

# ATHEA ACCREDITATION PROCESS MANUAL

AS OF: 12 March 2018

## Preface

ATHEA, The Association for Transnational Higher Education Accreditation, is a membership-based association. Within ATHEA, the ATHEA Board of Commissioners independently conducts the accreditation-related activities for the association.

The Scope of Accreditation is to provide accrediting, quality assurance, educational and other services to its member institutions, degree/diploma granting post-secondary educational institutions offering higher education and located inside or outside the European area, including, but not limited to, the countries who are signatories of the Bologna Protocols.

The purpose of this document is to describe the ATHEA accreditation process for conducting accreditation.

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## **PART ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### ***Mission, Vision, and Values of ATHEA***

#### MISSION

The Association for Transnational Higher Education Accreditation (ATHEA) is a voluntary, non-governmental, membership association that is dedicated to quality assurance and improvement through accreditation via peer evaluation. Accreditation by ATHEA instils public confidence in the institutional mission, goals, performance, and resources through its rigorous accreditation standards and their enforcement of those standards. ATHEA standards for accreditation are based on the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) required for recognition by the European Quality Assurance Register in Higher Education (EQAR).

#### VISION

The Association for Transnational Higher Education Accreditation (ATHEA) aspires to be the preeminent resource for institutions of higher education striving to achieve excellence in fulfilling their missions. ATHEA intends, through voluntary assessment and adherence to high standards for student learning outcomes and operational behaviour, to assure higher education's publics that its accredited institutions are fulfilling their stated purposes and addressing the publics' expectations.

## CORE VALUES

The Association for Transnational Higher Education Accreditation (ATHEA) is guided by these Core Values:

- Voluntary membership
- Self-regulation and peer-review
- A continuous and seamless relationship with member institutions to promote continuous self-evaluation and institutional improvement
- Respect for the unique mission of each institution and evaluation within that context
- Student learning and effective teaching
- Transparency about the accreditation processes and the status held by each member institution
- Commitment to the principles of cooperation, flexibility, and openness
- Responsiveness to the needs of the higher education community and societal changes
- Consideration of societal and institutional needs through attention to and emphasis on both improvement and compliance
- Responsiveness to a diverse, dynamic, global higher education community that is continually evolving



## ***Scope of Accreditation***

The Scope of Accreditation is to provide educational, accrediting, quality assurance and other services to its member institutions, degree/diploma granting post-secondary educational institutions offering higher education and located inside or outside the European area, including, but not limited to, the countries who are signatories of the Bologna Protocols.

## ***Statement of Accreditation Philosophy***

### Organizational Purpose

ATHEA is a non-profit organisation to promote the following activities:

- (a) To provide educational, accrediting, quality assurance and other services to its member institutions, degree/diploma granting post-secondary educational institutions offering higher education and located inside or outside the European area, including, but not limited to, the countries who are signatories of the Bologna Protocols.
- (b) To serve as an accrediting agency that is included on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education. As such, the ATHEA will conduct voluntary, non-governmental peer review and make decisions concerning the accreditation or pre-accreditation status of member institutions.
- (c) To promote quality assurance and improvement through voluntary accreditation via peer evaluation and instil public confidence in its institutional members' missions, goals, performance, and resources through its rigorous accreditation standards and their enforcement.
- (d) To initiate and sustain such training and research activities as may be consistent with the general purposes of ATHEA.

## ATHEA's Accreditation Beliefs

ATHEA believes that accreditation must be mission-based, strategic planning driven, outcomes and competency centred, and based upon peer-review. Accreditation signifies that an institution has a purpose appropriate to higher education and has resources, programmes, and services sufficient to accomplish and sustain that purpose. Accreditation indicates that an institution maintains clearly specified educational objectives that are consistent with its mission and appropriate to the degrees it offers, and that it is successful in achieving its stated objectives.

Self-regulation through accreditation embodies a philosophy that a free people can and ought to govern themselves through a representative, flexible, and responsive system. Accordingly, accreditation is best accomplished through a voluntary association of educational institutions. Accreditation enhances educational quality throughout the region by improving the effectiveness of institutions and ensuring that institutions meet standards established by the higher education community and serves as a common denominator of shared values and practices among the diverse institutions.

Both a process and a product, accreditation relies on integrity, thoughtful and principled judgment, rigorous application of requirements, and a context of trust. It provides an assessment of an institution's effectiveness in the fulfilment of its mission, its compliance with the requirements of its accrediting association, and its continuing efforts to enhance the quality of student learning and its programmes and services. Based upon reasoned judgment, the process stimulates evaluation and improvement, while providing a means of continuing accountability to constituents and the public. An intended outcome of accreditation is that the process leads to continuous enhance and development of the institution and serves as a mechanism of continuous improvement.

The product of accreditation is a public statement of an institution's continuing capacity to provide effective programmes and services based on agreed-upon requirements. The statement of an institution's accreditation status is also an affirmation of that institution's continuing commitment to the principles and philosophy of accreditation.

Accreditation supports the right of an institution to pursue its established educational mission; the right of faculty members to teach, investigate, and publish freely; and the right of students to access opportunities for learning and for the open exchange

of ideas. However, the exercise of these rights should not interfere with the overriding obligation of an institution to offer its students a sound education.

The ATHEA would adhere to the following fundamental characteristics of accreditation:

- Participation in the accreditation process is voluntary and is an earned and renewable status.
- Member institutions develop, amend, and approve accreditation requirements through an open and transparent governance concept.
- The process of accreditation is representative, responsive, and appropriate to the types of institutions accredited.
- Accreditation is self-regulation.
- Accreditation requires institutional commitment and engagement.
- Accreditation is based upon a peer review process.
- Accreditation requires an institutional commitment to student learning and achievement.
- Accreditation acknowledges an institution's prerogative to articulate its mission within the recognized context of higher education and its responsibility to show that it is accomplishing its mission.
- Accreditation expects an institution to develop a balanced governing structure designed to promote institutional autonomy and flexibility of operation.
- Accreditation expects an institution to ensure that its programmes are complemented by support structures and resources that allow for the total growth and development of its students.

## **ATHEA OVERVIEW**

ATHEA is the name of both the Transnational Higher Education Accreditation itself as well as the membership-based organisation. ATHEA accreditation is the principle service provided by ATHEA to its members. An institution joins ATHEA in order to be awarded ATHEA accreditation.

The processes, procedures, and specifics of ATHEA fall within the purview of the ATHEA Board of Commissioners, which organisationally is part of ATHEA with independence relative to matters of accreditation. The full name of the ATHEA Board of Commissioners is: *Association for Transnational Higher Education (ATHEA) Board of Commissioners for the Association for Transnational Higher Education Accreditation (ATHEA)*.

The ATHEA Board of Commissioners is organisationally subordinate to the ATHEA Board of Directors, but there is a degree of separation relative to Commission actions relative to accreditation. Such separation ensures unbiased accreditation actions. The shortened versions would be *the ATHEA Board of Commissioners* when referring to the organisational entity, and *ATHEA Commissioners* when referring to the persons on the Commission.

Based on the actions taken by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners, the institution has different accreditation statuses with related dues/fees requirements.

A few examples regarding the use of ATHEA are as follows:

- The ATHEA Board of Commissioners grants ATHEA Candidacy to XYZ University. Thus, XYZ University is an ATHEA Institutional Member and has been granted ATHEA-Candidacy. Or, XYZ University is a Candidate for ATHEA. A unique logo will be available to the candidate to designate the status.
- The ATHEA Board of Commissioners awards ATHEA to XYZ University. Thus, XYZ University is an ATHEA Institutional Member and has been awarded ATHEA accreditation, which is designed ATHEA-Accredited. Or, XYZ University has received ATHEA accreditation and has ATHEA-Accreditation. A unique logo will be available to the member who has obtained ATHEA to designate the achievement.
- An institution joins and is a member of ATHEA.
- Institutional members of ATHEA seek to obtain ATHEA accreditation.

- An Institutional Member is a candidate for ATHEA accreditation (ATHEA-Candidate).
- An Institutional Member that has been granted ATHEA-Candidacy is accredited by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners and has been awarded ATHEA accreditation (ATHEA-Accredited).

