

**ROMANIAN AGENCY FOR QUALITY
ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION
(ARACIS)**

**CODE
OF GOOD
PRACTICE
FOR**

**The Quality Assurance Departments within
Romanian Higher Education Institutions**



Bucharest, 2008

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Introduction

The Code of Good Practice for the Quality Assurance Departments within Higher Education institutions in Romania was drafted as an output of the project entitled „Network for Higher Education Quality: NEQ”, implemented by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - ARACIS, represented by: professor Mihai Aristotel Ungureanu - project coordinator, professor Mircea Ivănescu, professor Radu Mircea Damian, professor Adrian Lungu, professor Adrian Bodi, professor Ioan Ianoș, professor Mihai Coman, professor Iordan Petrescu, professor Mircea Alămoreanu, professor Lucian Ciolan and experts Oana Sârbu, Mihaela Băjenaru and Bogdan Florian, together with the Dutch Inspectorate for Education, represented by experts Obe de Vries and Peter van den Eijnde. Representatives of 14 Romanian higher education institutions were also coopted within this project, as pilot phase: „George Bacovia“ University of Bacău, North University of Baia Mare, „Transilvania“ University of Brașov, Academy of Economical Studies of Bucharest, „Nicolae Titulescu“ University of Bucharest, University for Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine of Cluj-Napoca, „Bogdan Vodă“ University of Cluj-Napoca, „Ovidius“ University of Constanța, University of Craiova, „Gr. T. Popa“ Medicine and Pharmacy University of Iași, „Ghe. Asachi“ Technical University of Iași, „Drăgan“ European University of Lugoj, „Emanuel“ University of Oradea and „Politehnica“ University of Timișoara.

A first version of the CODE was discussed at the workshop organized in Bucharest, within the Matra project, on March 26-28, 2008, when the IT network facilitating communication between ARACIS and universities was started and begun contributing to the harmonisation of standards, procedures and university practices in Romania, with the ones of the European Higher Education Area.

An improved version of the CODE was developed at the NEQ seminar held in Bucharest on May 5 -10, 2008. The revised sections of the CODE were structured on principles and explanatory elements aiming at facilitating the implementation of the quality assurance mechanisms in every higher education institution in accordance with the imposed standards, while respecting their own specificity, strategy and internal/external policies.

The CODE was presented, analyzed and adopted within the final conference of the MATRA project organised in Bucharest, on September 8-9, 2008, with the participation of representatives of more than 80 accredited universities, as well as of the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth.

The CODE does not contain elements of legislation, being more of a guide for all higher education institutions accessing the NEQ, in their effort to implement an adequate quality assurance system; nevertheless, its provisions are harmonized with the legislation in force at the moment.



A. Study programmes design, approval, monitoring and review

A.1. Introduction

- Study programmes design is a complex process that must take into consideration the institution's strategy, mission, educational policies, as well as the national social and economic objectives, the local aspirations and demand, the changes imposed by QA review processes and internal/external evaluations.
- The process of designing a study programme starts from its objectives, reflected in the structure of the curricula. The programme can contain modules or sections, and should offer flexibility in defining educational pathways for students.
- Study programmes design is a creative, permanently innovative activity.

A.2. Principles:

- ❖ The institution should take on full responsibility for the standards and the quality of the procedures involved in:
 - the design of study programmes (hereinafter called programmes);
 - the approval of programmes;
 - the monitoring and review of programmes.
- ❖ Monitoring and review of programmes should be a priority of the academic management of the institution.
- ❖ In designing a programme, the institution should take into consideration the following:
 - the national qualifications framework and the employers' professional requirements;
 - National and European legislation;

- the compatibility of the programme with the institution's strategy and its mission statement;
 - the existing human and physical resources;
 - the existence of academic relations with other institutions that might further enhance the program;
 - The level of risk posed for the existing resources of the institution by the approval and revision of the programme.
- ❖ The university Senate has full responsibility for defining, maintaining and ensuring quality standards for any programme provided. This responsibility can be delegated or transferred to academic entities (teams) within the institution.
- ❖ It is very important that the responsibility, mission and authority of such teams should be well defined so that the academic staff and students should perfectly understand the entire mechanism, the stages of the procedures and the individual and collective responsibility assumed.
- ❖ In order to ensure the objectivity of the approval and review process, the institution should use external evaluation. This external participation in the programme evaluation should determine:
- objectivity and independence of the monitoring programme;
 - cooperation with other institutions involved in the programme development;
 - objective evaluation of the academic potential of the institution;
 - objective evaluation of other resources of the institution in substantiating the programme;
 - programme accessibility for the institution's students;
 - to what extent the Bachelor programme can be continued through Master's and Doctoral study programmes;
 - involvement of external evaluators which should be correlated to the scale and complexity of the programme.

- ❖ The approval, monitoring and review procedures should be clearly described and communicated to everyone involved, teaching staff and students alike. The steps of the approval or review procedures, as well as the responsibilities should be clearly specified.



A.3. Design:

- The institutions should publish the principles underlying the initiation, design and development of the programme. These should include:
 - the institution's mission statement;
 - the goal of the programme;
 - the level of the programme and its position within the national qualifications framework;
 - external reference points;
 - students' role in the programme design and development;
 - the associated curriculum and the growth degree of the information provided;
 - the quality standards progressively imposed upon the training level;
 - the opportunities offered to the student upon programme graduation;
 - the balance between the theoretical and practical aspects of the programme;
 - the coherence of the program; the logical structure of the curriculum, enabling the programme to reach its objectives;
 - the number of credits obtained after attending the programme
 - the modular structure of the programme. To what extent, having gone through a module, the programme allows for access to other modules
 - the degree granted;

- to what extent is the knowledge acquired as a result of following the programme going to impact the student's career;
- the necessary resources for programme development;
- to what extent the existing resources allow the program to reach the desired quality standards;
- to what extent training within the programme determines an increase in the student's intellectual level, to what extent are his/her capacities, preferences and abilities increased.

A.4. Approval:

- ◆ The institution should demonstrate that the decisions in favour of approving a programme are exclusively grounded on its observance of academic standards and on training opportunities provided to students.
- ◆ The approval of the programme involves taking into account the following elements:
 - principles that formed the basis for the programme design;
 - defining the standards imposed by the level of the title and diploma awarded;
 - programme curriculum and credit points associated;
 - the resources needed for the programme development;
 - the anticipated demand for the programme; both students' and labour market demand is estimated;
 - the correspondence between the programme curriculum and scientific research in the field;
 - the opportunities offered by the programme;
 - the period of time for which the programme approval is valid.
- ◆ The final decision on the programme approval is made by the Senate of the institution or by a delegated academic entity, independent of the academic department that has proposed the program.

A.5. Monitoring and review:

- ▶ The institutions must have the necessary means for the programmes design, approval, monitoring and review. During this process the following should be taken into account:
 - benefits obtained by the institution, academic staff and students by introducing new programmes;
 - to what extent the new programme contributes to a better integration of graduates into the labour market;
 - to what extent the new programme facilitates student's access to knowledge;
 - the risk assumed by the institution by extending its programmes portfolio with this new programme.

