

Accreditation with EQANIE – Frequently Asked Questions

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1. General questions concerning accreditation with EQANIE

Q1: The accrediting body in our country is not yet authorized by EQANIE. Does EQANIE accredit degree programmes of itself?

A1: Yes, EQANIE does conduct accreditations. As an initial step towards this, a request form and a curriculum overview should be sent to the EQANIE head office. More information on accreditation with EQANIE can be found at: <http://www.eqanie.eu/pages/quality-label.php>

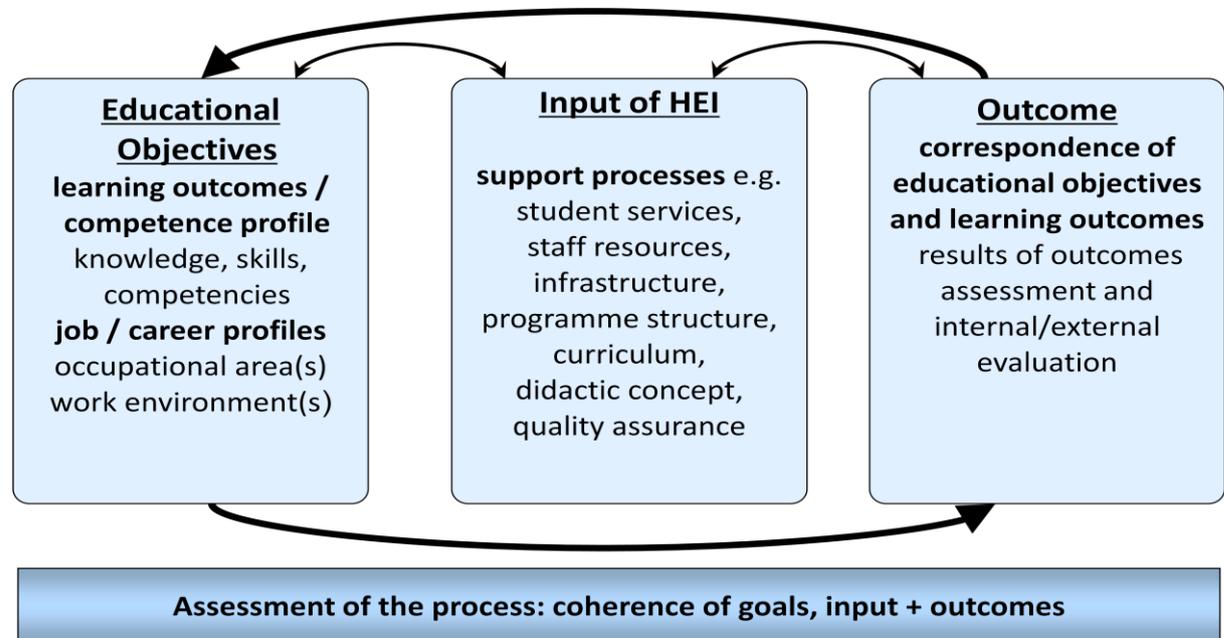
Q2: Has EQANIE published any model curricula or a standardized list with subjects/fields for study in the field of informatics, at which to orient the design of degree programmes?

A2: EQANIE has not published any model curricula and currently does not recommend any. We think that a model curriculum would possibly lead to a misunderstanding of our approach to quality: EQANIE assesses whether the goals defined for a degree programme are achieved, but we believe that there are many possible ways of achieving these goals. EQANIE'S intention is not to prescribe in any way which methods / curricular content should be chosen in order not to hinder innovation or creative solutions or alternative approaches to education. In this context, EQANIE's approach to assessment views the implementation of a degree programme as a process consisting of three interdependent phases.

1. *Definition of objectives / prior and ultimate qualifications:* The educational objectives of each degree programme are assessed in terms of the learning outcomes to be attained by students during their course of study. The assessment is focussed on the strict implementation of overarching objectives and targeted learning outcomes in the individual modules of a degree programme.
2. *Input:* The focus in this context is on the measures, instruments and resources invested in by the institution of higher education for the implementation of a degree programme. They are

the outcomes of support or organisational processes, and are aimed at attaining the targeted objectives in a degree programme.

3. *Outcome assessment / quality control in higher education*: The establishment and functioning of effective feedback mechanisms within the institution of higher education's internal quality assurance process, which contributes to the ongoing improvement of a degree programme, is one of the bases for the award of an accreditation seal with multi-year validity.



