

REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA
COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

DECISION

No. 109, dated 15 February 2017

ON THE ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTIONING OF THE AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE ACCREDITATION BOARD, AND ON THE DETERMINATION OF FEES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

(Amended by Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 562, dated 31 July 2019; Decision No. 825, dated 24 December 2021; Decision No. 39, dated 29 June 2023; Decision No. 628, dated 10 October 2024)

Based on Article 100 of the Constitution, and Articles 14, 15 and 106 of Law No. 80/2015, “On Higher Education and Scientific Research in Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Albania”, with the proposal of the Minister of Education and Sports, the Council of Ministers

DECIDES:

1. The reorganization of the Public Agency for Higher Education (APAAL) into the Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education (QAAHE).
2. The Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education is a central public institution, a legal entity, headquartered in Tirana, and funded by the state budget and other lawful revenues.
3. The Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education carries out its activities within the scope of responsibility of the ministry in charge of higher education.
4. The Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education enjoys independence in:
 - a) drafting and approving its procedures, evaluation criteria, and formats;
 - b) selecting experts and special evaluation committees;
 - c) preparing the content and results of quality assessment reports in order to improve quality, according to its approved models;
 - d) monitoring external evaluation processes within the framework of periodic accreditation and continuous quality monitoring of higher education institutions and their study programs;
 - e) organizing and publishing final results within the framework of the National Student Survey.
5. The Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education bases its activities on internal guidelines and the Higher Education Quality Code, which is updated according to European quality standards and guidelines within the European Higher Education Area, and has the following mission:
 - a) ensuring quality in higher education through external, objective, and independent evaluation;

- b) maintaining quality standards;
 - c) promoting and improving the quality of higher education institutions and the study programs they offer.
6. The Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education is headed by the Director, who is the head of the institution and represents it in relations with third parties. The Director organizes and directs all activities of the institution.
7. The Director of the Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education is appointed and dismissed from office upon the proposal of the minister in charge of education, by order of the Prime Minister. The Director of the Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education must meet the following criteria:
- a) hold at least the academic degree of “Doctor”;
 - b) have over five (5) years of work experience in institutions operating in the field of higher education, including experience in senior management positions.
8. The structure and organization of the Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education shall be approved by order of the Prime Minister within one (1) month from the entry into force of this decision.
9. Employment relations for the Director and the staff of QAAHE are governed by the provisions of the Labor Code.
10. The Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education has the following areas of activity:
- a) external quality evaluation for initial and periodic accreditation of higher education institutions and their study programs, through the unified government portal “e-Albania”;
 - b) monitoring and assessing the academic quality and compliance with quality standards of institutions and programs offered by them, prior to initial and subsequent accreditation evaluations;
 - c) preliminary evaluation within the framework of the establishment and/or reorganization of higher education institutions and study programs at the request of the ministry responsible for education;
 - d) preliminary evaluation and recognition of study programs offered by accredited Albanian higher education institutions from foreign higher education institutions in one of the European Union member states, the United States of America, Canada, or Australia;
 - e) periodic evaluation, every three years, of teaching quality in higher education institutions and continuous monitoring thereof through the National Student Survey, in accordance with its guidelines;
 - f) evaluation of internal quality systems (audits) in higher education institutions, in accordance with its guidelines and the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area;
 - g) thematic, analytical, and comparative evaluations of institutions and/or study programs, in support of higher education policies, either autonomously or at the request of the ministry responsible for education.
11. QAAHE has the following specific duties and responsibilities:

- a) Assists in the establishment and functioning of the internal quality assurance system in higher education institutions, in accordance with the Quality Code. It cooperates with higher education institutions and maintains continuous relations with these units;
- b) Cooperates with the ministry responsible for education in preparing state quality standards and updating them as part of the Quality Code;
- c) Drafts evaluation guidelines, criteria, procedures, evaluation formats, and other acts for its internal functioning;
- d) Proposes to the minister responsible for education changes to the legal framework in the field of quality assurance in higher education;
- e) Is the authority responsible for managing and exchanging information related to results, quality, and accreditation in higher education;
- f) Publishes, through its official website, final reports on external evaluations, continuous quality monitoring, the National Student Survey, and acts of the Accreditation Board. Provides updated information on the status of higher education institutions/study programs regarding evaluation and accreditation, and announces, before the start of each academic year, the list of accredited higher education institutions and study programs;
- g) Publishes and disseminates national and international materials and information on quality assurance in higher education;
- h) Administers the electronic database in support of monitoring and quality assurance processes;
- i) Manages requests from higher education institutions for external evaluation by agencies that are members of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), which it submits for approval to the Accreditation Board;
- j) Cooperates and coordinates its activities with homologous agencies that are part of ENQA and/or the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), through joint and/or coordinated evaluations, selected according to the profile and characteristics required for each evaluation in which they are engaged;
- k) Follows procedures for QAAHE's full membership in ENQA and/or EQAR;
- l) Coordinates its activities with the ministry responsible for education and its subordinate institutions, in support of policies related to quality in higher education, evaluation of research, financing of higher education institutions, and data exchange in the field of higher education;
- m) Cooperates and coordinates with the National Agency for Research, Science, and Innovation, including results of AKKSHI's evaluation of research activities, for external quality assurance processes.

12. For the evaluation procedure, the Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education acts as follows:

a) Establishes special evaluation committees, composed of domestic and/or foreign experts, who must have:

- an academic degree or title;

- documented previous work experience in institutional evaluation and/or in the field of study programs, within external quality assurance in Albania and/or abroad.

Additional criteria for selecting these experts, in specific and certified cases, depending on the type of external evaluation, program, and study cycle, are defined in the internal regulations of the Accreditation Board.

b) Experts in these committees are selected according to QAAHE's internal regulations from annual lists approved by the Accreditation Board. The composition of special evaluation committees, the number of experts for each type of evaluation, and their remuneration are determined according to Annex 1 and Tables 1/a and 1/b attached to this decision and forming an integral part of it. Exceptions apply when there is a lack of experts in a specific field and new experts need to be engaged, who are added to the list, always according to the criteria and in cooperation with the Accreditation Board.

c) Temporary committees for thematic, analytical, and comparative evaluations are composed of domestic and/or foreign experts with academic qualifications, experience in higher education and scientific research, and knowledge of quality processes, according to the main fields of higher education in natural, engineering and technological, medical, agricultural, social, and human sciences, from lists approved by the Accreditation Board.

13. The Accreditation Board is established and operates within QAAHE as a collegial, decision-making, and independent body in its activities.
14. The Accreditation Board consists of 11 members, of whom at least 3 and no more than 5 must be foreign. The Chairperson and members of the Board must have at least 10 years of experience in academic and research institutions, domestically or abroad, hold an academic degree/title, or have at least 5 years of experience in the field of quality assurance in higher education. The Chairperson and Board members must also have advanced proficiency in written and spoken English. A student representative from the National Student Council participates in the Board as an observer.
15. The appointment and dismissal of the Chairperson and members of the Accreditation Board are made by order of the Prime Minister, upon the proposal of the minister responsible for education. The mandate of the Board members is 4 years.
16. The Accreditation Board meets at least six (6) times a year. Any member who is absent without justification for one-third of the meetings shall be replaced.
17. Members of the Accreditation Board must comply with the legal and sub-legal acts regulating conflicts of interest.
18. A meeting of the Accreditation Board is held when at least eight (8) members are present. Decisions of the Board are taken by a three-quarters ($\frac{3}{4}$) majority of the members present.
19. The Accreditation Board approves its internal rules of procedure.
20. The Accreditation Board is supported by the technical secretariat, composed of QAAHE staff designated by the Director of QAAHE.
21. The Accreditation Board has the following duties and responsibilities:

- a) Reviews final reports of external quality assessments for initial and periodic accreditation, for institutional and program accreditation, and makes the final accreditation decision;
- b) In cases where external evaluation is conducted by foreign agencies at the request of higher education institutions, according to point 3, Article 15 of Law no. 80/2015, the Board preliminarily reviews and approves the institution's request for the evaluation by the foreign agency;
- c) Makes the final decision, which may be:
 - “**positive**”, when the relevant institutional or program standards and criteria are met. The duration and validity period of institutional accreditation is determined according to the degree of compliance with quality standards, and for programs also according to their duration. The maximum validity period of institutional accreditation and/or study programs shall not exceed six (6) years;
 - “**negative**”, when a low level of quality is found, standards are not met, and the institution is unable to fulfill them.
- d) Before taking the final decision, based on evaluation results and the institution's capabilities, the Board may request additional documentation, set conditions, and deadlines for fulfillment.
- e) Reviews preliminary evaluation reports regarding the establishment and/or reorganization of higher education institutions and study programs, and recommends to the minister responsible for education whether to open/reorganize these institutions or programs.
- f) Reviews complaints related to the external quality assessment process and issues a reasoned decision on acceptance or rejection of the complaint, in accordance with the provisions of the Code of Administrative Procedures.
- g) Issues the official accreditation certificate within one month from the date of the decision.
- h) Administers cases where QAAHE or the ministry responsible for education identifies deviations from standards by higher education institutions, for decision-making or review of previous accreditation decisions.
- i) When deciding on the accreditation of joint study programs offered between domestic and foreign higher education institutions, as well as for branches of foreign higher education institutions operating in the Republic of Albania, considers also their accreditation in the country of origin.
- j) In making its decisions, the Board follows the Code of Administrative Procedures. Board decisions are final, binding, and enforceable. Decisions of the Board may be appealed in court by parties with a legitimate interest, within the deadlines provided by applicable legislation, against administrative acts.
- k) Conducts preliminary evaluation and recognition of study programs offered in accredited Albanian higher education institutions by foreign higher education institutions from the European Union, the United States of America, Canada, or Australia.

- l) Approves the annual activity report of the Board and QAAHE, which is published within the first quarter of the following calendar year and immediately sent for information to the ministry responsible for education.
- m) Approves the specific criteria for selecting domestic and foreign evaluation experts.
- n) Approves the annual list of domestic and foreign experts engaged in special or temporary committees according to academic fields, based on QAAHE lists and those of foreign experts provided by ENQA/EQAR.
- o) Approves guidelines on internal and external quality processes, drafted and proposed by QAAHE.
- p) Approves the internal rules of procedure of QAAHE.
- q) Based on accreditation results, requests QAAHE to carry out special quality monitoring processes for higher education institutions or study programs and reviews their results.
- r) Approves the methodology and instruments of the National Student Survey for teaching quality, as proposed by QAAHE.
- s) Reviews final reports of the National Student Survey before publication.
- t) Approves the model and format of the accreditation certificate prepared by QAAHE.

22. The financing of QAAHE and the Accreditation Board shall be provided by the state budget, as well as by revenues generated from its activities, including: evaluation fees, income from trainings, revenues from services provided, income from domestic and foreign programs and projects, donations from natural and legal persons, domestic and foreign, as well as any other lawful source.

23. Fees for external quality evaluation and accreditation, paid by higher education institutions, are determined according to Annex 2, attached to and forming an integral part of this decision.

24. QAAHE has the right to use ninety percent (90%) of the revenues generated from its activities. Revenues not used during a financial year shall carry over to the following year. Revenues shall be used for payments to consultants and external experts engaged, for payments and expenses of the Accreditation Board, for investments, for QAAHE's operational payments and expenses, for activities abroad, including membership in international networks.

25. The scheme for the use of revenues shall be approved by the Ministry of Finance.

26. The Chairperson and members of the Accreditation Board are paid for each meeting attended. Twelve (12) meetings are held annually. If necessary, the Board may convene up to three (3) additional meetings in the same calendar year, upon request of the minister responsible for education.