### ***Levels of Institutional Membership***

Three levels of institutional membership are recognized by the ATHEA:

1. **Institutional Membership.** This is the entry into the ATHEA and the starting point for all institutional members who may seek accreditation.
2. **Candidacy for Accreditation.** An Institutional Member who has completed all of the requirements for candidacy status as stated in this Accreditation Policy Manual will be a considered a candidate for accreditation.
3. **Accredited.** Once an ATHEA Candidate Member completes a self-evaluation, passes a site evaluation, and is accepted into accreditation status by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners, the institution is awarded accreditation. In order to become an Institutional Member of the ATHEA, an academic institution must:

### ***Privacy and Confidentiality of Accreditation Information***

When an institution becomes a member of ATHEA, it agrees to the disclosure of its accreditation status, including disclosure of the extent to which its academic programs are in compliance with the ATHEA Standards. The disclosure of this information assists external stakeholders, such as students, parents, employers, and the general public, in making appropriate educational decisions.

Much of the information provided to the ATHEA during the accreditation process is confidential, and the ATHEA makes every reasonable effort to protect that confidentiality. Some of the information provided to ATHEA by the member institutions will need to be publically available as required by the ATHEA bylaws.

Only site evaluators, staff, and ATHEA Board of Commissioners may review confidential institutional information. The ATHEA Board of Commissioners requires these individuals to abide by this confidentiality requirement.

ATHEA and the ATHEA Board of Commissioners make every reasonable effort to avoid conflicts of interest. All members of the evaluation team must sign a

declaration form prior to commencing activities in order to declare any potential conflict of interest. Site evaluators are excluded from involvement in the accreditation process for institutions in which they have had, or might foresee having, a professional or personal conflict of interest. Members of the ATHEA Board of Directors and ATHEA Board of Commissioners are required to recuse themselves from discussions, deliberations, or decisions about their own institutions where a conflict of interest might exist.

Site evaluators understand their ethical responsibilities pertaining to conduct before, during, and after accreditation site visits. Matters pertaining to an accreditation site visit are not discussed in public and are treated confidentially.

ATHEA Board of Commissioners policy requires that each site evaluation member maintain the confidentiality of all accreditation materials (e.g., self-study, site visit reports, etc.). While such materials can be disseminated throughout the institution, as appropriate, they should not be shared with outside parties without the approval of the ATHEA Board of Commissioners

## **PART TWO: THE INSTITUTION ACCREDITATION PROCESS**

### ***Institutional Membership***

This is the entry into the ATHEA and the starting point for all institutional members who may seek accreditation. The institution must have legal authorization to operate as an educational institution, have students in an academic programme, be in existence for at least 1 year, and offer and teach at least one of their own institution's programmes. If, for example, an institution is teaching for another institution but has no academic programmes of their own, they could not be an Institutional Member. In the ATHEA Charter, the specific term stated is *Member*.

#### Requirements for Institutional Membership

In order to become an Institutional Member of ATHEA, an academic institution must:

1. Submit an application for Institutional Membership. Applications for ATHEA institutional membership must be approved and signed by the institution's chief executive officer (i.e., president, chancellor, director general), affirming its commitment to abide by the accreditation policies and procedures of ATHEA. The application form will be reviewed by ATHEA staff and the applicant will be notified regarding acceptance.
2. Pay its membership dues to ATHEA.
3. Provide evidence that the institution has the legal authority to operate as a tertiary educational institution. In cases where the documentation of the legal authority is written in a language other than English, the academic institution must submit a copy of the original non-English version and an English translation of the original documentation.

An Institutional Member is not allowed to claim or imply candidacy or accreditation by ATHEA until candidacy or accreditation has been officially granted.

## ***Candidate for ATHEA***

An Institutional Member who has completed all of the requirements for candidacy status as stated in the Accreditation Policy Manual will be considered a candidate for accreditation. The Institutional Member must have graduates of the programme and be in existence for at least 3 years. The specific term used to state the outcome a positive outcome for candidacy is ATHEA-Candidate.

In order to become ATHEA-Candidate, an institution must:

1. Be an institutional member of the ATHEA.
2. Submit an ATHEA Self-Evaluation. The submission must be approved and signed by the institution's chief executive officer (i.e., president, chancellor, director general), affirming the institution is committed to abide by the accreditation policies and procedures of the ATHEA Board of Commissioners.
3. Pay its application fee for candidacy status to ATHEA.

## ***Candidacy Actions by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners***

When the "ATHEA Accreditation and Candidacy Self-Evaluation Template" is complete, the ATHEA Board of Commissioners will review the Candidacy Self-Evaluation and the Candidacy Visit Report and will take one of the following actions on the institution's request for candidacy status:

1. Candidacy Granted
2. Action on Candidacy Deferred
3. Candidacy Denied

### Candidacy Granted

If, in the judgment of the ATHEA Board of Commissioners, the institution's Candidacy Application and the Candidacy Visit Report indicate that the institution is substantially ready to pursue ATHEA accreditation, then the institution will be granted ATHEA Candidacy status. The institution will be notified in writing of the ATHEA Board of Commissioners' response. The institution will remain an Institutional Member of ATHEA and granted ATHEA-Candidate.

Once ATHEA-Candidate has been granted, the institution will, in consultation with the ATHEA Board of Commissioners, determine a timeframe for attaining first-time accreditation.

The timeframe for attaining first-time accreditation normally will not exceed five years. Under extenuating circumstances, an extension of an institution's ATHEA-Candidate status may be approved by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners. In those cases, in which an extension is granted, the institution will be required to undergo a mentoring visit in order to address the issues that led to the extension request.

Under no circumstance is there any guarantee that the institution will be accredited just because ATHEA-Candidate status has been granted. This determination is made by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners after a self-evaluation is prepared and a peer-evaluation visit is conducted.

An ATHEA-Candidate is not allowed to claim or imply accreditation by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners until accreditation has been awarded by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners.

Once an institution has been granted ATHEA-Candidate, the institution may denote this status on its website, in its catalogue and official publications, and in its

advertising; however, the following form of notice and specific language must be used:

*[Institution's name] has been granted Candidate for Accreditation by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners for the Association for Transnational Higher Education Accreditation (ATHEA). The [institution] has affirmed its commitment to excellence in higher education and is eligible to undergo an accreditation review. For more information regarding ATHEA, please visit [www.ATHEA.org](http://www.ATHEA.org).*

The institution is also allowed to use the ATHEA-Candidate Logo.

#### Action on Candidacy Deferred

If there are issues of concern pertaining to the institution's operations and/or its academic programmes, the ATHEA Board of Commissioners may defer action on candidacy status for a time period not to exceed one year pending remedial action and/or receipt of additional information. The ATHEA Board of Commissioners will provide written reasons for the deferred action and will invite the institution to respond.

A deferred action is, in effect, a ruling of no action on ATHEA-Candidate status at that time, and therefore, the action cannot be appealed. If, within the time period specified by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners, the institution takes appropriate remedial action, the institution may provide written notification to the ATHEA Board of Commissioners requesting reconsideration of the deferred action and describing the corrective actions the institution has taken. The letter must provide evidence and documentation that the issues that led to the deferred action have been satisfactorily addressed.

Based on a review of the institution's request for reconsideration of the deferred action and the evidence and documentation provided, the ATHEA Board of Commissioners will then determine the action to be taken on the institution's request for ATHEA-Candidate status. The institution will be notified in writing of the action of the ATHEA Board of Commissioners on its request for reconsideration of deferral.

If the institution does not take the identified remedial action and/or does not request reconsideration of the deferred action within the specified time period, then no further remedy is available to the institution for the period of one year. After one year, the institution may reapply to become a candidate for accreditation. The institution's membership in ATHEA will continue.

## Candidacy Denied

If there are substantial deficiencies in the institution's operations and/or its academic programmes, and if, in the judgment of the ATHEA Board of Commissioners, the institution is not sufficiently prepared to pursue accreditation, then ATHEA-Candidate status may be denied. In the case of denial of ATHEA-Candidate status, the ATHEA Board of Commissioners will provide written reasons for the denial. The institution may request a reconsideration of the denial action and may present its case, including new evidence, in a fair and impartial hearing before the ATHEA Board of Commissioners at its next scheduled meeting. The procedures for this type of hearing are as follows:

1. The request for such a hearing must be made within fifteen days of the date of notification of the denial, must be in writing, and must be signed by the chief executive officer of the institution. The arguments and reasons in support of the request must be limited to the points enumerated in the ATHEA Board of Commissioners' written statement of denial.
2. The institution may present only evidence **not** already considered. The institution may send one or more representatives, including its legal counsel, to present its case. The ATHEA Board of Commissioners records and subsequently transcribes all proceedings of this type for its own use.

