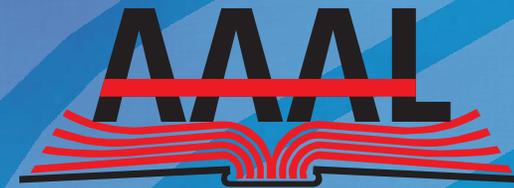




REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA  
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE



ACCREDITATION AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Address:

Accreditation Agency for Higher Education  
"Lekë Dukagjini" Str., No. 5  
Tirana - Albania

Tel/Fax: +355 4 257 954 / 266 302  
E-mail: [aahe\\_aaal@adanet.com.al](mailto:aahe_aaal@adanet.com.al)  
Web: [www.aaal.edu.al](http://www.aaal.edu.al)

---

## "Guidelines on External Evaluation of Quality in Higher Education"

---



REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA  
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE



ACCREDITATION AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

---

# "Guidelines on External Evaluation of Quality in Higher Education"

---

*prepared by :*

**Prof.Ass. Dhurata BOZO**  
**Prof. Adem Tamo**  
**Prof.Ass. Mimoza Hafizi**

**November 2005**

Printing was sponsored by:



**Open Society Foundation for Albania**  
**Soros Foundation**

## P R E A M B L E

The wide-ranging social and economic developments that have occurred both in the country and in particular at the Higher Education environment, the integration policies doggedly pursued by our country towards the ultimate goal of making the European Union integration a reality, the inclusion of our Higher Education into the Common European Higher Education Area, the persistent desire of these institutions to gain more in the way of autonomy have reinforced and brought to a top-notch level the responsibilities of the universities and other institutions with vested interests in higher education.

The official commitment of Albanian political system to formally acknowledge and practically execute documents linked up to Bologna Process, the signing of such documents on our part at the Berlin Conference way back in September 2003, among other things, highlights the need for establishing and promoting the Culture of Quality and other related characteristics which are to be put in the mainstream for all our higher education institutions.

In quite a recent meeting of Ministers of Education held in Bergen in May 2005, Quality Assurance at the Higher Education System is to be reformulated and promoted as one of the main pillars in the context of the Bologna Process. This can be realized through the

National Institutions of Quality Assurance in close cooperation with the Institutions of Higher Education and the relevant European structures and beyond.

Quality at Higher Education is a multi-faceted concept. It is concerned with all the functions and activities that are conducted at the Institutions of Higher Education: with teaching and learning process, with scientific research, with students' admissions, the hiring and qualification of teaching staff, with education facilities and equipments, with services rendered on the benefit of third parties, and with the managerial team. The evaluation of all these dimensions is necessary for the perspective of people both within and outside the system. The latter could be the ones with experience in the field of evaluation. Hence the combination of the internal evaluation with the external one in the Higher Education Institution is vital to the increase of Quality.

Evaluation of Quality and Accreditation are the twinning components of Quality Assurance. The Evaluation of Quality is made possible through the Internal Evaluation (self-evaluation) and External Evaluation. While evaluation is the process of determining the quality level of HEI, of curricula and certain academic programs, the accreditation is a process of decision-making in connection to the evaluation conducted.

The process of internal evaluation is an important indicator of autonomy of HEIs. In the meantime, it constitutes to be an aid to the leading and executive teams of the unit of higher education in terms of boosting awareness of the extent of such an important issue as Quality. It also helps perpetuate a two-way mutual faith climate among the academic staff, the helping and

managerial staff and students and the wider public, who figure largely in this process.

On the other hand, it's pretty clear that under the conditions when much more autonomy and a higher level of responsibility is sought out for the HEIs, the evaluation with external experts becomes necessary in order to prove the validity and objectivity of the internal evaluation; in a way it is the external evaluation which ultimately proves the quality of any institution, of a university curricula or diploma for that matter.

The ultimate aim is for society to receive in a real, clear, and transparent manner and for the intent of any likely use in the future the accurate information on the status and condition of Higher Education institution. The people who are intensely keen on finding out the real status behind and institution include: the society, parents, students, employers, and political system. Hence the provision of information on the status on one hand, gives them the chance to make the right and desired choices in the Higher Education Market, and on the other hand it is a real proof that the Higher Education Institution accepts the responsibility that it has adopted or is about to assume, it enhances the level of confidence among the social partners and the end users as well.

Quality Assurance on the outside serves to keep afloat the National Standards of Quality at Higher Education, for accrediting the program and/or institutions of Higher Education, for protecting the users of this service, for providing independent information with quantitative and qualitative data on programs or institutions towards the long-term objective in ensuring and increasing quality in this sector of public education.

In this context, the Agency of Accreditation of Higher Education (AAAL) has attached special importance to the development of Evaluation Guidelines as well as of Manuals according to Contemporary Standards of Quality and transparent procedures in the evaluation of these institutions in a clear and reliable manner at all levels of university organization and in all its wide range of activities. The development of such guidelines is the best response to the permanent responsibilities they have in ensuring Quality Assurance at Higher Education as part of the Accreditation System. The ever growing demands on higher education, not only in the field of education, but also in the scientific research area, make such an obligation both fundamental and essential.