27. The remuneration per meeting shall be as follows:

- a) Members with permanent residence in the Republic of Albania: 30,000 (thirty thousand) ALL;

- b) Members with permanent residence outside the Republic of Albania: 600 (six hundred) EUR;
- c) The Chairperson, depending on their permanent residence, shall receive thirty percent (30%) more than Board members.

28. Travel and accommodation expenses in Albania for the Chairperson and foreign and Albanian members of the Accreditation Board, with permanent residence outside Albania, shall be covered for no more than three calendar days per meeting.

29. Travel and accommodation expenses in Tirana for domestic Board members residing outside the capital shall be covered for no more than three calendar days per meeting. Expenses related to Board activities shall be covered from QAAHE revenues.

30. QAAHE shall have its own official emblem, logo, and seal, approved by the Head of the Agency.

31. The emblem consists of the emblem of the Republic of Albania with the inscription: “Republic of Albania, Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education”, in accordance with Council of Ministers Decision no. 474, dated 10.7.2003, “On the use of the emblem of the Republic and its proportions”, as amended.

32. QAAHE’s official seal shall have the form and elements defined in Council of Ministers Decision no. 390, dated 6.8.1993, “On the rules for the production, administration, control, and storage of official seals”, as amended. QAAHE’s seal shall be produced, administered, and stored in accordance with the applicable legislation.

33. The structure and organization of APAAL, approved by Order no. 171, dated 27.9.2010, of the Prime Minister, shall remain in force until the approval of the new structure and organization pursuant to this decision.

34. The Chairperson and members of the Accreditation Board shall be appointed by order of the Prime Minister within one (1) month from the entry into force of this decision. The Accreditation Council shall continue to operate with its current composition until the establishment of the Accreditation Board.

34.1. Application procedures under this decision, through the unified portal “e-Albania”, shall be implemented once the ministry responsible for education publishes in the Official Notices Bulletin the completion of the implementation process and the start date of the Higher Education Information Management System (HEIMS). Until the system becomes operational, applications shall be submitted directly to QAAHE. Administrative requests and procedures under review by QAAHE, until the implementation and functionality of HEIMS, shall be processed according to the provisions in force of this decision at the time of their submission.

35. Council of Ministers Decision no. 424, dated 2.6.2010, “On the establishment and organization of APAAL”, as amended, is repealed.

36. The Ministry of Education and Sport, the Ministry of Finance, and the Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education are tasked with implementing this decision.

This decision enters into force upon its publication in the Official Gazette.

PRIME MINISTER

Edi Rama

Annex 1. Payments to Foreign and Domestic Experts Engaged in the External Evaluation Process within Accreditation

1. Foreign experts engaged in the external evaluation of higher education institutions and study programs within the framework of accreditation shall be paid 500 EUR per day, for a number of days determined according to Tables 1/a and 1/b.
2. Domestic experts engaged in the external evaluation of higher education institutions and study programs within the framework of accreditation shall be paid 25,000 ALL per day, for a number of days determined according to Tables 1/a and 1/b.
3. Travel and accommodation expenses of foreign experts in Albania shall be covered for no more than five (5) days, while domestic experts' travel and accommodation expenses shall be covered when the evaluation is conducted outside their residence, for no more than five (5) days.
4. Payment to the expert for services provided under point 6, Article 104, of Law no. 80/2015, "On Higher Education and Scientific Research in Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Albania," shall be made according to points 1 and 2 and Tables 1/a and 1/b of this Annex.
5. Temporary evaluation committees shall consist of three (3) experts. Payment to the expert for "... analytical and comparative evaluations, as well as other processes promoting and improving quality," provided under point 1, Article 104, of Law no. 80/2015, shall be made according to the category of academic staff holding the title "Professor" in public higher education institutions, for no more than five (5) days per evaluation.
6. The domestic or foreign expert engaged in fulfilling conditions or in preliminary evaluation within the framework of opening and/or reorganizing higher education institutions and study programs shall be selected by the ministry responsible for education from the list approved by QAAHE. The number of experts shall be no fewer than two (2), and the total payment for all experts shall not exceed twenty-five percent (25%) of the base fee provided for the external evaluation of the higher education institution and/or study program, according to Tables 2/a and 2/b.

