



**THE SELF-EVALUATION REPORT
OF
THE ACCREDITATION COMMISSION
OF
THE CZECH REPUBLIC**

JULY 2009

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FOREWORD

The Accreditation Commission of the Czech Republic (hereafter referred to as “ACCR”) is an institution systematically concerned with the evaluation of the quality of institutions of higher education and their study programs. Through its activities, the ACCR creates conditions for quality assurance and improvement in tertiary institutions’ primary activities. Its tools in these areas are institutional evaluations, evaluations of accredited activities and accreditation processes. While evaluation is understood as the primary way in which to improve the quality of Czech institutions of higher education, the process of accreditation primarily fulfils a disciplinary function because it is based on minimum standards and requirements and attempts to separate the quality from the low quality. The ACCR does not recommend accreditation for poor quality study programs and non-accredited programs cannot be opened, students may not be admitted to them, teaching may not be conducted, exams carried out or studys granted and these programs may not be financed using public (government) funds.

The ACCR is concerned with the quality of tertiary education and evaluates in a comprehensive manner the educational, scholarly, research, artistic and other academic activities of institutions of higher education. In addition to these responsibilities, which are set forth in Act No. 111/1998 Coll., on Higher Education Institutions and supplements to some other Acts (The Higher Education Act) and in the Statute of the ACCR as approved by the Government of the Czech Republic in its Resolution No. 744 of 28 July 2004, the ACCR carries out additional activities in accordance with its obligations arising out of the ACCR’s membership in ENQA (European Network of Quality Assurance) and the Czech Republic’s inclusion in the European Higher Education Area.

The ratification of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (hereafter referred to as “ESG”) has placed those institutions responsible for quality assurance in higher (tertiary) education in a new situation. According to the Bergen Communiqué, well-functioning systems of quality assurance fulfilling that document’s requirements to the highest possible study must be established in all of the signatory countries no later than 2010. Even though the ACCR is among the leading agencies within the European context on issues relating to quality assurance in higher education and has many years of experience in quality assurance of HIEs and in study programs and fields of study (disciplines), both the Bergen Communiqué and the ratified ESG demand of it many tasks and commitments.

ESG and conditions along with ENQA membership obligations require the creation of an internal system of quality evaluation for those institutions responsible for quality assurance in higher education and the introduction of regular external evaluations on either a national or international level. It is completely

proper and legitimate to ask those institutions responsible for quality assurance in higher education to demonstrate through a quality assurance evaluation that their activities are of sufficient quality, that within their framework they cultivate a culture of quality, which in accordance with the law they demand of evaluated institutions of higher education.

It is in this context that the ACCR had to create a mechanism of self-evaluation process for systematic improvements in the quality of its activities and ask for external evaluation in accordance with ESG.

This report contains the most important information about existing higher education system in the Czech Republic, system of quality assurance of higher education and system of quality assurance of ACCR. With the present external review, ACCR states its ambition to confirm full membership of ENQA. The main role of this report is to be an information base for external evaluation and provide maximum data necessary for working of evaluation board. Nevertheless, this report can be also useful for everybody who is interested in quality assurance of higher education in the Czech Republic.

1 THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC & THE NATIONAL EVALUATION AND ACCREDITATION AGENCY

1.1 National Higher Education System

Existing Higher Education (HE) in the Czech Republic is part of the national educational system of the classical type: pre-primary education, basic primary, general and professional secondary and tertiary and further education. HE covers all areas of knowledge and its main purpose is to shape good citizens of the democratic society capable of living and working in an environment of market economy, built on knowledge. Continuously there is a tendency to increase the quality of academic activities, cultivation of the academic environment and involvement of higher education institutions in international co-operation in education, research and development, and therefore on enhancing their competitiveness.

There are three objectives to create desirable HEIs system in the Czech Republic.

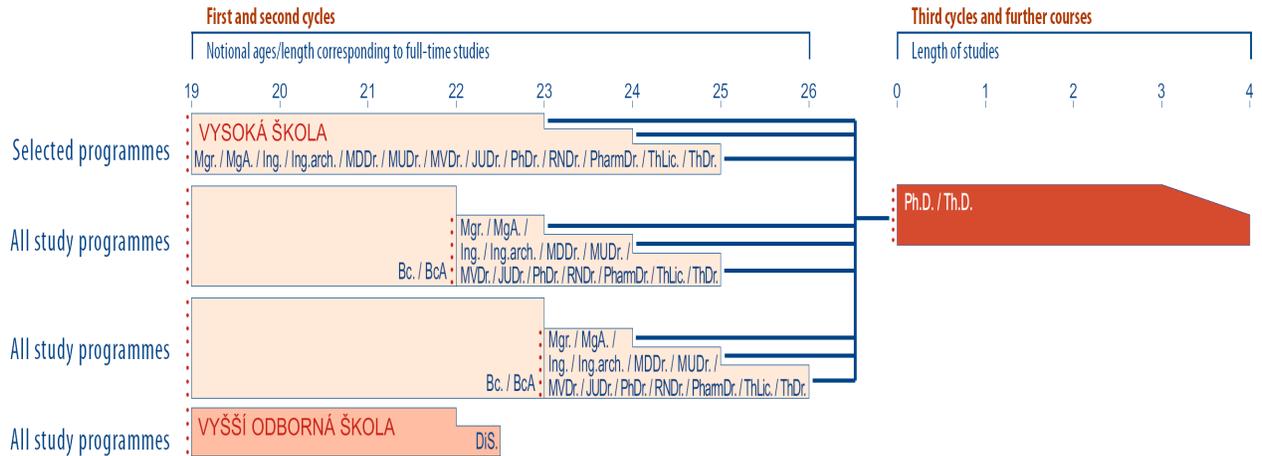
In the area of **education**, the system should develop and make full use of the potential of individuals, prepare young people for entering the labour market and provide them with the employment over the long term, educate active citizens who strive to build democratic society, encourage graduates to pursue continuing education and learn throughout their lives, and further develop knowledge in a wide range of disciplines. In the area of **research** the HEIs are expected to establish appropriate conditions for the development of R&D of top standards to communicate the results of research and development and to apply them in practice as an important source of innovation. Last but not least there is the third area of operation of HEIs, their **co-operation with the business sector** (enterprises, employers and other clients), their contribution to the establishment of innovative and technological partnerships and involvement in the development of the region where the higher education institution exists.

In the Czech system of HE, HEIs of university and non-university type exist, there are public (26), state (University of Defence and the Police Academy – 2) and private institutions (45) of both types (Table 1). Private higher education institutions began to emerge shortly after the Act came into the force (1998). They have often developed from private tertiary professional schools. Forty-five private institutions of higher education were registered by to date 16.1. 2009. Higher education institutions of non-university type usually offer bachelor study programmes and, if accredited, they can provide master study programmes. They are not allowed to provide doctoral study programmes. Higher education institutions of university type offer programmes leading to a bachelor, master and in all cases also to a doctoral study. The type of higher education institution is stated in its statute in agreement with an expert standpoint of the Accreditation Commission.

Number of higher education institutions

Public	26
State	2
Private	45

Structure of higher education in the Czech Republic and educational studys



Bc.	Bakalář	MDDr.	Zubní lékař	Ph. D.	Doktor
BcA.	Bakalář umění	MgA.	Magistr umění	PharmDr.	Doktor farmacie
DiS.	Diplomovaný specialista	Mgr.	Magistr	PhDr.	Doktor filozofie
Ing.	Inženýr	MUDr.	Doktor medicíny	RNDr.	Doktor přírodních věd
Ing. Arch.	Inženýr architekt	MVDr.	Doktor veterinární medicíny	Th.D.	Doktor teologie
JUDr.	Doktor práv			ThDr.	Doktor teologie
ThLic.	Licenciát teologie				

‘**Selected programmes**’ comprise those for which the accreditation has not yet expired; these include programmes in specific disciplines such as medical studies, veterinary studies and pharmacy, or other programmes very carefully selected by the Accreditation Commission.

Study programmes ISCED 5B of varying length are offered at konzervatoř and vyšší odborné školy (ISCED 5B). The title awarded is DiS. The Accreditation Commission is not responsible for those institutions.

There are three levels of higher education leading to the respective academic studies (bachelor, master and doctoral). They are in line with the provisions of the Higher Education Act as well as with the ideas of the Bologna process. The amendment of the Higher Education Act adopted in April 2001 introduced bachelor study programmes as an obligatory first level of higher education and a necessary precondition for continuing studies in any master study programme. There are only few exceptions where a Master study programme has the traditional “long” form and starts after secondary school graduation and students can continue to study at these master study programs after passing the entrance exam. These have to be decided by the Accreditation Commission.

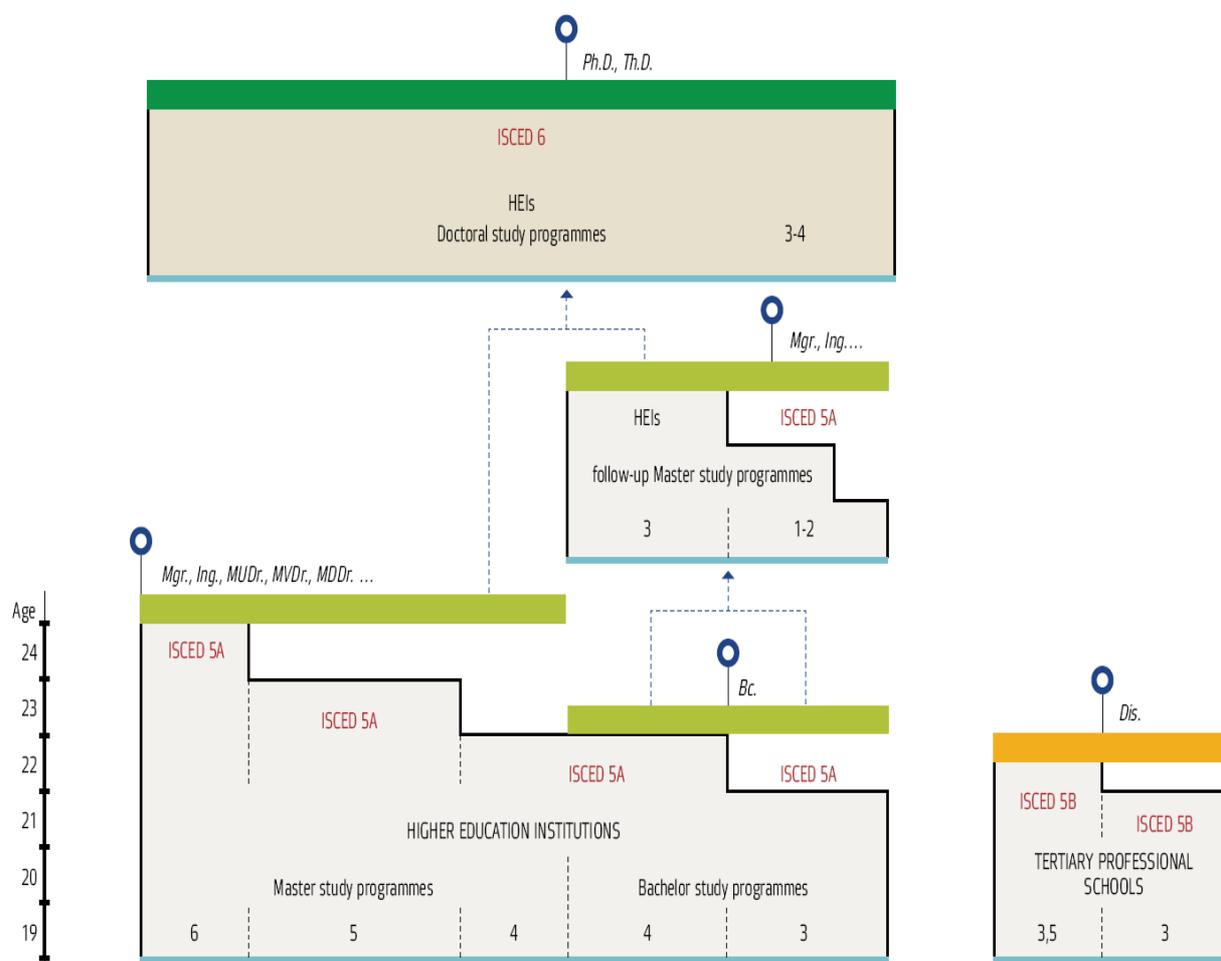
Bachelor’s study programmes are focused on professional training (in many cases still just theoretical) and provide a basis for studies in Master’s study programmes. The programmes last 3-4 years and graduates acquire qualification of ISCED level 5A.