On this account alone, AAHE is proposing "The Guideline of External Quality of Higher Education". This material follows the first edition of the "Guideline of Internal Evaluation of Quality" at Higher Education. The main aim of this manual is to help the External Evaluation Team to conduct a complete evaluation and accreditation process; to help the HEIs to work closely with the External Evaluation Team and to benefit from its experience, to help the HEIs to build up the procedures and practices in evaluating quality in order to make such a process inseparable from the work of the institution itself. The ongoing reform of education is based on its own internal needs, but even the integrating processes as such ask for the establishment of a Culture of Quality, in the sense that it will enable the planning objectives, the exchange of information, the qualifications of teachers and students, the realization of joint projects with similar institutions in the EU countries and beyond.

Thus in the final analysis, the External Evaluation helps in an indirect way the establishment of the Internal Systems of Quality Assurance of HEIs, which leads to the creation of Culture of Quality, which is in the short and long run the goal of the External Institutions of Quality Assurance ( AAHE, Accreditation Council and MOES).

This guideline is compiled for the first time ever in the history of our education. In its compilation process wide and extensive use has been made of all European documents in support to the Bologna Process, the experience of the counterpart agencies, standards of Quality Assurance in Higher Education which were approved in Bergen in May 2005. This manual owes a lot to the experience of AAHE which was enriched over the years and best utilized to adapt this manual to the current conditions of our HEIs. Admittedly, such a document on Quality Assurance and many others to follow are not to stay as permanent fixtures, they are likely to gain more in new elements. They are likely to fit in with the further reforms of HE in the context of implementing the Bologna Document with success.

**Authors**

**C O N T E N T S:**

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>I. EVALUATION PROCESS.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>II. EXTERNAL EVALUATION .....</b>	<b>14</b>
II.1. Stages and the timeframe.....	14
II.2. The External Evaluation Team.....	17
II.3. Working plan of the External Evaluation Team.....	21
II.4. The External Evaluation Report.....	27
II.4. 1. Description.....	30
II.4. 2. Analysis.....	30
II.4. 3. Synthesis.....	34
II.4. 4. Conclusions.....	39
II.4. 5. Recommendations .....	39
<b>III. THE RELATIONSHIP OF EXTERNAL EVALUATION         GROUP WITH HEIs, INTERNAL EVALUATION GROUP         AND AAHE.....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>IV. FINAL EVALUATION REPORT.....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>V. ACCREDITATION.....</b>	<b>45</b>

## I. EVALUATION PROCESS

Evaluation of Quality at Higher Education falls under the responsibility of Accreditation Agency of Higher Education (AAHE). It could very well take its own analysis into the diplomas issued by any Higher Education Institution (HEI). The subject of its analysis might just as well extend to university subjects, study courses of all institutions, or the internal quality system of HEI. As such, it could assume a rich choice of forms and meanings. All types of evaluation administered are to be guided, as a rule of thumb, by the principle of combining the courses with a perspective of the times ahead fixed in your mind. As such, the evaluation of Quality offers to the HEI the objective evaluation instrument of what has been achieved as well as the perspective on relevant changes to be made in order to give Quality Assurance a chance to gain ground.

The evaluation of Quality has to be characterized first of all by high-profile professionalism, objectivity, impartiality, complete transparency and the inclusion of all actors in all of the evaluation stages.

The main objectives of the evaluation processes are as follows:

- To get to reveal/denote facts about the status and condition of the institution, programs and curricula at Higher Education, in real time and in the national and international context;
- To promote the administration of evaluation in an objective fashion and voluntary basis, in order to paint a clear and amazingly transparent snapshot of the institution, on the basis of which the institution should build development plans in line with its mission statement;
- To make public any information in order that for all partners and the public at large ( student body, parents, academic and helping staff, other social partners, economic or social ones) to be better informed of the quality of HEI, programs, curricula, diplomas and other services that are being offered;
- To provide a wide range of data, a rich set of recommendations and other professional considerations which are going to serve as starting points for the further accreditation process;
- To deepen the understanding of the need to do evaluations of Quality at Higher Education Institutions and to better serve to cultivate the culture of quality at HEIs, which is to be reflected upon the form and shape of structures, practices and other internal procedures of Evaluation of Quality. These structures no doubt do combine the experience gained in the course of the internal and external evaluation;

- To ultimately serve to cultivate the Culture of Quality at Higher Education Institutions, which will be targeted as the long-term objective of this process.

Evaluation of Quality goes through two stages: **Internal Evaluation** (Self-evaluation) and **External Evaluation**.

**Internal evaluation** (self-evaluation) is the evaluation that the unit (institution) conducts of its own will in its attempts to be accredited or in the circumstances when inclusion in the accreditation process is requested of such an institution. Such an evaluation is done under the full responsibility of the institution when it takes the initiative for such an evaluation, or when inclusion in the process is required in the accreditation process, in compliance with the accreditation plans. The results of such an evaluation are to be recorded in the **Self-Evaluation Report**. The self-evaluation report is an integral part of the full package titled the **Self-Evaluation Folder**. The self-evaluation folder contains all of the materials on which are based all of the activities of the institution to be accredited. The materials contained within this folder could be made available to the External Evaluation Team. During the preparation of the folder special care is taken in order for it to depict in true colors the entire development of the institution, to display all the previous evaluations conducted within the institution, to bring out all the elements of achievements and the weakness of the institution as well as the perspective into which the

institution is heading to. The most analytical and entire prospect of such a development is to be found within the self-evaluation report. The preparation of such a report is done on the basis of the recommendations issued in the Guideline of Internal Evaluation of Quality.

