

Standards for the Internal Quality Assurance System of Higher Education

Bratislava, 2 July 2020

Article 1

Introductory provisions and scope of standards

1. *Standards for the internal quality assurance system of higher education* (hereinafter referred to as the „internal system“) shall mean a set of requirements for the internal system and its implementation¹. These requirements are set out in Articles 2 – 11 of these standards.
2. A set of procedures, criteria, and indicators for benchmarking through which the Agency's Executive Board Working Group (hereinafter referred to as “the working group”) and Agency's staff evaluate compliance with the standards and measures to ensure compliance of the internal system or its implementation with the Standards for the internal system is set in the Methodology for standard evaluation issued by the Agency.
3. Standards use defined terms, the interpretations of which are set out in Article 12 of these standards. Defined terms are in italics when they first appear in the text.
4. Standards for the internal quality assurance system of higher education are consistently based on the European Standards and Guidelines for Higher Education Area² (ESG 2015) and take into account generally binding regulations, which are in particular Act no. 269/2018 Coll. on Quality Assurance of Higher Education and Amendment of Act no. 343/2015 Coll. on Public Procurement and Amendments to Certain Acts, as amended (hereinafter referred to as the „Quality Assurance Act“) and Act No. 131/2002 Coll. on Higher Education and Amendments to Certain Acts, as amended (hereinafter referred to as the „Higher Education Act“).
5. Standards for the internal system regulate the requirements for the evaluation of the internal systems of higher education institutions based in the Slovak Republic. They shall apply *mutatis mutandis* to the evaluation of the internal systems of applicants for State consent³. For the evaluation of the internal systems of higher education institutions based abroad, they shall apply, as appropriate, with an emphasis on the evaluation of compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area⁴ from 2015.

Article 2

Policies for quality assurance

1. In its strategic management, the higher education institution shall consistently apply *the quality assurance policies*. Their basic principle is to accept the primary responsibility of the institution for the quality of education provided for *all structures* of the institution and at all levels and all aspects.

¹ According to Sec. 2 letter a) of Act no. 269/2018 Coll. on Quality Assurance of Higher Education and Amendment of Act no. 343/2015 Coll. on Public Procurement and Amendments to Certain Acts, as amended (hereinafter referred to as the “Quality Assurance Act”).

² Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area – ESG 2015.

³ According to Sec. 33 of the Quality Assurance Act.

⁴ Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area – ESG 2015.

2. Institution has in its strategic documents, especially in the long-term plan, clearly defined the institution's mission that is consistently fulfilled.
3. Institution has in its strategic documents, especially in the long-term plan, clearly defined strategic objectives, in terms of its educational activities, *creative activities*, and other related activities that are in accordance with its mission.
4. Institution formalizes and strictly follows quality assurance policies. For this purpose, it has established appropriate *structures and processes* that are linked to a coherent *internal quality assurance system for higher education* (hereinafter referred to as the „internal system“), that includes the whole institution. The internal system defines the competences and responsibilities of individual structures, executives, other staff, and relevant *stakeholders* to ensure the quality of higher education and related activities.
5. Institution has sufficient personal staff, financial and material resources commensurate with the size of the institution, and the extent of the educational, creative, and other related activities carried out.
6. The policies, structures, and processes of the institution's internal system shall ensure:
 - a) involving students and external stakeholders in quality assurance;
 - b) the interrelationships between education and other creative activities. The level and focus of creative activity correspond to the level of higher education and the learning outcomes;
 - c) support for the internationalization of educational, creative and other related activities so that its level is commensurate with the mission and strategic objectives of the higher education institution, the learning objectives, and outcomes and the needs of stakeholders;
 - d) the guarding against all forms of intolerance and discrimination against the students, staff, and candidates, based on gender, race, color, language, age, sexual orientation, belief or religion, disability, political or another opinion, national or social origin, nationality or ethnic group, property, and origin;
 - e) the preservation of *academic integrity* and respect for academic ethics and ensure vigilance against plagiarism and other *academic fraud* facilitate their detection and ensure the consequences;
 - f) effective mechanisms for examining incentives that the student seeks to protect their rights or legally protected interests that they believe have been violated or that the student points out specific deficiencies in their activities or the inactivity of the institution⁵. The examination of incentives is transparent and is also carried out with student representatives. The complainants are provided with feedback on the results of their examination and the measures are taken;
 - g) the consistency and compliance with generally binding regulations and internal regulations of the higher education institution;
 - h) the continuous improvement of the quality of the activities carried out by the higher education institution and the development of a quality culture at all parts and levels of the higher education institution;

⁵ According to Sec. 3 letter g) of the Quality Assurance Act.