Table 1/a: Payment of Experts for Institutional Evaluation

No.	Study Programs	Foreign Expert		Domestic Expert	
		Days/Expert	No. of Experts	Days/Expert	No. of Experts
1	Professional College	1 to 3	1	1 to 3	1
2	Academy	2 to 4	1	2 to 4	1
3	University College	3 to 5	1	3 to 5	2
4	University	4 to 6	2	4 to 6	1

Table 1/b: Payment of Experts for the Evaluation of Study Programs

No.	Study Programs	Foreign Expert		Domestic Expert	
		Days/Expert	No. of Experts	Days/Expert	No. of Experts
1	2-year Professional	–	–	1 to 2	2
2	Bachelor	–	–	2 to 3	2
3	4-year Bachelor	–	–	2 to 4	2
4	1-year Professional Master	–	–	1 to 2	2
5	2-year Professional Master	–	–	2 to 3	2
6	Master of Science	1 to 2	1	1 to 2	1
7	Integrated Master of Science	3 to 4	1	3 to 4	1
8	1-year Executive Master	1 to 2	1	1 to 2	1
9	2-year Executive Master	2 to 3	1	2 to 3	1
10	SPA (2 years)	1 to 2	1	1 to 2	1
11	SPA (3–4 years)	2 to 3	1	2 to 3	1
12	Doctorate	2 to 3	2	1 to 3	0

Annex 2. Fees for Evaluation and Accreditation in Higher Education Institutions

1. The fees paid by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) for institutional evaluation and accreditation are calculated based on the basic fee determined for the type of institution, to which a percentage increase is applied depending on the number of fields of study in which the HEI operates, the level of studies, and the number of students at the time of submission of the request for external evaluation within the framework of accreditation. The base fee and corresponding calculations are presented in Table 2/a. By decision of the Accreditation Board, higher education institutions with no more than 30 students across all study cycles may be exempted from paying fees for institutional evaluation and accreditation.
2. The fees paid by HEIs for the evaluation and accreditation of study programs according to their type are presented in Table 2/b. The external evaluation within the framework of the first accreditation of professional study programs, as well as first- and second-cycle programs in both public and non-public HEIs, shall be carried out in groups,

where possible, and for no more than three programs, according to the cycle and field of study at the basic unit level.

The fees for evaluation within the framework of the first accreditation of these programs shall be 65% of the fee of each program being jointly evaluated, according to Table 2/b. In cases where the basic unit offers one professional study program or one program for the first and/or second cycle, the fees for evaluation within the framework of the first accreditation of these programs shall be 65% of the respective program fee, according to Table 2/b.

Experts conducting external evaluation within the framework of the first accreditation of professional study programs and first- and second-cycle study programs in public HEIs shall be paid 70% of the value of each jointly evaluated study program, as defined in Table 1/b.

3. The fee for the evaluation and accreditation of a study program applies to programs without profiles or with a single profile. For study programs with more than one profile, and where the evaluation is conducted simultaneously, the payment for program evaluation increases by 10% of the base fee for each additional profile. Profiles that are not evaluated and accredited together with the program are subject to the full program fee at the time of their evaluation and accreditation.
4. The fees paid by HEIs for fulfilling conditions or for preliminary evaluation within the framework of the establishment and/or reorganization of higher education institutions or study programs amount to 30% of the base fee foreseen for the external evaluation of the HEI and/or study program, according to Tables 2/a and 2/b.
5. Study programs referred to in point 5, Article 35, of Law No. 80/2015, “On Higher Education and Scientific Research in Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Albania,” pay 50% of the evaluation and accreditation fee of the program of the same cycle and type.
6. For the evaluation and approval of a foreign evaluation agency, pursuant to point 3, Article 15, of Law No. 80/2015, “On Higher Education and Scientific Research in Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Albania,” the fee is **120,000 ALL**.
7. For the review of the external evaluation and the accreditation decision-making process carried out pursuant to point 3, Article 15, of Law No. 80/2015, “On Higher Education and Scientific Research in Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Albania,” the fee is **180,000 ALL**.
8. The fee for reviewing an application for evaluation within the framework of accreditation is **3,000 ALL**.
9. The calculation of the fee for each evaluation requested by HEIs is carried out by QAAHE and communicated to the HEI, which, prior to the start of the evaluation process, deposits the payment at a second-level bank for QAAHE’s account, in the Treasury Branch of Tirana.
10. The fees for other services provided by QAAHE, for individuals, experts, or institutions, are presented in Table 2/c.
11. The revenues generated from the evaluation and service fees provided by QAAHE are used for:

