



European Council of Leading Business Schools

ECLBS

Accreditation Handbook

General Handbook for Programme Accreditation — All Cycles

Foreword

The European Council of Leading Business Schools and Institutions (ECLBS) is a non-profit association established in 2013, dedicated to advancing the quality of vocational and higher education institutions in Europe and worldwide. This Handbook is the single authoritative statement of how ECLBS conducts programmatic accreditation, what it expects of applicant institutions, and how it reaches, publishes and reviews its decisions.

This edition consolidates and supersedes all previous ECLBS programmatic accreditation guidelines, assessment guides and procedural notes. Where an earlier document conflicts with this Handbook, this Handbook prevails.

The Handbook is accompanied by four subsidiary documents which form part of the same regulatory set:

- **ECLBS Accreditation Handbook — Bachelor Programmes** (first cycle / EQF level 6)
- **ECLBS Accreditation Handbook — Master Programmes** (second cycle / EQF level 7)
- **ECLBS Accreditation Handbook — Doctoral Programmes** (third cycle / EQF level 8)
- **ECLBS Accreditation Handbook — Non-Degree Programmes** (short courses, micro-credentials, certificates, awards, diplomas, vocational and advanced diplomas)
- **ECLBS Self-Assessment Report (SAR) Guidelines**
- **ECLBS Programmatic Accreditation Application Form**

Part I — ECLBS, its Mandate and its Standards

1. About ECLBS

ECLBS is governed by a board of trustees drawn from several countries, representing both state and private organisations, each with distinct terms of reference. In cooperation with the ALCC Chamber of Commerce in Riga, Latvia, ECLBS also operates as a business organisation promoting trade, networking and regional economic development.

2. Purpose and scope of this Handbook

This Handbook:

- defines the eligibility conditions for admission to an ECLBS accreditation procedure;
- sets out the architecture of the ECLBS quality criteria and the rating scale used to assess them;
- describes each procedural step from enquiry to decision, publication and follow-up;
- states the decision categories, accreditation periods, conditions regime and seal entitlements;
- establishes the rights of the applicant institution, including the right of response, appeal and complaint.

It applies to **programmatic accreditation** of study programmes at all three Bologna cycles, and to non-degree provision (diplomas, awards, certificates, structured courses) where ECLBS accepts such provision into procedure. ECLBS offers programmatic accreditation only. It does not accredit institutions, and no ECLBS decision, seal or certificate constitutes accreditation, recognition or endorsement of an institution as a whole.

3. Objects of accreditation

ECLBS accredits:

- **Bachelor programmes** (first cycle, EQF level 6);
- **Master programmes** (second cycle, EQF level 7), including MBA and Executive MBA programmes;
- **Doctoral programmes** (third cycle, EQF level 8), including structured doctoral programmes, doctoral schools and individual doctoral routes;
- **Non-degree provision** — short courses, micro-credentials, certificates, awards, diplomas, and vocational or advanced diplomas — where a defined qualification objective, curriculum, assessment scheme and quality assurance arrangement exist. Non-degree provision is assessed against the criteria set in the *ECLBS Accreditation Handbook — Non-Degree Programmes*, which operates a four-category proportionality mechanism and its own decision thresholds; those provisions modify this Handbook for non-degree procedures.

Programmes may be submitted **individually** or in a **cluster**. A cluster comprises programmes that share substantial curricular, structural, staffing or governance elements, and is assessed in a single procedure producing a single report with programme-specific findings and a separate decision for each programme.

4. Types of procedure

Type	Applies when	Indicative accreditation period
Interim accreditation (concept accreditation)	The concept of a study programme is complete and documented, but the programme has not yet started or has no enrolled cohort	1–3 years
Initial accreditation	The programme is running but has not previously been accredited by ECLBS	2–5 years
Re-accreditation	The programme currently holds, or has recently held, ECLBS accreditation	3–5 years
Premium Seal accreditation	An established programme with graduates achieves an exceptional result (see §17)	6–7 years

A programme without graduates is assessed against **the same criteria** as an established programme. The absence of outcome data does not lower the standard; it changes the evidence base, and the panel assesses the robustness of the institution's plans, projections and monitoring arrangements instead of realised results.

