



**National Agency for Quality Assurance
in Education and Research**



SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT



Chişinău - 2022

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List of abbreviations

- ANACEC** – National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research
- ANACIP** – National Agency for Quality Assurance in Professional Education
- CEENQA** – Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
- DHEE** – Department of Higher Education Evaluation
- ECTS** – European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
- EEP** – External evaluation panel
- EER** – External evaluation report
- EHEA** – European Higher Education Area
- ENQA** – European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
- ESG** – Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
- EQA** - External quality assurance
- EQAR** – European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
- EQAVET** – European Network for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training
- ETF** – Forum for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training
- GB** – Governing Board of ANACEC
- GD** – Government decision
- HE** – Higher education
- HEI** – Higher education institution
- ME/MECR/MER** – Ministry of Education/Ministry of Education, Culture and Research/Ministry of Education and Research
- MEE** – Methodology of external quality evaluation for the authorization of provisional operation and accreditation of vocational education and training, higher education and professional continuous training study programmes and institutions
- NCAA** – National Council for Accreditation and Attestation
- NQF** - National Qualifications Framework
- NSI** – National School Inspectorate
- PC** – Profile committee
- PCHE** – Profile committee in higher education
- QA** – Quality assurance
- RM** – Republic of Moldova
- SAR** – Self-assessment report
- SER** – Self-evaluation report
- SICI** – Standing International Conference of Inspectorates
- VET** – Vocational education and training

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1. Introduction

With the approval in 2014 of the Education Code, the legal and institutional framework of the national QA system was defined, one of its components being the establishment and ensuring the operation of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Professional Education (ANACIP). The new structure was established by Government Decision (GD) no. 652/2014 *On the establishment of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Professional Education*. The reform, initiated by Law no. 190/2017 for the amendment and completion of some legislative acts, promoted and carried out in the context of the implementation of the *Strategy on the reform of the public administration for 2016-2020*, included a series of organizational and content changes for many structures from various fields of public interest, including quality assurance.

As a result, by GD no. 201/2018, the name of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Professional Education was changed to National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC). The new structure absorbed the National School Inspectorate (NSI), an administrative authority under the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research (MECR), and the National Council for Accreditation and Attestation (NCAA), an administrative authority autonomous from the Government.

ANACEC's mission is to implement state policies and contribute to the development oriented towards the best international standards in the areas of competence assigned. The agency covers several fields of activity, such as: quality assurance in general education, vocational education and training, continuous training, higher education, research and innovation. However, in this SAR the activities of ANACEC on the dimension of higher education are described, which fall under the scope of ESG.

QA agencies operating in member countries in the European Higher Education Area, which carry out external quality evaluation activities in the field of higher education, must go through an external assessment process, every 5 years, to establish compliance of their operation and activities with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG).

ANACEC has chosen to undergo external assessment by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) for the first time and intends to apply for full membership. Currently, ANACEC is an affiliated member of ENQA (since January 2016). The assessment will also serve as a basis for requesting the Agency's inclusion in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), a condition also stipulated in the *Education Code* of the RM (art. 115, letter n)).

The Self-Assessment Report (SAR) of ANACEC is prepared in accordance with the recommendations stipulated in the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews*, approved in 2021. There are presented 6 years of activity, basically since the establishment of the entity (Government Decision No. 652/2014 *On the establishment of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Professional Education*). It should be noted that during this period the Agency faced several difficulties and challenges, given the restructuring of the entity by the Government in February 2018. At the same time, the Agency recorded progress both at the national level, by establishing and applying an external QA framework in education based on European values, principles and good practices, which, however, takes into account the national context, as well as at the international level, by creating viable partnerships and active involvement in projects with a significant impact on the Agency and the educational system in general.

Going through an internal assessment process, the conclusions of which are presented in the Report, is an opportunity to reflect on the agency's activities and operation, with the aim of identifying areas for improvement.

At the same time, the external assessment will provide an excellent opportunity to receive external feedback on how ANACEC fulfills its quality assurance mission, to reflect on the strengths, weaknesses and challenges the agency faces, to improve and develop dialogue with the main stakeholders.

2. Development of the self-assessment report

The process of developing this SAR was initiated by the decision of the ANACEC's Governing Board (GB) on the action plan and the composition of the working group. Thus, a series of actions were planned, the people responsible were appointed and the deadlines for each of them were set. The main actions are:

- developing the draft SAR;
- public consultation of the draft SAR by:
 - creating a dedicated section on the ANACEC website in the [Transparency](#) section,
 - placing the draft SAR on the website of ANACEC / sending emails to HEIS (Romanian version),
- collecting feedback and systematizing the information/proposals received;
- finalizing the SAR and its approval by the GB decision of 29.07.2022.

The working group consisted of representatives of MER, academia, the Profile Committee in Higher Education (PCHE), the business environment and students, presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The working group for the elaboration of the SAR of ANACEC

People involved in writing the SAR

No	Category	Last name, first name	Position
1.	Management	Chiciuc Andrei	President
		Petrov Elena	Vice-President
		Baciu Sergiu	Secretary General
2.	Department of Higher Education Evaluation	Banu Felicia	Head of Department
		Danila Natalia	Main specialist
		Balan Stela	Main specialist
		Cioban Natalia	Senior specialist
3.	Public Relations and International Cooperation Office	Guvir Stela	Head of Office
4.	Financial-administrative office	Avornic Ana	Chief accountant
5.	Institutional management section	Rudei Parascovia	Head of Section

People involved in the process of providing general feedback on the SAR

No.	Name of subdivision/institution	Last name, first name	Position
1.	Governing Board of ANACEC	Șaptefrați Lilian	GB member

2.	Profile committee in higher education of ANACEC	Todos Petru	PC chairperson
		Duca Maria	PC member
		Stepanov Georgeta	PC member
3.	Ministry of Education and Research	Velişco Nadejda	Secretary General of the Ministry
4.	State University of Medicine and Pharmacy „Nicolae Testemiţanu”	Şalaru Virginia	Head of Academic Quality Management Section
5.	Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova	Cepraga Lucia	Head of the Studies, Curriculum Development and Quality Management Section
6.	Moldova State University	Carauş Irina	PhD student
7.	„Ion Creangă” State Pedagogical University	Ciobanu Anastasia	Master student
8.	Moldovan Association of ICT Companies (ATIC)	Bzovii Mariana	Executive Director
9.	Chamber of Commerce and Industry	Badâr Iurie	Head of Expertise, Evaluation and Services Department in International Trade

The members of the working group were involved in this activity in the period July 2021 - July 2022 both at the stage of writing the SAR (ANACEC representatives), but also with the role of providing feedback, suggestions for improvement (representatives of stakeholders), given the national context of QA in higher education (HE).

It should be noted that when developing the SAR, the members of the working group also took into account the opinions expressed by the European experts, co-opted within the Twinning project *Enhancing the quality and effectiveness of the VET system in the Republic of Moldova*, the project *Supporting European QA Agencies in meeting the ESG (SEQA-ESG)*, as well as the World Bank project that came up with a series of recommendations to ANACEC regarding the compliance of its activities with the ESG requirements.

3. Higher education and quality assurance of higher education in the context of the agency

The Republic of Moldova became part of the Bologna Process in 2005, which led to a comprehensive reform in the higher education sector, aimed at modernizing the system and aligning it with European standards. The strategic objectives in the field of education are also established in the Association Agreement concluded between the RM and the European Union.

Currently, the national education sector is regulated by the *Education Code* (in force since November 2014), which establishes the legal framework for its planning, organization, operation and development, and the *National Qualifications Framework*, which ensures the transparency of HE, facilitates academic mobility and the recognition of diplomas at international level. It is correlated with the European Qualifications Framework and the need for qualifications on the national and European labour market. The qualifications awarded in HE are described in the National Register of Qualifications in Higher Education, coordinated by MER.

Higher education in the RM is structured in three cycles (Figure 1).



Figure 1. General structure of higher education

Bachelor's degree studies and integrated higher education can only be organized for the specialties provided in the *Nomenclature of professional training fields and specialties* (GD 482/2017). Bachelor's degree studies are completed with the passing of the final exam and/or the bachelor's degree thesis/project and the issuance of the bachelor's degree diploma.

The integrated higher education is organized in the fields of Medicine, Pharmacy, Veterinary Medicine and Architecture. They are completed with the passing of the final exam/thesis and the issuance of the diploma equivalent to the master's degree diploma.

Master's degree studies are the second stage of university studies and ensure deepening in the field of bachelor's degree studies or in a related field and aim to develop scientific research capabilities. They are a mandatory preparatory basis for doctoral studies and are completed with the public defence of the master's degree thesis/project and the issuance of the master's degree diploma.

Bachelor's, integrated higher education and master's degree diplomas are accompanied by the diploma supplement, issued in Romanian and English.

Doctoral degree studies are organized in doctoral schools established within HEIs, as well as within national and international consortia or partnerships. Doctoral degree studies are carried out through two types of programmes:

- a) scientific doctorate, which aims to produce original, internationally recognized scientific knowledge,
- b) professional doctorate, in the fields of arts and sports, which aims to produce original knowledge based on the application of the scientific method and systematic reflection on artistic creations or on high-level national and international sports performances.

Doctoral degree studies are completed with the public defence of the doctoral thesis, the awarding of the PhD title (in the respective field) and the issuance of the doctorate diploma by the institution organizing the doctoral degree programme following confirmation by ANACEC.

According to national legislation, bachelor's and master's degree studies can be organized in the form of full-time, part-time and distance education, and doctoral degree studies in full-time and part-time education.

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is applied in the HE system. The ECTS measure the amount of work required of the student within an academic course/discipline. 30 ECTS are allocated for an academic semester, and 60 ECTS for an academic year.

HE is organized in universities, academies and institutes. Over the last 10 years, there has been a decrease in the number of HEIs, as well as the number of students enrolled in the system. Thus, if in the academic year 2010/2011 the educational process in HE was organized

in 33 institutions (Figure 2), of which 19 were public and 14 private institutions, in the academic year 2021/2022 the number of HEIs decreased to 21.

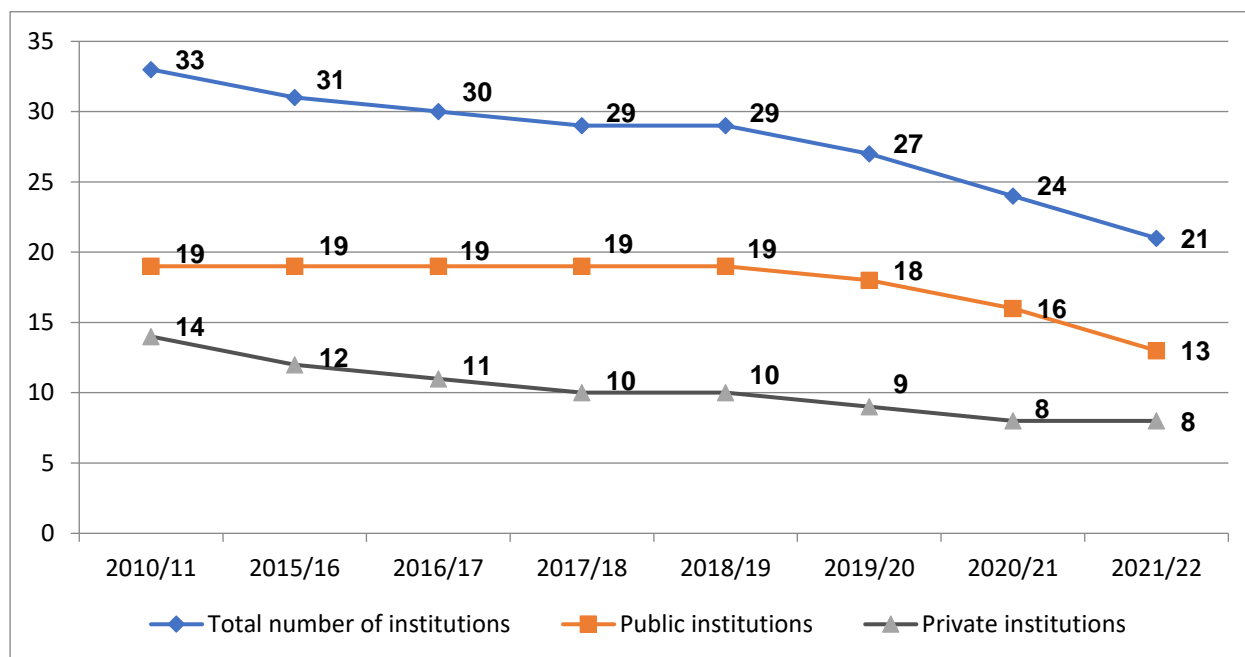


Figure 2. Dynamics of the number of higher education institutions

The dynamics of the student number in recent years (Figure 3) shows a constant decrease (the exception is the 2020/21 academic year, when, due to the Covid-19 restrictions, more students chose to study in the country). Thus, in the 2010/11 academic year, 109,363 students were enrolled in HE, and in the 2021/22 academic year, the number of students decreased to 61,327. The main causes that determined the decrease in the number of students in HEIs in the RM relate to the demographic decline and population migration, as well as the possibility of young people of accessing HE offered by European universities.

The system of governing bodies of HEIs consists of the senate, the council for institutional strategic development, the scientific council, the faculty council, the board of administration and the rector of the institution.

HEIs have university autonomy status, which consists in the right of the university community to organize and self-manage, to exercise academic freedoms without any kind of ideological, political or religious interference, to assume a set of competencies and obligations in accordance with national policies and strategies for the development of HE. University autonomy refers, in particular, to organizational autonomy, academic autonomy and human resource autonomy.

The financing of public HEIs is carried out in accordance with the *Methodology of budgetary financing of public higher education institutions* (GD no. 343/2020), which establishes the method of allocating standard funding for public HEIs on a standard cost basis per student and adjustment coefficients, associated with the degree of complexity of the bachelor's and master's degree study programmes, of compensatory funding to support performance and of complementary funding to modernize the institution's material and didactic base.

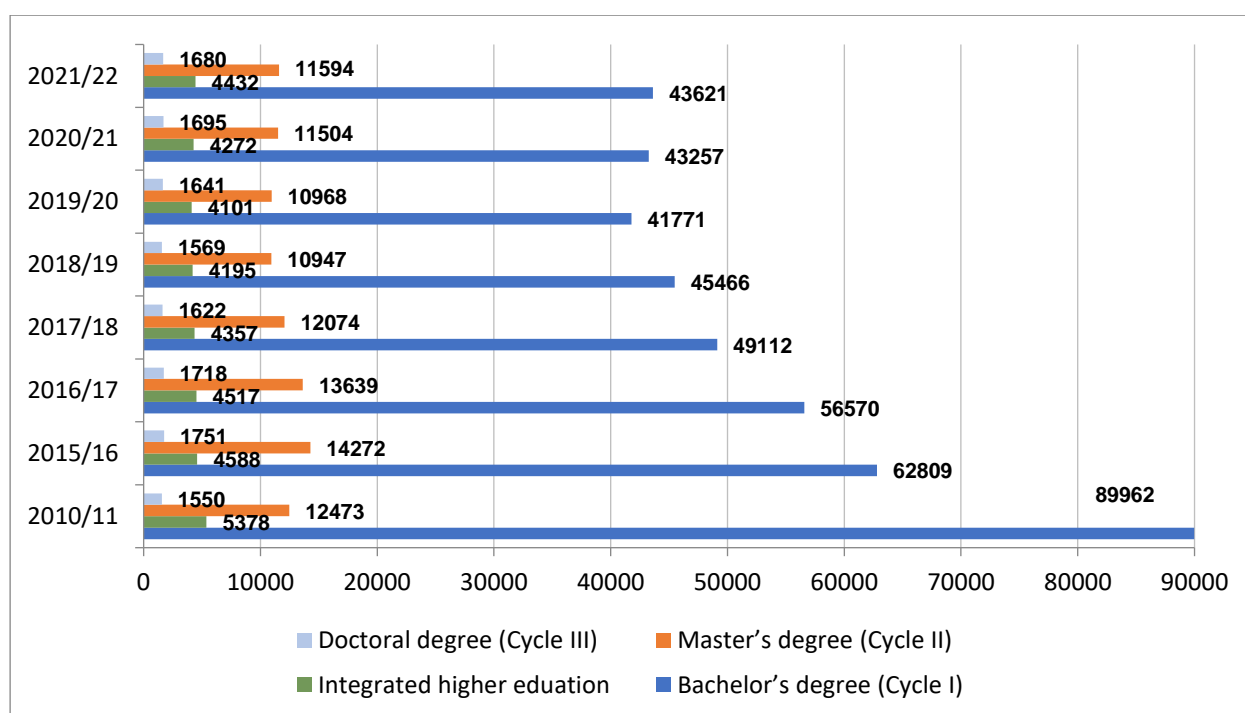


Figure 3. Dynamics of the number of students per education cycle

Since 2014, the national QA system has been strengthened, including through the establishment of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Professional Education.

Quality assurance in HE (art. 112, 113, 114 of the *Education Code* describe the mechanisms for quality assurance and evaluation in higher education) is achieved through a set of actions to develop the institutional capacity to elaborate, plan and implement study programmes, based on which the trust of the beneficiaries is formed and strengthened that the institution offering education meets and improves the quality standards in accordance with its mission.

At the national level, MER develops QA policies in education, and ANACEC implements state QA policies in education and externally evaluates the quality of study programmes, respectively at the level of HEIs, for the authorization of provisional operation and accreditation of study programmes and educational institutions.

At the institutional level, the internal QA structures implement the national and institutional QA policies and monitor the quality assurance of all processes in the institution. The detailed description of the national higher education evaluation system is presented in section 4.

4. History, profile and activities of the agency

Short history

The foundations of ANACEC were laid in 2013, when the *Law on Education* in force at that stage was supplemented with a separate article that provided for the establishment of an entity responsible at national level for the external quality evaluation in education. In the same context, in 2014 the Interim Board was established, which over the course of a year prepared the normative and methodological basis for the establishment of the respective entity. Thus, in 2015, pursuant to art. 115 (1) of the *Education Code* no. 152/2014, the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Professional Education (ANACIP) was established, with the status of an administrative authority of national interest with distinct responsibilities in the field of quality

assurance in education, autonomous from the Government, independent in its decisions and organization.

In 2017, in the context of the implementation of the *Strategy on the reform of public administration for 2016-2020 in the Republic of Moldova*, through changes in the *Education Code*, the national system of external quality assurance (EQA) in education and research was redesigned, including the legal status of the entity responsible for the external quality evaluation at the national level. Later, in 2018, the Government approved, by GD no. 201/2018, the [Regulation on the organization and operation of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research](#) (Annex 14), which details the mission, functions, tasks, rights of the Agency and the way of organizing its activity.

Thus, ANACEC was established by the Government as a national administrative authority under the MECR. The new structure absorbed the National School Inspectorate (ISN), an administrative authority subordinate to MECR, and the National Council for Accreditation and Attestation (NCAA), an autonomous administrative authority.

As a legal entity under public law, ANACEC has attributes specific to public authorities, provided for in the normative acts, and its employees have obtained the status of civil servants. ANACEC was empowered with new tasks and responsibilities in the field of quality in general education and in research.

Profile of the Agency

According to its **Mission**, the Agency implements state policies and contributes to the development oriented towards the best international standards in the areas of competence assigned.

The **functions** established by the legislative and normative framework are carried out in two major areas: (1) general education, vocational education and training, higher education and continuous professional training, and (2) research and innovation.

In order to carry out its mission, the Agency ensures and performs the following processes:

- quality evaluation in general education;
- quality evaluation in vocational education and training;
- quality evaluation in higher education;
- external evaluation of continuous professional training programmes;
- external evaluation of organizations in the fields of research and innovation;
- evaluation of the scientific and scientific-teaching staff.

Structurally, the Agency is made up of the Governing Board, the Profile Committees and the administrative apparatus (Figure 4).