Master’s study programmes aim to provide theoretical knowledge based on latest scientific findings, research and development, at mastering their applications and to develop creative skills. These study programmes follow on from Bachelor’s studies. Their standard length is 1-3 years. If the character of the study programme so requires, accreditation can be granted to a Master’s study programme (4-6 years long), which does not follow on from a Bachelor’s one. Graduates of all types of Master’s study programmes acquire qualification of ISCED 5A.

A Doctoral study programme can follow the completion of a Master’s programme. It is aimed at scientific work, independent creative activity in the area of research and development or at independent theoretical and creative skills in art. It is offered solely in universities and lasts 3-4 years and graduates acquire qualification of ISCED level 6.

According to the 1998 Act, all types of study programs are subject to accreditation. The award of accreditation to a study program is a task within the competency of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, which involves state agreement with the way the program is to be delivered, including the right to award appropriate academic studys. In the case that a study program is not accredited, no applicants can be admitted, no lectures may be held, no examinations can be held, and no academic studys may be awarded. This award of accreditation is based on the decision of the ACCR. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports can not act arbitrarily against the decision of the ACCR.

Organisation of the Education System in the Czech Republic



Establishment of a higher education institution

Public and state higher education institutions are established and closed down by an act of Parliament. Any changes through merger, (only with other public higher education institutions) or division may be implemented in the same way. Legal entities with their domicile in the Czech Republic are authorised to act as private higher education institutions if granted the respective state permission by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (hereinafter the Ministry).

The Higher Education Act does not specify subject areas for study programmes. The Accreditation Commission is responsible for deciding whether such programmes are suitable for the field in question and, if so, they are presented to the Ministry for accreditation.

1.2 Mission statement and strategy of the Accreditation Commission (ACCR)

In the Czech Republic, the **quality assurance and accreditation procedures are used to enhance quality in higher education.**

The National system of quality assurance in HE comprises the following three interconnected components:



The Accreditation Commission is an expert body established in accordance with the Act (1998). It is composed of 21 members, academic and professional experts, who are nominated by the Minister of Education and appointed by the Czech Government. The Minister discusses the nominations with representatives of higher education institutions, the Research and Development Council (a unit of the Government of the Czech Republic) and the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. The ACCR

may establish work groups to carry out evaluation of specific matters and activities. The regulations concerning the activities of the ACCR and its work groups are stipulated in the Statute approved by the Government. The Act further entrusts the ACCR with **general care for the quality of higher education, involving evaluation of all accredited activities and publication of the results**

The ACCR takes care of the quality of higher education and performs comprehensive evaluation of educational, scholarly, research, developmental, artistic or other creative activity of higher education institutions. According the 1998 Act and its Statute it must perform in particular following activities:

a) evaluate activities pursued by HEIs and the quality of accredited activities, and publish the results of such evaluations;

b) assess other issues concerning the system of higher education presented to it by the Minister, and express its standpoints over these issues.

The ACCR is authorized to require from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, public, state and private HEIs and legal entities which participate in educational and scholarly, research, developmental, artistic or other creative activity of HEIs the necessary information, documentation and co-operation in accomplishment of its obligations.

To carry out its activities the ACCR establishes permanent and special work groups to deal with the evaluation of specific matters and activities. These work groups are composed of specialists who are to consider particular study programs, HEI or other activities. The regulations for the Accreditation Commission and for its work groups are defined in the Statute approved by the Government. Material and financial support for the activities of the Accreditation Commission is provided by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports.

According to the 1998 Act the ACCR is obliged to issue its statement on applications for accreditation of study programs, applications for the right to perform habilitation procedures and procedures for the appointment of professors, applications for establishment, merger, amalgamation, splitting or dissolution of a faculty of a public HEI, determination of the type (university or non-university) assigned to a HEI.

The ACCR is entrusted by the 1998 Act with general care for the quality of higher education, involving evaluation of all accredited activities and publication of the results. It is also obliged to elaborate a professional standpoint on further matters concerning higher education presented for its consideration by the Minister of Education, Youth and Sports.

1.3 Establishment of the ACCR

The ACCR was established in 1990 as an independent government body taking care of the quality in higher education. Until 1998 its activities comprised mostly evaluation and accreditation of newly established HEI and new study programs and evaluation of HEI as institutions. Existing study programs at traditional HEI were accredited on the basis of the 1990 Act on Higher Education and there was no obligation to evaluate them anew by the ACCR. According the 1998 Act its scope, obligations and rights were substantially increased, and evaluation and accreditation of all the study programs has become one of its main tasks (all the existing study programs should be evaluated and accredited according the 1998 Act by the end of 2002). New obligations for the Accreditation Commission have arisen as a result of the possibility to establish private HEI. A legal entity with its domicile in the Czech Republic may act as a private HEI on the basis of state permission which is awarded by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports on the basis of the standpoint of the Accreditation Commission.

1.4 Description of the legal framework and other formal regulations concerning ACCR

The statute and processes of the ACCR is regulated by the Act No. 111/1998. The version concerning to the ACCR of the Act will be enclosed in appendix.

According to the art.8, § 83 where is written “the mode of action of the Accreditation Commission as well as its work groups is stipulated in the Statute of the ACCR approved by the Government. Upon approving the Statute by the Government, the Ministry shall make it public in an appropriate manner”. The last version of the Statute was updated as the Statute of the Accreditation Commission which was approved by the Government Decree, No. 744 dated 28th of July 2004 and has come into effect on this day (see also appendix).

Material and financial resources for the activities of the ACCR are provided by the Ministry. Nevertheless, that the members of the ACCR perform their duties independently.

1.5 Internal organization of ACCR

The Accreditation Commission consists of 21 members. The **Chair, vice-chair and members** of the ACCR are appointed by the Government upon a nomination of the Minister. Prior to making a nomination, the Minister shall request references from the representation of higher education institutions, Research and Development Council (a unit of the Governmental Board of the Czech

Republic) and the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and discuss the nomination with these institutions.

Members of the Accreditation Commission are appointed for a six-year term; they can be appointed for the maximum of two terms of office. Upon the first appointment of the members of the Accreditation Commission, the Government is to specify the names of one third of members whose term of office shall expire in two-year time and one third of members whose term of office shall expire in four-year time. Members of the Accreditation Commission represent irreproachable persons enjoying general authority as experts. Scope of Authority of the Chair, Vice-chair and Commission members are described in the Statute of the Accreditation Commission (see appendix).

The membership in the ACCR is incompatible with the duties of the Rector, vice-rectors and deans. A member of the ACCR may be dismissed only in case of losing one's integrity, long-term non-participation in the work of the Accreditation Commission, or upon his/her own request.

In order to perform specialist preparatory work for its proceedings, the ACCR may establish **work groups**. Their composition must correspond to the type of the study programme, its form and objectives of studies. They might be permanent and special work groups.

Currently there are 20 permanent work groups and the number of members of the work group depends on the size of the field of the higher education to which they relate to. There is not any regulation on the term of office but usually the members stay as long as their chairman is a member of the Accreditation Commission.

Names of permanent work groups

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| ● Biology and Ecology | ● Health Care |
| ● Economics | ● Education, Psychology and Kinanthropology |
| ● Pharmacy | ● Law and Security Studies |
| ● Philology and Literary Arts | ● Social Science |
| ● Philosophy, Theology and Religion | ● Technical Science |
| ● Physics | ● Arts and Art Sciences |
| ● Geology | ● Veterinary Medicine |
| ● History | ● Military Professions |
| ● Chemistry | ● Agriculture, Forestry and Food Industry |
| ● Medicine | |
| ● Mathematics and Computing Sciences | |
-

To achieve its objectives, the Commission is authorised to establish special work groups for the evaluation of institutions according to article No.3 of the Statute or for consideration of other issues concerning higher education

Administration of ACCR. Administrative, material and financial means for the activities of the Commission are provided by the Ministry via the Secretariat of the Accreditation Commission. In spite of the above mentioned conditions The Secretariat of the Accreditation Commission does not feel like a part of the Ministry and is very loyal to the ACCR. The Secretariat of the Commission is organisationally incorporated in the section of Science and Higher Education of the Ministry. The Secretariat of the Commission is directed by the Secretary of the Commission who is appointed and dismissed by the Minister upon a proposal of the Commission's Chair, and this no later than 60 days following presentation of the proposal.

The Commission Secretary may participate in discussions of the Commission and work groups without having the right to vote. The full-time personnel of the Secretariat of the Accreditation Commission comprise five employees.

1.6 International activities of ACCR

Since its foundation the ACCR has been aiming at implementation of internationally recognized procedures and practices of quality assurance. At least three members of the Accreditation Commission are usually academics from Western European countries. Frequently, foreign experts are asked to participate in processes of institutional evaluation in certain fields (law, medicine etc.).

In order to have topical information and to participate in dissemination of good practice the Accreditation Commission of The Czech Republic became full member of INQAHE, ENQA. It also participated in creating the Central and Eastern Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education which was founded in 2001 in Cracow and established on October 2002 in Vienna. All these networks aim at disseminating information about good practice, share experience and foster cooperation among members, and serve as a clearing house for issues of quality assurance. Members of the ACCR and of its secretariat participate in workshops and seminars organized by these international networks.

During the evaluation of restructured study programs, the ACCR follows internationally used procedures and standards, where possible. Growing emphasis on transparency of curricula and their assessment in the practices of the ACCR is the result of the necessity to create adequate conditions for the mobility of students (demand for the recognition of qualifications, credits, and study periods abroad), and recognition of diplomas.

Above all the Bologna process in quality assurance and enhancement is connected to mutual recognition of the practices and procedures used by national quality assurance agencies. One of the important points of the Prague Communiqué from 2001 was the stress put on cooperation of national and other actors in quality assurance in Europe to cooperate in quality assurance and enhancement, to design scenarios for mutual acceptance of the results of evaluation and accreditation or certification

mechanisms, in establishing the common framework of reference and in disseminating best practice. Consequently the the ACCR stresses the necessity of introducing internationally comparable standards in evaluating study programs and higher education institutions, enhancing transparency of standards, criteria of evaluation and all the procedures and methods used. The first agreement started at the end of 2002 by agreement with the Hungarian AC to begin with the process of mutual recognition of evaluation and accreditation practices of the Czech and Hungarian accreditation commissions in the field of medicine later continued to other fields of study. A similar approach has been with the Slovak AC and nowadays we would like to proceed in the same direction with other European national evaluation and accreditation bodies.

The ACCR carries out additional activities in accordance with its obligations arising out of the ACCR's membership in ENQA (European Network of Quality Assurance) and the Czech Republic's inclusion in the European Higher Education Area. In 2005, cooperation between ENQA, EUA, EURASHE and ESIB led to the preparation of the document Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, which was approved at meeting of government ministers responsible for higher education held in Bergen, Norway that year. The standards and guidelines and conditions along with ENQA membership obligations require the creation of an internal system of quality evaluation for those institutions responsible for quality assurance in higher education and the introduction of external evaluations on either a national or international level.

It is completely proper and legitimate to ask those institutions responsible for quality assurance in higher education to demonstrate through a quality assurance evaluation that their activities are of sufficient quality, that within their framework they cultivate a culture of quality, which in accordance with the law they demand of evaluated institutions of higher education. It is in this context that the ACCR must strive for systematic improvements in the quality of its activities.

The joint project of the ACCR of the Czech Republic and the AC of Slovakia to create a system of internal evaluation and prepare for external evaluations came about as the result of long-term good relations and cooperation, common goals and similar problematic areas and of course the advantages of the linguistic relatedness of Czech and Slovak. The goals of this project include cooperation in the creation of a system of internal evaluation for both accreditation commissions and the creation of the necessary foundations for external evaluation as well as further cooperation in the development of national systems of quality assurance in higher education.