**External Evaluation** is administered by External Evaluation Group, which is set up, guided along and follows closely the criteria defined by the AAHE and the Accreditation Council, which are faithfully described in this guideline. It is run and monitored by AAHE; during this stage the evaluation and analysis of the unit and/or programme, curriculum is done by experts in various fields who display no conflict of interest or any hidden agenda with the unit under evaluation. The compilation of the External Evaluation is sought out and supported by the AAHE. Its own content is under the responsibility of EET and in this sense such an evaluation should be independent, while the report itself is under the possession of the AAHE. As a result, the members are not allowed to produce the data, to make any statements or to publish any parts of the report without the consent first of the AAHE. The period over which the evaluation stretches out is divided into two stages: the fact-gathering or fact-finding period and the analysis stage. The two stages are crowned with the compilation of the evaluation report for all its components already set out in the guidelines that follow.

At the end of the two reports ( IER and EER), AAHE drafts up the **Final Report of Evaluation** relying on three main sources:

- The Self-evaluation folder including the Self-evaluation Report;
- The External Evaluation Report, and
- Notes and discussions run by AAHE during the Self-evaluation and External evaluation process.

With the conclusion of the External Evaluation, the Final Evaluation Report is submitted to the Council of Accreditation in order for it to issue its recommendations or to make its respective decisions. On the basis of this decision that AC makes for each evaluation, the Evaluation Report along with the evaluation outcomes is **made public**.

Further details on the complete procedure of evaluation and accreditation of Higher Education could be found in the publication titled “ *Procedures for Evaluating Quality at Higher Educations*”, approved by the Accreditation Council in June 2004.

## II. EXTERNAL EVALUATION

The Evaluation of Quality and Accreditation are sought out by the Institutions of Higher Education and the Ministry of Education and Science. In the cases when evaluation is sought out by HEI, it starts out only when approved by the Council of Accreditation and is administered according to the timelines already laid out by the AAHE and approved by the AC. A complete evaluation process for the intent of accreditation lasts two months in two years’ time and the timeframe is determined by the size of the institution to be accredited. It is also determined by the fact if the evaluation is at the program or institutional level, or a combination of both. Within this period of time, the External Evaluation stage takes up half of the time given to evaluation as a whole. In every concrete case, the deadline and the timeframe of the evaluation are to be determined by the AAHE and later on are to be approved by the AC.

### II.1. Stages and the timeframe

- External Evaluation consists of several stages:
- a) Determining the timeframe of the External Evaluation
  - b) Informing the institution under evaluation about the timeframe of the external evaluation to take place
  - c) Establishing the External Evaluation Team

- d) Informing the institution about the composition of the External Evaluation Team;
- e) Contracting the members of the External Evaluation Team;
- f) Training the External Evaluation Team from the AAHE staff
- g) Helping the EET get to know the Self-Evaluation folder and the ensuing discussion
- h) Compiling the working plan
- i) Preparing the EET for the visits down to the HEIs;
- j) Meeting of the EET with the head of the institution under evaluation and the Self-Evaluation Team
- k) Visits to the destination (unit) of the EET;
- l) Compilation of the preliminary External Evaluation Report by the team;
- m) Discussion of the preliminary report with reps of the institution under evaluation;
- n) Compilation of the External Evaluation Report and submission of the report to AAHE.

As well as the above criteria, the member of the External Evaluation Teams is expected to stick to several criteria of an ethical nature which in their entirety enable the product of their labor to be useful to society, to be in line with the common interests of development of Higher Education and to respect the participants in it.

Experts are not allowed to hide the data, to tinker with them or to even change them. They are also not allowed to discard the sensitivity of the participants, the plagiarism, and giving up the truth for various narrow interests. In relation to the above it is all too natural for a member of the External Evaluation Team to inform the participants on the nature of the study to be conducted, to do the preliminary evaluation of the acceptability of its own actions, to determine the extent of the harm done to the others, to make public the obligations and responsibilities to the subjects and the persons doing the study, to honor the freedom of participants in order to halt cooperation with them, to protect the participants in the study up to the moment when a decision is being made against them etc. The respect of such criteria makes a come-true reality of the appearance of an objective evaluation report, which is useful and acceptable to all.

During the whole process, the AAHE takes good care of honoring the determined criteria, in order for the procedure in question to be followed through in a proper fashion as well as the statements contained within the guidelines. It supports the EET for the needs that might arise in the course of its own work and it gets informed on the way how the work goes. In cases of failure to respect them, the AAHE discusses, determines or issues recommendations for the EET.

## II.2. The External Evaluation Team (EET)

In pressing ahead with the selection of the External Evaluation Team the recognition and familiarity with the program and traits of the HEIs to be evaluated are to be uppermost in the mind of anyone commissioned with such a task as selection procedures fall in place. As well as the above, other points had to be looked at such as recognition of the Higher Academic Institutions, skills and the professional integrity, one-sidedness, objectivity, embodiment in the team of a wide range of opinions striving to keep at a distance any inclusion of persons, who tend to be conflict-generating people. The members of the independent actors and doers in their undertaking are led by the service they have to place to the benefit of improving quality at the relevant institutions. They stand among the groups with far and wide interests as one-sided and fair evaluators and objective in their evaluation process. This core of criteria is to be reflected upon the content of the External Evaluation Report.