Based on the evidence presented at the hearing, the ATHEA Board of Commissioners may affirm, modify, or reverse its previous decision to deny ATHEA-Candidate status. If the previous action of denial is upheld, the denial becomes final.

If the institution does not exercise its right to request reconsideration of the denial action or if the previous action of denial is upheld by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners in a reconsideration hearing, then no further remedy is available to it for the period of one year. After one year, the institution may reapply to become a candidate for accreditation. The institution's membership in ATHEA will continue.

The institution must pay in advance any additional costs associated with scheduling meetings of the ATHEA Board of Commissioners to address requests for reconsideration of denial of candidacy.

## ***Candidacy Timetable, Costs, and Application***

### Candidacy Timetable

The ATHEA Board of Commissioners works with each institution to establish a timetable for obtaining ATHEA-Candidate status that suits its particular needs. Typically, it takes an institution about, at a minimum, two to three months to prepare and compile the materials required for candidacy. Candidacy visits usually takes two days. Depending on the complexity of the institution, more time may be necessary for the candidacy visit.

### Costs of Candidacy

Institutional Members who wish to seek accreditation from the ATHEA Board of Commissioners must first become a Candidate for Accreditation (ATHEA-Candidate) and then if the candidate is approved for accreditation by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners, the member becomes accredited (ATHEA-Accredited) by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners and designated appropriately. Costs for candidacy evaluation can be found at the website.

ATHEA will invoice the institution for all costs for the candidacy visit that are incurred by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners representative and will pay the representative after an expense report has been filed with the ATHEA office. The institution will make **no direct payments** to the ATHEA Board of Commissioners representative. Reimbursements to ATHEA should be made by the institution within 30 days for all of the invoiced costs of the candidacy visit.

### Application for ATHEA-Candidate Status

Application for ATHEA-Candidate status is made by the chief executive officer of the institution (i.e., president, chancellor, director general) by submitting an application form to the ATHEA Board of Commissioners and enclosing the appropriate application fee. An application for ATHEA-Candidate status can be downloaded from the ATHEA website.

## ***ATHEA-Accredited***

Once an ATHEA-Candidate institution completes a self-evaluation, passes a peer-review site evaluation, and is accepted into accreditation status by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners, the institution is awarded accreditation. The ATHEA-Candidate must have at least 2 cycles of graduates from the institution. The specific term for accredited is ATHEA-Accredited.

### First-Time Accreditation

In order for an institution unit to be considered for first-time accreditation by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners, the institution must:

1. Be granted ATHEA-Candidate status by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners.
2. Submit a First-time Accreditation Application. The First-time Accreditation Application must be approved and signed by the institution's chief executive officer (i.e., president, chancellor, director general), affirming the its commitment to abide by the ATHEA's accreditation policies and procedures. The First-time Accreditation Application can be downloaded from the ATHEA website.
3. Pay the applicable application fee for accreditation to ATHEA.
4. Prepare a self-evaluation. The "ATHEA Accreditation and Candidacy Self-Evaluation Template" can be downloaded from the ATHEA website.
5. Undergo a site visit for peer review.
6. Be reviewed by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners.

Guidelines for preparing the self-evaluation are found in the "ATHEA Accreditation and Candidacy Self-Evaluation Template". It is essential that these guidelines be followed when preparing the self-evaluation. Incomplete, inaccurate, or poorly organized information may jeopardize the institution's potential for accreditation. ATHEA personnel are available to answer questions throughout the preparation of the self-evaluation.

A preliminary draft copy of the self-evaluation must be submitted to ATHEA at least 150 days prior to the site visit. ATHEA staff will review the draft self-evaluation for completeness and accuracy. Any missing information and inaccuracies will be

communicated in writing to the institution, which will then revise its self-evaluation accordingly to ensure that it is complete, addresses all accreditation standards, and is in the appropriate format with supplementary materials.

The completed self-evaluation must be submitted at least 60 days prior to the site visit. No explicit site visit travel arrangements will be made, and no site visits will be conducted until ATHEA has received a complete and accurate self-evaluation.

### ***Reaffirmation of Accreditation***

After 7 years following the date of accreditation, reaffirmation of accreditation is required in order for an institution to maintain its accredited status. In order for the institution to be considered for reaffirmation of accreditation by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners, the institution must:

1. Submit a Reaffirmation of Accreditation Application. The Reaffirmation of Accreditation Application must be approved and signed by the institution's chief executive officer (i.e., president, chancellor, director general), affirming the its commitment to abide by the ATHEA's accreditation policies and procedures. The Reaffirmation of Accreditation Application can be downloaded from the ATHEA website.
2. Pay its applicable application fee for reaffirmation of accreditation to the ATHEA.
3. Prepare a self-evaluation. The "ATHEA Accreditation and Candidacy Self-Evaluation Template" can be downloaded from the ATHEA website.
4. Undergo a site visit.
5. Be reviewed by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners.

Requirements for preparing the self-evaluation are found within in the ATHEA Accreditation and Candidacy Self-Evaluation Template". It is essential that these requirements be followed when preparing the self-evaluation. Incomplete, inaccurate, or poorly organized information may jeopardize the institution's potential for accreditation. ATHEA personnel and the ATHEA Board of Commissioners are available to answer questions throughout the preparation of the self-evaluation.

A preliminary draft copy of the self-evaluation must be submitted to ATHEA at least 150 days prior to the site visit. ATHEA staff will review the draft self-evaluation for

completeness and accuracy. Any missing information and inaccuracies will be communicated in writing to the institution, which will then revise its self-evaluation accordingly to ensure that it is complete, addresses all accreditation standards, and is in the appropriate format with supplementary materials.

The completed self-evaluation must be submitted to ATHEA at least 60 days prior to the site visit. No explicit site visit travel arrangements will be made, and no site visits will be conducted until the ATHEA Board of Commissioners has received a complete and accurate self-evaluation.

## ***Accreditation Timetable, Costs, and Application***

### Accreditation Timetable

The ATHEA Board of Commissioners works with each institution to establish a timetable for obtaining accredited status that suits its particular needs. Typically, it takes an institution about, at a minimum, six to eight months to prepare and compile the materials required to achieve accredited status. Accreditation visits usually takes three days. Depending on complexity of the institution, more time may be necessary for the peer-review visit.

### Costs of Accreditation Review

Institutional Members who wish to seek accreditation from ATHEA must first become a Candidate for Accreditation (ATHEA-Candidate status). If the institution is approved for accreditation by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners, the Institutional Member becomes accredited and designated appropriately (ATHEA-Accredited). Costs for accreditation evaluation can be found at the ATHEA website.

ATHEA will invoice the institution for all accreditation visits-related costs incurred by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners representatives and will pay the representatives after an expense report has been filed with ATHEA. The institution will make **no direct payments** to the ATHEA Board of Commissioners representatives. Reimbursements to ATHEA should be made by the institution within 30 days for all of the invoiced costs of the accreditation visit.

## ***Site Visit Procedures***

### Site Visit Team Composition

After the institution submits its self-evaluation, the ATHEA Board of Commissioners will designate a team of professionally-trained peer reviewers, including one student, to conduct the site visit. The ATHEA Board of Commissioners selects site visit team members from a pool of well-qualified individuals with experience in the evaluation process and in higher education institutional operations.

The Chair of the team will be responsible for assuring that the site visit is conducted objectively. The size of the team and the qualifications of its members are influenced by the institutions' size, complexity, and number of locations. For institutions that offer programmes of that are taught in a language other than English, at least one member of the site visit team will be fluent in the language of instruction.

The ATHEA Board of Commissioners is committed to avoiding potential conflicts of interest by site visit team members. The following guidelines will be used to determine site visit team composition:

- No member of the site visit team will have had a recent affiliation with the institution that is being considered for accreditation, nor will the members of the site visit team have relatives who are employees of the institution.
- No member of the site visit team will be a graduate of the institution that is being considered for accreditation.
- No member of the site visit team will have a known, expressed bias for or against the institution.
- No member of the site visit team will currently be a full-time employee of another institution in the institution's primary competitive market.