2 SYSTEM OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The ACCR takes care of the quality of higher education and performs comprehensive evaluation of educational, scholarly, research, developmental, artistic or other creative activity of higher education institutions. According the 1998 Act and its Statute it must perform in particular following activities:

- a) evaluate activities pursued by HEI and the quality of accredited activities, and publish the results of such evaluations;
- b) assess other issues concerning the system of higher education presented to it by the Minister, and express its standpoints over these issues.

The ACCR is authorized to require from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, public, state and private HEI and legal entities which participate in educational and scholarly, research, developmental, artistic or other creative activity of HEI the necessary information, documentation and co-operation in accomplishment of its obligations.

To carry out its activities the ACCR establishes permanent and special work groups to deal with the evaluation of specific matters and activities. These work groups are composed of specialists who are to consider particular study programs, HEI or other activities. The regulations for the ACCR and for its work groups are defined in the Statute approved by the Government. Material and financial support for the activities of the ACCR is provided by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports.

According to the 1998 Act the ACCR is obliged to issue its statement on applications for accreditation of study programs, applications for the right to perform habilitation procedures and procedures for the appointment of professors, applications for establishment, merger, amalgamation, splitting or dissolution of a faculty of a public HEI, determination of the type (university or non-university) assigned to a HEI.

The ACCR is entrusted by the 1998 Act with general care for the quality of higher education, involving evaluation of all accredited activities and publication of the results. It is also obliged to elaborate a professional standpoint on further matters concerning higher education presented for its consideration by the Minister of Education, Youth and Sports.

2.1 The evaluation of activities of HEI

For evaluation the ACCR usually chooses one HEI or several institutions performing similar accredited study programs. The evaluation lasts, if longest, one year and a half and is carried out according following procedures:

1. selection of HEI by the Commission and authorization of a competent member of the Commission to implement the evaluation procedure;
2. establishment of a special work group;
3. notification to the Rector, dean or director of HEI of a fact that institution has been chosen for evaluation by the Accreditation Commission;
4. elaboration of requirements concerning information used for the evaluation of HEI, and their submission to the head of HEI being evaluated;
5. elaboration of gained information by the special work group;
6. expression of the opinion of the evaluated HEI's head concerning the composition of the special work group;
7. visit of at least three members of the special work group in the evaluated HEI;
8. elaboration of recommendations and conclusions from the evaluation carried out by the special work group and discussion with representatives of the evaluated HEI about these recommendations and conclusions;
9. submission of recommendations and conclusions to the Accreditation Commission;
10. acceptance of recommendations and conclusions related to the evaluated HEI by the ACCR in participation of its representatives.

Recommendations and conclusions are then together with the opinion of the representatives of evaluated HEI submitted to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and are published.

2.2 Accreditation of study programs

According to the 1998 Act, all types of study programs are subject to accreditation. The award of accreditation to a study program is a task within the competency of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, it involves state agreement with the way the program is to be delivered, including the right to award appropriate academic studys. In the case that a study program is not accredited, no applicants can be admitted, no lectures may be held, no examinations can be held, and no academic studys may be awarded.

The written application from a higher education institution for the accreditation of a study programme must include the following:

- a) the name of the higher education institution or its constituent part that is responsible for providing the study programme;
- b) the components of the study programme under subsection 44 of the Act
- c) evidence of appropriate staff, financial, material, technical and information support for the study programme for at least the standard length of study;
- d) a description of the planned development of the study programme, its rationale and the anticipated number of students to be admitted;
- e) in the case of study programmes in the field of health services, the standpoint of the Ministry of Health with respect to the possible employment of graduates in this field is also required¹⁹.

The Ministry passes the application immediately to the ACCR, which reaches a decision no later than 120 days from the date of receipt.

If there are any deficiencies in the application that might be corrected, the ACCR invites the higher education institution to do so within a reasonable length of time and suspends the review procedure. If the higher education institution fails to correct these deficiencies by the deadline that has been set, the Accreditation Commission makes its decision on the basis of the original documentation.

No later than thirty days after receiving the standpoint of the ACCR, the Ministry makes its decision on whether or not to award accreditation. In making this decision, it takes into consideration the general policy of the higher education institution with regard to its teaching, scholarly, scientific, research, development, artistic or other creative activities of as well as an assessment of its activities.

The Ministry will not grant accreditation if:

- a) the study programme does not comply with the requirements listed in Part 4 of this Act;
- b) sufficient academic staff, equipment and information support are not guaranteed for the relevant study programme;
- c) implementation of the study programme is not backed by sufficient financial, material or technical resources;
- d) the higher education institution does not offer sufficient guarantees that regular teaching in the programme will be ensured;
- e) the application contains incorrect data deemed crucial to awarding the accreditation; the Accreditation Commission has issued a negative standpoint

If the requirements listed in paragraphs a) and b) are not met, the ACCR will not issue an affirmative standpoint with regard to an application for the accreditation of a study programme. The standpoint of the ACCR must include the reasons why the study programme does not meet the requirements listed in paragraphs a) and b).

¹⁹) Section 53 of Act No. 20/1966 on public health care, as amended by Czech National Council Act No. 548/1991.

The evaluation should concern both the content of the study programme and the readiness of the higher education institution or another educational institution to deliver the programme.

Accreditation is issued by the Ministry on the basis of an expert evaluation submitted to the Ministry by the Accreditation Commission. This evaluation should concern both the content of the study program and the readiness and state of preparation (personal and material) of the HEI or other educational institution to deliver the program. A study program (and broader personal and material conditions under which it is to be delivered) is evaluated by a permanent work group of the Accreditation Commission. Its expert opinion is then submitted to the Accreditation Commission to be reconsidered and assessed. The Ministry is bound by the 1998 Act not to award accreditation in the case of a negative assessment of a study program. In the case of a positive standpoint of the Accreditation Commission the Ministry is bound by an explicit list of grounds on which it may refuse to award accreditation.

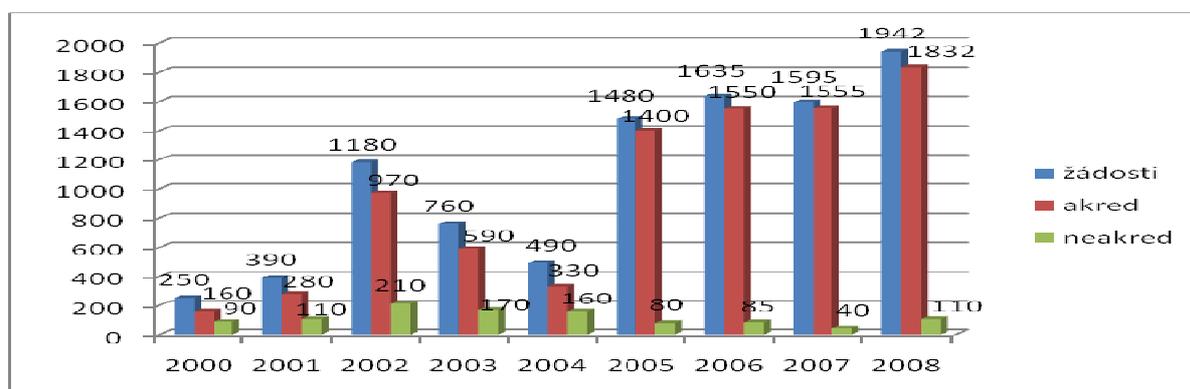
Accreditation of a study program is awarded for a limited period of time, maximally for twice the standard length of the program. In the case of doctoral study programs, accreditation should not be awarded for more than ten years (usually it is awarded for 8 years).

A HEI or a unit of such an institution may carry out procedures for habilitation (*venium docendi*) and procedures for the appointment of professors only on the basis of accreditation. A similar mechanism to that used for study programs also applies in the case of these procedures.

New obligations arise for the Accreditation Commission that are related to the possibility of establishing private higher education institutions. The Act stipulates the requisites of an application for state permission to establish such an institution. The Ministry then asks the Accreditation Commission to present its standpoint on the design of study programmes prior to making its decision on granting state permission.

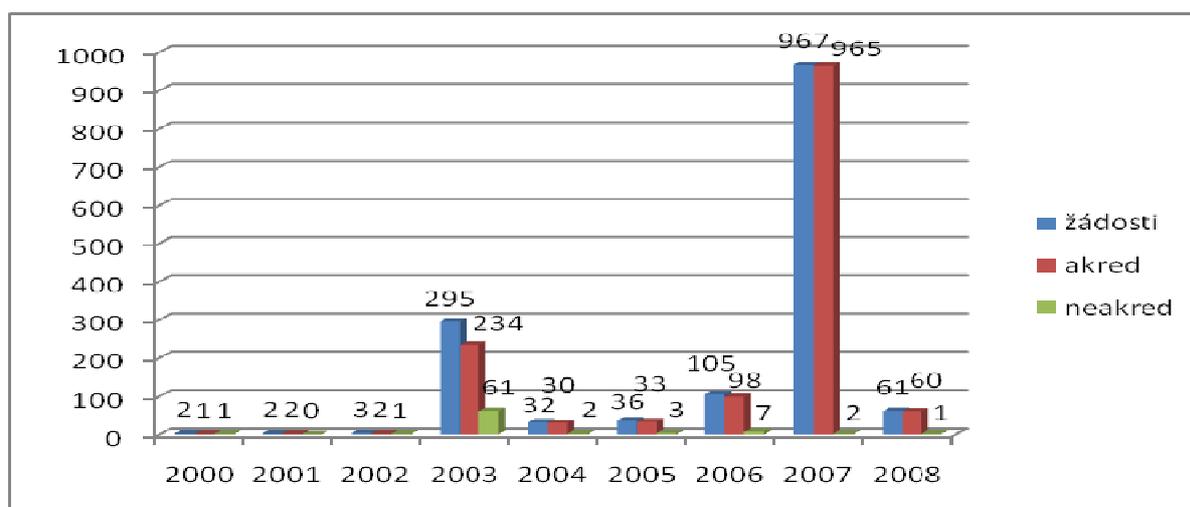
Some statistical data

The first graph refers to the delivery of opinions on applications for the accreditation of study programmes. Fields of study are taken as the unit of measure. It is apparent from the graph that the expected reduction in the number of applications after 2002 (i.e. after the end of the transitional period provided for by law, during which all study programmes had to undergo the reaccreditation process) did not materialize. On the contrary, after 2005 there was a large-scale increase in the number of applications. Moreover, surprisingly this was at a time when most higher education institutions had switched to structured studies:



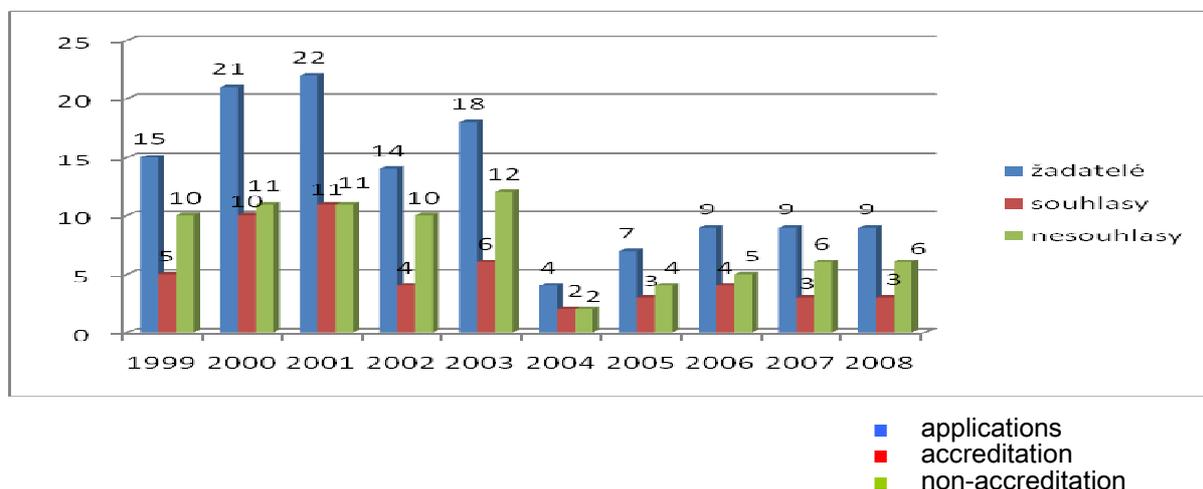
- applications
- accreditation
- non-accreditation

The second graph shows the number of applications for the accreditation of fields of habilitation procedure and procedure for appointment as a professor. These applications are submitted as part of a drive every four years. The fields of habilitation procedure and procedure for appointment as a professor were first accredited in 1999; the next campaign is due to take place in 2011:



- applications
- accreditation
- non-accreditation

The third graph shows the number of applications for State approval to operate as a private higher education institution. The establishment of private higher education institutions was only made possible under the current law. Whereas, in the first five years that the law was in force (1999–2003), the ACCR delivered opinions on 90 applications, since 2005 the number of applications handled has settled at around 8 per year:



2.3 Internal and external evaluation

All HEI are obliged to implement a regular internal evaluation and to make its results public. An additional requirement is to make a detailed description of the evaluation procedure within the internal regulations of HEI. The framework for this obligation is very open, and it is left to the institution to implement evaluation procedures and use its results. Until now, the developments in the field of internal evaluation are quite diverse, varying from very well organized systems to only some formal procedures of non-systemic nature. Until recently there was slight motivation to share information and disseminate good practice. According the 1998 Act, all HEI are obliged to elaborate and publish an annual report on its activities which should use results of internal evaluation as well. Well organized, systematic internal evaluation serves as a very good basis for external assessment and evaluation implemented by the Accreditation Commission.

