

Pursuant to Article 10, paragraph 1, item 7 of the Law on the Agency for Higher Education of the The Republic of Srpska ("Official Gazette of the The Republic of Srpska, number: 42/24"), the Steering Board of the Agency, at its 50th regular session held on 19.11.2024, adopts the

RULEBOOK ON INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE OF THE AGENCY

I GENERAL PROVISIONS

Article 1.

This Rulebook prescribes the goal, purpose and procedures for internal quality assurance of the Agency for Higher Education of the The Republic of Srpska (hereinafter: the Agency), as well as other issues of importance for improving the quality of the Agency's work.

Article 2.

(1) The aim of the quality assurance system is to build mechanisms for continuous improvement of the quality of the work of the Agency and all its organizational units through the improvement of all processes and their outcomes.

(2) The purpose of the quality assurance system is to establish principles, criteria and procedures for quality assurance in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

(3) The strategic commitment of the Agency is to establish a culture of quality in the higher education system of the The Republic of Srpska.

Article 3.

(1) Internal quality assurance is a set of measures and activities that guarantee commitment and responsibility for continuous improvement of the quality of Agency's activities.

(2) The areas of internal quality assurance are:

- a. strategy, policy, development and functioning of the quality assurance system (development of the quality system and its continuous improvement, development of the organizational structure for quality monitoring, application of quality assurance system procedures);

- b. external evaluation methodologies that are purposeful and are improved in cooperation with stakeholders;
- c. external evaluation processes that are precisely defined, consistent, efficient and transparent;
- d. experts in external evaluation procedures who are independent and adequately trained;
- e. standards and criteria for the outcomes of external evaluation procedures;
- f. reports on all forms of external evaluation that are publicly available to all stakeholders, as well as all decisions resulting from them (accreditation decisions, recommendations, etc.);
- g. processes for resolving complaints and appeals that are independent and predetermined;
- h. procedures and actions for the recognition of higher education qualifications acquired abroad;
- i. resources for carrying out the activities of the Agency, including physical resources, equipment and human resources;
- j. expertise and qualifications of employees, including continuous training and development;
- k. IT equipment and continuous improvement of the information system, methods of collecting and using information;
- l. international cooperation,
- m. thematic analyses focused primarily on external evaluation processes and other competencies of the Agency,
- n. publicity of operations and work and
- o. other areas of importance for carrying out the activities of the Agency.

Article 4.

Quality management in the Agency is aligned with internationally accepted documents in the field of quality assurance in higher education.

Article 5.

The grammatical terminology of the use of masculine and feminine gender for terms in these regulations includes both genders.

Article 6.

The Code of Business Ethics is an integral part of this Rulebook.

PART II SPECIAL

Article 7.

- (1) The Agency adopts a strategy defining development directions for a period of six years.
- (2) Key stakeholders – higher education institutions, the labor market and students – are involved in the development of the strategy.
- (3) An integral part of the strategy is Action Plan defining activities based on strategic goals, the actors responsible for the activities and the deadlines for their implementation.
- (4) The Strategy is adopted by the Steering Board.

Article 8.

The Agency has a mission and values that are publicly available on the Agency's website.

Article 9.

- (1) External evaluation methodologies are defined in a way that is purposeful, efficient and publicly available.
- (2) External evaluation methodologies are continuously improved in cooperation with stakeholders.
- (3) The Agency conducts regular surveys of key stakeholders (higher education institutions, experts and reviewers) using the Agency's information system, with the aim of determining the level of satisfaction with the quality of the Agency's work.
- (4) The questionnaire forms for surveying higher education institutions, experts and reviewers are an integral part of this Rulebook (OB AVORS 18 and OB AVORS 19).

Article 10.

- (1) External evaluation processes are implemented in a manner that is precisely defined, consistent, efficient and transparent.
- (2) The contract concluded between the Agency and the higher education institution specify mutual rights and obligations in more detail.

(3) The higher education institution is informed by the Agency on the dynamics of the implementation of the steps within the procedure.

(4) Employees of the Agency are obliged to keep all data and information about the higher education institution within the external evaluation process as a business secret, with the exception of information that is publicly available.

(5) When calculating the costs of external evaluation procedures, the Agency is guided by the principles of purposefulness and cost-effectiveness.

(6) If during the process of external evaluation of a higher education institution or study program a change in the standards or criteria is made against which the external evaluation process is carried out, the Agency is obliged to enable the institution to complete the initiated procedures in accordance with the standards, or criteria, that were in force at the time the procedure was initiated.

Article 11.

(1) The Agency adopts standards for the outcomes of external evaluation procedures that are clear and define measurable quality indicators.

(2) Standards for the outcomes of external evaluation procedures are adopted in a public procedure that enables access to draft acts to all interested parties.

(3) The standards are published on the Agency's website.

Article 12.

(1) Selection of the reviewers, i.e. experts who will be engaged in the external evaluation procedure, are based on the references of the reviewer, i.e. experts in the scientific field to which the study program that is the subject of the evaluation belongs.

