

ECBE AISBL

Avenue Louise 65, 1050 Brussels, Belgium
BE 0543.364.504
tel.: +32-2-535 89 07, fax: +32-11-82 43 04
www.ecbe.eu

ECBE SAR SUPPLEMENT

European Council for Business Education

Excellence in Business Education



European Council for Business Education aisbl

Avenue Louise 65, 1050 Brussels, Belgium

BE 0543.364.504

Tel: + 32 2 235 89 07

info@ecbe.eu

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1. Preamble

1.1 Used abbreviations

ECBE/Agency European Council for Business Accreditation aisbl

AGM	Annual General Assembly (of all members of the Agency)
AISBL	Association Internationale Sans But Lucratif (Belgian Law)
APR	Annual Programme Report
BoD	Board of Directors
BoC	Board of Commissioners
CoA	Committee of Appeal
CoC	Chairperson of Commissioners
CoR	Chairperson of Reviewers
CoRT	Chairperson of the Review Team
DoA	Director of Accreditation
DoFA	Director of Finance and Administration
ECA	European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAR	The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
PoA	President of the Agency
PoR	Pool of Reviewers
RT	Review Team
RV	Review Visit
RVR	Review Visit Report
SER	Self-Evaluation report
VPoA	Vice-President of the Agency



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2. Introduction

With this document we want to describe the activities carried out by the ECBE on the basis of self-evaluation findings, those that have already been completed and those that are in the process of implementation.

Namely, following the submission of the ECBE self-assessment report to ENQA in early 2020 (February and then April 2020), the Agency proceeded to implement an action plan to improve the quality of its operations, based on the findings of the self-evaluation. The action plan was implemented in two stages:

- In the first part, activities related to the results of self-evaluation and Swot analysis were performed, which we have already described partly in the SAR.
- In the second part, we prepared an action plan and started its implementation, in May and June 2020, after we ran a simulation of an external evaluation and simulation of an external (online) review visit. This action plan included six central areas or sets of activities and is shown in Table 1. The action plan was discussed at several ECBE Board of Directors meetings and approved by the ECBE Board of Directors on May 25th, 2020.

The implementation of the action plan was monitored and discussed within the BoD and other formal and informal groups of participants/ECBE stakeholders.

This supplement to the ECBE SAR was discussed on-line within the ECBE Quality committee and approved by the ECBE BoD on September 7th, 2020.

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Activity	Responsible body/individuals	The deadline for the start of activity
1. Strengthen the cooperation and participation of external stakeholders in ECBE's governing bodies (Standard 3.1; Standard 3.5)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nominate the industry representative to the BoD - Advisory board from 3-5- industry representatives: 	BoD	June 10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reviewers from industry – consider including them into the Pool of reviewers (also important for Standard 3.5: Resources) (the BoD members search for nominations, the senior reviewers search for nominations). 	BoD	In process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop a website in a way, that companies that cooperate with member institutions are listed on the website. This is in line with the fact that ECBE is a member driven organization. 	DoFA	In process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reconsider the structure of the Strategic committee and Quality Committee (QC), defined in the ECBE Bye-laws. 	BoD	June 10
2. Quality committee (Standard 3.1; Standard 3.6)		
The topics to be addressed by the newly structured Quality Committee: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Changes of the Quality Management Manual to address ESG standards part 2 and part 3. - New version of the ECBE Quality Management Manual - Self-evaluation cycle 	QC (DoA and members of QC)	June 25
3. ECBE processes (Standard 2.1; Standard 2.2; Standard 2.3; Standard 2.4; Standard 2.5; Standard 2.6)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prepare the plan (including the methodology) for analyses of the review reports and BoC decisions, prepare the comparison and after that prepare the workshop and discussion on findings 	BoC, CoR, DoA	June 25 – October 2020



- On-line trainings , especially for reviewers joining the pool and for student reviewers.	DoA, Student representative	June 15
- Update of documents – guidelines and templates	DoA (BoD confirms)	June 10
- Develop a detailed feedback structure by ECBE to institutions regarding their submitted APR.	CoR, DoA	June 20 - October 2020
- Development of a semi-structured rubrics or chart, that may present the idea, why the accreditation period may vary from 2 to 5 years.	CoC and BoC, DoA	June 15
- Inform member institutions		
4. Committee of Appeal (Standard 2.7)		
Appeals and Complaints procedures – an updated document.	(BoD and Committee of Appeal).	June
5. Additional (Standard 3.5; Standard 3.6)		
Changes on the website:	DoFA	asap
- Completely public access to reports and decisions		
- Explanation above the table of accreditation cases regarding the date of starting publishing review reports and decisions.		
- Check again all documents are up-to-date and accessible on the website.		
6. Activities for the mid-term action plan (2021-2022), associated with above described activity 1 (Standard 3.1):		
- Consider the changes of Statutes (and Bye-laws) to include students as stakeholders in the BoD and/or BoC	BoD	2021-2022
- With the purpose to achieve this, students' representatives are participating as observers to the BoD and BoC meetings, even before the legal changes.		