- i) the interrelationships between the internal system and long-term intention of the institution;
 - j) the effective performance of administrative activities related to quality assurance and the non-burdening of teachers, students, and other creative staff of the institution with unjustified bureaucracy.
7. In the case of the institution carries out the habilitation procedure and inaugural procedure, the policies, structures, and processes of the internal system shall ensure that it meets the Standards for habilitation procedure and inaugural procedure⁶.
 8. Quality assurance policies shall be binding on all higher education contractors or other third parties that participate or have an impact on the quality of education, creative activities, and other related activities.
 9. Quality assurance policies and processes shall include regular monitoring, evaluation, and revision of the internal system involving all stakeholders. These processes take into account whether the internal system leads to the achievement of strategic objectives in the field of quality assurance set in strategic documents, especially in the long term.
 10. Institution shall allow easy public access to formalized policies and processes and further documentation of the internal system, while the method of accessing information shall respect the specific needs of persons with disabilities. The internal system documentation relevant to students is published in all languages of the study programmes.

Article 3

Design, modification, and approval of the study programme

1. Institution has formalized structures and processes for the design, modification, and approval of study programmes. The competences, extent, and responsibilities of individual structures, staff, and other stakeholders for ensuring the quality of the study programmes are defined.
2. The structures and processes for the design, modification, and approval of study programmes shall ensure:
 - a) the involvement of students, employers, and other relevant stakeholders;
 - b) a transparent, fair, professional, objective and independent evaluation of the study programme, avoiding conflicts of interest and possible bias;
 - c) that the study programmes meet the standards for the study programme⁷;
 - d) the study programmes have a specified and communicated qualification acquired through their successful completion, corresponding to the requirements of the relevant level of the qualifications framework;
 - e) that the content and the level of qualifications meet the sector-specific expectations of employers and other external stakeholders;

⁶ Standards for habilitation procedure and inaugural procedure issued by the Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education.

⁷ Standards for the study programme issued by the Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education.

- f) that the study programmes have a specified graduate profile and, within this, clearly defined and communicated learning objectives and learning outcomes that are verifiable and appropriate to the institution mission, level of qualification and the field knowledge according to the relevant field of study or a combination of fields of study⁸ in which graduates obtain their university degree;
 - g) the interrelationships between education and creative activities, the level and focus of creative activity correspond to the level of higher education and the learning outcomes;
 - h) the study programmes provide students with *transferable competencies* that affect their personal development and can be used in their future careers and life as active citizens in democratic societies.
3. The structures and processes for the design, modification, and approval of joint study programmes with universities abroad shall ensure the application of the principles of the European Approach to Quality Assurance in Joint Study Programmes⁹.
4. The granting of a higher education institution's entitlement for design, implementation, and modification of study programmes in the relevant field of study and degree¹⁰ is conditional upon the compliance of the internal system and its implementation with these standards and the implementation of the study programme or Standards for the study programme¹¹. This condition shall be met by all study programmes assigned to the relevant study field(s) and degree that take place at the institution and its structures.

Article 4

Student-centered learning, teaching, and assessment

The policies, structures, and processes of the internal system shall ensure that:

- a) the students are encouraged to take an active role, autonomy, creativity and independence in education and learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach;
- b) the diversity of students and their needs is respected in the implementation of study programmes, and the flexibility of learning paths is enabled, also about the possibility of reconciling work/family life with university studies;
- c) a variety of educational and assessment methods, forms and concepts are used in the implementation of study programmes and the application of learning methods is regularly evaluated and improved;

⁸ Fields of study in which institutions in the Slovak Republic can provide higher education, and their descriptions are given in the Decree of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic No. 244/2019 Coll. on the System of Study Branches in the Slovak Republic.

⁹ European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, available on

https://www.eqar.eu/assets/uploads/2018/04/02_European_Approach_QA_of_Joint_Programmes_v1_0.pdf

¹⁰ In connection with Sec. 25 art. 1 of the Quality Assurance Act.

¹¹ According to Sec. 30 art. 11 and 12 of the Quality Assurance Act.

- d) students are provided with adequate guidance and support by teachers and promote mutual respect within the learner-teacher relationship;
- e) the assessors are familiar with existing testing and examination methods of verifying achievement of learning outcomes, methods of testing, testing and assessing student performance, and receive support in developing their skills in this field;
- f) the criteria for and method of assessment, as well as criteria for marking, are known to the students and published in advance;
- g) the assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. Students are given feedback, which, if necessary, is linked to advising on the learning process;
- h) the assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students and carried out following the stated procedures and that produces reliable conclusions that do not lead to unjustified differences in similar cases;
- i) the regulations for assessment take into account mitigating circumstances, including those cases concerning students with known specific needs;
- j) where possible, assessment is carried out by more than one examiner;
- k) a formal procedure for student appeals is in place, while fair treatment of applicants for remedies is guaranteed.