The accreditation of study programs, of procedures for habilitation and for appointment of professors, and state permission for running a private HEI together with institutional evaluation serve as a very effective means for ensuring the quality of higher education.

Since its establishment in 1990, the Accreditation Commission has conducted external evaluation of HEI on the basis of peer reviews and comparative evaluations of faculties and related fields of study. For this purpose it elaborated a mechanism to enable standard steps to be followed in evaluation processes, and provided help and guidance for institutions. Evaluation focuses on the overall activity of an institution and the conditions under which study programs are provided. The Accreditation

Commission requires data on general characteristics of the institution (faculty, institute), staff and organization structure, study programs, research and development activities, equipment and funding. More than three quarters of the total number of faculties have already been evaluated. There has been a serious debate on the proper use of the evaluation results. The prevailing idea is to maintain an improvement-oriented approach, and provide institutions with enough time to improve in the case of negative findings before issuing any unfavorable decision. Public reports, including details about strengths and weaknesses of individual HEI (faculties, institutes) together with relevant recommendations, serve as effective means for further improvement and development. According the 1998 Act, the Accreditation Commission may in the event of serious deficiencies occurring while implementing a study program make the following proposal to the Ministry depending on the nature of the matter:

- a) restriction of accreditation consisting in a ban on admitting new applicants to the studies in the pertinent study program;
- b) temporary termination of accreditation consisting in a ban on performing state examinations and awarding academic studys;
- c) withdrawal of accreditation.

These restrictions serve as an efficient disciplinary device and in a limited number of cases were used during 1990's as a solution of serious deficiencies where other remedies were inefficient. Such restrictions are used only in cases when minimum standards of quality are not met, and are not considered by the Accreditation Commission to be the main road to enhance quality in the Czech higher education.

2.4 International evaluation

During the last decade a number of Czech higher education institutions have undergone evaluation carried out by international bodies or foreign institutions. For example: quality audits by CRE - Czech Technical University in Prague, Palacky University in Olomouc, evaluation by the European Association for Veterinary Education - University of Veterinary and Pharmaceutical Sciences in Brno, evaluation by a prestigious foreign university - Czech University of Agriculture in Prague evaluated by the Agricultural University in Wageningen, "Fédération Européenne d'Associations Nationales d'Ingénieurs" (FEANI) accreditation - received by 25 Czech faculties of technology, "International Gesellschaft für Ingenieur-pädagogik" (IGIP) accreditation - received by four higher education institutions, National Committee on Foreign Medical Education and Accreditation in the U.S.A. (NCFMEA) – accreditation received by all Czech medical faculties, and others. These activities are considered to be very useful for the evaluated institutions. They contribute to a better understanding of the importance of evaluation, and offer a new perspective from which various evaluating mechanisms and approaches may be viewed.

3 REGULATORY INTERNAL EVALUATION OF ACCREDITATION COMMISSION BASED ON THE JOIN PROJECT WITH ACCREDITATION COMMISSION OF SLOVAK REPUBLIC

3.1 Description of the joint project of the Czech and Slovak accreditation commissions for meeting the standards set out in the Bergen Communiqué and requirements for membership in ENQA

The ratification of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area has placed those institutions responsible for quality assurance in higher (tertiary) education in a new situation. According to the Bergen Communiqué, well-functioning systems of quality assurance fulfilling that document's requirements to the highest possible study must be established in all of the signatory countries no later than 2010. Even though the Accreditation Commission of the Czech Republic and the Accreditation Commission of Slovakia are among the leading agencies within the European context on issues relating to quality assurance in higher education and both commissions have many years of experience in quality assurance in institutions of higher education and in study programs and fields of study (disciplines), both the Bergen Communiqué and the ratified Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area demand of them many tasks and commitments. Although these could be dealt with by the two accreditation commissions independently of one another, cooperation in meeting ENQA membership requirements (in particular assuring internal and external evaluations) may provide synergies and mutual benefits in a number of areas.

The primary goal of the joint project of the Accreditation Commission of the Czech Republic and the Accreditation Commission of Slovakia is cooperation in the creation of systems of internal and external evaluations for the accreditation commissions. This cooperation is also a reaction to the development of the Bologna Process and should prepare the groundwork for future mutual recognition of inputs, processes and results of evaluations and accreditations.

The following model of cooperation has been prepared on basis of negotiations at a joint meeting of representatives of the Accreditation Commission of the Czech Republic and the Accreditation Commission of Slovakia. The model's individual sections are strictly based on the recommendations in Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area:

Internal evaluation

Internal evaluation of each Accreditation Commission is carried out annually. It is carried out independently in each Accreditation Commission but according to the same rules and standards in order to allow for the comparison of the results. Each evaluation's results should be made public in the form of a report whose structure is mandatory for both commissions (three chapters: Evaluation of Structures, Evaluation of Process Quality and Evaluation of the Results of Accreditations and Evaluations).

Internal evaluations are carried out by two independent three-member boards elected from among the members of Accreditation Commission of the Czech Republic (for the internal evaluation of the Accreditation Commission of the Czech Republic) and the Accreditation Commission of Slovakia (for the internal evaluation of the Accreditation Commission of Slovak Republic). Members of the Evaluation Board are elected for three-year terms. The Evaluation Board prepares a draft evaluation report based on the mandatory structure, presents it for discussion at a meeting of the Accreditation Commission in question and writes a final report on the internal evaluation to be made public. This report also includes an analysis of the fulfillment of recommendations set out in previous internal and external evaluations.

The first internal evaluations of the Accreditation Commission of the Czech Republic and the Accreditation Commission of Slovakia were carried out in 2007, the second one in 2008.

External evaluation

A five-year cycle for an external evaluation of the activities of the Accreditation Commission of the Czech Republic and the Accreditation Commission of Slovakia has been established. This external evaluation may be carried out in each Accreditation Commission independently or may occur concurrently. The evaluations' results will be made public in a report whose structure is based on the requirements set out in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

External evaluations will be carried out by one eighteen-member Evaluation Board, with equal representation from the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic. Membership requirements are based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. Members of the Evaluation Board will be representatives of stakeholders and experts on quality assurance in higher education, including international experts from third countries (outside of Czech and Slovak Republic).

The results of the Evaluation Board's activities will be an external evaluation report of the respective Accreditation Commission. Before it is made public, the report will be discussed at a meeting of the Accreditation Commission in question attended by at least eight members of the Evaluation Board

including its chairperson or vice-chairperson. The report together with the response of the Accreditation Commission under evaluation will then be made public.

The activities of the Evaluation Board are controlled and directed by a statute signed and approved by the Ministers of Education of the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic.

Reasons for Accreditation Commission of the Czech Republic and the Accreditation Commission of Slovak Republic

There are several aspects:

- A long-term common history, a high study of mutual understanding and cooperation in the development of institutions of higher education in both countries.
- Experience with cooperation in the evaluation of institutions of higher education (e.g. evaluations of the University of Veterinary and Pharmaceutical Sciences Brno and the Faculty of Pharmacy of Charles University in Prague).
- Mutually intelligible languages.

3.2 Description of the internal evaluation of the Accreditation Commission of the Czech Republic

In accordance with the project above, in early 2007 the ACCR appointed an internal evaluation committee. The committee's first task was to pave the way for an internal evaluation ready for the subsequent production of an evaluation report. Here, the committee drew on the predetermined outline of the ACCR internal evaluation report respecting the ESG.

Draft outline of the ACCR internal evaluation report

I. Evaluation of the structure

a) of the ACCR in general:

- how efficient the composition of ACCR members is in terms of the representation of different fields and the effectiveness of procedures, including the involvement of the ACCR's foreign members,
- in terms of the representation of other interest groupings, such as employers (practical experience) or students;
- attendance at meetings, the workload of individual members;

b) of the ACCR's permanent work groups:

- whether the number and composition of these groups is consistent with requirements,
- in terms of the representation of other interest groupings, i.e. students, employers (practical experience),
- the workload of individual members;

c) of the ACCR's special work groups:

- whether the number of members and their composition is consistent with the objectives of the evaluation they are handling,
 - the involvement of individual members in the process of assessing and preparing the relevant materials;
 - in terms of the representation of other interest groupings, i.e. students, employers (practical experience),
- d) of the Secretariat of the Accreditation Commission:
- in terms of the effective number of staff and their qualifications,
 - in terms of the material and technical facilities available for the ACCR's activities.

II. Evaluation of process quality

a) effectiveness of activities:

- whether the demands placed on the formal particulars of applications create conditions for quality assessment by the ACCR,
- whether the assessment procedure is suited to the nature of the applications,
- whether the processes and documentation for the evaluation are in line with the ACCR's requirements,

b) communication:

- in terms of internal communication, such as mutual communication between the ACCR, the Secretariat of ACCR, and the ACCR's work groups; internal communication within the ACCR and within the ACCR's work groups,
- in terms of external communication, i.e. the quality and effectiveness of communication with relevant institutions and the public,

c) transparency of evaluation and accreditation processes:

- publication of criteria,
- adherence to criteria,
- the justification provided for rejected applications,
- the way requirements to supplement applications are defined when the procedure is suspended,
- compliance with the time limits for the consideration of applications,

d) independence:

- functional and procedural independence,
- mechanism to provide protection from political pressures and lobbying,
- existence or need for an internal "code of ethics" for ACCR members and work group members,

e) control mechanisms:

- the provision of internal control mechanisms,
- procedures for investigations in cases where the rules on the accreditation process are infringed,
- control process documentation,

f) financial resources and efficiency in the utilization of funds:

- funds allocated for ACCR activities,
- effectiveness in the utilization of funds,

g) international cooperation:

- cooperation with the ACCR or similar bodies in neighbouring and other States in the framework of the Bologna Process,
- the active presentation of ACCR at international events, including activities as part of the ACCR's membership of international organizations (ENQA, CEEN, etc.)

III. Evaluation of the results of evaluation and accreditation outputs

- evaluation of the results of activities carried out by the ACCR and its work groups,
- evaluation of the handling of observations made by higher education institutions and the public regarding the ACCR,
- analysis of problems that need to be addressed,
- accompanying statistical data for the period evaluated.

