ATHEA

ASSOCIATION FOR TRANSNATIONAL
HIGHER EDUCATION ACCREDITATION

ATHEA STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION

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 ATHEA Standards for Accreditation provide the basis for evaluating institutions, as well as the internal and external quality assurance of the organisation.

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ATHEA STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION

The Accreditation Standards are derived from the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) as approved by the Ministerial Conference in May 2015.

10 Standards for Accreditation (used as the basis for evaluating institutions)

1. **Policy for Quality Assurance**. The institution has a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of the institution's strategic management. Internal stakeholders develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders. This policy should be included in the institutions strategic planning process. All transnational activities of the institution including joint programmes, partnership arrangements, branch campuses, etc. should also be included within the policy for quality assurance.

2. **Design and Approval of Academic Programmes**. The institution has processes for the design and approval of their academic programmes. The programmes are designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme is clearly specified and communicated and referred to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

3. **Student-Centred Learning, Teaching, and Assessment.** The institution's academic programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process and the assessment of student learning reflects this approach.

4. **Student Admission, Progression, Recognition, and Certification.** The institution consistently applies pre-defined and published regulations and policies covering all phases of the student cycle including student admission, progression, recognition, and certification.

5. **Teaching Staff**. The institution assures that its teachers, are appropriately qualified and competent to teach the assigned courses. The institution applies fair and transparent processes for the

recruitment and development of the teaching staff. The institution performs research appropriate to the institution's mission.

6. **Learning Resources and Student Support**. The institution has appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and provides adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support.

7. **Information Management.** The institution collects, analyses, and uses relevant information for the effective management of their academic programmes and other institutional activities with appropriate policies and procedures to facilitate clear communication with all stakeholders.

8. **Public Information.** The institution publishes information about its activities, including academic programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date, and readily accessible. The institution also publishes information regarding its ethical standards and conduct, community engagement activities, and social responsibilities.

9. **On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes.** The institution monitors and periodically reviews their programmes to ensure that the programmes achieve the objectives set for them and are responsive to the needs of students and society. Periodic reviews lead to continuous improvement of the academic programme. Actions planned or taken as a result of the periodic reviews are communicated to all those concerned. A periodic review is also completed on the comprehensive quality assurance plan.

10. **Cyclical External Quality Assurance.** The institution undergoes external quality assurance in line with the ATHEA Standards on a cyclical basis.

7 Standards for the Process of Accreditation -
used to guide the ATHEA accreditation process

1. **Consideration of Internal Quality Assurance.** ATHEA's quality assurance addresses the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance strategies and processes

2. **Designing Methodologies Fit for Purpose.** ATHEA's quality assurance is defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders are involved in its design and continuous improvement.

3. **Implementing Processes.** ATHEA's external quality assurance processes are reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently, and published. ATHEA's external quality assurance processes include a self-evaluation, a site visit, a report resulting from the external assessment, and consistent follow-up.

4. **Peer-review Experts.** A group of external experts that include at least one student member conducts the external quality assurance.

5. **Criteria for Outcomes**. Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance are based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

6. **Reporting**. Full reports by the peer-review experts are published, clear, and accessible to the academic community, external partners, and other interested individuals. If the ATHEA Board of Commissioners takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision will be published together with the report.

7. **Complaints and Appeals.** Complaints and appeals processes are clearly defined as part of the design of ATHEA's assurance processes and is communicated to the institutions.

7 Standards for Organisational Quality Assurance -
used to evaluate ATHEA

1. **Activities, Policy, and Processes for Quality Assurance**. ATHEA will undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. ATHEA will have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These goals and objectives will translate into the daily work of the agency. ATHEA will ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

2. **Official Status**. ATHEA has an established legal basis and will be formally recognized as a quality assurance agency by EQAR.

3. **Independence**. ATHEA will be independent and act autonomously. ATHEA will have full responsibility for its operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

4. **Thematic Analysis**. ATHEA will regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of its external quality assurance activities.

5. **Resources**. ATHEA will have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out its work.

6. **Internal Quality Assurance and Professional Conduct**. ATHEA will have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of its activities.

7. **Cyclical External Review of the ATHEA**. ATHEA will undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate its compliance with its standards. ATHEA will conduct an informal review with other similar agencies for review of its standards and practices as a benchmark every 2 to 3 years.

APPENDIX: ESG ALIGNMENT

A foundational concept with ATHEA is that when eligible, ATHEA seeks recognition on EQAR. A key component of such eligibility is that ATHEA follows the ESG Standards. It is therefore essential that there is alignment between ATHEA's policies and practices with the ESG.

Alignment with Part 1 of the ESG

Part I of the ESG concerns the standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance. ATHEA's accreditation standards are aligned with the ESG as shown in the following table.