Article 5

Student admission, progression, recognition, and certification

The policies, structures, and processes of the internal system shall ensure that:

- a) institutions consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student "life cycle", e.g. student admission, progression, recognition, completion, and certification;
- b) the offer to candidates is published in advance and provides objective and complete information on the study programmes, admission requirements and criteria and other study conditions;
- c) the inclusive conditions and equal opportunities for every candidate who demonstrates the prerequisites for graduation and that the admission procedure is fair, transparent and reliable and that the selection of candidates is based on the appropriate methods of assessing their eligibility and suitability for study;
- d) the support measures and an environment for equalizing opportunities to study at university for students with specific needs¹² and students from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- e) the quality level of the defended final and rigorous theses corresponding to their degree, while at the same time ensuring effective detection and principled sanctions of plagiarism and other academic fraud;
- f) transparent, consistent and reliable recognition of higher education qualifications, periods and parts of the study, prior learning, including non-formal and *informal learning*, following the generally binding rules and principles of the Convention on the

¹² According to Sec. 100 of the Higher Education Act.

Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European region¹³ to support student mobility;

- g) the successful completion of studies is confirmed by the institution by the award of a university degree as well as by the publication of further documentation explaining the qualification gained, including achieved learning outcomes and the context, level, content, and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed.

Article 6 Teaching staff

The policies, structures, and processes of the internal system shall ensure:

- a) fair, transparent, and objective process for the selection and development of the teaching staff. The criteria of the institution for filling positions of university teachers are following a mission and long-term intention and generally binding regulations of the institution;
- b) the openness of the selection process of university teachers and enable their interinstitutional, intersectoral and international mobility;
- c) the sufficient number of their *teachers* with required qualification, transferable competencies, pedagogical skills, practical experience, workload distribution and the level of creative activity results to support the study programme(s);
- d) the interrelationships with education and teachers' creative activities are strengthened whose focus and level of achievement is commensurate with the level of *qualification framework* and the learning outcomes at which education is provided;
- e) the professional development and development of pedagogical, digital and transferable competences of teachers;
- f) transparent assignment of teachers for the provision of study programmes and educational activities, the teaching of individual subjects and the conduct of the final and rigorous theses which guarantee a level of qualification, competence, practical experience, corresponds to the level and learning outcomes and the thematic focus of the final theses. *Profile study subjects* are normally provided by university teachers in the position of professor or associate professor who works at the university for fixed weekly working time. In their vocational education programmes, they are also provided by university teachers who are experienced specialists from the relevant economic or social field who work at a university for a fixed or part-time period;
- g) the professional qualifications of teachers providing the study programmes are higher than those achieved by the completion of the study programme. This requirement may be waived in justified cases, such as foreign language lecturers, practitioners, and doctoral candidates;
- h) the workload allocation of higher education teachers enables the provision and quality of study programmes, teaching and other related learning activities, assessment of students, activities related to their professional development and the fulfillment of the

¹³ Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, Lisbon 1997.

university's mission to the extent and proportions corresponding to the working time fund in relation to the size of their working time and the nature of their position.

Article 7

Learning resources and student support

The policies, structures, and processes of the internal system shall ensure that:

- a) institution has sufficient financial resources allocated to the comprehensive provision of study programmes and related creative, supportive and other activities appropriate to its mission;
- b) institution has the spatial, material, technical, infrastructural and institutional provision of educational, creative and other related activities corresponding to learning outcomes, number of students and their specific needs;
- c) institution has functional contractual partnerships with specialized teaching establishments and other institutions which are necessary to achieve learning outcomes, in particular, practical training for the professions concerned;
- d) easy access to information resources, library collections, and services corresponding to learning outcomes, focusing on creative activities and student numbers;
- e) students have easy access to counseling and other support services and administrative resources that meet their diverse needs and are prerequisites for their progress in their studies and for their personal and career development;
- f) qualified support staff providing tutoring, counseling, administrative and other support services and related activities for students whose capacity is appropriate to their number and diverse needs;
- g) students have adequate social security, sporting, cultural, spiritual and social activities during their studies;
- h) all the resources referred to in the preceding paragraphs a) – g) shall be provided for each location where the study programmes take place;
- i) the efficient and effective use of all resources;
- j) accessibility of resources and awareness of their accessibility for students.