Process of the internal evaluation in 2007

It was decided to use questionnaires for the evaluation in 2007. Based on the outline above, the committee prepared two questionnaires: one for ACCR members and another for members of the ACCR's permanent work groups. The aim was to map out how various players view the relevant activities of the ACCR. The questionnaire was designed to provide the evaluation committee with an insight not just into the work of the ACCR, but also that of its permanent and special work groups. With this in mind, the questionnaire was sent to all ACCR members and all members of work groups for them to fill in. The respondents assessed various criteria by means of a quantitative scale; if their assessment was unfavourable, they were asked to provide a qualitative assessment, i.e. written reasons, or a description or analysis of the problem.

The committee appraised the questionnaires that were handed in and used them as the basis to draft an internal evaluation report. The draft report was discussed with the ACCR at its meeting in November 2007. The ACCR took due note of the report and published it on its website.

The internal evaluation in 2007 identified the main areas in which the ACCR still needs to improve in implementing the ESG and other issues associated with the ACCR's activities.

Process of the internal evaluation in 2008

In 2008, the ACCR did its utmost to resolve the problems pinpointed in the internal evaluation in 2007. The aim of the evaluation in 2008 was therefore to ascertain whether and to what extent the ACCR had dealt with the issues set out in the report. The internal evaluation carried out in 2008

provided important feedback and the 2008 internal evaluation report was conceived as a report detailing the implementation of recommendations formulated in the previous year.

The 2008 external evaluation report notes, as evidenced by the text below, positive trends and substantial progress in fixing the problems identified.

Composition of the Accreditation Commission's internal evaluation committee

Year	Members
2007	Milan Sojka, Jiří Sobota, Pavel Höschl
2008	Milan Sojka, Jiří Sobota, Petr Kylvoušek
2009	Milan Sojka, Petr Kylvoušek, Jan Štěpán

3.3 Internal evaluation of the Accreditation Commission carried out in year 2007

The most important part of the Report from 2007 contains following findings:

In its activities, the ACCR makes every possible effort to apply the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and examples of good practice by foreign agencies involved in quality assurance in higher education. At the same time, the ACCR is able to take advantage of its many years of experience with accreditations and evaluations of quality in Czech higher education system and its long-term efforts to improve its activities. There do remain areas where the practices of the ACCR must be improved because internationally recognized standards are not fully adhered to the evaluation criteria. This is particularly the case with the active participation of students in the activities of the ACCR (students are not directly represented in the ACCR and are only represented in some of the permanent work groups). The majority of the work groups are made up entirely or predominately of academics and the viewpoints of employers is lacking here. Nor are these viewpoints sufficiently represented in the ACCR itself.

Evaluation of the ACCR's structures

The overall makeup of the ACCR in terms of the representation of scholarly (educational) disciplines is generally satisfactory. This was the overwhelming opinion of the members of the ACCR when questioned on this issue. There are concerns about the effectiveness of the ACCR in light of attempts to increase the number of members on the ACCR. Some members of the permanent work groups proposed a number of improvements (creating a separate work group for the environmental sciences, including experts from specific fields within a number of the permanent work groups).

From the point of view of the international comparison of approaches to evaluation and criteria, it is very significant that the ACCR has members from abroad. At the present time, however, foreign members are only from Germany, which somewhat limits international comparability. It is necessary to add representatives from Slovakia, Scandinavia and/or the United Kingdom, or even from Mediterranean countries (a limiting factor here is however language). Academic staff from institutions and the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic dominate the ACCR and its work groups. No students are represented in the ACCR and the number of experts representing the business community and employers is very low.

In particular it is necessary to increase the number of students and outside experts in the permanent and special work groups. Cooperation with the Student Chamber of the Council of Higher Education Institutions of the Czech Republic is gradually resulting in an increasing number of students in the work groups. It is also necessary to increase the number of experts working in the field in order to better reflect the view of employers, which is of particular significance in technical and economic disciplines. It is worth noting that many members of the ACCR and its permanent work groups consider the current makeup of these bodies to be effective; many members of the permanent work groups indicated in their questionnaires opposition to the inclusion of students and some even to representatives from business.

Evaluation of structure at the level of the Secretariat of the ACCR

The Secretariat of ACCR is understaffed and lacks sufficient financial and material support. Given the increasing demand on the development of evaluation materials, growing demands on foreign language skills in the context of cooperation with international bodies (ENQA, CEEN, ECA, etc.) and the growing role of the ACCR's international activities, it is necessary to increase financial support and staffing levels for the Secretariat as well as modernizing its technical support. The majority of the ACCR's members evaluated the work of the Secretariat very positively in terms of ensuring evaluation and accreditation.

Evaluation of the effectiveness of the ACCR's activities

In its activities the ACCR makes every effort to apply internationally recognized standards and procedures, to achieve the greatest degree of transparency in these procedures and to adhere to the explicitly formulated evaluation criteria. In accordance with the legally established accreditation criteria, all study programs and their individual scholarly disciplines and fields for naming docents and professors are all subject to fixed-period accreditation and periodic extensions of that accreditation. This results in extensive demands on resources and time for both the ACCR and the institutions of higher education.

It is not possible to move from a system of accrediting study programs to the accreditation of institutions (which is the practice for most member agencies in the European Consortium for

Accreditation) when functioning internal systems of quality assurance can be found in only a small number of public and private institutions of higher education. It would however be appropriate to move to the accreditation of institutions for those institutions of higher education that can conclusively demonstrate internal systems of quality assurance that function well. (A necessary precondition for such a shift would have to be the realization of significant legislative changes together with the functioning internal quality assurance systems.)

Evaluations are gradually becoming the basic tool for increasing quality and creating a culture of quality assurance at Czech tertiary institutions. It would be appropriate from the motivational point of view to introduce the concept of “Center of Excellence” to the evaluation results.

The activities of the ACCR have thus been focused primarily on issuing rulings on applications for accreditation and on evaluating institutions of higher education. As a result of the large demands flowing from the agenda relating to granting new accreditations and extending the validity existing accreditations, very little time remains for strategic concerns and discussions of conceptual materials.

Applications of the HIEs for new accreditations and extending the validity of existing accreditations are often submitted without the proper structure or necessary information for evaluating the application. The requirement of submitting each application in triplicate leads to increased costs and increases the difficulty of the entire process. The publications of newly planned official guidelines on applications for accrediting study programs should result in a simplification of this process and increased effectiveness. For example, applications will be submitted in a single copy rather than triplicate. Applications should primarily be submitted to the work groups for evaluation in an electronic format with clearly defined requirements for specific information. Many members of the ACCR and the permanent work groups expressed support for this change in the questionnaire.

Evaluation of communication

The major issue in this area is the ACCR’s communication with the general public. It is necessary to find appropriate ways of communication that will best inform the public about the activities of the ACCR and its work groups. One such method is to make better use of the ACCR’s web pages. A related key issue is to improve the quality of these web pages’ English-language version. Communications with the Department of Higher Education at the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports are on a very high level and there has been a significant improvement in communication with the Czech Rectors Conference and the Council of Higher Education Institutions of the Czech Republic. There are occasional problems in communications with some tertiary institutions, the causes of which rest on a lack of information (uncertainties about the ACCR’s mission, and the criteria and procedures it uses in evaluating institutions of higher education on the one hand, and delays and inflexibility in the updating of the ACCR’s web pages and confusing information on the other).

The questionnaires also revealed certain problems in communication between the ACCR and the permanent work groups.

Evaluation of process transparency

In all of their activities, the ACCR and its standing and special work groups attempt to maintain the highest levels transparency in both the criteria and procedures it uses. Criteria are made public on the ACCR's web pages. These are applied by the work groups with consideration being given for the situation in specific fields – primarily setting levels of requirements that will correspond with the nature of the discipline. These criteria are held to with only minor exceptions in the activities of both the ACCR and the permanent work groups. The major issue appears to be that at the level of the standing WG's, these criteria are not always interpreted in the same way. The ACCR is addressing this issue and is attempting to ensure that the established criteria are not observed in a merely formal manner. It is also necessary to deal more deeply with the issue of interdisciplinary comparison and consistency in the evaluation of differing fields (the sciences, engineering, the social sciences and humanities and the fine arts).

Legally-mandated deadlines are being observed by the ACCR. In some cases, the arguments for rejecting an application for accreditation are not sufficiently convincing, which occasionally leads to misunderstandings and incorrect interpretations on the part of the applicants.

ACCR independence

The functional and procedural independence of the ACCR is guaranteed by the Higher Education Act of 1998 and the statute of the ACCR as approved by the Government of the Czech Republic. This independence is strictly maintained in all the activities of the ACCR and its standing and special WG's. The moral integrity of the members of the ACCR and members of the work groups has thus far meant being able to resist pressures from lobby groups.

A majority of the members of the ACCR and the permanent work groups consider the adoption of an explicit "Code of Ethics" to be unnecessary. Adoption of such a document, however, could have a positive impact on the public and might lead to the reduction of lobby group pressure. Some respondents consider such a code as appropriate for new members of the permanent work groups, which membership changes more frequently.

ACCR control mechanisms

The control mechanisms set out by the Higher Education Act and the ACCR statute work very well. The right of appeal has been established. These mechanisms have not yet been institutionally implemented to a sufficient study. It is desirable to include within them formal procedures to be used

when rules and regulations or the criteria of the accreditation process have been violated. This should be a separate area of responsibility within the Secretariat of ACCR.

Evaluation of international cooperation

The ACCR is a member of ENQA, CEEN and ENQAHE. Cooperation with these associations is important for the exchange of experience and good practices. Cooperation with ENQA is of critical importance in improving the professionalism of the quality assurance system (seminars, annual meetings, publications, participating in projects, etc.).

Cooperation with the AC of Slovakia is successfully developing and one of its results is the joint project for the internal and external evaluation of the AC's and cooperation with members of CEEN where is ACCR a member also is working well.

Evaluation of evaluations and accreditations

In its activities, the ACCR is placing ever increasing emphasis on the evaluation of institutions of higher education and their accredited activities; this is in spite of the fact that the number of applications for new accreditation and extending the validity of accreditation means that the members of the ACCR and most of the work groups are overburdened. Evaluations and accreditations almost always meet expected quality standards and correspond to accepted criteria. In spite of the fact that starting point for the process of accreditation is the application of minimal standards, this process is fundamentally based on evaluation.

Because of the large demands on time required by the existing legislation the ACCR has not yet been able to create sufficient space for the discussion of conceptual issues. In the future, the ACCR should systematically focus on an analysis of the impact of the Bologna Process on the quality of Bachelor's and Master's study programs, the possibilities of making the processes of evaluation and accreditation more effective, increasing motivation to improve quality and searching for a closer link between evaluations and the financing of public institutions of higher education.

Existing problems and recommendations

1. The ACCR should attempt to make its activities more effective and create space for discussion of conceptual issues.

- The starting point for a more effective system in the future should be a shift from accrediting study programs to the accreditation of institutions (HIEs and/or their constituent faculties). A necessary precondition is creating functional internal systems of assessing quality assurance at tertiary institutions.
- Applications for accreditation should be submitted and processed primarily in electronic form
- Further discussions about the criteria used in particular for Master's and doctoral study programs and disciplines for naming associate professors and Professors.

2. It is necessary to improve communication between the ACCR and the permanent work groups. In this context, it is necessary to make better use of the ACCR's web pages and transmitting information via FTP.
3. It is necessary to focus on improving the level of information that tertiary institutions and the general public have about the ACCR's activities.
4. The ACCR should discuss questions relating to the inclusion of students and outside experts in the activities of the permanent and special work groups.
5. It is necessary to request that the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports increase the budget of the ACCR in view of its new responsibilities arising from the participation of the Czech Republic in the Bologna Process and the need to better provide for the Secretariat of the ACCR (in terms of both personnel and material).

3.4 Internal evaluation of the Accreditation Commission carried out in year 2008

The report on the external evaluation of the ACCR in 2008 discussed, in particular, the extent to which the ACCR had dealt with the problems noted in the 2007 report. The most important part of the report contains the following findings.

1. The ACCR should seek to streamline its activities and create room for discussion on policy matters.

a) The fundamental way of streamlining activities in the future should be the transition from the accreditation of fields of study to the accreditation of faculties; however, this is subject to the creation of functioning internal quality assurance systems.

