

Rules and Conditions for Conducting an Authorization and Accreditation Visit to Higher Educational Institution in a Remote or Semi-Remote Format

Article 1. Scope of Regulation

1. The rules and conditions for conducting authorization and accreditation visit to Higher Educational Institution in a remote or semi-remote format (hereinafter referred to as the rule) define the rules and conditions for conducting authorization and accreditation visit in remote or semi-remote format by the LEPL - National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (hereinafter referred to as the Center).
2. Conducting a visit remotely refers to an assessment in which the expert group carries out all stages, including interviews with stakeholders, review of infrastructure and other assessment activities, completely remotely, through modern communication technologies, without an on-site visit to the institution;
3. Implementing a visit in semi-remote format refers to an assessment form where part of the evaluation process takes place remotely and part is performed through an on-site visit to the institution. This assessment format may stipulate that:
 - a) Certain members of the expert group engage in the assessment process remotely, while the other members participate in the process through an on-site visit;
 - b) All members of the expert group conduct the interviews with stakeholders remotely, while the evaluation of infrastructure, material resources, clinical bases and laboratories takes place through an on-site visit;
 - c) The expert group participates in the on-site visit with its full composition, however, certain stakeholders (for example: students, graduates, employers and others) engage in the interview process remotely;

Article 2. Preconditions for Conducting the Evaluation Process in a Remote or Semi-Remote Format

1. Under appropriate circumstances, accreditation visits at higher educational institutions can be implemented in a remote or semi-remote format, while authorization visits at higher educational institutions may be carried out only in semi-remote format;
2. An on-site visit is the standard and prioritized format. The remote or semi-remote format is considered an alternative measure to be used only under exceptional circumstances and at the same time, the Center is certain that the consistency, objectivity, transparency of the assessment process is properly ensured and the use of this approach does not negatively affect the quality of the assessment of the educational institution or educational programme;

3. Assessment in remote format is permitted only in exceptional cases, including during: global pandemic, war or declared state of emergency, force majeure and circumstances beyond control, as well as in cases of geographical or logistical constraints or the existence of other objective circumstances;
4. Participation of an expert/expert group in the assessment process remotely or in semi-remote format is permissible if an international/local expert faces problems related to transportation, health, or other objective circumstances exist that prevent expert to participate fully in the on-site visit;
5. The expert is obliged to inform the Center as soon as this circumstance arises;
6. The Center, on an exceptional basis, consents to the involvement of the expert in the evaluation process remotely/semi-remotely if:
 - a) the reasonable deadline for replacing the expert has already expired;
 - b) due to the specifics of the assessment process and the field, it is impossible to find another expert with relevant qualifications/competence;
 - c) considering the timeframe for conducting the administrative proceedings and the accreditation deadlines for the educational programme, it is impossible to find an expert who will be able to conduct an on-site visit;
7. Conducting assessment by experts remotely or in semi-remote format may also be carried out because of the geographical location of the institution. For example, during the assessment of an international joint higher educational programme that is implemented with the participation of a foreign partner university. In such instance, the interview process with stakeholders of foreign university is conducted remotely and the review of educational infrastructure/resources takes place through electronic platforms and/or pre-recorder video materials or a virtual campus tour;
8. The institution is obliged, when agreeing the agenda with the Center, if needed, request the involvement of the specific person remotely and justify the necessity of such participation and indicate in the agenda the names of remote participants, or the need to conduct the review of educational infrastructure/resources through video materials or virtual campus tours;
9. The Center decides on the application of remote or semi-remote assessment format, in agreement with the institution and the expert group.

Article 3. Assessment Process Conducted in Remote or Semi-Remote Format

1. Remote or semi-remote assessment includes:
 - a) Video conferences using appropriate electronic platforms (such as Zoom, MS Teams, Google Meet, etc.);
 - b) Evaluation of institutional infrastructure and material resources using video materials or digital campus tours.
2. Remote or semi-remote visits are conducted through an online platform agreed upon in advance with the institution. The institution is responsible for the platform's technical support.