### Logistical Arrangements

After the site visit dates are agreed upon and the site visit team is appointed, the institution will be responsible for coordinating logistical arrangements with the chair of the team and/or the ATHEA Board of Commissioners. Logistical arrangements include developing the agenda for the site visit, procuring a meeting room on campus for team meetings, communication of the site visit arrangements with on-campus personnel, hotel reservations, and arrangements for the site visit team to meet key staff, faculty, students, alumni, and community groups.

Once site visit team members have accepted an accreditation site visit assignment and a team chair has been designated, ATHEA will notify the institution of the members' names, positions, and profiles along with the dates of their visit. ATHEA will distribute copies of the self-evaluation to each member of the site visit team. Prior to the site visit, team members are expected to examine and review carefully all of the submitted self-evaluation materials.

Prior to the site visit, the team chair will work with the institution's Accreditation Liaison to ensure that sufficient support is available to conduct a successful visit. The site visit team chair is responsible for keeping the team members informed about the site visit arrangements.

Site visit team members will normally arrive the evening before the first day of the official site visit. The team chair will notify the other members of the team of the time and place of their first meeting. At this first meeting, the team chair will review the specific plans for the site visit, identify the team members who will be responsible for writing specific portions of the team's report of findings, and organize the team so that a successful visit is possible. This meeting should also include a discussion of the team's reaction to the institution's self-evaluation and related materials, a review of the agenda for each day of the site visit, and a discussion of how and when its final report of findings will be compiled and forwarded to the ATHEA Board of Commissioners.

#### Site Visit Team's Responsibilities

During its visit to the institution, the site visit team should meet with the chief executive officer of the institution, the chief academic officer, faculty members, students, and other stakeholders as deemed appropriate. The site visit team begins the process of evaluation by considering institution in its entirety. As representatives of the ATHEA, the site visit team is responsible for validating that the information in the self-evaluation is accurate. The site visit team should try to accumulate as much pertinent information as it can and use appropriate sampling techniques to review the accumulated data. The site visit team's findings should reflect its collective judgment about the clarity of mission of the institution and its ability to deliver a high-quality learning experience to its students.

A final site visit team meeting should be held during the last day of the site visit, at which time the team will seek to reach agreement on the content of its report of findings to the ATHEA Board of Commissioners. At this meeting, the site visit team chair should finalize plans for an exit interview with the institution's Accreditation

Liaison and other appropriate administrators. At the exit interview, the site visit team will provide an oral summary of the major findings that will be included in the team's written report. The site visit team should not communicate any decisions.

Each member of the site visit team is responsible for writing a portion of the team's report of findings. The site visit team chair has overall responsibility for gathering this information from the team members and preparing a comprehensive final report for the ATHEA Board of Commissioners. If no additional information is required from the institution, the site visit team's report of findings normally will be completed no later than two weeks after the team's visit to the institution and forwarded to ATHEA offices. If the final site visit team's report of findings is delayed beyond two weeks, ATHEA offices should be notified.

The precise length of the site visit depends on the location(s), size, and complexity of the institution. Generally, three days is sufficient time to allocate for the site visit. It may take extra days if there are extensive off-campus sites or other extenuating circumstances.

### Institution Response

After the site visit team's report of findings has been forwarded to the ATHEA Board of Commissioners, a written summary report of the site visit team's findings will be sent to the institutions' Accreditation Liaison for review and comment. A written response by the institution's Accreditation Liaison, or his or her designee, is required within two weeks of receipt of the report. The ATHEA Board of Commissioners cannot review the institution's request for accreditation without this response. Accordingly, a specific written response to each finding, indicating areas of agreement, disagreement, and/or clarification, must be provided by the institution.

### ***Accreditation Actions by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners***

The ATHEA Board of Commissioners is the independent accreditation decision-making body of ATHEA and is composed of at least five members from ATHEA's accredited membership and at least one member who represents the general public.

The ATHEA Board of Commissioners reviews the self-evaluation materials, the site visit team's report of findings, and the institution's response. Based on this review, the ATHEA Board of Commissioners determines:

1. Whether the site visit team's report of findings is complete and supported with factual information.

2. Whether the site visit team's report of findings and other materials support the granting of accreditation.
3. Whether the institution's response to the site visit team's report of findings is substantially in agreement with team's report. If not, the Commissioners will obtain clarification of any conflicting views.

Accreditation actions by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners are taken only after reviewing the institution's self-evaluation, the site visit team's report of findings, and the institution's response to the team's report. At each level of review, the ATHEA Board of Commissioners considers:

- 1) The extent of the institution's compliance with the ATHEA Accreditation Standards
- 2) Both the number and seriousness of any deficiencies
- 3) The institution's willingness and capability to pursue excellence in higher education.

The ATHEA Board of Commissioners takes one of the following actions on an institution's request for accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation:

- 1) Accreditation Granted
- 2) Action on Accreditation Deferred
- 3) Accreditation Denied

### ***Accreditation Granted***

Accreditation is granted to those institutions judged by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners to be in compliance with the ATHEA Accreditation Standards. The institution must be current with its membership dues, and the site visit expenses must have been paid before accreditation is granted. The institution will be notified in writing of the ATHEA Board of Commissioners' decision regarding the accreditation status of the institution.

If accreditation is granted by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners, it may be accompanied by one or more of the following items:

- ***Recommendation.*** Recommendations are suggestions for improvement that are intended to assist the institution in achieving its goals. Action by the institution on recommendations is suggested but is not required.

- **Action Required.** Action Required represent areas in which the institution is not in full compliance with the Accreditation Standards. The institution is required to respond to these actions and has up to three years to eliminate the deficiencies identified in the Commissioners letter as Action Required unless otherwise specified by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners. Until the ATHEA Board of Commissioners determines that these deficiencies have been eliminated, the progress made in ameliorating the deficiencies must be addressed each year in the institution's Annual Report.

When accreditation is accompanied by Action Required-statements, the ATHEA Board of Commissioners may require a commissioners' visit to validate that the deficiencies identified in the Action Required statements have been corrected or that sufficient progress is being made in addressing the Action Required. The decision to require a commissioners' visit and the timeframe for the visit will be based on the number and seriousness of the deficiencies and other factors as deemed appropriate by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners. In the case of a required commissioners' visit, the accreditation status of the institution will be determined by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners based on a written commissioners' report of the visit. The institution will pay in advance the costs of this visit, which include travel expenses, hotel accommodations, food, transportation, and an administrative fee.

- **Commendations.** Commendations represent areas of excellence in which the institution could be an example to other institutions.

### ***Action on Accreditation Deferred***

When the institution that is a candidate for accreditation or is seeking reaffirmation of accreditation are found to be in noncompliance with a number of the Accreditation Standards, the ATHEA Board of Commissioners may defer action on accreditation for a time period not to exceed three years pending remedial action and/or receipt of additional information. The ATHEA Board of Commissioners will provide written reasons for the deferred action and will invite the institution to respond.

During this period, the institution will continue to hold the status of candidate for accreditation, or in the case of reaffirmation of accreditation, the institution will continue to hold its accredited status.

A deferred action is, in effect, a ruling of no action on accreditation at that time, and

therefore, the action cannot be appealed. The two major reasons for a deferred action are as follows:

1. The deficiencies are extensive, and/or
2. Adequate information pertaining to compliance with the Accreditation Standards was not included in the self-evaluation or other related documents.

If, within the time period specified by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners, the institution corrects the identified deficiencies, it may provide written notification to the ATHEA Board of Commissioners requesting reconsideration of the deferred action and describing the corrective actions it has taken. If the request for reconsideration is not received within one year of the deferred action, the institution must prepare and submit a new self-evaluation.

Upon receipt of a request for reconsideration of a deferred action, the ATHEA Board of Commissioners may assign a commissioner to make a one-day visit to the institution to validate that the deficiencies have been corrected. Subsequent to the one-day visit (if applicable), a written commissioner's report of the visit will be provided. Based on a review of the institution's request for reconsideration of deferral, the commissioner's report (if applicable), and the new self-evaluation (if applicable), the ATHEA Board of Commissioners will then determine the accreditation status of the institution. The institution and its institution will be notified in writing of the action of the ATHEA Board of Commissioners on the request for reconsideration of deferral.

