The aims behind quality assurance arrangements in higher education are defined for individual processes and as part of mission statements and / or responsibilities of the institutions concerned. There is no single official document defining overall aims of the quality assurance system.

External quality assurance

External quality assurance currently comprises:

- ex-ante or initial institutional evaluation / accreditation: assessment of applications for, and the granting of, permits to establish non-public higher education institutions;
- ex-ante or initial programme evaluation / accreditation: assessment of applications for, and the granting of, authorisations to provide first-, second- and long-cycle programmes in any field of study (in cases extending beyond the autonomy of higher education institutions); and evaluation / accreditation of new first- and second-cycle programmes in the fields of Nursing and Midwifery (long-cycle programmes not provided in the two fields);
- ex-post or periodic programme evaluation/accreditation: mandatory evaluation / accreditation of ongoing first-, second- and long-cycle programmes in all fields of study, and of ongoing first- and second-cycle programmes in the fields of Nursing and Midwifery.

There are currently no national arrangements for external quality assurance of third-cycle programmes.

For the planned changes, see ‘Reforms in the last decade’ below.

Applications for permits to establish non-public higher education institutions (HEIs) and for authorisations to provide programmes are assessed by the Polish Accreditation Committee (PAC), and the Minister of Science and Higher Education grants permits and authorisations. Granting permits and authorisations where certain minimum quality standards are met has, by definition, a supervisory function or orientation. It is worth noting, though, that the focus in the criteria for assessing applications has now shifted from formal legal-compliance aspects to the quality of planned programmes (see ‘Reforms in the last decade’ below).

Evaluation / accreditation of ongoing programmes in all fields of study, which is the responsibility of PAC, aims to combine supervisory and advisory functions. On the one hand, such programme evaluation / accreditation is required to provide programmes, a negative rating given by PAC may lead to the Minister’s decision to suspend or withdraw the authorisation to provide a given programme, and PAC evaluations cover both quality aspects and compliance with legislation. On the other hand, pursuant to legislation and its own mission statement, PAC works for quality enhancement in higher education, its programme evaluations, leading to one of four quality ratings, extend beyond ‘yes/no’ accreditation, ”, and the evaluation process now places much greater emphasis on education quality enhancement (see below).
New and on-going programmes in two medical fields, Nursing and Midwifery, are subject to additional evaluation and accreditation. Evaluations are conducted by the National Accreditation Council for Schools of Nursing and Midwifery (NACSN&M) (Krajowa Rada Akredytacyjna Szkół Pielęgniarek i Położnych), and related accreditations are granted by the Minister of Health. This process has a supervisory function: evaluation covers compliance with standards laid down in national legislation and leads to a proposal submitted to the Minister to grant, withdraw or refuse accreditation, and refusal or withdrawal results in ceasing student enrolment until accreditation is (re-)granted.

Programme evaluations conducted by so-called peer accreditation commissions (see the introductory section to Chapter 11 [1]) have an exclusively advisory role, supporting HEIs in the development of quality culture and quality improvement. The commissions, which focus on specific types of HEIs or fields of study, do not operate on the basis of national legislation. They carry out evaluations on the basis of applications submitted voluntarily by HEIs, and their accreditation decisions do not entail any legal consequences. In recent years, most of the commissions have suspended or reduced their activity in view of mandatory accreditation by PAC. Thus, they are not included in the next sections. More details can be found on the websites of the commissions which are still active:

- [Foundation for the Promotion and Accreditation of Economic Education](http://example.com)[2]
- [Accreditation Commission of Universities of Technology](http://example.com)[3]
- [University Commission on the Quality of Medical Education](http://example.com)[4]
- [Accreditation Commission of Agricultural Universities](http://example.com)[5] (in Polish only)
- [Accreditation Commission of Universities of Fine Arts](http://example.com)[6] (in Polish only)

**Internal quality assurance**

HEIs are required to implement and improve an internal quality assurance system. The legislation does not predefine the scope, elements or principles of an internal system. It refers only in general terms to regular review and improvement of programmes as part of an internal system, in particular in the context of needs of the socio-economic environment, and graduate career monitoring, and defines basic conditions for academic teacher appraisal. Detailed arrangements are laid down by HEIs in their statutes and other internal regulations. Internal quality assurance is taken into account by PAC and NACSN&M in their external evaluations.

