Requirements for Implementation of EUR-ACE Accreditation Centres in Partner Countries

December 2019

Index

1. Introduction

An ambitious objective of the MEDACCR Project is the identification/creation of national centres or agencies for the EUR-ACE accreditation of Engineering Study Programmes (ESPs).

The requirements to be fulfilled by accreditation agencies in order to be authorized to award the EUR-ACE label are established in *§ 3. Standards and Guidelines for Accreditation Agencies* of the ENAEE document *EUR-ACE Framework Standards and Guidelines* (EAFSG) [1].

As established in the EAFSG, the "standards apply to the effectiveness of the agency accreditation procedures in the evaluation of the learning process of the degree programme being accredited and its compliance with the Student Workload Requirements, Programme Outcomes and Programme Management".

The established standards "apply to the quality assurance of the internal processes of accreditation agencies. The standards are mandatory, but the guidance is not intended to be prescriptive. It is recognised that agencies that accredit engineering programmes will have different histories and traditions and will have established internal organisation and accreditation processes that are tuned to the needs of their particular communities and relevant regulatory requirements. Nevertheless, it would be expected that agencies will incorporate processes consistent with the standards that are accepted internationally as providing the basis for effective accreditation of engineering degree programmes. This guidance is intended to indicate methods that have gained general approval through widespread use and to reflect a consensus of good practice.

An agency that uses methods and procedures differing from those indicated by the guidelines should provide evidence that its methods and procedures comply fully with the standards described here".

The guidelines that follow the standards are not prescriptive but are intended to assist agencies in meeting the standards. Agencies are free to satisfy the standards in accordance with their own traditions and resources.

Standards of an accreditation agencies substantially compliant with the requirements specified in the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education* Area (ESG), Part 3 - Standards for External Quality Assurance Agencies [2] automatically fulfil also the ENAEE standards. In this case, agencies are eligible to apply to be a member of European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA, www.enqa.eu) and to be listed in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR, www.eqar.eu).

Appendix 2 of EAFSG provides also some guidelines on programme accreditation process as a guide to assist accreditation agencies when these agencies are applying for authorisation to award the EUR-ACE label.

The guidelines are not intended to be prescriptive. They are an indication of what ENAEE would expect to form the basis of the accreditation process of the agency, if the required standards are to be achieved.

The two following paragraphs present the *Standards and Guidelines for Accreditation Agencies* and the *Guidelines on Programme Accreditation Process* respectively.

2. Standards and Guidelines for Accreditation Agencies

The established standards for accreditation agencies are seven: five regard the programme evaluation and accreditation and two the quality assurance of accreditation agency.

2.1. Programme Evaluation and Accreditation

The five standards of this group regard:
- Methods and Procedures;
- Documentation;
- Accreditation Process;
- Decision-making;
- Publication.

2.1.1. <u>Methods and Procedures</u>

The methods and procedures of the agency must ensure that engineering degree programmes are accredited accurately in accordance with the agency's established standards.

(a) This standard is concerned with the processes used by the agency to establish, review and update its requirements of accredited programmes, of the infrastructure and resources of the HEI to deliver programmes and also of the agency procedures for evaluating programmes. Agencies need to be receptive to innovation in engineering technologies and teaching methods, to avoid accreditation inhibiting the introduction of new subjects and ways of teaching.

(b) Established accreditation agencies will have a wide range of different arrangements for consulting all stakeholders to ensure that their accreditation processes are conducted efficiently and effectively. Whatever the arrangement, the agency procedures should ensure that its standards and methods of working are reviewed at regular intervals and updated as required. The use of international accreditors is one way of ensuring that the agency standards and practices are consistent with international developments.

(c) In addition to ensuring that the specified standards of engineering education are maintained, accreditation agencies can have an important role in the development of engineering programmes through, for example, sharing good practice.

2.1.2. <u>Documentation</u>

The accreditation standards and procedures must be publicly available in an accessible format.

(a) The details of the accreditation standards and procedures should be widely available. A university applying for accreditation of a programme will require a clear statement of the standards and procedures that will be used to assess its application. It would be expected that agencies using web-based publishing have effective procedures for controlling changes to such documents.

(b) Agencies have widely different publication practices, often arising from long-standing traditions that determine the format and number of publications, but the expectation would be that all documents relevant to accreditation are publicly available and contain explicit statements of the accreditation standards. The documentation should provide comprehensive information on the procedures used in evaluating programmes, including, but not limited to, format of self-assessment report, timetable of observation visit, membership of accreditation panels and other committees and a template for accreditation reports.

(c) There should be an effective arrangement to ensure that changes in documentation arising from improvements in presentation and procedures are communicated to HEIs and other stakeholders. If the documentation is available on a website, it should be properly signposted and readily downloaded.