The 2007 report inter alia stated that, in a situation where few public and private higher education institutions have a well-functioning internal quality assurance system, it is impossible to switch from the accreditation of study programmes to the accreditation of institutions. Gradually, however, for those higher education institutions which clearly demonstrate that they have a well-functioning internal quality assurance system, it would be advisable to make the changeover to the accreditation of institutions (although this will require the corresponding legislative changes).

Since 2002, following the completion of the accreditation of all previously non-accredited study programmes, as legislatively enshrined in the Higher Education Act of 1998, the ACCR has increased the emphasis on evaluating higher education institutions and evaluating accredited activities. Evaluation has steadily emerged as an essential instrument in improving quality and fostering a culture of quality at Czech higher education institutions. From the point of view of incentives, it would be appropriate to introduce the designation "centre of excellence" as an evaluation result. However, transparent criteria would have to be set for the granting of this designation

The ACCR's activities to date have focused on accreditation and evaluation. Due to the congested agenda associated with the accreditation of study programmes, there has been no time for strategic reflection and debate on conceptual materials. In its activities, the ACCR has gradually placed an increasing emphasis on evaluation, although, given the number of applications for accreditation, members of the ACCR and the members of the majority of work groups are significantly overworked. The outputs of evaluations and accreditations are mostly of a high quality and meet the adopted criteria. The accreditation process is also strictly based on evaluations.

In the future, the ACCR should systematically analyse the impact of the Bologna Process on the quality of bachelor's and master's courses, consider the possibility of more effective evaluations and accreditation, increase motivation to enhance quality, and search for stronger links between the evaluation and financing of public higher education institutions.

Measures taken:

This is a long-term strategy that requires the establishment of well-functioning internal evaluation systems at higher education institutions. In 2008, the ministry announced the Tertiary Education Evaluation project, to be implemented under the Education for Competitiveness Operational Programme (ECOP), which should create a model system covering the internal evaluation of quality for higher education institutions; this system should gradually be tested in a real environment at selected higher education institutions and steadily be put into practice.

The ACCR has focused on the comprehensive evaluation of higher education institutions as its main activity and is seeking to combine this on an increasing scale with assessments of applications for the accreditation and renewal of accreditation of study programmes and fields of study in respect of habilitation procedure and procedure for appointment as a professor.

In its work, the ACCR is also gradually trying (as documented by minutes of ACCR meetings) to discuss policy issues related to the quality of educational activities.

In this regard, the ACCR has drawn up suggestions on how to modify the competence of the ACCR legislatively in the upcoming new Tertiary Education Act.

b) Applications for accreditation should be submitted and processed by electronic means

Measures taken:

At the initiative of the ACCR, the ministry started work on a new version of the decree on the content of applications for the accreditation of study programmes. However, the preparation of the new decree has had to contend with a number of problems arising from the current Higher Education Act and other regulations (e.g. the Labour Code). The new decree will be drawn up in the context of

the Tertiary Education Act now being prepared, in respect of which the ACCR is making important change proposals.

II. The need for further discussion on the criteria applied to master's and doctoral study programmes and to applications for the accreditation fields of study for habilitation procedure and the procedure for appointment as a professor.

Measures taken:

At its meetings, the ACCR has devoted considerable attention to this issue and significantly differentiated the criteria (for bachelor's, master's, and doctoral programmes, for the fields of study in relation to habilitation and professorship procedure, and for individual areas of expertise); it has tightened these criteria considerably. This discussion will continue. The criteria must be sufficiently transparent. Higher education institutions must be familiarized with them in depth and should incorporate them into their internal evaluation systems and develop them to suit their own conditions. One step was already taken the ACCR put new criteria on their webpage.

III. Improving interaction between the ACCR and work groups.

In this field, the 2007 report noted that the ACCR and its work groups were trying to maximize the transparency of criteria and procedures. The criteria are published on the ACCR website. Work groups apply them in view of the situation in individual fields of study. In particular, it is necessary to set a level of requirements corresponding to the nature of the field of study. The criteria are respected in the activities of the ACCR and work groups. Certain difficulties, however, have arisen in that, especially among work groups, the criteria are not always interpreted in the same way. This issue is being addressed by the ACCR, which is seeking to ensure that criteria are not just formally observed. The problem of cross-field comparisons and the consistency of evaluations of different fields (science, technology, social science, art) also requires further attention. In some cases, the arguments put forward for the rejection of an application for the accreditation of study programmes is not sufficiently convincing, causing occasional confusion and incorrect interpretation by applicants.

Measures taken:

To achieve greater transparency in assessments of applications for accreditation and to ensure the unification of criteria, the ACCR held an expert seminar for members of all work groups (on 14 March 2008) aimed at harmonizing their awareness of the interpretation of ACCR criteria and exchanging experience of assessments of applications for accreditation between members of the various work groups.

The ACCR has produced a handbook for assessors of applications for the accreditation of study programmes and created a form for the evaluation of the programmes submitted. In the interests of maintaining maximum transparency, the handbook and the form are available on the ACCR website.

Challenges and recommendations for the upcoming period

Analysis of risk areas:

- work groups whose chairmen/woman are not ACCR members
- the rules of procedure of work groups – simplification and harmonization
- records and evidence to justify unfavourable decisions (with regard to possible appeals)
- the administration of work groups

Measures proposed:

- The term of office of a work group chairman/woman must be the same as the term of office of an ACCR member (i.e. a maximum of 6 plus 6 years). Increase the involvement of work group chairmen who are not ACCR members in the ACCR's activities, ensure their regular attendance at ACCR meetings.
- Review work groups' rules of procedure and, if appropriate, draft new model rules of procedure.
- Require that work groups submit to the Secretariat of ACCR all supporting documents relating to their meetings (i.e. minutes and all reviews)
- Examine the possibility of arranging external administrative support for work groups.

IV. Focus on raising awareness of ACCR activities among higher education institutions and the general public.

In this field, the 2007 report noted that it is necessary to look for the most appropriate ways of informing the public about the mission and activities of the ACCR and its work groups. In this respect, the ACCR website should also be used. From the perspective of quality, the English version of the ACCR website particularly needs to be improved.

Measures taken:

There has been a certain, although not fully satisfactory, improvement in the quality of the ACCR website. There are regular updates and the structure of information has been arranged more clearly. Materials, including promotional documents, are still missing that could provide a deeper insight into the ACCR's activities and its plans in the field of quality assurance in Czech higher education.

V. Continue discussing the involvement of students and professionals in the activities of work groups.

In this field, the 2007 report noted that the composition of the ACCR is satisfactory in terms of the structure and representation of fields of study. The representation of professionals and international experts, especially from the Slovak Republic and countries with developed systems of quality assurance in higher education, should be improved

Measures taken:

This problem is being addressed by regularly replacing ACCR members in accordance with the requirements of the Higher Education Act. The first positive changes in this respect emerged in September 2008, when an expert from the Slovak Republic, who is also a member of the Slovak Accreditation Commission, became a new member of the ACCR).

In cooperation with the Student Chamber of the Higher Education Council, there has been an increase in the representation of students in work groups; the ACCR has sound experience of cooperation with students recommended by the HEC Student Chamber. So far, there has been little headway in increasing the involvement of professionals, who often lack the motivation for such activity. Another obstacle is the lack of funds to adequately compensate them for the work and time they devote to this activity.

VI. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports should be approached to increase the ACCR's budget in view of the new challenges arising from the Czech Republic's participation in the Bologna Process and to improve the resources of the ACCR Secretariat

In this field, the 2007 report noted that, considering the difficulty of its work, the Secretariat of ACCR operates very well but that it is severely short-staffed. It backed up this finding by pointing out the increased requirements placed on the processing of evaluation materials, the growing demand for language skills to handle cooperation with international bodies (ENQA, CEEN, ECA, etc.) and the greater need to make the ACCR's activities more international.

Measures taken:

In 2008, the number of staff at the ACCR Secretariat was increased by one position, which can be regarded as an initial major positive step.

However, the independence and professionalization of the ACCR would benefit significantly if the method used to finance it were changed (e.g. if its budget were set as a percentage of the annual budget for public higher education institutions). The adoption of such a budgeting rule would lay the foundations for the professionalization of the ACCR in the future.

4 COMPLIANCE OF ACCREDITATION COMMISSION ACTIVITY WITH ESG

The internal evaluations of the ACCR in 2007 and 2008 helped to uncover a number of problems which the ACCR has worked intensively on fixing so that its activities comply with the terms of the ESG. This part of the report therefore analyses the current situation (i.e. the situation in 2009). It deals with the fulfilment of the second and third parts of the ESG, i.e. the ESG for external quality assurance area of tertiary education and the ESG for external quality assurance agencies.

4.1 Compliance with ESG Part 2: European standards for the external quality assurance of higher education

ESG 2. 1. Use of internal quality assurance procedures:

External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

In line with the terms of the ESG, the Higher Education Act requires all higher education institutions to carry out regular internal evaluations and publish the results. Responsibility for the quality of higher education is thus borne primarily by the higher education institution itself.

Consequent upon:

- Section 21(1)(f) and Section 42(2) of the Higher Education Act stipulates that a higher education institution is obliged to conduct regular evaluations of the institution's activities and publish the results,
- Section 17(2)(c) of the Higher Education Act stipulates that the charter of a higher education institution must include a definition of the content, conditions and frequency of evaluations of the institution's activities,
- Section 21(2)(b) of the Higher Education Act stipulates that the annual report on the activities of a higher education institution must include the results of evaluations of the institution's activities,
- Section 21(4) and Section 42(4) of the Higher Education Act stipulates that the annual activity report, the annual management report, the long-term plan of a public higher education institution and the results of evaluations of its activities must be publicly accessible.
- Section 47b (1) of the Higher Education Act stipulates that the education institutions are obliged to make public, at no profit to themselves, the doctoral, Master's, Bachelor's and advanced Master's theses that have been defended at their institutions, including the readers' reports and results of the defence.

All higher education institutions in the Czech Republic have created their own internal quality assurance systems. In its evaluations of higher education institutions and evaluations of the accredited activities of higher education institutions the ACCR draws on the results of those internal evaluations and verifies to what extent the internal quality assurance system has been developed, how effective it is, and to what extent it provides the higher education institution with appropriate feedback.

Consequent upon:

At the start of each evaluation, the ACCR requests the following documents from the higher education institution:

- An annual report for the previous period, containing the results of an evaluation of the institution's activities,
- An analysis and critical assessment of the institution's internal quality assurance system, information about the evaluation methodology (including student evaluation),
- A separate analysis of the most significant problems, as viewed by the institution's management, and any proposals on how to tackle such issues.

Visits by an ad hoc work group to a higher education institution (site visits) include on-the-spot verification of the institution's internal evaluation system and results. A discussion is held with the management of the higher education institution, teachers and students. Ad hoc groups also examine to what extent and at what quality the institution's internal information system is used for evaluation purposes.

In preparing the evaluation report, the ad hoc group examines the standard of the internal quality assurance system, whether it provides sufficient feedback, and whether the management of the higher education institution takes proper stock of the evaluation results (whether it views the problems realistically and whether the proposed solutions are appropriate).

A certain predicament in this field is that while all higher education institutions run their own internal evaluations in accordance with the Higher Education Act and the ESG, the evaluation system has not been developed to the same level at all institutions. It is envisaged that the internal evaluation systems will gradually be improved and harmonized in the main aspects (see the draft Long-term Plan of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports for 2011–2015). In this context, the ACCR believes it plays the role of a significant authority which not only externally evaluates the quality of higher education institutions, but also, through its activities, helps to enhance internal quality assurance systems.

ESG 2.2 Development of external quality assurance processes:

The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used

The most important objectives and processes of external quality assurance are set out in the Higher Education Act, in particular in the following provisions:

Section 79 defines the processes in the accreditation of study programmes

Section 82 defines the processes in the accreditation of the fields of habilitation procedure and procedure for appointment as a professor

Section 85 defines the processes on discovering deficiencies in the educational activities of higher education institutions

The objectives and processes of external quality assurance are developed further in the ACCR Statut approved by the Government of the Czech Republic. The statut has been drawn up to ensure the maximum transparency of the ACCR's activities and evaluation processes. The statut defines the following procedures in particular in the evaluation of higher education institutions (Article 3); the statut also incorporates the ACCR's rules of procedure (Article 12) and sets out how procedures are followed by ACCR work groups (Article 11).