- ▶ The institution must ensure periodical programme monitoring, so as to:
 - ensure that the programme remains valid, according to the scientific developments and the practical implementation requirements;
 - allow for an evaluation of the students' outputs (employee satisfaction, successful employment etc.);
 - continuously evaluate the curriculum;
 - ensure that the recommendations made following the evaluations are implemented.

- ▶ Other factors to be taken into consideration along the process:
 - reports of external evaluators;
 - reports of accreditation committees;
 - feedback from students and the teaching staff;
 - feedback from the employers.

- ▶ Institutions should periodically publish critical elements concerning the validity and relevance of the programmes offered.

- ▶ In this process, the institutions will consider the following:
 - effects of changes in labour market;
 - continuity of the technical and academic resources of the institution

- modifying directions of current research associated with the programme field
 - changes in students' requests
 - changes in employers' requests
 - students' and graduates' feedback.
- In case a programme is cancelled, the decision will be communicated to the teaching staff and the students enrolled in the program, and all the necessary actions will be undertaken in order to transfer the students to other programmes or to allow them to complete their studies.



B. Master's and Doctoral study programmes

B.1. Introduction:

- Institutions may provide Master's and Doctoral study programmes only if they have accredited undergraduate programmes in that field.
- Institutions are responsible for Master's and Doctoral study standards and programmes.
- Institutions have the legal right to implement, monitor and review the set of regulations that define the quality of Master's and Doctoral study programmes.
- These rules should clarify:
 - the entry requirements for these programmes
 - academic and procedural requirements imposed on the course of the programme;
 - duration of studies and qualitative criteria required for completion of studies.

B.2. Principles:

- ❖ Research is an important component of Master's and Doctoral study programmes. The quality of research can be assessed through:
 - articles, books, monographs, publications, participation to conferences;
 - research staff (teaching staff and students);
 - transfer of knowledge and applications of research in the practical field, in the social, economic and industrial fields.
- ❖ The admission procedures, standards and criteria for such programmes should be clear, public and thoroughly transparent.

- ❖ The institution should ensure the necessary academic infrastructure for the programme. This includes:
 - the existence of teaching staff and high quality researchers;
 - the existence of doctoral supervisors (for research-oriented programmes);
 - the existence of a right ratio between the number of students and the number of teaching staff;
 - the existence of a technical infrastructure for research, accessible to students;
 - students' direct access to IT equipment, electronic library and other electronic information means;
 - close links with social and economic environment so that research results can be implemented;
 - availability of external financing solutions for the programme development.

- ❖ The institution should ensure a "research culture" within the programme, with full participation of students. They should be permanently encouraged by publication of results, participation in seminars and workshops, the granting of diplomas or other types of recognition etc.

- ❖ The institution shall appoint scientific/theme supervisors in order to guide students throughout the programme. Both supervisors and students shall be communicated their responsibilities by means of written regulations.



- ❖ Students' assessment process is continually monitored throughout the programme.

- ❖ Throughout the programme, institutions should ensure the necessary opportunities for students, especially with regards to research. Institutions

should set up mechanisms to ensure permanent and constructive feedback of Master's and Doctoral study programmes from employers and students.

- ❖ Institutions shall define criteria for the academic standards of Master's and Doctoral study programmes. These shall include relevant provisions especially for the research component and will be permanently revised and communicated to students and the teaching staff.
- ❖ The institutions shall provide students:
 - full information on the programme curriculum;
 - the number of credit points granted for each module / semester of the programme;
 - the monitoring of learning and research activity;
 - procedures for completion of each semester, for the disciplines included in the curriculum;
 - conditions for obtaining re-assessment in a certain stage of unsatisfactory appraisals;
 - ways to present the final thesis.
- ❖ The institution shall ensure that students have endorsed their responsibilities under the programme. These include:
 - responsibility for their professional development;
 - maintaining contact with the researchers and academic body, throughout the duration of the programme;
 - compliance with the deadlines imposed for activities required under the programme;
 - understanding of the rules of the institution, research ethics, intellectual property rights etc.
- ❖ The institution shall provide all the necessary information to the students for better understanding of the academic environment:
 - general information about the institution;
 - information about the portfolio of Master's and Doctoral study programmes provided;
 - full information about the chosen programme;

- the code of research ethics with the internal regulations of the institution;
 - social and counselling services available to students;
 - information on health insurance;
 - information on health and safety;
 - possible involvement in social activities.
- ❖ In order to ensure students' access to the best training and research facilities and expertise, it is recommended that programmes should be initiated in partnerships with other universities, with research institutes and innovative companies. These may follow models recommended by the Bologna Process, European Institutes of Innovation and Technology (E.I.T.) and other similar initiatives.
- ❖ The institution shall communicate students:
- the initial objectives of research and the specific requirements imposed by the research topic approached (research agreement);
 - stages and phases stipulated by the research agreement;
 - how research is monitored;
 - how research is finalised.
- ❖ The evaluation of research standards must be rigorous and transparent. Possible students' assessment instruments are: oral examinations, written tests and project evaluation.
- ❖ Assessment procedures shall be communicated to all parties involved: students, supervisors and examiners.
- ❖ A special mechanism will analyse all students' appeals and observations regarding the quality of research, the assessment system and the technical support.



❖ The institution is solely responsible for diplomas and degrees awarded upon completion of these programmes.

❖ The institution shall provide students with information on the degree and diploma awarded upon completion of the programme.



C. Students assessment

C.1. Introduction:

- Assessment is the process whereby students' individual knowledge, understanding and skills are appraised. Assessment can be conducted as follows:
 - ongoing assessment of knowledge, understanding and skills; alongside knowledge and skills, attitudes are fundamental components of the results of the teaching process. Study programmes should be evaluated from the perspective of shaping attitudes consistent with the requirements of employers and society;
 - the assessment results are expressed by means of grading in order to reflect the performance level attained by the student.
- The manner in which the student is assessed is a critical part of the learning process. Good assessment is accomplished if, upon completion of a study programme or module, the student can demonstrate the extent to which s/he has acquired the expected knowledge and learning outcomes.