Table 1: Action plan, approved May 2020

3. Organization chart and the role of external stakeholders

In order to strengthen the role of external stakeholders in the governance of the Agency and in the implementation of its activities, BoD approved amendments to the Bye-laws (June 6th, 2020 meeting), which allow to change the organizational structure of the ECBE in such a way as to involve external stakeholders, with the purpose to strengthen and broaden the perspective and improve efficiency of ECBE's bodies.

The new organizational chart is presented by Figures 1 and 2.

The major improvements/changes to the organisational structure refer to reconsidering and reconstructing the committees (as described in sub-chapters 3.1 – 3.5), and strengthening and expanding the Pool of Reviewers with reviewers from industry and cooperation with other accreditation agencies.

In the Bye-laws (June 2020) the following standing committees were defined:

- executive committee
- quality committee
- advisory board
- annual conference committee.

3.1 Executive Committee

The Executive Committee is the executive and strategic group for the BoD, which aims to contribute to the development of the Agency, based on knowledge of both the education system, the quality standards in the field of (higher) education, as well as on the knowledge of the employment and employability of graduates in the field of economics, business studies and management.

It also advises on necessary changes in the Agency's policy, strategy, procedures, operations and on various aspects of higher education.

As such, it translates strategic inputs of the BoD, The Quality Committee and the Advisory Board into action plans by preparing updates to ECBE's Statutes, Bye-Laws, Procedures and standards, subject of approval by the BoD.

For important changes, and prior to the discussion/approval of the change proposals issued by the Executive Committee by the BoD, these proposals will be submitted to the Advisory Board, who will comment on the proposals.

Its task are also the preparation of the yearly budget and the non-academic preparation of the Annual Conference.

Following the approval of the Bye-laws (June 2020), the Executive Committee is formed and active (the discussion on the ECBE Doctoral cycle standards in September 2020).

COMPOSITION

President (chair), DoFA, DoA and the Treasurer.

3.2 Quality Committee (QC)

This Committee monitors and assesses the process of the quality assessment and quality assurance system within the framework of the activities of the Agency in relation to the ESG and EHEA standards.

Through its proposals, it helps to continuously improve all quality-related activities. In its activities, it is committed to cultivating a quality culture in all the Agency's activities. If needed, it can propose changes and additions to the Statutes, Bye-Laws and procedures.

Although QC was formally included in the previous organizational structure, it was not active, and its structure was different. The newly formed QC had its first on-line meeting on June 24th, 2020, where it reviewed the activities related to the action plan and the process of obtaining ECBE membership in ENQA. A plan of activities for QC was also discussed and agreed: the two main activities of the transitional operation are the preparation and launch of a new self-evaluation cycle (in autumn 2020) and the discussion regarding the new cycle of thematic analysis (in December 2020).

The Quality Committee has also made a positive contribution. When discussing the launch of the new self-evaluation cycle, QC suggested several additions including to the ECBE Quality Manual, namely that it should be revised to include the quality conditions and quantitative indicators, according to which ECBE evaluates its' quality in general, or its compliance with the ESG. They also made particular suggestions in relation to the ECBE SAR which are highlighted in the next section.

THE AGENCY'S SELF-EVALUATION REPORT

ECBE pays special attention to ensuring the fulfilment of ECBE standards, ESG standards and the principles of the EHEA. As such, QC is involved in preparation of the Self-Evaluation Report as defined in the Quality Management Manual. Usually, the SER is prepared every two years, but in case specific circumstances would require such self-evaluation to be executed more often, this period may be shortened.

The implementation of self-evaluation is carried out with the participation of all relevant stakeholders, both internal and external, by collecting information at all levels and with the reports prepared by the Quality Committee members. Self-evaluation report is discussed by the BoD, that incorporates the findings into the annual plan; it is communicated with all external stakeholders and to the Annual General Meeting, it is publicly available from the Agency's website.