Efforts at transparency and the consistent fulfilment of ESG conditions have led the ACCR to create and publish a series of documents defining the objectives, processes and criteria for external quality assurance. The content of all these documents was discussed by the ACCR at meetings attended by members of bodies representing higher education institutions (the Czech Rectors Conference and Higher Education Council). The most important documents are:

- Handbook for Assessors of Applications for the Accreditation of Study Programmes
- This document consists of two parts – methodology for the assessment of applications and forms. On publication in 2008, those submitting applications for accreditation (higher education institutions) were given an insight into the procedure applied by the ACCR when assessing applications
- ACCR Standards for Study Programmes
- ACCR Standards for Fields of Habilitation Procedure and Procedure for Appointment as a Professor
- General Questionnaire for the preparation of evaluation reports forming a basis for external evaluations
- Detailed criteria of work groups

All these documents are published on the ACCR website.

With regard to evaluations of the activities of a higher education institution, in addition to the decision to conduct the evaluation the ACCR also announces whether it is an evaluation of the institution's activities or an evaluation of the quality of the institution's accredited activities, and which specific activities will be the focus of the evaluation. The higher education institution is notified in advance of the composition of the special work group appointed for the evaluation so that it can express any

objections sufficiently in advance. It is also customary for the chairman of the special group to consult the principal objectives of the evaluation and its projected course with the rector of the higher education institution (or other representative delegated by the rector). The special work group's draft report on the evaluation, including the proposed conclusions and recommendations, is discussed at an ACCR meeting attended by a representative of the institution in question (the rector). The evaluation report is published together with the opinion, if any, of the representative of the institution regarding the findings or procedures followed by the ACCR.

ESG 2.3 Criteria for decisions:

Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.

The ACCR applies two types of criteria: criteria provided for by legislation and criteria set by the ACCR. In Section 79, the Higher Education Act defines a criterion for assessing whether the submitted study programme meets the requirements of the Act and whether it has sufficient human, material and information resources. The content of the study programme, together with other evidence presented in the application for accreditation, is laid down in the Decree of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports on the content of applications for the accreditation of study programmes. This Decree was prepared and published in 1999 in cooperation with the ACCR.

The 2005 amendment to the Higher Education Act reinforced transparency in the grounds of decisions by explicitly stating that any unfavourable opinion delivered by the ACCR must include reasons, indicating the specific points where the study programme failed to meet the criteria and on the basis of which the ACCR proposes that accreditation be refused. The same amendment to the Higher Education Act defined the possibility for the ACCR to review and mitigate previous conclusions and decisions. In Section 79(8), the Ministry was given the possibility, if the facts set out in the grounds of the ACCR's unfavourable opinion are inconsistent with the true situation or are contrary to the law, to call on the ACCR to initiate new procedure on the delivery of an opinion and to remedy the shortcomings in the grounds of the original opinion. Beyond this provision, it should be noted that all the Ministry's decisions on accreditation are issued in administrative proceedings and that higher education institutions may lodge an appeal, in the form of a "remonstrance", in accordance with the Rules of Administrative Procedure of the Czech Republic (Act No 500/2004).

The criteria set by the ACCR are based on criteria under the Higher Education Act, which are clarified and formulated more precisely. In general, the criteria are defined in two documents first drawn up and published in 2003 (and periodically amended and update since then):

- ACCR Standards for Study Programmes

This document describes the ACCR's general minimum requirements for the examination of applications for the accreditation of bachelor's, master's and doctoral study

programmes, the criteria for the accreditation of part-time types of studies, and the criteria for the accreditation of programmes to be pursued in a foreign language.

- ACCR Standards for Fields of Habilitation Procedure and Procedure for Appointment as a Professor

In addition to these general ACCR standards, specific criteria are published for certain categories of study programmes with related fields of study (e.g. for study programmes in the field of teacher training.).

The ACCR discusses the set criteria on an ongoing basis, including with the representatives of higher education institutions. The main subjects of discussion are issues regarding the difficulty of the criteria and their uniform interpretation. As part of drive for transparency, the ACCR focuses on exchanges of experience in applying the criteria between the players involved in the accreditation process and the evaluation process (including exchanges of experience between members of different work6 groups).

ESG 2.4 Processes fit for purpose:

All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

As has been mentioned above, the ACCR has an elaborate system of procedures and criteria that are clearly defined and published. However, they do not include any separately published criteria for the selection of experts for assessments of applications for accreditation or for evaluations of the activities of higher education institutions, with the exception of the legislative framework under the Higher Education Act and the ACCR statut.

Experts who are involved in the accreditation and evaluation process must meet the requirement of expertise and be generally accepted authorities in the field of higher education, science or the practical application of knowledge. Permanent work groups (for the examination of applications for accreditation) are largely made up of academics, to a lesser extent staff from research institutions, and to an even lesser extent professionals. Some permanent work groups also have foreign experts. Since 2006, students have also been members of special work groups (for assessments of the activities of higher education institutions). In this respect, the ACCR has built on very good cooperation with the Student Chamber of the Higher Education Council. In the appointment of members of work groups, the criterion of impartiality and non-bias is strictly observed. A person involved in the activities of institution being evaluated or contributing to a study programme that is the subject of assessment is automatically barred from becoming a member. A person from a workplace which is a direct competitor of an evaluated institution is not allowed to become a member. In order to prevent conflicts of interest, the ACCR statut (Article 9) provides that a work group member must not be a rector, vice-rector, dean or senior member of staff from an institution eligible to apply for the accreditation of a

study programme. Members of work groups are kept informed of ACCR criteria and processes, and aids, methodological guides and seminars are prepared for them. They consult accreditation issues with ACCR members and staff from the Secretariat of ACCR.

The effectiveness of the process of assessing applications for the accreditation of a study programme or field of habilitation procedure and procedure for appointment as a professor is safeguarded by a multi-level system of assessment. A submitted application is first assessed by one or more experts designated by the chairman of the work group. Assessment at this stage is strictly anonymous. In the second stage, based on reviews, the permanent work group deals with the application and recommends certain conclusions to the chairman. If the study programme in question extends into various expert fields, they are assessed by two or more work groups. In the third stage, the application is handled by the ACCR, which, after a discussion, delivers an opinion on accreditation. If the ACCR's opinion is not favourable, the Ministry cannot grant accreditation.

If an application is for the accreditation of a study programme, the ACCR explores whether the submitted proposal contravenes the Higher Education Act. When assessing the quality of a study programme, the ACCR uses its content as a basis. A fundamental factor is the consistency of outputs (the study objectives and the graduate profile) with the range of compulsory and mandatorily optional subjects, State examination subjects, and themes addressed by dissertations. It is also important to assess the human and information resources and, in the case of master's and doctoral programmes, the related research and creative activities of the institution.

The effectiveness of the process of assessing applications is also confirmed by two-level appellate procedures, as partly described above. If a higher education institution appeals before the Ministry issues a decision to refuse accreditation, the Ministry will ask the ACCR to re-examine the application and, if appropriate, changed its previous opinion. Following the issue of a decision, the institution applying for accreditation may file a "remonstrance" (appeal), the legitimacy of which is decided by the Minister in accordance with the Rules of Administrative Procedure of the Czech Republic (often in cooperation with the ACCR); an advisory body in this case is the Appellate Commission, which is wholly independent of the ACCR and composed primarily of external experts.

The process of evaluating the activities of higher education institutions explicitly meets the requirements of the ESG. The ACCR statut (Article 3) sets out five evaluation steps:

- the preparation of a questionnaire for the production of a self-assessment report
- the production of a self-assessment report by the institution to be evaluated
- an assessment of the submitted report and other requested information, a visit by the special work group to the institution (comprising a minimum of 3 experts)
- the consideration of the draft report, preliminary conclusions and recommendations at an ACCR meeting attended by representatives of the institution being evaluated

- publication of the final report, final conclusions and recommendations, including any opinion put forward by representatives of the institution being evaluated

After the evaluation, the ACCR may recommend the renewal of the accreditation of study programmes provided by the institution. If the ACCR finds deficiencies during its evaluation of the activities of a higher education institution, it recommends that the higher education institution rectify the situation, and sets a deadline for the submission of a report in order to assess how the higher education institution is meeting the ACCR's recommendations. The ACCR usually sets a time limit of one or two years for the production of a report on the implementation of the ACCR's recommendations. If, during an evaluation, the ACCR finds very serious shortcomings, it may propose to the Ministry that the restrictions laid down by the Higher Education Act (Section 58) be applied against the higher education institution.

ESG 2.5 Reporting:

Reports should be published and should be written in a style, which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.

Under the Higher Education Act, the ACCR is required to publish opinions on applications for accreditation and to publish reports, conclusions and recommendations stemming from its evaluations of the activities of higher education institutions.

The ACCR publishes evaluation reports on its website. Although primarily intended for representatives of the institution in question, they are also widely read by other recipients (students, course applicants, parents, journalists, etc.). A higher education institution has the right to request that the publication of the report be accompanied by an opinion drawn up by the institution's representative concerning the ACCR's findings or procedures. However, in practice such requests are rare since most conflicts are usually resolved when the draft report is consulted with the representatives of the higher education institution.

Evaluation reports are usually structured as follows:

- Introduction, description of the situation, specification of the issue (the purpose and criteria of the evaluation), organizational formalities behind the evaluation
- Description of the findings (depending on the focus of the evaluation and the areas of the institution's activities evaluated)
- Conclusions, summary, appraisal, positive and negative aspects (or where appropriate a SWOT analysis)
- Recommendations (for the institution's management), proposal of how to proceed

ESG 2.6 Follow-up procedures:

Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

The system of follow-up procedures is described under Standard 2.4. The Higher Education Act requires that the ACCR set follow-up procedures in case it finds deficiencies during the evaluation. Where deficiencies are found, the ACCR has a duty to recommend the higher education institution to remedy the situation, and set a deadline for the submission of a report detailing how the identified shortcomings are being fixed. The submission of such reports is usually required after one or two years as of the publication of the evaluation report. If more serious deficiencies are identified, the ACCR sets a shorter deadline for the submission of the relevant check report. The ACCR frequently applies the system of follow-up check reports to make sure that the recommendations related to the accreditation of study programmes are being implemented.

In general, in the last two years the ACCR has focused on developing and promoting awareness of the fact that external evaluations do not end with the publication of the report, because the purpose of an evaluation is not capture the static state but the standard of processes in place at the institution.

ESG 2.7 Periodic reviews:

External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.

The obligation to carry out periodic reviews is laid down in the Higher Education Act, which in Section 81 provides that accreditation may be granted for a maximum period of ten years. The ACCR, in accordance with its standards, recommends granting accreditation for four- or eight-year periods depending on the quality of the study programme submitted and the resources secured for it.

ESG 2.8 System-wide analyses:

Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments etc.

The ACCR regularly draws up and, at the end of March, publishes an annual report (this is an obligation arising from Article 4 of the ACCR statut). Up to 2006, the annual report mainly contained summary statistics. In 2007, in accordance with the implementation of the ESG, the ACCR decided that the core of the annual report would be an analysis summing up the findings as general trends and describing the main problems related to quality assurance in higher education. Since 2007, the

aggregate statistical reporting has only formed an annex to the main body of the report, which is an analysis of the system as a whole.

Given its position and the quantity of information at its disposal, the ACCR is frequently approached as an advisory body on matters relating to higher education. ACCR members actively participate in lectures and discussions on quality assurance processes and criteria; some of them also publish articles on this subject in journals. The preparation of specific publications would pose certain difficulties considering how busy the ACCR is, although such publishing (at least occasionally) would undoubtedly enrich the ACCR's activities.

4.2 Compliance with ESG Part 3: European standards for external quality assurance agencies

ESG 3.1 Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education:

The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

The implementation of Part 2 of the ESG is described in the previous chapter. Attention should also be paid to the ACCR's internal evaluation system and its outputs in 2007 and 2008, described in detail in this report.