C.2. Principles:

- ❖ Higher education institutions are the only academic entities enabled to design and use students' assessment standards:
 - they design, approve, monitor and review students' assessment strategies;
 - they rigorously implement the assessment strategies and methods allowing for the appraisal of the student's level of learning;
 - they appreciate which academic standards can be maintained following the assessment strategy adopted and which standards can be eliminated;
 - they determine the frequency and timeliness of the assessment procedures: annual, semestrial or ongoing throughout the academic year;

- they appreciate to what extent the assessment mechanism correctly reflects students' capacity to reach the level of knowledge imposed according to the desired performance standards. This appraisal may involve assessment on a given period (a year of study or having gone through a module) or upon completion of the programme;
 - they impose a mechanism to permanently monitor the training activity and carry a permanent comparison with the imposed standards.
- ❖ Higher education institutions shall publish the principles and procedures underpinning students' assessment:
- assessment principles and procedures should be clear, accurate, accessible to the teaching staff and students, and the assessment system should ensure equitable treatment of all students, eliminating the subjectivism, ensuring impartiality of assessment;
 - the scoring system should be selected to ensure that the appraisals awarded reflect as accurate as possible students' capacity to acquire knowledge and skills and the extent to which the level reached matches the standards imposed;
 - the assessment climate in which the assessment is carried out must be untense, characterised by academic spirit, with the sole purpose of fair student assessment.
- ❖ Higher education institutions should encourage evaluation practices which support effective and continuing training (learning):
- students' assessment technique must take into account the level of knowledge, understanding and skills acquired;
 - it is necessary to introduce a system of getting feedback on the activities determined by how they are reflected in the improvement of the level of knowledge;
 - the assessment system should consider any scientific outcomes attained by the student in the field he/she is being assessed;
 - if the programmes assessed involve practical activities (laboratory activities, projects, practical work, etc.) their weight in the assessment decision should be reflected accordingly;

- assessment systems should encourage performance-orientation in students.
- ❖ Higher education institutions shall make public the assessment committees and their specific procedures:
 - assessment commissions must be aware that their decisions are not contrary to procedures, strategies and regulations approved at institutional level;
 - if students' assessment is carried out on several levels the duties of these commissions must be precisely identified on each level so that the final result may reflect correctly students' level of knowledge;
 - in order to ensure an objective assessment it is recommended that an external evaluator should be included in the commission;
 - in order to eliminate a potential conflict of interests, the members of the commissions must state that they have no personal interests (kinship relation) towards the students assessed;
 - after each assessment, the decisions reached by the commissions must be recorded, becoming official documents certifying students' level of knowledge.
- ❖ Higher education institutions should ensure rigorous, objective and flexible assessment and maintain the necessary level of security for the assessment:
 - definition of clear and strict procedures is key to ensuring proper assessment of students;
 - institutions must make public facilities available to students with certain health problems;
 - assessment procedures must specify precisely the time allocated for the assessment, which is the deadline for submitting a paper (project), penalties if the specified deadline is not respected;
 - conditions of re-assessment if, in a first phase, the appraisal was unsatisfactory.
- ❖ Time allocated for assessment and its timetable correspond to the level of assessment and the programme being assessed.

- ❖ Scoring and appraisal mechanisms are transparent:
 - the levels of knowledge or research performance related to certain assessment appraisals must be rigorously established. They should reflect objectivity, lack of subjectivity of the evaluation committees. The delimitations between levels must be properly defined to avoid any ambiguities;
 - a more uniform treatment of these levels is recommended at department level;
 - the levels leading to awards or special recognition shall be clearly defined.

- ❖ Higher education institutions should clearly implement the rules and procedures for progress from one module or programme to a higher one:
 - the institutions shall clearly specify the number of credit points obtained after completion of the programme or having gone through a module of the programme;
 - the institution shall specify the educational provision after completion of each module or programme;
 - the institution shall specify to the student to what extent failure to obtain credit points for one module (programme) allow for the continuation of the programme, for transfer to another programme or prevent him/her from continuing with the programme;
 - the institution shall specify the educational provision after completion of the Bachelor programme;
 - in case of transfer from one institution to another within the same programme or a similar one, the recognised appraisals, credit points and possibilities to continue studies shall be specified.

- ❖ Higher education institutions should allow student feedback on assessment, in order to find the best assessment solutions and allow for continuing improvement, over time, of the assessment procedures.

- ❖ Higher education establishments should have in place training programmes for assessors and ensure that they are competent and fully understand their role and responsibilities.

- ❖ If the training is provided in a certain language, the assessment shall be performed in the same language.

- ❖ Higher education institutions shall clearly specify information on the imposed criteria and standards, both to student and assessors.
 - students shall have access to any information on assessment techniques and criteria. They should be accessible through the website or any other media;
 - information on the evaluation shall be submitted in a timely manner so that students, for any level of assessment, have the time to understand procedures and to become familiar with them;
 - departments involved in assessment should advise students on the assessment techniques and procedures used.

- ❖ Higher education institutions should periodically review the assessment rules, in order to ensure that they meet the expected outcomes.
 - students' assessment rules should reflect the legislation amendments or changes in the labour market demand;
 - any change brought to the assessment rules should be discussed in the academic community and be agreed upon, with students' participation.

- ❖ Students should display a correct academic conduct during assessment and be aware of their responsibilities:
 - the institution should clearly define improper conduct in an assessment procedure;
 - students need to be informed about the consequences of improper conduct: plagiarism, fraud, etc.

- ❖ Higher education institutions must ensure that the assessment documents are immediately registered, and the relevant decisions are made public or posted as soon as possible:

- the institution should specify precisely the responsibilities of staff in charge with collecting, verification and registration of assessment decisions;
- the institution should ensure the protection of electronically stored data, eliminating any possibility to lose, alter or modify information;
- the institution should specify possibilities of access to the outcomes of the student assessment.



D. Career education and social and human integration

D.1. Introduction:

- Career education is defined as the system of processes, facilities and activities meant to prepare the students to make the best decisions for their future career, considering the present or perspective conditions of the labour market.
- This component of the CODE allows higher education institutions to inform students on perspectives for their future career.
- The strategy of the institution should be well adapted to the changes and requirements of the labour market:
 - labour market is constantly changing and it is extremely important for the institution to give students, as much as possible, a complete picture of these developments;
 - the institution strategy should focus on fostering those abilities that make students adaptable to new demands of the labour market.
- The higher education institution should develop students' capacity of improving their skills to meet external requirements, their capacity of forging opportunities and of being prepared for lifelong learning.
- In identifying adjustments to society's needs, an important role is played by an adequate information system, which would highlight both the requirements of a future career, and the resources provided by the institution in order to fulfil these requirements.
- Training the students for their future careers should be an integrated, coherent and unitary solution, which involves both the institution's training

strategy and the human factor, academic departments, tutoring staff, hiring departments and related services.

- The higher education institutions should have a clear, well-documented, accessible strategy on career education, related information and student guidance options.
- Within the institution, a career orientation department (COD) should be set up to provide information and guidance for students.
- This strategy should be unbiased, focused on the individual, confidential, collaborative, accessible and compliant with institutional policies.
- This strategy should be included within the current quality assessment procedures.
- The higher education institution should check the extent to which the career education strategy enables graduates to adjust more easily to employers' requirements.
- At institutional level, the institution should provide mechanisms for the academic departments to contribute to students' career education. The institution may encourage the inclusion within the academic curriculum of courses on professional deontology exemplifying specific issues of integration on the labour market.
- Throughout their study cycle, students should continuously receive information on existing job offers. This information may still be conveyed after students' graduation from the respective higher education institution.
- The higher education institution should clearly indicate the students the necessary knowledge and skills to attain a future career.
- The institution must continuously promote the cooperation between career education departments and employers.

