

# **Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions in Bulgaria**

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- I. Short description of the Bulgarian higher education system (HES) in the context of the Eastern European countries (EEC)**
- II. Structure and functions of the Bulgarian evaluation and accreditation agency (NEAA)**
- III. Improving quality of HE in Bulgaria. Concluding remarks and recommendations**

# **I. Short description of the Bulgarian higher education system (HES) in the context of the Eastern European countries (EEC)**

- **Brief historical recall**
- **Size and structure of the institutional network**
- **Degree structure**
- **Doctoral education**

- **Size and structure of the institutional network**

**Table 1**

***Higher Education Institutions in Bulgaria by type and form of ownership (2007)***

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Universities and equivalent HEIs</b>	<b>Colleges</b>	
			<b>At the universities</b>	<b>Independent</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Public</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Private</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>

# •Degree structure

**Table 2**

## ***National System of Higher Education Degrees (2007)***

<b>Degree</b>		<b>Type</b>	<b>Issued by:</b>	<b>Min. Years of Study</b>
Professional Bachelor		Post-secondary professional higher education	College	3
<b>Bachelor</b>		First Qualification Degree	University or Equivalent institution	4
<b>Master:</b>	After Bachelor	Second Qualification Degree	University or Equivalent institution	1
	Integrated (long-term) Master	Qualification Degree	University or Equivalent institution	5
<b>Doctor</b>		Scientific Qualification Degree	Research institutes, University or Equivalent institution	3

*The national degree structure follows the Bologna 3-phases model.*

**Table 3**

**Comparison with the size and degree structures of HE system in Poland, Czech Republic and Romania (2004)**

Countries	Population in millions	Total number of students in tertiary HE	Intensity indicator (number per 10 000 population)	Number of HEI		Educational cycles of HE studies (in years)				Areas of study
				Public and state institutions	Private	Bachelor	Master		Doctor	
							After bachelor	Long term		
Bulgaria	8,0	228 500	286	37	16	4	1 - 1,5	5	3	51
Poland	38,5	1 850 000	481	121		3-4	1,5 - 2	4 - 6	3 - 4	106
Romania	23,7	596 300	251	56	20	3-4	1,5 - 2	4 - 6	3	
Czech Republic	10,3	245 000	238	28	33	3-4	1 - 3	4 - 6	3	>100

# • Doctoral studies

**Table 4**

## ***Classification of scientific specialities***

<b>Sciences</b>	<b>Number of scientific specialities</b>
<b>1. Natural Sciences, Mathematics and computer Sci</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Mathematics and Comp. Sci.</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Mechanics</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>01.03 and 04 Physical Sci</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>01.05 Chemical Sci</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>01.06 Biological Sci</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>01.07 and 08 Earth Sci</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>2. Technical Sciences</b>	<b>206</b>
<b>3. Medical Sciences</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>4. Agrarian Sciences</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>5. Humanitarian and Social Sciences</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>Total Number</b>	<b>505</b>

**Table 5****Total number of doctoral students formed by different institutions (2005)**

<b>Type and number of institutions</b>	<b>Total number of doctoral students</b>	<b>Number of doctoral students admitted during 2005</b>	<b>Number of recipients of Doctor's degree during 2005</b>
Universities and specialized higher schools - 29	4321	1023	392
Institutes of the Academy of sciences - 72	670	200	103
Institutes of the National Agrarian Center – 15	113	20	19
Institutes of Medicine – 6	59	16	14
Total number - 122	5163	1259	528

**Table 6**

**Number of recipients of Doctor's degree in Bulgaria, Poland, France and Finland (2001)**

	<b>Population In million</b>	<b>Number of recipients of Doctor's degree per year</b>	<b>Intensity indicator (number per 10 000 population per year)</b>
<b>Bulgaria</b>	<b>8,0</b>	<b>535 (50 % women)</b>	<b>0,67</b>
<b>Poland</b>	<b>38,5</b>	<b>4 400 (44,5 % women)</b>	<b>1,15</b>
<b>France</b>	<b>57,7</b>	<b>11 000 (40 % women)</b>	<b>1,91</b>
<b>Finland</b>	<b>5,2</b>	<b>1 200 (40 % women)</b>	<b>2,30</b>



**Table 7**

***Scientific field of the recipients of Doctor's degree  
(in percentage)***

Country	Bulgaria	Finland
Sciences		
Technical and Natural Sciences	40,8 %	43,3 %
Medical Sciences	10,0	17,2
Humanitarian and Social Sciences, Arts	39,3	24,3

## **II. Institutional evaluation and accreditation in Bulgaria**

- **Basic activities of NEAA**
- **Internal organization of NEAA**
- **Evaluation and accreditation in Bulgaria follows the European practices**
- **Grade scale of rating**
- **NEAA's approach to the accreditation of doctoral programmes**
- **Recent progress of the accreditation procedures**
- **International recognition**

# • **Basic activities of NEAA**

In 1996 the Bulgarian government set up NEAA as the only national statutory body in charge with both evaluation and accreditation.