The External Evaluation Team, depending on the bulk of the work carried out and the specifics of each evaluation, as a rule of thumb has in its own ranks from 3 up to 5 persons. 2 or 3 persons have to be experts in the field, one should be the representative of the AAHE and a student will have to figure in as well.

The members of the Evaluation team are to be selected by the AAHE and to be approved by the AC on the basis of the criteria laid out below:

- a) Should be well-established figures in the field to be evaluated and to boast skills and knowledge and far-ranging visions on the teaching program. It would be a good thing for one member of the team to have some first-hand experience of the way how the HEI operates as well as the in the areas of the Higher Education Policy in the country;
- b) Should own/hold onto titles and other academic degrees. Exception should be made only in the cases when a member of the team is to be picked and chosen from among the labor market. If that is the case the person should not necessarily have any degrees and titles.
- c) They should not display any hint of conflict with the unit or institution to go through evaluation: The members should not be employees of the institution undergoing evaluation.
- d) At least one member of the team should come from the non-academic environment such as the labor market or the non-university scientific research institutions;
- e) The External Evaluation Team is strongly recommended to have in its own ranks a student representing the student governing body. In cases when this is almost impossible, it is a must to pull

in the process the ideas, opinions and suggestions thrown in by the students of the course or institution which experienced the evaluation.

- f) It's long been suggested that even foreign experts that meet the afore-mentioned criteria might be just as well involved.

The team is deliberately set up to carry out the evaluation mission (ad-hoc group) and is disbanded at the end of the evaluation, especially when the evaluation report has been drawn up and properly submitted. It determines the organizational structure: it also picks and chooses a chief ( head) , a secretary and it puts together a working plan.

The head of the team is in charge of guiding along the efforts of the team, it splits up the chunks of responsibilities among its own members, it sets the timelines for accomplishing the tasks which is brought to account for the supervision of the tasks in honoring and following to a letter the evaluation guidelines, the relations among the team and those with the HEI and AAHE.

While the representative of the AAHE is responsible for closely looking at the entire process, to render assistance to the team members in all of the stages of the work and to bring to the immediate attention of AAHE any issues to be faced with. The representative of AAHE also takes care of collecting the necessary data,

the legal and non-legal documentation of HEI and it acts out as the promoter or facilitator of the work in fully realizing the Working Plan of the EET. But the AAHE should in no way intervene or color in the thinking and actions of the team members in the tasks that they are performing, especially when it comes to professional considerations. The AAHE should refrain from exerting any influence on the ideas and opinions that are to be written down on the Evaluation Report of the External Evaluation Team.

With the establishments of the EET, the AAHE informs the HEI under evaluation of the composition of the group and it awaits any comments or grievances related to any given member. In these cases, when the HEI has grievances, the AAHE does consider them and adopts attitudes which it considers reasonable. After this stage, the final composition of the EET goes to the AC for final approval. Upon consent, the AAHE does inform the HEI of the composition of the EET, by having to ask the institution to name a person in the role of a coordinator who is to facilitate the execution of the working program.

Right after the External Evaluation Team is established and approved, the AAHE binds the contract of cooperation with each of the team members, with the exception of its own representative. In this contract are included the tasks and the rights of the parties, the Job Description and the timeframes, the remuneration system

according to the legislation in effect and the terms of unbinding the contract.

### II.3. Working plan of the EET

In the beginning of the External Evaluation, the EET is trained with specialists of AAHE on all of the evaluation procedure. The EET is equipped with the Self-Evaluation Folder which includes the Self-Evaluation Report (see the instructions for the Internal Evaluation of Quality at Higher Education, edition of AAHE 2004), with the Evaluation Procedure and the Guidelines on the External Evaluation. During this meeting the EET in cooperation with the AAHE does draft up the Working Program, it appoints the chair and the secretary of the EET and splits up the duties among its members. In this meeting the contracts of cooperation with the AAHE and each member of the EET are signed.

In the working plan of the EET predictions will have to be made of:

- a) Discussing well in advance of the Self-Evaluation Report;
- b) Meeting of the EET with the Head of the Institution and the Self-Evaluation Team. This meeting is brokered by the AAHE;
- c) The visit of the EET to the HEI and recognition that the HEI should have of the visiting agenda of the EET;

- d) The context and aspects of evaluation and recognition of the HEI with them;
- e) Instruments to be used in interviews and opinion polls;
- f) The list of persons to be interviewed by EET;
- g) The work space and activities to be visited and getting to know the HEI closely;
- h) The major aspects of preparing the draft-report of the External Evaluation;
- i) Deadlines of preparing the draft-report of the External Evaluation
- j) Discussions of the Preliminary External Report with the managing team of the institutions, reps of the self-evaluation team, of students and administration, of the Faculty Staff, senate of institutions that are to be accredited;
- k) Reflecting upon the comments and suggestions put in by the HEI in a special section of the report;
- l) Submission of the External Evaluation Report to the AAHE.

In the course of the preliminary discussions of the Self-Evaluation Report, the Evaluation Team should examine closely such issues as:

- a) Has all the necessary documentation been placed in a folder? This documentation tells us about the legal basis, the manner of functioning,

management, the organizational structure, statute and the diplomas issued etc ;

- b) Have all the quantitative and qualitative data been sufficient in order to create an initial idea over the staff, program, infrastructure and students etc ;
- c) What about the status of diplomas, programs or the institutions being open to evaluation? Is such a status clearly and fully depicted?