If an institution that is a candidate for accreditation does not correct the identified deficiencies and/or does not request reconsideration of the deferred action within the specified time period, then its candidacy status lapses and no further remedy is available to it for the period of one year, after which it may reapply to become a candidate for accreditation. In the case of reaffirmation of accreditation, the accredited status of the institution lapses, and no further remedy is available to it for the period of one year, after which it must begin anew the process of accreditation in order to regain it. In this case, the institution and its parent institution must strike any reference to ATHEA accreditation from their websites, catalogues, and other public documents.

The costs of a commissioner's visit to validate corrective action will be paid in advance by the institution. These costs include travel expenses, hotel accommodations, food, and transportation.

## ***Accreditation Denied - Board of Appeal for Accreditation***

If the institution is in significant noncompliance with the Accreditation Standards the ATHEA Board of Commissioners may deny accreditation. If accreditation is denied, the ATHEA Board of Commissioners will provide written reasons for the denial.

Should the organisation want to appeal the decision, it can do this in line with § 17 of ATHEA's Charter (Status: April 5, 2017).

### **"Board of Appeal for Accreditation**

- (1) The Board for Appeal for Accreditation decides on accreditation issues only. The "Arbitral Tribunal" (§ 16) decides on all other issues.
- (2) An Accredited Member can appeal a suspension or withdrawal of its accreditation within 60 days.
- (3) The accreditation status of the Institutional Member is protected pending final disposition of the appeal process.
- (4) The member is granted the opportunity for a hearing before the Accreditation Commissioners on all material issues in controversy.
- (5) The member receives a written prior notice of the proceedings, the charges levied, and the standards by which the programs are ultimately to be judged.
- (6) An Accredited Member has to file an appeal signed by its Chief Executive Officer.
- (7) An appeal of withdrawal of accreditation must be on the grounds that such a decision was:
  - (a) Arbitrary, capricious, or otherwise in substantial disregard of the Accreditation principles, policies, or procedures; or
  - (b) Not supported by sufficient evidence in the record upon which the Accreditation Commissioners based the withdrawal action.
- (8) The Board of Appeal has no jurisdiction or authority pertaining to the reasonableness of the Accreditation Standards, policies, and procedures.
- (9) The Board of Appeal will not consider any evidence that was not in the record for review by the Accreditation Commissioners.
- (10) The Board of Appeal is composed of five (5) persons, each of whom must be a faculty member or academic administrator of an institution whose ATHEA-accredited institution is in good standing. The appointments are made by the Board of Directors of the ATHEA, who will also appoint the Chair of the Board of Appeal.
- (11) Each member appointed to the Board of Appeal must be experienced with the ATHEA accreditation process.
- (12) The issues at hand may not directly affect an appointee to the Board of Appeal.
- (13) The Board of Appeal is empowered to review, upon notice of appeal by an academic business unit, the withdrawal of accreditation of an Institutional Member.

The Board of Appeal has the authority to:

- (a) Affirm the decision of the Accreditation Commissioners.

(b) Remand the case to the Accreditation Commissioners with recommendations for further consideration."

The institution must pay in advance any additional costs associated with scheduling meetings of the ATHEA Board of Commissioners to address requests for reconsideration of denial of accreditation.

### ***Public Notification of Accreditation***

Once institutional accreditation has been granted by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners, an institution must denote this status on its website and in its catalogue and official publications and may denote it in its advertising. The form of notice and specific permissible language are prescribed by ATHEA.

A template for the form of notice that must be used on the institution's website and in its catalogue and other official publications is provided below:

*[Institution's name] has received institutional accreditation from the ATHEA Board of Commissioners for the Association for Transnational Higher Education Accreditation (ATHEA). The [institution] has affirmed its commitment to excellence in higher education. For more information regarding ATHEA and ATHEA, please visit [www.ATHEA.org](http://www.ATHEA.org).*

### ***Public Accountability***

In order to make informed educational decisions, various stakeholders of the institution, including current and potential students and their families, employers, governmental entities, and other members of the public who may have an interest in the institution, are entitled to have access to information pertaining to the quality of the programmes of the institution. Consequently, the ATHEA requires its accredited members to be accountable to the public for student learning outcomes in their programmes.

Therefore, before first-time accreditation can be granted by the ATHEA and subsequent to the granting of accreditation, an institution must publicly disclose information pertaining to the degree of student learning in its accredited programmes. In addition, the institution must indicate in its catalogue the ways in which the public may access this information. At a minimum, the institution must make student achievement data available on the unit's and/or the institution's website, but it should also make this information available in hard-copy form should it be requested by any member of the public.

## **PART THREE: CHANGES IN ACCREDITATION STATUS**

### ***Probation***

The ATHEA Board of Commissioners may place the accredited institutions on probation for the following reasons:

1. When an institution has been *Accredited with Actions Required* does not remove the deficiencies identified in the accreditation letter within the required three-year period, the ATHEA Board of Commissioners may place the institution on probation.
2. When an accredited institution becomes significantly out of compliance with the Accreditation Standards, the ATHEA Board of Commissioners may place that institution on probation.

When the institution is placed on probation, the institution will be notified of and requested to respond to the issues that caused the probationary status. These issues must be remedied within the time frame specified by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners but will not exceed two years. When the deficiencies are ameliorated, the institution will submit to ATHEA a written request for a review and removal of the probationary status.

A commissioner will visit the institution to verify that the deficiencies have been corrected to the satisfaction of the ATHEA Board of Commissioners. The report of these findings is made to the ATHEA Board of Commissioners for its final disposition. If the deficiencies are not corrected or if the institution does not submit a request for removal of probationary status within the specified time period, institution will be subject to withdrawal of accreditation.

### ***Withdrawal of Accreditation***

Withdrawal of accreditation differs significantly from denial of accreditation. Denial applies to the institution when seeking first-time accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation, while withdrawal applies to the institution after it has been granted first-time accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation. Withdrawal of accreditation typically occurs following a period of probation. Accreditation may be withdrawn by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners through the following two types of actions:

1. Suspension of Accreditation
2. Revocation of Accreditation

The ATHEA will notify the institution by certified mail regarding the withdrawal of accreditation. The institution will have a 60-day time period in which to initiate an appeal of accreditation withdrawal. The accreditation status of the institution is protected pending final disposition of the appeal process

### Suspension of Accreditation

Suspension of accreditation occurs when, in the judgment of the ATHEA Board of Commissioners, an accredited institution no longer complies with the Accreditation Standards and/or policies and procedures. A judgment of suspension will specify the time period, conditions, and terms by which the institution may regain accreditation through correction of the conditions that led to the suspension.

Reasons for suspension include, but are not limited, to the following circumstances:

1. When a major area of an institution is thoroughly examined and found not to be in compliance with current Accreditation Standards and/or policies and procedures.
2. When periodic reports filed by the institution fail to conform to prescribed reporting requirements.
3. When any substantial or significant change in the operation, structure, governance, ownership, control, location, facilities of the institution is made without notification to the ATHEA.
4. When the institution fails to respond adequately to inquiries or requests for information or fails to cooperate in completing arrangements for a scheduled evaluation.
5. When the institution has substantially disregarded directives of the ATHEA.
6. When the institution fails to file an annual report on a timely basis as required by the ATHEA.
7. When the institution has failed to pay its annual membership dues or accreditation fees in a timely manner as established by the ATHEA Board of Directors.

If the institution does not correct the conditions that led to the suspension in the specified time period, the institution will be subject to revocation of accreditation.

## ***Revocation of Accreditation***

Revocation of accreditation most often follows suspension from ATHEA, and thereafter, the failure of the institution to correct deficiencies noted by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners. A judgment of revocation by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners requires that the institution begin anew the process of accreditation in order to regain it.

### Due Process

In all cases where accreditation has been withdrawn, either by suspension or revocation, the institution is afforded the following procedural guarantees according to § 16 of ATHEA's Charter "The Board of Appeal for Accreditation".

If the institution does not exercise its right of appeal within the 60-day time period afforded to it, or if the institution's appeal is denied and the withdrawal of accreditation is upheld, then the institution must strike any reference to ATHEA accreditation from their websites, catalogues, and other public documents.