- a) payments and expenses of experts engaged according to Annex 2;
- b) payments and expenses for the Accreditation Board;
- c) coverage of operational expenses for the Accreditation Board;
- d) investments for QAAHE and the Accreditation Board;
- e) annual membership fees of QAAHE in international networks;
- f) payments for evaluation related to QAAHE's membership in ENQA, EQAR, or other international networks;
- g) supplementary remuneration for QAAHE staff.

Table 2/a: Basic Fees for External Evaluation and Institutional Accreditation of HEIs

No.	Type of Higher Education Institution	Base Fee	Increase on the Base Fee
1	Professional College with 1–2 fields of study, up to 200 students	791,500 ALL	The base fee increases by 10% for each additional field of study and by 5% for every 200 students exceeding the base number. <i>(Base fee + 10% of the base fee for each additional field + 5% of the base fee for each additional 200 students)</i>
2	Academy offering first and second cycle programs, up to 300 students	910,875 ALL	The base fee increases by 15% if third cycle programs are offered, and by 5% for every 300 students exceeding the base number. <i>(Base fee + 15% of the base fee for offering third cycle programs + 5% of the base fee for each additional 300 students)</i>
3	University College with 1–2 fields of study, up to 600 students	1,205,250 ALL	The base fee increases by 10% for each additional field of study and by 5% for every 600 students exceeding the base number. <i>(Base fee + 10% of the base fee for each additional field + 5% of the base fee for each additional 600 students)</i>
4	University with 1–2 fields of study, up to 2,000 students	1,888,625 ALL	The base fee increases by 10% for each additional field of study and by 5% for every 2,000 students exceeding the base number. <i>(Base fee + 10% of the base fee for each additional field + 5% of the base fee for each additional 2,000 students)</i>

Table 2/b: Fees for External Evaluation and Accreditation of Study Programs

No.	Study Programs	Fee (in ALL)
1	2-year Professional	173,621
2	Bachelor	225,747
3	4-year Bachelor	277,874
4	1-year Professional Master	173,621
5	2-year Professional Master	225,747
6	Master of Science	364,517
7	Integrated Master of Science	600,945
8	1-year Executive Master	308,417
9	2-year Executive Master	364,517
10	SPA (2 years)	364,517
11	SPA (3–4 years)	482,731
12	Doctorate	610,490

Table 2/c: Fees for Other Services

No.	Description	Time of Payment	Fee (in ALL)
1	Fee for external evaluation of the internal quality assurance system	Paid upon submission of the application to QAAHE	100,000
2	Fee for special activities requested by the HEI within the framework of the quality evaluation process	Paid upon submission of the application to QAAHE	20,000
3	Fee for the provision of documentation related to evaluation and accreditation not covered by the Law on Access to Information (per page)	Paid upon submission of the application to QAAHE	10
4	Annual fee for services provided by QAAHE to HEIs (special publications, workshops, trainings, etc.)	At the beginning of each academic year	50,000
5	Annual fee for services provided by QAAHE to experts (special publications, workshops, trainings, etc.)	At the beginning of each academic year	5,000