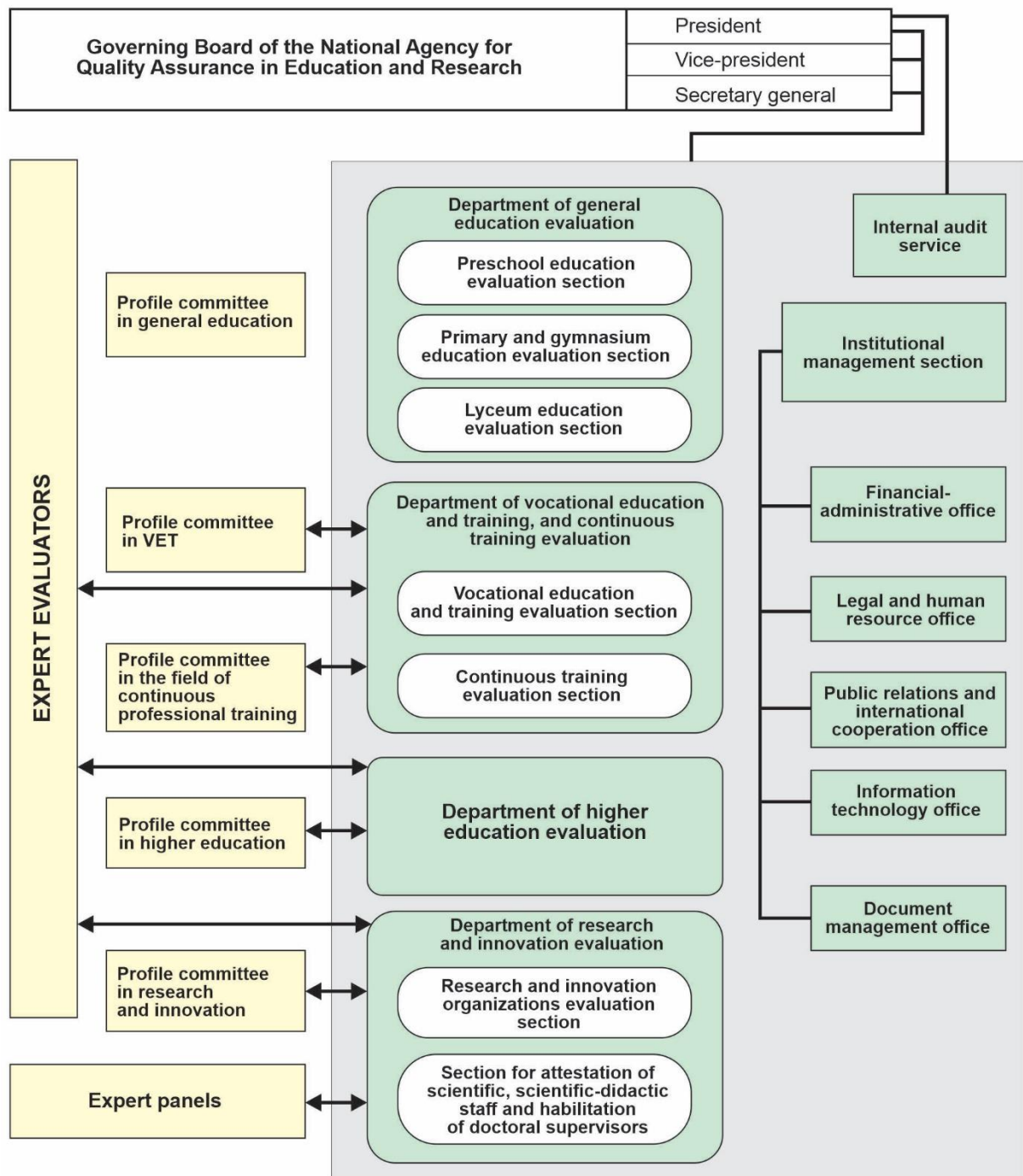


Figure 4. Organizational structure of ANACEC

The Governing Board of ANACEC (GB), consisting of 15 members, is the collective management body that ensures the development and implementation of the Agency's Strategy and approves decisions based on the examination of the external evaluation results. The composition of the GB, the method of establishment, the tasks are regulated (GD no. 201/2018, points 12-25; *Education Code*, art. 115 (8)). The *Education Code* provides for an incompatibility clause, according to which GB members cannot hold positions of public dignity, the position of rector or director of the educational institution (see comp. 5, standard 3.3 Independence).

The executive management of ANACEC is ensured by the President of the GB, who is assisted by the Vice-President and the Secretary General, who are selected from among the GB members based on an additional public competition (GD no. 248/2019, point 20), organized based on the provisions of *Law no. 158/2008 Regarding the public office and the status of the civil servant*. The person designated winner in the competition for the position of President of the GB was appointed to the position by the Government (Order no. 333-d of 04.12.2019), and for the positions of Vice-President and Secretary General – by the MECR (Order no. 1874-p of 05/12/2019 and Order No. 2010-p of 31/12/2019). The activity of the President, Vice-President and Secretary General of the GB falls under the provisions of Law no. 158/2008.

The Profile Committees (PC) set up for each field of activity of the Agency (general education, VET, HE, continuous professional training, research and innovation) work alongside the subdivisions of the Agency as permanent component organizational structures. The mission, structure, mechanism of establishment and operation, as well as their tasks are established by the [Regulation of the profile committees of ANACEC](#), elaborated by ANACEC and approved by GD no. 327/2019, as well as their own organizational and operating regulations, accessible on the ANACEC website. There are nine people in each PC, personalities with outstanding experience in the committees' fields of activity, with professional achievements recognized at the national and international level, selected through a public competition for a four-year mandate. The competition for the selection of PC members was organized by GB in 2020. The nominal composition of the PC of ANACEC is approved by MECR Order no. 119 of 10.02.2020 and is public on the Agency's website.

In the process of external evaluation of study programmes/institutions, ANACEC involves expert evaluators selected based on the [Methodology for the selection of expert evaluators](#), developed by ANACEC and approved by the GB decision.

The structure, organization chart and staff number of the administrative apparatus of ANACEC are regulated by GD no. 201/2018. Thus, ANACEC is made up of departments, sections and offices (Figure 4), with a maximum number of 52 staff units. The detailed analysis of the administrative apparatus is presented in section 5, standard 3.5 Resources.

Activities of the Agency

In order to carry out the duties delegated by the Government, the Agency has developed and, after approval by the competent structures, applies a series of methodological documents, including [Methodology of external quality evaluation for the authorization of provisional operation and accreditation of vocational education and training, higher education and professional continuous training study programmes and institutions](#) (GD no. 616/2016, with subsequent amendments and additions), (hereinafter MEE, Annex 1).

Since its establishment, according to the normative regulations in force, ANACIP/ANACEC has mainly focused on the external evaluation of study programmes. The external evaluation processes and procedures used in HE, VET and continuous training are similar, the applied methodology, accreditation standards and performance indicators being the same (GD no. 616/2016, Annexes 2-7). The operational and instrumental aspects of external quality evaluation and the specifics of HE, VET and continuous training are reflected in the 8 Guidelines of External Quality Evaluation, developed for each level of education and university cycle separately, both for the evaluation of study programmes, as well as for institutional evaluation. In the process of developing the MEE and the Guidelines, the Agency collaborated

with educational institutions of different levels, the Council of Rectors/Council of Directors, MER, other stakeholders. The mentioned Guidelines were approved by the GB.

Starting from 2018, ANACEC took over from the NCAA, and continued, the process of attestation of scientific and scientific-teaching staff according to established procedures, carried out by the NCAA. At the same time, NSI's tasks were also taken over. Thus, starting with the 2020-2021 academic year, after a piloting stage and developing the related methodological framework, ANACEC initiated the external evaluation process of general education institutions and management staff at this level. The dynamics of the number of decisions issued by the GB for the authorization of provisional operation/accreditation of study programmes and educational institutions, and of decisions on the attestation of scientific and scientific-teaching staff in 2016 - 2021 is represented in Table 2.

Table 2. Dynamics of the number of decisions issued by the GB (2016-2021)

Governing Board decisions	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total (2016-2021)
Professional training programmes in vocational education and training, and continuous training externally evaluated	38	150	181	224	580	377	1550
Study programmes in higher education externally evaluated	13	145	120	103	33	156	570
TOTAL programme decisions	51	295	301	327	613	533	2120
Institutions externally evaluated	-	2	1	10*	15*	60*	88
TOTAL	51	297	302	337	628	593	2208
Subjects related to the attestation of scientific and scientific-didactic staff	-	-	55	69	75	120	319

* Evaluations of general education institutions

The figures in the table show that between 2016 and 2021, the external evaluation process was organized and completed for **2120 study programmes** in HE (levels 6, 7 and 8 of the NQF), VET (levels 3, 4 and 5 of the NQF) and continuous training. At the same time, it is noticed the doubling of the number of study programmes (especially continuous training programmes) evaluated by ANACEC in 2020, a pandemic year, with multiple restrictions. In 2017 and 2018, **3 institutions** (2 VET and 1 continuous training) were authorized for provisional operation or accredited. Also, 85 general education institutions were externally evaluated in 2020-2021, and in 2022 – the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the RM.

The *Education Code* (art. 115 (2), l), n)) provides for the responsibility of ANACEC to periodically elaborate self-assessment reports of the quality of its own activity in order to prepare for the external assessment by similar agencies from other countries and the obligation to take the necessary steps as, in no more than 3 years after its establishment, to be registered

in EQAR. The reform of the Agency in 2018, the expiration of the mandate of the first GB in 2019 and the pandemic conditions led the postponement of the initiation of the application process for the international external assessment.

ANACEC's activity on the dimension of quality assurance in HE is based on the legal provisions in force. The *Education Code*, in art. 113 (2), defines quality evaluation in HE as a complex set of self-evaluation/internal evaluation and external quality evaluation activities, in accordance with approved accreditation standards, criteria and indicators. ANACEC carries out the external evaluation, which aims at:

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

The national legislation (*Education Code*, art. 113 (4)), allows HEIs to request external quality evaluation by ANACEC or another QA agency, registered in EQAR.

The national QA system in HE involves the completion of two successive stages with different purposes, in terms of the rights granted to the institutions (Figure 5):



Figure 5. Successive stages of external quality evaluation of study programmes/educational institutions

Both study programmes and HEIs are subject to external evaluation for the authorization of provisional operation and accreditation/re-accreditation. Completing the external evaluation process for the authorization of provisional operation is mandatory before starting to operate, for any legal person, public or private, interested in offering study programmes in HE. Given that the authorization of provisional operation of study programmes expires after the first batch of graduates, HEIs are motivated to apply for external evaluation for accreditation. The fact that HEIs cannot obtain authorization of provisional operation or accreditation for master's and doctoral degree study programmes (cycles II and III) is also a stimulus, if the study programmes in the same field from cycle I and cycle II, respectively, are not accredited. In addition, the law establishes that study programmes and accredited HEIs are subject to periodic external evaluation, with a view to re-accreditation, at least once every 5 years.

Thus, ANACEC performs the following types of external evaluation (Figure 6):

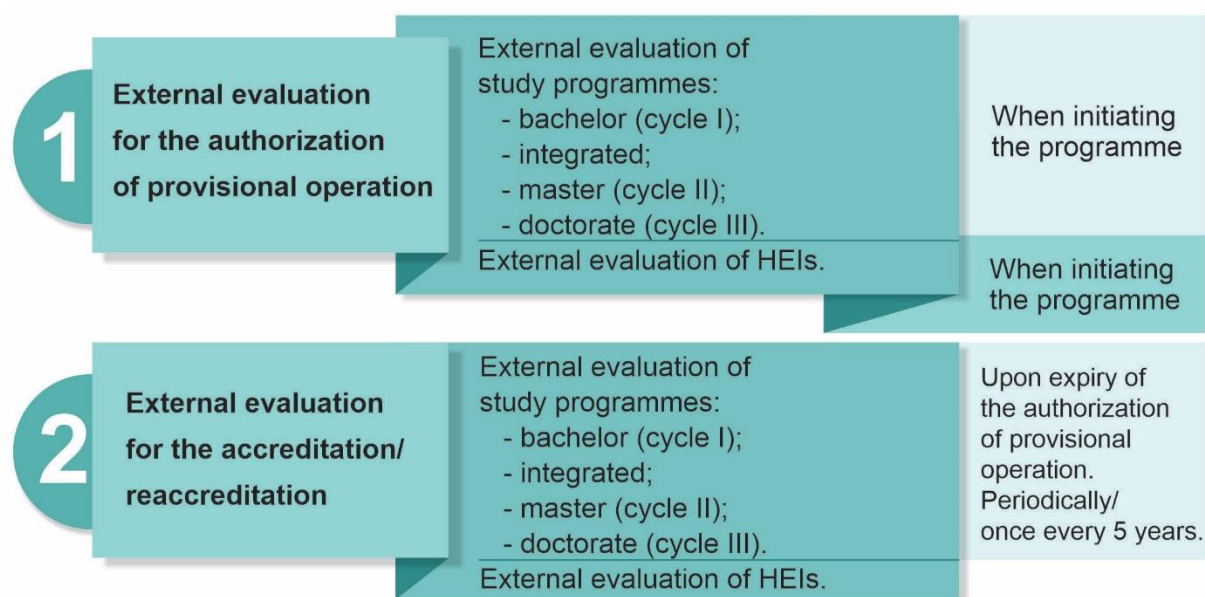


Figure 6. Types of external quality evaluation of study programmes/educational institutions

It should be noted that since its approval, the MEE has been amended and supplemented twice, in 2018 and 2022. Taking into account the results of the first cycle of external evaluation activities, carried out in the period 2016-2021, following the general findings and the recommendations formulated by the parties involved in this process, as well as the changes made in the MEE in 2020 and 2022, the *Guidelines for the external evaluation of bachelor's degree (cycle I) and integrated higher education study programmes* (Annex 2.) and the *Guidelines for the external evaluation of master's degree (Cycle II) study programmes* (Annex 3) were updated. In the process of completing both documents, the opinions of the evaluated universities, PCHE, MER, expert evaluators, including students and employers, were consulted. The completed Guidelines were approved by the GB (Decision No. 27 of 25.09.2020 and Decision No. 73 of 01.04.2022) and implemented. The changes made in the mentioned Guidelines concern the reference documents, the evaluation standards, the points awarded and the weight per performance indicators. At the same time, the work tools of the external evaluation committee (EEP), including the *Site Visit Record Sheet* and the *External Evaluation Report (EER)*, were improved in terms of structure and content.

The process of updating the *Guidelines for the external evaluation of doctoral study programmes*, started in the academic year 2019-2020, was stopped due to the activities planned in the „Higher Education” project, financed by the World Bank, which will contribute to the development /updating the normative framework for doctoral studies. The *Guidelines for the external evaluation of higher education institutions* (Annex 4), approved in 2016, was applied for the first time in April 2022.

The external quality evaluation procedure is initiated at the request of the HEI/ consortium/ partnership/ subsidiary/ founder/ MER and includes all the stages recommended at the European level: (1) self-evaluation, which ends with the elaboration of the SER (Annex 5) by the requesting institution and its submission to ANACEC; (2) examination of the dossier and initiation of the external evaluation process; (3) establishment of the EEP; (4) carrying out the documentation visit to the institution; (5) developing the EER (Annex 7); (6) reviewing and approving the results of the external evaluation.

In carrying out the external evaluation activities, a key role is played by the EEP, which includes, compulsorily, expert evaluators representatives of the academic environment with competencies in the field of professional training of the study programme, business/employer representatives who carry out their professional activity in the field subject to evaluation, including student representatives (GD no. 616/2016, point 39). At the same time, the composition of the EEP includes, as appropriate, international experts (GD no. 616/2016, point 38) from the partner QA agencies. In the period 2016-2021, the experts recommended by ARACIS (Romania) consolidated the composition of 11 EEPs.

The evaluation calendar is drawn up every six months by the Department of Higher Education Evaluation (DHEE), based on requests, and is approved by order of the President of ANACEC. In the last two years, ANACEC organized the external evaluation process, taking into account the *Calendar of external quality evaluations for the accreditation of study programmes*, established by MECR by Order no. 457 of 18.05.2020. In pandemic conditions, the MECR amended the Annex to the respective Order, extending the external evaluation period for the accreditation of bachelor's (cycle I) and master's (cycle II) degree study programmes.

The year 2020, marked by the pandemic, was quite challenging for ANACEC. The suspension by the public authorities of the educational process in educational institutions of different levels, and subsequently the prohibition or limitation of access to the institutions, conditioned the temporary suspension of the process of receiving and examining requests for external evaluation from the institutions. The external evaluation plan was revised, with the agreement of the MECR, by shifting the deadlines. The relaunch of ANACEC's external evaluation activities by educational levels took place, in stages, as follows: (1) at HE, VET and general education level - from September 2020; (2) at the continuous training education level - from July 1, 2020.

New trends and changes in the educational system have also influenced the external evaluation procedure:

- Submission of self-evaluation reports and supporting materials in electronic format has become a mandatory condition for all applicants for external evaluations.
- The role of institutional web pages as a source of information for members of EEPs in identifying evidence increased.
- The format of the site visits was changed by compensating the specific set of activities partially or, as the case may be, fully through online activities.
- EEP working meetings, interviews with various target groups from institutions providing educational services were organized using ICT tools on various online platforms.
- Activities were carried out to strengthen the internal capacities of the Agency to face the new requirements, in particular by identifying the appropriate platforms (BigBlueButton, Google Meet, Cisco Webex), testing them, but also training the staff in the use of the new tools.
- Training/work sessions were planned and carried out online with all the categories targeted in the external evaluation process.

As national authority responsible for the external quality evaluation in education, research and innovation, also taking into account the pandemic conditions, ANACEC has carried out distinct actions to support HEIs in order to ensure quality. For this purpose, consolidated efforts have been undertaken to:

- support and expand ANACEC's presence on social media;

- design, development and launch the new web page in November 2020 - www.anacec.md;
- conceptualize, develop, with the support of the PRIM Project, managed by MECR and financed by the World Bank, and launch [10 informational/video spots](#), intended to provide information on various aspects related to the educational system in the RM and quality assurance in education to different target groups.

Given the impossibility of holding meetings in physical format, the Agency initiated and carried out for the first time a series of new online activities, including:

- Online consultations on QA topics.
- Planning and organizing a series of webinars for various target groups, which gave participants the opportunity to learn about a certain topic, ask questions and share their own experiences.

Thus, for example, in 2020, the specialized departments organized 103 webinars on various topics that brought together 2727 participants in total. With regard to HE, 14 online activities (webinars, information/training sessions) were planned and carried out in 2020 in which approx. 300 people took part, and 80 online activities were performed in 2021, respectively, including 15 webinars, 4 training sessions for ARACIS experts, 3 training seminars for potential experts from the Diaspora and 58 training sessions for ANACEC experts.

- Development of the curriculum for the course *External evaluation in education* (for all levels) of 90 hours (3 ECTS credits) and relevant contents, with their placement on the Google Classroom platform¹.
- Development with the support of the Twinning Project *Enhancing the quality and effectiveness of the VET system in the Republic of Moldova* of a video to promote the image and visibility of ANACEC internally and externally, which is accessible on the [Agency's YouTube page](#).

An important activity of ANACEC is the elaboration of thematic studies, which are of two types:

- based on the analysis of the external evaluation results of study programmes carried out horizontally in certain fields of study.
- questionnaire to collect feedback from all actors involved in the external evaluation process regarding the activity of ANACEC, the functionality of the applied methodology and procedures, the quality of the services provided, the performance of the EEP.

The studies are public on the ANACEC website.

ANACEC promotes the ANACEC trademark, which is a symbol of the promotion of evaluation services and QA in education and research. The principles of using the trademark are established by the [Regulation on the use of the trademark of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research](#), approved by GB, decision no. 40 of 26.02.2021.

ANACEC has also established its own „Quality Crystal”, which is awarded annually to educational/research institutions and individuals who have contributed substantially to the

¹ In 2020, registration for the respective course was announced for applicants from general education in two rounds. The courses were organized and certificates were issued to the participants who fully completed the requirements for the course. At the HE level, the course was announced for applicants from from the diaspora. Since 2021, the respective course has been organized and carried out also for people interested in external evaluation in HE.

promotion and consolidation of the quality culture in the fields of education and research in the RM.

A mandatory element in the external evaluation process is the post-evaluation monitoring (follow-up) (Annex 11) in order to establish the level of implementation of the recommendations and mandatory improvement areas, specified in the EER as a result of the findings made during the evaluation. Initially, the post-evaluation monitoring was envisaged as a procedure applied in the following situations:

- in the external evaluation process for reaccreditation of study programmes/educational institutions, at performance indicator 10.1.2;
- for study programmes/educational institutions conditionally accredited for a period of 3 years. In such situations, mandatory elements for the institutions were the development, within up to 6 months, of an action plan to eliminate the non-conformities identified in the external evaluation process; placing it on the institution's website; subsequently drawing up and submitting to the Agency a report with evidence on the actions taken to eliminate the non-conformities.

