

Guidelines for Accreditation Experts: Law Programmes in Moldovan Universities

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Purpose

The purpose of accreditation of study programmes is to determine the study programmes at the higher education level in which a higher education institution may conduct studies and issue graduation documents which are recognized by the state.

The purpose of these guidelines is to specify and clarify the role and tasks of accreditation experts before, during, and after the assessment visit.

Assessment areas

Accreditation of study programmes has **five assessment areas**:

- study programme and its development
- teaching and learning
- teaching staff
- students
- resources

Each assessment area has several requirements. Please see [Requirements and Procedure for Accreditation of Study Programmes in Moldova](#) where the requirements are listed. The requirements base on the Moldovan legislation, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, and best practices on quality assurance in higher education.

Selection of experts

The size of a committee is three to five members. A committee shall comprise at least two academic representatives and one student representative who is a student at the time of applying. In addition, a member from outside the higher education sector (employer representative) is involved whenever possible. It is equally important to ensure that a committee includes experts who have participated in the development of similar study programmes at recognised higher education institutions and are aware of the latest trends in the European and world higher education areas.

Committees include experts from different countries, which mandates the use of English as a working language and which also indicates that higher education institutions must submit their self-evaluation reports in English.

The chair of the committee is selected by EKKK while composing a committee. The process coordinator sends an invitation to the person chosen to act as a chair. Should it become evident that the chair does not discharge his/her duties during the preparatory period of the assessment visit, EKKK has right to dismiss him/her and replace with another member of the committee.

Every committee has an assessment coordinator, who is not a member of the committee. As a rule, coordinator is one of the employees of EKKK, and it is his/her task to help to organize the committee's work.

In addition, there is a secretary whose task is to take notes during the assessment visit and compile the assessment report together with the other committee members. The secretary may be one of

the committee members, the coordinator or a separate person. EKKA will appoint a secretary while composing a committee.

After the composition of a committee has been approved by the Minister of Education of the Republic of Moldova (hereinafter: MoE) as well as the institution under accreditation, the Director of EKKA issues an order appointing the membership of the committee, its chair, secretary and coordinator. The institution may request to replace or add some experts.

The members of a committee are expected to be independent and unbiased in their assessments (avoid the *conflict of interest*). They should have necessary teamwork skills and proficiency in both spoken and written English.

After the committee has been approved, the coordinator will send the committee members contracts for services. The experts are to sign the contracts and send them back to EKKA by regular mail. According to the contract, remuneration is paid to the committee members upon the approval of the final assessment report by the Director of EKKA.

Conflict of interest

A conflict of interest is presumed to be present in the following cases:

- a committee member has an employment or other contractual relationship with the higher education institution under evaluation at the time of assessment, or he or she has had an employment relationship with that higher education institution within three years prior to the assessment visit;
- a committee member is participating in the work of a decision-making or advisory body of the higher education institution under evaluation at the time of assessment;
- a committee member is studying at the higher education institution under evaluation, or graduated from it less than three years ago;
- the membership connected with the study programme of the higher education institution under evaluation includes a person closely related to a committee member – spouse or life partner or a family member.

Tasks of the assessment committee members and coordinator before the visit

Before the assessment visit, the committee members are expected to fulfil the following work tasks:

- review a self-evaluation report of a higher education institution;
- examine documents that regulate the accreditation of study programmes;
- complete the assessment training provided by EKKA;
- participate in the meetings and discussions of the committee;
- contribute to the priming of the assessment report before the assessment visit;
- participate in wording of recommendations and preparing the assessment report;
- examine the comments of the higher education institution on the assessment report and considering them when coordinating the output of the final assessment report;
- perform other tasks related to assessment activities according to the division of tasks among the members of a committee;
- adhere to the agreed committee deadlines.

The chairperson of the committee (in addition to the points mentioned above) has also the obligation to:

- chair the meetings of the committee;
- divide tasks among the members of the committee;
- lead the committee during the visit;
- after the visit, give the overview of provisional conclusions of the committee to the higher education institution;
- ensure that the opinion of the committee is justified;
- prepare and confirm the assessment report.