Following a suggestion by the QC, the SER should now include an overview of decisions and reasons for revoking accreditations or awarding accreditations for a limited period of time. It was felt that it could be very informative if an analysis of the review reports and BoC decisions is prepared, allowing us to engage in a comparison of findings. This will enable workshops and discussion on findings to involving the PoR and BoC (this is also related to training that is described in the next chapter of this document). The QC also suggested that SAR should include strengths and weaknesses after each ESG standard and this has been adopted.

COMPOSITION

DoA (chair), 1 student, 1 representative of other accreditation agency, 2 representatives of a member institution.

3.3 The Advisory Board

The Advisory Board advises the Agency about its global long-term strategic orientation, considering the specific points of view of all stakeholders. Its ideas will be worked out by the Executive Committee.

It will comment on all major (strategic) change proposals issued by the Executive Committee.

The establishment and active start of the work of the Advisory Board is still in the process of formation.

COMPOSITION

President (chair), 2 representatives of employers, a representative of students and a representative of other quality assurance agency.

3.4 Annual Conference Committee

Organizes the academic part of the Annual Conference and the Pre-Conference Seminar.¹

¹ The non-academic part is organized by the Executive Committee and the DoFA.

COMPOSITION

Vice-President (chair), DoA, 1 BoD member.

3.5 Appointment of the “observer” position

The newly approved Bye-laws also introduced the “observer” position. Namely, the BoD may appoint representatives of the Agency's external stakeholders as observers in the Agency's various organizational units (BoD, BoC, PoR, committees, ...).

This was important especially regarding the BoD structure, that is defined in the ECBE Statutes and does not include the representative of a student as a member. With this amendment of the Bye-laws the observer status of the student representative was introduced, and a student representative was appointed (BoD meeting, June 12th, 2020) as the observer member of the ECBE BoD.

3.6 Reviewers from industry

We expect to expand the Pool of reviewers with reviewers from the industry for certain types and kinds of study programmes (for example if the programmes are vocational or applicative or similar; however, if the programmes are doctoral or theoretical/basic, then reviewers from the industry might not be best suited to judge on issues pertaining to science, research and basic scholastics).

With the purpose to obtain relevant nominations and applications, the BoD members and senior reviewers were asked to check possible nominees in their networks. When making this decision, the BoD also highlighted the need for appropriate training, especially for new reviewers, which is described in the next section of this supplementary report.

3.7 Industry survey

The pandemic has changed the way we communicate with companies and has made it somewhat more difficult. As the ECBE is in the process of setting up its Advisory Board, with the participation of industry representatives, as well as in the process of appointing a BoD member - an industry representative (after an active BoD member who was an employers' representative in BoD, passed away in spring 2020), BoD encouraged the implementation of a survey among companies.

ECBE works in the field of fostering and evaluating quality in higher education and, more specifically, in the fields of economics and business, management, tourism and other related subjects. We recognise that the rapidly changing needs of the labour market demand assessment of the importance and the level of graduates' competences, knowledge and skills, which represent an important aspect of quality. The competences, knowledge and skills of the graduates can be objectively provided by the employers, institutions and companies in which the graduates are employed.

Therefore, we have prepared an anonymous, online survey that presents a series of questions related to the knowledge, skills and competences that may be important for success in the careers of graduates of the bachelor/master/doctoral level study programmes from the field of economic, business, management, tourism and related fields.

The survey started before the summer vacations in 2020, and is in process of completing. The survey analysis results will be very valuable for ECBE and for its' members in relation to the development of standards and criteria for quality assurance and in the process of improving the planning of courses for future students.

3.8 Cooperation with other accreditation agencies

In order to strengthen cooperation with external stakeholders and strengthen international cooperation, the ECBE has devoted much of its activities in the last few months, to strengthening contacts with other accreditation agencies.

Based on the agreement on possible forms of cooperation with the Slovenian quality assurance agency (SQAA), we signed the Memorandum of Understanding and started with the activities of exchanging reviewers and the participation of representatives of both agencies in the bodies of agencies. Namely, the SQAA, despite being a national agency for quality in higher education, is quite similar to the ECBE in quite a few respects (size, way of working, lean organization, etc.)

In July 2020, the ECBE also became a member of the CEENQA network (on the basis of the application, the CEENQA general assembly approved the ECBE's membership in this network). In this way, the ECBE became more closely involved in the international exchange of experience between accreditation agencies.