Article 8

Information management

The policies, structures, and processes of the internal system shall ensure that:

- a) information is systematically collected, processed, analyzed and evaluated, which is used in the effective strategic, tactical and operational management of the implementation and development of study programmes, creative activities and other related activities of the institution;
- b) institution has a set and systematic follow-up of a set of indicators to evaluate, in particular, the characteristics of the candidate and student population, success and other admission characteristics, success rates and programmes, degree of graduation in degree programmes, degree of student satisfaction with the implementation of

degree programmes and availability of resources needed for the study, degree of applicability of degree graduates, degree of satisfaction of employers and other external stakeholders with quality graduates, profile characteristics of teachers and other staff, results of creative activities and degree of their connection with education, degree of internationalization of institution activities;

- c) all stakeholders are involved in the collection and processing of information.

Article 9

Public information

The policies, structures, and processes of the internal system shall ensure that:

- a) institution publishes clear, precise, objective, adequate, accessible and up-to-date quantitative and qualitative information about their activities, including the study programmes they offer and their graduates, as well as other related activities in accordance with the mission of the institution, which is relevant to the candidates, students, employees, employers, and other external stakeholders and the public;
- b) institution publishes up-to-date information on the implementation and functioning of the internal system, the results achieved and the measures are taken;
- c) information about the study programmes is published in all languages of their implementation.
- d) the published information is easily accessible, even for people with disabilities.

Article 10

On-going monitoring and periodic review and approval of study programmes

The policies, structures, and processes of the internal system shall ensure:

- a) on-going monitoring, periodic review and periodic approval of study programmes involving employers, students, and other stakeholders;
- b) that the implementation of the study programmes, student assessment learning outcomes are in line with the latest knowledge, technological possibilities, the needs of students, employability of graduates and expectations of employers and stakeholders and the institution creates the supportive and effective learning environment for students;
- c) that the institution has sufficient spatial, personal, material, technical, infrastructural, information and financial resources for the implementation of study programmes and other related activities;
- d) that students have the opportunity to express at least once a year the quality of study programmes, the quality of teachers, the quality of support services, and the quality of the university environment. Students are provided with feedback on evaluation results and measures taken;

- e) that the modification of study programmes resulting from their on-going monitoring and periodic review is designed with the participation of students, employers, and other stakeholders;
- f) that the study programmes are periodically approved at a period appropriate to their standard length of study.

Article 11

Cyclical external quality assurance

The institution undergoes periodic external quality assurance review to ensure that the internal system is developed and implemented in line with the Standards for the internal system.

Article 12

Glossary of terms

1. For the purposes of these standards, a set of terms is defined, the definitions of which are set out in paragraphs 2 to 25 of this Article.
2. *Academic fraud* is a dishonest action that is contrary to academic integrity and moral standards. These include plagiarism, cheating tests, fabrication of research results, recording fictitious data, omitting inappropriate facts and data, falsifying research, dishonest practices in publishing results, not declaring conflicts of interest, misusing the information gathered during the assessment, fictitious authorship, superficial and poor quality assessment, systematic and conscious publishing in predatory magazines and publishing houses, etc.
3. *Competence* is an authority, extent, responsibility, the person's reach to the role, process, procedure, activity which the person is responsible for.
4. *Competence*¹⁴ is a professional competence of the person as the result of a complex of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that the person has acquired through formal and informal learning in the process of gaining its own practical experience. Competences, together with knowledge and skills, serve as structural characteristics of learning outcomes.
5. *Creative activity* means a research activity, development activity, artistic activity, or other creative activity¹⁵ of a higher education institution that is relevant to its mission, mostly to learning objectives and learning outcomes.
6. *Final thesis* means bachelor thesis in first-degree study programmes, diploma thesis in second-degree study programmes and dissertation thesis in third-degree study programmes.
7. *Informal education* is the learning through the lifelong process of acquiring knowledge, skills, and attitudes from day-to-day experience, from the environment and contacts with other people.

¹⁴ Means „competence“ in the terminology of the Quality Assurance Act (Sec. 3, art. 3, letter a) Art. 4), or "competence" in the terminology used in the educational literature.

¹⁵ According to Sec. 3 art. 2, letter a) of the Quality Assurance Act.