Since December 2018, post-evaluation monitoring has been applied to study programmes that have demonstrated, at least for one accreditation standard, „partial compliance with requirements” (where 50-90% of performance indicators correspond to the minimum level set by the Agency), institutions being asked to develop and submit to ANACEC Corrective Action Plans, based on the recommendations and mandatory improvement areas formulated by the EEP in the EER, and subsequently also reports on the implementation of these plans

By GB Decision no. 23 of 04/01/2022, the [Post-evaluation monitoring procedure](#) has been completed/amended and applies to all evaluated study programmes/institutions. The monitoring process (follow-up) aims to track/observe the progress of the evaluated educational institutions in the implementation of the improvement areas/recommendations proposed by ANACEC, as a result of the external evaluation process.

The external evaluation process is presented in more detail in section 6.3.

In the external evaluation process, EEP members verify the achievement of the accreditation standards by examining the self-evaluation dossier submitted and during the visit to the institution, according to the agenda developed by mutual agreement. The results of the site visit are recorded in the Site Visit Record Sheet (Annex 6), which is signed by all the members of the EEP, as well as by the management of the institution. Subsequently, the EEP elaborates the EER and adopts decisions by consensus or by a simple majority of votes of its members. In case of separate opinions, they are included, together with the arguments provided, in the minutes of the EEP meeting.

ANACEC has an internal QA system at the institutional level, which ensures efficient management of internal processes. The key principle of ANACEC's activity is the promotion of the quality culture and the continuous improvement of institutional performances (see standard 3.6).

International activities of the Agency

International cooperation, along with all the previously mentioned activities, is one of the Agency's priorities, and ENQA's membership will strengthen ANACEC's legitimacy as an external QA agency in the EHEA.

Shortly after the election by international juried competition of the GB of ANACIP (07.09.2015) and the initiation of the process of ensuring the functionality of the Agency, ANACIP undertook the necessary steps, and on 17.12.2015 obtained the affiliate status of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The association with the most important European Association in the field of QA has allowed over time the connection and involvement in activities for the development and promotion of the quality culture at the European level, the initiation of new partnerships and areas of joint activity with similar Agencies from the signatory states of the Bologna Process.

With the establishment of the Agency's new organizational structure, as a result of the 2018 reform, a new subdivision appeared - the Public Relations and International Cooperation Office (SRPCI), which operates in accordance with its own organizational and operational regulations. One of the objectives of the SRPCI is to promote and monitor the Agency's collaboration with international organizations in the field and counterpart organizations from other countries in order to participate in international projects and programs and take over experience in the field of QA in education and research. Thus, during the years 2016-2022, ANACIP/ANACEC strengthened and expanded its activities of internationalization and promotion of its own image, both nationally and internationally, through actions to increase visibility on various communication media (webpage of the Agency – www.anacec.md, social networks – [Facebook](#); [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#) and on the portals of European partners, such as www.eupartnerssearch.com and www.up2europe.eu).

In this regard, collaborative relations were also initiated by signing Cooperation Agreements with national and international entities, as well as foreign QA agencies, which led to a series of activities, such as:

- ensuring access to information of public interest about the quality of HE at an interstate and international level;
- disseminating experiences and good practices of external quality evaluation of study programmes and HEIs;
- appointing expert evaluators with the aim of involving them in external evaluation activities of study programmes and HEIs from other states;
- joint participation in internal or international projects in the field of QA, financed at national level or by other European or international institutions/organizations;
- organizing, in partnership, activities in the field of QA, such as conferences, forums, workshops, debates, informal meetings, etc.;
- providing mutual support in joining international organizations or networks of QA agencies in HE;
- developing and publishing the results of joint external evaluation activities in joint studies and syntheses;
- carrying out joint projects in the field of QA in HE.

As a result of cooperation activities, following training and testing stages, in accordance with the internal procedures of the concerned Agencies, several ANACIP/ANACEC experts obtained the status of experts of several QA Agencies, members of ENQA, and participated in the external evaluation processes of study programmes (bachelor's, master's and doctorate)/institutions, as follows:

- In 2017 - three experts (ARACIS, Romania); two experts (NAA, Russia), one expert (IAAR, Kazakhstan);
- In 2019 - an expert (IAAR, Kazakhstan);
- In 2020 - six experts (IAAR, Kazakhstan);
- In 2021 – 17 experts of ANACEC were co-opted and involved in the process of international accreditation of bachelor's and master's degree study programmes, offered by three HEIs from the Russian Federation, organized by the Certification Association „Russian Register”, and 9 experts participated in the evaluations organized by IAAR, Kazakhstan. A representative of ANACEC participated in the expert group for the review of the international accreditation methodology, and another representative of ANACEC became a member of the International Accreditation Council of the Russian agency „Russian Register”.
- Also in 2021, thanks to the existing increasingly consolidated partnership relations, 53 experts of ANACEC were trained and obtained the expert status of ARACIS, Romania, of which 36 were involved in the periodic external evaluation of institutions organizing doctoral studies or fields of doctoral studies.

However, it remains a challenge to involve experts from the RM in external quality evaluations of study programmes/educational institutions from other countries, where this activity is carried out in accordance with the ESG mainly in English, according to the procedures of European QA agencies. The language barrier limits ANACEC experts' access to training and participation in events (seminars, webinars, round tables, mobility projects, etc.) organized by partner agencies, members of ENQA or CEENQA.

At the same time, ANACIP/ANACEC took part in several national and European projects, covering all fields of activity, with the aim of strengthening its own human and material capacities, exchanging experience and good practices, implementing good practices in the current activities of the Agency, improving the normative framework etc. Thus, regarding the projects in the field of QA in HE and their results, it is worth mentioning:

- 2017, the project *SMART DIASPORA: QUALITY for HOME, because we CARE!*, implemented by the Centre for Innovation and Politics from Moldova.

Results: contributed to the realization of the activities of stimulation, training and involvement of students, doctoral students and teaching staff from the Diaspora in the quality evaluation processes of VET, HE and continuous training study programmes and institutions in the RM.

- 2019-2021, the Twinning project *Enhancing the quality and effectiveness of the VET system in the Republic of Moldova* also had a component of strengthening the human capacities of ANACEC and providing expertise on the legal framework and the Agency's activities in terms of aligning them to the ESG and good practices of European QA agencies, ENQA members, e.g. EKKA, Estonia and FINNEC, Finland.

Results: ANACEC benefited from the support of the experts within the project who formulated recommendations to improve the *Methodology of External Evaluation*, the external evaluation process (experts being involved as observers in the important stages of this process - expert training, SAR analysis, participation in site visits), but also regarding the elaboration of the Agency's SAR, according to ENQA requirements.

- 2019-2020, the project [Effective Involvement of Stakeholders in External Quality Assurance Activities](#) (ESQA), coordinated by the Romanian Ministry of National Education.

Results: carrying out an [analysis on the involvement of stakeholders](#) in the external QA activities of ANACEC with the identification of examples of good practices, participation in events to disseminate this analysis (two peer-review activities, organized in Bucharest and Copenhagen; one peer-learning activity as part of the meetings of the BFUG Group of mutual teaching-learning on QA topics, organized in Ghent, Belgium; the Forum „Organization Management. Achieving sustainable success”, organized online by the Certification Association „Russian Register”, the Russian Federation); developing an [analysis on the needs for change](#) for effective stakeholder involvement, based on the Guide for Effective Stakeholders' Involvement in Quality Assurance and an [action plan](#).

- 2020 - 2022, the project [Supporting European QA Agencies in meeting the ESG](#) (SEQA-ESG), coordinated by ENQA.

This ongoing project aims to support quality assurance agencies and national authorities in creating a QA system in line with ESG recommendations. Thus, ANACEC and MER participated in all project activities, such as the national peer counselling visit, peer-learning workshops, staff mobility. Within the project, with the support of ENQA, the Agency developed, involving stakeholders, and initiated the implementation of the [National action plan on quality assurance of higher education in the Republic of Moldova for the period 2021-2023](#), approved by the GB, decision no. 53 of 25.06.2021.

- 2020-2023, the project [Enhancement of Quality Assurance in Higher Education System in Moldova](#) (QFORTE), ongoing project coordinated by the Moldova State University.

Part of the project's activities are aimed at strengthening the human and material capacities of ANACEC, updating the *Education Code*, the MEE and the *Guidelines for external evaluation of higher education institutions* in accordance with the ESG recommendations and the good practices of the European QA agencies, the elaboration and the implementation of an electronic platform based on these Guidelines, the international institutional accreditation of five HEIs from the RM.

Another important aspect is the Agency's affiliation. Thus, ANACEC has made the necessary efforts and is currently:

- Member of the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA);
- Member of the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates (SICI);
- member of the Quality Assurance Forum in VET and Continuous Training (ETF), ERI SEE and Eastern Partnership.

It should be noted that the Agency's staff also get involved in various international activities (conferences, seminars, webinars, trainings, etc.), including by presenting various reports and publishing articles in specialized journals. This information is made public on social networks, on the webpage ([Publications](#) section), as well as in the [annual activity reports](#).

ANACEC has not yet carried out external evaluations outside the country.

5. Profile, functioning and external quality assurance activities of the agency (compliance with Part 3 of the ESG)

5.1 ESG Standard 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

The policies, processes and activities implemented by ANACEC for the purpose of evaluation and quality assurance correspond to the standards described in Part 3 of the ESG, but also with the purpose, objectives, functions, tasks and responsibilities of the Agency, established by the *Education Code* and GD no. 201/2018. These are based on the [Strategy of ANACEC \(2018-2023\)](#) which clearly defines the Agency's mission, vision and values, and the [National action plan on QA of HE in the Republic of Moldova for the period 2021-2023](#). To ensure the transparency of its own activity, but also the visibility of ANACEC both internally, as well as externally, they are public on the Agency's website (<https://anacec.md/en/content/strategy>).

The entire activity of the Agency results from the **ANACEC's mission**, namely to implement state policies and contribute to the development of the education system, oriented towards the best international standards, and taking into account the national context, by developing quality in the field of general education, VET, HE, continuous training, as well as in research and innovation organizations.

In the context of the assumed mission, ANACEC aims to ensure:

- the structural and qualitative compatibility of the national system of external quality evaluation of education and research with the standards and guidelines accepted in the European area on these dimensions;
- promoting principles, regulations and norms for ensuring unitary and comparable quality for each level of education in the RM;
- stimulating the increase of the level of responsibility of the institutions in the fields of education and research towards the quality of the services provided;
- developing and promoting a quality culture in general education, VET, HE and continuous training, in research and innovation institutions;
- promoting the competitiveness of general education, VET, HE and continuous training in the RM, of the field of research and innovation.

In its activity, ANACEC is guided by a series of **principles and values**, including public accountability, independence, professionalism, transparency, respect for university autonomy and the specifics of institutions of any level, adaptation and compatibility at the European level, external evaluation based on trust and oriented towards development, cooperation with all stakeholders, institutional efficiency and effectiveness through innovative management and the consolidation of available resources.

The ANACEC Strategy establishes **four strategic objectives**, which derive from its mission, with a list of activities for their implementation, result indicators and deadlines. The **strategic objectives** are: (1) promoting and ensuring quality in education and research; (2) ensuring the sustainable development of the external quality evaluation system in education and research; (3) capacity building of ANACEC as a national structure responsible for QA in education and research, (4) obtaining the recognition of the Agency on a national and international level.

ANACEC **promotes and ensures quality in education and research (objective 1)**, in particular through external evaluations, including external evaluation of study programmes/educational institutions and their ability to meet quality standards. The entire process is carried out on the basis of the *Methodology of External Evaluation*, which regulates

the conceptual, normative and procedural framework for external quality evaluation for the authorization of provisional operation and accreditation/reaccreditation of study programmes and educational institutions of all types and forms of organization of education, by levels and cycles. The external quality evaluation is carried out on the basis of accreditation standards, criteria and performance indicators established for higher education in annexes no. 4 and 5 of the Methodology, as well as the evaluation standards and the minimum mandatory evaluation standards set out in the Guidelines for external quality evaluation.

The **European reference** is one of the fundamental principles on which the process of evaluating the quality of an educational institution and/or a study programme is based. Thus, the normative framework expressly stipulates (GD no. 616/2016, point 13 subpoint. 2) that the VET, HE and continuous training institutions in the RM meet the quality standards according to the provisions of the Bologna Process, the Copenhagen Process, the European Higher Education Area, the European Research Area, the European Education Area, to ensure confidence in the quality of studies, academic mobility and recognition of qualifications and study documents. In this context, the Methodology conceptually meets the requirements of ESG 2015, and the 10 applied accreditation standards fully correspond to ESG standards (see section 6 standard ESG 2.1). The correlation of national accreditation standards with ESG standards is also represented in the Annex to the [National action plan, 2021-2023](#).

The orientation of the Methodology towards the benefit of educational institutions, students, but also the entire society is obvious, from the perspective of the objectives it is focused on (see standard 2.2). ANACEC approaches in a fair manner all educational institutions, public or private persons interested in offering study programmes/educational services. The steps taken in the external evaluation process and the procedures applied are similar, including in terms of evaluation standards.

Accreditation standards, evaluation criteria, performance indicators and evaluation standards adapted and applied per education level and university cycle, as a component of the *Guidelines of external evaluation*, are public on the webpage. They are additionally explained and interpreted during the information sessions systematically organized for the representatives of the educational institutions after the operation of the changes and periodically when they request the external evaluation by ANACEC.

The external quality evaluation procedure is initiated at the request of the HEI/consortium/partnership/subsidiary/founder/MER and includes all the stages recommended at the European level: (1) self-evaluation, which ends with the elaboration of the SER by the requesting institution and its submission to ANACEC; (2) examination of the dossier and initiation of the external evaluation process; (3) establishment of the EEP; (4) carrying out the site visit; (5) developing the EER; (6) reviewing and approving the results of the external evaluation.

To ensure a growing level of expertise, ANACEC co-opts, with the support of foreign agencies, **international experts** as members of the EEPs. If these practices were episodic during the evaluation of bachelor's degree study programmes (11 people in total, recommended by ARACIS), then for master's degree study programmes the inclusion of the international expert in the composition of the EEP is mandatory. ANACEC launched several calls for the co-optation of experts from the Diaspora. The applicants (teachers and students, originating from the RM, who work/study in prestigious university centres in various countries), after a series of trainings, were involved in the external evaluation missions. Given the conditions of the strict regulation of the method of calculating salaries for experts, an impediment in the evolution of this process can be

the salary level proposed by ANACEC for international experts, which is clearly lower compared to that proposed by other European agencies and, therefore, unattractive for potential evaluators. Another obstacle in the wider involvement of international experts is the communication language during the external evaluation process, which is currently predominantly Romanian. In 2021, with pilot status, ANACEC organized an external evaluation entirely in English. Thus, all documents related to the process were drawn up in English. An important objective for ANACEC is the gradual expansion of the activities of carrying out the external evaluation process in a foreign language for study programmes offered in a foreign language or at the request of educational institutions.

During its activity, the Agency responded to the requests of the HEIs to externally evaluate the study programmes developed by the universities at all university cycles in order to obtain authorization of provisional operation. The annual dynamics of the evaluations carried out at HE level during the respective period is shown in Table 3.

In the external evaluation process for the purpose of accreditation, priority was given to bachelor's degree and integrated study programmes, the first cycle of evaluations being completed in 2020. Thus, in 2016 - 2021, following the requests submitted by public and private universities, ANACIP/ANACEC carried out, on the basis of service provision contracts, external quality evaluation activities for the authorization of provisional operation or accreditation of **570 study programmes** developed/implemented by HEIs, bachelor's degree study programmes having the largest share of approx. 64.4%. Among the study programmes evaluated for accreditation, the share of bachelor's degree study programmes is even more consistent, constituting 58.8%. 20 doctoral degree study programmes were externally evaluated for authorization of provisional operation. In 2021, the number of master's degree study programmes, for which the institutions requested external evaluation by ANACEC, increased considerably. Thus, during the year, the external evaluation process was organized for **141** study programmes in cycle II, with a share of 24.7%.

Table 3. Dynamics of external quality evaluations of study programmes in higher education (2016-2021)

Type of evaluation	Year						Total evaluated programmes
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	
Accreditation (Cycle I, Bachelor)	-	144	85	66	30	10	335
Accreditation (Cycle II, Master)	-	-	-	5	-	134	139
Accreditation (Integrated higher education)	-	-	4	1	-	-	5
Authorization of provisional operation (Cycle I, Bachelor)	4	-	9	13	1	5	32
Authorization of provisional operation (Cycle II, Master)	1	-	16	18	2	7	44
Authorization of provisional operation (Cycle III, Doctorate)	8	1	6	-	-	-	15
Total	13	145	120	103	33	156	570

At the same time, a priority activity for the future is the completion of the regulations and the guidelines for the evaluation of the third cycle of university studies and resuming the external evaluation process of doctoral study programmes.

Stakeholder involvement in the Agency's activities

ANACEC, based on the provisions of national normative acts, international regulations, but also of its own [Regulation](#), involves various stakeholders in external QA activities. In the field of HE, their involvement is carried out at different levels, as follows:

At the organizational level: Governing Board (GB), Profile committee in higher education (PCHE), External Evaluation Panels (EEP).

At the elaboration level: GB, PCHE, EEPs, representatives of the academia (programme managers/coordinators, QA managers at faculty, department/chair level), management of HEIs (vice-rectors, responsible for QA at the institutional level), the Council of rectors, student associations, business representatives, other stakeholders, as appropriate.

At the consultation level: MER, central and/or specialized public authorities, HEIs, Rectors' Council, PCHE, EEPs, student associations, business representatives/sectoral committees, civil society.

At the implementation level: HEIs, EEPs, PCHE.

At the monitoring level: MER, HEIs.

The stakeholder opinion consultation results, interested in the EQA in education and research, are recorded, analysed, formalized, by taking the appropriate decisions by the Agency's GB and MER.

Stakeholder involvement in external evaluation activities is ensured by including the student and the employer representatives, with permanent status, in the composition of the GB, but also in the composition of each EEP, mandatory conditions regulated at national level.

In order to identify and effectively involve students in the external evaluation process, ANACEC has launched various calls. Trainings were organized for the applicants, after which some of them were registered in the Register of student evaluators, and later involved as members of the EEP, providing them with equal rights with the other members. To identify employers, ANACEC collaborates with professional associations, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the RM and other partners.

In parallel, consultations with the stakeholder representatives on various topics have been periodically organized, including in the process of: (1) elaboration and completion of the ANACEC Strategy, of the National Action Plan, 2021-2023; (2) public discussions of draft normative and methodological acts developed by ANACEC; (3) presentation of the results of external evaluations in certain fields; (4) feedback collection regarding the organization of the external evaluation process; (5) presentation of the results of surveys organized by ANACEC, etc.

ANACEC disseminates QA information in the system (on the website, social networks Facebook and Twitter, YouTube); provides methodological assistance to institutions in the external evaluation process, organizes information/training seminars/webinars on various topics in the fields of competence; offers online courses in QA. The Agency develops and publishes thematic studies, being still at an early stage in this regard.

Based on the activities established in the Activity Plans and carried out by the ANACEC subdivisions, at the end of each year the Activity Report is drawn up, approved by the GB and made public on the Agency's website, in the [Transparency](#) section, which presents the public in detail the achievements and challenges of the Agency in the reference year on all dimensions of its activity.

The collaboration with the Government of the RM, the central public authorities and, in particular, the MECR/MER is also materialized through the involvement of ANACEC staff in various national Councils, in working groups for the elaboration/improvement of the normative framework in the field of QA in education, etc. ANACEC's opinion is requested for various drafts of national normative acts.

Thus, the entire activity of ANACEC has been based on expanding collaboration with stakeholders in order to ensure quality in HE in the RM. ANACEC has been an active partner of HEIs, continuously supporting, through the activities carried out, their efforts in the QA and improvement process, as well as of MER in the elaboration and/or review of national regulations in the field of QA in HE.

5.2 ESG Standard 3.2 Official status

ANACEC, like its predecessor ANACIP, obtained official status by law. In particular, the *Education Code* no. 154/2014, art. 112, mentions that ANACEC, in partnership with MECR, ensures quality management in HE at the national level. Also, according to art. 115, para. (2), letter d) ANACEC „evaluates, on a contractual basis, the institutions offering professional training programmes, as well as their programmes, for the authorization of provisional operation, accreditation and reaccreditation in vocational education and training, in higher education and in continuous training”.

Through amendments to the *Education Code*, operated by Law no. 190 of 21.09.2017, starting with 20.02.2018 ANACEC's tasks were complemented with new responsibilities taken over from NSI and NCAA. Thus, the inclusion in 2018 of general education and research as new areas of responsibility of ANACEC is a clear proof of the recognition of the Agency at the national level as a competence centre for EQA. GB decisions regarding the external evaluation results of study programmes/educational institutions form the basis of MER decisions regarding the operation of HEIs and their programmes.