The accreditation procedure assesses the logic and effectiveness of the educational process in a degree programme. The combination of the elements in the individual phases of the process and the relationship between the three phases – and especially between the objectives and their implementation – play a key role in the overall assessment of the accreditation procedure.

We also do have a set of learning outcomes which form the basis for our assessment of programmes across all informatics disciplines (cf. the Euro-Inf Framework Standards p. 3-5). The EQANIE auditing team will check if the Euro-Inf learning outcomes are broadly covered by the applicant programmes. Within this wider framework, the degree programme(s) will be assessed against their own defined educational objectives.

Q3: Does EQANIE have any check list enabling an early (initial) check of a programme's prospects for accreditation?

A3: EQANIE does not currently have a checklist in this sense. In principle, the institution interested in the Euro-Inf Label should be able to demonstrate that its programme(s) produce(s) graduates who achieve the Euro-Inf learning outcomes (in particular those listed on pp. 3-5 of the Euro-Inf Framework Standards). Furthermore, the programme(s) must demonstrate compliance with the criteria and requirements stipulated in the table in section 2.1 of the Euro-Inf Framework Standards.

There is also the possibility for an in-principle check: a curriculum overview on the programmes for which application is envisaged can be submitted to the EQANIE head office. In an accompanying form the institution can indicate which specialization / experience they think the experts of a future auditing team should possess. On this basis, the EQANIE Accreditation Committee will make – case

by case – a first appraisal of the in-principle prospect of the programme to be accredited by EQANIE. It will then also decide how many experts there should be in the audit team (standard 4 + 1 staff member).

EQANIE also does several checks before conducting an audit. During the period of preparing the report, the HEI shall send a draft report to the EQANIE head office and request feedback before a final version of the self-assessment report is submitted.

Q4: Is it necessary to add a curricular overview when submitting the accreditation request?

A4: Yes, the curricular overview is not optional, but mandatory upon the submission of an accreditation request! We need this information in order to decide which auditors would be most suitable for this particular programme.

Q5: How long are the awarded Euro-Inf labels valid?

A5: As explained in the Euro-Inf Framework Standards, section 2.3, the accreditation decision can have different outcomes - one (the most common) of them is "accreditation with requirements". Normally, the accreditation is then granted for a shorter period than five years, usually one year. In such a case, the higher education institution submits evidence within one year about the fulfillment of the requirement. This evidence is then assessed by the members of the peer group who submit their proposal to the Accreditation Committee. Upon confirmation by the Accreditation Committee that the requirement has been fulfilled, the accreditation duration is prolonged to the full period of five years.

Q6: Is re-accreditation after the 5 years as expensive and as rigorous as the first accreditation?

A6: EQANIE is currently evaluating a number of different approaches to reaccreditation procedures and looking into options to reduce efforts and costs on all sides while at the same time ensuring high quality standards. Nevertheless, it is good practice in quality assurance that accreditation standards and criteria just as degree programmes change over time. Therefore, it has to be assured that the degree programme when undergoing a re-accreditation meets the criteria and requirements valid at that time.

Q7: What should we do when we make changes to our programme during the accreditation period?

Naturally, and as an intended result of the principle of continuous improvement, degree programmes will change over time. EQANIE expects to be informed without delay about substantial changes in an accredited degree programme. The institution should submit an informal request for assessment of the changes and retention of the accreditation. This request must include a description of the change in question. The documentation will then be examined by the Accreditation Committee which decides whether or not the change is substantial, and if applicable, which further steps have to be undertaken. Please ask the Secretary General of EQANIE for further details about this procedure.

2. Questions about the EURO-INF Accreditation Criteria and the Self-Assessment Report (SAR)

Q1: Which interval should be covered by the data provided in the Self-Assessment Report? We realise that some aspects of the design and planning of our degree programme go back to times when the programme was offered for the first time. Also, there is some fluctuation in the teaching and support staff. Which date should be the reference for self-assessment report?

A1: Most of the data should cover an interval of the last four to five academic years, e.g.: developments of the budget for staff or for research; or data on study success, graduates etc. It is important to allow the experts to gain an impression of the programme's development over time, e.g. is the budget for teaching decreasing or increasing over the years, and why. If the applicant programme in its current form is still very young, but has a considerable overlap with an older version of the programme, it can still be useful to analyse data from this older programme in order to make predictions / draw conclusions for the new programme. Examples are student intakes, graduate placements etc...