**Reforms in the last decade**

In the last decade, quality assurance arrangements were strengthened by amendments to the 2005 Law on Higher Education (LoHE) which came into force in October 2011, and detailed regulations issued on this basis. The amended legislation placed greater emphasis on internal quality assurance in line with the principle adopted in the European Higher Education Area that HEIs themselves take primary responsibility for the quality of education. LoHE explicitly entrusted the responsibility for the implementation and improvement of an internal quality assurance system to Rectors of HEIs, and internal quality assurance became a major criterion in external evaluations conducted by PAC. The new provisions also pointed to the role of the Conferences of Rectors in supporting efforts to improve the quality of education. At the same time, the responsibilities of PAC were extended to include ex-post institutional evaluation (which also covered third-cycle programmes). Furthermore, the amended LoHE linked, for the first time, the quality of education with funding to the extent that as part of the so-called pro-quality subsidy within the State budget, the Minister of Science and Higher Education now awards additional funding to organisational units of HEIs which have been given an outstanding quality rating as a result of a PAC programme evaluation (e.g. in 2018: 25 units, each receiving annually 1,000,000 PLN (around 240,000 euro) between 2018 and 2020).
Amendments to the legislation adopted in 2016 aimed at reducing bureaucracy in education and quality assurance processes, as part of the ‘Deregulation Package’, and making PAC evaluations still more clearly geared towards quality enhancement. Institutional evaluation was abolished, so PAC again conducts only programme evaluations. Based on the amended regulations, PAC developed new simplified criteria which have been in place since January 2017 (see Chapter 11.2, Approaches and methods of quality assurance). Programme evaluation still covers both aspects which have direct impact on the quality of education and formal (legislation) compliance aspects. The two elements are, however, more clearly separated, greater emphasis is placed on quality and education improvement, and quality aspects are the focus of a site visit undertaken as part of an evaluation. A similar approach has been adopted to assessing applications for authorisations to provide programmes.

Despite changes in the regulations concerning education and quality assurance between 2011 and 2015, higher education still suffers from bureaucratic burdens (requirements for the establishment and provision of degree programmes, and accreditation procedures); unsatisfactory quality of education and its limited relevance to the needs of the socio-economic environment; low effectiveness of training for doctoral students; and low status of the teaching path of an academic career as compared to the research path. In response to these and other issues, not related directly to quality assurance, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education drafted a new Law on Higher Education and Science. The Bill is currently being considered by the Parliament; it is expected to be passed by the end of September 2018, with a large part of its provisions coming into force in the academic year 2018/2019.

The Bill combines a number of existing and new elements of quality assurance. Regardless of detailed arrangements (where these are laid down in the Bill) differing to some extent from those now in place, the quality assurance system will include the three above-mentioned external quality assurance processes: ex-ante institutional evaluation / accreditation; ex-ante programme evaluation / accreditation; and ex-post programme evaluation / accreditation. These processes will still involve the Minister of Science and Higher Education and PAC, and the Minister of Health and the NACSN&M. The areas to be addressed by PAC in programme evaluation listed in the Bill largely overlap with the criteria currently in place (see ‘Approaches and methods of quality assurance’ below); however, effectiveness of internal quality assurance will be subject to the so-called overall evaluation as a new process. Like the legislation currently in force, the Bill provides for periodic assessment of teacher performance (at least every 4 years or at the request of the Rector) which should take into consideration feedback on teachers’ performance collected from students, incl. doctoral students, at least once in an academic year. Criteria and procedures for teacher performance appraisal and procedures for student evaluation of teaching will be laid down by the rector of an HEI (after consultation with the senate, trade unions, and student and doctoral student self-government bodies in the former case).

The Bill introduces overall evaluation, covering quality assurance activities undertaken by an HEI in all domains where it offers programmes and conducted by PAC, and evaluation of doctoral schools, focusing on the quality of education in doctoral schools and conducted by a Research Evaluation Committee. New general criteria for programme evaluation and overall evaluation will be laid down by the Minister of Science and Higher Education in a Regulation based on the provisions of the new Act coming into force on 1 October 2020; detailed criteria will be subsequently adopted by PAC. Criteria for quality evaluation of education in doctoral schools will be set out by the Minister in a Regulation based on the provisions entering into force on 1 October 2019.