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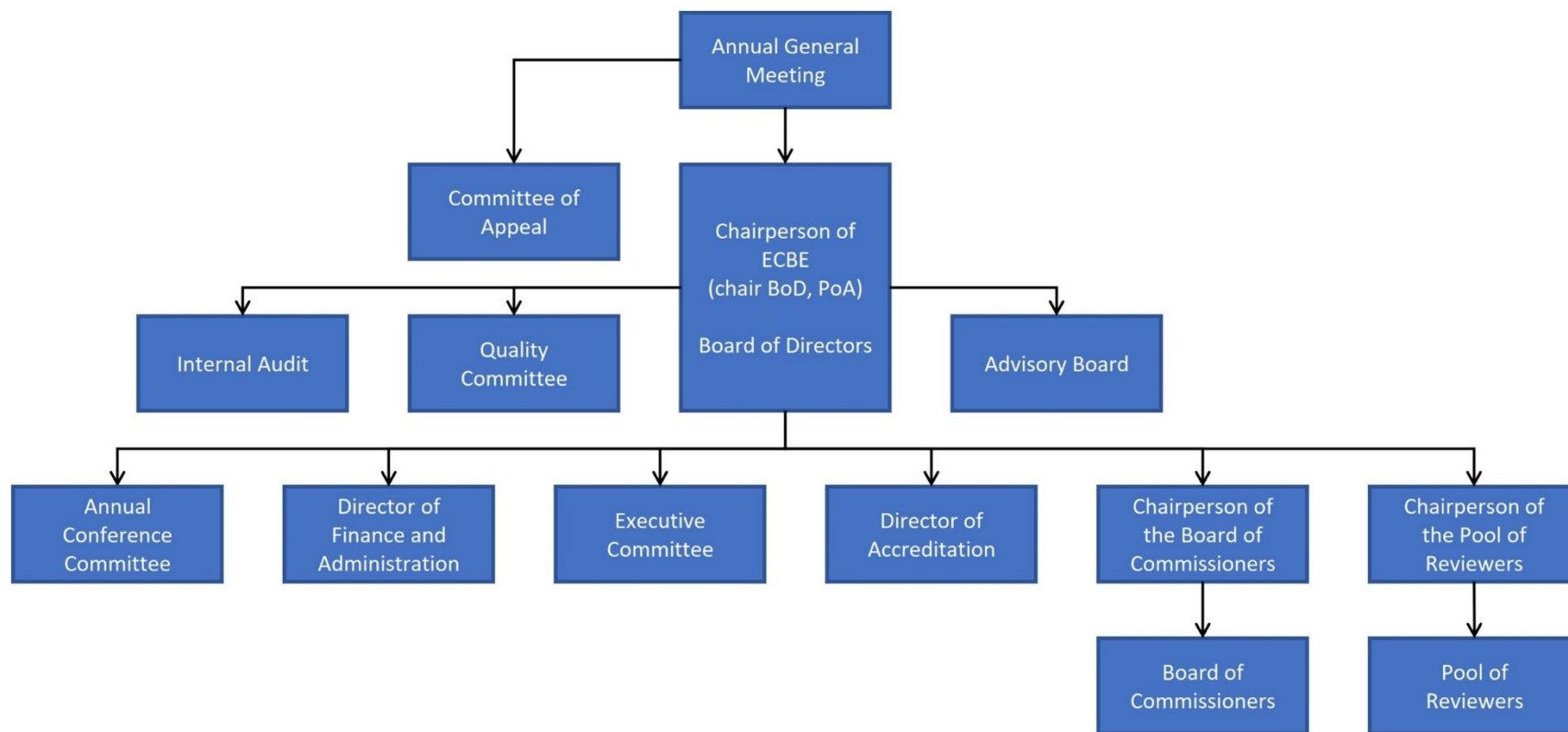