After this analysis, the EET compiles in advance a set of questions and points to be debated, which are to be dealt with in the first meeting that the EET conducts with the head of the Institution and the Internal Evaluation Team (IET).

During this meeting which is brokered and officially informed by the AAHE, opinions are exchanged among the evaluation groups and the EET explains any ambiguities, it makes reply to questions and it asks for any documentation that is missing. One of the members of the EET is appointed as the focal point between the EET and the institution under evaluation.

This contact might just as well serve for the entire phase when the EET pays the visit to the institution to be evaluated. This focal point could well be even the representative of the AAHE in EET. In the course of the meeting, the EET in close cooperation with the HEI sets out the precise agenda of the days when visits are to take place. It also defined the working team (staff, administration personnel, students etc). Visits carry them

to teaching secretaries, administration, the teaching environments, libraries etc. In the course of the meeting, the secretary keeps the minutes of the meeting on the data which will later be used in the formulation of the Evaluation Report.

After defining the EET agenda, according to the division of tasks the expertise takes off. The unit under evaluation should place at the disposal of the group the teaching programs and plans, the development plans, tests or exam sheets, publications of the staff, the respective CV-s, the procedures for evaluating the performance of students, the regulation on the functioning of the unit, of recruiting the staff in the various angles of qualification etc. Each member of the HEI under evaluation should be on the spot during the time of such an evaluation of the institution. The experts could pay a visit to each spot/place in the HEI. They could ask for additional information or documentation if and when necessary. They might have meetings with the academic staff, with certain teachers, with the administrative and helping staff. They could as well interview people anywhere in order to collect the necessary information. To this effect, the leaders of the HEI are responsible to create all the possible facilities for the visits, interviews and opinion polls according to the best standards.

The EET conducts interviews with students, in order for it to be in a position to compare their various points of views with the staff. The interviews with students are important, because on the basis of such

interviews you could get information on the way how the teaching process is conducted, on the workload, the quality of the teaching staff, the forms of teaching etc. As a basis for collecting such information serves the Questionnaire of the Student, compiled by the AAHE in close cooperation with the University Students and students. The collection of ideas and opinions could be done on the basis of other questionnaires, at various levels by having to select on a random basis students from various years. In all the cases the questionnaires should have no indication of the persons filling them in. The subjects should be many in number in order for us to represent the general voice of the students.

Part of the visiting program is a visit to the facilities: the teaching office, the lecture halls, the labs, libraries, the helping facilities, and other relaxing and entertainment places. The expert, if they see it necessary, could just as well attend a teaching activity. In all cases they have to be accompanied by the representative of the HEI.

The EET is supposed to discuss and meet with other institutions outside the HEI (faculty, university, institute, academy, higher school) which is connected with the HEI under evaluation. So if a medicine faculty is placed under evaluation, the information could be asked of a policy-maker in the field, the public and private employer, and the end-users of the medical service. If evaluation is to take place at the teacher training faculty then opinion has to be sought out at the regional

education directorates, from the public and private school, from parents and teachers who have graduated recently from school, or from various experts in the field.

During the visit to the HEI, the EET should carry out the visit, should get information, should strike up acquaintances and examine closely the HEI in all the matters which have to do with the evaluation aspects, which are dealt with below:

The visit of the EET to the HEI could range from one to eight weeks, depending on the size of the institutions under evaluation. It could depend as well on the geographical characteristics and the location of the EET and other operational organizational difficulties etc.

At the end of the visit to the place, the EET concludes with a series of findings and classifies them in line with the familiar structure of the evaluation. In the confines of this report, the word *finding* implies facts and attitudes to be noticed and identified at the HEI, which are concerned with the evaluation of quality. At the end of the EET and in close cooperation with the EET a discussion meeting is being held, where the EET presents all the findings of the mission in front of an audience composed of the staff of the HEIs, administration, teaching staff, the student body, business etc. It also awaits any reaction to the findings already presented to such an audience. The aim of such a meeting is mostly to verify the findings, and if possible, to enrich and add more to them. If any findings are to be opposed, then all

of them are to be written on a special paragraph or two in the report.

The methodology used in the external evaluation of the HEI stands in need of using a rich choice of techniques, such as study of the documentary materials which describe the proceedings, the issues, the legal basis, as well as the programs of the HEI. In addition, the observations could be realized in the spaces and activities of the HEI; conducting interviews with key persons in the academic process of the HEI, organizing the focus group with various stakeholders at the HEI, and opinion polls of various actors at the HEI.

Visits to the HEI are concluded with the final meeting of the EET with the head of the institution and the IET, where the head of the evaluation presents all of the opinions and awaits in turn the suggestions.

At the end of the visits, the EVT compiles the relevant External Evaluation Report.