2.1.3. Accreditation Process

The accreditation process must be effective in acquiring all the evidence necessary to make decisions.

(a) The value of accreditation evaluations to universities, and to the wider engineering profession, is enhanced by a process designed to acquire the information necessary to make an informed decision. Agencies should ensure that the specification for the contents of the self-assessment report, and the agenda for the site visit by the accreditation panel are structured to obtain the required information. Accreditation evaluations are demanding of the time and resources of universities and therefore the process should not make unnecessary or excessive demands.

(b) The timetable for the accreditation process should provide adequate time to enable the HEI to assemble the relevant information. The format, content and detail of the evidence to be provided in the self-assessment report submitted by the HEI should be clearly specified. The agency should list the supporting documentation that is to be provided either before or during the visit of the accreditation panel, such as minutes of meetings, examples of assessed student work, and quality assurance procedures.

(c) The collective experience of agencies in many countries is that it is important to train the members of accreditation panels to assess evidence presented in different formats, ask relevant follow up questions, and make balanced judgements. The number and expertise of the panel membership should be determined by the nature of the programmes being assessed. Usual practice is that the accreditation panel consists of at least three persons, with appropriate representation from all relevant sectors of the engineering profession.

(d) The self-assessment report and other specified information should, typically, be available to the accreditation panel about one month in advance of the site visit. The duration of the site visit will be determined by the need to collect the required evidence, and to investigate aspects of the self-assessment report. The agenda for the visit should be specified in advance by the agency, but may be changed by the accreditation panel depending on circumstances. It would be expected that the agenda would schedule an initial meeting of the panel to review the submitted evidence, and a programme of meetings as required with HEI management, teachers, students, graduates, and employers. There should also be an opportunity for the panel to inspect the teaching and other supporting facilities, and to evaluate assessed student work. In order that the time available during the visit is used efficiently, some agencies request samples of assessed student work to be sent to the accreditation panel ahead of the visit, thereby enabling the work to be scrutinised more carefully.

(e) If the agency uses a template for the report of the accreditation panel, it should be publicly available to ensure that the HEI is fully aware of the basis for accreditation decisions.

2.1.4 Decision-making

Accreditation decisions must be demonstrably accurate, consistent and unbiased.

(a) The decisions of the agency need to be accepted by all stakeholders, if accreditation is to be accepted as evaluating the quality of engineering programmes. The agency should retain documented evidence of how decisions are reached.

(b) Agency decisions on accreditation should be based on careful and unbiased evaluation of the evidence provided by the university, and in the report of the accreditation panel. The decisions should be made by a board appointed for that purpose and composed of representatives from all sectors of the profession. The report (devoid of any recommendations) should have been cleared for factual accuracy by the university prior to consideration by the board, and it would be expected that one of the members of the accreditation panel would present the report to the board. Any member of the board who has (or has had) a connection of any sort with the university concerned should not be present during the decision-making process.

(c) It would be expected that the agency has documented procedures for appointing members to the board and would maintain a balance of representation between all sectors of the profession. The terms of reference of the board, and its rules and procedures should be documented and publicly available. The board should have a range of possible decisions on accreditation to ensure that it can act constructively in the best interests of the profession.

(d) The agency should have formal procedures for communicating decisions to HEIs, for recording decisions, for following up any actions required, and for any appeals against decisions.

2.1.5. Publication

The agency must publish the outcome of the accreditation evaluation.

(a) Publication of the decision to accredit a programme, and the period for which the accreditation is valid, will contribute to maintaining the standard of engineering programmes.

(b) The list of programmes accredited by the agency should be published including the period for which the accreditation is valid. The university should also be able to use accreditation of its programmes in publicity for prospective students. Agencies should also give consideration to publishing some parts of the report of the accreditation panel, subject to any limitations arising from confidentiality and other relevant considerations.

2.2. Quality Assurance of Accreditation Agency

The two standards of this group regard:
- Administration;
- Status and resources.

2.2.1. Administration

The management, organisation, and administration of the agency must ensure that the accreditation functions of the agency are implemented accurately and reliably.

(a) Agencies will have developed a wide range of different practices to administer its accreditation procedures and will usually have arrangements that are well tried and understood. Nevertheless, because an agency is making decisions on the quality of programmes on behalf of the engineering profession, it is important to review its practices from time to time, and to subject them to external scrutiny. Its organisation and processes should be open and transparent to ensure the efficiency and integrity of its accreditation decisions.

(b) The agency's administrative arrangements, procedures and rules should be fully documented and publicly available. Such arrangements should include, but not be limited to, the procedures for membership of the decision-making board and other relevant committees, for making accreditation decisions, and for selecting accreditation panels. It would be expected that the agency has quality assurance procedures to evaluate its activities. Such procedures should include a report at regular intervals, typically annually, to record and review its activities, and which should be independently, preferably externally, assessed.