**Responsible bodies**
Bodies responsible for external quality assurance

In accordance with the legislation currently in force, the bodies responsible for external quality assurance include: the Minister of Science and Higher Education and the Polish Accreditation Committee, and the Minister of Health and the National Accreditation Council for Schools of Nursing and Midwifery. See also ‘Reforms in the last decade’ above.

Minister of Science and Higher Education

The main powers of the Minister of Science and Higher Education, who carries out his/her responsibilities in cooperation with the Polish Accreditation Committee (PAC), include:

- granting permits for the establishment of non-public HEIs after consultation with PAC (ex-ante institutional accreditation);
- granting authorisations to HEIs to provide first-, second- and long-cycle programmes (in cases extending beyond the autonomy of HEIs) after consultation with PAC (ex-ante programme accreditation);
- withdrawing or suspending HEIs' authorisations to provide first-, second- and long-cycle programmes on the basis of a negative quality rating given by PAC, and re-granting such authorisations after consultation with PAC (ex-post programme accreditation);
- requesting PAC in justified cases to carry out a programme evaluation which is not included in a schedule for a given year adopted independently by PAC (ex-post programme accreditation).

Polish Accreditation Committee

PAC was established in 2002 (as the State Accreditation Committee) on the basis of amendments to the Higher Education Act and the Act on Schools of Higher Vocational Education then in force. Currently, it operates on the basis of the Act of 27 July 2005, The Law on Higher Education, which defines its responsibilities and general operational rules, and the Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 20 September 2016 on the general criteria of programme evaluation. PAC is the only statutory body responsible for mandatory external evaluation in all fields of study and all HEIs. Its main responsibilities include:

- conducting mandatory programme evaluations (first-, second- and long-cycle programmes) and presenting their findings to the Minister of Science and Higher Education (ex-post programme evaluation); where a negative quality rating is given by PAC, the Minister may take a decision to withdraw or suspend an authorisation of the HEI concerned to provide a given programme;
- giving opinions to the Minister of Science and Higher Education on applications for permits to establish non-public HEIs (an advisory function in ex-ante institutional accreditation);
- giving opinions to the Minister of Science and Higher Education on HEIs' applications for authorisations to provide first-, second- and long-cycle programmes in individual fields of study (in cases extending beyond the autonomy of HEIs) or for the re-granting of an authorisation (an advisory function in ex-ante programme accreditation).

PAC is an autonomous institution whose independence was confirmed by two external reviews (2008 and 2013) based on ‘The European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area’ (ESG) of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). PAC underwent another ESG-based review in spring 2018, with a report to be published in autumn 2018. Although members of PAC (80 to 90) are appointed for a 4-year term by the Minister of Science and Higher Education, candidates are proposed by various independent institutions. These include: the General Council for Science and Higher Education, the Conferences of Rectors, the Students’ Parliament of the Republic of Poland, the National Representation of Doctoral Students,
senates of HEIs, and national academic associations and employers’ organisations. Members of PAC may be dismissed only at the request of its Presidium. Administrative and financial services are provided by the PAC Bureau, financed from the State budget; the director of the PAC Bureau is appointed and dismissed by the President of PAC.

PAC’s responsibilities and general operational framework, and the general criteria and scope of its evaluations are laid down in the national legislation. However, PAC adopts independently its operational procedures, including evaluation procedures and detailed criteria, draws up a list of experts participating in evaluations, appoints evaluation panels and takes decisions to award individual quality ratings.

PAC has been a full member of ENQA since 2009 and was entered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) in the same year. It has also been a full member of the Central and Eastern European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (CEENQA) since 2002, the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) since 2005, and the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) since 2007.

Minister of Health and National Accreditation Council for Schools of Nursing and Midwifery

The Minister of Health [10] and the National Accreditation Council for Schools of Nursing and Midwifery [11] (NACSN&M) (formerly the National Accreditation Council for Medical Education, NACME) are responsible for accreditation of new and ongoing programmes in two medical fields of study: nursing and midwifery (ex-ante and ex-post programme accreditation).