## ***Voluntary Withdrawal***

There may be reasons for an institution to withdraw voluntarily from ATHEA membership and thereby forfeit its accreditation. The ATHEA requires that the chief executive officer of the institution place this action in writing and forward it to ATHEA headquarters. The institution is then required to make a public statement of its withdrawal, and to strike any reference to ATHEA accreditation from its website, catalogues, and other public documents. Voluntary withdrawal does not entitle the institution to a refund of membership dues.

## **PART FOUR: REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

### ***Substantive Changes***

The ATHEA Board of Commissioner's Sub-Committee on Substantive Change reviews the Substantive Change request to determine if the proposed substantive change is acceptable and if it materially affects the institution's capacity to earn accreditation before the candidate phase expires or to retain accreditation after accreditation is awarded by ATHEA.

The ATHEA Board of Commission then takes one of the following actions:

1. If the ATHEA Board of Commissioners determine that the proposal is acceptable and does not affect the institution's capacity to earn or retain accreditation, the Commission acts to acknowledge receipt of the proposal and to include the change within the scope of the institution's candidate status.
2. If the ATHEA Board of Commissioners determine that the proposal is acceptable, but it materially affects the institution's capacity to earn accreditation before the candidate phase expires, the Commission postpones a decision on the substantive change and launches a review of ATHEA Candidate for Accreditation.
3. If the ATHEA Board of Commissioners determines that the proposal is not acceptable, it may reject the proposal. If the institution goes forward and makes the substantive change the Commission will launch a review of the institution's ATHEA Accreditation.

**The following changes must be reported to ATHEA immediately:**

New Campuses

It is the responsibility of the institution to notify ATHEA when a new campus location is opened. The notification must include a discussion and document of how the new location is integrated into the institution's quality assurance strategy.

Change of Institution's Name or Location

The ATHEA should be notified immediately in writing if an institution is considering a change in its name and/or physical location.

Change of Ownership

The transfer of ownership or a major change in the controlling structure of an institution is considered to be a substantive change and must be reported in writing to the ATHEA. The notification must include a discussion and documentation of how the change in ownership is integrated into the institution's quality assurance strategy.

Closing of Institution

When the ATHEA receives information, from whatever source, that an institution has ceased to operate, it will immediately take steps to verify the information. If an institution has ceased to function, the accreditation is summarily suspended. Such action is authorized without prior notice or hearing and with immediate public notice. The institution will be notified in writing of the suspension at its last known address. If no petition to lift the suspension is received within 60 days of this notification, the suspension automatically becomes a revocation of accreditation.

## ***Annual Reports***

All institutional members of ATHEA agree to abide by the accreditation policies and procedures of ATHEA. The institution will keep ATHEA fully informed of its activities on at least an annual basis. To assist the institution in this regard, the ATHEA requires an annual report from each institutional member. Only institutional members who did not start their candidacy process yet are exempt.

The purpose of the annual report is to keep ATHEA apprised of the activities and the changes that take place within the institution each academic year so that a determination can be made as to whether the institution remains in compliance with the Accreditation Standards, policies, and procedures. Any activity or change within the institution and/or the institution that materially alters the status of the faculty, the curricula, the resources in support of the institution, or another issue that might affect its compliance with the Accreditation Standards must be reported in the annual report to ATHEA.

## **PART FIVE: PROCEDURE FOR THIRD-PARTY COMPLAINTS**

### ***Introduction***

The ATHEA exists to promote and recognize quality in higher education and expects its members to comply with its Accreditation Standards and policies. ATHEA will review complaints from third parties, such as students, faculty members, or other interested parties, pertaining to alleged noncompliance with its Accreditation Standards and policies.

### ***Process***

Third-party complaints must be written and must be sent to ATHEA either through email (published contact address at the website) or by regular mail.

Third-party complaints must:

1. Identify the specific Accreditation Standards and/or policies with which it is alleged that the institution is not in compliance.
2. Specify the relationship of the complainant to the institution against which the complaint has been filed.
3. Fully identify and describe the situation surrounding the instance of alleged noncompliance.
4. Provide complete and appropriate documentation pertaining to the instance of alleged noncompliance.

When a third-party complaint concerning an institution member of the ATHEA is received, ATHEA personnel will investigate the complaint. If the complaint does not meet the four requirements listed above, the complainant will be notified, and no further action will be taken until such time as the four requirements have been met. When the four requirements have been met, a copy of the complaint will be sent to the chief executive of the institution which the complaint has been filed. The institution will be asked to provide a written response to the complaint to ATHEA within 30 days. This response should focus on the specific Accreditation Standards and/or policies identified in the complaint and should fully address the allegations contained in the complaint.

The complaint and the response of the institution to the complaint will be reviewed by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners at its next regularly-scheduled meeting. If

the ATHEA Board of Commissioners determines that the complaint has merit and that the institution is not in compliance with the Accreditation Standards and policies, it will specify necessary corrective actions and an appropriate timetable for the corrective actions to be taken. If the ATHEA Board of Commissioners determines that the complaint has not been substantiated, then no further action will be taken. In either case, the decisions of the ATHEA Board of Commissioners will be communicated in writing to the complainant and to the institution against which the complaint had been filed.

## **PART SIX: CONFLICTS BETWEEN ACCREDITATION STANDARDS, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES WITH NATIONAL OR REGIONAL LAWS**

The ATHEA exists to promote and recognize quality in higher education and expects its members to comply with its Accreditation Standards and policies. When these Accreditation Standards and policies conflict with national or regional laws governing an institution, ATHEA will follow the process described below:

1. The appropriate governing body will be identified and then contacted to determine the scope of and the facts pertaining to the potential conflict.
2. The results of the investigation of a potential conflict will be reported in writing to the ATHEA Board of Commissioners at its next regularly-scheduled meeting and to the institution.
3. The ATHEA Board of Commissioners will determine the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the potential conflict. This will be communicated in writing to the institution.
4. If the institution disagrees with the decision of the ATHEA Board of Commissioners, they may request a reconsideration of the decision and present their case in writing, including new information and/or evidence within 15 days.
5. The ATHEA Board of Commissioners might invite the institution to present its case at its next meeting.
6. Based on this information, with or without a hearing, the ATHEA Board of Commissioners will make a final decision.
7. The institution has the right to appeal the decision according to § 16 of ATHEA's Charter "The Board of Appeal for Accreditation"

The institution must pay in advance any additional costs associated with scheduling meetings of the ATHEA Board of Commissioners to address requests for reconsideration of its decision.

## **PART SEVEN: REQUESTS FOR RECONSIDERATION OF BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' DECISIONS**

In situations not otherwise covered in this manual, the following policies and procedures will apply to cases in which an institution request a reconsideration of a decision by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners:

1. If an institution disagrees with a decision of the ATHEA Board of Commissioners, the institution may request a reconsideration of the decision and may present their case, including new information and/or evidence in writing within 15 days.
2. The ATHEA Board of Commissioners might invite the institution to present its case at its next meeting.
3. Based on this information, with or without a hearing, the ATHEA Board of Commissioners will make a final decision.
4. The institution has the right to appeal the decision according to § 16 of ATHEA's Charter "The Board of Appeal for Accreditation"

During this period, the institution will continue to hold its current membership status with the ATHEA.

The institution must pay in advance any additional costs associated with scheduling meetings of the ATHEA Board of Commissioners to address requests for reconsideration of its decisions.

## **PART EIGHT: CHANGES IN ACCREDITATION STANDARDS, POLICIES AND MANUALS**

The following policies and procedures will apply to changes in the Accreditation Standards, policies and manuals (Accreditation documents):

1. Accreditation documents may be amended by a recommendation of the ATHEA Board of Commissioners.
2. The Accreditation Liaison from any institutional member of ATHEA may recommend changes in the Accreditation documents.
3. A 60-day period of comment by members on proposed revisions must precede any vote on the amended documents. The notice of comment on proposed revisions to ATHEA accreditation documents must be sent to the Accreditation Liaison of all institution members.
4. Voting on the amended accreditation manuals may be conducted at the annual conference or electronically.
5. Changes to ATHEA accreditation manuals must be approved by two-thirds of those institution members voting.
6. The current version of the Accreditation Standards will be posted publicly to the ATHEA website.
7. Policies and manuals will be available to members only or publicly via the ATHEA website.