A very interesting and important element of the SAR is the HEI's analysis of the data collected and the formulations of strategies or expectations for the coming years. Both these aspects, although crucial, are often omitted in the SAR!

Q2: Is it enough to give a 5-6 lines long description of the content in the Module Handbook if its native language reference is 20 lines long?

A2: The answer would be "yes" only in the event that a major part of the information contained in the original version of the handbook is redundant. Please make sure that all relevant information is translated and included in the English version of the module handbook.

Q3: How do I write (programme) learning outcomes?

A3: The formulation of learning outcomes at programme or module level is, admittedly, not an easy task. Neither is it easy to use learning outcomes descriptions once they have been agreed on. EQANIE dedicated a whole conference to this issue.

A very useful practical guide to working with learning outcomes can be found in the [conference proceedings](#) ("Using Learning Outcomes – Future Potential, Advantages and Traps" – Presentation by Prof. Áine Hyland, European Universities Association). Among other things, the presentation includes advice on which verbs to use and which to avoid when formulating learning outcomes. Another very useful document is "Writing and Using Learning Outcomes: a Practical Guide".

Q4: How do I write educational objectives?

A4: The educational objectives of a programme are defined individually by each higher education institution. They are often directly related to the mission/priorities of the university. It is mostly meaningful to embed them in the objectives of the university or of the department where the programme is offered in order to demonstrate how the course fits within the broader vision of the HEI.

Q5: We do not understand the meaning (the expected contents) of section 3.3: “Financial Resources”.

A5: This section is needed to show that the offer of the degree programmes is a sustainable one, i.e. that there are sufficient funds in place to ensure that the programmes can be offered not only right now, but also in the next 5 years to come. Here you do not need to go too much into detail, but it is necessary to provide the auditors with some numbers that demonstrate the feasibility of the programmes. All auditors sign a declaration of confidentiality and the report will not be published so that confidential issues such as budgetary means will remain undisclosed to third parties.

3. Questions about the Self-Assessment Report (SAR)

Q1: Is there a template for the self-assessment report?

A1: Yes, please ask the EQANIE Secretariat to provide you with the latest version. In principle, the self-assessment report needs to provide a self-reflection and evidence for the fulfillment of the Euro-Info learning outcomes and accreditation criteria as stipulated in the Euro-Inf Framework Standards.

Q2: Which staff members should be included in the staff handbook (staff CVs)?

A2: The staff handbook should include all members of academic staff who assume tasks in research and /or teaching. CVs of laboratory or technical staff do not need to be included.

Q34: In which format should we submit our self-assessment report?

A3: In principle, we suggest that the self-assessment report should be submitted in searchable pdf-format. The document pages should be numbered. Also, it facilitates the work of the auditors tremendously if the files are not only numbered (e.g. “Appendix B”), but if all file names indicate their content (e.g. “Appendix B – Module Handbook”).

Also, each Appendix should not consist of more than one file. If the applicant institution submits a number of individual (sub-)files within one appendix (e.g. “CV of staff X.pdf”, “CV of staff Y.pdf”, “CV of staff Z. pdf”), the reading becomes very difficult for the audit team. Small, individual files should always be merged to one single file. Creating separate (sub-)folders for each appendix should be avoided.

Q4: Should any documentation / information on the applicant programme that is available online (e.g. on the webpage of the applicant HEI) be included in the written documentation / made available in print?

A4: First, we do not expect you to send a print version of the documentation. The material on CD-ROM or in a zipped email file is fine (c.f. the answer to the question “Q: In which format should we submit our self-assessment report?”).

Second, yes: All information that is relevant / useful for the accreditation process should be included in the SAR or its appendices. EQANIE does not expect its peers to look for information beyond the SAR (even though it is a positive aspect if information on the programme is available online).

4. Questions about the accreditation procedure

Q1: Should each programme undergo a separate accreditation procedure?

A1: No, while a separate assessment will be made and decision will be taken for each programme under review, the accreditation procedure can be conducted simultaneously in relation to a group of degree programmes (cluster procedure) at an institution of higher education, depending on the relevant prerequisites and requirements. The decision on whether a cluster procedure can be applied, and which degree programmes it will cover, is made on an ad hoc basis by the EQANIE Accreditation Committee upon receipt of an accreditation request to this end from the institution of higher education.

