



AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA

CODE OF BUSINESS ETHICS

Banja Luka, November 2024

CODE OF BUSINESS ETHICS

GENERAL PROVISIONS

Article 1

The Code of Business Ethics (hereinafter referred to as the "Code") defines ethics as a set of principles, rights, and obligations that regulate human and professional relations among employees in the Agency for Higher Education of the Republic of Srpska (hereinafter referred to as the "Agency"), as well as all other individuals (experts, reviewers, etc.) engaged by the Agency through contracts, and their relationship with all stakeholders who are expected to respect ethical standards, aiming to justify public trust and the credibility of the Agency's work.

Article 2

- (1) The fundamental values for which the Agency advocates are: integrity, goodwill, mutual respect, human dignity, personal responsibility, and institutional accountability.
- (2) All employees, associates, and other involved parties are obligated to respect the principles of equality and non-discrimination in all aspects of their business.
- (3) Discrimination based on race, sex, gender, gender identity, nationality, language, religion, age, physical appearance, disability, or any other personal attribute is strictly prohibited.
- (4) The Agency is committed to creating a working environment in which all individuals have equal opportunities for development, advancement, and contribution, without fear of unfair treatment or harassment.
- (5) The purpose of the Code is to establish general ethical guidelines and procedures and to point out the duties and obligations of all individuals involved in quality assurance processes in higher education.
- (6) The Code generally establishes expected relationships based on responsibility and integrity and will not enumerate what is not allowed, nor is it intended to foresee all possible situations that may arise.
- (7) The Code promotes the respect of ethical principles and values in ensuring quality in higher education, business relations, relations with the public, the application of modern technologies, and the protection of the environment. It also establishes procedures for cases of deviations from these values and principles.
- (8) The Code does not limit human, intellectual, and academic freedom but emphasizes the role of dignified relations among all stakeholders and the responsible exercise of rights in accordance with responsibility in the field of higher education.
- (9) The Code is subject to changes and amendments in accordance with the development of the Agency's activities.

Article 3

(1) The definitions used in the Code have the following meaning:

- a) **Employees** of the Agency are all persons with whom the Agency enters into an employment contract, either for an indefinite or fixed period, as well as those engaged to perform

evaluations or reviews of higher education institutions and/or study programs.

- b) **Service users** are all institutions that request the services of the Agency.
- c) **Stakeholders** are all other participants in the quality assurance process in higher education in the Republic of Srpska.
- d) **Experts** are individuals who, during external evaluations, determine the fulfillment of quality standards and criteria in the work of higher education institutions and study programs.
- e) **Reviewers** are individuals who participate in external evaluations for the purpose of initial accreditation or accreditation of study programs through the review model.
- f) **An observer** in the accreditation process is an individual who attends a visit to a higher education institution without decision-making authority.

(2) The Agency ensures professional and efficient service to its users by competent and ethical individuals employed at the Agency.

Employees of the Agency

Article 4

(1) The obligations of the employees of the Agency are as follows:

- They must adhere to the strategic and other documents of the Agency, as well as all other legal and subordinate regulations of the Republic of Srpska.
- They must not damage the reputation and business of the Agency through their actions or business decisions.
- They must not disclose information regarding the Agency's operations and external evaluation procedures, nor information about costs related to specific procedures or compensation for experts or reviewers to any outside party without the permission of their direct superior.
- They are obligated to maintain confidentiality and avoid conflicts of interest.
- They must represent the Agency in all their interactions with service users or other stakeholders.
- They must not have a direct or indirect interest, nor be directly or indirectly involved in activities that could create obligations toward the Agency's service users, nor engage in activities that could lead to a conflict of interest. If an employee is also engaged at a higher education institution, they cannot participate in the external evaluation process of that institution and/or its study programs.
- They must not offer consulting services to users.