ANACEC organizes and carries out its activity in accordance with the legislative and normative framework in the field of education and research (e.g.: *Education Code*, *Science and Innovation Code*), [Regulation on the organization and operation of ANACEC](#) (GD no. 201/2018), [Methodology of external evaluation](#) (GD no. 616/2016), and with the international treaties to which the Republic of Moldova is a party. The legal framework in force is also a sound basis for carrying out ANACEC's tasks and responsibilities in external evaluation at the HE level.

5.3 ESG Standard 3.3 Independence

Currently, according to the *Education Code* no. 152/2014, art.115 (1) and the *Regulation on the organization and operation of ANACEC*, point 2, ANACEC is an administrative authority under the MER, established by the Government, financed from the state budget, including collected revenues.

Organizational independence

The structure, organization chart, staffing and activity of ANACEC are regulated at the national level.

At the same time, ANACEC elaborates and approves internal acts, develops and applies the external evaluation tools, plans external evaluation missions, selects experts and establishes the composition of the EEP, organizes the external evaluation process, organizes information/training in the field of EQA for evaluators/representatives of the institutions. Complying with the existing regulations, ANACEC conducts independently the competitions for filling vacant public positions. The entire methodological toolkit, developed by ANACEC, the internal rules and procedures allow the Agency to operate independently and without the involvement of any third parties.

The profile of the GB and the method of its establishment are regulated, ensuring its independence. The powers granted to GB are described in point 25 of Annex no. 1 to GD 201/2018. In particular, the GB: 1) establishes the Agency's strategic development directions and approves its institutional strategy; 2) approves the Methodology for the selection of experts; 3) presents to the MER the normative acts necessary to carry out the Agency's functions and tasks in order to be promoted for approval by the Government; 4) approves the plan of evaluation and/or accreditation missions and the composition of teams of evaluators; 5) examines the EER, adopts decisions on them and sends them to the MER for approval; 6) approves the Code of Professional Ethics within the Agency, including with regard to experts; 7) approves the Agency's annual activity report and SAR, etc.

GB members are selected through an open competition, international juried, organized by the MER, based on its own Regulation, from among all those interested, for a 4-year term and taking into account that the same person can repeatedly apply for membership of the GB, but not more than for 2 consecutive mandates. The established procedure was applied in 2015 to the selection of the first GB of ANACIP, invested for a 4-year mandate. With the establishment in 2018 of ANACEC on the basis of ANACIP, through the absorption of NSI and NCAA, the term of exercising GB functions of ANACIP was extended until the expiration of the 4-year mandate. In 2019, for the organization of the competition for selecting members of the GB of ANACEC, MECR used the same competition procedure ([Regulation on the organization and conduct of the competition for selecting members of the Governing Board of ANACEC](#), Annex to MECR Order no. 1076 of 30.08.2019), with the involvement of 5 international experts, delegated by QA agencies registered in EQAR. The nominal composition of the GB of ANACEC was confirmed by MECR Order no. 1397 of 01.11.2019 for a 4-year mandate (2019-2023) and is accessible on the Agency's website (<https://anacec.md/en/content/legislation-2>).

The working method of the GB, in particular, the method of convening, organizing and conducting meetings, including in online format, through electronic platforms for communication, drawing up and implementing the agenda, presenting materials, adopting decisions and completion of the minutes, are established by the Agency in the [Regulation on the organization and conduct of the meetings of the Governing Board of ANACEC](#) (GB Decision no. 38 of 26.02.2021).

It should be noted that the level of independence of the GB is also ensured by the fact that its members are selected on a competitive basis from among the people who meet the participation requirements and apply on their own as experts, but not as representatives of the institutions in which work.

The normative framework also expressly establishes the conditions for revoking the members of the GB, which are as follows:

- 1) impossibility to exercise their duties for a period of at least 4 months, including for health reasons;
- 2) failure to comply with the provisions of the *Code of Professional Ethics* (Annex 10) and/or the provisions of the *Regulation on the organization and operation of ANACEC*;
- 3) appointment/election to a position of public dignity, rector, member of the Institutional Strategic Development Council or director of an educational institution;
- 4) unjustified absence at 4 consecutive GB meetings.

The Government's regulation of various aspects in ANACEC's activity minimizes the possibilities of rapid intervention at the entity level, in case of necessity. Such a situation was visible during the pandemic period, which required operational changes, but their promotion required long-term coordination. The delegation by the Government to the GB of the right to make decisions on several dimensions in the Agency's activity would considerably simplify the processes. Another example relates to the regulation of staffing, including positions and functions, from the perspective of ANACEC's status as a structure under the MER, which conditions the capping of salaries, negatively influencing the level of attractiveness of the positions put up for competition. Thus, we intend to prepare and submit to the Government proposals for amending the current regulatory framework, including changing the Agency's status.

Operational independence

From an operational point of view, ANACEC implements state policies in the field of QA in education at all levels (general education, VET, HE and continuous training), as well as in research and innovation. In 2016, the Agency developed through a participatory process, with the broad involvement of all stakeholders, the [Methodology of external evaluation](#) and criteria for the authorization of provisional operation and the accreditation of study programmes and educational institutions (MEE), with their submission to MER to be promoted for approval by the Government. In addition to the MEE, there are also the Guidelines for the external evaluation of study programmes on university cycles and of higher education institutions, developed by the Agency and implemented after approval in 2016 by the GB. Thus, since the establishment of the Agency, the external evaluation process is carried out, transparently and objectively, according to the procedure designed by the Agency and described in the MEE.

In its current activity, ANACEC capitalizes on the rights granted by regulation, including 1) to submit proposals to the MER on the improvement of the regulatory framework in the fields of competence; 2) to approve normative acts within the limits of the competences established by the normative framework; 3) to establish councils, commissions, expert groups and other consultative platforms; 4) to train evaluators in its fields of competence; 5) to delegate expert evaluators for the EQA missions.

Thus, in 2018-2022, ANACEC developed and submitted proposals to the Government for the amendment of the *Education Code*, which are still to be approved. At the same time, proposals to complete/improve the MEE were sent to the MER for promotion to the Government for approval. Some of them have been accepted in the recent revision of the Methodology.

In carrying out external evaluation activities, ANACEC involves expert evaluators selected from its own *Register of evaluators* (see standard 3.5). At the HE level, the composition of the EEP is

designed by the DHEE, taking into account the profile of the study programme(s) planned for evaluation and the requesting institutions. The composition of the EEP is reviewed in the GB meetings, then consulted with the concerned HEIs to exclude any possibility of conflict of interest. The institutions, within 5 days, express themselves vis-à-vis the composition of the EEP, and in the absence of objections, it is approved by the President's order.

In addition, ANACEC promotes a clear policy to ensure confidentiality in the external evaluation process and exclude any conflict of interest. In this sense, each evaluator contracted by ANACEC, based on a *Contract for the acquisition of external evaluation services*, signs a *Confidentiality Agreement*. The subject related to the lack of conflict of interest is discussed individually with each of the experts co-opted during the phase of establishing the EEP. To formalize the process, from September 2021, the Agency's evaluators must also sign the *Declaration on the lack of conflict of interest* (Annex 8). For the purpose of ensuring confidentiality and excluding the possibility of conflicts of interest, the *Confidentiality Agreement* and *Declaration on the lack of conflict of interest* are also signed by all members of the GB and PCHE.

We intend to continue to improve periodically, in accordance with European standards in the field and through public consultations, our own external evaluation methodology of institutions offering professional training programmes and their programmes, in order to stimulate HEIs for continuous development.

Independence of formal outcomes

According to the procedure established by the Agency, the external evaluation results are formalized, going through several stages. EEP members, based on what was found and analysed in the external evaluation process, formulate, by common agreement, a series of strong points, recommendations, mandatory improvement areas, which are also materialized in decision proposals regarding the evaluated study programme/institution. That information is then presented during the PCHE meetings for examination and validation. Subsequently, the decision of the EEP, validated by the PCHE, is submitted to the GB for approval.

The GB in its capacity as a collective management body, empowered with voting rights and decisions, is independent in approving proposed decisions on all examined subjects, including the results of the external evaluation of study programmes/educational institutions. According to the established mechanisms, third parties cannot intervene in this process. The proposed decisions approved by the GB are sent to the MER for formalization. The final decision regarding the authorization of provisional operation/accreditation, non-accreditation or the withdrawal of the right to organize a study programme or activity of a HEI is adopted by the MER, based on the decision proposed by the GB. Final decisions enter into force after the issuance of the MER order.

It should be noted that during the entire period of activity of ANACIP/ANACEC, no cases of changing GB decisions by MECR/Government have occurred. At the same time, the MECR decided not to issue non-accreditation decisions proposed by the GB for bachelor's degree study programmes. The agency notified MECR about the possible negative effects of not issuing non-accreditation decisions for the system and potential beneficiaries. At the same time, to inform the society, the Agency published the respective GB decisions on its website.

Being aware of the fact that delegating to ANACEC the right to internally approve decisions in several areas of activity would strengthen the Agency's independence and contribute to greater

efficiency in the management of various aspects, we will continue to promote changes in the regulatory framework in this regard.

5.4 ESG Standard 3.4 Thematic analysis

The Agency elaborates and publishes Annual Activity Reports covering all intervention/activity areas of ANACEC, providing data illustrating the achievements per entity/departments, the dynamics of processes over time and brief analyses of the evaluation results of study programmes/institutions providing educational services, including on the HE dimension.

Relevant for the system are studies based on the analysis of the external evaluation results of study programmes in HE. In 2019, a DHEE employee developed and defended the master's thesis „External quality evaluation of bachelor's degree studies in the Republic of Moldova". The paper describes the good practices identified at the level of institutions in the external evaluation process carried out by the Agency during 2016-2018 and proposes a set of recommendations for improving the external evaluation procedure.

The elaboration of thematic studies per general fields of study was initiated in 2020, when the respective activity was included in the Annual Activity Plan of ANACEC. Thus, at the completion of the external evaluation process of the bachelor's degree programmes in the general field of study **021 Arts**, DHEE developed a study that represents an analysis of the field. The study includes a list of general findings and per each accreditation standard, the strengths and weaknesses identified by the EEP, the development trends of the field and a list of recommendations for various categories of beneficiaries, including MER in its capacity as the public authority responsible for development and promotion of policies in education. These are aimed at improving ANACEC's activity, guiding/stimulating HEIs to do things better, contributing to continuous quality assurance in the system. The results of the external evaluation in the given field were discussed during the PCHE meetings and with HEI representatives. In 2021, DHEE developed a thematic study based on the results of the external evaluation of master's degree study programmes in the general field of study **041 Economic Sciences**. The studies are public on the [ANACEC website](#) in Romanian.

Another direction of analysis is carried out by the annual organization of online surveys to collect feedback from all actors involved in the external evaluation process (representatives of the evaluated institutions and experts of ANACEC - members of the EEP) regarding the activity of ANACEC, the functionality of the methodology and procedures applied, the quality of the services provided, the performance of the EEP, the level of objectivity and transparency in the approval process of GB decisions, the relevance and impact of the external evaluation process for improving the quality of the educational and managerial process at the programme level, etc. The studies are public on the ANACEC website.

In particular, the results of the survey carried out in two stages in 2018 were discussed with HEI representatives during the Seminar with the generic title „Assuring the quality of university studies: from challenges to prospects", organized on 25.10.2018 by ANACEC in partnership with the University Agency of Francophonie (AUF) and ARACIS (Romania). At the same time, they were examined within the DHEE, Agency's management, PCHE and were materialized in concrete actions aimed at improving the external evaluation process through proposals to improve the *Methodology of external evaluation* and Guidelines, the external evaluation procedure, the EEP activity of ANACEC. The results of the analysis of the questionnaires applied in 2018 were also published in the magazine [Higher Education Discovery, no. 4, 2018](#).

Carrying out thematic studies, stakeholder questioning, analysing, disseminating and exploiting the results of the external evaluation and the existing good practices in the universities of Moldova, are constant concerns in the activity of ANACEC, which we aim to develop and expand, planning them regularly. The activity plan of ANACEC for the current year includes as distinct activities (1) the questioning of the beneficiaries of the external evaluation process and (2) the elaboration of a thematic study on the general fields of study included in the external evaluation process. It is expected that these studies will be published on the Agency's website. To present the results of the studies, DHEE will organize a round table with all stakeholders: representatives of HEIs, representatives of PCHE, GB members of ANACEC, international experts involved in the process of external quality evaluation of study programmes/HEIs.

The results of the external evaluation and surveys, as well as aspects of the EQA activities, are also reflected in the papers written by the Agency's staff and included in various national and international [publications](#).

5.5 ESG Standard 3.5 Resources

Facilities and material resources

ANACEC carries out its activity in the building on 38A Hîncești Road which belongs to the Public Institution „Centre of Excellence in Construction”, with which a rental contract is concluded annually.

Cosmetic refurbishments were carried out in the available spaces, furnishing them according to their destination and equipping workplaces with IT facilities and high-speed Internet connection. Thus, there are offices for the employees; three meeting rooms, equipped with projectors, screens, an interactive whiteboard; two dining rooms; an IT room, two spaces for archiving documents, a storage space. Currently, ANACEC has sufficient spaces and ensures optimal and safe working conditions for the entire team.

The Agency uses a licensed BigBlueButton videoconferencing platform, as well as various Microsoft and Google platforms. To ensure the functionality and security of work correspondence, all ANACEC employees have corporate email addresses on the top-level domain anacec.md, registered with the support of the Information Technology and Cybersecurity Service.

Human resources

ANACEC activity on the HE dimension is ensured by the following categories of human resources:

- **Governing Board of ANACEC**

Total: 15 members, including 13 teaching staff with scientific and scientific-teaching titles, 1 employer, 1 student from cycle III. The scientific and scientific-teaching titles held: 5 doctors habilitate and 8 doctors of science, 4 university professors and 9 university lecturers. Gender distribution: 6 men and 9 women.

- **Profile Committee in HE**

Total: 9 members including 2 doctors habilitate and 7 doctors of science; 3 university professors and 6 associate professors; 1 man and 8 women.

- **Expert evaluators** (teaching staff, business representatives, students, international evaluators).

Currently, there are approx. 700 people registered in the [Register of evaluators](#) of ANACEC. The Register of evaluators in HE includes 262 experts, including 152 teaching staff, 80 employers, 30 students and 38 international experts.

- **Administrative staff**

Total: 10 people, including 3 employees, evaluation specialists, coordinators of the external evaluation process in HE and 7 employees – support staff. At the moment, two evaluation specialist units are vacant, for which a public competition has been announced.

According to point 30 of GD 201/2018, the President of the GB approves or modifies the staffing status and the staffing scheme of the Agency within the limits of the labour remuneration fund and the structure and staff-limit established by the Government; appoints to public office, modifies, suspends and terminates the work relations of civil servants within the Agency, under the conditions of Law no. 158/2008; hires and releases the contracted staff of the Agency.

ANACEC's policy and activities to strengthen the administrative staff are structured in three key directions:

1. Ensuring with the required staff

Effectively, on 01.07.2022, 43 people are employed, i.e. approx. 82% of 52 units according to staffing status. Of them, approx. 62% are people aged up to 49 years, $\frac{3}{4}$ are women. The characteristics of the staff by age and gender is shown in Figure 7.

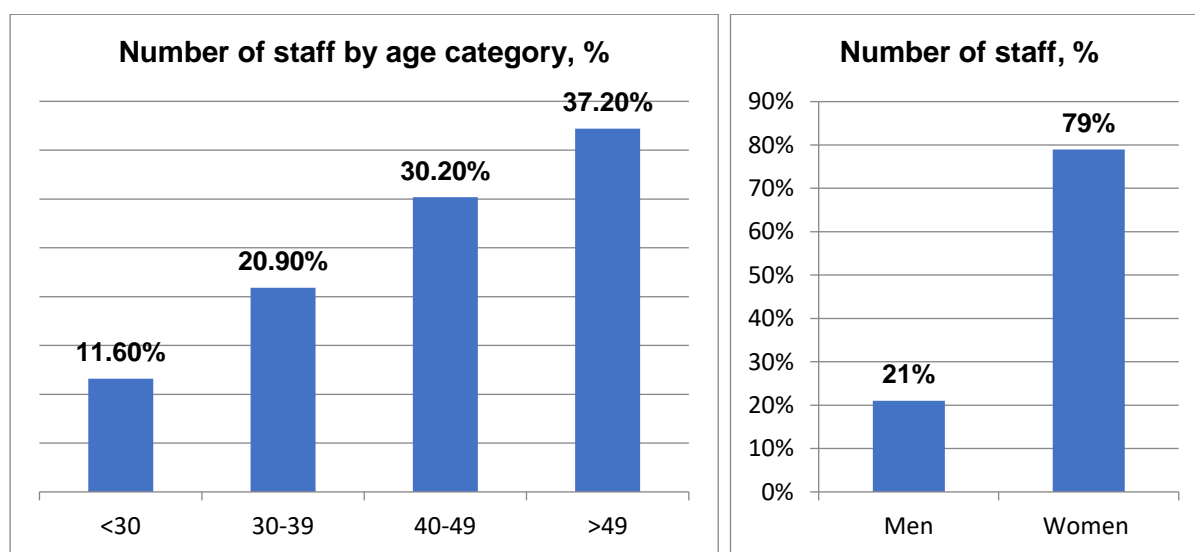


Figure 7. Characteristics of the staff by age and gender

According to the legislation in force, the filling of vacant public positions and the employment of staff are carried out through public competition. Since the establishment of the Agency, the vacant positions have not been fully filled, although the employment competitions are organized regularly. For example: in 2020, ANACEC organized 6 competitions for 11 vacancies. Due to the lack of requests or the submission of a single file, the competition was extended for three positions. Consequently, 6 people were employed in that year. In 2021, following the 8 competitions held, 7 people were hired.

According to ANACEC's job title lists, a total of 5 positions are provided for DHEE (1 Head of Department, 3 main specialists and 1 senior specialist). During the entire period of the Agency's activity, the DHEE units were partially covered. One reason would be the regulated and capped salary given the ANACEC status, which negatively influences the level of attractiveness of the positions put up for competition. Identifying trained specialists is difficult if we take into account the variety and complexity of the tasks granted to DHEE (conceptualization activities, updating the normative and methodological framework; organization and coordination of the external evaluation process of study programmes/HEI; development of thematic studies; training/information, etc.), correlated with an increased degree of responsibility.

At the same time, a more intense process of staff turnover has also been witnessed in the DHEE, compared to other departments. Currently, there are 3 employees within the DHEE: the head of the department, 1 main specialist and 1 senior specialist, two of whom hold the scientific title of doctor of sciences, and one employee - a master's degree. Taking into account the requested workload, given the number of study programmes and HEIs subject to the external evaluation process, ANACEC has requested and will insist on the review and completion of the normative regulatory framework, including through interventions to adapt staffing to the current needs of the agency.

2. Maintaining and stimulating staff

In order to appreciate, but also stimulate the employees to carry out the tasks of the position, but also to obtain the optimal results in their activity, within the Agency, quarterly, in accordance with the provisions of the *Regulation on the manner of establishing and paying the increase for performance*, the performance evaluation is carried out with the appreciation of the results of the staff's activity and the formulation of the objectives for the next period. In order to stimulate and motivate employees, surveys are carried out annually, the following types of questionnaires being developed and applied: (1) Questionnaire to identify motivational factors for employees; (2) The questionnaire for identifying professional training needs; (3) The questionnaire to establish the level of satisfaction, to collect impressions and recommendations regarding the implementation of team building. As a result of the survey analysis, three important documents were developed: (1) The annual non-financial employee motivation programme; (2) Annual professional development plan; (3) Report of team building activities. These documents are updated annually to support improvement processes on this dimension.

3. Professional development and professional career of staff

Career management is a point of interest both for the Agency's staff and for the Agency as an employer, professional development representing one of the constant concerns of the ANACEC management. The ways of covering the needs of professional development and motivation are: (1) participation in various events (conferences/seminars/workshops/webinars, etc.); (2) involvement in training through internal and external thematic courses, of different duration; (3) business trips/study visits. In the period 2020-2022, in pandemic conditions, the share of online activities, organized including by various international structures, has increased substantially, a fact that has also had a beneficial effect on the number of beneficiaries within ANACEC. Capitalizing on all these ways allowed employees to perform professionally (Annex 15).