- The institution should check to what extent the COD permanently takes into consideration the developments on the labour market and the opportunities it provides, in order to supply better offers to the graduates.
- The institution should promote an information network among the potential beneficiaries, by using the Alumni associations.
- The higher education institution should check that all COD staff has the necessary qualities, skills and knowledge in order to perform effectively the department's tasks.
- The services provided by COD should be continuously monitored by the Senate of the institution.
- COD should receive information from employers on graduates' integration on the labour market. Based on that information, the COD strategy should be permanently adjusted and adapted.
- Institutions are responsible for the academic standards of the degrees offered; students and employers should be permanently informed on the degrees awarded and on the rights and obligations derived from them.



E. Admission

- The institution should have clear, consistent and well-defined policies and procedures for students' recruitment and admission.
- The institution's admission procedures should be published on the institution's website. These procedures should include both compulsory national regulations, as well as the specific elements of the university.
- Study programmes and the number of places granted by the institution each year, approved by the Senate of the institution, should be officially published approximately 6 months before the approved date of admission.
- In order to provide better information to future candidates, the institution should publish promotional materials, as clear and precise as possible, so as to provide sufficient information.
- The information provided should include both data about future training within the programme and about the opportunities forecasted on the labour market, after completion of their studies.
- Admission procedures should be transparent. The final results should be immediately published on the university website.
- The staff involved in the admission process must be perfectly aware of the institution's mechanisms and regulations. They must prove communication skills and represent the friendliest possible interface for the candidates.
- The institution should have information about the recruitment and admission processes. Based on this information, the admission strategy should be reviewed and adapted every year.
- The institution should have its own appeal-settling procedures.

F. Scientific research

F.1. Introduction

- This section of the CODE defines a set of procedures and regulations coordinating the research activity in the academic community, the manner its results are recorded and reported and subsequently disseminated, applied and used. These principles allow for checking the quality and integrity of results generated by research are cornerstones for ensuring good quality in research and also serve as benchmarks to identify "bad practices" of fraud and plagiarism.
- Scientific research represents a critical component of the academic environment.
- The research strategy within the educational institution is an essential part of the institutional strategic plan.
- The research strategy should reach a balance between fundamental and applied research.
- The research strategy is passed by the institution's Senate, and then made public.
- The institution has a Senate Commission that monitors and assesses research against the objectives proposed. The research report is presented annually to the Senate for approval.

F.2. Principles:

- ❖ The institution is responsible for ensuring the quality of the research process, a complex process which in addition to the quality of "research

itself" includes procedures on the management of funds allocated for research, funds from the public budget or from private or external sources.

- ❖ The university should require all members of the academic community to adhere to the highest standards of quality in research.

- ❖ Research activity involves observance of the following principles at institutional level:
 - *Honesty*: the researchers and the academic staff have a responsible attitude toward the other members, ensure accuracy of data obtained through research, do not generate conflicts, observe intellectual property rights over the findings, recognize the ownership of other teams' findings, do not accept plagiarism or piracy, do not undertake actions that would distort or negatively affect the peer-to-peer relations with the research team.
 - *Openness*: university fosters cooperation between universities and within the university, the exchange of ideas, and common capitalization on scientific findings without leading to conflicts over the intellectual ownership of the research findings. To that purpose, it is recommended to have all findings patented.
 - *Accountability*: each member of the academic community must promote accountability within research teams; they must disown forgery, fakes, and plagiarism, and contribute to a proper environment for the capitalising on the scientific potential. Each member of the community must assume responsibility for the findings of the research.
 - *Cooperation*: research teams should work as one; the entire team should be involved, and, according to the results, everyone should have the appropriate share in the published materials and other ways of capitalising on results or acquiring recognition.
 - *Integrity*: an irreproachable moral conduct should be assumed in the research activity. That requires special efforts in order to carefully check the findings obtained and published, and to eventually withdraw certain findings if they proved to be erroneous.

→ *Ethics*: the university should set up an Ethics Commission in order to monitor the implementation of the above principles for each research activity undertaken. In every institution there should be a *code of ethics* that defines the research practices and regulates human and animal experiments.

F.3. The research process

- ◆ In approaching a research topic, the teams involved should provide a clear analysis, a complete study of the project's success factors, the existing resources and the responsibilities of the team members.
- ◆ The team members should identify and declare any conflicts of interest of a legal, ethical, moral, financial, institutional, and personal or any other nature, so that it does not divert the team's activity.
- ◆ The research activity should observe academic ethics, in the sense that it must not, directly or indirectly, endanger people's health and life, and it must not lead to environmentally damaging activities.
- ◆ Within the research team it is critical to clearly establish responsibilities, both in terms of funding and in terms of capitalizing upon the results. Special emphasis should be placed on the publication of research findings.
- ◆ Research teams should get students interested and involved during all stages where they can bring competent contributions.
- ◆ The research team coordinator should continuously make sure that all the involved staff have the adequate level of training. He/she can organize training sessions.
- ◆ The research findings should be protected by patents, published in journals or presented at prestigious national and international conferences.

- ◆ The contribution of each team member should be well outlined, with the agreement of all other team members.
- ◆ In the context of a fair research climate in the institution, each author or co-author of a published work should also identify their own contribution, originality of their own effort in research or design. The practice of „honorary” authors or co-authors which involves nominated co-authors who do not have a substantial participation in research should be abandoned.
- ◆ All research projects undertaken within the institution should have the approval of the rector or of the head of the university’s research department.
- ◆ Doctoral programmes are part of the institution’s research plan.
- ◆ The institution promotes an international dimension of the scientific research. Researchers’ mobility grants, research contracts with international partners, international joint doctoral programmes, publication of results in internationally recognised journals, etc. are encouraged.
- ◆ The institution should report and assume only the results obtained by researchers who represent it and to take all measures to avoid double reporting. If within the team of research scientists there are also researchers from other institutions, each contribution which can be reported and for which institutions should be clearly specified.

F.4. Research resources

- Contract funding can be obtained from the budget resources of the Ministry of Education and Research, from internal resources or from research grant awards from national and international donors.
- Funding can be obtained from civil society funds, private companies or foundations.

- The university can manage bequeathed wills, usufructs and donations made with the express intent of promoting knowledge, in compliance with the legislation in force.