Accreditation in Bulgaria involves 4 types of procedures, designed to enable a decision about whether an institution or programme should be granted accredited status. These procedures are based on evaluation and accreditation of:

- (i) an institution;
- (ii) a subject of study at different qualification levels;
- (iii) a single programme of study that is in the list of regulated professions;
- (iv) a doctoral programme of study.

NEAA also evaluates projects for establishment of new higher education institutions, new branches and faculties, new subjects and new programmes of study dealing with regulated professions. For these the Agency has a separate set of procedures.

## ***Table 8 Institutional and programme accreditation***

**Object of accreditation: institutional accreditation, program accreditation or a combination?**

	Programme	Institution	
<b>(1) Albania</b>	■	■	Parallel
<b>(3) Bulgaria</b>	■	■	Consequently, programme follows institutional
<b>(7) Latvia</b>	■	■	Parallel
<b>(4) Rep. of Macedonia</b>	■	■	Consequently, programme follows institutional
<b>(2) Austria</b>	■	■	Combination
<b>(4) Czech republic</b>	■	■	Combination
<b>(6) Hungary</b>	■	■	Combination
<b>(10) Romania</b>	■	■	Combination with separate procedures
<b>(11) Russia</b>	■	■	Combination; programme may be accredited separately
<b>(12) Slovak Republic</b>	■	□	From 2005 combination
<b>(5) Germany</b>	■	□	Integrated
<b>(9) Poland</b>	■ *	□	Integrated

\*only master programmes

■ – yes; □ – no;

# • **Internal organization of NEAA**

**Accreditation Council - 11 members with a 6 year term of office**

- ✓ elaborates criteria and procedures
- ✓ approves nominations for the members of the Standing Committees and expert groups
- ✓ makes decisions about the accreditation status of existing and newly established institutions, faculties, branches and programmes included in the list of regulated professions.

**8 Standing Committees in the main fields of study - 3 to 7 representatives of universities who are subject specialists in the respective field**

- ✓ nominate peer group members for site visits
- ✓ prepare them for the evaluation
- ✓ make decisions about the accreditation of programmes of study at different qualification levels.

**Standing Committee for Post-Accreditation Control and Monitoring - 5 members**

- ✓ responsible for the organization of follow-up reviews

**Review Peer Groups – 3 to 7 experts**

- ✓ serve on short-term contracts with the Agency

- **Evaluation and accreditation in Bulgaria follows the European practices**

The usual four-step approach is adopted

1. A self-evaluation report by the institution based on a handbook of criteria or standards
  2. External evaluation based on a site visit by the team of external experts
  3. Preparation of a final evaluation report by the corresponding Standing Committee
  4. Decision-making by the Accreditation Council or by the Standing Committee depending on the type of procedure
- 
- ✓ The handbook of standards
  - ✓ Who is an expert? What are the requirements concerning the expert teams?
  - ✓ Are there international experts involved?
  - ✓ Are the students involved in the evaluation procedures?

**Table 9**  
**Student involvement in the institutional processes**

	Self evaluation	External evaluation (peer review)		Decision-making
	In the HEI	HEI representative/ interview partner	Peers/Experts	Accreditation Council
(1) Albania	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(2) Austria	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(3) Bulgaria	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(4) Czech Republic	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(5) Germany	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
(6) Hungary	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> from 2004	<input type="checkbox"/>
(7) Latvia	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
(8) Rep. of Macedonia	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(9) Poland	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(10) Romania	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(11) Russia		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> in the nearest	future	
(12) Slovak Republic	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

■ - yes

□ - no

- **Grade scale of rating**

The Agency makes its evaluation and accreditation decisions on the basis of:

- (i) a four grades scale of ratings, namely “Very Good”, “Good”, “Satisfactory” and “Non-satisfactory”, when they concern institutional or programme accreditation procedures, and
- (ii) “Yes” or “No” scale, when they concern evaluation of projects for the establishment of new institutions or programmes study.

Institutions or programmes that are rated “Very Good”, “Good” receive 6 years term for an accreditation status. Those rated “Satisfactory” receive 3 years term.