Figure 1: ECBE organisation chart



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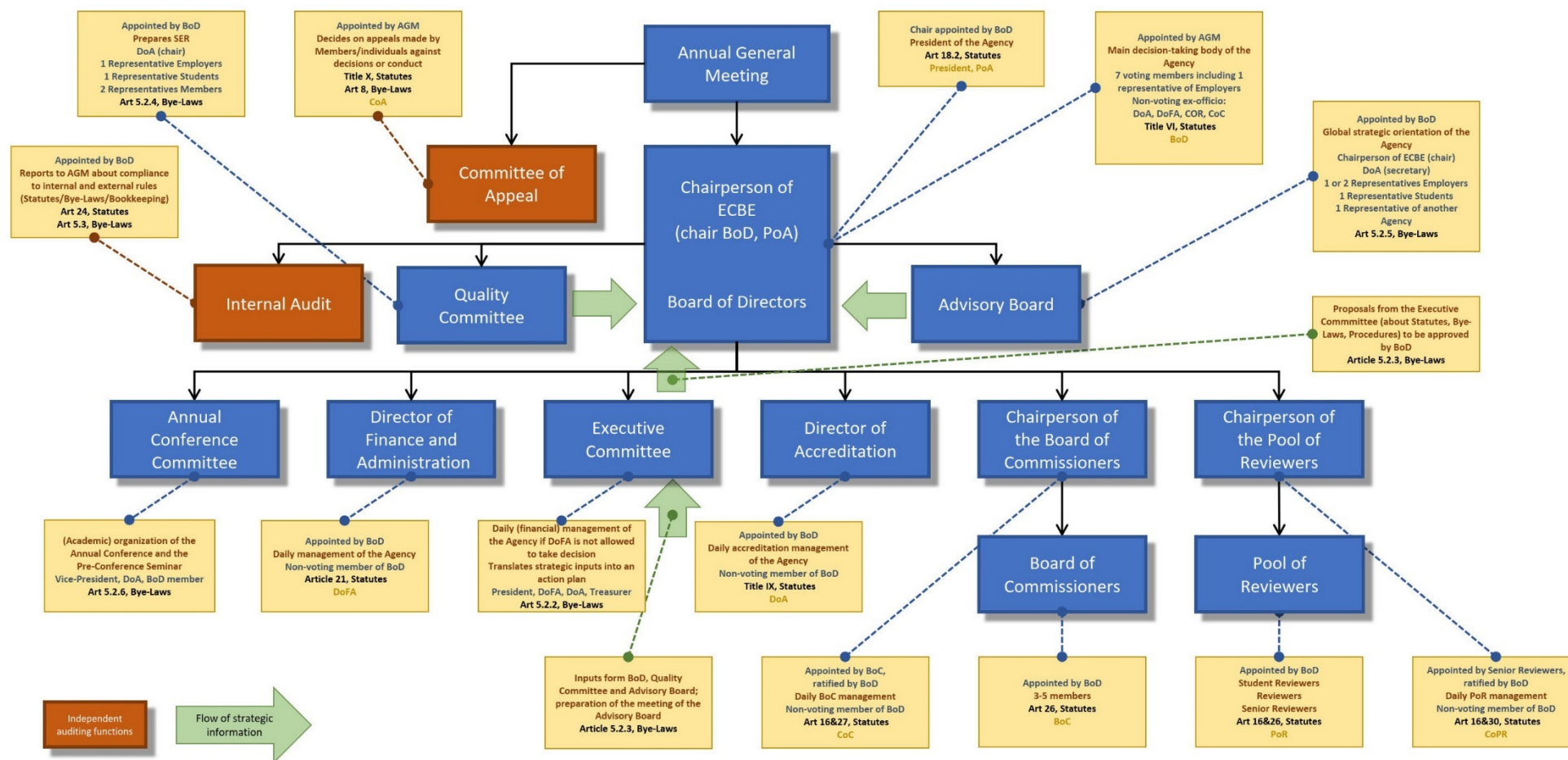


Figure 2: ECBE's organisation chart (including clarifying remarks)



4 ECBE processes and activities

4.1 Trainings for reviewers

The self-evaluation revealed that the on-line trainings, especially for reviewers joining the pool and for student reviewers, could be improved. During on-line meetings with reviewers in June 2020, the following topics were identified:

- understandings of standards and writing the review reports: there is no hierarchy of ESG standards and other QA specifications applied by ECBE, but still certain topics receive much more attention than others and some are assessed more critically than others.
- Training – discussion how external evaluations could be more case specific in passing valuable judgements.
- Training could also tackle the narrative character of review reports, some stereotypical strengths and recommendations.

The simulation of the external review visit revealed some ambiguity on the understandings of the combination of ECBE and ESG standards by ECBE reviewers. The on-line meeting with reviewers, held on June 24th, 2020, included also the discussion about these standards, that are described in detail in the ECBE documents, that are also available on the ECBE website.

In August 2020 on-line training materials were prepared and communicated with ECBE reviewers: two on-line audio presentations, related with the ESG and ECBE standards and test for assessment. ECBE is planning to proceed with the additional content.

The ECBE website is in the process of updating with the e-classroom for reviewers, where reviewers can download the videos and presentations, and where the on-line test is also available.