The tasks of a coordinator are to:

- ensure smooth functioning of the evaluation process on the basis of the requirements and the timeframe provided in this document;
- prepare in cooperation with the committee members the list of people whom the committee would like to interview, and the list of additional materials that the committee needs from the institution in order to prepare for the visit;
- coordinate with an institution of higher education the schedule of the visit, the names and the titles of positions of the people participating in meetings; and, if necessary, to request additional materials from the institution of higher education;
- before the visit, assemble all the comments written into the assessment report by the committee members;
- prepare worksheets with questions to be asked during the visit;
- perform other tasks assigned by the chairperson related to the evaluation.

Self-evaluation report

A higher education institution shall conduct self-evaluation of study programmes and prepare a self-evaluation report according to the *Template for the self-evaluation report*.

The coordinator shall send the self-evaluation report to the committee no later than *one month* prior to the visit. **The chair** will then inform the members of the committee about the further process: whether the members are expected to comment on the whole report or, for example, the assessment areas / study programmes among experts are divided, so that each expert focuses on (a) certain area(s) / programme(s). It is recommended that each area /programme is covered by at least two experts.

Members of the committee are obliged to read the report and start to make preliminary comments in the report template developed by EKKK. The members are expected to send their comments – potential strengths and improvement areas – and possible questions that they would like to ask during the assessment visit to the coordinator no later than *2 weeks* before the visit.

The coordinator will, based on the proposals received by committee members and in coordination with them, prepare a list of the following items concerning the self-evaluation report:

- questions and/or comments;
- a provisional list of the strengths of the programmes and the topics to be focused on in the course of assessment visit;
- a list of additional materials to be requested;

- a list of individuals whom the committee would like to meet during the visit;

The coordinator shall prepare the draft schedule for the visit, and coordinate it with the chair of the committee as well as with the higher education institution under evaluation no later than *1 week* before the visit.

Introductory training/seminar

A day before the assessment visit, the assessment committee meets for final preparations of the visit.

The meeting usually starts at 9 a.m. with an introductory seminar carried out by MoE and EKKA staff members. The committee will be informed about the systems of higher education in Moldova and principles of quality assurance. Following this, expectations for the visit and the work of the committee will be discussed.

Most of the day is devoted to the individual work of the committee: finalizing questions and their order based on the pre-prepared worksheets for the interviews (especially for the first visit); dividing the roles among the committee members – who will be responsible for which questions/topics, how minute taking is organized, etc.

Assessment visit

After the introductory training, experts participate in an assessment visit to the higher education institution guided by the chairman of the committee. Assessment visits are integral parts of the process, but they are conducted in flexible ways – the cooperation among all committee members is essential, both before and after the visit.

A visit to one institution may last up to three days. The length of the visit depends from the number of study programmes to be accredited.

Usually, the committee meets the Rector and/or Vice-Rector, Faculty dean/Institute director, academic staff, students, alumni, employers. The selection of the interviewees depends on the issues raised in the self-evaluation report.

In larger institutions, some interviews can be held in parallel (e.g, parallel interviews with teaching staff). In that case, the committee members need to divide in two groups.

It is the chairman's responsibility to keep to the time schedule during the entire visit, i.e. start and end all the meetings on time.

It is recommended that all committee members take notes during the interviews (see also "Introductory training/seminar").

In general, after every interview the committee has time for reflection. All coffee breaks and lunches are held separately from the staff of the institution and can also be used for committee reflection.

At the end of the visit, the chairman gives an overview of provisional conclusions of the committee to the representatives of the higher education institution, i.e., some strengths and improvement areas for each assessment area.

Interviewing techniques and tips

- Situation is stressful for the higher education institution – reduce strain at the beginning of each interview! (*We are here to support your development* etc.).
- Pose short and easily understandable questions, one question at a time.
- Use relevant questions: What have you done? Why have you done so? What are the results? Are they good or bad? Why do you think so (comparison)? How do you use them? What have you learned from the process? ...
- Let everyone talk. Address questions to specific persons if necessary.
- Reduce domination. Interrupt if necessary.
- End each interview with thanking for time and answers.
- If possible, leave 2-3 minutes for additional question „Is there anything we did not ask but you would like to tell us“?
- Directing (advising) questions should be avoided (Wouldn't it be better if you ...? Why don't you ...?)
- Always remember that you represent EKKA during the visit.

