

CODE OF ETHICS FOR MEMBERS OF EXTERNAL REVIEW PANELS

This code sets forth the basic rules of professional conduct to be followed by external experts in the process of external reviews of study programmes.

External reviewers shall carry out their evaluation activities in accordance with Guidelines for External Reviews of Study Programmes developed by the National Centre for Public Accreditation (NCPA) for conducting the public accreditation procedure.

External reviewers are expected to have a sufficient level of competence for evaluation of study programme(s), be specially trained and certified. External reviewers of study programmes are required to adhere to the following high ethic standards: professionalism (professional competence), honesty, impartiality and objectivity.

1. Professional competence

Experts are professionals in the corresponding fields of study; they are responsible for carrying out the evaluation of study programme(s) at the high level against the NCPA standards and criteria.

Experts should show respect in establishing relations with other expert reviewers and the staff of the educational institution under accreditation. They should avoid using expressions and statements that might express disrespect towards honor and dignity of other experts and representatives of the institution under review.

2. Conflict of interest policy

Before being appointed as Review Panel members, experts will be required to notify the National Centre for Public Accreditation (NCPA) of existence of any circumstances which could result in a conflict of interest.

Circumstances leading to the conflict of interest may be the following:

- Present or former employment in the Institution delivering the study programme(s) under review
- Provision of consulting services regarding accreditation of the study programme(s) under review
- Former or actual engagement in negotiations concerning possible employment in the Institution delivering the study programme(s) under review
- Studying at the Institution delivering the study programme(s) under review
- Financial relationships with the Institution delivering the study programme(s) under review.

Experts are required to notify NCPA as soon as possible of any changes or emergence of conflicting interests in addition to already disclosed. If experts are unsure as to whether an interest should be disclosed.

During the review process of the study programme(s) the Review Panel members should voluntarily avoid any meetings /decisions which could lead to a conflict of interest. Panel members shall notify NCPA of any discrepancies between their personal interests and the interests of public accreditation of the study programme(s) under review, as the discrepancies could result in affecting the integrity of the external review procedure.

Panel members shall not take any money or other rewards from the institution under review which can affect the evaluation results.

Experts shall not exceed his/her powers, conferred by NCPA.

Panel members and NCPA sign a non-conflict-of interest agreement prior to the beginning of public accreditation procedure and submit it to NCPA.

3. Working Principles of an External Review Panel

Panel members should not refer to their personal work experience as the best practice. The external review implies teamwork, thus reaching an agreement on the review results with all the panel members. A student is a full member of the panel of equal status to the other members. Each member of the panel actively contributes to the work and proves their specific viewpoint and expertise.

The external review implies the use of complementary expertise and achievements of experts employed in various fields (academic, professional), in order to fairly evaluate the quality of the educational programmes.

Experts should be able to adapt to various groups of stakeholders and conditions in an educational institution; be flexible and open. It is important to be able to understand their own and stakeholders' motives; analyse and anticipate possible developments of discussion; acquire a solid understanding of the information obtained during the review procedure. It is also important to be able to foster a friendly but professional atmosphere during the meetings, manage emotions and prevent conflicts.

During international accreditation, it is necessary to take into account the cultural conditions and mindset of foreign experts – panel members; follow moral and ethical principles, standards and rules of international cooperation.

When involving interpreters, their work should be acknowledged and appreciated. Experts should be well-aware of the work of an interpreter and adjust their communication with stakeholders accordingly. If any online interviews take place, foreign experts should be able to follow the interviews with an accurate and complete translation.

Except in emergency situations, no mobile phones are to be used by experts during interviews.

Before the site-visit experts will thoroughly assess the self-evaluation report and study the additional material available on the website of the educational institution. In addition to studying the self-evaluation report and supplementary documents, the external review involves the use of a variety of expert methods including interviews, surveys, visiting classes; clarifying and satisfying experts' requests; using the relevant analytical tools that ensure independent analysis of the tendencies in higher education, evaluating the current situation and ways for the development of study programmes.

4. Confidentiality

Confidentiality is one of the key principles of NCPA activities. The information and documentation submitted to NCPA is confidential and should be used only in the process of public accreditation of (an) study programme(s).

Expert reviewers assume obligations of providing no access to the submitted information. The information can't be made public without permission of the institution under review and NCPA.

The working documents completed by experts are considered NCPA internal documentation and shall be kept confidential. The contents of the documents are NCPA intellectual property.

Any assessment or expression of expert opinions contained in the working documents is not to be communicated to representatives of the Institution under review.