate of graduates according to the general field of study (in the first year after graduation) is over 70%.	

Accreditation standard 10. Cyclical external quality assurance

Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis.

Criteria	Performance indicators	Evaluation standards	ESG – guidelines
10.1. External quality assurance	10.1.1. Implementation of the provisions and recommendations of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research and of the relevant ministries	The institution has and implements procedures for the communication, implementation and monitoring of the provisions and recommendations of the	External quality assurance in its various forms can verify the effectiveness of institutions' internal quality assurance, act as a catalyst for improvement and offer the institution

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		MECR and the relevant ministries.	new perspectives. It will also provide information to assure the institution and the public of the quality of the institution's activities. Institutions participate in cyclical external quality assurance that takes account, where relevant, of the requirements of the legislative framework in which they operate. Therefore, depending on the framework, this external quality assurance may take different forms and focus at different organisational levels (such as program, faculty or institution). Quality assurance is a continuous process that does not end with the external feedback or report or its follow-up process within the institution. Therefore, institutions ensure that the progress made since the last external quality assurance activity is taken into consideration when preparing for the next one.
	10.1.2. Implementation of observations, recommendations and decisions formulated based on external evaluation by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research / other quality assurance agencies	The institution examines the observations, recommendations and decisions of ANACEC / other quality assurance agencies and takes consistent measures for the development of the study program after the external evaluation.	

Annex 2

The fundamental principles and rules of conduct in the work of expert evaluators

- 1) *The rule of law and the overall community interest* over the personal interest.
- 2) *Promoting the quality culture* in the evaluation process.
- 3) *Professional competence*, as a principle according to which all the activities carried out by the expert evaluators are treated with responsibility, competence and efficiency, based on the acquired knowledge and skills, in this sense the expert evaluators have the following obligations:
 - to know the legislation specific to the activity carried out, to be constantly concerned with increasing the level of training;
 - to permanently develop the professional competencies required by the evaluation procedures and to participate in professional training programs organized or recommended by ANACEC;
 - to fulfill responsibly all the obligations established by the evaluation procedures.
- 4) *Integrity*, a principle according to which the activity of expert evaluators is exercised with honesty and fairness, in this sense the expert evaluators must respect the following rules of conduct:
 - to avoid any activity that could affect the credibility, objectivity and impartiality;
 - to signal to the ANACEC management if they are in a situation of incompatibility or conflict of interests between the quality of evaluator and other qualities deriving from their activity and to request the replacement with another expert evaluator in case they find the situation of incompatibility or conflict of interests;
 - not to provide false information or data during and / or after the evaluation activity.
- 5) *Objectivity*, the principle according to which the conclusions and opinions formulated by the expert evaluators in the work carried out must be based exclusively on the evidence and documents analyzed, without other external influences. Thus, the expert evaluators have the following obligations:

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- to prepare the evaluation reports objectively, analyzing all the relevant aspects of the evaluated activity;
 - not to be influenced by personal interests or those of third parties in the formulation of their own opinions;
 - not to superficially treat the information, data, documents obtained in the evaluation process;
 - not to omit, in bad faith, information, data and documents obtained during the evaluation process;
 - to base their conclusions, observations / recommendations / areas for improvement in the reports drawn up during the evaluation exclusively on verified facts and documents from reliable and unequivocal sources.
- 6) *Confidentiality*, a principle according to which expert evaluators are prohibited from disclosing personal data, information and documents made available to them in the exercise of the activity of evaluator. In this respect, the expert evaluators have the following obligations:
- sign a confidentiality agreement when engaging in the evaluation activity;
 - not to use in the personal interest or for the benefit of third parties the information acquired in the course of the evaluation activity;
 - not to make public information or documents that could harm the prestige and public image of those evaluated.
- 7) *Independence*, a principle according to which expert evaluators must exercise their activity impartially and demonstrate their independence from any external influences and interest groups. In this respect, experts have the following obligations:
- to have an impartial and independent attitude towards any political, economic, religious, ethnic or other interest in carrying out the evaluation activity;
 - not to get involved in activities or relations that could affect the evaluation activity that they carry out and to bring to the knowledge of the ANACEC management any act or fact that could affect the activity;
 - not to provide services other than those provided by the legal framework in force regarding the evaluation activity carried out.