



NEAQA Serbia

National Entity for Accreditation and
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THEMATIC ANALYSIS

OF REPORTS OF THE PEER-REVIEW PANELS ON THE ACCREDITATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE NEW REGULATIONS WHICH CAME INTO FORCE IN MARCH 2019

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INTRODUCTION

In accordance with new regulations on accreditation, which came into force in March 2019, peer-review panels, composed of three members, were introduced; one teacher, one student and one representative of the economy, with the task of reviewing the documentation submitted along with the request by the Higher Education Institution (HEI), as well as verifying the accuracy of the statements during the visit in order to determine the factual situation relevant to the decision on accreditation.

This analysis is based on the accreditation reports of seven HEIs in the accreditation process (University of Belgrade - Faculty of Law, University of Singidunum - Faculty of Health and Business Studies, University of Novi Sad - Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Kragujevac - Faculty of Engineering Sciences, University of Belgrade - Faculty of Electrical Engineering, University of Niš - Faculty of Electronics, Union Nikola Tesla University - Faculty of Engineering Management). Although the sample is currently small (the first visits where the new regulations were applied started in September 2019), this thematic analysis will be completed with newly arrived reports. Initial accreditation reports were omitted from the analysis since their content differs from other reports and separate consideration of the reports is necessary.

As the implementation of the procedure is in the initial phase, there is a noticeable difference in the ways of writing of the peer-review panels' reports. Commendations and recommendations are not clearly specified, which indicates that in the following period the form should be modified and the reviewers should receive a training on the importance and expectations of each new element in the form. Namely, in the existing form, in addition to the recommendations, there is also a part called Examples of excellence and so far that part has been filled in in only 2 out of 7 reports. The need to improve the reports of the peer-review panels comes from the fact that the panels would commend the institution in the part related to the fulfillment of standards, but not complete the part related to excellence. In this context, it might be necessary to improve the form of the report in order to facilitate future thematic analyses.

The report could be supplemented with the following categories for each of the standards being analyzed: relevant facts, analysis of facts, commendations, recommendations and the conclusion of the peer-review panel, in order to shape the comments of the panel even more clearly.

Table 1 lists the numbers of commendations and recommendations for seven institutions according to the standards for accreditation of HEIs.

Table 1

Evaluation subject	Commendations	Recommendations
1. Main tasks and goals of HEI	1	7
2. Planning and controlling	2	3
3. Organization and management	1	3
4. Studies	-	6
5. Scientific research and artistic work	4	-
6. Teaching personnel	3	9
7. Non-teaching personnel	2	4
8. Students	1	4
9. Space and equipment	1	5
10. Library, textbooks and information support	5	7
11. Internal mechanisms for quality assurance	-	19
12. Sources of financing	-	10
13. Public availability	-	1
	20	77

The table shows that the peer-review panels gave more than three and a half times recommendations (3.85) than commendations, and that most recommendations were in the domain of Standard 11 - Internal mechanisms for quality assurance (24.67%). A more detailed analysis of commendations and recommendations according to standards for accreditation of HEIs is provided in Annex 1.

TRENDS AND QUESTIONS ARISING FROM THE COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PEER-REVIEW PANEL

1. Main tasks and goals of HEI

The peer-review panels' commendations in this standard referred to a modern approach in the management of a HEI, while the recommendations applied to the definition of the mission, goals and tasks that were sometimes set too broadly and sometimes too narrowly (especially in the case of providing scientific, professional and artistic youth, as in providing material conditions for the modernization of teaching and scientific work and for the improvement of publishing activities). The recommendations also related to the public availability of the mission, vision, goals and objectives on the websites of the institutions.

2. Planning and controlling

The commendation in this standard was addressed to one institution and referred to the incentive for young scientists who could be approved a leave of absence of up to one year for professional and scientific training abroad or writing a monograph. The recommendations in this standard also referred to the public availability of plan documents and current information.

3. Organization and management

One HEI has an Employers' Council in order to include relevant interested parties in its work, which was highlighted by the peer-review panel. The recommendations related to the training of non-teaching personnel, then organization and communication within the institution itself, as well as the inclusion of strategies, which only partially include management and teaching staff.