Glossary

(L. Vlăsceanu, L. Grünberg, Dan Pârlea - *Quality Assurance and Accreditation: a glossary of basic terms and definitions*)

ACCREDITATION:

1. The process by which a (non-)governmental or private body evaluates the quality of a higher education institution as a whole or of a specific educational programme in order to formally recognize it as having met certain predetermined minimal criteria or standards. The result of this process is usually the award of a status (a yes/no decision), of a recognition, and sometimes of a license to operate within a time-limited validity. The process may imply initial and periodic self-review and external evaluation. The accreditation process generally involves three steps, each having specific activities: (i) a self-assessment process conducted by the faculty, the administrators, and the staff of the institution or academic programme, resulting in a report that takes as its reference the set of standards and criteria of the accrediting body; (ii) a study visit, conducted by a team of peers, selected by the accrediting organization, who review the evidence, visit the premises, and interview the academic and administrative staff, then draft an evaluation report, including a recommendation to the commission of the accrediting body; (iii) examination by the commission of the evidence and recommendation based on the given set of quality criteria and resulting in a final judgment and the communication of the formal decision to the institution and other stakeholders, as appropriate.
2. The instrument by which one institution, without its own degree awarding powers or which chooses not to use its awarding powers, gains wider authority to awards, and/or gains recognition of its qualifications by another competent authority and the right to exercise powers and responsibility for academic decisions. This authority might be the State; a government agency; or another domestic or foreign higher education institution.

ASSESSMENT:

1. The process of the systematic gathering, quantifying, and using of information in view of judging the effectiveness of training and the adequacy of the study programme of a higher education institution as a whole (institutional assessment) or of its educational programmes (programme assessment). It implies the evaluation of the core activities of the higher education institution (quantitative and qualitative evidence of educational activities and research outcomes). Assessment is necessary in order to validate a formal accreditation decision, but it does not necessarily lead to an accreditation outcome.
2. A technically designed process for evaluating student learning outcomes and for improving student learning and development as well as teaching effectiveness.

Assessment of individual qualifications: The formal written appraisal or evaluation of qualifications of an individual by a competent authority in order to grant him/her recognition for academic and/or professional further use.

AUDIT:

The process of reviewing an institution or a programme that is primarily focused on the accountability of latter, evaluating/determining if the stated aims and objectives (in terms of curriculum, staff, infrastructure, etc.) are met. In the United Kingdom, when the audit is an internal institutional process it is called (starting with 2002) “institutional review” process.

Institutional Audit/Institutional review: An evidence-based process carried out through peer review that investigates the procedures and the mechanisms by which an institution ensures its quality assurance and quality enhancement. When it specifically addresses the final responsibility for the management of quality and standards that rests with an institution as a whole, the process is called an institutional review.

Audit Report/Evaluation Report/Assessment Report: (i) The document prepared following a quality assessment peer review team site visit that is generally focused on institutional quality, academic standards, learning infrastructure, and staffing. The report about an institution describes the quality assurance (QA) arrangements of the institution and the effects of these arrangements on the quality of its programmes. The audit report is made available to the institution, first in draft form for initial comments, and then in its final, official form. It contains, among other things, the description of the methodology of the audit, the findings, the conclusions of the auditors, and various appendices listing the questions asked. In Europe, the document is often called an “evaluation report” or an “assessment report”. (ii) Such a report may also be prepared about an accreditation agency, describing its quality assurance arrangements and the effect of these arrangements on the quality of the programmes in the institutions for which it is responsible.

Internal Audit: There are currently three main modes for the provision of internal audit within higher education: (i) in-house teams employed as staff members by the respective institutions; (ii) audit consortia (which may provide services to a number of clients both within and outside the sector); and (iii) accountancy firms that undertake internal audits.

Management Audit: A management audit reviews the general management, policy, and policy-making of a given institution.

BEST PRACTICE:

A method or an innovative process involving a range of safe and reasonable practices resulting in the improved performance of a higher education institution or programme, usually recognized as “best” by other peer organizations. A best practice does not necessarily represent an absolute, ultimate example or pattern whose application guarantees the improved performance of a higher education institution or programme; rather, it identifies the best approach to a specific situation, as institutions and programmes vary greatly in constituencies and scope.

CERTIFICATION:

The process by which an agency or an association acknowledges the achievement of established quality standards and usually grants certain privileges to the target individual (student or teacher).

CODE OF PRACTICE:

A Code of Practice is a non-binding document that describes the minimum audit requirements and those that are considered to reveal a practice worthy of consideration.

A Code identifies a comprehensive series of system-wide expected conduct covering matters relating to the management of academic quality and standards in higher education. It provides an authoritative reference point for institutions as they consciously, actively, and systematically assure the academic quality and standards of their programmes, awards, and qualifications. A Code assumes that, taking into account nationally agreed upon principles and practices, each institution has its own systems for independent verification both of its quality and standards and of the effectiveness of its quality assurance systems. In developing a Code, extensive advice is sought from a range of knowledgeable practitioners.

COMPETENCIES:

A specific and measurable pattern of behaviours and knowledge that generates or predicts a high performance level in a given position or context of responsibilities. They account for the identification and application of ideas and solutions in order to solve problems with maximum efficiency and minimum use of resources.

Cognitive competencies: Skills that contribute to the objectives of individual knowledge development, also serving as individual protective factors contributing to successful adaptation. These may include competencies like: reasoning, information-gathering, information analysis, systems-thinking and pattern recognition, theory building, problem-solving, decision-making, planning and goal-setting.

Attitudinal competencies: Actions, values and norms that indicate and generate high performance, and also show that the different types of knowledge have been effectively developed by the subject.

Professional competencies: An individual's specialized knowledge of information sources, access, technology, services, and management, and the ability to critically and effectively evaluate, filter and use this knowledge in order to successfully accomplish specific assignments.

CREDITS:

A credit is an agreed upon quantified means of expressing the level of learning based on the achievement of learning outcomes and their associated workloads. Generally, once gained, credit cannot be lost. Credit may have a relative value (as the case when they were first introduced) or absolute value (when they made the shift to an accumulation system - no longer calculated on an ad hoc proportional basis but on the basis of officially recognized criteria - that is the official length of a degree programme or unit).

Accumulation of Study Credits: Set credits gained by a student in a given higher education institution may be recognized in another institution, depending upon the commonality in terms of level and context. Thus, study credits are considered as transferable.

ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System): The main transparency tool for the recognition of study periods, ECTS is a student-centred system based on the student workload required to achieve the objectives of a programme of study specified in terms of learning and competencies to be acquired. As a European Community project initially established under the ERASMUS Programme (1988-1995) ECTS was developed more broadly between 1995-1999 under the higher education component of the SOCRATES Programme, ERASMUS, and proved to be an effective tool for creating curricular transparency and facilitating academic recognition. The activity of ECTS is two-fold: on the one hand, it guarantees academic recognition to students of studies completed abroad and simultaneously enables studies abroad; on the other hand, it provides higher education institutions with curricular transparency by offering detailed information regarding the respective curricula and their relevance for earned degrees and by enabling higher education institutions to preserve their autonomy and responsibility for all decisions regarding student achievement. The Bologna Declaration takes ECTS as the common framework for curriculum design and student mobility within the envisaged European Higher Education Area.

CRITERIA:

Checkpoints or benchmarks determining the attainment of certain objectives and/or standards. Criteria describe to a certain degree of detail the characteristics of the requirements and conditions to be met (in order to meet a standard) and therefore provide the (quantitative and qualitative) basis on which an evaluative conclusion is drawn.

