

Pursuant to the articles 25, 26 and 30 of the Law on Higher Education of Republika Srpska ("RS Official Gazette number", 73/10, 104/11, 84/12, 108/13), and article 48 of the Framework Law on Higher Education ("BiH Official Gazette" number 59/07 and 59/09), "European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area – ESG, ENQA, 2009) and article 16, item i) of the RS Higher Education Accreditation Agency, on its session held on 29th June, 2012., Agency's Steering Board has adopted

## **Rulebook** on accreditation of higher education institutions

### **1. General provisions**

#### Article 1

The Rulebook on accreditation of higher education institutions (hereinafter: Rulebook) regulates the term and objectives of accreditation, internal quality assurance of higher education institution, application, external evaluation, follow-up activities and issuing decision on accreditation.

#### Article 2

Accreditation of higher education institutions is part of the overall higher education reform conducted in accordance with the Bologna principles with the final goal of achieving recognition of the higher education of Republic of Srpska within the European higher education area. The subject of the accreditation are higher education institutions and study programs taught, including higher education management procedures, study programs realisation processes, internal quality assurance system in higher education institution, capacities, resources and potentials of the higher education institution as well as capacities for changes.

#### Article 3

The terminology used in the Rulebook is a standard quality assurance terminology and definitions required in the Rulebook are as follows:

- a) Quality** is a set of characteristics of higher education institution, i.e. study program, that prove the level of meeting students' and other stakeholders' requirements and expectations in the higher education process.
- b) Quality assurance** is the aspect of higher education institution management providing planning and supervision over performance and improvement of key teaching-scientific processes, with the goal of achieving trustful relations with stakeholders with reference to realisation of expected quality level. It includes activities such as: evaluation, accreditation and audit.
- c) Quality assurance system** is a set of procedures, activities and resources of higher education institution required for quality assurance.
- d) Accreditation** is a process of quality assurance of higher education institution or a study program based on self evaluation of higher education institution and assessment

conducted by independent experts with the aim of recognising and improving the quality of higher education in the European higher education area.

**e) List of Experts** is a list of names and data on national and international experts who meet criteria required for participation in the accreditation process.

**f) Panel of Experts** is an independent body that, in the course of external evaluation, establishes the level up to which criteria and standards regarding the quality of work of higher education institution are met.

**g) Self evaluation** is a process by which the higher education institution systematically and through documentation checks the effectiveness and efficacy of the Quality assurance system and its processes with the aim of starting new projects and activities of improvement.

**h) External evaluation** is objective and impartial evaluation of quality assurance system conducted by the Panel of Experts, with the purpose of accrediting higher education institution and the study programs taught, with regards to valid standards and criteria.

## 2. Objectives

### Article 4

Accreditation is conducted with the basic purpose of verifying and improving the quality of processes in higher education institutions, looking up to positive practice of European countries and quality assurance agencies associated in the European association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

Bearing in mind that the accreditation process is voluntary, it has an objective of encouraging higher education institutions in Republika Srpska to develop the internal quality assurance systems in order to improve the processes and activities performed by these institutions.

With the purpose of determining clear definition of preconditions for accreditation of higher education institutions, all institutions working in the area of higher education are encouraged to public and individual consultations in order to ensure consent on the required structure of higher education institution quality assurance system and effectiveness of the self-evaluation process.

## 2. Internal Quality Assurance of Higher Education Institutions

### Article 5

Before applying for accreditation, the higher education institution is entitled to consult the Agency on the form and the content of the application as well as to get familiarized with the procedure and the duration of the accreditation process.

Prior to submitting the application for accreditation, the higher education institution is obliged to ensure the fulfilment of conditions defined in the document Instruction on Accreditation Entry Requirements, which refers to legitimate work of the institution regarding the legislation in place and establishment of the effective quality assurance system.

### Article 6

Through the public consultations on internal quality assurance of higher education institutions, in coordination with stakeholders, the Agency shall point out to examples of good practice in the quality assurance area, in accordance with valid standards and criteria

as well as objectives of the higher education institutions.

#### Article 7

Through consultations with Accreditation forum, Council for the Development of Higher education and Quality Assurance, as well as with experts from the area of quality assurance, the higher education institution conducts the self-evaluation process with the aim of establishing the effectiveness of the established quality system.

#### Article 8

The self-evaluation report serves as a basis for conducting the quality improvement projects that will reflect on further activities. The self-evaluation should comprise the work of the entire institution, as well as each of its organisational units.

The self-evaluation process should include all key groups in the higher education institution and especially: students, academic and non-academic staff, stakeholders, such as representatives of the local community, labour market, alumni, etc.