Financial resources

The financial policy of ANACEC, in its capacity as an administrative authority, is strictly regulated. In order to carry out the duties and cover the expenses necessary for proper

operation, according to the regulatory framework, the Agency is financed from three sources of income, shown in Table 4:

Table 4. Financial resources

Type	Explanation/Decipherment	Expense category
(1) Budget sources	Resources from the state budget.	Payment of employees' salaries. Expenses for participation in continuous training courses and events. Maintenance of the premises. Development (repairs, equipment, office supplies, services, hygiene products, etc.).
2) Collected revenue	Revenue from the provision of paid services, representing fee income from HEIs requesting external quality evaluation and covering the costs of external evaluations. The formula for calculating the fees for each evaluation activity is approved by the <i>Regulation on the calculation of fees for services provided in the external evaluation of the quality of vocational education and training, higher education and continuous training study programmes and institutions (Annex no. 2, GD no. 616/2016)</i> , being correlated with specific criteria, e.g. the level of the study programme, etc.	Remuneration of GB members, PCHE members, expert evaluators for services rendered
3) Resources related to externally funded projects	Current grants received from international organizations for projects funded from external sources for the state budget.	Capacity building of the Agency

The financial resources granted from the state budget for the years 2019, 2020 and 2021 were practically similar. At the same time, the total income from own receipts increased in 2021, compared to 2019, by approx. 81%. Thus, the total executed budget of ANACEC for the year 2021 was 12285233 lei (617780 Euros), which is an increase of approx. 20% compared to 2019. At the HE level, revenues from own receipts decreased substantially in 2020, due to the pandemic by stopping external evaluations in HE, after which an increase of approx. 31% was in 2021, compared to 2019. The share of expenses for HE in total expenses per institution was approx. 21% in 2019, approx. 10% in 2020 and approx. 23% in 2021. Resources transferred within ongoing international projects increased by approx. 40% from 55,364 lei in 2019 to 139,950 lei in 2021. 6,155,526 lei (309,540 Euros) were allocated for the salary fund of the Agency's employees in 2021, of which 676,736 lei (34,030 Euros) were allocated for the salaries of DEHE staff. 1,215,783 lei (61,137 Euros) were allocated for the remuneration of

experts involved in the process of external evaluation of study programmes in HE. The available financial resources are sufficient for the operation and continuous development of the Agency.

The Agency's **website** was developed from own sources and launched in November 2020. Thus, the Agency's website has become friendlier, more consistent and more efficient, contributing to better visibility of ANACEC's activity. The information is available in Romanian and English. On the webpage you can find relevant information and accurate data about current activities, as well as information about the legal framework in the field, the structure and organization of the entity, applied procedures, GB activity, results of external evaluations, international activities, participation in projects, etc. The Agency's current activities are also reflected on its [Facebook page](#).

5.6 ESG Standard 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

ANACEC has an internal QA system at the institutional level, which ensures efficient management of internal processes. The key principle of ANACEC's activity is the promotion of the quality culture and the continuous improvement of institutional performances.

ANACEC makes constant efforts to improve its own internal QA processes and procedures, as a precondition for the efficient performance of delegated duties, ensuring the credibility of the external evaluation process organized and carried out and promoting the quality culture. From the perspective of the principle of public responsibility, ANACEC, in its capacity as a national structure, in its own activity pursues and ensures:

- compliance with the legislation in force and national policies in the field of competence;
- compliance with equity and ethics policies;
- efficiency of the use of resources and the quality of the managerial act;
- transparency of decision-making processes and activities

[The values and principles](#) shared and promoted by ANACEC staff are:

- *Independence in its activity* – ANACEC tends to strengthen its functional autonomy, respecting the normative framework in force, in organizing activities and in making decisions regarding external quality evaluation.
- *Public accountability* – ANACEC works to continuously improve the educational system and provides stakeholders with credible, accessible and up-to-date information on the quality of education.
- *Professionalism* - ANACEC recognizes and rewards the professionalism of expert evaluators and members of the academic community who demonstrate competence and promote quality culture.
- *Integrity* – ANACEC promotes justice, honesty and equity, adopting for all its partners and clients, correct attitudes and resolutely rejecting discrimination.
- *Transparency* - ANACEC ensures maximum transparency regarding standards, rules, procedures, evaluation principles, etc. ANACEC provides motivations based on consistent and correct information for the decisions taken.
- *Adaptation and compatibility at European level* – ANACEC promotes good European practices, collaborating with educational institutions, central and local public authorities, as well as with international bodies.

- *External evaluation based on trust* - ANACEC constantly develops, in order to create and maintain a favourable climate, benevolent, harmonious, balanced relations with all its partners and clients.
- *Development-oriented external evaluation* – ANACEC ensures the objectivity, proactivity of the external quality evaluation process and promotes innovations in education and research.
- *Cooperation* - ANACEC collaborates with educational institutions of different levels, with organizations in the fields of research and innovation, with agencies, national and international organizations concerned with ensuring quality in education.
- *Efficiency and effectiveness* - ANACEC promotes an innovative management oriented towards the optimization of material and human resources, the rational use of time, the reduction of costs and the consolidation of available resources.

In order to fulfil its mission and achieve its objectives, ANACEC implements a [quality policy](#), which is made public and which provides the general direction for all activities, the fundamental elements of ANACEC’s quality policy, and presents a general framework for the development of the Agency and its internal QA system.

Quality management is an integral part both in the management of ANACEC’s activities, as a national entity, and in the management of the daily activities of employees and staff co-opted by the Agency. The entire quality management process is based on the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle, oriented towards continuous improvement.

The responsibility for quality in the performance of work duties is shared by all ANACEC employees. Process monitoring is carried out by the GB, executive management, heads of departments/sections/services.



Figure 8. Quality assurance system of ANACEC

The internal QA system (Figure 8), focused on satisfying the requirements of customers, beneficiaries and stakeholders, is an integral part of the general management of ANACEC. Internal QA is carried out in all areas of activity and is based on the normative framework developed and implemented, which ensures the functionality of the entity and the efficient and effective performance of delegated functions, tasks and responsibilities.

For the successful implementation of the system, a qualitative and effective leadership, the support of an internal quality culture through adequate human and financial resources, the identification and empowerment of „quality culture champions” was needed, who would contribute to the development and implementation of a quality policy and transfer of good practices, of strategic management, of creating teams within the institution to ensure the mixing of ideas and their dissemination among the ANACEC community.

Strategic management is described, developed, maintained and continuously improved in accordance with the [ANACEC Strategy \(2018-2023\)](#), the [President’s Statement on the ANACEC Quality Policy](#) and the [National Action Plan, 2021-2023](#). The provisions stipulated in the mentioned documents are operationalized in the Annual Activity Plans of ANACEC and its subdivisions, including the Plan for 2022. Strategic decisions are approved by the GB during meetings, which are held in accordance with the [Regulation on the organization and conduct of the meetings of the GB of ANACEC](#). GB meetings are public, and the decisions taken and the approved normative framework for regulating the Agency’s activity are published on the official website of ANACEC. The decisions can be appealed by the evaluated educational institutions, and the stakeholders are involved in the development and improvement of the documents approved by ANACEC.

The **management of external evaluations** is aimed at the benefit of educational institutions, students, stakeholders and is carried out in strict accordance with the [Methodology of External Evaluation](#). The quality of the management of external evaluations is ensured by:

- 1) *Adequate design of the external evaluation process*. In this regard, the Agency plans the calendar of external evaluations and examines the external evaluation requests and dossiers presented by HEIs, establishing the degree of correspondence to the established requirements and informing the beneficiaries;
- 2) *Process organization*. Initiating the external evaluation process involves the appointment of an EEP and an evaluation coordinator within DHEE. The external evaluation process starts after consulting the institutions regarding the composition of the EEP;
- 3) *Process coordination*. The agency monitors the correct conduct of evaluation activities and decision-making. Decisions on the results of the external evaluation are successively taken/validated/approved by the EEP, PCHE, GB and MER;
- 4) *Process evaluation*. The direct beneficiaries of the external evaluation process (evaluators and educational institutions) are systematically questioned about the way of carrying out the evaluation.

At the same time, the monitoring of the actions and measures to improve the quality assurance process, undertaken by the educational institutions of different levels as a result of the external evaluation activities of the study programmes/educational institutions is carried out with the application of the [Post-evaluation monitoring procedure](#).

Human resource management is focused on identifying, maintaining and continuously developing human capital. Confidentiality, ethical behaviour and professionalism of employees are ensured through the application of Law no. 158/2008 on the public office and the status of the civil servant, the [Code of Professional Ethics of ANACEC](#), the job descriptions and the regulations of ANACEC subdivisions (see stand. 3.5).

Financial and material resource management is carried out in accordance with the provisions of the normative framework in force and is focused on the identification, provision and

maintenance of the infrastructure and the creation of a working environment necessary for carrying out the Agency's activities in appropriate conditions.

The GB President is responsible for organizing the financial management and control system, as well as the internal audit function in the Agency. Internal audit reports are drawn up annually, submitted to MER and are public on the [ANACEC website](#). At the same time, according to the normative framework in force, annually the Court of Accounts verifies the financial reports of ANACEC.

Document management is focused on standardization, regulation of the way of managing documented information and is carried out in accordance with the following procedures:

- *SP.01 Elaboration of documented procedures* - establishes the manner of initiation, elaboration, endorsement, as well as the content, format, revision and archiving of any documented procedure on activities, used within ANACEC;
- *SP.02 Elaboration and control of documents* - establishes the manner of initiation, development, verification, approval, modification, dissemination, withdrawal and archiving of regulations, methodologies, guides, as well as other departmental normative acts approved by ANACEC ([Process diagram for developing documents](#));
- *OP.01 Management of the e-Management automated information system* - which ensures a unique, internally regulated framework regarding the use of the e-Management Automated Information System.

Monitoring and improvement are the defining components of the QA system, which ensure the continuous development of the Agency and contribute to meeting the requirements and expectations of all beneficiaries/stakeholders.

ANACEC has an internal managerial control/audit system, the organization and functioning of which fully allows the provision of reasonable assurance of the fact that the public funds allocated for the purpose of achieving strategic and operational objectives have been used in conditions of transparency, economy, efficiency, effectiveness, legality, ethics and integrity. Annually, this internal control/audit is carried out based on the National Internal Control Standards in the public sector and the [Managerial Responsibility Statement](#) is adopted.

ANACEC permanently cooperates with universities, in order to improve external evaluation processes to ensure the quality of study programmes and HEIs. Thus, ANACEC applies effective feedback mechanisms to ensure that the accreditation standards it uses are rigorous and fit for purpose, and that the application of the standards, the reporting of how an institution applies the standards and the decision to grant authorization or accreditation are consistent. These mechanisms include questionnaires such as: the opinion of institutional representatives and the opinion of the expert evaluator. Subsequently, the opinion of the stakeholders involved in the evaluation and EQA process is collected, systematized, discussed and taken into account when improving the internal QA processes (e.g., selecting and training expert evaluators, carrying out the external evaluation process, updating evaluation standards specified in the external evaluation guidelines, improvement of the EEP activity and the involvement of the ANACEC coordinator, etc.).

At the same time, ANACEC representatives participated in scientific conferences, seminars and other national events, giving several presentations on the topic of quality improvement in higher education.

The Legal and human resources service applies a series of job satisfaction questionnaires and employee feedback questionnaires as a result of various professional development activities, continuous training. The feedback results are analysed by ANACEC's specialized departments. If the feedback requires the undertaking of any actions, the necessary measures are taken to implement them. Thus, the [Annual professional development plan of ANACEC staff](#) is drawn up and implemented.

Part of the monitoring and improvement process is the transparency of ANACEC's activity, including the [Annual Activity Reports of ANACEC](#) (available in Romanian), which are made public on the Agency's website, to be consulted by all stakeholders, with the opportunity to express their opinion regarding the activity the agency.

Thus, ANACEC implements various internal QA mechanisms/procedures, which cover the Agency's main areas of activity.

In order to achieve the quality standards on various dimensions, distinct activities have been undertaken that allow the monitoring of the processes, guarantee the consistency of the elaborated documents and the quality of the expected results.

- In particular, on the dimension of the modification of the normative and methodological framework, the activities are carried out in teams, the consultation of the drafts with the PC and the approval by the GB, being mandatory steps.
- On the dimension of feedback collection, the questionnaires developed for various categories of stakeholders involved in the external evaluation process, are applied in regularly organized surveys, and the analysis of the results obtained within the specialized Departments is materialized in proposals for improving the activity.
- In order to improve the reporting processes, templates were developed/implemented for the documents and reports - component part of the external evaluation process - EER, Site visit record sheet, Minutes of the EEP, Minutes of the PC, etc. The review of EERs in several stages within the Specialized Department, PC, GB also contributes to their consistency and quality.

A priority in ANACEC's activity from the perspective of internal QA is the **human resource capacity**. The recruitment, selection and hiring process of ANACEC staff is strictly regulated by national legislation (see stand. 3.5). The quality of the staff's activity is monitored and analysed, following the legal procedures and the provisions of its own *Regulation on the manner of determining and paying the performance bonus*. Corrective and preventive measures are applied when critical situations are identified. Prevention measures mainly focus on the professional development of employees.

For **debutant civil servants**, ANACEC, according to the legislation, applies the 6-months trial period, which is also an integration period, at the end of which, in accordance with the qualification obtained at the evaluation, they are confirmed or not in public office. To ensure the successful implementation of the integration period for each newcomer, a mentor is appointed, as a rule, the direct manager. The integration period of the debutant civil servant is carried out on the basis of an individual programme, developed by the Human Resources subdivision and mentor, which includes activities related to the employee's duties. At the same time, the new employees get familiar with the content of the *Guide of the new employee*, approved by Order 139-p of 27.06.2018. Between 2018 and 2021, 21 civil servants, including all DHEE employees, successfully passed their trial period and were confirmed in public office.

Given the fact that expert evaluators are a key figure in the external evaluation process and the services provided by them directly influence the quality of the processes, the **training of expert evaluators** is a mandatory component of the external quality evaluation process at all levels of education, regardless of the purpose of the process, with the aim of developing and ensuring the necessary skills for external experts to promote the objectivity and consistency of the Agency's decisions in the field of external QA in general education, VET, HE and continuous education. The process is regulated by the [Methodology for training the expert evaluators](#) (Annex 13), approved in 2018 by the GB in the 2nd edition (GB Decision no. 10 of 18.12. 2018). The methodology describes the normative, organizational and methodical aspects of the process of training expert evaluators; establishes the forms/levels/types/stages of training, their objectives, as well as the minimum content units and the purposes of training sessions.

Depending on the intended purpose, the training sessions organized by the Agency are divided into several categories. Initiation sessions - mandatory stage for training the person in the external evaluation processes and special training sessions, mandatory at the initiation stage of each external evaluation mission are traditionally organized. A complete cycle of preparation and realization of the training session includes 11 stages, which are described in the mentioned Methodology. The monitoring of the quality of the completed training is ensured through peer assistance and advice, but also the collection of feedback through the application of the *Questionnaire to assess the level of satisfaction of the trainees regarding the training session*. The completed questionnaires are analysed, the information collected being used as a basis for making changes in the training activities organized by ANACEC.

Ethical aspects and rules of professional conduct for employees, GB members and evaluators are regulated by the [Code of Professional Ethics of ANACEC](#), which was revised in 2018 (GB Decision no. 26 of 25.01.2019) from the perspective of the new tasks granted to the Agency, as a result of the reformation of the entity in February 2018. The [Methodology for the selection of expert evaluators](#) completes the Code of Ethics, detailing the rules of conduct of experts in evaluation activities. Employees with civil servant status and contractual staff are also governed by the provisions of the *Code of Conduct of civil servants* (Law no. 25/2008). The provisions of the [Internal Regulation of ANACEC](#), approved by GB Decision no. 57 of 28.04.2022, covers the entire staff of the Agency. In order to avoid any situations of deviations, it is brought to the attention of the employees, under signature.

Relations with ANACEC evaluators are regulated by the Contracts for the purchase of external evaluation/expertise services, concluded with each contracted person, specifying the services, terms and conditions of provision, as well as the obligations of the parties.

Greater attention is paid to the **resolution of petitions** (any complaint, appeal, notification addressed to ANACEC by a natural or legal person). In this sense, the [Regulation on the settlement of petitions submitted to ANACEC](#), approved by the GB, decision no. 58 of 26.03.2021, which establishes how to initiate, conduct and complete the administrative procedure initiated by ANACEC to resolve the petitions received (see stand. 2.7).

It can be stated that in recent years the quality and intensity of ANACEC's activity has increased, based on the measures taken by the Agency, taking into account the recommendations received from beneficiaries/partners, and that this trend will be maintained constantly, according to the requests and aspirations of all stakeholders regarding QA in HE. At the same time, the process of developing and implementing internal system and operational procedures will remain a permanent concern, being an important component of the internal QA system.

5.7 ESG Standard 3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies

ANACEC is undergoing its first external evaluation by ENQA.

6. Design and implementation of the agency's external quality assurance activities (compliance with Part 2 of the ESG)

6.1 ESG Standard 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance

Quality assurance in HE is a continuous process, which is based on the autonomy of HEIs in identifying and implementing their own quality management options. In this sense, the *Education Code* in art. 99 (2) expressly establishes that „The internal evaluation of the educational process in higher education is carried out by the institutional quality assurance structures, based on an institutional regulation”. According to art. 107 (1) „The public accountability of the higher education institution consists in: b) applying the regulations in force regarding the assurance and evaluation of quality in higher education”. At the same time, art. 113 stipulates that „(2) Quality evaluation in higher education represents a complex set of self-evaluation activities, internal evaluation and external evaluation of quality, in accordance with approved accreditation standards, criteria and indicators. (3) Self-evaluation and internal evaluation of quality in higher education are carried out by the institutional structures responsible for quality assurance, in accordance with national reference standards”. It should be noted that currently the vast majority of HEIs in the country implement SMC according to ISO 9001:2015, certified by national or international specialized bodies.

ANACEC supports institutional responsibility for QA and contributes to the improvement of HEI's activities, promoting national and international good practices, which are taken up in its own MEE and Guidelines and which are implemented in the evaluation process of study programmes and HEIs, being aimed at ensuring quality in HE in the RM, as an element of EHEA.

In its capacity as a national entity authorized to carry out the external evaluation at HE level, ANACEC organizes this process based on the MEE, which is the basic normative act in the field of external quality evaluation, being developed by ANACEC in accordance with the national normative framework and the recommendations in field at European level.

The external quality evaluation for the authorization of provisional operation and accreditation of study programmes and educational institutions is carried out on the basis of accreditation standards, criteria and performance indicators, established in the annexes to the MEE, as well as evaluation standards and mandatory minimum evaluation standards set out in the *Guidelines of external evaluation*, which are public and can be accessed on the ANACEC website:

- [Guidelines for the external evaluation of bachelor's degree \(cycle I\) and integrated higher education study programmes;](#)
- [Guidelines for the external evaluation of master's degree \(Cycle II\) study programmes;](#)
- [Guidelines for the external evaluation of higher education institutions.](#)

The 10 accreditation standards, performance criteria and indicators, as well as evaluation standards are developed in accordance with the recommendations in *ESG 2015, Part I* and based on national standards in the field of education, promoted through various documents (laws, regulations, Government decisions and decisions of the MER).

In the process of developing the accreditation standards, the provisions of the standards stated in the ESG were taken into account, and the criteria, performance indicators and evaluation standards transpose the ESG guidelines for each standard, adapted to the national context (Table 5).