4. Studies

There were no commendations in this standard and the recommendations related to a more precise definition of the competencies that students acquire upon completion of certain study programs. Also, to defining the criteria by which the "difficulty" of the course can be determined, which could lead to a clearer distribution of ECTS points by course, as well as that HEIs should work on introducing joint study programs with HEIs from other countries.

5. Scientific research and artistic work

In this standard, the peer-review panel commended the planning and realization of the scientific research work, its multidisciplinary character, the monitoring of the results of the researchers as well as the publishing activity, while there were no recommendations.

6. Teaching personnel

The commendations of the panel refer to the level of quality of the teachers as well as to the introduction of criteria for promotion to teaching positions that are stricter than the minimum criteria set by the National Council for Higher Education and the Council of Scientific Areas of the University.

The recommendations were in terms of increasing the number of teachers and associates, a more evenly distributed workload and the improvement of their skills in order to accept new technologies and means of communication and thus the use of new modern forms of teaching instead of classical ones, in communication and teaching.

7. Non-teaching personnel

Within this standard, the panel commended one institution for having an officer in charge of working with persons with disabilities, as well as a proportionate number of teaching and non-teaching personnel, which enables the correct conduct of teaching and other processes at the HEI and leads to the relief of financial and spatial resources of the institution, which should be kept and nurtured in the long term.

The recommendations were related to the perceived shortcomings regarding the unorganized procedure and rules on the advancement of non-teaching personnel, as well as the uneven distribution of non-teaching personnel in the professional service.

8. Students

Within this standard, the panel's commendation was addressed to an institution that had adopted a Rulebook on criteria and methods for providing support to students from vulnerable social groups, which represents the systematic solution of the HEI for working with this category of students. In accordance with the aforementioned Rulebook, one executor with a higher education in the field of social sciences and humanities was appointed, with the tasks of support planning.

The panel recommended institutions within this standard to pay more attention to the development of students' communication and presentation skills, but not at the expense of professional knowledge, then to pay attention and take certain measures in order to increase the number of students who manage to complete their master's studies in the stipulated time frame and to reduce the number of students who quit doctoral studies, to adopt measures that allow the distribution of students by modules based on quotas to follow market trends (possibly also the wishes of students), as well as to introduce permanent monitoring of student progress by generation.

9. Space and equipment

The panel's commendations within this standard referred to the accessibility to persons with disabilities, as well as the availability of electronic textbooks, tactile boards with the Braille system, and the installation of an induction system for speech amplification for the hearing impaired.

The recommendations related to the accessibility of space and equipment for persons with disabilities, the expansion of spatial capacities, as well as the improvement of the level of technical and software equipment for teachers and associates in the processes of teaching preparation and exams and scientific research work (they should have computers, software packages, access to databases, etc.)

10. Library, textbooks and information support

The commendations of the panel were addressed to the modernization of the library collection, employment of competent and high-quality personnel that continuously aims to improve professionally, the development of information systems and infrastructure, the networking of computers and improvement of network resources, the procurement of laptops and video projectors, as well as servers and other equipment to support advanced services such as video conferences, distance learning, etc. as well as the volume of textbook literature.

The recommendations, on the other hand, ranged in the domain of improving all of the above: the number of computers, expansion of the library fund, development of information systems, improvement of publishing activities, etc.

11. Internal mechanisms for quality assurance

Although there were no commendations within this standard, most recommendations were made within it and they referred to the creation of strategic documents, the definition of goals and activities for their realization, improvement of internal mechanisms for quality assurance, more efficient and effective work of all employees, training and advancement of employees and raising awareness among all employees about the importance of quality assurance.

12. Sources of financing

There were no commendations within this standard and the recommendations were aimed at finding additional sources of financing through various aspects: cooperation with the economy, commercialization of services, participation in projects, etc.

13. Public availability

There were no commendations within this standard either, only a recommendation to improve the internet presentation of the institution so that it could be easily used by an average IT-educated person.