5. Normative framework

ECLBS criteria are derived from, and are to be read consistently with:

- the **Bologna Declaration** and the Bologna Process framework;
- the **Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015)**, in particular Part 1 (internal quality assurance) as the reference for institutional expectations, and Parts 2 and 3 as the reference for ECLBS's own conduct;
- the **Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA)** and the **Dublin Descriptors**;
- the **European Qualifications Framework (EQF)** and applicable **national qualifications frameworks**;
- the **ECTS Users' Guide**;
- the **Lisbon Recognition Convention** and its subsidiary texts, where ratified by the relevant state;
- the **Diploma Supplement** format;
- the **EQUAL MBA Guidelines**, for MBA and Executive MBA provision;
- the **Salzburg Principles and Recommendations** and the **European Charter for Researchers**, for third-cycle provision;
- **ISCED 2011 / ISCED-F 2013** for level and field classification;
- applicable **national law and state authorisation requirements** in the jurisdiction of delivery.

Where a national requirement is stricter than an ECLBS criterion, the national requirement applies and compliance with it is assessed. Where an ECLBS criterion is stricter, the ECLBS criterion applies for the purposes of the ECLBS seal.

6. Principles of ECLBS accreditation

- **Independence.** Decisions are taken by the ECLBS Accreditation and Certification Committee (EACC) free from institutional, commercial, political or governmental influence. Payment of charges confers no entitlement to a positive outcome.
- **Integrity and impartiality.** Every expert and staff member involved declares interests and withdraws where impartiality could reasonably be doubted.
- **Peer review.** Assessment is performed by qualified peers in constructive-critical dialogue with the institution, not by desk audit alone.
- **Transparency.** Criteria, procedures, decision rules, appeal routes and outcomes are published in advance and applied consistently.
- **Proportionality.** The depth of scrutiny is proportionate to the programme's scale, cycle, mode of delivery and risk profile.
- **Student participation.** A student member sits on every review panel with full rights.
- **Enhancement orientation.** Accreditation is a development instrument. Recommendations are issued to strengthen provision, not only to record deficiency.
- **Non-discrimination.** Procedures are conducted without discrimination on any ground.
- **Confidentiality.** Information obtained is used only for the procedure, subject to the publication rules in §20.
- **Fitness for purpose and fitness of purpose.** Both the appropriateness of the programme's objectives and the adequacy of their implementation are assessed.

Part II — Eligibility and Admission to Procedure

7. Membership requirement

Applications for ECLBS programmatic accreditation are open only to members of ECLBS.

The applicant institution must:

- hold current ECLBS membership in good standing at the date of application;
- maintain that membership without interruption throughout the procedure; and
- maintain that membership throughout the validity period of any accreditation granted.

Applications from non-members are not admitted to procedure and are returned. Lapse, suspension or termination of membership during a procedure suspends the procedure; lapse, suspension or termination of membership during an accreditation period is a ground for suspension or withdrawal of the accreditation and of the right to use the ECLBS Quality Seal (see §22).

8. Institutional eligibility

In addition to membership, admission to an ECLBS accreditation procedure requires that the institution is:

- a **public institution**, or
- a **state-approved or state-authorised institution**, or
- an institution **currently in a documented process of state approval or authorisation**.

Without state approval or authorisation of the higher education institution, or evidence of an active approval process, no ECLBS accreditation procedure is conducted. The institution must be legally entitled, in its jurisdiction, to deliver the programme and to award the qualification submitted.

9. Eligibility of the programme

The programme submitted must have:

- a defined qualification objective and intended learning outcomes referenced to a qualifications framework;
- a complete curriculum with module or course descriptions;
- an assessment and examination scheme with binding regulations;
- identified staffing and resources sufficient for delivery;
- legally binding study and examination regulations, or, for interim accreditation, complete draft regulations scheduled for approval.

Where any part of the programme is delivered by a partner, franchisee, validated centre or other third party, the arrangement must be documented by a written agreement, and the applicant institution must demonstrate that it retains responsibility for academic standards.

10. Financial arrangements

The accreditation procedure is financed by the applicant institution. The institution bears:

- the **submission fee**, payable on lodging the application;

- the **process fee**, covering the administration and coordination of the procedure;
- the **visit costs**, covering travel, accommodation, subsistence and, for online visits, technical arrangements;
- the **expert fees**, covering the honoraria of the review panel members; and
- upon a positive decision, the **accreditation fee**, covering the certificate, the seal licence and the publication and register entries.