#### **II.4. The External Evaluation report**

In preparing the External Evaluation Report, the EET should be led by the principle of fairly depicting the status and condition of the HEI and/or the diploma or program in a real, objective and transparent manner. The report should be simple and easy to understand, thus care should be taken with the structure, composition,

style and tone of writing. In each case it should contain at all costs the following components:

- Description ;
- Analysis
- Synthesis
- Conclusions
- Recommendations

The report should in no way bring in any data (they are brought in details by the RIE). It will have to bring in findings and to express the attitude of the EET. It will have to show that this reflects the best national and international practices and is in coherence with the best European standards. The facts do have a more objective nature and are to be found in all documentation, in the orders, instructions, practices and procedures which can be easily verified through the many missions. The attitudes represent certain behaviors of the members who take part in the processes of the HEIs and which are closely connected with the actors in the process and as such they tend to show a subjective side to it. However all the facts and attitudes that the EET finds in the institution are necessary in order to arrive at a fair evaluation of the academic standing of the HEI.

The findings will have to be depicted with extreme care, in order that they be protected and verified in case of opposition raised. It is highly recommended that at

least for each finding to be thought of as significant, it is important that its source is acknowledged.

The work of the EET does have a direct impact on the quality and form of the final report. The lack of culture of how to operate in a team at times does give to the nature of the report a somewhat fragmented, non-unique character full of various styles. The efforts put into harmonizing the various styles is overcome with serious editions and the use of the technical-scientific style. In addition to this, it is expected that the report should contain even elements of the structure such as: introduction, the table of contents, the list of abbreviations, tables and graphs, the list of the subjects being interviewed and the appendices, as well as the list of references. The technical depiction of the report and its ethical criteria are the same as those implemented in the empirical scientific research.

## REPORT COMPONENTS

### II.4.1. Description

The External Evaluation Report should start with the working program and how and when this program was established in the first place. The report should be followed by overall information on HEI evaluated, its own history, the legal and sub-legal basis, the organizational structure and the diplomas issued.

### II.4.2. Analysis

Right after this introductory part, each aspect of evaluation is subject to analysis, by having to stick to the AAHE printed manual «Aspects and indicators of Quality Evaluation at Higher Education », January 2005. Based on this, use could be made of the Internal Evaluation Report, when that one is considered to be tight and reliable by the group itself, as well as the meetings, note-taking reports and other comments scrawled and jotted down by the group members during their visit to their destination. In the External Evaluation Report its mandatory that all other data, thoughts, comments and other suggestions of students for all those aspects of quality where they feel that they could render their assistance to the evaluation process and improving the quality.

The most comprehensive aspects over which should be oriented and concentrated the whole External Evaluation Group in drafting the External Evaluation Report are:

**a. Mission and objectives of a Higher Education Institution; programme, curriculum etc.**

**Terms of reference:** Aims and objectives of teaching process and scientific research, the short-term, medium-term and long-term strategies, following up and aligning the objectives and aims with timelines, overall data on HEI.

**b. Organizational structure of HEI, its constituent units and its management**

Organizational structure, the hierarchical organization, issues of policies in the decision-making area, quality of supporting staff, composition of units and their respective staff, competences, working contracts and their work relations, collection and use of information for the personnel.

**c. Analysis of courses of study, diplomas MSc etc.**

Didactical structure of unit, data on admission, data on distribution of students across courses of study and academic years, data on the progress of

students and passing rate, coordination of teaching process with other units.

**d. Study programs, organization of curricula, Bologna Declaration, credits**

Aims of study programs, contents of programmes, distribution of workload across the various teaching units, organization of the academic year, terms, teaching syllabus, full harmony of courses of study, literature and other supporting materials, Bologna System with all its constituent elements.

**e. Teaching and supporting staff**

Structure of teaching and supporting staff in the curriculum of each course of study, teaching staff, supporting staff and student ratios, needs for additional staff, distribution of workload, relations with other structures outside the working hours, data on qualification of staff, criteria set in hiring staff.

**f. Teaching process**

Organization, types of teaching, workload and quality of fulfillment, knowledge check-up, student's schooling standing, average duration of studies, passing-grade rate and other related issues, data on post-university studies: criteria, quality, admission=enrolments, graduation, teaching methods and methodologies,

technologies in teaching, internal evaluation of teaching process.

**g. Scientific research**

Research policies, publications over years, projects won over and completed, participation in various activities at home and overseas, activities run by the unit ( institution), cooperation with other institutions at the local, national and international level, linking up research to teaching, presence of Master's courses, institutional and individual participation confirmed in such courses, outcomes of Master's courses, official outcomes of individual research activities or activities for institutions.

**h. Students and graduates**

Procedures on admitting students and their real application, statistics, knowledge check-up, getting students involved with other activities overseen by unit, hiring the freshly-graduated students, informing students.

**i. Facilities, material resources, logistics and other services delivered on behalf of community**

Facilities, infrastructure, information technology, libraries, other services for students, residence halls.

**j. Financing and management of financial resources**

Financial resources, data over the years,

expenditures, costs per students, financial auditing, managing capacities.

**k. Internal system of Quality Assurance**

Institutionalizing quality assurance system, its functioning, self-evaluation and on-going upgrading of quality, outcomes of external evaluation

**l. National and international cooperation and relations with the public**

Contact with the local, national and international environment, staff mobility at each of aforementioned levels, communication with former graduated students, participation in national and international programs, links with the business community and the labor market.

### II.4.3. Synthesis

After doing the analysis of the most important findings at the institution/progam, which are depicted according to the above aspects, the report synthesizes the outcomes of evaluation in three major headings which are closely connected with the educational policy, the policy of scientific research and administration. In the course of this synthesis, the report should try and give responses to the questions that follow below in accordance with the three headings.