Overview of the types of procedure currently offered by EQANIE

Type of Procedure	Features	Accreditation Certificate
Individual procedure	The procedure is conducted for an individual Bachelor's or Master's degree programme or a consecutive Bachelor's and Master's degree programme.	The accreditation certificate applies to the degree programme. A separate and individual decision is made for each degree programme.
Cluster procedure	The procedure is conducted for a group of (related) degree programmes. One audit group assesses several degree programmes.	The accreditation certificate applies to the degree programme. A separate and individual decision is made for each degree programme.

Q2: Is it possible to have a video conference to carry out an accreditation event to help reduce the price?

A2: No, a video conference as a substitute to the accreditation visit is currently not an option. With a VC event we could not be sure that there were no other people in the room off camera, inhibiting those we were talking to from being as frank as they might otherwise be, e.g. students in the presence of staff, staff in the presence of senior managers. We believe this is very important for us, we have to ensure that our processes are completely transparent.

Additionally, the onsite visit will allow the panel members to gain an impression of the actual resources available to students and to make sure that more than offices are available.

Q5: What are the different steps of the accreditation procedure?

A5: In line with section 3 of the Euro-Inf Framework Standards, an accreditation procedure is divided into three stages:

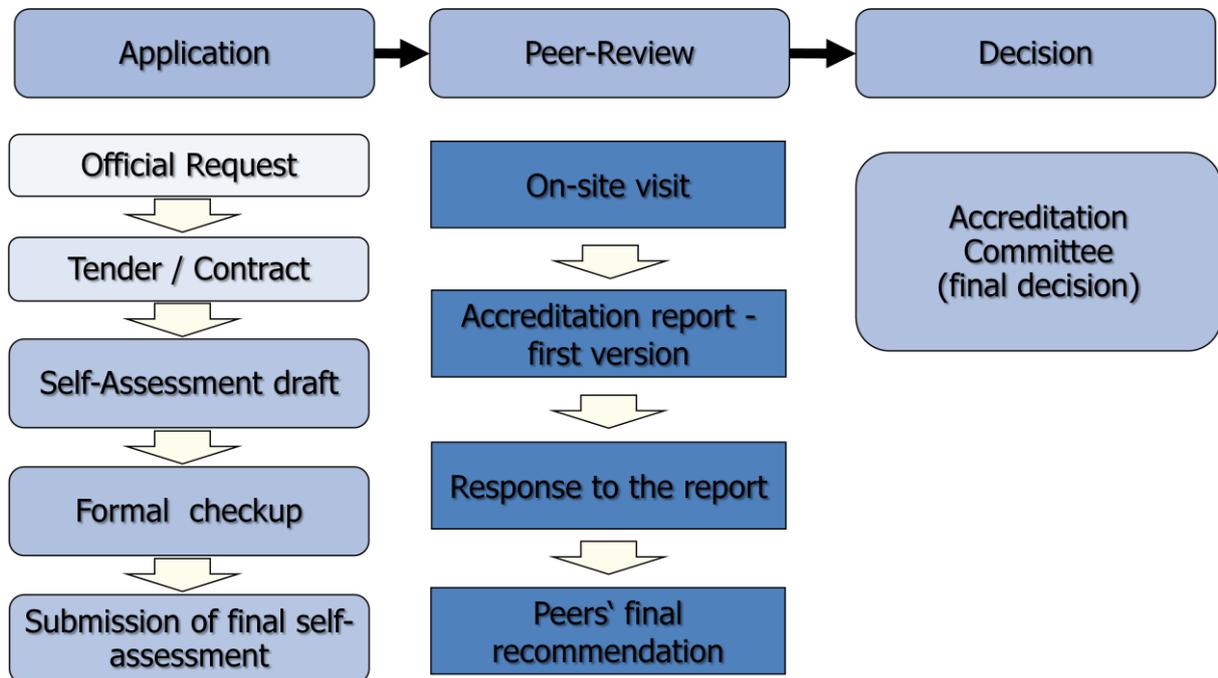
1. Application	<u>Institution</u>	Submits an application to EQANIE's Secretariat containing relevant preliminary information. This information should include the accreditation request and a brief outline of the curriculum , showing the specialist content of the programme(s). The
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accreditation request can also be downloaded from our website at www.eqanie.eu ➔ *Quality Label* and e-mailed to our Secretariat. The form proposes subject areas from which auditors should be appointed.