Practical arrangements for the visit – expectations from HEI

The institution lets the committee use an appropriately furnished room during the visit and allows the committee to:

- access statutes and normative documents which provide for and govern the activities of the higher education institution and its structural units;
- interview employees and students of the higher education institution at the choice of experts;
- access information related to teaching, learning and students; educational materials; and the study information system;
- access information related to the teaching staff concerning their CVs, work load, methodological work and research activities;
- examine the internal quality assurance system of teaching and learning;
- examine the condition of the infrastructure of the higher education institution;
- access subject syllabuses/programmes as well as instructional documents related to the content of teaching and learning;
- access students' final papers;
- access information related to financial activities of the higher education institution;
- visit any forms of contact learning (lectures, seminars, laboratory work, etc.);
- if necessary, obtain other information related to teaching, learning and research.

After the visit

Within five days after the visit, EKKA shall ask the higher education institution for feedback on the apparent preparation of members of the committee, the relevance of their questions and other pertinent issues according to the form established by EKKA. The results of the feedback shall be taken as a basis for choosing members of committees for subsequent assessments.

After the assessment visit, **the committee** is expected to do the following:

- participate in wording recommendations and preparing the assessment report;
- examine the comments of the institution of higher education about the assessment report and consider them when compiling the final assessment report;
- to perform other tasks related to evaluation activities according to the division of tasks among the committee members;
- adhere to agreed deadlines.

The chairman shall

- ensure that the opinion of the committee is justified;
- finalise the assessment report;
- confirm it by sending the final report in PDF-format to the coordinator.

Assessment reports

The committee evaluates a programme in five separate areas: study programme and its development, teaching and learning, teaching staff, students and resources (hereinafter 'component assessments').

Component assessments will be based on conformity analysis by areas. Areas will be evaluated on a scale with three values: 'conforms to requirements', 'partially conforms to requirements', and 'does not conform to requirements'.

The committee is asked to compile an assessment report (see [the Template](#)) which:

- presents a **concise analysis on the study programme** of the higher education institution and the **recommendations** for improving the quality of instruction;
- points out **the strengths** and **areas for improvement of study programmes** submitted to the assessment by five assessment areas, and preferably in international comparison.

The component assessments should preferably be based on the decision adopted by consensus. If consensus is not reached, a simple majority of members of the committee shall make the decision, and the dissenting view(s) together with the reason(s) will be included in the report. If the votes are equally divided, the vote of the chairperson will decide.

Committees shall submit assessment reports to EKKa by the end of the sixth week after the visit and EKKa shall forward it to the MoE/institution of higher education within one week after receipt of the report.

Higher education institutions shall have the opportunity to submit their comments about the assessment report within two weeks after receipt of the report. The committee shall review the comments received and consider them while preparing its final report.

The chair of the committee will forward the electronic version of the final assessment report, including the final component assessments, to the EKKa Bureau no later than *by the end of the tenth week* after the visit.

The EKKa Bureau shall forward the committee's assessment report and the comments by the higher education institution to the EKKa Quality Assessment Council.

The Quality Assessment Council shall approve an assessment report within three months after receipt of the report. The Council shall weigh the strengths and areas for improvement pointed out by an assessment committee and its recommendations, and then shall decide whether to accredit the study programme for five years, for three years, or not to accredit it.

Writing the report: some tips

- All the findings in the report should be based on solid evidence gathered by the committee and (if possible) comparative analysis. Subjective opinions of the committee members and unsubstantiated claims should thus clearly be avoided.
- To prevent any ambiguity or vagueness in the comments, the style of the report should not be overly polite. When stating areas of improvement or giving suggestions, conditional mood should thus be avoided.

Total workload

A member of the assessment committee should account for:

- 2-3 days of preparatory work: reading the self-evaluation reports and preparing questions for the visit;
- 6-7 days for the assessment visit: 1 day for the introduction and preparation for the visit, 4 days for the visit, 1-2 days for writing the assessment report and consensus meeting;
- 2-3 days to finalise the assessment report.

Practical information regarding travel and accommodation

EKKA will book and buy flight tickets in economy class for the committee members according to the information they have provided – preferred dates/times for arrival and departure, etc. All additional costs – train/bus/taxi to/from the airport and travel insurance will also be covered by EKKA. Travel insurance should be arranged and bought by the committee member him-/herself. All receipts and boarding passes should be kept and given/sent to the coordinator. Reimbursements will be made according to original receipts.

NB! Meals at airports will not be covered.

EKKA will also book and pay for the hotel accommodation (single rooms) for max 7 nights. All additional nights and other costs exceeding the base cost (double room, mini bar etc.) will be covered by experts themselves.

Breakfasts and lunches during the visit are provided by EKKA. The cost of dinners is included in remuneration.