## A. EDUCATIONAL POLICIES

### What is the educational policy?

The plans and programmes are in full compliance with the mission and surroundings; the part-time education system and the life-long learning are an integral part of the activities undertaken by the unit; the offer is in full compliance with the local, national and international objectives; the objective is discernable and easy to evaluate; the university diploma offers chances for employment; the post-university diploma relies on the scientific research of the unit and on the contacts it establishes with the social, economic and industrial partners, etc. outside the unit. The preparation provided by the unit enables the students to be involved in the labor market.

### How is the educational offer achieved?

Education takes place under proper conditions; the unit checks and evaluates in an undisputed manner the students; the educational offer is evaluated on a regular basis. The unit in a strict manner plays by the policy of improving the pedagogical methodology of teaching; it proposes to students a service that is likely to lead them to success.

### Students from the entry point to the exit

The unit has in place what we call a waiting policy, getting the students informed and providing them with

the sense of orientation; its also caters to special categories of students ( sportsmen, disabled peoples); it encourages the participation of students in the institutional life; it places at the disposal of students documents and various types of information;; it organizes for them assistance even outside the formal teaching programs and plans; “tutorship” is the element of the work that the unit is engaged in with students, the unit helps students to get employment or to stay in touch with the employment environment during and after the graduation process.

## B. SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH POLICIES

The unit is well aware of the strong and weak points in its own area of research; It encourages evolution, dynamics of research and it carries out such priorities by guaranteeing the future of research; It defines its own priorities in the area of research; The unit has up and running a policy of evaluating research; It has in place a policy for evaluating research and cares for its implementation ; it has a research productivity.

## C. ADMINISTRATION (GOVERNANCE) OF HEI SERVING ITS OWN MISSION

### Level of autonomy

The External Evaluation Group should verify if the unit has got a coherent statute, democratic debating is

possible; autonomy is and feels real; the unit has real development projects going on; the unit prepares each year an annual teaching and research report on activities based on individual reports etc.

### **Organization of unit and its constituent units**

The External Evaluation Team should analyse the organizational structure of unit; structure of unit and its mission ratio; distribution of competences across the unit; the internal debate; if the internal services are placed at the functioning of unit and its mission;

### **Partners of unit**

The unit is well aware of its own surroundings; it has established relationships with local, regional, national and international units; national and international mobility.

### **Administration of human resources**

Analysis should be made of qualification policies and treating personnel at all its levels, academic or supporting ones, competences within this field, policies of social treatment and if there are any also the hiring policy.

### **Financial administration**

Is the budget being prepared according to the defined rules; Are the financial means sufficient in attaining the aims and objectives of HEIs; Has the policy

of budgeting and financial auditing is being established and does it act in full compliance with the adopted procedures.

### **Administration of information systems and logistics**

Does the unit consist of information systems; are the information systems in full compliance with the timely levels; is students' life under the care of the unit; are real estate (immobile property) recognized and administered in a correct manner; is the cultural and scientific heritage evaluated, administered and well preserved; what about grounds, their administration, and the logistics administration.

In the publication titled "Aspects and Indicators of Evaluation of Quality at Higher Education", Part II, a publication by AAHE, in March 2005, the Agency proposes a few tables, through which the unit brings in quantity indicators which are already included in the Self evaluation Report. The External Evaluation Team, after making sure that such findings are real upon the visit down to the place, brings in the report comments and analysis over such indicators by calling the attention to those indicators that bear witness to a deviation from the national standards of HE. As such they could very well be pure indicators of quality of a certain aspect under review.

#### II.4.4. Conclusions

At the very end of the report, the External Evaluation Team (EET) will have to sum up all that has been discovered and should adopt an attitude accordingly. This should be in the form and shape of a SWOT analysis (**S**trength-**W**eaknesses-**O**pportunities-**T**hreats). This ultimately implies the EET, out of all the evaluation conducted, will have to bring out the weakness, which are the possibilities and capacities over which the unit relies for changes and improvement of condition (opportunities) and are there any factors that threaten the status quo towards improvements.

#### II.4.5. Recommendations

After the EET has done such an analysis, bringing in the four aspects in the form of the obvious points, clear and free from ambiguity, concludes the report with its accompanying recommendations. In this part of the report, EET, based on the four points mentioned earlier, strongly recommends the steps that the unit, staff, the senior executives, the policy-making entities should. This also goes for other major players that deal with such matters, in order to make sure that there is conformity with the standards and improvement of quality. In this part of the report it should come out loud and clear as whom do the recommendations target in order to plan out for future action.

After the External Evaluation Report is prepared, the EET discusses it at length at any one of its meetings. It also studies how it fits in with the requests included in the guidelines. It also approved with through a wide consensus. The report at this stage is also in the form of a preliminary report, because at some later point, it has to be revealed or depicted not in its entirety, with the focus on several points, in a meeting the EET has with the institution under evaluation, the IET and the head of the institution. The EET will have to take into account all the suggestions, comments or proposals for any likely changes in the content of the report, when they are open to or allow for arguments. It's right after this meeting that the EET drafts up the final form of the report. The report in two copies signed from all the members of the team is submitted to the Agency of Accreditation of Higher Education.

### III. RELATIONS BETWEEN THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION GROUP AND HEI, INTERNAL EVALUATION GROUP AND AAHE

The very basis for establishing the relations among actors in the evaluation and accreditation process is transparency, mutual respect and cooperation and help provided.