Experts and Reviewers

Article 5

- (1) In order to ensure that accreditation and review processes are carried out at the highest possible level of quality, it is necessary for experts and reviewers to show professionalism, independence, and respect toward parties involved during the external evaluation activities.
- (2) By signing a contract with the Agency, experts and reviewers accept the conditions of this Code and commit to acting in accordance with it.

Article 6

Experts and reviewers are obligated to:

- Immediately notify the Agency if there is a change in facts related to a conflict of interest and/or if they believe they may be in a conflict of interest.
- Respect the principles defined by applicable laws and regulations, standards, and criteria of the Agency.
- Use valid Agency documentation forms for the purposes of external evaluation.

Article 7

Documents and knowledge gained during the review, accreditation, or external evaluation process are considered business secrets, which experts and reviewers are obligated to keep permanently, except for documents that the Agency makes publicly available.

Article 8

Experts and reviewers must act impartially and objectively.

Article 9

- (1) Experts and reviewers must not offer or accept rewards or compensation from the institution's representatives or third parties representing the interests of the institution, and are obligated to immediately report to the Agency if they receive such an offer.
- (2) Experts and reviewers must immediately notify the Agency if they notice that another member of the expert committee or the procedure coordinator is acting contrary to the principles of this Code.
- (3) Experts are obligated to manage their expenses (travel, accommodation) economically and responsibly when organizing a visit to a higher education institution.

Article 10

(1) All experts and reviewers must adhere to the following principles of good practice when performing their work:

- Be open and clear in discussions with representatives of the institution or stakeholders.
- Always verify gathered opinions and evidence.
- Be courteous when interacting with representatives of the institution or stakeholders.
- Establish a working atmosphere where all expert committee members are equal partners who take responsibility.
- Ask questions in a constructive, but critical context.
- Avoid asking personal questions.
- Adhere to the time frames defined by the visit plan in respect to the time allocated by all participants, which is particularly taken care of by the committee chair and procedure coordinator.
- Be present during the entire visit to the institution, except in justified circumstances that cannot be predicted.
- Prepare for the visit to the institution, familiarize themselves with the documentation provided by the institution, complete checklists, and prepare questions in advance for each group of interlocutors.
- Dedicate undivided attention to all interlocutors during meetings (mobile phones off, etc.).
- Do not express conflicting opinions during meetings with the institution's representatives or stakeholders. Discussions about different opinions are held during internal consultations of the Commission.
- Respect the time frames defined for preparing the report.
- Recommend that requests for additional data or information be submitted while reading the documentation so that adequate responses can be prepared.
- Ensure that their claims in the reports are based on concrete evidence.

(2) The committee chair is obligated to ensure that all opinions and evidence presented are considered and to address any doubts before the end of the visit, ensuring answers to all questions.

Article 11

If during the external evaluation process there is a gross violation of the principles of this Code, the Agency will ensure that the person responsible for the violation is removed from the procedure. If it concerns a member of the expert committee, their opinion will be excluded from the final report, and the contract will be terminated.

Observers in the Accreditation Process

Article 12

1) If there is consent from the institution and the members of the expert committee, an observer (from other agencies, etc.) may be present during the visit to the institution.

- 2) The rules of this Code also apply to observers in the process, where appropriate.
- 3) The observer signs a statement agreeing to respect the principles of this Code before the visit begins.

Article 13

In addition to the general principles of this Code, the observer in the accreditation process must adhere to the following principles:

- They do not participate directly in discussions with the institution's representatives or stakeholders during official meetings. If the observer has questions, they can ask the procedure coordinator or the Agency's representative responsible for working with the observer after the meeting (translation, etc.).
- They do not participate in the Commission's discussions about evidence, findings, and opinions in the accreditation process.
- They are obligated to keep all information gathered during the visit to the institution confidential until the report is published on the Agency's website, and to keep information that is not part of the report permanently confidential.
- Recording the visit is not allowed.

TRANSITIONAL AND FINAL PROVISIONS

Article 14

The Code is an integral part of the Rulebook on Internal Quality Assurance of the Agency's Work and takes effect on the same day.