(2) Before engaging a reviewer/expert Agency checks for any potential conflicts of interest in relation to the institution or study program that is the subject of the external evaluation in order to assure independent and impartial evaluation.

(3) A conflict of interest is considered to be a business or personal relationship of a reviewer/expert or close relative (including marriage) with a higher education institution, as follows:

- Existing business relationship (as a teacher, associate or other business relationship),
- Share in the ownership of a higher education institution,
- Position in the management or management structure of the institution and
- Business relationship in the previous five years.

(4) Prior to signing a contract, reviewers or experts must declare the absence of any conflict of interest.

(5) An integral part of this Rulebook is the Declaration of the absence of a conflict of interest Form OB AVORS 07.

(6) A reviewer, i.e. expert may not be engaged in the external evaluation procedure of the same higher education institution and/or study programs of a higher education institution, twice in a row.

Article 13.

(1) Reports on all forms of external evaluation are published on the Agency's website.

(2) All decisions made on the basis of external evaluation reports, including accreditation decisions, are published on the Agency's website.

Article 14.

(1) Procedures for resolving complaints and appeals are defined by the Law on the Higher Education Agency of the The Republic of Srpska (hereinafter: the Law), the Statute of the Agency and by-laws regulating external evaluation procedures and are publicly available on the Agency's website.

(2) Complaints and appeals are considered by the Complaints and Appeals Committee as an independent body of the Agency, and issues an opinion on the merits of the complaint or appeal, on the basis of which the Steering Board makes the final decision.

Article 15.

(1) The procedures and actions for the recognition of higher education qualifications acquired abroad are defined by the Law and by-laws and are publicly available on the Agency's website.

(2) The instructions for initiating the procedure for the recognition of foreign higher education qualifications for the purpose of employment, that describes the sequence of steps necessary for the application to be considered, are available on Agency's website.

(3) The application form for the recognition of foreign higher education qualifications is available on the Agency's website, as well as in printed form at the Agency's premises (OB AVORS 20).

(4) An integral part of the form referred to in paragraph 3 of this Article is the account to which the fee for the recognition costs is paid, as well as all payment instructions.

(5) A list of all documents that must be attached to the application form for recognition of foreign higher education qualifications are published on the Agency's website.

Article 16.

- (1) The Agency's management provides adequate resources for the performance of the Agency's activities, including work space, equipment and human resources.
- (2) The Agency's employees must have adequate qualifications and expertise to perform tasks within the Agency's activities.
- (3) To promote continuous employee development, Agency plans targeted training programs designed to enhance skills and competencies.
- (4) The Agency encourages employees to engage in lifelong learning, including various forms of formal, non-formal and informal education.
- (5) The Agency's employees keep all information acquired in the performance of their duties as a business secret.
- (6) Employees of the Agency, as well as other participants in the processes of external evaluation of higher education institutions and study programs, are obliged to adhere to the Code of Business Ethics.

Article 17.

- (1) To enhance the efficiency of external evaluation procedures, data collection, and other tasks, the Agency develops its own information system.
- (2) Within the information system, different levels of access are assigned to different users, as decided by the Director of the Agency.
- (3) The system administrator is responsible for maintaining and monitoring the operation of the information system.
- (4) Reviewers and experts in the external evaluation procedure work in the information system.
- (5) The reviewer/expert receives a personal account and password within the system, granting access exclusively to the external evaluation process in which they are engaged.
- (6) The Agency ensures that its information system remains current while safeguarding the confidentiality of the information it collects.

Article 18.

- (1) With the aim of enhancing the visibility of both the Agency and the higher education system of the Republic of Srpska internationally, the Agency will engage in international cooperation with associations, networks, registries, and other global organizations in the field of quality assurance in higher education, also striving to improve its own methodologies and processes.
- (2) The Agency cooperates with other agencies and bodies in the field of higher education in the countries of the region, Europe and the world.

(3) The Agency participates in national, regional and international projects in the field of higher education.

Article 19.

(1) The Agency regularly prepares thematic analyses that analyze external evaluation processes, at least every five years.

(2) Thematic analyses are dedicated to the analysis of the external evaluation process and include satisfaction surveys of key stakeholders in the procedures (higher education institutions, experts and reviewers), as well as analyses of external evaluation reports.

(3) Thematic analyses may also be conducted on other aspects of the Republic of Srpska's higher education system if deemed significant.

Article 20.

(1) The work of the Agency is public and the Agency's activities are promptly published on the Agency's website.

(2) All laws and by-laws regulating the activities of the Agency, as well as all other documents of importance to the public, are available on the Agency's website.

(3) The Agency keeps official records of all data within its scope of competence, and at the request of the parties, issues certificates of facts on which it keeps official records.

(4) The application form for issuing a certificate or confirmation of facts about which the Agency keeps official records is available on the Agency's website (OB AVORS 21).

(5) The Agency maintains relations with the public and all interested parties, including the media, to whose requests responds in a timely manner in accordance with its competences.

III TRANSITIONAL AND FINAL PROVISIONS

Article 21.

The Rulebook enters into force on the day following the date of their adoption.

President of the Steering Board

Prof. Marijana Kapovic Solomun, PhD