4.2 New versions of documents

In March 2020 (the BoD meeting on March 27th, 2020) two important documents were updated, discussed and approved by the ECBE BoD:

- document Appeals and Complaints (described in detail in the chapter 5 of this document)
- document Standards and criteria of accreditation for study programmes in the field of economics and business (and related fields)

As already mentioned, the simulation of the external review visit revealed some minor ambiguity on the understandings of the combination of ECBE and ESG standards by ECBE stakeholders (especially reviewers and member institutions). Namely, ECBE expands the ESG, but it does so through generic assessment criteria and issues for consideration, not by changing standards (as also presented in Guidelines for reviewers and Guidelines for Institutions), with assessment criteria regarding the requirements of the labour market, regarding students with disabilities, teaching workload and structure of study programme.

Therefore, the improvement of the following documents was prepared - the new versions of documents are also available at the ECBE website:

- Standards and criteria of accreditation for study programmes in the field of economics and business (and related fields)
- Accreditation process guidelines for institutions
- Stage 2 Template for preparing SER (for institutions)
- Guidelines for reviewers

The new versions of the documents were approved by the ECBE BoD at the meeting on June 12th, 2020 and were communicated with reviewers and member institutions.

4.3 The accreditation period

As we perceived that the decision on the length of the accreditation period could be better defined, the members of the Board of Commissioners, at the suggestion of Chairperson, developed and prepared the semi-structured rubrics - chart, that presents the idea, why the accreditation period may vary from 2 to 5 years. It was included into the new version of the ECBE Bye-laws.

GUIDELINES REGARDING THE ACCREDITATION PERIOD DECISIONS

The guidelines on the accreditation period, which can vary between 2 and 5 years, designed as semi-structured rubrics, serve as a guideline for the BoC in decision-making and as a tool to explain the decision-making to the institution. It should be emphasized that this is not a rigid tool, as the BoC also takes into account the "severity" of irregularities, the possibilities for their elimination, the national framework, etc.

Accreditation	Overall compliance with standards	Number of standards - full compliance	Number of standards substantial compliance	Number of standards partial compliance	Major inconsistencies	Minor inconsistencies
5 years	Full / Substantial	Min 5	0-5	0	0	Max 2
4 years	Substantial	Min 4	Min 4	Max 2	Max 2	Max 3
3 years	Substantial	Min 3	Min 5	Max 2	Max 3	Max 4

2 years	Substantial	Min 2	Min 6	Max 2	Max 4	Max 5
Accreditation declined	Partial / Non-compliant				>5	>6

Table 2: Guidelines for accreditation period decisions

Overall compliance	Number of standards full compliance	Number of standards substantial compliance	Number of standards partial compliance	Number of standards non-compliance
Full	Min 5	Max 5	0	0
Substantial	0-8	0-8	Max 2	0
Partial	0-2	0-3	5-10	0
Non-compliant	0-1	0-2	0-10	0-10

Table 3: Guidelines for overall compliance with standards

4.4 Follow-up procedure

The assessment of the follow-up procedures showed, that they are working on the level of reporting and reflect ECBE's systematic overview of the progress of the institution and their accredited study programmes, on the annual basis. Although institutions receive feedback, it was revealed that ECBE should formalize a mechanism for providing feedback, especially since more benefit can be obtained out of the Annual Programme Reports (APR), where institutions periodically report a lot of useful information on the content and delivery of the study programmes.

The discussion as to how to prepare detailed feedback on the part of ECBE, to institutions regarding their submitted APRs, was initiated. A working group consisting of the Chairperson of the PoR, DoA and a senior reviewer began a discussion on improving the system for evaluating annual APRs and communicating reports with institutions. In May 2020, the drafts of the updated APR template documents were prepared and communicated (e-mail) with the above-mentioned working group:

- APR process description in the Bye-laws
- APR template for institutions
- APR review report template.

The documents are currently under discussion, the process is not yet complete.

4.5 On-line Review Visits

The Chapter 3.3.3.8 of the Bye-Laws (approved by the BoD in June 2020) was developed as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic situation, in 2020. The decision about conducting on-line review visits during COVID-19 interruption was justified and supported by the ENQA and EQAR statement regarding the adaptation of accreditation procedures (<https://www.eqar.eu/covid-19/> - available on March 29th, 2020). With this, the ECBE set out a protocol for conducting online external review visits.

At this point, we summarize the content of these provisions from the ECBE Bye-laws.

The Bye-laws state that in case of unexpected situations that could endanger the health or life of the Review Team or of the people of the evaluated institution, or when there are legal regulations that make it impossible to perform a particular Review Visit on-site, the institution can request the on-line form of Review Visit. This proposal has to be submitted to the DoA, and is subject to approval by the ECBE BoD.