## APPENDIX: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Academic Cycle:** An academic cycle refers to the time period from when a group of students start a programme and when the same group of students complete a programme. Schools that offer continuous enrolment periods may have continuous cycles as opposed to schools with set enrolment periods may have annual academic cycles.

**Academic Program:** An organized sequence of courses, modules, credits, classes, subjects, papers, etc. that leads to the awarding of a degree, diploma, certificate, or other equivalent credential at the undergraduate or graduate level in an institution of higher education.

**Academic Quality:** The overall level of performance of the institution in the context of its mission as measured by the extent of accomplishment of the institution's intended student learning and operational outcomes and its mission and strategic goals.

**Accreditation Liaison:** The representative of an ATHEA member institution that has been assigned the primary contact while the institution seeks to achieve ATHEA Accreditation and for any follow-up communication, such as addressing *Actions Required* for the accreditation letter and reports.

**Accreditation Peer Review:** is the evaluation of an institutions self-evaluation done by work by one or more people of similar competence in higher education. It constitutes a form of self-regulation by qualified members of a profession within the relevant field, in ATHEA's case it is tertiary education. Peer review methods are employed to maintain standards of quality, improve performance, and provide credibility.

**Accreditation Self-Evaluation:** is a summary of the Standards the institution will need to comply with to achieve ATHEA. There are 10 Standards that have multiple objectives that will need to be addressed in Accreditation Self-Evaluation.

**Accreditation Standard:** a series of agreed-upon commonly accepted areas which are vital for successful quality education and reveals quality learning environments in higher education. ATHEA has identified 10 Standards can be applied to all tertiary education institutions.

**Accreditation Status, ATHEA-Accredited:** An accreditation status awarded to an institution by the ATHEA Board of Commissions. Once awarded, the membership status is Accredited Member of ATHEA, having obtained ATHEA.

**Accreditation Status, ATHEA-Candidate:** An accreditation status granted to an institution by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners. Once granted, the membership status is Candidate Member of ATHEA.

**Accreditation Status:** Refers to either Candidate for Accreditation or Accredited statuses.

**Accreditation:** The process of self-evaluation and external peer review for quality assurance, accountability, and quality improvement of an institution of higher education. The recognition of excellence in education ATHEA; excellence in education for the institution includes achieving its mission and strategic goals, and compliance with ATHEA's Accreditation Principles.

**Accredited Member:** The status granted by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners to an institution that has successfully completed the ATHEA review process and has the institution accredited by ATHEA.

**Accredited.** Once a Candidate for Accreditation completes a self-evaluation, passes a site evaluation, and is accepted into accreditation status by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners, the institution is awarded accreditation. The ATHEA-Candidate must have at least 2 cycles of graduates (students that start and finish the programme) from their institution. The specific term for accredited is ATHEA-Accredited.

**Action Plan:** A series of steps designed to accomplish a goal or an objective, or to make changes and improvements related to strategic planning and outcomes assessment.

**Actions Required:** are issues and or processes that need to be addressed by an institution following Board of Commissioners decision on a candidacy or an accreditation application. These actions must rectify within the time period stated in the commissioner's letter following their decision.

**Affiliated Institution.** An Affiliated Institution is a status for being associated with ATHEA and reserved for institutions and corporations that are associated with higher education wish to learn, be informed, and potentially receive assistance from ATHEA relative to quality improvement in higher education.

Affiliated Institutions are not necessarily on an immediate path for accreditation, rather perhaps at a later time the Affiliated Institution's institution will be ready to embark on obtaining ATHEA. Affiliated Institutions may also be corporations who would like to sponsor and support the activities of ATHEA.

**Annual Report:** A report required of all institution members of ATHEA, regardless of accreditation status, which is to be submitted annually to ATHEA. The annual reports are used to monitor the status of institution members and their efforts toward continuous improvement.

**Applicant:** An institution that has submitted a completed ATHEA membership application form with appropriate enclosures as specified in the ATHEA criteria for institutional membership.

**Assessment:** A process of determining whether established student learning and operational goals/objectives have been achieved, and whether the mission and broad-based goals of the institution are being accomplished. The process involves gathering, evaluating, and interpreting results in light of intended outcomes.

**ATHEA Accredited:** An ATHEA member that has completed a self-evaluation, hosted a site evaluation, and is accepted into accreditation status by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners, the institution is awarded accreditation.

**ATHEA Board of Commissioners:** The ATHEA Board of Commissioners is the independent accreditation decision-making body of ATHEA and is elected by the organization's membership in accordance with the ATHEA Charter. The Commissioners review and evaluate requests for accreditation and determine the accreditation status of all ATHEA institution members. The commissioners are responsible for maintaining and updating the ATHEA Accreditation Process Manual and associated documents.

**ATHEA Board of Directors:** The Board of Directors is elected by the ATHEA institution membership in accordance with the bylaws of the ATHEA. The directors are responsible for general oversight of the affairs of the organization and for establishing policy.

**ATHEA Bylaws:** The document that expands upon the ATHEA Charter that addresses the day-to-day operational governance, procedures, policies, and practices of the organization.

**ATHEA Charter:** a document, issued by a sovereign or state, outlining the conditions under which a corporation, colony, city, or other corporate body is organized, and defining its rights and privileges. In the case of ATHEA, it is issued by the Austrian government.

**ATHEA:** Is the acronym for The Association for Transnational Higher Education Accreditation.

**Awards/Awarded:** Terms used when referring to the ATHEA Board of Commissioners awarding Accreditation to an Institution.

**Benchmarking:** The process of continuously measuring and comparing an institution's resources, processes, and outcomes against comparable resources, processes, and outcomes in the institutions of leading institutions of higher education, and against educational best practices to obtain information that will assist the institution in identifying and implementing improvements.

**Bologna Protocols:** Launched in 1999 by the Ministers of Education and university leaders of 29 countries, the Bologna Process aims to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010; it has further developed into a major reform encompassing 46 countries. Taking part in the Bologna Process is a voluntary decision made by each country and its higher education community to endorse the principles underlined in the European Higher Education Area. The Bologna Process does not aim to harmonize national educational systems but rather to provide tools to connect them. The intention is to allow the diversity of national systems and universities to be maintained while the European Higher Education Area improves transparency between higher education systems, as well as implements tools to facilitate recognition of degrees and academic qualifications, mobility, and exchanges between institutions. The reforms are based on ten simple objectives which governments and institutions are currently implementing. Most importantly, all participating countries have agreed on a comparable three cycle degree system for undergraduates (Bachelor degrees) and graduates (Master and PhD degrees).

**Candidacy Application:** It the first document to be submitted to begin the candidacy process. This document must be approved and signed by the institution's chief executive officer (i.e., president, chancellor, director general), affirming the institution is commitment to abide by the accreditation policies and

procedures of the ATHEA Board of Commissioners. Payment of the application fee for candidacy is part of the application.

**Candidacy Self-Evaluation:** is a summary of the Standards the institution will need to comply with to achieve ATHEA-Candidate status.

**Candidacy Site Visit.** An on-campus review of the institution's academic programs and operations in response to the institution's request for institutional accreditation. The site visit includes validation of the candidacy self-evaluation by an ATHEA site-visit team of professionally trained peer reviewers.

**Candidacy Visit Report:** Following the visit, the candidacy site visit team will prepare a comprehensive final report for the ATHEA Board of Commissioners. If no additional information is required from the institution, the candidacy site visit team's report of findings normally completed no later than two weeks after the team's visit to the institution and forwarded to the ATHEA Board of Commissioners. If the final candidacy site visit team's report of findings is delayed beyond two weeks, ATHEA offices should be notified

**Candidacy:** A process during which an institution prepares for a first-time accreditation review by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners.

**Candidate for Accreditation:** An Institutional Member who has completed all of the requirements for candidacy status as stated in the Accreditation Policy Manual will be considered a candidate for accreditation. The Institutional Member must have graduates of the programme and be in existence for at least 3 years. The specific term used to state the outcome a positive outcome for candidacy is ATHEA-Candidate. In the ATHEA Charter, the specific membership category is Candidate Member. The member therefore becomes an ATHEA Candidate Member, having been granted ATHEA-Candidate by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners.