The Minister of Health grants accreditation on the basis of evaluations carried out by NACSN&M. NACME was established on the basis of the amended Act on the Nursing and Midwifery Professions of 5 July 1996 and the Regulation of the Minister of Health of 31 July 2001 on the National Accreditation Council for Medical Education and the accreditation procedure. Currently, NACSN&M operates on the basis of the Act on the Nursing and Midwifery Professions of 15 July 2011 and the Regulation of the Minister of Health on the National Accreditation Council for Schools of Nursing and Midwifery. In accordance with the legislation, the responsibilities of NACSN&M include:

- carrying out evaluations concerning HEIs' compliance with the standards for programmes laid down in the national legislation;
- assessing on an on-going basis HEIs' compliance with the national standards for programmes;
- submitting to the Minister of Health proposals for granting accreditation or withdrawing accreditation in cases where a given HEI does not comply with the national standards for programmes.

Like in the case of PAC, members of NACSN&M (up to 12) are appointed by the Minister of Health for a 4-year term, with 50% of candidates proposed by schools of nursing and midwifery (HEI units offering first- and second-cycle programmes) and 50% by professional self-government bodies for nurses and midwives, nurses' and midwives' associations and professional organisations. NACSN&M defines independently detailed evaluation criteria and takes autonomous decisions concerning the extent to which HEIs comply with the national standards for programmes. However, the Minister of Health lays down, by regulation, NACSN&M's operational rules and the procedure for evaluation which provides a basis for accreditation, and takes final accreditation decisions, though they are based on NACSN&M’s positive or negative opinion on the HEI's application for accreditation. Furthermore, the Ministry of Health provides administrative support to NACSN&M. The important role of the Ministry can be explained by the fact that evaluations carried out by NACSN&M focus on HEIs' compliance with the standards for programmes which are set in the national legislation.
NACSN&M is not subject to external review, is not a member of ENQA and is not included in EQAR.

Bodies responsible for internal quality assurance

The Law on Higher Education entrusts the Rector of an HEI with the responsibility for supervising the implementation and improvement of an internal quality assurance system. Detailed internal quality assurance arrangements are laid down in HEIs’ statutes and other internal regulations. HEIs have appointed representatives of Rectors, coordinators or other persons, committees or other bodies and / or have established units directly concerned with internal quality assurance.

Approaches and methods of quality assurance

This chapter describes the following elements of the quality assurance system:

- **External quality assurance**:
  - **ex-ante institutional evaluation / accreditation**: assessment of applications for, and the granting of, permits to establish non-public higher education institutions;
  - **ex-ante programme evaluation / accreditation**: assessment of applications for, and the granting of, authorisations to provide first-, second- and long-cycle programmes in any field of study (in cases extending beyond the autonomy of higher education institutions), and evaluation / accreditation of new first- and second-cycle programmes in the fields of Nursing and Midwifery;
  - **ex-post programme evaluation/accreditation**: mandatory evaluation / accreditation of ongoing first-, second- and long-cycle programmes in all fields of study and higher education institutions, and of ongoing first- and second-cycle programmes in the fields of Nursing and Midwifery.

- **Internal quality assurance**

For information on the planned changes, see ‘Reforms in the last decade’ above.

External quality assurance

**Ex-ante institutional evaluation / accreditation**

The legislation does not refer to ‘institutional accreditation’, but it lays down a mandatory procedure for granting permits to establish non-public higher education institutions (HEIs) (public HEIs are established on the basis of national legislation). The responsibility for such ex-ante institutional evaluation/accreditation rests with the Minister of Science and Higher Education who is required to consult the Polish Accreditation Committee (PAC).

**Applications** are submitted by legal entities or natural persons to the Minister and reviewed by PAC which gives its opinion to the Minister. **Permits** for the establishment of non-public HEIs are granted by the Minister for an indefinite period of time. The Minister is not required by law to take a decision which is in agreement with PAC’s opinion. However, in practice, the Minister’s decisions differ from those recommended by PAC in exceptional cases, justified by reasons other than the quality of applications (e.g. a refusal to grant a permit in spite of PAC’s favourable opinion in view of the fact that there is no demand for graduates in the field of study concerned in a given region).

PAC normally gives its opinion on an application on the basis of documents submitted by the applicant, but its **procedure** provides for a site visit in justified cases. In assessing applications, PAC takes into account the aspects discussed under ‘Ex-ante programme evaluation / accreditation’ below
as HEIs to be established also apply for an authorisation to provide programmes. The criteria are published on PAC’s website [9].