ESG 3.2 Official status:

Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

The ACCR operates in accordance with the Higher Education Act (especially Section 8). The ACCR's statut was approved by a resolution of the Czech Government.

The Higher Education Act states that the ACCR's mission is to maintain the quality of higher education and to comprehensively examine the educational, scientific, developmental, artistic or other creative activities of higher education institutions

ESG 3.3 Activities:

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

In accordance with the Higher Education Act, the ACCR fulfils its mission in particular by evaluating the activities of higher education institutions and the quality of accredited activities, and by publishing the results of such evaluations. The ACCR delivers opinions on applications for the accreditation of study programmes, on applications for authorization to hold habilitation procedure and procedure for appointment as a professor, and on other matters identified in the Higher Education Act.

The ACCR acquired its current status in the system of quality assurance in higher education in 1999, when the Higher Education Act entered into force. However, even under previous legislation the ACCR conducted external evaluations of higher education institutions and was involved in the accreditation of post-graduate study programmes. In effect, then, the ACCR has been engaged in these activities continuously since its inception in 1990.

ESG 3.4 Resources:

Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.

The ACCR is composed of 21 members, who are mainly higher education teachers and researchers; three members of the ACCR are from abroad and one is a professional. In its internal evaluation, the ACCR found the representation of the individual areas of expertise to be satisfactory. Following the reconstruction of permanent work groups after the internal evaluation in 2008 (e.g. the transformation of the work groups for Geology and Geography), the number of these work groups and the distribution of the fields of study handled by them also appear to be satisfactory. The congestion of the ACCR as a whole (as a result of the system for the accreditation of individual study programmes and their fields) and the workload of certain specific members of the ACCR (responsible in particular for the very busy programmes – economics, pedagogy and psychology, art, social sciences) remain a problem. As the position of ACCR member is not a professional post and is held in addition to normal work duties at a parent workplace, the workload is very heavy. The administration of the ACCR's activities is the responsibility of the Secretariat of the ACCR. After the sweeping staff cuts in 2006, the situation took a small turn for the better in 2008 when another post was added to the Secretariat's structure. At present, the Secretariat of the ACCR consists of 5 members of staff.

The ACCR's activities are financed from State resources; the ACCR budget is part of the budget of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. The financial resources allocated to the ACCR are extremely limited and do not allow for the implementation of significant activities beyond the scope of normal

operations. Budget constraints also make it impossible to provide adequate compensation to ACCR members, members of work groups, and other evaluators. The fees are only token amounts; many activities are carried out on a voluntary basis. Certain difficulties are posed by the Ministry's complex internal mechanisms for the handling of funds. These mechanisms burden the already overworked Secretariat and prevent flexible responses to the ACCR's needs.

ESG 3.5 Mission statement:

Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

The objective and purpose of the ACCR's activities are defined in the Higher Education Act, the ACCR statut and other publicly available documents. Documents containing ACCR procedures and criteria have also been published. This issue has already been discussed in detail in a previous section of this report.

ESG 3.6 Independence:

Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

The ACCR's independence is defined in Section 83 of the Higher Education Act, which explicitly states that ACCR members are independent in the performance of their duties. To rule out possible conflicts of interest, the Act provides that the position of ACCR member is incompatible with the position of rector, vice-rector or dean. The ACCR statut extends this rule to the position of work group member, and also prohibits a senior member of staff of a higher education institution from being a member of the special work group evaluating the activities of that institution (Article 9). The ACCR's independence is supported by the method used to appoint its members; the chairman, deputy chairman and members of the ACCR are appointed by the Government on a proposal from the Education Minister. Before submitting a nomination, the Minister seeks recommendations from the Czech Rectors Conference, the Higher Education Council, the Research and Development Council and the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, and consults the nomination with them. ACCR members are appointed for a term of six years; they may be appointed for a maximum of two terms. To ensure the continuity of the ACCR's activities, one part of the ACCR's members is replaced on a regular two-year basis. The Higher Education Act guarantees that an ACCR member may be removed from office before his term only for reasons of long-term failure to participate in the ACCR's work or at his own request.

Members of work groups are appointed by the ACCR on a proposal from the chairman of the relevant work group. A list of such members is published on the ACCR website. External evaluators are chosen

by the chairman of the work group and remain anonymous for the duration of the evaluation. Their reviews are private, but may be sent to the evaluated institution as anonymous reviews by the chairman of the work group.

When decisions are taken on the accreditation of study programmes and fields of habilitation procedure and procedure for appointment as a professor, the ACCR's independence is strengthened by a "right of veto", as the Ministry cannot grant accreditation if the programme has not received a preceding favourable opinion from the ACCR. In the process for approving findings and recommendations from evaluations of higher education institutions, this takes place at ACCR meetings and is within the exclusive competence of the ACCR.

The ACCR takes decisions on all opinions, conclusions and recommendations as a collective body by means of a vote. The approval of the submitted proposals requires the presence of at least two thirds of the ACCR and the backing of an absolute majority of all ACCR members (ACCR Statute, Article 12).

Certain questions could be raised by the status of the Secretariat of the ACCR, which is organizationally integrated into the Research and Higher Education Group of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. Although this arrangement leads to minor complications in the management of the budget and the organization of the web presentation, it has no effect on the actual functioning of the ACCR and does not compromise its independence.

ESG 3.7 External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies:

The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include:

- a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;
- an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency;
- publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;
- a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

The ACCR's most important processes are defined in the ACCR Statut. Article 3 of the Statut, for example, regulates evaluations of the activities of higher education institutions (see the remarks on the implementation of guideline 2.4). The transparency of the accreditation process is also covered by the Ministry Decree on the content of applications for the accreditation of study programmes, which effectively serves as binding guidance for the preparation of the reports used in the ACCR's assessments. Site visits by special work groups to higher education institutions is a mandatory part of the process when evaluating the activities of such institutions, and an optional part of the process for assessing applications for accreditation. In evaluations of the activities of higher education institutions,

the work group also includes a student (or students). All the ACCR's opinions, conclusions and recommendations are published in the minutes of ACCR meetings and in separately published reports on the evaluation of higher education institutions. Published ACCR opinions include follow-up recommendations, the implementation of which is checked either by reference to a requested check report (depending on the seriousness of the problems identified, higher education institutions are usually required to prepare these reports after 1 or 2 years), or during the next re-accreditation of the study programme (accreditation is usually granted for a period of 4 to 8 years, before the expiry of which the higher education institution is required to apply for renewal).

The process also includes the appeal procedures defined in the Higher Education Act (Section 79(8)) and in the ACCR Statut (Article 1). "Remonstrance" procedure, which takes place in accordance with the Rules of Administrative Procedure of the Czech Republic, can be regarded as second-instance appellate procedure. Appellate procedures are described under Standard 2.4.

ESG 3.8 Accountability procedures:

Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

Certain procedures guaranteeing the ACCR's accountability are defined in the ACCR Statut. These include the ACCR rules of procedure, mechanisms to prevent conflicts of interest in cases where an ACCR member is appointed a rector, vice-rector or dean during his ACCR tenure, and mechanisms to prevent conflicts of interest in relating to members of work groups. Other procedures for ensuring accountability and transparency are applied by the ACCR beyond the scope of its statut: the publication of criteria and other internal materials (ACCR standards for study programmes and fields of habilitation procedure and procedure for appointment as a professor, the methodological tools for assessing applications for accreditation), the anonymity of assessors and the anonymous disclosure of reviews if an institution requests the perusal of such a review, a three-tiered assessment mechanism (evaluators – work groups – ACCR), a mechanism for the representatives of institutions to attend ACCR meetings and work group meetings as visitors (where an application is submitted for the accreditation of a type of study programme not previously offered by the institution), etc.

Following the adoption of the ESG, the ACCR (in a joint project with the Accreditation Commission of the Slovak Republic) drew up a system of periodic internal and external evaluations. The ACCR's first internal evaluation took place in 2007, the second in 2008. The evaluation reports were posted on the ACCR website. A detailed description of internal evaluation mechanisms is included elsewhere in this report.

Issues of accountability, the transparency of processes and mechanisms of internal quality are constantly subject to debate within the ACCR and are being continuously improved. If processes of accountability did not exist, the ACCR would be unable to fulfil its mission of maintaining quality in higher education, and its role of acting in this field as the top authority.

5. SWOT ANALYSIS

After considering all strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, the ACCR came up with the following SWOT analysis:

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independence and informal authority • Emphasises on the quality in the international context • Involvement in international structures, active participation in them • A long history of a well-functioning system of quality assurance in higher education and branch balance of the members of ACCR • Emphasises on the connection of educational processes and research • The potential to solve policy issues • The transparency of the assessment system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Congestion of the ACCR as a whole and the excessive workloads of certain members (economic fields) means there is insufficient time to address policy issues • Limited financial resources (a lack of funds to pay ACCR members, assessors and international experts) • Lack of time and funds for training evaluators and members of work groups • An inflexible system of funding within the Ministry • Obsolete information system, unsatisfactory website • Poor communication between the ACCR and the public, lack of adequate information outside the Ministry website
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in the importance of evaluating the activities of higher education institutions • Informal efforts to switch from programme to institutional accreditation • Well-initiated system of ACCR internal evaluation • Increase in transparency and consistency in decision-making • New definition of the ACCR's role with respect to the ESC in the forthcoming Tertiary Education Act • Creating of the partnership between ACCR and HEI and strengthening the role of participation of HIE in internal evaluation processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACCR activities are underfunded • Risk that quality assurance will become unmanageable due to an increase in the number of programmes run by institutions and their branches; this could conceivably lead to a reduction in quality • The increasing complexity of the system, greater emphasis on formalization and bureaucratization • ACCR activities burdened by the Ministry's internal procedures • Legislative deficiency (existing barriers in the system when some problem occurs)

APPENDICES

Documents in English

1. The Higher Education Act - ACT NO. 111/1998 (AMENDED AND CONSOLIDATED) ON HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND ON AMENDMENTS AND SUPPLEMENTS TO SOME OTHER ACTS (regulations concerning accreditation processes)
2. Statute of the Accreditation Commission from 2004
3. Annual Report of the Accreditation Commission for 2008
4. 42 Decree of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of 10 February 1999 on the content of applications for the accreditation of study programmes
5. Accreditation Commission standards for assessing applications for the granting, expansion and renewal of accreditation for study programmes and fields of study
6. Recommended standards of the Accreditation Commission for the assessment of applications for the accreditation of fields of habilitation procedure and procedure for appointment as a professor
7. The Questionnaire for Students for external evaluation of HEI
8. Questionnaire for the internal evaluation of the quality assurance of activities carried out by the Accreditation Commission, established under Act No 111/1998 on higher education and amending other laws – June 2007

Documents in Czech

9. Metodická pomůcka pro zpracování části žádosti o udělení státního souhlasu - bakalářský nebo magisterský studijní program. In Czech.
10. Náležitosti žádosti o akreditace, jejich rozšíření a prodloužení platnosti u bakalářských a magisterských studijních programů - platné od 1.1.2006. In Czech.
11. Náležitosti žádosti o akreditace, jejich rozšíření a prodloužení platnosti u doktorských studijních programů - platné od 1.12.2007. In Czech.
12. Požadavky pro akreditaci studijního programu /studijního oboru s výukou v cizím jazyce.
13. Náležitosti žádosti o akreditaci oboru habilitačního nebo profesorského řízení. In Czech.
14. Příručka pro posuzovatele: posouzení žádosti o akreditaci studijního programu. In Czech.
15. Zápisy ze zasedání AK jsou dostupné na <http://www.msmt.cz/vzdelavani/zapisy-ze-zasedani>. In Czech.
16. Zprávy AK o hodnocení činnosti vysokých škol jsou dostupné na <http://www.msmt.cz/vzdelavani/zpravy-z-hodnoceni-a-prijata-doporuceni>. In Czech.
17. Ukázka dotazníku AK pro zpracování sebehodnotící zprávy vysoké školy. In Czech.