**EQAR:** European Quality Assurance Register

**ESG:** European Standards and Guidelines

**Faculty Development:** A process whereby faculty members seek to improve their professionalism related to teaching, discovery, application, and integration.

**Faculty Load:** Consists of teaching loads (the actual number of courses taught during an academic term for full-time, part-time, and adjunct faculty), and

other academic assignments (e.g., student advising, committee work, and other administrative assignments).

**Faculty Qualification Levels:** A faculty member's education, certifications, industry experience, and teaching experience determine his or her qualification level. Faculty members are classified as being doctorally-qualified, professionally-qualified, minimally-qualified, or unqualified.

**Findings:** Items and issues identified by a site-visit team resulting from its visit to the institution and its evaluation of the institution's self-evaluation in order to determine compliance with the ATHEA Accreditation Standards. The ATHEA Board of Commissioners examines these findings to determine whether they should be identified as observations, notes, or commendations.

**Grants/Granted:** Terms used when referring to the ATHEA Board of Commissioners granting Candidate for Accreditation.

**Hybrid Program:** A programme delivered to students partially online and partially face-to-face.

**Institutional Accreditation:** Accreditation granted to an academic institution in its entirety by an accrediting organization.

**Institutional Member:** This is the entry into the ATHEA and the starting point for all institutional members who may seek accreditation. The institution must have legal authorization to operate as a tertiary educational institution, have students in a programme of higher education, be in existence for at least 1 year, and offer and teach their own institution's programmes. If, for example, an institution is teaching for another institution but has no academic programmes of their own, they could not be an Institutional Member.

**Intended Outcome:** A planned or desired result pertaining to student learning or institution operational effectiveness.

**Learning Resources:** Are information represented, accessible or stored in a variety of media and formats, which assists student learning as defined by the learning outcomes of the institutions curriculum. Learning resources are generally understood to be texts, videos, software, and other materials that assist students to meet the objectives for learning.

**Legal Authority to Operate:** An institution demonstrates that it has legal authorization to operate as a tertiary educational institution in their primary location.

**Measurement Instruments:** Tools used to determine the extent to which intended outcomes have been achieved. Measurement instruments for student learning can be either direct measures or indirect measures.

**Measures, Direct:** Methods used to assess the extent of student achievement of intended learning outcomes. The measures provide direct evidence to determine whether the desired learning has taken place (the evidence provided should be relevant, verifiable, and representative). Examples of direct measures include comprehensive exams, capstone course assessments, portfolio evaluations, pre- and post-test assessments.

**Measures, Indirect:** Methods used to assess students' or external bodies' perceptions, thoughts, or opinions pertaining to the educational experiences of students. Examples of indirect measures include exit surveys, exit interviews, focus groups, alumni surveys, and employers' evaluations of students.

**Member, Affiliated Institution:** An Affiliated Institution is a status for being associated with ATHEA and reserved for institutions associated with higher education who wish to learn, be informed, and potentially receive assistance from ATHEA relative to quality improvement in higher education. Affiliated Institutions are not necessarily on an immediate path for accreditation, rather perhaps at a later time the Affiliated Institution will be ready to embark on ATHEA accreditation. In the ATHEA Charter, the specific term used is *Affiliated Member*. Affiliated members are restricted to organisations, not individuals.

**Membership Status (Category), Accredited:** Once an ATHEA Candidate Member completes a self-evaluation, hosts a site evaluation, and is accepted into accreditation status by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners, the institution is awarded accreditation. The ATHEA-Candidate must have at least 2 cycles of graduates from their institution. The specific term for accredited is ATHEA-Accredited. The Candidate Member therefore becomes an ATHEA Accredited Member, having been granted ATHEA by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners.

**Membership Status (Category), Candidate for Accreditation:** An Institutional Member who has completed all of the requirements for candidacy status as stated in the Accreditation Policy Manual will be considered a candidate for accreditation. The Institutional Member must have graduates of the programme and be in existence for at least 3 years. The member therefore becomes an ATHEA Candidate Member, having been granted ATHEA-Candidate by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners.

**Membership Status (Category), Institutional Member:** This is the entry into the ATHEA and the starting point for all institutional members who may seek accreditation. The institution must have legal authorization to operate as a tertiary educational institution, have students in an academic programme, be in existence for at least 1 year, and offer and teach their own institution's programmes. If, for example, an institution is teaching for another institution but has no academic programmes of their own, they could not be an Institutional Member. In the ATHEA Charter, the specific term stated is Institutional Member.

**Membership Status (Category):** Refers to the status related to membership for the member institution.

**Mission/Goal/Objective:** Mission is a statement of the purpose of an institution or an institution, the reason(s) for its existence, and sometimes includes its future direction or vision. Goals are established to place into action various facets of the mission, purpose, and vision of the institution or the institution (the results it wants to accomplish in the future). The mission and goals of the institution should be congruent with those of the institution. Objectives are the specific, measurable results that the institution or the institution expects to achieve consistent with its mission and goals.

**Objectives:** For each accreditation standard, there are specific objectives that define how the standard is evaluated.

**Off-Campus:** Any site other than the main campus at which courses are taught by the institution is considered to be "off campus." Online and/or video delivery of courses to dedicated sites may also be considered "off-campus."

**Operational Effectiveness:** The ability of the institution to accomplish its operational goals and intended operational outcomes.

**Outcomes Assessment Plan:** A document prepared by an institution that outlines the process it uses to measure the academic quality of its programmes, the

extent of its operational effectiveness, and the degree to which it is accomplishing its mission and broad-based goals.

**Peer Evaluator:** is a qualified member of a profession within the relevant field, in ATHEA's case it is tertiary education.

**Publicly Available Information:** the main purpose of providing publicly available information is to demonstrate that an institution of higher education is delivering to their students and other stakeholders the achievement of its stated mission and. This information should include evidence of student learning and operational effectiveness.

**Qualified Teachers/Faculty:** Qualified faculty members are identified primarily by credentials, but other factors, including but not limited to equivalent experience, may be considered by the institution in determining whether a faculty member is qualified. Qualified Teacher/faculty possess an academic degree relevant to what they are teaching and at least one level above the level at which they teach, except in programs for terminal degrees or when equivalent experience is established. In terminal degree programs, faculty members possess the same level of degree. When faculty members are employed based on equivalent experience, the institution defines a minimum threshold of experience and an evaluation process that is used in the appointment process.

**Reaffirmation of Accreditation:** Once an institution has been granted accreditation by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners, an institution must have that accreditation reaffirmed periodically by developing a self-evaluation, undergoing a site visit, and being reviewed by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners.

**Realized Outcome:** A measurable statement of performance resulting from the implementation of a course of action. A realized outcome may or may not be an indicator of success in achieving goals and objectives.

**Recommendations:** is a comment by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners that it believes would be helpful to the institution in achieving its goals. Action on observations is highly recommended but is not required.

**Rubric:** An established guide used to provide consistent evaluations of assessment results generated by identified measurement instruments. A rubric establishes criteria for objective assessment and evaluation. A rubric can be a description of performance characteristics corresponding to points on a rating scale, or an

explicit objective of performance qualities on a rating scale, or a defined scoring point on a scale.

**Scholarly and Professional Activities:** Those activities and tasks that faculty members undertake in order to enhance and further develop their knowledge, skills, and abilities within their fields of study.

**Self-Evaluation:** A comprehensive report prepared by an institution that documents the extent of the institution's compliance with the Accreditation Standards.

**Site Visit:** A comprehensive, on-campus review of the institution's programmes and operations in response to the institution's request for institutional accreditation. The site visit includes evaluation of the institution's self-evaluation by a ATHEA site-visit team of professionally- trained peer reviewers and students.

**Standard:** The ATHEA Accreditation Standards represent its criteria for accreditation.

**Strategic Goals:** Strategic goals represent aspirations of the institution and should be directly related to the accomplishment of the institution's mission.

**Student Learning Outcomes:** Measurable knowledge, skills, and abilities of students related to a course or programme of study.

**Student Support Services:** is where and institution provides services and support for students to enhance growth and development. These services include, but are not limited to, career counselling, academic counselling, administrative services, and student life

**Tertiary educational institution:** A post-secondary educational institution.

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