### **3. Application**

#### Article 9

After ensuring that all previously mentioned conditions are fulfilled, the higher education institution determines what organisational units and study programs shall be subject to accreditation and completes the application for each of them, as well as the statement thus confirming that all conditions for applying to accreditation are met.

#### Article 10

Minimum of study programs submitted by the university should be five (5) from three (3) scientific areas, i.e., one (1) study program from one scientific area for colleges. In the case of less study programs submitted, the Panel for external evaluation shall recommend accreditation for the period of time shorter than the one defined in the paragraph 4.5.

In order to provide the better data visibility and effectiveness of external evaluation, the higher education institution may complete the application form separately for every organizational unit responsible for executing candidate study program.

#### Article 11

Agency director appoints the coordinator of the external evaluation process by a decision. The coordinator may be one of the Agency employees or outsourced, but in any case, capable of coordinating the external evaluation process.

#### Article 12

Agency analyses the scope of required activities for conducting the accreditation process and on the basis of those activities the Agency estimates the time lines and the scope of external evaluation activities. Based on the alleged estimation, the Agency establishes the cost of the accreditation and makes the proposal of the Contract. The confidentiality statement is a part of the Contract.

#### Article 13

Based on the information contained in the application form, the Agency checks the completeness of the application as well as HEIs' legitimacy through obtaining information from the competent bodies. If those requirements are not met, the higher education institution is given a deadline for making corrections. After checking the elements of the contract by the higher education institution, the Agency organises the official contract signing.

## **4.0 External Evaluation**

### Article 14

External evaluation is conducted in accordance with the aforementioned phases and the Instructions for Conducting the External Evaluation Process, a document which is an annex to this Rulebook.

### **4.1. Forming a Panel of Experts**

#### Article 15

The coordinator analyses scientific and educational areas submitted for accreditation by higher education institution and compares it to the profiles of experts from the expert lists. The proposal is then sent to the director, proposing the Panel of Experts (hereinafter: Panel) that should include at least one student and one international expert.

#### Article 16

When forming the Panel of Experts, Agency checks the possible conflict of interests with reference to the higher education institution that gets accredited. Agency director forwards the proposed composition of the Panel of Experts to the Agency for the Development of the Higher Education and Quality Assurance of Bosnia and Herzegovina which appoints the Panel of Experts within 15 days. If the Agency for the Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance of Bosnia and Herzegovina does not appoint this Panel within the given deadline, it is deemed that the appointment is accepted in the proposed composition, after what the Agency signs the engagement contract with all Panel members.

### **4.2. Preparation of the External Evaluation Process**

#### Article 17

Coordinator of the external evaluation process prepares the documentation submitted by the higher education institution, valid standards and the criteria, valid legal regulations and other necessary documents and submits it to the Panel members in electronic form. Within 15 days time, the Panel members shall examine the received documentation after what the Agency organises consultations on external evaluation process with the purpose of providing its objectivity, effectiveness and efficacy. On that occasion, the Panel shall compose an external evaluation plan and program which will be presented to the higher education institution by the coordinator.

### **4.3 Documentation analysis**

#### Article 18

Panel members conduct the thorough analyses of the higher education institution's documentation comparing it with requirements of the standards and criteria and each member individually makes the internal check list, as well as other auxiliary notes that shall be used during the visit to the higher education institution. During the documentation analysis, electronically, with the assistance of coordinator, Panel members exchange their remarks and findings, after what the Panel chairman creates the detailed program for the visit to the higher education institution.

During the documentation analysis, Panel members may demand additional documentation through the coordinator.

#### **4.4. On site visit**

##### Article 19

Based on the created on-site visit program, the coordinator informs the higher education institution on the program details and, with the responsible party from HEI, arranges the detailed working schedule of the individual Panel members.

##### Article 20

The higher education institution is obliged to provide an escort for each Panel member, person who will be authorized to provide all required information and evidence on fulfilling the standards and the criteria.

The higher education institution is obliged to present to the Panel the self-evaluation report, information on the status of initiated projects for quality improvement as well as other documents that the Panel requests, including the contacts with students, alumni and other stakeholders.

##### Article 21

During their course of work, in a closed session, Panel members communicate between themselves on the findings and non-conformities with regards to standards and criteria.

As a rule, Panel makes decisions by consensus.

Panel member, who disagrees with the decision, may ask for the exception in writing, enclosing the explanation.

##### Article 22

On a final meeting with official representatives of the higher education institution, the Panel members present their findings pointing out on the discovered non-conformities, stating recommendations for improvements. Minutes are taken during the meeting what makes part of the Panel report.

