

Standards and Guidelines for Agencies applying for authorization to award the “Euro-Inf Bachelor” and “Euro-Inf Master” quality labels.

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1. Introductory Note

EQANIE has implemented a system for the accreditation of informatics programmes within Europe. For this purpose, EQANIE has adopted the “EQANIE Framework Standards and Accreditation Criteria for Informatics Programmes”, following the framework originally developed within the Euro-Inf project (2006-2008). This document is applicable to the accreditation of informatics programmes at the First and Second Cycle levels. In case of a positive decision about the accreditation by EQANIE the Euro-Inf Bachelor and Master label will be awarded to individual study programmes on the basis of the Framework Standards and Accreditation Criteria.

An international, non-profit association, the European Quality Assurance Network for Informatics Education (EQANIE), has been established to administer the necessary organization and planning,

and to support the accreditation system. The Executive Board of EQANIE has appointed a Euro-Inf Accreditation Committee, composed of representatives of European higher education institutions, industrial or business enterprises and quality assurance bodies. The Accreditation Committee has basically two functions: It evaluates and decides upon applications of Higher Education Institutions requesting accreditation for individual study programmes. Also, it evaluates applications from accreditation agencies wishing to award the Euro-Inf label and to recommend to the EQANIE Executive Board the authorization of such accreditation bodies to do so. Eligible to apply for authorization are agencies from countries within the European Higher Education Area that accredit informatics programmes. A precondition for application is that an already functioning national accreditation system is in place which is in conformity with the EQANIE Framework Standards and Accreditation Criteria for Informatics Programmes.

The purpose of this document is to describe the guidelines and procedures for accreditation agencies intending to apply for authorisation to award the “Euro-Inf Bachelor” and “Euro-Inf Master” labels to degree programmes in informatics. The next section outlines the procedure for evaluating applications, and the final section provides detailed guidance on making an application.

2. Review of Accreditation Agencies – Procedure

This section outlines the procedure for evaluating an application for the authority to award the Euro-Inf label. There are five phases:

2.1 Application.

An accreditation agency (subsequently referred to as the Applicant) seeking the authority to award the Euro-Inf label should apply to EQANIE by submitting in English the information listed below. The application should be addressed to the Euro-Inf Accreditation Committee, and sent to the EQANIE Secretariat (ASIIN Consult GmbH, c/o Vdi, Postfach 101139, 40002 Düsseldorf, Germany). The information supplied will be treated in confidence, and will be used only for the purposes of the application.

Four paper copies and one electronic copy of the following information are required:

A completed Application Form and supporting documentation (attached) explaining how the standards and procedures of the Applicant comply with those of the Euro-Inf Framework has to be submitted in English. Detailed guidance on completing the Application Form is given in the next section. The completed Application Form is essentially a self-evaluation document, and can refer to existing documentation of the Applicant.

The EQANIE secretariat, together with one member of the Accreditation Committee, will review the application for completeness and coherence; if necessary, the Applicant will be asked to provide

additional information. A complete application is a precondition for the initiation of the review process.

2.2 Appointment of a Review Team

The Euro-Inf Accreditation Committee will appoint a team of at least three auditors (usually one member of the Accreditation Committee plus two other experts), which will be responsible for the evaluation of the application. The members of the Review Team should be completely independent of the Applicant, and have the necessary knowledge, experience and expertise to conduct the review. EQANIE will try to recruit peers who speak the respective mother language. If this is not possible the applicant is expected to provide a translation service. The Applicant may request that auditors be replaced, if there is a possible conflict of interest. One member of the review team will act as its chairman and be responsible for coordination amongst the team members and for the chairing of talks with representatives of the Applicant.

The responsibilities of the Review Team are to:

- evaluate the submitted application and supporting documents;
- observe and evaluate *at least two accreditation visits* for the accreditation of *at least one degree programme at each programme level* (First Cycle degree, Second Cycle degree). It is possible to observe and evaluate the accreditation of a First and a Second Cycle degree programme which are part of one joint visit;
- observe and evaluate the decision making process at a meeting of the decision making body of the Applicant, and preferably the one in which the decisions on the observed accreditation visits are to be reached. It is considered sufficient if only one member of the review team participates in the decision-making meeting of the applicant agency. This observation may also be made via video-conference;
- submit an evaluation report to the Accreditation Committee.

2.3 Visit by the Review Team

The details of the duration and schedule of the visit may vary for different reviews. The length of the visit will be determined at the beginning of the review process when the terms and conditions are being decided upon. It is likely that a visit of at least two days will be necessary for a Review Team to fully validate the documentation and clarify remaining issues.

The date of the visit and its agenda will be coordinated by the Chair of the Review Team. The date will depend on the availability of the Review Team, but the Applicant may indicate convenient dates when submitting the application.

2.4 Report on the Application

After assessing all the evidence, the Review Team will draft a report on the application. This draft report will be sent to the Applicant for the correction of any errors of fact. The corrected report, together with recommendation of the Review Team, will be submitted to the Euro-Inf Accreditation Committee for consideration.

2.5 Decision on Authorisation

The Euro-Inf Accreditation Committee will discuss the report of the Review Team, and decide whether or not to recommend that the Applicant should be authorised to award the Euro-Inf label. The final decision will be taken by the EQANIE Executive Board. The Applicant will be informed of the decision by the EQANIE Executive Board, and receive a final version of the report.

In case of a negative decision, the Applicant may appeal to the EQANIE Board of Appeals. If the Applicant decides to re-apply, the Accreditation Committee may decide on a shortened procedure to evaluate the re-application. The maximum period of authorisation is five years. Before the expiration of this period, an authorised agency should apply for re-evaluation to demonstrate compliance with the current EQANIE Framework Standards and Accreditation Procedures. A shortened procedure may be used for such a reevaluation.