Table 5. Comparison between the accreditation standards applied by ANACEC and ESG 1

Accreditation standard	Standards, criteria and performance indicators for the external evaluation of bachelor's degree, integrated higher education study programmes (revised, 2022)		Standards, criteria and performance indicators for the external evaluation of master's degree study programmes (revised, 2022)		Standards, criteria and performance indicators for the external evaluation of higher education institutions (2016)	
	Criterion	Performance indicator	Criterion	Performance indicator	Criterion	Performance indicator
1. Policy for quality assurance	1.1	1.1.1	1.1	1.1.1	1.1	1.1.1
	1.2	1.2.1, 1.2.2, 1.2.3*	1.2	1.2.1, 1.2.2, 1.2.3*	1.2	1.2.1, 1.2.2, 1.2.3
					1.3	1.3.1, 1.3.2*, 1.3.3*, 1.3.4, 1.3.5
					1.4	1.4.1*, 1.4.2*
2. Design and approval of programmes	2.1	2.1.1, 2.1.2	2.1	2.1.1, 2.1.2	2.1	2.1.1, 2.1.2
	2.2	2.2.1, 2.2.2, 2.2.3, 2.2.4	2.2	2.2.1, 2.2.2, 2.2.3, 2.2.4		
3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	3.1	3.1.1, 3.1.2*, 3.1.3*, 3.1.4*	3.1	3.1.1, 3.1.2*, 3.1.3*, 3.1.4*	3.1	3.1.1*, 3.1.2*, 3.1.3*
	3.2	3.2.1*, 3.2.2	3.2	3.2.1*, 3.2.2	3.2	3.2.1*, 3.2.2*, 3.2.3*, 3.2.4*
	3.3	3.3.1*, 3.3.2*	3.3	3.3.1*, 3.3.2*		
4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	4.1	4.1.1*, 4.1.2*	4.1	4.1.1*, 4.1.2*	4.1	4.1.1*, 4.1.2*
	4.2	4.2.1*, 4.2.2*	4.2	4.2.1*, 4.2.2*	4.2	4.2.1*, 4.2.2*, 4.2.3*
	4.3	4.3.1*	4.3	4.3.1*	4.3	4.3.1*
5. Teaching staff	5.1	5.1.1, 5.1.2	5.1	5.1.1, 5.1.2	5.1	5.1.1, 5.1.2, 5.1.3*
	5.2	5.2.1*, 5.2.2*, 5.2.3*	5.2	5.2.1*, 5.2.2*, 5.2.3*	5.2	5.2.1*, 5.2.2*
	5.3	5.3.1*, 5.3.2*, 5.3.3*	5.3	5.3.1*, 5.3.2*, 5.3.3*	5.3	5.3.1*, 5.3.2*
6. Learning resources and student support	6.1	6.1.1	6.1	6.1.1	6.1	6.1.1
	6.2	6.2.1, 6.2.2, 6.2.3, 6.2.4*	6.2	6.2.1, 6.2.2, 6.2.3, 6.2.4*	6.2	6.2.1, 6.2.2, 6.2.3*, 6.2.4
	6.3	6.3.1, 6.3.2*	6.3	6.3.1, 6.3.2*	6.3	6.3.1*, 6.3.2
	6.4	6.4.1*	6.4	6.4.1*	6.4	6.4.1*, 6.4.2*
					6.5	6.5.1, 6.5.2

7. Access to information	7.1	7.1.1	7.1	7.1.1	7.1	7.1.1*, 7.1.2*
	7.2	7.2.1*	7.2	7.2.1*	7.2	7.2.1*, 7.2.2*
8. Transparency of information of public interest regarding the study programme	8.1	8.1.1, 8.1.2*	8.1	8.1.1, 8.1.2*	8.1	8.1.1, 8.1.2*
9. On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	9.1	9.1.1, 9.1.2*, 9.1.3, 9.1.4*	9.1	9.1.1, 9.1.2*, 9.1.3, 9.1.4*	9.1	9.1.1*, 9.1.2*, 9.1.3*, 9.1.4*
	9.2	9.2.1*, 9.2.2*	9.2	9.2.1*, 9.2.2*	9.2	9.2.1*, 9.2.2*
10. Cyclical external quality assurance	10.1	10.1.1*, 10.1.2*	10.1	10.1.1*, 10.1.2*	10.1	10.1.1*, 10.1.2*

* Note: It does not apply in the case of external evaluation for the authorization of provisional operation

ANACEC evaluates the institutions in terms of achieving the 10 accreditation standards and aims to ensure the continuous improvement of HE quality in the Republic of Moldova. At the same time, in order to facilitate the effective application of accreditation standards, the *Guidelines for the external evaluation of study programmes* (bachelor, integrated studies and master) were updated and reapproved by the GB in September 2020 and April 2022. The opinions/suggestions of various stakeholders (HEIs, expert evaluators, employers and the profile committee), as well as European practices in the field were taken into account.

6.2 ESG Standard 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

Aspects related to the development and implementation of QA mechanisms in HE are regulated by the Education Code. Thus, according to art. 3, „quality in education is the set of characteristics of a study programme and its providers, through which the expectations of the beneficiaries are met in relation to the quality standards”. According to art. 112 (1) „Quality assurance in higher education is achieved through a set of actions to develop the institutional capacity to develop, plan and implement study programmes, through which the trust of the beneficiaries is formed and strengthened that the institution offering education meets and improves quality standards in accordance with its assumed mission”. At the same time, the Education Code expressly provides (point (2) of art. 115) that ANACEC:

„b. elaborates, in accordance with the European standards in the field, and publishes its own evaluation and accreditation methodology of the institutions offering professional training programmes and their programmes which it proposes for approval to the Government;

c. formulates and periodically revises, based on European and international good practices, accreditation standards, national reference standards and performance indicators used to evaluate and ensure quality in education”.

In this context, ANACEC approaches the process of quality assurance in HE as a peer entity that oversees quality, but also advises to facilitate and stimulate the achievement of quality standards, accepted by all those who offer services on the educational market.

In order to implement the legislative provisions, ANACEC successively carried out a series of activities related to:

- analysis of the experience of European quality assurance agencies (including AQAS, EKKA, ARACIS, etc.);
- analysis of the national legal framework/national standards regarding VET, HE and continuous professional training;
- initiation of internal discussions regarding the structure of the external evaluation procedure, accreditation standards, criteria and performance indicators, so that they cover all educational levels;
- discussions on the regulation of external evaluation fees, which were accepted by stakeholders;
- development of a common methodology and standards, adjusted to the national context, in accordance with ESG 2015;
- discussion of the MEE drafts and the Regulation for the calculation of fees for the services provided in the framework of the external quality evaluation with the GB members;
- involvement in the analysis of the developed documents of all stakeholders (HEIs in the country (who were asked to include students in their internal discussions), the Ministry of Education, the National Council of Rectors, the Ministry of Finance, etc.), who provided relevant feedback;
- collecting feedback and using it to perfect the developed drafts;
- mediating the elaborated drafts, accompanied by informative notes, on the specialized government website: <http://particip.gov.md> for public discussions;
- completing the table of divergences, based on the collected feedback, confirming the acceptance or non-acceptance of the formulated proposals, providing the necessary arguments based on the European experience and the national legal framework;
- presentation of draft documents for Government approval.

A similar algorithm was applied by the Agency to the development of the *Guidelines for the external evaluation* of study programmes by university cycles/HEIs. Thus, ANACEC ensures that all activities carried out are documented through clearly defined procedures, fit-to-purpose (of improving the quality of activities and promoting the quality culture in HEIs) and are accessible to all beneficiaries.

The first version of the *MEE*, which coherently regulated the conceptual, normative and procedural framework for external quality evaluation for the authorization of provisional operation and accreditation of study programmes and VET, HE and continuous training institutions of all types and forms of organization of education, by levels and cycles, was approved by GD no. 616/2016. The *Guidelines for external evaluation* were approved in 2016 by the GB and implemented by the Agency. The *MEE* and the *Guidelines for external evaluation* are the basic documents on which the Agency bases its quality assurance activities.

It should be noted that the changes recently made by the Government in the *MEE* cover the following aspects:

- organization of the external quality evaluation process both per study programme and per group of study programmes in the same field of professional training;
- initiation of the external quality evaluation procedure for the (re)accreditation of bachelor's degree study programmes, if the programme has graduates every year of the last 5 years;
- mandatory inclusion (co-optation) of an international expert in the nominal composition of the EEP in the case of accreditation of doctoral programmes and HEIs;
- obtaining by the doctoral schools of the authorization of provisional operation/accreditation together with the authorization of provisional operation/accreditation of the study programmes offered;
- carrying out online site visits (in exceptional cases, conditioned by external factors, which limit the access of people within the institutions to be evaluated) on remote communication platforms, established by mutual agreement with the educational institution;
- determining the possible variants of final decisions following the completion of the external evaluation process for the authorization of provisional operation and the accreditation of study programmes and HEIs.

In order to facilitate the understanding and implementation of accreditation standards by HEIs and EEPs and to ensure the effectiveness and objectivity of the external evaluation process, the Agency has developed different working tools, namely:

- the site visit record sheet (which aims to guide the experts in carrying out the interviews and recording the findings during the evaluation visit);
- the EER template;
- Excel tables to facilitate the calculation of the score obtained in the external evaluation (for the quantitative part of the evaluation);
- leaflets that briefly present the stages of the external evaluation procedure and leaflets that briefly describe the types of external evaluation (authorization of provisional operation/accreditation) and the final results.

In addition, a series of information sessions, internal and external trainings were organized with the management of educational institutions and expert evaluators.

It should be noted that both the Methodology and the guidelines for external evaluation were expertized by external experts, and the proposals made by them were taken into account when finalizing the respective documents.

ANACEC, through the external quality evaluation for the authorization of provisional operation/accreditation/reaccreditation of study programmes and educational institutions, supports the increase in the competitiveness of HEIs and the satisfaction of the requirements of stakeholders, achieving the following essential objectives:

- ensuring the academic community, beneficiaries, employers and the public in general, that the study programme and the HEI meet the minimum quality level corresponding to state educational standards and good practices, both national and international;
- assisting the HEI in the process of developing a high-performance management and a genuine quality culture, as well as demonstrating, through relevant evidence and documents, their level;

- offering HEI support in order to align the study programmes to the requirements of the EHEA and the European Research Area;
- stimulating the HEI in the continuous promotion of the quality of the teaching process, research, innovation, artistic creation, demonstrated by relevant results, in accordance with the requirements of the labour market;
- supporting academic mobility and mutual recognition of study documents;
- promoting cooperation between HEIs in ensuring, monitoring and improving the quality of the teaching process;
- identifying, mediating and not accepting any attempt to provide a study programme or operation of a HEI that does not meet the minimum quality standards.

Thus, the external quality evaluation carried out by ANACEC encourages the continuous development and improvement of the HEI and the educational offer.

An important objective for ANACEC has been the development of a stable connection between external quality evaluation activities and internal quality assurance by HEIs. The promotion and implementation of a clear *Methodology for external evaluation*, developed on the basis of a productive dialogue with stakeholders, has contributed to the continuous development of internal quality assurance processes in HEIs. We mention the relevance of the EEP activities, which carry out an effective external evaluation process based on clear values and principles, promoting and developing the quality culture in HE.

The monitoring by ANACEC of the quality improvement process is carried out in accordance with the [Post-evaluation monitoring procedure](#), developed with the participation of representatives from all HEIs and approved by the GB (15.03.2019), revised and updated by decision no. 23 of 01.04.2022 of GB. The procedure is public on the ANACEC website.

Systemically approaching quality assurance in HE, the Agency ensures a relevant, transparent and open external evaluation process. The computerized elements of the external evaluation process (Google Apps, BigBlueButton, MSing) introduced contribute to its simplification. By collecting permanent feedback and analysing the accumulated data, the proper functioning and development of the external evaluation process is guaranteed. In this sense, ANACEC periodically surveys the representatives of the institutions and the experts, to see how they perceive the added value of the evaluation and to improve some processes. At the same time, the procedures, external evaluation tools are improved and adjusted, based on what was learned from the initial experience, but also taking into account the fact that the next stage is the re-accreditation process and taking into account the improvements made by the institutions based on recommendations and mandatory improvement areas formulated in the first round of the external evaluation process, following the Plan-Do-Act-Check/Adjust quality cycle.

6.3 ESG Standard 2.3 Implementing processes

The external quality evaluation procedure implemented by ANACEC follows several steps that are established in the MEE. Thus, the external quality evaluation process is predefined, made public, applied constantly and coherently, and the reliability of the process is ensured by the detailed documentation of all stages and the coordination of external evaluation activities by an employee of ANACEC.

The process diagram for external quality evaluation for the authorization of provisional operation/accreditation/reaccreditation of the study programme from its initiation to its

completion (Figure 9) shows all the stages of the process, their consecutiveness, the regulatory deadlines established for each and the responsible structures/subdivisions.

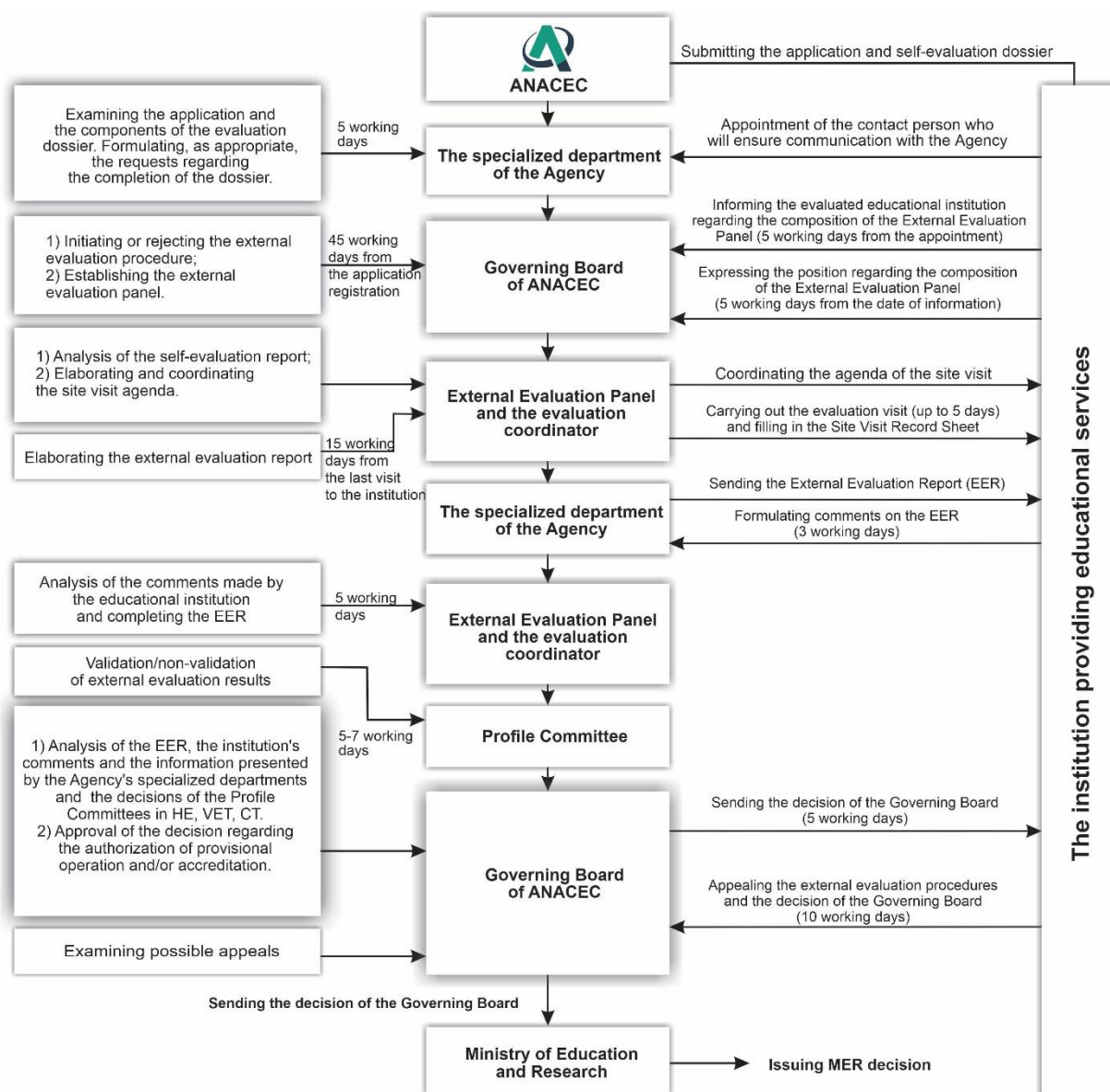


Figure 9. Process diagram for the external quality evaluation

The external quality evaluation procedure applied by ANACEC for the authorization of provisional operation/accreditation/reaccreditation of the study programme and/or the educational institution includes the following stages:

1. Initiation of the evaluation procedure by the educational institution/ consortium/ partnership/ subsidiary/ founder/ MER.
2. Internal quality evaluation (self-evaluation) and the development of the SER, a reflective document through which the institution reviews/analyses its own activities, taking into account how the evaluation standards are met, highlighting the identified strengths and the areas where further development is needed.
3. External quality evaluation:

- a) submission of the application and the external evaluation dossier on paper and in electronic format, completed according to annex no. 1 of the MEE, to the DHEE;
- b) examination of the application and the components of the external evaluation dossier. Returning it to the educational institution in the event of detection of non-compliance with the rigors of completion or elaboration of the SER. Formulation of requests to complete the dossier as appropriate.
- c) approval by the GB of the decision to initiate or reject the initiation of the external evaluation procedure;
- d) establishment of the EEP of at least 3 members, selected from the Agency's Register of evaluators;
- e) informing the evaluated educational institution, within up to 5 working days from the date of appointment of the EEP, regarding its composition;
- f) presentation by the educational institution, within up to 5 working days from the date of the information, of the opinion regarding the composition of the EEP;
- g) the analysis of the external evaluation dossier and the SER by the EEP and the prior establishment of the level of achievement of the accreditation standards, evaluation standards and mandatory minimum evaluation standards set out in the *Guidelines for external quality evaluation*;
- h) elaboration and coordination of the visit agenda with the educational institution and the chairperson of the EEP;
- i) carrying out the external evaluation visit to the institution, which lasts up to 5 working days, and completing the „Site visit record sheet”.

The visit to the institution allows the members of the External Evaluation Panel to carry out the following activities:

- to examine the documents related to the activity of the educational institution and its subdivisions;
- to interview, at the choice of experts, representatives of employees, students/graduates of the educational institution, as well as employers;
- to access information related to the teaching-scientific activity, the teaching and scientific staff, the technical-material base and the financial activity of the educational institution;
- to attend classes;
- to examine the internal quality assurance system;
- to obtain other information related to the activity of the educational institution.

The results of the visit are recorded in the Site visit record sheet, which is signed by all EEP members, a copy being kept at the evaluated institution.

- j) drafting, within up to 15 working days from the last visit to the institution, the EER containing the recommendation regarding the result of the external evaluation of the study programme/ HEI (authorization/ non-authorization of provisional operation; accreditation/ non-accreditation), as well as a series of quality improvement proposals. The recommendations are justified based on the data collected during the evaluation visit, as well as those resulting from the analysis of the documents made available by the institution subject to external evaluation;
- k) sending the EER to the educational institution subject to the external evaluation procedure, which, within 3 working days of receiving the Report, has the opportunity to make comments and provide additional evidence, if necessary;

- l) analysis of the comments made by the educational institution, within up to 5 working days; finalizing the EER by the EEP;
 - m) examining and validating the results of the external evaluation by the PCHE and submitting the proposed decisions, accompanied by minutes, to the GB;
 - n) examination of the evaluation results and decision-making by the GB, which is based on the proposal presented by the EEP, validated by the PCHE, the comments made by the HEI, as well as additional materials presented at the request, as the case may be, of the GB;
 - o) examination of possible appeals: as a result of the examination of the appeal, the Appeals Committee prepares a report that also includes the Report of Appeal Examination, which are subsequently examined in the GB meeting.
4. Sending the GB decision to the MER.
 5. Publication of the GB decision and the EER on the ANACEC website.
 6. Granting of the authorization of provisional operation/accreditation/reaccreditation by MER.
 7. Monitoring the implementation of the recommendations resulting from the external evaluation (follow-up).

A mandatory element in the external evaluation process is the post-evaluation monitoring in order to establish the level of implementation of the recommendations and mandatory improvement areas, specified in the EER as a result of the findings made during the evaluation. The [Post-evaluation monitoring procedure](#) describes the steps that educational institutions undertake in the post-evaluation period to improve the quality of study programmes/institutional quality. On the higher education dimension, the *Post-evaluation monitoring procedure* is applied by DHEE. Accordingly, educational institutions initiate and carry out, at the end of the external evaluation process, corrective/preventive actions to eliminate the non-conformities detected in the external evaluation process or to prevent possible future non-conformities. The educational institutions develop, within up to 6 months, from the approval of the decisions by the GB, Corrective Action Plans based on the mandatory improvement areas and the recommendations formulated by the EEP members, with the indication of those responsible and the deadlines. Corrective and preventive measures are designed and implemented by educational institutions during the validity of the decision on the authorization of provisional operation or accreditation of the study programmes/educational institution. Afterwards, the educational institution prepares a Report on the implementation of the corrective measures plan, which is presented to the specialized department of the Agency. Based on the Reports on the implementation of the corrective measures plan, DHEE formulates preliminary conclusions regarding the progress/results of the educational institution's implementation of the improvement areas/recommendations proposed by the EEP.