	<u>EQANIE</u>	Receives the application and conducts a formal initial evaluation ; the preliminary information is examined by the Secretariat and the Accreditation Committee to establish the number of auditors required. Based on this information, the Secretariat compiles a proposal for the accreditation procedure (time frame and costs), and requests written acceptance of the costs from the applicant / institution of higher education administration.
<u>2. Assessment</u>	<u>Institution</u>	Formalises the application for accreditation by accepting the costs or by signing an accreditation contract. Compiles a self-assessment report in accordance with the guidelines / proposed structure. EQANIE offers to organise a meeting at its Secretariat prior to the submission of the finalised self-assessment report to check the report for formal completeness and discuss it with the programme co-ordinators. Alternatively, the Secretariat can communicate the outcomes of the initial assessment in writing.
	<u>EQANIE (Peers)</u>	In the interim, EQANIE assembles a peer panel on the advice of the Accreditation Committee. The Accreditation Committee appoints one of the auditors as team spokesperson. The audit team visits the institution and conducts an audit of the applicant department. The audit usually takes a day and a half, or two or more days in the case of cluster procedures.
	<u>EQANIE</u>	Forwards the draft accreditation report to the applicant institution to check for factual errors.
	<u>Institution</u>	Checks for factual accuracy on the draft accreditation report and makes corrections or additions where necessary.
<u>3. Decision</u>	<u>EQANIE</u>	The auditors provide the Accreditation Committee with a final assessment and recommended decision. EQANIE's Accreditation Committee makes a decision regarding the accreditation. The applicant institution of higher education is informed of the decision.

The final version of the **accreditation report** is sent to the institution of higher education. A list of accredited degrees is published on the internet.

The three stages of the accreditation process



Q6: How are the peer panels composed? How are the members selected?

A6: The panels are normally composed of at least 4 experts: 2 professors (academic faculty members), 1 industry representative and 1 student. The inclusion of a student member in the peer panels is in line with the “European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education”, European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), 2009, Helsinki 3rd edition, criterion 3.7. (www.enqa.eu)

Panel members are chosen according to the following criteria:

- Panels are composed of members that enable it to gain a specialist overview of the degree programme(s) being assessed during a procedure
- Panels are composed of members that enable it to gain an overview of the interests of the parties affected by a specific course of study being offered, and include these in its assessment
- Members have proven specialist expertise
- Academic members have proven activity in one of the disciplines of informatics (Computer Science, Computer Engineering, Information Systems, Information Technology, and Software Engineering etc.)
- Industry representatives have experience of employing graduates of higher education informatics degree programmes in the workplace (in a human resources capacity)

The following are excluded from nomination as auditors:

- Individuals involved in application procedures in the institution to be audited
- Colleagues who are cooperating on publications or projects with teaching staff from the institution to be audited
- Individuals employed by, or in a relationship of dependence with, the institution to be audited.

EQANIE auditors must not accept an assignment as member of an audit team to an applicant institution if to do so would cause a conflict with the interests of other parties to the accreditation process. EQANIE auditors must be vigilant to ensure that conflict of interest situations are identified and dealt with appropriately.

Each EQANIE auditor is required to sign a **confidentiality agreement and declaration of impartiality** prior to the commencement of the audit. The applicants are informed of the composition of the audit team. The institution of higher education may request that auditors be replaced where there is evidence of possible bias. The Accreditation Committee will deal with such a request.

Q7: What will the onsite visit be like?

A7: Normally, the visit at your institution will last 1 ½ days. Discussion rounds will take place with the head of department / university, with academic staff members, with a representative group of students, with former students as well as with relevant employers / industry / professional informatics organisations representatives. The peer panel will also want to visit relevant facilities (libraries, laboratories, etc.) and review of project work, final thesis, examination papers and other assessed work (with regards to the standard and modes of assessment as well as to the learning achievements of the students). At the end of the visit, you will receive feedback by the panel. You will receive the detailed schedule for your planning well ahead of the visit.

Please ask the EQANIE Secretariat for a sample schedule.