- **NEAA's approach to the accreditation of doctoral programmes**

The universities that can offer doctoral programs should be carefully selected. The accreditation of a doctoral program by our agency is realized at two levels – as an integral part of the institutional accreditation of the higher education institutions necessary for completeness of the evaluation of their teaching and research potential and by means of a subject evaluation of each scientific speciality listed in the Classification.

- **Recent progress of the accreditation procedures**

The list of all institutionally accredited Bulgarian HEI can be found on the official website of NEAA:

<http://www.neaa.government.bg>

The new round of reaccreditation with the new criteria starts in 2005.

From 40 HEI applying for reaccreditation, 26 were rated very good, 11 – good, 1 – satisfactory and 2 – unsatisfactory.

From 11 evaluated projects for establishment of new HEI for the period 2005-2007 only one received approbation.

The programme evaluation and accreditation, offered in 52 broad fields of study introduced with the National Classifier of Areas and Fields of study and 505 doctoral programmes, listed in the National Classifier of scientific specialities is now in progress.

# • International recognition

## The NEAA

- ✓ participates in international activities concerning the development of the quality of higher education in Europe and the mutual understanding and recognition of the accreditation decisions among related agencies
- ✓ co-founder of the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies /CEEN/ (since 2006 the NEAA President has become a member of CEEN Steering Committee)
- ✓ Candidate Membership status of European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education /ENQA/ since 2006
- ✓ Bilateral agreements for cooperation with the French National Evaluation Committee /CNE/ and with the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance of the Higher Education /ARACIS/ - joint working groups, researches, exchange of information and experts and promotion of mutual mechanisms of recognition.
- ✓ Cooperation activities in the sphere of external quality assurance with other countries from the region of South-Eastern Europe /SEE/
- ✓ Participates and organizes the international conferences - “Institutional evaluation in the European HEA” (Sofia, 10-11 June 2006); “Current trends in the European Quality Assurance and the situation in the SEE region” (Sofia, 9-10 November 2007)

# **III. Improving quality of HE in Bulgaria.**

## **Concluding remarks and recommendations**

- **Concept of quality**
- **Primordial role of HEI**
- **Reconstruction the Doctorates. Synergy between research and teaching**
- **Role of the Agency**

- **Concept of quality**

- ✓ complex concept with various elements according to the different point of view of all actors – teachers, researchers, students, public and private partners, state institutions, society in general
- ✓ continuous process
- ✓ function of the good interaction between all actors in the field of HE

# . Primordial role of HEI

## **The universities**

- ✓ assume responsibility for ensuring that the programmes and research training they offer are designed to meet new challenges and include appropriate professional career opportunities
- ✓ elaborated the internal quality systems in order to specify clearly the institutional objectives to be achieved, the roles, responsibilities and procedures for continuous quality improvement

Most of the implemented internal quality systems in the Bulgarian universities defined clearly their specific place but sometimes with a bureaucratic content.

The analysis of the self-evaluation reports of a non-negligible part of them shows one common weakness – a relatively self-centred view of their activities minimizing the relationship between the institutions and their environment which influence them.

- **Reconstruction the Doctorates. Synergy between research and teaching.**

The doctoral formation is an important tool to enhance the quality of the research and the teaching.

An intense restructuration of the doctoral formation with the following elements is in consideration now:

- reorganization of doctoral schools with various size and structures
- a new legislation and replacement of the outdated Soviet system
- periodical evaluation of doctoral programmes by the NEAA
- an intensive national, international and interdisciplinary cooperation is in the order of the day; doctoral programmes offered jointly would be particularly beneficial
- it may be useful to concentrate the financial resources for doctoral studies only in the universities insuring a high-profile and interdisciplinary research
- surviving attitudes from the past concerning doctoral students have to be overcome

# • Role of the Agency

## The NEAA

- intends to improve its methodology in close relation with the other European agencies by mutual visits, joint training of experts and by promotion of mutual mechanisms of evaluation and accreditation
- provides public information in appropriate manner. For example the final step of the programme evaluation and accreditation of each of the 52 broad fields of study introduced with the National Classificator is the elaboration of a summarized report on the actual state of all HE offering training for the needs of public and a vision for the future development in the corresponding field of study.
- analyze the results of the developed approach of both institutional and programme evaluation and accreditation of the Bulgarian universities



**In conclusion,  
we believe that our national agency  
has to play a crucial role to ensure a  
minimum level of quality for  
institutions and programmes, to  
enhance the quality and to provide  
public information in appropriate  
manner.**

**Thank you for your attention!**