HEIs participate in the external evaluation result dissemination activities organized periodically by ANACEC (conferences, workshops, round tables).

6.4 ESG Standard 2.4 Peer-review experts

In carrying out external evaluation activities, ANACEC involves various categories of experts that it selects from its own *Register of expert evaluators*, thus ensuring the realization of an external evaluation process in a professional, objective and independent manner.

Selection of experts

The process of recruitment and selection of expert evaluators is carried out in accordance with the provisions of the [Methodology for the selection of expert evaluators](#) and the criteria related to the professional and scientific skills of the candidate. In the process of recruiting and co-opting expert evaluators, the Agency ensures that the recruited experts have recognized professional skills and have successfully completed the training stage carried out by DHEE. Thus, EEPs are made up of teaching staff (university teaching staff/researchers), student representatives, employer representatives, international experts, who meet all the requirements provided by the regulatory framework.

The requirements for the selection of expert evaluators, from different categories of stakeholders, cover the following aspects:

- **teaching staff in higher education** - holding a scientific/scientific-teaching title, experience in the field of quality assurance or management in higher education, work experience in the field of expertise, compliance with professional ethics, knowledge of the Romanian language and/or a foreign language and the lack of criminal record;
- **employers' representatives** - having experience in the field of quality assurance or management, having work experience in the field of expertise, compliance with professional ethics, knowledge of the Romanian language and/or a foreign language and lack of criminal record. When selecting expert evaluators in this category, the Agency co-opts representatives of the professional area from different sectors: private, public and non-governmental;
- **student representatives** cover the following aspects: being a student in one of the three cycles of higher education (bachelor's, master's or doctorate), having good academic results/record, knowledge of the Romanian language and/or a foreign language and the lack of criminal record;
- **international experts** - holding a scientific/scientific-teaching title, experience in the field of quality assurance or management in higher education, work experience in the field of expertise, compliance with professional ethics, knowledge of the Romanian language. For situations where there is a need for expert evaluators from specific fields or international expert evaluators, ANACEC requests their recommendation or designation by the partner quality assurance agencies.

According to the provisions of point 39 of the MEE, the EEP consists of at least 3 members. The number and category of experts in the panels depends on the number of evaluated programmes and the education cycle. Thus, in the external evaluation process for the authorization of provisional operation/accreditation of programmes, the following categories of experts are co-opted, mandatorily: teaching staff with scientific/scientific-teaching titles, student representatives, employer representatives, international experts, as appropriate. In the case of external quality evaluation for the accreditation of doctoral programmes and HEIs, in addition to the categories of experts stated above, the involvement of an international expert in each EEP is mandatory.

EEP members must be independent, not represent the interests of the organization they belong to or of other third parties, confirm the lack of conflicts of interest by signing the *Declaration on their own responsibility on the lack of conflicts of interest* and have to keep information

confidential. These requirements also apply to international experts involved in the external evaluation process.

In the external evaluation process, the legal provision is taken into account according to which higher education institutions can present their opinion on the composition of the EEP. In cases where the HEI demonstrates the existence of a conflict of interest, the Agency analyses the evidence/arguments presented and, as appropriate, replaces the EEP member.

Training of experts

The training of expert evaluators is a mandatory component of the external quality evaluation process, with the aim of developing and ensuring the necessary skills of experts to promote the objectivity and consistency of the Agency's decisions. The training of national expert evaluators is carried out through initiation/benchmark sessions, special/thematic training sessions and training courses. The training of international expert evaluators requires the mandatory completion of initiation/benchmark sessions and special training sessions, depending on the topic. The duration of the training varies depending on the type of training from 2-3 academic hours in the case of initiation/benchmark sessions and special/thematic training sessions to 90 hours in the case of the „External Evaluation in Higher Education” training course (3 ECTS credits).

In order to ensure the effectiveness of the training approach, the training activities are focused on training/strengthening the evaluation skills of experts and are interactive. Thus, all types of training carried out by the Agency, suppose participants' familiarization with various topics such as: regulatory framework provisions, rights and obligations of evaluators, rules of ethical conduct, the use of external evaluation tools (Site visit record sheet, Guidelines for External Evaluation), as well as the full capitalization on their professional and evaluation experience. **Initiation/benchmark sessions** are mandatory for the involvement of trainees in the external evaluation processes organized by the Agency. They primarily focus on familiarizing the participants with topics related to:

- the provisions of the national legislative and normative framework (*Education Code, Methodology of External Evaluation*, other normative acts, as the case may be);
- the rights and obligations of expert evaluators, including the rules of ethical conduct;
- the use of external evaluation tools (Site visit record sheet, Guidelines for External Evaluation)
- the elaboration of the EER.

Initiation/benchmark sessions are usually organized in groups of up to 20 participants. Depending on the number and category of experts (teaching staff, student representatives, employer representatives, international experts) these sessions are organized with the participation of experts from all categories as well as separately for each category. Special attention is paid to training sessions for students.

The respective sessions are organized both offline and online, with the use of Cisco Webex, Zoom, Google Meet, BigBlueButton platforms, etc. They include PPT presentations, task demonstrations (e.g., organizing the interview with a certain category of beneficiaries), case studies/discussions on examples of application in the process of evaluating external quality assurance procedures (opportunities for active involvement of experts), group activities, individual tasks/activities for developing external evaluation reports, etc.

The **special and/or thematic training sessions** aim to develop/consolidate evaluation skills, based on the *Methodology of External Evaluation* in force. Special training sessions are mandatory at the initiation stage of each external evaluation mission and are organized for EEP members. Thematic sessions are regularly organized by the Agency and aim at certain topics of interest in the Agency's activities (e.g.: *Aspects of the external evaluation of study programmes (Guidelines for external evaluation of bachelor's degree programmes, integrated higher education, master's degree programmes)*), *Defining elements of the monitoring of study programmes/ HEIs in the post-evaluation period (Post-evaluation monitoring procedure)*, *Aspects regarding the involvement of stakeholders (Regulation on the involvement of stakeholders)*).

The **training course** „External evaluation in higher education”, of 90 hours (3 ECTS credits), contains 3 modules and is carried out periodically. The first module of the course aims at the individual examination by the participants of the normative framework on external evaluation. The second module is focused on the training, development and consolidation of external evaluation skills in the training sessions. In this module, trainees familiarize themselves with the provisions of the European normative framework regarding the external quality evaluation, the national normative framework on the quality evaluation of study programmes, the external evaluation procedure of study programmes, the role of the expert evaluator in the external evaluation process and the tools used in this process. In the third module, trainees develop individually/or in groups a portfolio. The training course organized in November 2021 was attended by 95 people from various categories of experts, including teachers, students and employers. The course can be accessed on the [Google Classroom](#) platform.

In order to establish the level of efficiency and usefulness of the training sessions, the trainers of the Agency apply the evaluation questionnaire of the level of satisfaction of the experts participating in the trainings. Based on the analysis of the data collected, changes/completions/improvements are made to the curriculum (Annex 9) of the training sessions, interventions are made in the contents provided by the Agency in the training process, the methods and tools used.

The calendar of training sessions and training courses for evaluators is established according to the needs of the Agency.

In the period 2017-2021, the Agency involved the following categories of experts in the process of external evaluation of study programmes in HE (Table 6):

Table 6. Categories of experts involved in the external evaluation of study programmes

Year	Category of experts				TOTAL
	Teaching staff	Employers	Students	International experts	
2017	75	45	29	9	158
2018	76	50	18	1	145
2019	62	31	18		111
2020	26	11	8	7	52
2021	90	42	29	21	182
Total	329	179	102	38	648

According to the data (Figure 10), teachers cover the largest share, with employers in second place. The smaller share of student representatives is conditioned by the fact that they are only involved in the external evaluation process for the accreditation of the study programmes. The number of international experts involved in the external quality evaluation process is different from year to year, but with an increasing trend, both for the external evaluation process for the accreditation of bachelor's and master's degree programmes.

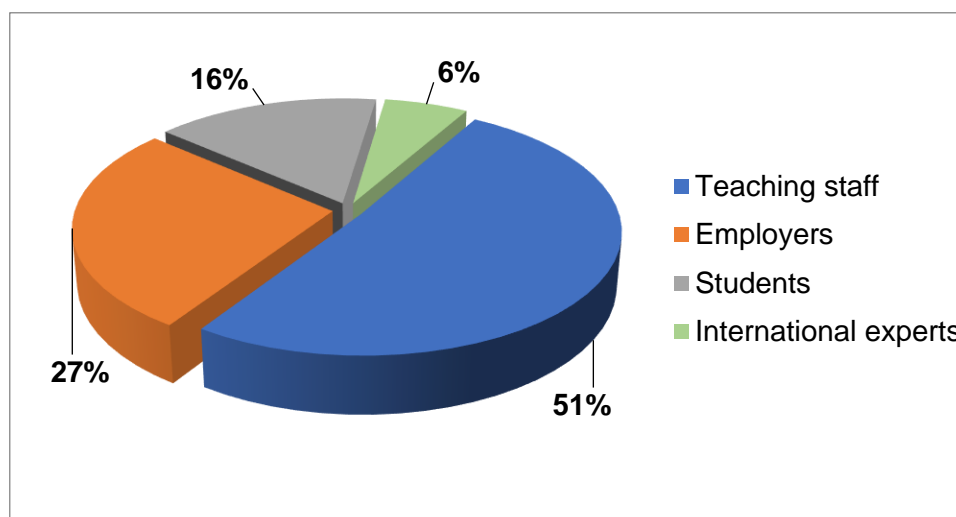


Figure 10. Distribution by category of expert evaluators involved in the external evaluations of study programmes in higher education in 2017-2021

Starting from 2018, ANACEC annually awards evaluators who have contributed substantially to the promotion and consolidation of the quality culture in the fields of education and research in the Republic of Moldova with its own „Quality Crystal” award. The process and conditions for awarding it are regulated by the *Regulation on awarding the „Quality Crystal” award*. The list of holders of the „Quality Crystal” award is published on ANACEC website.

The competences of the evaluators are also evaluated by the HEI. In this sense an online questionnaire is applied annually by the Agency, after the completion of the external evaluation process. Following the external evaluation process, as well as the results obtained following the collection of feedback, a series of positive aspects were highlighted that are attested by various categories of experts, including, knowledge of the particularities of the national and European educational system and the trends in the evaluated field, the growing interest in becoming national and later international expert evaluators, the dissemination of good practices in the labour field, openness, activism, the desire for change. At the same time, there were also some weaknesses and challenges identified, including the tendency of some experts to impose their institutional experience in the external evaluation process, a certain dose of subjectivism, insufficient knowledge of the national normative framework by certain categories of experts (e.g., regarding the organization of the educational process in HE by employers and students), certain hesitations/difficulties in formulating mandatory recommendations and improvement areas, less attractive remuneration for evaluators co-opted from the business sector and international experts. The scope for co-opting international experts remains limited, given the need for them to know the Romanian language. In order to overcome the weaknesses and challenges stated above, the Agency analyses each challenge/vulnerability separately,

including the involvement of student representatives in all types of external evaluation (for authorization of provisional operation and accreditation in all education cycles), and undertakes preventive/corrective measures taking into account its specifics.

6.5 ESG Standard 2.5 Criteria for outcomes

All decisions regarding the results of external evaluations of study programmes/HEIs are made taking into account the provisions of the national regulatory framework, including European good practices, and are based on clear, explicit criteria, which are published and applied constantly, consistently and transparently by all decision-makers.

Thus, in accordance with the provisions of the *MEE* and the *Guidelines for External Evaluation*, the EEP establishes in the EER the level of achievement of the evaluation standards for the performance indicators of each accreditation standard, identifies, as appropriate, the strengths, formulates recommendations and mandatory improvement areas. The strengths represent examples of good practice, and the recommendations and areas for improvement are the basis for the development of the *Plan of corrective measures* for improving the quality of the evaluated study programme.

The EER developed by the EEP are submitted for examination to the PCHE, which decides on the validation/non-validation of the external evaluation results for each study programme/HEI evaluated. PCHE examines the content of the EER in accordance with the requirements of the Methodology, the Guidelines and the provisions of the [Regulation on the organization and operation of the profile committee in higher education](#). Validation decisions are conditional on the achievement of the following requirements:

- correspondence of the evidence included in the EER with the evaluated performance indicators;
- clarity and logic of the presentation of the findings made during the external evaluation process;
- sufficient reasoning through evidence and findings of the score awarded;
- formulation of strengths, recommendations and areas for mandatory improvement for performance indicators;
- correctness of the formulation of the final recommendation of the EEP (including the examination of the comments on the EER received from the HEIs and the minutes of the EEP);
- degree of fulfilment of the accreditation standards that partially correspond to the requirements on the study programmes/educational institutions subject to the post-evaluation monitoring procedure.

PCHE members formulate, as appropriate, recommendations and mandatory improvement areas for the performance indicators in the EER. The EEP examines the recommendations made by the PCHE and completes, as appropriate, the EER of the evaluated study programmes/HEI.

The GB examines the EER and PCHE recommendations and in accordance with the provisions of the *Methodology of External Evaluation* makes the appropriate decisions.

The decisions of the EEP and the GB following the external evaluation of study programmes/HEIs are based on the criteria approved by GD 616/2016, with subsequent

amendments and additions. Thus, currently, the GB adopts the decision on the authorization/non-authorization of provisional operation or accreditation/non-accreditation of the study programme/HEI, taking into account the following:

I. Based on the results of the external quality evaluation for the authorization of provisional operation of study programmes/HEIs:

1) if the share of the level of achievement of each accreditation standard is at least 50%, and the accreditation standard 2. *Design and approval of programmes* has 100% level of achievement, the GB proposes the authorization of provisional operation of the study programme/HEI;

2) if the share of the level of achievement of at least one accreditation standard is less than 50%, and the accreditation standard 2. *Design and approval of programmes* does not have 100% level of achievement, the GB proposes the non-authorization of provisional operation of the study programme/HEI.

II. Based on the results of the external quality evaluation for the accreditation of study programmes/HEIs:

1) if the share of the level of achievement of each accreditation standard is at least 90%, and the accreditation standard 2. *Design and approval of programmes*, and the accreditation standard 5. *Teaching staff*, respectively, have 100% level of achievement, the GB proposes the accreditation of the study programme/HEI for a period of 5 years;

2) if the share of the level of achievement of accreditation standards is 60-90%, and the accreditation standard 2. *Design and approval of programmes*, and the accreditation standard 5. *Teaching staff*, respectively, have 100% level of achievement, the GB proposes the accreditation of the study programme/HEI only after the removal of detected non-conformities, within up to 6 months, demonstrated by an exhaustive report.

If at the end of the granted term the HEI demonstrates the achievement of each accreditation standard to a share of at least 90%, and the accreditation standard 2. *Design and approval of programmes* and the accreditation standard 5. *Teaching staff*, respectively, have 100% level of achievement, the GB proposes the accreditation of the study programme/HEI for a period of 5 years.

If at the end of the granted term the HEI does not demonstrate the achievement of each accreditation standard to a share of at least 90%, and accreditation standard 2. *Design and approval of programmes* and accreditation standard 5. *Teaching staff*, respectively, do not have 100% level of achievement, the GB proposes the non-accreditation of the study programme/HEI.

3) if the share of the level of achievement of at least one accreditation standard is less than 60%, and the level of achievement of the accreditation standards 2 and 5 is less than 100%, the GB proposes the non-accreditation of the study programme/HEI.

The final decision regarding the authorization or non-authorization of provisional operation, the accreditation or non-accreditation of the study programme or of an educational institution, as well as the withdrawal of the operation right of an educational institution or the right to organize a study programme is adopted by MER, based on the decision of the GB or the decision of

another quality assurance agency, registered in EQAR, within no more than 30 days from the date of the decision.

Thus, the decision-making mechanism regarding the results of external evaluations of study programmes/HEIs is prescriptive, clearly described, consistent and comparable. The consistency and comparability of decision-making is ensured by: the presence of the evaluation coordinator from the initiation of the external evaluation process until the presentation of the evaluation results in the GB meetings and the examination of the external evaluation results by the GB of ANACEC after their validation by the PCHE.

6.6 ESG Standard 2.6 Reporting

The structure and format of the EER are regulated by ANACEC and contains information regarding: the type of evaluation carried out, the educational institution, the name of the study programme, the general field of study, the number of credits, the form of education, the date of submission of the external evaluation request, the dossier code, the period of the external evaluation panel's visit to the institution, the date of the initiation of the external evaluation process by the GB of ANACEC and the composition of the external evaluation panel. EER is structured on accreditation standards that reflect the level of achievement of the criteria and performance indicators, approved in the *Methodology of External Evaluation*. A mandatory requirement is to write the EER in clear and understandable language.

The EEP, in an objective and independent manner, respecting the norms, standards and criteria established in the *Methodology of External Evaluation*, drafts the EER which includes information about the study programme/HEI evaluated, the level of achievement of the standards, general conclusions, strengths identified/examples of good practice, demonstrated for the study programme/HEI, the recommendations and mandatory improvement areas formulated by the experts and the recommendation on the external evaluation outcome. It should be noted that the external evaluation panel adopts decisions by consensus or by a simple majority vote of its members. In the case of separate opinions, they are included in the minutes together with the arguments.

The EER, with the EEP's recommendation, is sent to the HEI, which has the right, within 3 working days, to submit comments on the Report, including pointing out possible errors or ambiguities. It should be mentioned that the completion of the Site Visit Record Sheet by the EEP members during the visit to the institution and giving the HEI representatives the opportunity to get acquainted with it at the end, to intervene with clarifications and to sign it, practically minimizes the possibility of factual errors in the EER. If the HEI presents the relevant evidence to the EER, the EEP examines the comments, prepares a report and, if necessary, with the arguments provided, changes or maintains the initial score and makes the final recommendation on the external evaluation results.

All [GB decisions](#) regarding the external evaluation of study programmes/institutions as well as the [External Evaluation Reports](#) are published on the ANACEC web page (available in Romanian). GB decisions are also publicized on the Agency's Facebook page.

6.7 ESG Standard 2.7 Complaints and appeals

The *Methodology of external evaluation* describes, in point 53, the manner of expressing disagreement/objections to the EER and the recommendation of the EEP regarding the results

of the external evaluation of educational institutions and study programmes. Thus, HEIs, within 3 working days of receiving the EER, have the right to make comments regarding it. Comments are submitted by institutions to the DHEE. The EEP analyses the comments/additional evidence submitted by the HEI within up to 5 working days, finalizes the EER and presents it to the PCHE. The evidence presented in the comments, the minutes and the EER are analysed by the PCHE, and the results regarding the validation/non-validation of the results of the external evaluation are submitted to the GB for approval.

Another point in the Methodology (pt. 72) stipulates that the educational institution subject to the external evaluation process can submit an appeal against the decision of the GB. The appeal is made in writing, within 10 working days from the date of transmission of the decision to the educational institution. In the period 2017-February 2021, appeals to the decisions of the GB were examined by the GB in another ordinary meeting.

In 2017, 30 comments/appeals were registered regarding the proposed decisions of the GB (accreditation/conditional accreditation/suspension of the external evaluation process/non-accreditation of study programmes in the field 14 Educational Sciences). Following the analysis of the appeals/comments submitted by the HEIs, the GB changed the initial decision regarding the accreditation/conditional accreditation/suspension of the external evaluation process/non-accreditation of the study programmes for 4 bachelor's degree study programmes.

In 2018, 4 comments/appeals were registered regarding the proposed decisions of the GB (accreditation/conditional accreditation/suspension of the external evaluation process/non-accreditation of study programmes). Following the analysis of the appeals/comments submitted by the HEIs, the GB changed the initial decision for 2 bachelor's degree study programmes.

Thus, in the period 2017-2018, 34 appeals/comments were submitted, and for about 17.7% of them, the initial decision of the GB was changed. In the period 2019-March 2021, no appeal was submitted to ANACEC with regard to the GB's proposed decisions.

Starting from March 2021, ANACEC applies the [Regulation on the settlement of petitions submitted to the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research](#) (approved by the GB of ANACEC, decision no. 58 of 26.03.2021). This regulation establishes the manner of initiation, conduct and completion of the administrative procedure initiated by the Agency to resolve the appeals submitted to ANACEC.

By petition is meant any complaint, appeal, notifications addressed to ANACEC by a natural or legal person. The general deadline for resolving the petition is 30 working days from its registration. For justified reasons related to the complexity of the subject of the petition, the general deadline can be extended by no more than 15 working days. The President of ANACEC approves the petition and forwards it, according to the competence, to the appropriate subdivision for examination.