**Ex-ante programme evaluation / accreditation: all fields of study**

The process involves granting authorisations to provide first-, second- and long-cycle programmes to basic organisational units of public and non-public HEIs which are not allowed to launch programmes independently as they do not meet the conditions laid down in the legislation (concerning the authorisation to award post-doctoral degrees). A decision to grant an authorisation is taken by the Minister of Science and Higher Education; like in the case of permits for the establishment of non-public HEIs, the Minister is, however, required to consult PAC which reviews applications. For authorisations to establish programmes in the fields of Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmacy, the Minister of Science and Higher Education also obligatorily consults the Minister of Health; in the case of the fields of Nursing and Midwifery, an authorisation can be granted by the Minister of Science and Higher Education only to programmes which have also been accredited by the Minister of Health (see below).

In accordance with PAC’s procedure, the assessment of applications normally includes only an analysis of documents submitted by applicant HEIs, but a site visit may also be undertaken in the case of justified reservations about the validity of the information provided. The assessment criteria cover: (1) general characteristics of a programme(s) to be provided; (2) rationale behind the establishment of (a) programme(s); (3) scientific research conducted, and research training provided to students (only in the case of academically-oriented programmes, as opposed to practically-oriented ones); (4) intended learning outcomes; (5) curriculum / study programme and plan; (6) methods for the verification and assessment of learning outcomes achieved by students; (7) a description of competences expected of student applicants; (8) conditions for providing programmes, and the organisation and implementation of the teaching and learning process. Assessment templates and detailed assessment criteria are available on the PAC website [9].

**Ex-ante programme evaluation / accreditation: fields of Nursing and Midwifery**

The National Accreditation Council for Schools of Nursing and Midwifery (NACSN&M) assesses the extent to which new first- and / second-cycle programmes in the two fields and the organisational units of HEIs which intend to establish them comply with the national standards laid down by legislation. Evaluation is conducted by the NACSN&M in accordance with the same procedures and criteria as ex-post programme evaluation (see below). Based on an evaluation, the NACSN&M submits a proposal to the Minister of Health to grant or refuse accreditation, The Minister grants accreditation for 3 or 5 years.

**Ex-post programme evaluation / accreditation: all fields of study**

Mandatory programme evaluation in all fields of study and all HEIs is carried out only by PAC. Evaluations are conducted in accordance with a schedule adopted annually by PAC, but they may also be undertaken at the request of the Minister of Science and Higher Education or an HEI. In the case of the Minister’s request, PKA conducts an evaluation immediately.

The frequency of evaluations is defined in PAC’s statutes, published on its website, and depends on the rating given as a result of the previous evaluation. PAC gives four quality ratings: outstanding, positive, conditional and negative, thus putting greater emphasis on levels of quality than it is normally the case in evaluations leading to ‘yes/no’ accreditation decisions. Unless there are circumstances justifying an earlier evaluation, a programme is re-evaluated after 8 years in the case of a previous outstanding rating, and after 6 years in the case of a previous positive rating; where a
conditional rating has been given, PAC defines the time-frame for a follow-up evaluation in each individual case (usually one year). Programmes which have received one of these ratings are automatically considered accredited. Where PAC has given a negative rating, the Minister of Science and Higher Education may suspend or withdraw the authorisation to provide a given programme. The Minister takes into account the type and extent of the shortcomings identified. The Minister may re-grant a suspended authorisation after consultation with PAC; in the case of a withdrawn authorisation, the programme may be launched again in accordance with a procedure for new programmes and is subject to evaluation as a new programme according to PAC’s evaluation schedule.

Evaluations are carried out by panels composed of PAC members and experts, two to seven members in total; a smaller panel of two members may be appointed for re-evaluation, following a conditional rating. Evaluation panels are normally chaired by PAC members. A panel is composed of academic experts, students-experts and experts-employer representatives.

Experts, including international experts, are appointed in accordance with the procedures and criteria published on PAC’s website and are obliged to complete training. Both PAC members and all experts are full and equal members of evaluation panels who analyse self-evaluation reports from HEIs, undertake site visits and prepare evaluation reports for PAC.

PAC conducts evaluations according to the criteria presented below which take into account the specificity of two programme orientations (‘profiles’): general-academic and practical. The criteria together with more detailed guidelines are available on the PAC website [9].

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Programme evaluation criteria: general academic profile / orientation</th>
<th>Programme evaluation criteria: Practical profile / orientation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Concept of education and its coherence with the mission and strategy of the HEI</td>
<td>1. Concept of education and its coherence with the mission and strategy of the HEI</td>
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<tr>
<td>◦ Concept of education</td>
<td>◦ Concept of education.</td>
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<tr>
<td>◦ Scientific research in the domains of science / fine arts related to the field of study / programme concerned</td>
<td>◦ Development work in the areas of professional / economic activity related to the field of study / programme concerned</td>
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<tr>
<td>◦ Learning outcomes</td>
<td>◦ Learning outcomes</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Study programme, and possibility of achieving intended learning outcomes</td>
<td>1. Study programme, and possibility of achieving intended learning outcomes</td>
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<tr>
<td>◦ Curriculum and study plan: selection of contents and teaching and learning methods</td>
<td>◦ Curriculum and study plan: selection of contents and teaching and learning methods</td>
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<tr>
<td>◦ Effectiveness in achieving intended learning outcomes</td>
<td>◦ Effectiveness in achieving intended learning outcomes</td>
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<tr>
<td>◦ Student admission; completion of study stages; graduation process; recognition and validation of learning outcomes</td>
<td>◦ Student admission; completion of study stages; graduation process; recognition and validation of learning outcomes</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system</td>
<td>1. Effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system</td>
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<tr>
<td>◦ Design, approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes</td>
<td>◦ Design, approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes</td>
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<td>◦ Public access to information</td>
<td>◦ Public access to information</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Staff involved in the education process</td>
<td>1. Staff involved in the education process</td>
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<tr>
<td>◦ Number, research / artistic achievements and teaching competence of staff</td>
<td>◦ Number of staff, their research / artistic achievements, professional experience gained outside an HEI, and teaching competence</td>
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<td>◦ Assignment of staff to courses</td>
<td>◦ Assignment of staff to courses</td>
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<td>◦ Staff development</td>
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Pursuant to the Higher Education and Science Bill, programme evaluation will cover, in particular, the following areas: curricula and standards (programme requirements); teaching and research staff; infrastructure / facilities used in the implementation of curricula; cooperation with the socio-economic environment; internationalisation; support for students in the learning process. They largely overlap with the criteria listed above. Effectiveness of an internal quality assurance system will be subject to so-called overall evaluation. See ‘Reforms in the last decade above.

Internal quality assurance systems are currently assessed with regard to the above-mentioned ‘European Standards and Guidelines’ (ESG). Evaluations also take into account accreditations and certificates awarded by national and international sectoral committees / agencies which conduct evaluations in selected areas of education, and by accreditation agencies which have been entered on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) or with which PAC has concluded agreements on the recognition of accreditation decisions.

Where PAC has given a conditional rating, it carries out a follow-up evaluation, assessing the effectiveness of remedial measures taken to address the reservations and shortcomings identified in the first evaluation and the relevance and implications of other changes introduced in a given HEI unit. The overall assessment includes conclusions concerning the effectiveness and completeness of introduced changes.

The evaluation procedure is based on the stages recommended in the ESG and includes: a self-evaluation report (or a report on remedial measures in the case of a follow-up evaluation) prepared by the HEI concerned; a site visit undertaken by an evaluation panel; a report prepared by the panel and provided to the HEI; feedback on the report from the HEI; a resolution with a quality rating adopted by the PAC Presidium; the publication of the quality rating together with its justification and the evaluation report.

PAC publishes quality ratings given, including negative ones, together with their justification, on its website and in the Public Information Bulletin. Detailed individual evaluation reports are also obligatorily available on the PAC website. Furthermore, PAC publishes annual reports with a summary analysis of evaluations and analytical reports on groups of fields of study. They enable overall
evaluation of the quality of education in HEIs and provide a basis for planning quality improvement activities.

PAC has an internal quality assurance, with a number of mechanisms, including internal audits of processes, and a questionnaire on external evaluations completed on a voluntary basis by evaluated HEIs. Results of the questionnaire surveys are published on PAC’s website and in its activity reports. In line with the ESG, PAC is also subject to external review at least every five years (the last one in 2018).

Ex-post programme evaluation / accreditation: fields of Nursing and Midwifery

Evaluations are conducted by the NACSN&M and provide the basis for accreditation granted by the Minister of Health. NACSN&M evaluation is not referred to in the legislation as evaluation of education quality, but as assessment of HEIs' compliance with the national standards for programmes. Thus, evaluations serve as the basis for 'yes/no' accreditation decisions, with no distinction made between quality levels of evaluated programmes.

The frequency of evaluations is determined by the validity period of accreditation which is granted for 3 to 5 years. Where accreditation is withdrawn, the HEI concerned may no longer enrol students until a given programme is re-accredited.

Evaluation is carried out by an evaluation panel composed of academic teachers training nurses and midwives. Panels do not include teachers from the evaluated HEI. The regulations concerning the NACSN&M do not require the participation of students or international experts.

Like ex-ante evaluations, ex-post evaluations are conducted by the NACSN&M according to the following four blocks of criteria, based on the national standards for the two fields concerned, which are available on the Council’s website [12] (in Polish only):

1. Methods for the implementation of the programme: curriculum; learning outcomes; the link between curricular contents, types of classes and teaching methods on the one hand and learning outcomes on the other hand; compliance of the curriculum and the programme of internships with the national standards; course load requirements; ECTS credits; documents concerning students' progress; and the final exam.
2. Teaching staff: compliance with the requirements concerning the minimum staff resources, teachers' qualifications, and the ratio of students to teachers.
3. Learning and teaching facilities: organisational structure; learning and teaching facilities; and arrangements for student internships.
4. Quality of education and achievements of the HEI: a quality assurance system; the functioning of an internal quality assurance committee, its evaluation criteria and tools; scope of internal quality evaluation; analysis of findings to improve the education process; and assessment of graduate employability / graduate career tracking.

Accreditation for a period longer than 3 years is awarded to units which comply with several additional criteria in each of the four blocks (e.g. a modular structure of the programme and provisions for international cooperation within the programme in the first block; international cooperation in the area of teaching and research in the fourth block).

The evaluation and accreditation procedure includes the following stages: an application for accreditation submitted by a HEI; review of the application by the NACSN&M; a site visit; a site visit report prepared by the evaluation panel and forwarded to the HEI for feedback; a resolution adopted by the NACSN&M with its positive or negative opinion on the HEI's application; a motion to grant,
refuse or withdraw accreditation put forward to the Minister of Health; an accreditation certificate awarded by the Minister of Health or the Minister's decision to refuse or withdraw accreditation. The NACSN&M publishes only the names of HEIs and the fields of study which have been granted accreditation together with its validity period.

The regulations concerning the NACSN&M do not lay down any specific arrangements to ensure the quality of its own procedures and do not provide for its periodic external review.

**Internal quality assurance**

The legislation requires that HEIs implement a quality assurance system and entrusts the responsibility for establishing and improving the system to the Rector of an HEI. It does not predefine the scope or components of the system, or principles for its functioning. There are only general provisions about the obligation to evaluate and improve regularly the quality of education, with special regard to the needs of the social-economic environment, including the labour market, and the monitoring of graduate careers, and general arrangements for academic teacher appraisal.

Pursuant to the legislation, HEIs are required to assess the performance of academic staff at least every four years, or at the request of the head of the organisational unit where the teacher works. Assessment is conducted by a body specified in the Statutes of the HEI. It covers, in particular, the performance of statutory duties and the observance of intellectual and industrial property rights by the teacher. Assessment given by students, including doctoral students, is obligatorily taken into account. The Rector may terminate an employment relationship with an appointed academic teacher after one negative assessment and terminates an employment relationship with a teacher when he/she has received two consecutive negative assessments.

Detailed internal quality assurance arrangements are adopted by individual HEIs in their statutes and other internal regulations. They are taken into consideration by PAC and the NACSN&M in their external evaluations.

**Summary reports on quality in higher education**

At national level, PAC’s reports are the main source of summary information on the quality of higher education. Reports include statistical data on evaluation / accreditation processes, and more detailed analyses in a breakdown by academic area or group of fields of study. Analytical chapters discuss, for example, strengths and weaknesses of HEIs, changes and trends and the impact of PAC’s activities on quality improvement. Reports are sent to, among others, the competent Ministers, the Parliament, the Conferences of Rectors and the General Council for Science and Higher Education, and are published on the PAC website. Findings are used to inform policy decisions relating to quality assurance in higher education, and by PAC itself to improve its processes.

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Enter the characters shown in the image.

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