ESG Standards for Internal Quality Assurance	ATHEA Accreditation Standards
1.1 Policy for quality assurance. Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.	**1. Policy for Quality Assurance.** The institution has a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of the institution's strategic management. Internal stakeholders develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders. This policy should be included in the institutions strategic planning process. All transnational activities of the institution including joint programmes, partnership arrangements, branch campuses, etc. should also be included within the policy for quality assurance.
1.2 Design and approval of programmes. Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct	**2. Design and Approval of Academic Programmes.** The institution has processes for the design and approval of their academic programmes. The programmes are designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme is clearly specified and communicated, and referred to the

level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.	correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.
1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment. Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.	**3. Student-Centred Learning, Teaching, and Assessment.** The institution's academic programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process and the assessment of student learning reflects this approach.
1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification. Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student "life cycle", e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification.	**4. Student Admission, Progression, Recognition, and Certification.** The institution consistently applies pre-defined and published regulations and policies covering all phases of the student cycle including student admission, progression, recognition, and certification.
1.5 Teaching staff. Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the staff.	**5. Teaching Staff.** The institution ensures that its teachers, are appropriately qualified and competent to teach the assigned courses. The institution applies fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the teaching staff. The institution performs research appropriate to the institution's mission.
1.6 Learning resources and student support. Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided.	**6. Learning Resources and Student Support.** The institution has appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and provides adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support.

1.7 Information management. Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.	**7. Information Management.** The institution collects, analyses, and uses relevant information for the effective management of their academic programmes and other institutional activities with appropriate policies and procedures to facilitate clear communication with all stakeholders.
1.8 Public information. Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible.	**8. Public Information.** The institution publishes information about their activities, including academic programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date, and readily accessible. The institution also publishes information regarding its ethical standards and conduct, community engagement activities, and social responsibilities.
1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes. Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.	**9. On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes.** The institution monitors and periodically reviews their programmes to ensure that the programmes achieve the objectives set for them and are responsive to the needs of students and society. Periodic reviews lead to continuous improvement of the academic programme. Actions planned or taken as a result of the periodic reviews are communicated to all those concerned. A periodic review is also completed on the comprehensive quality assurance plan.
1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance. Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis.	**10. Cyclical External Quality Assurance.** The institution undergoes external quality assurance in accordance with the ATHEA Standards on a cyclical basis.

Alignment with Part 2 of the ESG

Part 2 of the ESG concerns the standards and guidelines associated with conducting the external quality assurance, specifically the practices and procedures related to higher education accreditation. The relationship between the ESG and the ATHEA Board of Commissioners practices and procedures is shown in the following table.

ESG Standards for External Quality Assurance	Accreditation Process Manual
2.1. **Consideration of Internal Quality Assurance.** External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.	**1. Consideration of Internal Quality Assurance.** ATHEA's quality assurance addresses the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance strategies and processes.
2.2. **Designing Methodologies Fit for Purpose.** External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.	**2. Designing Methodologies Fit for Purpose.** ATHEA's quality assurance is defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders are involved in its design and continuous improvement.
2.3. **Implementing Processes.** External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include • a self-assessment or equivalent; • an external assessment normally including a site visit; • a report resulting from the external assessment; • a consistent follow-up.	**3. Implementing Processes.** ATHEA's external quality assurance processes are reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently, and published. ATHEA's external quality assurance processes include a self-evaluation, a site visit, a report resulting from the external assessment, and consistent follow-up.
2.4. **Peer-review Experts.** External quality assurance should be carried out	**4. Peer-review Experts.** A group of external experts that include at least

by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).	one student member conducts the external quality assurance.
2.5. **Criteria for Outcomes.** Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.	**5. Criteria for Outcomes**. Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance are based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.
2.6. **Reporting.** Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.	**6. Reporting**. Full reports by the peer-review experts are published, clear, and accessible to the academic community, external partners, and other interested individuals. If the ATHEA Board of Commissioners takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision will be published together with the report.
2.7. **Complaints and Appeals.** Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.	**7. Complaints and Appeals.** Complaints and appeals processes are clearly defined as part of the design of ATHEA's assurance processes and is communicated to the institutions.

Alignment with Part 3 of the ESG

Part 3 of the ESG concerns the standards and guidelines associated with quality assurance agencies, specifically ATHEA governance, structure, organization, policies, procedures, and practices. The relationship between the ESG and ATHEA is shown in the following table.

ESG Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance Agencies	Alignment with ATHEA
3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance. Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.	**1. Activities, Policy, and Processes for Quality Assurance**. ATHEA will undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. ATHEA will have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These goals and objectives will translate into the daily work of the agency. ATHEA will ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.
3.2 Official status. Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.	**2. Official Status**. ATHEA has an established legal basis and will be formally recognized as a quality assurance agency by EQAR.
3.3 Independence. Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.	**3. Independence**. ATHEA will be independent and act autonomously. ATHEA will have full responsibility for its operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.
3.4 Thematic analysis. Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.	**4. Thematic Analysis**. ATHEA will regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of its external quality assurance activities.

3.5 Resources. Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.	**5. Resources**. ATHEA will have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out its work.
3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct. Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.	**6. Internal Quality Assurance and Professional Conduct**. ATHEA will have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of its activities.
3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies. Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.	**7. Cyclical External Review of the ATHEA**. ATHEA will undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with its standards. ATHEA will conduct an informal review with other similar agencies for review of its standards and practices as a benchmark every 2 to 3 years.

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