Complaints are the petitions formulated before or during the external evaluation processes of the quality of study programmes/educational institutions. The object of the complaint can be: the incompatibility of the experts to participate in the external evaluation process due to the conflict of interests; violation by the experts and/or ANACEC staff, in the external evaluation process, of the external evaluation procedure, of the rules of conduct established in the *Methodology for the selection of expert evaluators* (Annex 12) and of the rules of professional ethics stipulated in the [Code of Professional Ethics of ANACEC](#).

The complaint regarding the conflict of interest is examined by the DHEE within 3 working days at the most. As the case may be, the Department proposes or not to exclude the expert from the external evaluation process.

The complaint regarding the violation by the experts and/or the ANACEC staff of the rules of professional conduct and deontology is examined within a maximum of 1 working day from the receipt of the complaint, by the specialized Department. If the complaint is reasonable, the external evaluation visit is suspended and the complaint is forwarded for resolution to the Ethics Commission of ANACEC, approved by order of the President. The complaint filed after the external evaluation visit is forwarded to the Ethics Commission for resolution. If the Ethics Commission finds that the alleged violations are real, the President of ANACEC orders the exclusion of the expert evaluator and/or ANACEC employee from the external evaluation process and the resumption of the evaluation process.

Appeals are the petitions by which GB decisions regarding the results of the external evaluation of study programmes/educational institutions are challenged. The appeals are examined within a maximum of 5 working days from registration, by the specialized Department that proposes 3 members of the Appeals Commission, competent in the field to which the appeal refers, selected from the Register of expert evaluators. Members of the GB, expert evaluators who are in conflict of interest or who were involved in the evaluation process of the examined case cannot be appointed in the composition of the Appeals Commission.

As a result of the appeal examination and of the Appeal Examination Report drafted by the Appeals Commission, the GB may decide to modify or maintain the previous decision. ANACEC officially communicates to the appellant by e-mail the decisions taken by the GB regarding the resolution of the appeal.

Since the entry into force of the aforementioned Regulation, 5 appeals have been submitted regarding the results of the external evaluations of study programmes. All 5 appeals were examined in accordance with the provisions of the *Regulation on the settlement of petitions* and the initial decision approved by the GB of ANACEC was maintained. No complaints were registered regarding the violation by the experts and/or the ANACEC staff, in the external evaluation process, of the rules of conduct established in the *Methodology for the selection of expert evaluators* and the rules of professional ethics stipulated in the *Code of Professional Ethics of ANACEC*. 2 complaints were registered regarding the impossibility of the evaluator's participation in the external evaluation process due to the conflict of interests. In both cases, the experts were replaced by other experts by order of the ANACEC President.

7. Opinions of stakeholders

The categories of stakeholders actively involved in QA activities in higher education in the Republic of Moldova are HEIs, teaching staff, students, representatives of the business environment, the Rectors' Council, MECR/MER. Thus, in the composition of the GB, which is the collective management body that ensures the development and implementation of the Agency's strategy, there are representatives of teaching staff (13), students (1) and employers (1).

At the same time, the EEP are set up based on the principles of representativeness, including compulsorily representatives of the academic environment, representatives of students and employers.

Table 7 presents the stakeholders involved in the external quality assurance processes carried out by ANACEC, the frequency and level of their involvement.

Table 7. Stakeholder involvement

Stakeholder categories	Number of meetings	Formal/informal activities	Level of involvement
Teaching staff, students, business representatives	2-3 sessions a year; Monthly (after GB designation of EEP composition).	Formal	Training sessions for expert evaluators Training sessions with EEP Updating the legal framework
MER/MECR	2 times a year	Formal	Approving the external evaluation decisions of study programs Disseminating evaluation results (dissemination seminars) Updating the legal framework
National Council of Rectors	1-2 times a year	Informal	Disseminating evaluation results (dissemination seminars)
Civil society	permanently	Informal	Disseminating evaluation results (seminars, information on the web page, social networking sites)
Higher education institutions	3 times a year	Formal	Information sessions Results dissemination sessions Updating the regulatory framework in force

Also, training sessions are planned and carried out for institutional representatives (e.g.: quality assurance managers, study programme coordinators) on the self-evaluation dossier, to explain the working tools used by ANACEC in the external evaluation process.

In order to motivate experts to get involved and participate in the external evaluation process, the Agency encourages the activities of evaluators and evaluated institutions by awarding diplomas of gratitude and the Quality Crystal awards, with the dissemination of information on social media pages (e.g. Facebook, the website Agency), the repeated involvement of the best experts in external evaluation missions, encouraging/recognizing their expertise in order to continuously improve the quality of education and the HE system.

To identify potential experts from various fields of professional training and motivate them to get involved in external evaluation activities, information seminars and training sessions are organized, in which the external evaluation procedure, stages, rights and responsibilities of expert evaluators are explained etc. To ensure the dissemination of good practices regarding the external evaluation process, as well as to intensify inter-institutional collaboration, ANACEC aims to identify and involve experts from as many HEIs as possible. It should be noted that, since its establishment, ANACEC has encountered difficulties in identifying potential expert evaluators on a national level for monopolistic study programs on the market of educational services, the solution identified for such cases being the co-optation of foreign experts.

Also, in the process of selecting the experts, ANACEC pays special attention to the representatives of employers, whose involvement contributes to strengthening the dialogue of the academic environment with representatives of the labour market, increasing the connection between the contents offered in the national HE system and the requirements of employers, to the development of practical-applicative character of study programmes. In this regard, employer representatives from several institutions were identified, selected and trained, including the State Chancellery, various ministries, research institutes under the MER, state and private enterprises, etc. Distinct activities are organized in order to motivate students for involvement in the external evaluation process, to ensure the students' vision in the quality assurance processes in the system.

Analysing the composition of the EEP from the perspective of the institution where the evaluators work, we can conclude that in the external evaluation process organized by ANACEC, teachers with scientific titles and students from 20 universities were trained as experts, and representatives of employers - from over 40 profile institutions in the country, including international experts from ARACIS. The main objective of DHEE in this activity segment is to strengthen the database of experts by completing the lists by fields of professional training, in order to maximally cover the study programmes in the educational offer, motivating and promoting the involvement of students with an active role in the external evaluation process, the establishment of ad-hoc EEP to avoid possible prior agreements or disputes, the promotion of professionalism, objectivity and the spirit of collegiality in external quality evaluation activities.

Another important aspect is the feedback provided by the coordinators to experts, members of the EEP, in relation to their activity, e.g.: how they behave during the visit, what topics were not discussed, etc. The work of the experts is appreciated by the representatives of the institutions when completing the post-evaluation questionnaire sent by ANACEC, information used by the Agency's employees in training activities. For now, the experts are not personally informed about the feedback received from the institutions, but ANACEC intends to formalize this aspect.

In the context of capitalizing on collaboration agreements with quality assurance partner agencies, continuous updating of the Register of evaluators, as well as for the purpose of strengthening the EEP composition, ANACEC involves in the process of external evaluation of study programmes experts from ARACIS and citizens of the Republic of Moldova from abroad, working in HEI and/or research.

8. SWOT analysis

Table 8. SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
1. The recognition of ANACEC at the national level as a structure responsible for the external evaluation of quality in education and research. 2. Effective cooperation with stakeholders (MER, higher education institutions, academic staff, international partners, representatives of the labour market), including by collecting and taking into account the feedback received from	1. The existence of an insufficient number of administrative staff (due to unattractive salaries). 2. Difficulties in managing the Agency's budget, as approvals are required from the Chief Authorizing Officer. 3. Difficulties in identifying potential expert evaluators, especially student and

<p>them in improving ANACEC methodologies and procedures.</p> <p>3. Application of European standards (ESG) to the development of external evaluation methodologies and ANACEC procedures; as well as in the process of external evaluation of study programmes and higher education institutions.</p> <p>4. Growing international visibility through membership in international networks of quality assurance agencies and participation in international projects.</p> <p>5. The decision-making independence of the members of ANACEC's governance and expertise structures is ensured, including through the election of GB members by an independent commission, which includes international experts, and the election by competition of members of Profile Committees.</p> <p>6. The continuous professional development of the Agency's staff is carried out regularly, in accordance with their needs and the Agency's development strategy (trainings, seminars, team-buildings, etc.).</p> <p>7. ANACEC contributes to the creation of a quality culture by recognizing the merits of individuals and institutions in this field by awarding diplomas of gratitude and the Quality Crystal, as well as by making them public on the agency's social networks.</p> <p>8. ANACEC contributes to increasing the international dimension of higher education in the Republic of Moldova by involving international experts in the evaluation of study programmes in the first cycle (Bachelor) and in the second cycle (Mater).</p> <p>9. The involvement of ANACEC in external quality evaluation activities at all levels of education, as well as research, allows the creation of synergies at the level of the education and research system.</p>	<p>business representatives, for specific or monopolistic fields of study that are managed by a single higher education institution, given the limited number of people working in those fields at the national level.</p> <p>4. The use of ICT in the Agency's procedures and activities is limited.</p>
Opportunities	Threats
1. Involvement of ANACEC representatives in the development of national policies as well as	1. Difficulties in formulating external evaluation decisions by the External

<p>normative acts for the field of education and research.</p> <p>2. Involvement of ANACEC experts in the evaluation of study programmes/educational institutions organized by partner quality assurance agencies.</p> <p>3. ANACEC is invited to be part of partnerships for the implementation of some projects with international funding.</p> <p>4. ANACEC representatives are invited to various events organized by the academic and business environment, thus ensuring the visibility of the agency and raising awareness at the level of society regarding the importance of quality assurance processes.</p> <p>5. Reviewing and completing the normative regulatory framework, when required, at the request of ANACEC, including through interventions to adapt staffing to the current needs of the Agency.</p> <p>6. Participation in external evaluations abroad, including in partnership with independent agencies.</p> <p>7. Conclusion of partnership agreements with various quality assurance agencies.</p>	<p>Evaluation Panels, as well as by the Governing Board, due to changes in the methodology in force.</p> <p>2. Reduction in public funding and revenue from the provision of external evaluation services due to the economic crisis.</p> <p>3. Impossibility to comply with the legal deadlines established for the external evaluation process, in times of crisis (e.g., pandemic situation), as well as due to the insufficient number of Agency staff and expert evaluators.</p>
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The SWOT analysis was initially carried out within the Agency. The identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats were then discussed with the GB members, and appropriate additions and changes were made.

9. Key challenges and areas for future development

Identifying the challenges and specifying the directions of activity for the next stage is a mandatory component in the process of drawing up the [annual activity reports of ANACEC](#). A relevant analysis of the current challenges and the establishment of areas for development in the next three years, especially with relevance for quality assurance in HE, were also carried out by ANACEC in the process of drawing up the [National Action Plan for the period 2021-2023](#).

In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, ANACEC, as the entity responsible for external quality assurance at the national level, as well as other relevant stakeholders in the fields of education, research and innovation, including educational service providers involved in the external evaluation process, are facing a series of challenges.

Since changes have been made by the Government in 2018 to the MEE applied by ANACEC, without being consulted, the Agency has made efforts and undertaken distinct actions in order to exclude inconsistencies in the text and the difficulties generated, in particular, regarding the formulation of decisions based on the external evaluation results. In this regard, the Agency has formulated several proposals to improve the *Methodology of External Evaluation*, which have been submitted to MECR/MER for examination and promotion for approval in the established manner. Part of ANACEC's proposals were at the basis of the changes to the Methodology

approved by the Government in February 2022. The new wording of the Methodology also excluded ambiguities regarding the final results of the external evaluation.

It is still a challenge for the Agency the degree of independence ensured by the regulatory framework that regulates ANACEC's activity. The fact that the Agency is under the MER, as well as uncorrelated and often unfounded interventions in the methodological documents applied by ANACEC, creates, on the one hand, difficulties in the Agency's activity, and on the other hand, undermines the Agency's authority from the perspective of European requirements regarding organizational and operational independence for an Agency responsible for quality assurance in education.

In the exceptional conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic, given the limitation of organizational and operational independence, the Agency encountered difficulties in its current activity, being unable to react promptly to real requirements, and coordination with the superior structures proved to be cumbersome and long-lasting, with a negative impact on the processes.

In the same context, there can be included the continuous attempts of the central public authorities to grant the Agency improper powers and responsibilities, such as the „state control of entrepreneurial activity”, which contradict the mission of the Agency, described in the *Education Code*, but also the good practices developed and promoted at European level in the field of quality assurance in education.

Completing the number of staff of ANACEC, in accordance with the structure and organizational chart approved by GD no. 201/2018 (the staff limit - 52 units), continues to be a difficult task. The competitions organized regularly in recent years have allowed the filling of only part of the vacant positions within the Agency's administrative apparatus, with 82.7% of the staff being completed on 01.07.2022. Vacancies are found in most subdivisions of the Agency. We note the persistence of a low interest on the part of potential candidates for public positions put up for competition. In addition to the large workload and the considerable level of responsibility, an essential demotivating factor remains the salary level, which is capped, given the status of the Agency as a structure under MER. Under these circumstances, the salaries for ANACEC employees (specialists, senior specialists, main specialists) remain unattractive even under the conditions of the new Salary Law.

Depending on the powers and responsibilities delegated by the regulatory framework, the Agency often faces situations that require qualified legal expertise. In this context, there is an urgent need to complete the staff positions with at least two legal adviser units. Another challenge is related to the DHEE staff number, which is not correlated with the volume and complexity of the tasks to be performed.

Considering the fact that in the Republic of Moldova there are study programmes in quite specific fields of professional training (e.g.: medicine, horticulture, agronomy, sports, veterinary medicine, architecture, etc.), these being provided only by a single HEI (e.g.: State University of Medicine and Pharmacy „Nicolae Testemițanu”, Technical University of Moldova, State Agrarian University of Moldova) it is a real challenge to identify potential expert evaluators, given the fact that the educational services market in our country is very limited. In this sense, but also in other cases, the involvement of international experts is a solution, and the normative framework allows this. An impediment to achieving this objective is the fact that the entire external evaluation process is carried out in Romanian, the experts must know the legal framework and the national context of higher education, as well as the fact that the involvement of international experts implies higher expenses on the part of the institutions.

According to the *National Action Plan for the period 2021-2023*, the planned activities were structured in several areas for future development:

1. Development of the normative and methodological framework;
2. Ensuring quality and transparency in the Agency's activity;
3. Quality evaluation in higher education;
4. Human resource capacity building;
5. International collaboration.

1. **The development of the normative and methodological framework** provides for (1) Amendment of the *Education Code* on the quality assurance dimension in order to strengthen the Agency's independence (2022) and (2) Updating *Regulation on operation of ANACEC* in accordance with the amendments to the *Education Code* (2022).

As a result of the participation in the ESQA project, the [Regulation on the involvement of stakeholders in external quality assurance activities](#) (November 2021) was developed, which aims to increase the commitment of educational institutions, students, potential employers, ministries in external quality assurance activities and enhancing the level of trust between ANACEC and stakeholders. The regulation was publicly consulted, improved, examined and approved by the GB in the meeting of 28.04.2022.

The Agency also plans to review, from the perspective of its own experience accumulated over several years in the evaluation process of study programmes, the *Guidelines for External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions*, approved in 2016, but which was applied only once in 2022. The respective activity will be carried out in 2023 with the support of the Erasmus+ QFORTE Project.

The amendment of the *Guidelines for the external quality evaluation of doctoral study programmes* is expected to be carried out as a distinct activity for the year 2022 within the „Higher Education” project, financed by the World Bank. At the same time, the *Procedure for the external quality evaluation of joint study programmes* will be finalized (2022). Recently, the [Post-evaluation monitoring procedure](#), applied by ANACEC, was revised and supplemented in accordance with ESG recommendations to ensure its consistency and relevance in order to increase and continuously improve the quality of studies offered by HEIs in the country, with their active involvement.

2. In order to **ensure quality and transparency in the Agency's activity**, the regular consultation of stakeholders is planned, as a priority activity. In particular, in order to continuously improve the external evaluation process, the questioning of the evaluators, as well as the representatives of the evaluated HEIs, will be carried out in two rounds annually. Following the collection of feedback, analyses will be carried out. The results will be discussed with stakeholders and improvement measures will be taken by formulating recommendations for improving the processes.

The dimension related to the development of thematic studies will be strengthened. These will be carried out for all the general fields of study evaluated, including recommendations and suggestions for all stakeholders involved: MER, ANACEC, HEIs. The development of thematic studies on the level of achievement of certain accreditation standards will be initiated, both horizontally (when evaluating study programmes offered by several universities) and vertically (when evaluating study programmes on university cycles: bachelor, master, doctorate).

3. **Quality evaluation in HE** remains a major direction in ANACEC's activity. The first round of external evaluation of the bachelor's degree study programmes has practically been completed. Starting from 2021, master's degree study programmes are mainly evaluated externally, and the

evaluation process of doctoral study programmes will begin in 2023. In 2023, the international external evaluation of 5 HEIs, partners in the Erasmus+ QFORTE project, is expected, a process in which ANACEC will also be involved.

Distinct efforts will be aimed at strengthening HEIs' capacities on the dimension of internal quality assurance. In this sense, with the support of the ERASMUS+ QFORTE project, workshops are organized for the partner universities (2022).

At the same time, in order to ensure the transparency of its activity, ANACEC will maintain its own database regarding the results of external quality evaluations in HE, that can be accessed on the web page at <https://anacec.md/en/high-education/evaluations>.

Starting from 2022, in the context of completing the entire quality cycle, ensuring consistency and a higher degree of coverage, post-evaluation monitoring (follow-up) applies to all institutions/study programmes evaluated in the period until the next accreditation, thus ensuring the obligation of the Agency's intermediate feedback for all externally evaluated study programmes and institutions. The development of corrective action plans and intermediate reports on the progress made in the implementation of the respective plans will be mandatory elements in this process. It is also expected to differentiate the forms of monitoring, including through reports, seminars, conferences, etc.

4. On the dimension of **Human resource capacity building**, given the defining role of ANACEC's expert evaluators in carrying out peer evaluations and in ensuring objective, substantiated as well as stimulating decision, for the development of HEIs, their information and training activities will be strengthened and organized continuously. In this context, it is expected to continuously complete the Register of ANACEC expert evaluators, only after the training of potential evaluators, testing of their professional skills and certification. At the same time, at least twice a year, ANACEC will announce the registration of those wishing to get involved in the external evaluation processes at HE level, in the continuous training course „Quality assurance in higher education” (3 ECTS credits). A concern of the Agency is also the permanent strengthening of the potential of the ANACEC team, through the annual identification of training needs and the provision of training opportunities, both with internal and external resources.

A priority is the development and expansion of the practices of co-opting foreign experts and involving them in the activity of mixed EEPs. In parallel, the Agency will also encourage institutions to draft external evaluation dossiers entirely in English, a fact that will facilitate the co-optation and involvement in the external evaluation process of representatives of other partner Agencies, responsible for quality assurance.

At the same time, it will be insisted, by promoting drafts to amend the normative framework in force, on the amendment of the ANACEC status, the differentiation of positions within the ANACEC subdivisions and the inclusion of legal advisers in the staffing positions.

5. In terms of **international collaboration**, emphasis will be placed on the further development of cooperation activities with various entities. The self-assessment of ANACEC (2021-2022) and the application for the external review by ENQA/EQAR (2022) also contribute to the visibility of ANACEC on a European and international level, with new possibilities for collaboration, partnerships, involvement in projects, etc.

Annexes

Annex 1. Methodology of external quality evaluation for the authorization of provisional operation and accreditation of vocational education and training, higher education and professional continuous training study programmes and institutions.

Annex 2. Guidelines for the external evaluation of bachelor's degree (cycle I) and integrated higher education study programmes.

Annex 3. Guidelines for the external evaluation of master's degree (Cycle II) study programmes.

Annex 4. Guidelines for the external evaluation of higher education institutions.

Annex 5. Self-evaluation report (example in English).

Annex 6. Site visit record sheet (example in English).

Annex 7. External evaluation report (example in English).

Annex 8. Declaration on the lack of conflict of interest.

Annex 9. Curriculum of the training course for expert evaluators.

Annex 10. Code of Professional Ethics of ANACEC.

Annex 11. Post-evaluation monitoring (follow-up) procedure of study programmes and educational institutions.

Annex 12. Methodology for the selection of expert evaluators.

Annex 13. Methodology for training the expert evaluators.

Annex 14. Government decision No. GD 201 / 2018 of 28.02.2018 on the organization and operation of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research.

Annex 15. Training activities for the staff of the Department of Higher Education Evaluation (2020-2021).