3. All aspects of the remote or semi-remote evaluation process - the schedule (agenda) and technical requirements - must be planned in detail in advance to ensure the smooth conduct of meetings;
4. All parties involved in the evaluation process (expert panel members, Center representatives, observers, institutional representatives, interpreter, etc.) must use reliable technical means (video conferencing platforms, stable internet connection, audio/video equipment, and other necessary tools) and test them in advance;
5. Remote meetings should be scheduled to avoid overload (short meetings with regular breaks are recommended). The data of participants (ideally not exceeding eight persons), their status/positions, and the format of participation (remote or on-site) must be specified;
6. The Center is authorized to request from the institution a contact person (resource person), who, if necessary, will provide access to educational documentation, coordinate organizational aspects and support the smooth flow of electronic communication. If needed, the expert panel may hold a preliminary meeting with this resource person to clarify information and requirements. The Center's designated staff serve as resource persons with the institution during the evaluation process;
7. During the visits, experts should have access to internal meetings in a closed meeting room, which should always be protected by a unique meeting ID and password;
8. Expert panel members must have full online access to all necessary documentation (via secure cloud storage or another suitable platform);
9. All participants of the meeting are obliged to adhere to confidentiality standards. It is prohibited for any stakeholder participating in interviews to make audio/video recordings or take photos containing personal data. If any circumstances arise involving disclosure of personal data (including incident-related information), the expert panel and the institution must immediately inform the Center.
10. All interview participants must be briefed on meeting requirements. Specifically, identification of participants is conducted before commencing the interviews and meetings. It is necessary for participants to be included in the process by indicating their name and surname, as well as the relevant position;
11. Video-camera must be enabled at the beginning of the meeting and whenever the participant is speaking (except for interpreters). Exceptions must be agreed upon in advance with the expert panel and the Center.
12. Members participating in the interviews must be warned that remote engagement should be conducted from a business environment - a workspace that ensures effective communication;
13. In the event of technical disruptions or unexpected problems, organizers and participants of the visit must act accordingly and ensure the identification of alternative ways to continue the process;
14. The expert panel has the right to request additional materials/information from the institution in a remote format, for example: to review electronic archives, learning management systems, library resources, purposefully request relevant videos or photographs from the institution;
15. The expert panel's final report indicates that the visit was conducted in a remote/semi-remote format and confirm that the chosen format was agreed upon by all participating parties.

Article 4. Obligations of the Educational Institution

1. The educational institution shall:

- a) Ensure the planning and implementation of the evaluation process from methodological and technical perspectives, in accordance with the applicable legislation and these rules and conditions;
- b) Provide complete information/documents and access to online resources (LMS environment, electronic materials, digital resources and software environment, video recordings);
- c) Ensure effective communication and coordination during the evaluation period;
- d) To ensure continuity and high quality of the process, identify potential technical or other barriers in advance and take measures to minimize them;
- e) Where necessary, carry out quality monitoring and/or collect feedback on the evaluation process conducted remotely or in a semi-remote format, in order to further improve the process;
- f) Ensure the reliability and objectivity of the information used in the evaluation process, as well as the consistent and efficient implementation of the process.

2. Technical requirements for remote/semi-remote visits:

- a) Use an appropriate electronic platform and conduct a prior stability check of the selected platform and server;
- b) Maintain a stable internet connection;
- c) Provide a properly equipped room for the experts' work;
- d) Ensure the presence of a resource person with the necessary technical competence throughout the process.

Article 5. Obligations of the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement

1. The center is obliged to:

- a) Ensure the planning and implementation of the evaluation process from methodological and technical perspectives, in accordance with the applicable legislation and these rules and conditions;
- b) When planning the evaluation process, agree in advance with the educational institution and the expert panel on the evaluation format (remote, semi-remote, or on-site visit);
- c) In the case of remote or semi-remote evaluation, ensure timely communication with all parties involved and provide clear instructions;
- d) When necessary, arrange for the participation of an interpreter and provide the interpreter with the necessary information and technical resources, which includes:
 - d.a) provide the interpreter in advance with the necessary information and the evaluation schedule, as well as information about participating parties and the terminology used (including the contextual content of educational documents and processes); During remote interpretation, the relevant features of the platform (e.g., simultaneous interpretation mode) may be used.

- d.b) ensure high-quality technical setup during interviews and meetings (appropriate equipment, good audio system, stable internet connection). Also, the interpreter shall maintain confidentiality and refrain from recording the process or sharing any information received with third parties;
- e) Provide technical and organizational support to the expert panel throughout the evaluation process;
- f) Ensure compliance with relevant personal data protection and confidentiality standards;
- g) Communicate with the institution as necessary regarding the submission of materials/information, agreement on technical requirements, correction of process-related issues, and provision of other relevant information;
- h) Where necessary, monitor quality and/or collect feedback on the evaluation process conducted remotely or in semi-remote format, in order to further improve it.