Performance Criteria: Checkpoints or benchmarks that are used to judge the attainment of performance standards. As qualities, characteristics, or dimensions of a standard for student performance, they indicate how well students meet expectations of what they should know and be able to do, as expressed by varying gradients of success by (scoring) rubrics or by grades.

CULTURE OF EVIDENCE:

As it relates to institutional quality culture, the culture of evidence is a mindset acquired in a higher education institution and based on clear ethical values, principles, and rules, which consists of the self-evaluation of its learning outcomes, engaging the teaching staff and the academic administration in a thoughtful, regular collection, selection, and use of relevant institutional performance indicators, in order to inform and prove, whenever (and to whomever) necessary, that it is doing well in specific areas (e.g. institutional planning, decision-making, quality, etc.) and for the purpose of improving its learning and teaching outcomes. The “culture of evidence” (as opposed to “a culture of professional tradition and trust”) is the empirical basis for the quality culture of a higher education institution. As formulated within the new WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges) standards, the culture of evidence requested from a higher education institution implies that the institution is encouraged to be able to provide empirical data proving the consistency of its own mission.

DESCRIPTOR (LEVEL):

Level descriptors are statements that provide a broad indication of learning relevant to the achievement of a particular level, describing the characteristics and context of learning expected at that level. They are designed to support the review of specified learning outcomes and assessment criteria in order to develop particular modules and units and to assign credits at the appropriate level.

Descriptors (Qualification): Qualification descriptors are statements that set out the outcomes of principal higher education qualifications at given levels (usually of an awarded degree) and demonstrate the nature of change between levels. At some levels, there may be more than one type of qualification. The first part of a qualification descriptor (of particular interest to those designing, approving, and reviewing academic programmes) is a statement regarding outcomes, i.e. the achievement of a student that he or she should be able to demonstrate for the award of the qualification. The second part (of particular interest to employers) is a statement of the wider abilities that the typical student could be expected to have developed. Upon periodical review of the existing qualification descriptors and in light of the development of other points of reference, such as benchmark statements, additional qualification descriptors at each level are elaborated. In view of the creation of the European Higher Education Area, a set of descriptors known as the 'Dublin Descriptors' was developed by an international group of higher education experts (Joint Quality Initiative) and serves as reference for a number of national quality assurance agencies, policy makers and specialists throughout Europe. The Dublin Descriptors seek to identify the nature of a qualification as a whole, without being prescriptive or exhaustive or imposing a specific threshold.

EFFECTIVENESS (EDUCATIONAL):

An output of specific analyses (e.g. the WASC Educational Effectiveness Review or its Reports on Institutional Effectiveness) that measure (the quality of) the achievement of a specific educational goal or the degree to which a higher education institution can be expected to achieve specific requirements. It is different from efficiency, which is measured by the volume of output or input used. As a primary measure of success of a programme or of a higher education institution, clear indicators, meaningful information, and evidence best reflecting institutional effectiveness with respect to student learning and academic achievement have to be gathered through various procedures (inspection, observation, site visits, etc.). Engaging in the measurement of educational effectiveness creates a value-added process through quality assurance and accreditation reviews and contributes to building, within the institution, a culture of evidence.

EFFICIENCY (EDUCATIONAL):

An ability to perform well or to achieve a result without waste of resources, effort, time, or funds (using the smallest quantity of resources possible). Educational efficiency can be measured in physical terms (technical efficiency) or in terms of cost (economic efficiency). Increased educational efficiency is achieved when the same amount and standard of educational services are produced at a low cost, if a more useful educational activity is substituted for a less useful one at the same cost, or if unnecessary educational activities

are eliminated. A programme or a higher education institution may be efficiently managed, but not effective in achieving its mission, goals, or objectives.

EVALUATION:

The general process of a systematic and critical analysis leading to judgments and recommendations regarding the quality of a higher education institution or a programme. An evaluation is carried out through internal or external procedures. In the United Kingdom, evaluation is also called review.

External Evaluation: The process whereby a specialized agency collects data, information, and evidence about an institution, a particular unit of a given institution, or a core activity of an institution, in order to make a statement about its quality. External evaluation is carried out by a team of external experts, peers, or inspectors, and usually requires three distinct operations: i.) an analysis of a self-study report; ii.) a site visit; and iii.) the drafting of an evaluation report.

Internal Evaluation/Self-evaluation: The process of self-evaluation consists of the systematic collection of administrative data, the questioning of students and graduates, and the holding of moderated interviews with lecturers and students, resulting in a self-study report. Self-evaluation is a collective institutional reflection and an opportunity for quality enhancement. The resulting report further serves to provide information for the review team in charge of the external evaluation.

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION/ORGANIZATION (HEI):

An educational body which carries out higher education activities based on legally approved study programmes.

Any higher education organization must follow an external evaluation procedure in order to assess its quality and to acquire the provisional functioning authorisation, followed by its official accreditation, as well as the accreditation of its study programmes. Generally, this requirement is compulsory for all higher education institutions (HEI) or organisations providing higher education programmes and activities and entitles HEIs, upon successful completion, to use the name 'university' or other similar legally recognized names. Also, HEIs have the primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance. Higher education institutions may differ in size, quality, resources, number of teaching staff and students, etc., as successful HEIs generally have to find a balance between often conflicting stakeholder demands and institutional values. HEIs can therefore be either local or global; elite or mass-oriented; specialized or transdisciplinary, and may foster either an academic culture (characterized by knowledge creation, scientific excellence, academic freedom and freely shareable results) or a business culture (characterized by profit creation and individual appropriation of social wealth).

Performance Indicators: A range of statistical parameters representing a measure of the extent to which a higher education institution or a programme is performing in a certain quality dimension. They are short-term or long-term qualitative and quantitative measures of the output of a system or programme. They allow institutions to benchmark their own performances or allow comparison among higher education institutions.

Performance indicators work efficiently only when used as part of a coherent set of input, process, and output indicators. As higher education institutions are engaged in a variety of activities and target a number of different objectives, it is essential to be able to identify and to implement a large range of performance indicators in order to cover the entire field of activity. Examples of frequently used performance indicators, covering various institutional activities, include the number of applications per place, the entry scores of candidates, the staff workload, the employability of graduates, research grants and contracts, the number of articles or studies published, the staff/student ratio, institutional income and expenditure, and institutional and departmental equipment and furniture. Performance indicators are related to benchmarking exercises and are identified through a specific piloting exercise in order to best serve their use in a comparative or profiling analysis.

Simple Indicator: A more general type of indicator, expressed in the form of absolute figures, intends to provide a relatively unbiased description of a process. Simple indicators are less relative than performance indicators as they exclude any judgments or points of reference (e.g. a standard, an objective, or an assessment).

OUTCOMES:

Anticipated or achieved results of programmes or the accomplishment of institutional objectives, as demonstrated by a wide range of indicators (such as student knowledge, cognitive skills, and attitudes).

Outcomes are direct results of the instructional programme, planned in terms of learner growth in all areas. An outcome must be distinguished from an objective, which is a desired result. Generally, each outcome statement should describe one effect of the instructional programme, and not accumulate several into one statement. Also, the statements should be clearly detailed and easily understandable by all teaching staff and students in the given area or department.

Outcomes Assessment: The process of evaluation and improvement of specific results of a higher education institution in order to demonstrate its institutional effectiveness. Assessment may concern the performance of teaching staff, the effectiveness of institutional practices, and the functioning of departments or programmes (e.g. programme reviews, budget reviews, etc.). It is a formative procedure used for institutional self-study, financial retrenchment, programme evaluation, and improved understanding of the current needs of students.

Student Learning Outcomes: Statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand, and be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning as well as the specific intellectual and practical skills gained and demonstrated by the successful completion of a unit, course, or programme. Learning outcomes, together with assessment criteria, specify the minimum requirements for the award of credit, while grading is based on attainment above or below the minimum requirements for the award of credit. Learning outcomes are distinct from the aims of learning in that they are concerned with the achievements of the learner rather than with the overall intentions of the teacher.

Student Outcome Assessment: The act of assembling, analyzing, and using both quantitative and qualitative evidence of teaching and learning outcomes, in order to

examine their congruence with stated purposes and educational objectives and to provide meaningful feedback that will stimulate improvement.

Measurable Outcomes: Results that can be quantified; all measures of student outcomes (except certain subjective learning achievements), including executive function skills, and affective-related measures. Examples of measurable outcomes include: numbers of persons who gain employment, numbers of people who register to vote, and numbers of people who achieve a graduate education degree. Learning achievements concern speaking, listening, reading, writing, and numeracy. Executive function skills include problem-solving, critical thinking, and meta-cognition. Affective-related measures include self-esteem, self-confidence, and interpersonal communication.

PEER REVIEW/EXTERNAL REVIEW:

Assessment procedure regarding the quality and effectiveness of the academic programmes of an institution, its staffing, and/or its structure, carried out by external experts (peers). (Strictly speaking, peers are academics of the same discipline, but in practice, different types of external evaluators exist, even though all are meant to be specialists in the field reviewed and knowledgeable about higher education in general.) For a review, the source of authority of peers, types of peers, their selection and training, their site visits, and the standards to be met may vary. A review is usually based on a self-evaluation report provided by the institution and can be used as a basis for indicators or as a method of judgment for (external) evaluation in higher education.

QUALIFICATION:

Any higher education award (degree, diploma, or other type of formal certification) issued by a competent, registered authority attesting to the successful completion of a course programme. It covers a wide variety of higher education awards at different levels and across different countries (e.g. the Bachelor's and Master's Degree, the Doctorate, etc.). A qualification is important in terms of what it signifies: competencies and range of knowledge and skills. Sometimes it is equivalent to a license to practice. It is often synonymous with credential.

Qualifications Framework: A comprehensive policy framework, defining all nationally recognized qualifications in higher education in terms of workload, level, quality, learning outcomes, and profiles. It should be designed to be comprehensible through the use of specific descriptors for each qualification covering both its breadth (competencies associated with learning outcomes) and its depth (level). It is structured horizontally in order to cover all qualifications awarded in a system, and vertically, by level. Its purpose is to facilitate:

- (i) curriculum development and design of study programmes;
- (ii) student and graduate mobility;
- (iii) recognition of periods of study and credentials.

While certain higher education systems have their own qualification frameworks, others allow for the development of a wide variety of qualifications without providing an explicit framework. The emerging European Higher Education Area, envisaged by the Bologna Declaration, is regarded by many as needing a pan-European Qualification Framework.

Among recent output-focused systems approaches and techniques used to classify and explain qualifications and qualification frameworks are: the Bachelor's/Master's Degree generic descriptors (e.g. The Joint Quality Initiative (or Dublin Descriptors); the Bachelor's/Master's Degree subject-specific benchmarks (e.g. The Tuning Project); the International Credit Framework (e.g. ECTS for transfer and accumulation); The Integrated National Credit Framework (e.g. Ireland, Denmark); or, Learning Outcomes and Competencies - General and Specific (e.g. United Kingdom, Denmark).

National Qualifications Framework: Generally, a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is designed to provide nationally recognized and homogeneous standards and qualifications, as well as recognition for all learning of knowledge and competencies and a basis for further review, articulation and development of existing and impending qualifications. Also, among other purposes, it should facilitate curricular change and allow for the improvement of access and social inclusion, as well as the integration of changing societal needs. A National Qualifications Framework is primarily developed through a medium-term process of policy development and public consultation.

European Qualifications Framework: A new development in higher education, the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF) is the targeted result of a European Commission initiative to be enacted by the European Parliament and Council in 2007.

It focuses on a set of eight general reference levels or learning outcomes that cover the whole range of qualifications and are valid on a trans-systemic basis. The EQF should provide stakeholders and employers with a global reference tool (or 'translation device') allowing them to clearly compare and relate qualifications and education and training systems.

QUALITY (ACADEMIC):

Quality in higher education is a multi-dimensional, multilevel, and dynamic concept that relates to the contextual settings of an educational model, to the institutional mission and objectives, as well as to specific standards within a given system, institution, programme, or discipline. Quality may thus take different, sometimes conflicting, meanings depending on:

(i) the understanding of various interests of different constituencies or stakeholders in higher education (e.g. students; universities; disciplines; the labour market; society; a government); (ii) its references: inputs, processes, outputs, missions, objectives, etc.; (iii) the attributes or characteristics of the academic world worth evaluating; and (iv) the historical period in the development of higher education.

RECOGNITION:

Formal acknowledgement of (i) individual academic or professional qualifications; (ii) programmes of a higher education institution; and/or (iii) quality assurance agencies, by a competent recognition authority that acknowledges certain standards and values with respect to special purposes that indicate the consequences of recognition. Recognition is usually of a cross-institutional or cross-border nature. As regards recognition of individual qualifications, learning experiences (e.g. degrees, diplomas, or periods of study) are validated with a view to facilitating the access of holders to educational and/or

employment activities. Here, at least two kinds of recognition, those for academic and those for professional purposes, should be distinguished.

Programme recognition generally refers to the recognition of a specific programme of study of one higher education institution by another. It functions on the basis of a peer acknowledgement procedure and is meant to allow a student to engage in continued study at the latter institution or to exempt him or her from studying again subjects and materials which are not significantly different in different higher education institutions. With regard to institutions, recognition refers to the acknowledgement of quality assurance agencies or accrediting organizations, deemed to be trustful, efficient, and accountable institutions of quality assurance, following particular recognition standards set by the competent (usually foreign) recognition authorities.

Academic Recognition: Approval of courses, qualifications, or diplomas from one (domestic or foreign) higher education institution by another for the purpose of student admission to further studies. Academic recognition can also be sought for an academic career at a second institution and in some cases for access to other employment activities on the labour market (academic recognition for professional purposes). As regards the European Higher Education Area, three main levels of recognition can be considered, as well as the relevant instruments (as suggested by the Lisbon Convention and the Bologna Declaration): (i) recognition of qualifications, including prior learning and professional experience, allowing entry or re-entry into higher education; (ii) recognition of short study periods in relation to student mobility, having as the main instrument the ECTS (European Credit Transfer System); (iii) recognition of full degrees, having as the main instrument the Diploma Supplement.