Different cases were identified:

Institutions applying for re-accreditation

If the Review Visit cannot take place in the planned period due to the above described circumstances, the Review Visit is postponed (until the first possible/available time period, communicated with the institution) and the accreditation period for the accredited study programmes is extended, according to the ECBE Bye-Laws, Chapter 3.3.3.7.

Institutions applying for reaccreditation and first accreditation of additional study programmes

If the Review Visit cannot take place in the planned period due to the above described circumstances, the Review Visit may be a.) postponed or b.) conducted in an on-line mode, taking into account the institution's requests:

Institutions with all study programmes on first accreditation

If the Review Visit cannot take place in the planned period due to the above described circumstances, the Review Visit will be postponed (until the first possible/available time period, communicated with the institution).

However, based on the assessment of the situation, the BoD can always decide to allow to conduct a Review Visit in on-line mode for all cases as defined in Chapter 3.3.8.1 of the Bye-laws (for example, if the period when the on site Review Visits are not feasible lasts for a period of 6 months or longer).

4.5.1 GENERAL REGULATIONS FOR ON-LINE REVIEW VISITS

On-line Review Visit must include interactions with representatives of the institution, all relevant stakeholders, and in all other respects must be done to the extent reasonably practicable that resembles the same format, expectations and documentation requirements associated with the on site visits. On-line Review Visits must rely on an engaged, interactive format, e.g. video telephonic meetings, video conference calls, and the like (including document reviews).

Interviews may be conducted within the minimum of one and maximum of seven days, depending on the availability of interviewees, on the basis of arrangements between the institution and the Chairperson of the Review Team (CoRT).

In the case of an on-line Review Visit the accreditation fee remains unchanged.

All interviewees proposed by the institution to take part in the on-line interviews must guarantee a good connection to allow the ECBE Review Team to have high quality interactions. In case of repetitive technical problems, not enabling a fair and complex assessment, the Review Visit is postponed to a period when it can be done on-site.

Video conference environment must be defined and tested before the start of the on-line Review Visit.

4.5.2 VIRTUAL BASE ROOM

For on-line Review Visits, the Virtual Base Room (VBR), using Sharepoint, replaces the traditional, paper based Base Room. For on-site visits, VBR is a documentary part of the base room, which also serves to the meetings and work of the RT. It also contains all requested (and potentially other relevant) documentation. Working procedures were also defined and included into the Bye-laws.

4.6 Development of evaluation and accreditation standards

We have already briefly described in SAR, that the critical reflection over the framework of the self-evaluation analysis has shown that it would be reasonable to review and develop specific and/or additional standards for some groups of study programmes in economics, business, management, and related fields, regarding the study cycle and for doctoral programmes in particular. The guidelines and provisions derived from EHEA standards set the quality assessment frameworks, but in some cases also allow for different interpretations (which is not, in itself, inappropriate), associated with the fact that ECBE operates in a specific subject field and at the same time at an international level, which brings great variability.

After the simulation of the external review visit in May 2020, the analysis of findings confirmed the need to continue in the direction we perceived important immediately after the self-evaluation in March and April 2020.

The working group (DoA, CoR, senior reviewer, BoD member) has intensified its efforts to prepare the basis for the discussion and assessment of the need to develop the evaluation and accreditation standards for doctoral study programmes. The working group has met in June, in August and in September 2020 (on-line). The documents produced by the working group, when finished, will be discussed by other bodies of ECBE, especially by the Quality Committee, Executive Committee and Board of Directors. Since we are aware of potential threat that external stakeholders, especially institutions in the process of evaluation and accreditation of their study programmes, will not be able to properly identify ECBE's additional standards, we will carefully communicate these documents with all internal and external stakeholders.



5. Appeals and Complaints

Appeals and Complaints document, defining appeal and complaint procedures, was discussed, updated and approved by the BoD (first at meeting on March 27, 2020 and after that at meeting on June 12, 2020).

During the simulation of the external visit it was revealed, that the ECBE documentation (Appeals and complaints procedures) needs to be supplemented, especially the following topics should be considered: avoiding the conflict of interest; procedures that CoA uses; student complaints; outsourcing. It was also assessed that the ECBE Bye-laws should include the complete appeals and complaints regulations (not only them being a separate ECBE document).

The text of the new Appeals and Complaints document is now also an integral part of the ECBE Bye-laws (Chapter 8).

ECBE is committed to working in an open and collaborative way. It is constantly striving to improve the services it offers, and if an appeal or complaint is received it is investigated thoroughly and openly, and mistakes are corrected. Appeal is broadly defined as an expression of dissatisfaction with the decisions of ECBE bodies. A complaint refers to a suspicion of a misconduct of an individual or institutional member of the agency.