3. Evaluation of Accreditation Agencies – Standards and Guidelines

3.1 Accreditation Standards

Programme Outcomes

Standard: The programme outcomes published as a standard by the applicant agency should fully comply with each of the four outcomes in Section 1 of the “EQANIE Framework Standards and Accreditation Criteria for Informatics Programmes”.

Guidelines: Programme Outcomes must form part of the accreditation standards. The Applicant must demonstrate compliance of the programme outcomes against which degree programmes are accredited by aligning them with the EQANIE programme outcomes, for example by listing them side-by-side in a tabular overview. A template for the alignment can be found on the EQANIE website (<http://www.eqanie.eu/pages/quality-label/authorised-agencies.php>). The four EQANIE programme outcomes of informatics programmes are:

- Underlying Conceptual Basis for Informatics

- Analysis, Design and Implementation
- Technological, Methodological and Transferable Skills
- Other Professional Competences

Although all four of the programme outcomes apply to both First Cycle and Second Cycle programmes, there are important differences in the requirements at the two levels. These differences in the levels of First and Second Cycle accredited informatics programmes should inform the interpretation of the programme outcomes by HEIs and by accrediting panels.

3.2 Programme Organisation

Standard: The accreditation criteria published as a standard by the applicant agency should fully comply with the Guidelines for Programme Assessment and Programme Accreditation as set out in the “EQANIE Framework Standards and Accreditation Criteria for Informatics Programmes” (Chapter 2).

Guidelines: The applicant agency must prove that its criteria demand a definition of the course structure, content and organization of Higher Education Institutions seeking accreditation which ensures that the graduates from these programmes will have achieved the Programme Outcomes. The specific information we are seeking is tabulated in Chapter 2 of the “EQANIE Framework Standards and Accreditation Criteria for Informatics Programmes” under five headings:

1. Needs, Objectives and Outcomes
2. Educational Process
3. Resources and Partnerships
4. Assessment of Educational Process
5. Management System

The reply should be organised under these headings. The third column of the table lists the questions to which we would like answers, and the fourth column indicates where we would expect the evidence for the answer to be found.

3.3 Accreditation Procedure

Standard: The procedures for program assessment and accreditation published as a standard by the applicant agency should fully comply with the procedures for programme assessment and programme accreditation as set out in the “EQANIE Framework Standards and Accreditation Criteria for Informatics Programmes” (Chapter 3).

Guidelines: Procedural guidelines for programme assessment must be specified in written form. The Applicant must demonstrate that the procedure for programme assessment (based on self-assessment of the Higher Education Institution followed by external assessment) corresponds to the EQANIE standards.

Individual accreditation agencies may add further requirements to these standards in order to adapt distinctive features of Higher Education in informatics in specific countries or cultural contexts and to ensure compliance with national legislation. At least the following aspects need to be addressed:

- Documentation to be provided by HEIs
- Composition of accreditation team
- Duration of the accreditation visit
- Structure of the accreditation visit
- Verification and validation of the report by the accreditation agency/commission
- Decision on accreditation
- Publication of results
- Procedures for appeals

3.4 Institution

Applying institutions must prove that they comply with the European standards and guidelines for external accreditation agencies as defined in the ENQA Report "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area", 2005 ("European Standards and Guidelines for External Accreditation Agencies") adopted by the Bergen Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, 19-20 May 2005;
<http://www.enqa.net/files/ENQA%20Bergen%20Report.pdf>.

If the applying agency operates as full member of ENQA or is inscribed in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR), its compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines does not need to be proven.

(a) Official status

Standard: Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities as agencies with responsibilities for the accreditation of study programmes in the field of informatics and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

(b) Activities

Standard: Agencies should undertake accreditation activities (at programme level) on a regular basis. These should be part of the core functions of the agency.

(c) Resources

Standard: Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their accreditation process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures. Agencies should have an appropriate pool of experts at their disposal.

(d) Mission statement

Standard: Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

Guidelines: These statements should describe the goals and objectives of agencies' accreditation processes, the division of labour with relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the cultural and historical context of their work. The statements should make clear that the accreditation process is a major activity of the agency and that there exists a systematic approach to achieving its goals and objectives. There should also be documentation to demonstrate how the statements are translated into a clear policy and management plan.

(e) Independence

Standard: Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

Guidelines: An agency will need to demonstrate its independence through measures, such as:

- Its operational independence from higher education institutions and governments is guaranteed in official documentation (e.g. instruments of governance or legislative acts).
- The definition and operation of its procedures and methods, the nomination and appointment of external experts and the determination of the outcomes of its accreditation processes are undertaken autonomously and independently from governments, higher education institutions, and organs of political influence.

◦ While relevant stakeholders in higher education, particularly students/learners, are consulted in the course of accreditation processes, the final outcomes of the accreditation processes remain the responsibility of the agency.

(f) Accountability procedures

Standard: Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

Guidelines: These procedures are expected to include the following:

1. A published policy for the assurance of the quality of the agency itself, made available on its website;
2. Documentation which demonstrates that:
 - the agency's processes and results reflect its mission and goals of accreditation;
 - the agency has in place, and enforces, a no-conflict-of-interest mechanism in the work of its external experts;
 - the agency has reliable mechanisms that ensure the quality of any activities and material produced by subcontractors, if some or all of the elements in its accreditation procedure are subcontracted to other parties;
 - the agency has in place internal quality assurance procedures which include an internal feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from its own staff and council/board); an internal reflection mechanism (i.e. means to react to internal and external recommendations for improvement); and an external feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from experts and reviewed institutions for future development) in order to inform and underpin its own development and improvement.
3. A mandatory cyclical external review of the agency's activities at least once every five years.