#### **4.5. Final report**

##### Article 23

Panel of Experts creates the draft report on a template described in Instructions, which is then forwarded by the coordinator to the higher education institution for the perusal. Should the higher education institution find certain factual omissions in the work of the Panel, ones that may influence the opinion on accreditation, they are to inform the Agency within 15 days time. Agency then familiarizes the Panel with the objection submitted, and after considering its justifiability it creates the final external evaluation report within 15 days, including the opinion on issuing the decision on accreditation which may be as follows:

a) opinion on issuing the decision on accreditation of higher education institution for the period of 5 years

b) opinion on issuing a letter of expectation where all discovered non-conformities are listed, including deadlines for correcting them, not longer than 12 months, as a condition for accreditation;

c) negative opinion, i.e. opinion stipulating non-issuing of accreditation, in case the Panel estimates the inability of correcting non-conformities within 12 months.

In the opinion stating the outcome of the external evaluation, Panel shall list candidate study programs for accreditation process that comply with standards and the criteria of external evaluation and through which the work of the institution has been evaluated.

#### **4. Follow-up activities**

##### Article 24

Agency submits the Panel report to the higher education institution with the request to provide consent to the contents of the report and proposed improvement measures. After considering the report, higher education institution provides objections and suggestions, if any.

At the same time, Agency informs all potential stakeholders on the possibility of having an insight in the contents of the report.

##### Article 25

Based on the final report and taking into considerations objections and suggestions of higher education institution and stakeholders, Agency and the higher education institutions agree on specific improvement tasks and projects and define deadlines for its realisation. Agreed projects are noted in the Form for monitoring follow-up activities (HEAARS OB 06) which is then signed by the Agency director and authorized person on behalf of the higher education institution.

##### Article 26

18 months later, the Agency shall perform an audit of the course of follow up activities in accordance with external evaluation methodology described in Article 4.0 of this Rulebook, with the limited audit objective, focused only on tasks and projects from the Form for monitoring follow-up activities (HEAARS OB 06).

For the purpose of conducting this audit, Agency director shall appoint three-member panel, including the Agency representative and the panel shall complete all activities within two-day time frame.

##### Article 27

For the purpose of conducting this audit, Agency and the higher education institution sign a contract based on normative defined in the Rule book Agency's service fees.

Should the Panel in its report state that the agreed activities haven't been realized within planned time frames, Agency shall start the procedure for removing the higher education institution from the Register of accredited higher education institutions.

#### **7. Decision on accreditation**

##### Article 28

Agency analyses the report of the external evaluation Panel and given opinion on accreditation, which is then sent to the Agency for the Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance of BiH with the purpose of issuing a recommendation on accreditation of higher education institution, i.e. study program.

#### Article 29

Within 15 days, the Agency for the Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance of BiH shall issue a decision on accreditation. In case it is not issued within the given timeframe, it shall be deemed that the recommendation is provided in accordance with the Panel opinion.

#### Article 30

Agency director can:

- A) issue a decision on accreditation,
- B) issue an expectation letter or
- B) issue a decision on rejecting an accreditation.

#### Article 31

After issuing a decision on accreditation, Agency addresses the request for registration of accredited higher education institution in the register of accredited higher education institutions to the Ministry of Education and Culture of Republika Srpska and the Agency for the Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance of BiH. The decision also includes study programs taught in accordance with standards and the criteria of external evaluation through which the work of the institution is evaluated and the period of accreditation.

Based on the recommendations for improvement provided by the Panel of experts, higher education institution creates Plan of projects and activities on quality improvement which is then sent to the Agency with the purpose of monitoring its realization.

#### Article 32

Letter of expectation is an act that points out the shortages with reference to the fulfilment of quality standards of study programs, i.e. higher education institutions, expressing the expectation that noted deficiencies shall be rectified within the given timeframe.

#### Article 33

Agency director shall issue a decision on rejecting accreditation for all or part of study programs taught at the higher education institution, on the basis of the expert Panel assessment that the higher education institution does not fulfil the quality assurance standards in higher education or if the higher education institution does not rectify the noted deficiencies within the given time frame.

The decision from the previous paragraph is final and no appeal is allowed against it, but there may be administrative lawsuit started before the competent court within 30 days from the decision receipt date.

#### Article 34

Higher education institution that has been rejected application for accreditation may submit another application for accreditation a year after the date of the decision on rejection of accreditation.

### **8. Final provisions**

#### Article 34

Within six months from the date of adopting the Rulebook by the Agency Steering Board, Agency shall issued the following documents:

- Instruction on Accreditation Entry Requirements,
- Application for with Statement on fulfilling the requirements,
- Contract Template,
- Instruction for composing external evaluation panel report.

Article 35

Rulebook comes into force on the day of issue.

Steering Board Chairwoman

Vanesa Kremenović, M.A., Associate professor