CONCLUSION

As aforementioned, although this analysis was done on a relatively small sample, it is still possible to draw useful conclusions that can improve the work of peer-review panels and contribute to the standardization of reports as a basis for future thematic analyses. Certain categories can be observed in the peer-review panels' reports, both in the domain of commendations and of recommendations, which can significantly help to improve the quality of work of the panels.

It should be noted that the recommendations addressed to a number of institutions within this sample, could also be addressed to other institutions, which the peer-review panels did not include in the report. For example, during visits to several technical faculties in Serbia (Faculty of Electrical Engineering - University of Belgrade, Faculty of Technical Sciences - University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Engineering - University of Kragujevac, and Faculty of Electronics - University of Niš) there were discussions on the need of students developing social and presentation skills, as well as a discussion on how to reduce the number of young engineers who quit master's and doctoral studies once they find a job, however the recommendations in terms of overcoming these challenges were mentioned in the report by only one peer-review panel.

In order to standardize the reports in the future, it is necessary to:

1. Complete the report of the peer-review panel;
2. Organize additional training for reviewers;
3. Further educate the Secretariat, which should direct the work of the reviewers in accordance with the positions and conclusions of the Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA), established on the basis of previously conducted analyses.

Annex 1

<i>Evaluation subject</i>	<i>Subcategories</i>	<i>Frequency (Institutions in total)</i>
1. Main tasks and goals of HEI	Commendations	
	Strategic management approach	1/7
	Recommendations	
	Defining	3/7
	Publishing	4/7
2. Planning and controlling	Commendations	
	Encouragement of young scientists	1/7
	Availability of information on the institution's website	1/7
	Recommendations	
	Availability of information on the institution's website	2/7
	Completeness of the work plan	1/7
3. Organization and management	Commendations	
	Cooperation with the economy	1/7
	Recommendations	
	Further improvement of non-teaching personnel	1/7
	Organizational structure of the institution	1/7
	Quality improvement of management and teaching personnel	1/7
4. Studies	Commendations	
	-	-
	Recommendations	
	Defining competencies	2/7
	Load measurement in ECTS	1/7
	Joint study program with other countries	1/7

5. Scientific research and artistic work	Commendations	
	Planning and realization of scientific research work	1/7
	Type of scientific research work	1/7
	Monitoring the work of researchers	1/7
	Publishing	1/7
	Recommendations	
	-	-
6. Teaching personnel	Commendations	
	Quality of teaching personnel	3/7
	Recommendations	
	Group sizes for lectures and exercises	1/7
	Number of teachers and associates	4/7
	Training (advancement) of teaching personnel	2/7
7. Non-teaching personnel	Commendations	
	Work with sensitive groups of students	1/7
	Balance in numbers between teaching and non-teaching personnel	1/7
	Recommendations	
	Training (advancement) of non-teaching personnel	3/7
	Service organization	2/7
8. Students	Commendations	
	Work with sensitive groups of students	1/7
	Recommendations	
	Development of students' skills	1/7
	Greater success of master's and doctoral students	1/7
	Market demands	1/7
	Monitoring students by generation	1/7

9. Space and equipment	Commendations	
	Accessibility for persons with disabilities	1/7
	Recommendations	
	Improvement of the space and equipment quality	4/7
	Accessibility for persons with disabilities	1/7
10. Library, textbooks and information support	Commendations	
	Quality of the library, textbooks and information system	5/7
	Recommendations	
	Improvement of the equipment fund	1/7
	Expansion of library fund and space	3/7
	Information system development	1/7
	Development of research activity	2/7
11. Internal mechanisms for quality assurance	Commendations	
	-	-
	Recommendations	
	Drafting of strategic documents	4/7
	Quality system improvement	5/7
	Building a culture of quality	7/7
12. Sources of financing	Commendations	
	-	-
	Recommendations	
	Finding additional sources of income	7/7
	Clarification of source of income	1/7
13. Public availability	Commendations	
	-	-
	Recommendations	
	Designing a user-friendly website	1/7