8. *Learning objectives of the study programme* are the statements that identify the student's ability at the end of the programme; i.e. express the expectations for graduates of programme. The objectives are implemented in the programme through verifiable/measurable learning outcomes.
9. *Learning outcome*¹⁶ is a detailed description of what the learner knows, understands, and can do at the end of the learning process so that the individual learning objectives of the programme (e.g. in the structure of knowledge, skills, competences¹⁷) are fulfilled. In contrast to the learning objective, the learning outcome is fixed and the rate of its fulfillment is measurable and verifiable. Learning outcomes are part of individual courses/programmes.
10. *Modification of a study programme* means the addition or deletion of compulsory subjects or compulsory optional subjects, a change in the conditions for the regular completion of study or modification of the information sheet of a compulsory subject or compulsory optional subject, except for teacher updates, recommended literature or subject evaluation¹⁸.
11. *Non-formal education* means systematic education, carried out outside the formal education system, organized by different institutions to provide education for certain groups of the population in selected types, forms, and content areas.
12. *Profile study subjects* are those subjects of the study programme that significantly contribute to the achievement of the graduate profile, i.e. the learning objectives and learning outcomes of the relevant study programme.
13. *Quality assurance/internal system policies* are deliberately set out a set of principles that guide the activities of the higher education institutions and its staff, students, and external stakeholders to achieve continuous quality assurance and development of higher education and related activities.
14. *Scientific integrity* is a prerequisite for quality scientific work consisting of strict adherence to the highest professional and moral standards, transparency, conducting research critically and without prejudice and the absolute integrity of the practice, teaching, and administration of science. Its opposite is scientific dishonesty and dishonesty.
15. *Skills* are the competences or instrumental art to apply knowledge and to perform a certain cognitive, psychomotor, or social activity easily and accurately. Skills, together with knowledge and competence, serve as structural characteristics of learning outcomes.
16. *Standards for the study programme* are the set of requirements whose fulfillment is conditional for the granting of the accreditation of the study programme.
17. *Stakeholders* are higher education actors, persons, communities or organizations that may influence or be influenced by the process of education and creative activity. A distinction is made between internal stakeholders (students and teaching staff) and

¹⁶ Refers to the „outcome of higher education“ in the terminology of the Quality Assurance Act (Sec. 3, art. 3, letter a) and art. 4, respectively “learning outcomes” in the terminology of the Decree of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic no. 614/2002 Coll. on the study credit system.

¹⁷ Competences in terms of Act, competences in terms of discourse in pedagogical professional literature.

¹⁸ According to Sec. 2 letter g) of the Quality Assurance Act.

external stakeholders (employers and other representatives of the relevant sectors of the economy and social practice, university graduates, domestic and foreign university partners, etc.).

- 18.** *Teachers (Teaching staff)* are all persons who provide study programmes, whether employed as a university teacher, a researcher, an art worker or as a doctoral candidate or practitioner, regardless of whether they work at the university for fixed weekly working time or for shorter weekly working time or on the basis of agreements on work performed outside the employment relationship.
- 19.** *The internal system processes* are rules, regulations, codes, formalized procedures, and a sequence of steps through which the quality and development of higher education and related activities are ensured.
- 20.** *The internal quality assurance system of higher education* means a consistently interlinked set of policies, structures, and processes through which the institution ensures and develops the quality of the fulfillment of its mission in the field of higher education, creative activities and other related activities.
- 21.** *The qualification framework* is the national qualification framework. The levels of the national qualifications framework are assigned to the qualifications framework levels in the European Higher Education Area¹⁹ and the European Qualifications Framework²⁰.
- 22.** *The rigorous thesis* is a work following a completed study programme, the defense of which is part of a rigorous examination, which is authorized to conduct only institutions that have an accredited study programme in the relevant field of study, after which the academic title "master" is awarded.
- 23.** *The structures of higher education institutions* include faculties, other pedagogical, research, development, arts, economics, and information centers at the headquarters of the higher education institution or its faculty, special-purpose facilities, detached workplaces, and consulting centers outside the university or its faculty.
- 24.** *The structures of the internal system* are collective bodies, departments of the institution, contractors, or persons with specified competencies and responsibilities for the defined extent of quality assurance in higher education and related activities.
- 25.** *Transferable competencies* are not specifically linked to a particular job or profession, but can be used and further developed in a variety of situations and conditions. Examples include communication skills, mathematical skills, organizational skills, digital skills, analytical skills, interpersonal skills, creativity and abstract thinking ability, critical thinking skills, mentoring and supervising skills, business skills, motivation and learning skills, contextual thinking and metacognitive skills.

¹⁹ Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

²⁰ European Qualifications Framework

Article 13**Transitional and final provisions**

1. These standards have been approved by the Executive Board of the Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education on 2 July 2020 and shall be valid from 1 September 2020.
2. The higher education institution shall adjust its internal system with Standards for the internal system within 24 months of its entry into force.