External Evaluation serves as an instrument through the AAHE exercises its own responsibility which has to make sure that the Institutions of Higher Education offer a high-quality education in compliance with the established standards. Through both the External Report and the internal one it helps anyone gain a better idea of the status of Higher Education. It also helps the beneficiaries of education be providing them with information on the status of higher education.

The relations of the External Evaluation Team with the AAHE are based on the contract compiled among the parties in which the EVT expresses its own commitment to depict an objective, a fair and transparent report for all findings that relate to the quality of services against the relevant funding and all other forms of assistance provided by the AAHE. Down at the core these relations are firmly based on the service that AAHE determines in the conditions laid out in the contract and which are regulated in it.

There are sound working relations between the External Evaluation Team and the HEI. The interests of both the HEI and the EET converge on making sure that all else is reported in a full and concise fashion, in a fairly transparent and objective way. In order to attain such a goal the HEI offers all the help it can to the EET and the EET keeps some very good ethical relations in all the contacts it establishes with the HEI personnel. The EET is by no means an auditing or strictly speaking a group with controlling powers attached to it. It does not have any purpose as to decide the destiny of the institution. Its role as a fact-gathering team defines for itself an objective and ethical role.

There are no institutional relations between the External Evaluation Team and the internal one. These are groups that act independently of each other. They do have the same mission, but they are established by different institutions and do reflect different interests. The establishment of such groups enables the increase of the objectivity level of the findings for the quality of the academic processes at the HEI. Being that there are not any impediments for the members of one group to put their heads together with members of the other group, because the cooperation between the two groups of evaluation, the internal and external ones, is fundamental to the real status of the institution. The idea of acting together and in unison, through the self-evaluation and the external expertise, the considerations in connection to the four elements mentioned above ( the SWOT analysis), will constitute the core of the recommendations which are to be included at a later stage in the Final Report of Evaluation compiled by the AAHE.

## IV. THE FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

With the submission or delivery of the External Evaluation Report, the Agency of Accreditation of Higher Education develops the Final Evaluation Report. The core of this report consists mainly of the considerations in terms of the four afore-mentioned elements (SWOT analysis). This report is done based on the External Evaluation Report, but you can easily find in it other opinions and views collected by the first contacts we have established with the unit. You can ultimately find in it the Continuation Plan of Evaluation (CPE), with all the deadlines overtly laid out, according to which the AAHE follows closely the unit or the program in question.

This report is largely considered to be a comparative review of the two reports where special stress is laid on identifying the four constituent elements of the SWOT analysis as it is mentioned above.

**Strength:** this part of the report describes in some detail the most significant achievements of the Higher Education Institution (HEI) in terms of the academic quality;

**Weaknesses:** This part of the report describes the most problematic issues facing HEIs in terms of academic quality.

**Opportunities:** this part of the report describes the opportunities of HEIs, their use to the best of advantages to which the ever continues increase of the academic quality is linked.

**Threats:** this part of the report describes the risks that may be posed to HEIs in terms of academic quality.

A tiny section of this report is made up of several contradictory findings, depreciations for the findings or other elements of the evaluation report as well as proposals and suggestions collected in the course of discussions held with HEIs during the whole evaluation process.

The last part of the final evaluation report consists of the list of recommendations for HEIs and for the AC, the deadlines for meeting each of the recommendations as well as the evaluation plan of carrying out the recommendations which are mirrored in the Continuation Evaluation Plan. This report is submitted for further consideration to the AC and upon this approval of the latter it takes on the institutional value of an official document.

## V. ACCREDITATION

When evaluation takes place within the frame of a periodic evaluation and accreditation process, the final Report of Evaluation is submitted to the Accreditation Council, which, based on all of the evaluation reports and documentation presented, adopts its own attitude and issues the respective recommendation and proposals, which at some later point take on the final shape and are to be executed by MOES and/ or (as the case might present itself) the Council of Ministers. The Accreditation Council is in a position to pass a ruling on the way how the evaluation in question is to be released.

Decision, on the basis of any case presented, could be: It's accredited (YES), Not Accredited (No), or Accredited under condition. When the final decision is to be effected, HEI is given a certain amount of time in order for it to adopt the proper measures, and after this period (which is always shorter than the time for the validity of such an accreditation) it is re-evaluated in order to verify the procedure of meeting all recommendations. If they are not properly met in the requested timeline, then a decision not in the affirmative is made.

At the end of the evaluation and accreditation process, AAHE is still bound by obligation to present the Final Evaluation Report and Recommendations and Proposals of the CA to the HEI that was evaluated and makes the publication according to the decision made by the CA on that evaluation.

**September, 2005**

For authors:

**Prof. Ass. Dhurata Bozo**, biologist by profession, an established professor with 20 years of experience in teaching at the Faculty of Natural Sciences, University of Tirana. As of 2003, she has been the Director of Higher Education Accreditation Agency.

**Prof. Ass. Mimoza Hafizi**, physicist, is a professor at the Faculty of Natural Sciences, University of Tirana. She has been one of the founding women of the Accreditation System in our country since 1999. As of February 2004, she has been acting as the deputy head of the Accreditation Council.

**Prof. Adem Tamo**, psychologist, is a professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tirana. He has got quite an extensive and rich experience in the field of Evaluation of Quality at Higher Education.

Translated by: Arian SHUMELI