Mutual Recognition: Agreement by two or more institutional bodies to validate each other's degrees, programmes, or institutions and affirmation by two or more quality assurance or accrediting agencies that the methodology of the agencies are sound and that the procedures are functioning accordingly.

Professional Recognition: Refers to the right to practice and the professional status accorded to a holder of a qualification. Owing to different regulations for the recognition of degrees or titles, a differentiation of two groups should be made: 'de Jure Professional Recognition' applies to the right to work in a specific country in a legally regulated profession (e.g. as a medical doctor). In the European Union, for instance, those regulations exist in both home and host countries and are subject to various European Union Specific Directives. 'De Facto Professional Recognition' refers to situations of unregulated professional recognition, such as situations in which no national legal authorization exists or is required.

Recognition of Prior Learning: The formal acknowledgement of skills, knowledge, and competencies that are gained through work experience, informal training, and life experience.

STANDARDS:

Statements regarding an expected level of requirements and conditions against which quality is assessed or that must be attained by higher education institutions and their programmes in order for them to be accredited or certified.

Standards may take a quantitative form, being mostly the results of benchmarking, or they may be qualitative, indicating only specific targets (e.g. educational effectiveness, sustainability, core commitments, etc.).

When quantitative, the standards include threshold levels that have to be met in order for higher education institutions or programmes to be accredited. More often than not, the thresholds or the “basic standards” are defined at the level of minimally acceptable quality. On other occasions, the standards refer to the highest level of quality, thus being considered as “standards of excellence”. These may result from a benchmarking exercise or be asserted implicitly, being so recognized by the peers in a collegiate way. Standards may have different reference points: (i) inputs (e.g. content standards); (ii) outputs (e.g. performance standards), (iii) processes.

Standards can be general (for a degree level, e.g. a Bachelor’s or a Master’s Degree) or subject-specific (e.g. discipline benchmarking statements in the United Kingdom). Standards may also vary by different types of standard setting methods (such as criterion-referenced, minimal competency, or objective setting methods). In order to judge properly whether or not a particular standard of quality is met, it has to be formulated clearly and explicitly and related to specific criteria which can be further divided into (more operational) indicators.

Standards are thus related to a specific (institutional programme) culture of evidence. In the context of the growing diversity of higher education, the translation of academic quality into standards and indicators has become complex. Often, a more dynamic approach to defining and assessing standards is visible (a mixture of reality-based components and potentiality-focused ones). The challenge is threefold: *(i) to diminish the number of reference standards; (ii) to relate them to appropriate performance indicators while also making use of specific criteria within a consistent culture of evidence; and (iii) to provide for sufficient flexibility in the formulation of standards* in order to allow for innovative academic developments.

Standards are often used synonymously with criteria, as in the United States, while in Europe standards are becoming increasingly distinct from criteria. A distinction between quality and standards (similar to the difference between process and outcomes) is also made, the term “quality standards” that is sometimes used being equivalent to the notion of standards as criterion.

In higher education standards are frequently set and assessed in four main areas:

- *Academic standards* (related to the intellectual abilities of students)
- *Standards of competence* (related to the technical abilities of students)
- *Service standards* (refer to the standards of service provided by the organization to the student)
- *Organizational standards* (principles and procedures by which the institution assures that it provides an appropriate learning and research environment).

Content Standards: Level of core competencies, relevant knowledge, and skills within a subject area, i.e. everything a student should know and be able to do.

Content standards shape what goes into the curriculum and refer to required inputs.

Educational Standards: Level of requirements and conditions regarding different stages of the educational process and the relationship between those stages, such as inputs, processes, and outputs. Various types of educational standards exist with regard to learning resources, programmes, and results, in general, and student performance (content standards, performance standards, proficiency standards, and opportunity-to-learn standards).

Performance Standards: Levels of achievement that are deemed exemplary or appropriate, *i.e.* specifications of the required level of quality of a student's work to meet the content standards. Performance standards shape expectations for educational outcomes.

European standards:

(i) for internal quality assurance within higher education institutions

Policies and procedures for quality assurance; approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards; assessment of students; quality assurance of teaching staff; learning resources and student support; information system; public information (as identified by ENQA)

(ii) for external quality assurance of higher education

Use of internal quality assurance procedures; the development of external quality assurance processes; criteria for decision; processes fit for purpose; reporting; follow-up procedures; periodic reviews; system wide analysis (as identified by ENQA)

(iii) for external quality assurance agencies

Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education Official status; activities; resources; mission statement; independence; external quality assurance criteria and processes used by agencies (as identified by ENQA)

STUDENT EVALUATION OF TEACHERS:

The process of using student inputs concerning the general activity and attitude of teachers. These observations allow the overall assessors to determine the degree of conformability between student expectations and the actual teaching approaches of teachers. Student evaluations are expected to offer insights regarding the attitude in class of a teacher (approachable, open-minded, entertaining, creative, patient, etc.), and the abilities of a teacher (to explain things, to motivate students, to help students think, to correct mistakes in a friendly manner, to offer information efficiently, etc.).

STUDENT SURVEY:

An assessment method that uses surveys and interviews to ascertain the satisfaction of enrolled students with programmes, services, and different other aspects of their academic experience. Students are usually asked to respond to a series of open-ended, close-ended, or telephone questions. The survey may include in-class questionnaires, mail questionnaires, telephone questionnaires, and interviews (standard, in-person, or focus group). Student surveys are relatively inexpensive, easy to administer, and can reach participants over a wide area. They are best suited for concise and non-sensitive topics, being able to give a sense, from the student perspective, of what is happening at a given moment in time, in the respective higher education institutions. Some observers may question their validity or reliability, as well as their relevance to academic policy.

STUDY PROGRAMME:

A core, modular component of higher education including all the activities (design, organization, management, as well as the process of teaching, learning and research) carried out in a certain field and leading to an academic qualification. Study programmes are established by higher education institutions or organizations and may differ by level of academic qualification (Bachelor, Master, Doctorate); study mode (full-time, part-time, distance learning, etc.); and field of knowledge specialization, in accordance with academic and professional division of labour. A study programme is accomplished through: (i) a curriculum, including all disciplines leading to an academic qualification, distributed by year of study, their weight being expressed in ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) type of study credits; (ii) syllabuses or course programmes, containing a description of the teaching and learning themes and practices associated with teaching, learning and evaluation; (iii) the organizational chart of students and teaching staff covering the period of implementation of the study programme; (iv) the system of academic quality assurance for all activities necessary for the completion of the study programme.

WORKLOAD:

A quantitative measure of the learning activities that may be required for the achievement of learning outcomes (e.g. lectures, seminars, practical work, private study, information retrieval, research, examinations).