The Committee of Appeal (CoA) decides on appeals against decisions of the bodies of the agency. CoA also addresses complaints against the conduct of any persons connected with the agency.

6. Thematic analysis

ECBE has established procedures for conducting Thematic Analysis – these procedures are included into the updated Bye-laws from June 2020, and into the Quality Management Manual, as well.

The process for selecting topics for Thematic Analyses is also developed.

Thematic Analyses are divided into sections:

- Thematic Analyses based on the assessment results (review reports)
- Thematic Analyses based on the surveys for specific topics that are important for the ECBE community.

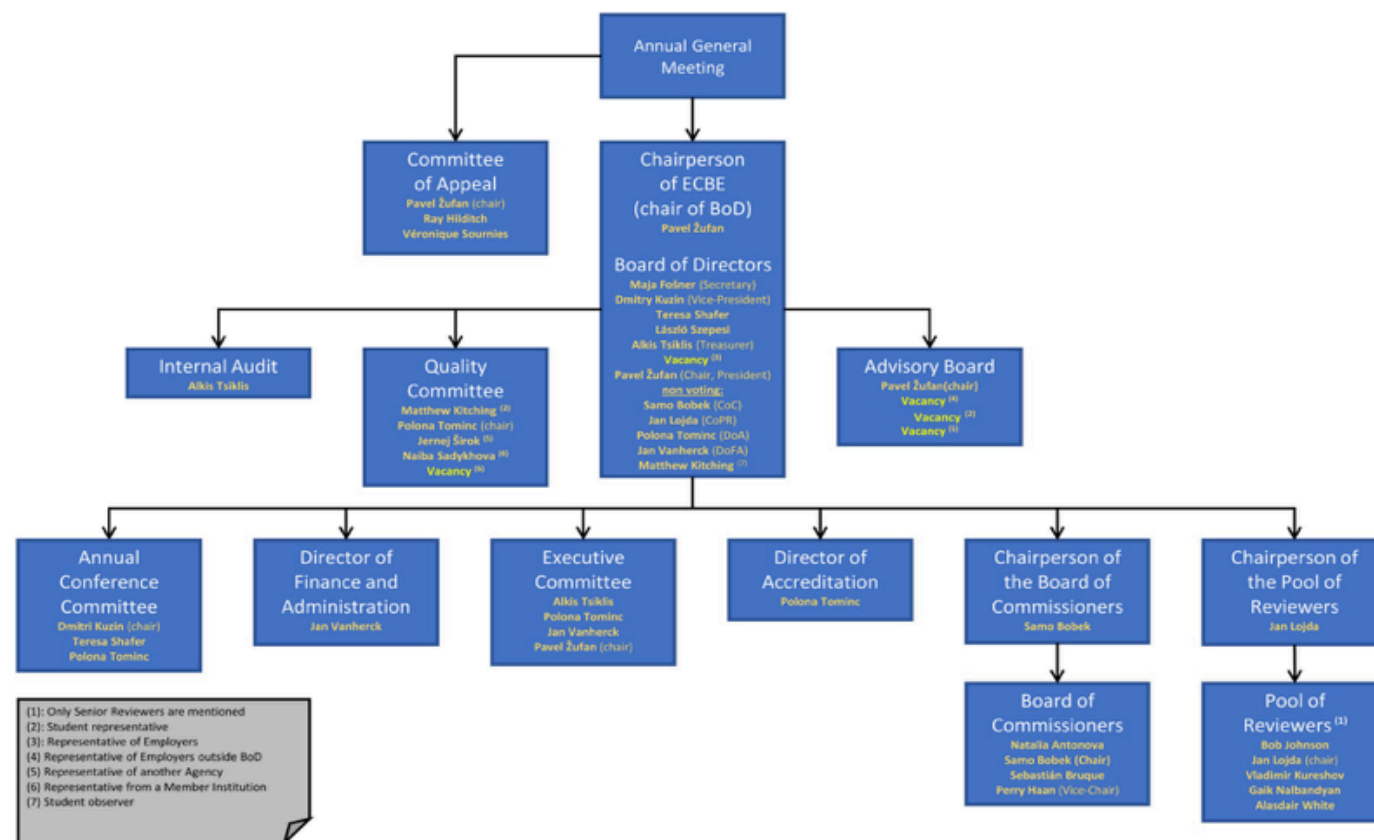
Cooperation with stakeholders and dissemination of results of Thematic analyses is now also defined and described in the ECBE Bye-laws.

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7. Appendix

Figure 3: Organizational chart with names



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