2.2.2. Status and Resources

The agency must be independent of outside influences and have adequate resources to undertake accreditation.

(a) The purpose of accreditation is to ensure the standard of engineering degree programmes. Therefore, the agency should be recognised, formally or otherwise, by the engineering profession as having that responsibility. The standards should have been established collectively by the profession. Furthermore, it is essential that the agency is independent of all influences or conflicts of interest that might impact on the integrity of its decisions on accreditation. In order to preserve its independence, it should have access to adequate financial resources and the technical expertise necessary to implement accreditation effectively.

(b) The value of the accreditation of programmes requires that the engineering profession recognises the agency as the organisation with the specific responsibility for ensuring the quality of engineering programmes. Such recognition can be formal and legally validated, or informal and validated by wide representation of the profession on the agency board, committees and panels.

3. Guidelines on Programme Accreditation Process

3.1. Application

The accreditation procedure should start with the application for accreditation by the HEI. The self-assessment report should consider all the questions set out in Appendix 1 and submit relevant documentation at least one month before the visit of the accreditation team.

3.2. Composition of the Accreditation Panel

The accreditation process is based on principles of peer review and normally the members of the accreditation panel should be from the national jurisdiction of the HEI concerned. The accreditation panel should consist of at least three persons, preferably more, including a student. At least one member of the accreditation panel should be an academic and at least one a practising engineering professional. All members of the accreditation panel should be sufficiently trained to enable them to participate expertly in the accreditation process and their curricula vitae should be publicly available. Accreditation agencies should promote short training courses for potential members of accreditation panels.

To facilitate the dissemination of good practice in accreditation, the accreditation agency should consider including external observers from outside the jurisdiction.

From each member of the accreditation panel, a statement should be received indicating that a conflict of interest does not exist between the member and the HEI at which one or several programmes are being accredited. This statement should be received prior to any documentation being distributed.

3.3. Duration of Site Visit

The site visit should last at least two days, including any preliminary meetings to evaluate the documentation and the visit to the HEI.

3.4. Agenda for Site Visit

The site visit should include:
- preliminary meeting of the accreditation panel prior to the visit to identify what information is to be obtained during the visit;
- meeting with head of department / university;
- meeting with academic and support staff members;
- meetings with current and former students;
- meeting with employers / industry / professional engineering organisations representatives;
- visits to facilities (libraries, laboratories, etc.);
- review of project work, final 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);
- feedback to the HEI at the end of the visit.

3.5. Programme Evaluation

a) Good practice arising from experience would indicate that the evaluation of programmes can be classified effectively using the judgements described below.

The following three points at least, should be considered:

(i) Acceptable without reservation;

(ii) Acceptable with prescriptions/conditions;

(iii) Unacceptable.

The judgment "acceptable" should be awarded to programmes where all requirements have been fully met, even if improvements are still possible.

The judgment "acceptable with prescription" should be awarded to programmes where requirements have not been fully met, but are judged to be resolvable within a reasonable period of time (as a rule no longer than half the regular full period of accreditation).

The judgment "unacceptable" should be awarded to programmes where requirements have not been met or fully met and are judged not to be resolvable within a reasonable period of time.

b) The members of the accreditation panel prepare an accreditation report. The accreditation report, without the recommendation, is then submitted to the HEI to check for factual errors and to submit a statement on the report. The statement of the HEI is transmitted to the members of the accreditation panel for review of the accreditation report and the finalisation of the recommendation concerning the accreditation decision.

3.6. Final Recommendation

In accordance with Section 5 above the following final recommendations should be used. It is recognised that individual agencies may add other types of recommendation, for example, where partial accreditation will result in the cancelation of a degree programme.

a) "Accreditation without reservation", with possible specification of recommendations for the improvement of the programme, should be awarded to programmes for which all the requirements are judged to be acceptable. In this case accreditation should be awarded for the full period of accreditation (which should not exceed six years).

b) "Accreditation with prescriptions/conditions" and the time in which prescriptions/conditions must be carried out, should be awarded if one or several requirements are judged to be acceptable but with prescriptions/conditions. In such cases accreditation must be awarded for a shorter period of time after which compliance with the prescriptions/conditions must be verified.

c) The judgment "unacceptable" should be awarded to programmes where requirements have not been met or fully met and are judged not to be resolvable within a reasonable period of time. In this case the accreditation panel can recommend that accreditation be withheld.

References

[1] ENAEE, *EUR-ACE Framework Standards and Guidelines* (EAFSG), http://www.enaee.eu/wp-assets-enaee/uploads/2017/11/EAFSG-Doc-Full-status-8-Sept-15-on-web-fm.pdf

[2] ENQA and others, *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf