The aims of quality assurance 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 setting out overall aims of the quality assurance system.

**External quality assurance**

The following external quality assurance processes are currently in place:

- **ex-ante** or **initial institutional evaluation / accreditation**: assessment of applications and entry of new non-public higher education institutions into the Register (a kind of licensing);
- **ex-post institutional evaluation / accreditation**: assessment of applications and extension of the validity period of registration for non-public higher education institutions;
- **ex-ante** or **initial programme evaluation / accreditation**: assessment of applications and the granting of permits to establish programmes in any field of study (for new non-public institutions and existing public and non-public institutions which do not meet the statutory requirements to establish a programme in a given field of study as part of their autonomy); and, additionally, evaluation / accreditation for new programmes in the fields of Nursing and Midwifery;
- **ex-post** or **periodic programme evaluation / accreditation**: evaluation / accreditation of ongoing programmes in all fields of study and, additionally, of ongoing programmes in the fields of Nursing and Midwifery.

The four processes apply only to **first-, second- and long-cycle programmes** and are mandatory. The 2018 Law on Higher Education and Science also provides for a comprehensive / overall evaluation focusing on the effectiveness of quality assurance in all areas where an institution provides education, and evaluation of the quality of education at doctoral schools. The two processes will be put in place in the coming years; see general information in the introductory chapter and the chapter ‘Reforms in the last decade’ below.

Applications for **entry** of non-public higher education institutions (HEIs) **into the Register** and for **permits to establish programmes** are assessed by the Polish Accreditation Committee (PAC), and the Minister of Science and Higher Education issues registration decisions and grants permits. Except in the cases where HEIs do not meet certain formal and legal requirements laid down by law, the Minister also consults PAC as part of the process for renewing registration of non-public HEIs. This kind of licensing where HEIs should meet specific standards has, by definition, a supervisory function. However, it is worth noting that the focus in the process of assessing applications by PAC has recently shifted from formal and legal compliance aspects to the quality of proposed programmes (see
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 evaluation / accreditation is required to provide programmes; a negative decision issued by PAC leads to the abolishment of the programme concerned (where established by an HEI which met the statutory requirements and, thus, was not required to obtain a permit from the Minister) or may lead to the withdrawal of a permit by the Minister (where a permit was needed to establish the programme); and PAC evaluations cover both quality aspects and compliance with legislation. On the other hand, in line with the legislation and its own mission statement, PAC places emphasis on quality enhancement in its evaluation processes (see below). Furthermore, while its accreditation decisions (positive and negative) are ‘yes’/‘no’-type decisions, PAC may award certificates for outstanding quality of education. They are awarded where a given programme has received a positive decision for the full validity period of 6 years, and the outcome is supported by examples of good practice in quality of education or regular achievements of students and graduates (see also the Chapter ‘Approaches and methods of quality assurance’.

New and ongoing programmes in two medical fields, Nursing and Midwifery, are subject to additional ex-ante and ex-post 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 accreditation is granted by the Minister of Health. This process has a supervisory function: evaluation covers compliance with standards laid down in the national legislation and leads to a proposal submitted to the Minister to grant, withdraw or refuse accreditation. Where accreditation is refused, the HEI concerned is not authorised to establish a programme and enrol students, and withdrawal results in ceasing student enrolment until accreditation is re-granted.

Evaluations conducted by so-called peer accreditation commissions (see the introductory section to Chapter 11) 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 based on 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](#) [1]
- [Accreditation Commission of Universities of Technology](#) [2]
- [University Commission on the Quality of Medical Education](#) [3]
- [Accreditation Commission of Agricultural Universities](#) [4] (in Polish only)
- [Accreditation Commission of Universities of Fine Arts](#) [5] (in Polish only)

**Internal quality assurance**

HEIs are required by law to ensure high quality of education, but the legislation does not lay down arrangements for internal quality assurance, except for general principles for study programmes and teacher appraisal. Detailed arrangements are laid down by HEIs in their internal regulations. Internal quality assurance is taken into account by PAC and NACSN&M in their external evaluations.

**Reforms in the last decade**

A quality assurance system for the entire higher education sector was set up by the legislation
adopted in 2001 which introduced uniform and mandatory arrangements for all types of HEIs and fields of study and provided the basis for the establishment of the State Accreditation Committee (currently, the Polish Accreditation Committee, PAC) in 2002. Reforms in the last decade have involved, in particular, strengthening quality assurance measures; shifting gradually the focus of external quality assurance from compliance with the legislation to qualitative aspects; placing a stronger emphasis on internal quality assurance; and simplifying criteria and procedures for external quality assurance. Amendments to the legislation have also provided the basis for awarding additional State-budget grants to HEIs for quality assurance activities. Institutional arrangements, with a key role of the Minister of Science and Higher Education and PAC in external quality assurance, have remained unchanged, whereas the scope of external quality assurance has evolved to some extent over the years.

Quality assurance arrangements were strengthened by amendments to the 2005 Law on Higher Education (LoHE) which came into force in 2011. Greater emphasis was placed 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. The LoHE 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. At the same time, the responsibilities of PAC were extended to include ex-post institutional evaluation (for organisational units rather than entire HEIs) which also covered third-cycle / doctoral programmes, as compared to programme evaluations conducted only for first-, second- and long-cycle programmes. The amended LoHE also linked, for the first time, the quality of education with funding insofar as the Minister of Science and Higher Education awarded additional funding to HEIs which received an outstanding quality rating as a result of a PAC programme evaluation. Grants were also awarded on a competitive basis for improvement of internal quality assurance at HEIs.

Amendments to the legislation adopted in 2016 aimed at reducing bureaucracy in education and quality assurance, and refocusing PAC evaluations still more clearly towards quality enhancement. Institutional evaluation was abolished. PAC developed simplified criteria for programme evaluation which were in place as from 2017. Programme evaluation still covered both qualitative aspects and formal aspects or compliance with the requirements laid down by law. However, the two elements were more clearly separated; greater emphasis was placed on the quality of education and its improvement, a site visit undertaken as part of an evaluation focused on qualitative aspects. A similar approach was adopted in assessing applications for authorisations to provide programmes.

Despite changes between 2011 and 2015, higher education still suffered from bureaucratic burdens (requirements for the establishment and provision of programmes, and accreditation procedures); unsatisfactory quality of education and its limited relevance to the needs of the socio-economic environment; low effectiveness of doctoral training; 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, and based on proposals submitted by the academic community, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education drafted a new Law on Higher Education and Science.

The current system, based on the Law on Higher Education and Science of 2018, still comprises a kind of ex-ante and ex-post institutional evaluation / accreditation for non-public HEIs, and ex-ante and ex-post programme evaluation / accreditation for all HEIs. The Law also provides for the introduction of two new processes, comprehensive evaluation and evaluation of the quality of education at doctoral schools.

Comprehensive or overall evaluation will be introduced based on the provisions of the Law which will come into force on 1 October 2020. It will focus on the effectiveness of quality assurance measures in all areas where an HEI provides education. Evaluations will be conducted by PAC at the request of an
HEI which has received only positive programme accreditation decisions or a positive comprehensive / overall evaluation decision. The process will end with a positive decision issued for a period of 3 to 8 years or refusal to issue a positive decision. During the validity period of a positive decision, PAC will not conduct programme evaluations in the fields of study assigned to the disciplines within such areas, unless it is instructed to do so by the Minister of Science and Higher Education. In the case of refusal to issue a positive decision, the HEI concerned will be eligible to re-apply for a comprehensive / overall evaluation only after 5 years, unless PAC sets a shorter timeframe.

The provisions of the Law concerning quality evaluation of education at doctoral schools come into force on 1 October 2019. However, the first cohort of doctoral students will take up studies at schools (as a new structure for doctoral training) in the year 2019/2020; the first evaluation may be conducted at least 5 years after the start date of training provided at a given school or earlier at the request of the Minister of Science and Higher Education. Evaluation criteria will address the relevance of a given programme and individual research plans to the learning outcomes defined for qualifications at Level 8 of the Polish Qualifications Framework, and the implementation of the programme and plans; methods for verification of the learning outcomes; qualifications of academic staff; quality of the admissions process; quality of academic tutoring and support in research activities; reliability of mid-term assessment; internationalisation; and effectiveness of education. Evaluations will be conducted by the Research Evaluation Committee (Komisja Ewaluacji Nauki) at least every 6 years and will end with a positive or negative decision. Where a negative decision is taken, the HEI (or another research institution) concerned will no longer be authorised to operate the doctoral school concerned.

The two new processes are not discussed in the next chapters as they will be introduced in the coming years and detailed arrangements are yet to be developed.

Pursuant to the 2018 Law on Higher Education and Science, the Minister of Science and Higher Education, awards, on a competitive basis, additional funding to HEIs as part of three programmes which are directly or indirectly related to quality assurance. As part of ‘The Teaching Excellence Initiative’ (Dydaktyczna inicjatywa doskonałości), public non-university HEIs receive a grant to improve the quality of education, based on evaluation decisions issued by PAC in 6 years preceding the Call and findings from student and graduate career tracking. The overall aim of ‘The Excellence Initiative: Research Institution’ (Inicjatywa doskonałości – uczelnia badawcza) is to enhance international standing of HEIs’ activities. Public and non-public university-type HEIs may receive a grant for improving the quality of research through, for example, enhanced international cooperation, and the quality of education, in particular, in priority research areas; putting in place arrangements for staff development and improvement of institutional management, including organisational changes for quality enhancement. In addition to the criteria concerning the quality of research, only HEIs which operate a doctoral school and have not received a negative programme accreditation decision from PAC are eligible to apply. Public and non-public university-type HEIs which distinguish themselves in a given region in terms of their research potential, fulfil specific research criteria and operate a doctoral school may apply for a grant under ‘The Regional Excellence Initiative’ (Regionalna inicjatywa doskonałości). It aims to strengthen HEIs’ activities in specific disciplines. Grants are awarded for projects which comprise a strategy for research and development or artistic activities, integrating the aims of the programme, and which support intensive development of HEIs.

Responsible bodies

Bodies responsible for external quality assurance

Pursuant to the legislation, the external quality assurance bodies are: the Minister of Science and Higher Education and the Polish Accreditation Committee (PAC), and the Minister of Health and the
National Accreditation Council for Schools of Nursing and Midwifery. Evaluation of the quality of education at doctoral schools will be conducted by the Research Evaluation Committee; see ‘Reforms in the last decade’ above.

**Minister of Science and Higher Education**

The main powers of the [Minister of Science and Higher Education](#) [6] include:

- laying down, by regulation, criteria for programme evaluation (and for comprehensive / overall evaluation and evaluation of the quality of education at doctoral schools – two processes which are not yet in place; see ‘Reforms in the last decade’ above);
- taking decisions on entry of new non-public HEIs into the Register for an initial period of 6 years, after consultation with PAC, where HEIs fulfil formal and legal requirements laid down by law (ex-ante institutional accreditation);
- taking decisions to renew the registration of non-public HEIs (after an initial period of 6 years) for an indefinite time, after consultation with PAC, or to refuse renewal in the cases where PAC has issued a negative accreditation decision for at least half of the programmes provided by a given HEI and in other cases specified by law (ex-post institutional accreditation);
- granting to public and non-public HEIs permits to establish first-, second- and long-cycle programmes (where an HEI does not meet the statutory requirements to establish a programme in a given field of study as part of its autonomy) after consultation with PAC, and after consultation with the Minister of Health (for the fields of Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmacy) or accreditation granted by the Minister of Health (for the fields of Nursing and Midwifery) (ex-ante programme accreditation);
- withdrawing permits for the establishment of programmes where PAC has issued a negative programme accreditation decision and in other cases specified by law (ex-post programme accreditation);
- instructing PAC to conduct a programme evaluation which is not included in its regular evaluation schedule (ex-post programme accreditation);
- appointing members of PAC from among candidates put forward by institutions and organisations identified in the legislation.

**Polish Accreditation Committee**

[PAC](#) [7] was established in 2002 (as the State Accreditation Committee) on the basis of the 1990 Higher Education Act amended in 2001. Currently, it operates on the basis of the Act of 20 July 2018, The Law on Higher Education and Science, which defines its responsibilities and general operational rules, and the Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 12 September 2018 on the criteria for 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:

- giving opinions to the Minister of Science and Higher Education on applications for entry of non-public HEIs into the Register (an advisory function in ex-ante institutional accreditation);
- giving opinions to the Minister of Science and Higher Education on applications for renewal of registration for non-public HEIs (an advisory function in ex-post institutional accreditation);
- giving opinions to the Minister of Science and Higher Education on applications from public and non-public HEIs for permits to establish first-, second- and long-cycle programmes (where an HEI does not meet the statutory requirements to establish a programme in a given field of study as part of its autonomy) (an advisory function in ex-ante programme accreditation);
- conducting periodic evaluations of first-, second- and long-cycle programmes (a decision-making role in ex-post programme evaluation); where PAC takes a negative decision, an HEI ceases to provide the programme concerned in case it was established by an HEI which fulfills...
the statutory requirements and, thus, was not required to obtain a permit from the Minister; in other cases, the Minister may withdraw a permit for the establishment of the programme; • conducting comprehensive / overall evaluations (a process which is not yet in place; see ‘Reforms in the last decade’ above).

As part of programme evaluations (and comprehensive / overall evaluations in the future), PAC may issue a decision based on an evaluation or accreditation decision or certificate of an entity which has conducted an evaluation if the entity is registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) or PAC has concluded an agreement on the recognition of evaluation outcomes with the entity. In its evaluation processes, PAC may also take into consideration an evaluation, accreditation or certificate of a national or international entity conducting quality evaluations.

PAC is an autonomous institution whose independence was confirmed by three external reviews (2008, 2013 and 2018) 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). Although members of PAC (up to 90) are appointed for a 4-year term by the Minister of Science and Higher Education, candidates are proposed by the PAC Presidium and independent institutions and organisations identified in the legislation. These include the General Council for Science and Higher Education; the Conferences of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland, Public Non-University Schools and Non-University Schools in Poland; the Students’ Parliament of the Republic of Poland; and national academic associations and employers’ organisations. The appointment of a PAC member may be revoked before the end of a term of office only by the PAC President and in the cases specified by law (death; resignation; failure to submit a vetting declaration (concerning work in or collaboration with the security service between 1944 and 1990); failure to fulfil at least one of the criteria for PAC members; non-participation in PAC work for a period longer than 6 months). Administrative and financial services are provided to PAC by the PAC Bureau, financed from the State budget. The head of the PAC Bureau is appointed and dismissed by the President of PAC.

PAC’s responsibilities and overall operational framework and the general criteria for its evaluations are laid down in the national legislation. However, PAC adopts independently its operational procedures, including evaluation procedures and detailed criteria, selects experts for evaluations, appoints evaluation panels and takes positive or negative evaluation / accreditation decisions.

PAC has been a full member of ENQA since 2009 and was entered into 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 [8] and the National Accreditation Council for Schools of Nursing and Midwifery [9] (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 evaluation / 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:

- conducting 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, refusing or withdrawing accreditation in cases where an HEI does not comply with the national standards for programmes.

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 programmes in these fields) and 50% by 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 the 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 national legislation does not identify bodies responsible for internal quality assurance, except that the criteria, procedure and entity conducting teacher appraisal are specified by the Rector of an HEI after consultations with the bodies and organisations within an HEI which are identified in the legislation (for details, see below). Detailed internal quality assurance arrangements are laid down by HEIs in their internal regulations. HEIs have appointed representatives of Rectors, coordinators or other persons, committees or other bodies and / or have established units directly responsible for 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 and entry of new non-public higher education institutions into the Register;
- **ex-post institutional evaluation / accreditation:** assessment of applications and renewal of registration for non-public higher education institutions;
- **ex-ante programme evaluation / accreditation:** assessment of applications and granting of permits to establish first-, second- and long-cycle programmes in any field of study (for new non-public institutions and existing public and non-public institutions which do not meet the statutory requirements to establish a programme in a given field of study as part of their autonomy), and additional evaluation / accreditation for programmes in the fields of Nursing and Midwifery;
- **ex-post programme evaluation/accreditation:** periodic evaluation / accreditation of ongoing first-, second- and long-cycle programmes in all fields of study and, additionally, of ongoing programmes in the fields of Nursing and Midwifery.
For information on the external quality assurance processes which will be introduced in the coming years (comprehensive / overall evaluation, and evaluation of the quality of education at doctoral schools), see the Chapter ‘Reforms in the last decade’ above.

- Internal quality assurance

External quality assurance

Ex-ante and ex-post institutional evaluation / accreditation

The national legislation does not refer explicitly to ‘institutional accreditation’ but specifies a mandatory procedure for entering non-public higher education institutions (HEIs) into the Register or, in other words, registration of non-public HEIs (public HEIs are established by national legislation). The responsibility for such ex-ante institutional evaluation / accreditation rests with the Minister of Science and Higher Education, with the Polish Accreditation Committee (PAC) having an advisory role vis-a-vis the Minister.

An application for entry into the Register (together with an application for a permit to establish (a) programme(s); see ex-ante programme evaluation below) is submitted by the founder of an HEI, and a registration decision (together with a permit to establish (a) programme(s)) is issued by the Minister. An entry in the Register is valid for an initial period of 6 years. The Minister refuses to enter an HEI into the Register when there are specific formal and legal grounds in relation to the founder (inclusion in the register of debtors as part of the National Court Register; due liabilities payable to the State budget; a valid court judgment for an intentional offence or tax offence in the case of natural persons, or liquidation or bankruptcy in the case of legal entities) or any of the first three grounds in relation to the founder’s legal representative(s); or when the draft statutes of the HEI do not comply with the legislation. Where none of these circumstances occur, an application is assessed by PAC, and the Minister refuses to register an HEI if PAC issues a negative opinion on the application for entry into the Register or for a permit to establish a programme.

Aside from identification data, an application for entry into the Register includes, among other things, documents which provide the legal basis for the establishment and operation of an HEI; information on financial resources, property and funding arrangements, and a strategy of the HEI. Reviews are prepared by PAC members or experts. PAC usually gives its opinion based on submitted documents, but its procedure also provides for a site visit, where appropriate. The criteria for assessing applications are published on PAC’s website [7].

Before the expiry of the initial 6-year period, the founder submits an application for renewal of registration. After consultation with PAC, the Minister renews the registration for an indefinite time or refuses to do so. A negative decision is taken in the case of gross violations of the law by an HEI or its founder; where PAC has issued e negative decision for at least half of the programmes provided by the HEI; or for any of the above-mentioned formal or legal reasons for refusal to enter an HEI into the Register.

Ex-ante programme evaluation / accreditation

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

The process involves granting permits to establish first-, second- and long-cycle programmes to new non-public HEIs and existing public and non-public HEIs which are not authorised to establish programmes in a given field of study as part of their autonomy as they do not fulfil the requirements laid down by law (in brief: as a transitional arrangement based on the legislation previously in force,
HEIs which are not authorised to award post-doctoral degrees; and ultimately, HEIs which do not have one of the three highest research grades in the discipline to which a given field of study is assigned; see also Chapter 7). Permits are granted by the Minister of Science and Higher Education. However, except in the cases specified by law (see below), the Minister is required to consult PAC which reviews applications. For programmes in the fields of Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmacy, the Minister of Science and Higher Education also obligatorily consults the Minister of Health; for programmes in the fields of Nursing and Midwifery, a permit can be granted by the Minister of Science and Higher Education only to programmes which have been accredited by the Minister of Health (see below). The Minister of Science and Higher Education refuses to grant a permit without consulting PAC on formal and legal grounds as stipulated by the legislation (failure to input necessary data into the information system for higher education and science; tax arrears of the HEI concerned or due subsidy-related liabilities payable to the State budget; liquidation of the HEI; a remedial action programme for a public HEI, no economic rationale for granting a permit; failure to implement post-audit recommendations). The Minister may also refuse to grant a permit if a given programme does not respond to socio-economic needs on the date of the submission of the application.

Applications are assessed by PAC members or experts. The procedure usually includes an analysis of submitted documents, but a site visit is also undertaken where appropriate. The assessment processes initiated in the transition period after the entry into force of the new Law on Higher Education and Science (between 1 October 2018 and 30 April 2019) are conducted in accordance with the previous arrangements. The assessment criteria for these processes cover: (1) general characteristics of the programme to be provided, incl. the relevance of its name; link to the mission and strategy of the HEI; correspondence between the level and profile of the programme and its aims, learning outcomes and scope; consistency between the aims, learning outcomes and scope of the programme and the domains, areas and disciplines identified; consistency between the degree to be awarded and the level, profile/orientation, aims, learning outcomes and scope of the programme; (2) rationale behind the establishment of the programme; (3) research conducted, and research training provided to students (only for academically-oriented, as opposed to practically-oriented, programmes); (4) intended learning outcomes; (5) curriculum and timetable; (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 delivery of the programme, and the organisation and implementation of the teaching and learning processes. Assessment templates and detailed criteria are available on the PAC website [7].

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 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). The criteria are published on the NACSN&M website [10] (in Polish only). 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

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

Evaluation of first-, second- and long-cycle programmes in all fields of study and all HEIs is carried out only by PAC. Evaluations are conducted in accordance with a schedule adopted by PAC, but an evaluation may also be conducted at the request of an HEI and is immediately undertaken at the request of the Minister of Science and Higher Education.
The frequency of evaluations is defined in PAC's statutes, published on its website, and depends on the outcome of the previous evaluation. PAC issues a positive decision for a period of up to 6 years or a negative decision. Where an HEI has received a positive decision for a period of up to 2 years, a follow-up evaluation ends with a positive decision valid for 6 years or a negative decision. Programmes which have received a positive decision are automatically considered accredited. Where PAC has issued a negative decision, a given programme ceases to be provided if it was established by an HEI which fulfilled the requirements laid down by law and, thus, was not required to obtain a permit from the Minister. In other cases, the Minister may withdraw the permit to establish a given programme, which, too, means that the programme may no longer be provided. The Minister may also withdraw a permit if a given programme has not commenced for 2 years after the issue of the permit; no student has been enrolled on the programme in two consecutive academic years; the HEI does not fulfil the formal requirements laid down by law or – for the fields of Nursing and Midwifery – the programme has not been re-accredited by the Minister of Health (see below).

Aside from issuing a positive or negative decision, PAC may award certificates for outstanding quality of education in four categories: ‘Excellent programme’ (excellence in education); ‘Always at the service of students’ (excellence in supporting students’ development); ‘Open to the world’ (excellence in international cooperation); and ‘Partner for development’ (excellence in collaboration with the socio-economic environment). A certificate is awarded to an HEI providing a programme which has received a positive accreditation decision for 6 years, supported by good practice examples relating to the quality of education or regular achievements of students and graduates (up to 5 years after graduation) and a recommendation in a report of the evaluation panel under the relevant PAC evaluation criteria.

Programme evaluations are conducted by panels of up to 7 members, composed of PAC members and experts. Panels consist of academic experts, students-experts, experts-employer representatives and international quality assurance experts. Experts are selected in accordance with the procedures and criteria published on PAC's website and are required to complete training. Both PAC members and all experts are full and equal members of evaluation panels.

PAC’s general evaluation criteria (see the table below) are identical for two types of programmes (orientations / ‘profiles’): academically-oriented and practically-oriented programmes. However, detailed criteria reflect the specificity of a given type. They address, for example, a linkage between the concept and aims of education and curricular contents, and the research activity of a given HEI and its outcomes for academically-oriented programmes, and progress and the state of practice in areas of professional / economic activity for practically-oriented programmes; effectiveness of teaching / learning methods, methods of student assessment and infrastructure in terms of preparing students for research activity as part of academically oriented programmes, and preparing students for professional activity and developing their practical skills for practically oriented programmes. The criteria together with indicators are available on the PAC website [7].

### Criteria for Programme Evaluation:

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<td>1.</td>
<td>Design of a programme: concept, aims of education and learning outcomes</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Implementation of the programme: curricular contents; timetable for delivery; types and organisation of classes; teaching and learning methods; practical placements / internships; organisation of the teaching and learning processes</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Student admission; verification of learning outcomes achieved by students; completion / recognition of individual semesters and years of study; and graduation</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Expertise, experience and number of teaching staff; and staff development</td>
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5. Infrastructure and educational resources used in the delivery of the programme, and their development

6. Collaboration with the socio-economic environment in designing, delivering and improving the programme, and its impact on the enhancement of the programme

7. Conditions and methods for enhancing internationalisation of the teaching and learning processes as part of the programme

8. Support for students in learning, social development, academic or professional development and entry onto the labour market; and development and improvement of support measures

9. Public access to information about the programme, conditions for its delivery and results achieved

10. Quality policy; design, approval, monitoring, review and improvement of the programme

Internal quality assurance is assessed in line with the ‘European Standards and Guidelines’ (ESG). PAC’s evaluation criteria cover all ESG which address the following aspects: policy for quality assurance; design and approval of programmes; student-centred learning, teaching and assessment; student admission, progression, recognition and certification; teaching staff; learning resources and student support; information management; public information; ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes; and cyclical external quality assurance.

As part of a follow-up evaluation, conducted for programmes which have received a positive decision for a period of up to 2 years, PAC assesses only the extent to which the HEI concerned has implemented recommendations made in the previous evaluation.

The evaluation procedure is based on the stages recommended by the ESG and includes: a self-evaluation report prepared by the HEI concerned; a site visit undertaken by an evaluation panel; an evaluation report prepared by the panel and provided to the HEI; a response from the HEI; a decision taken by PAC; the publication of the decision together with its justification and the evaluation report. In the case of a follow-up evaluation of a programme which received earlier a positive decision valid for up to 2 years, an evaluation panel prepares its report based on the HEI’s report on the implementation of recommendations, but it may also request additional information from the HEI or conduct a site visit.

PAC’s resolution, together with its decision and justification, and the HEI’s response are published on the PAC website and in the Public Information Bulletin. Reports prepared by evaluation panels are also available on the PAC website. Furthermore, PAC publishes annual reports with a summary analysis of evaluations which provide the basis for overall evaluation of the quality of higher education and for planning quality improvement activities.

PAC has an internal quality assurance system in place, with a number of mechanisms, including internal audits of processes, a questionnaire survey on external evaluations for evaluated HEIs, and a so-called quality window on the website – a feedback form which stakeholders can use to send their comments and suggestions. Findings from the questionnaire survey are regularly published on PAC’s website and in its activity reports. In line with the ESG, PAC also undergoes an external review every 5 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 quality evaluation, but as assessment of HEIs' compliance with the national standards for programmes. Evaluations serve as the basis for 'yes/no' accreditation decisions, with no distinction made between quality levels of 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 [11] (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 internship scheme with the national standards; course load requirements; ECTS credits; documents concerning students' progression; and the final exam.
2. Teaching staff: compliance with the requirements for 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; 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**

Internal quality assurance is integrated in general terms into the mission of the higher education and research system which, as stated in the legislation, is to provide highest-quality education and
conduct highest-quality research, shape civic attitudes, and contribute to societal development and the creation of an innovation-based economy. The legislation does not predetermine the scope or elements of internal quality assurance, except for general arrangements for study programmes and teacher appraisal.

HEIs should regularly evaluate and improve programmes. Programmes should integrate findings from an analysis of relevance of learning outcomes to labour market needs, and findings from the career tracking system, managed by the Minister of Science and Higher Education, for first-, second- and long-cycle students and graduates and individuals who apply for, and are awarded, doctoral degrees.

All academic teachers, except for the Rector of an HEI, should undergo a performance appraisal. It is conducted at least every 4 years or at the request of the Rector. It covers, in particular, the performance of duties as part of teaching and/or research activities and the observance of intellectual and industrial property rights. The criteria, procedure and entity conducting appraisal are specified by the Rector after consultation with the HEI’s Senate, trade unions and student and doctoral student self-government bodies. Appraisal takes into consideration outcomes of student evaluation of teaching, conducted at least once a year by students and doctoral students. Appraisal ends with a positive or negative outcome. The Rector may terminate the employment relationship with a teacher after one negative assessment and is required by law to do so when a teacher has received two consecutive negative assessments.

Detailed internal quality assurance arrangements are adopted by individual HEIs in their 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 processes and more detailed analyses of selected issues (for example, findings from programme evaluations in a breakdown by 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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