Amounts, currency, payment schedule, cancellation terms and any charges for extensions, follow-up procedures, appeals or substantial-change reviews are published on the ECLBS website, www.eclbs.eu, which is the authoritative source and is updated from time to time. The amounts applicable to a procedure are those published at the date the accreditation contract is concluded, and remain fixed for the duration of that procedure. The contract records the amounts so applicable.

Evaluation of the procedure does not commence until the self-assessment report has been submitted and the charges then due have been settled.

Part III — The Criteria Framework

11. Dimensions of programme quality

ECLBS assesses programme quality along three dimensions:

- **Content** — Does the programme pursue an appropriate qualification objective, and do its contents and competences align with the relevant national, European or other qualifications framework?
- **Form** — Is the formal configuration of the programme consistent with the applicable standards: admission requirements, degree awarded, modularisation, workload calculation, credit allocation and examination design?
- **Resources** — Are sufficient resources available to deliver the programme: qualified academic and administrative staff, facilities, learning environments, technology and access to literature?

12. Architecture of the criteria

For Bachelor and Master programmes, the criteria are organised in five chapters, preceded by a general information chapter that is descriptive and not itself assessed:

Chapter	Title
0	General information (descriptive)
1	Objectives
2	Admission
3	Contents, structure and didactical concept
4	Academic environment and framework conditions
5	Quality assurance and documentation

The Bachelor and Master criteria set comprises **54 criteria**. Of these, **29 are essential criteria in every procedure**, marked with an asterisk (*). A further **four criteria become essential where the programme type makes them applicable** — professional experience for master programmes requiring it; student support in distance learning for blended and distance programmes; cooperation with academic institutions for cooperative, double and joint programmes; and cooperation with enterprises for vocational, educational and franchise programmes.

Doctoral programmes are assessed against a distinct criteria set of **47 criteria, of which 35 are essential**, organised in six chapters and set out in the *ECLBS Accreditation Handbook — Doctoral Programmes*.

Non-degree provision is assessed against a further distinct criteria set of **44 criteria, of which 32 are essential**, organised in six chapters and set out in the *ECLBS Accreditation Handbook — Non-Degree Programmes*. That Handbook classifies each submission into one of four categories by notional learning hours and applies a defined subset of the criteria to the two smallest categories.

13. The rating scale

Each criterion is rated on the following scale:

Rating	Meaning
Exceptional	The requirement is fulfilled at a standard that constitutes international good practice and is demonstrably exemplary
Exceeds quality	The requirement is fulfilled and the additional expectations stated under

Rating	Meaning
requirements	“Exceeds quality requirements” are met
Meets quality requirements	The requirement stated under “Meets quality requirements” is fulfilled
Does not meet quality requirements	The requirement is not fulfilled
Not relevant	The criterion does not apply to this programme; the panel records the reason

Each criterion in the cycle-specific handbooks is expressed as (a) a question or instruction to the institution, (b) a “Meets quality requirements” benchmark, and (c) where applicable an “Exceeds quality requirements” benchmark. A rating of *Not relevant* must be justified in the assessment report and is neutral in the decision arithmetic.

14. Non-negotiable criteria

Two criteria are non-negotiable for Bachelor and Master programmes:

- **Criterion 1.1 — Objectives of the study programme**
- **Criterion 3.1.1 — Logic and conceptual coherence of the curriculum**

Both must be rated at least *Meets quality requirements*. **Conditions may never be imposed on these two criteria.** If either is not met, accreditation is refused.

For doctoral programmes the non-negotiable criteria are **D1.1 (objectives of the doctoral programme)**, **D3.2 (supervision arrangements)** and **D5.1 (thesis requirements and originality)**. For non-degree provision the non-negotiable criteria are **N1.1 (objectives and intended learning outcomes)**, **N1.5 (truthful designation of the qualification)** and **N3.1 (curriculum coherence and alignment to outcomes)**.

Part IV — The Procedure

15. Overview of procedural steps

Step	Higher education institution	ECLBS
1	Confirms ECLBS membership; contacts ECLBS	Confirms eligibility and membership standing
2	Attends preparatory meeting (optional)	Explains criteria, evidence expectations and timetable
3	Submits completed application form	Checks admissibility; calculates procedural costs; issues offer
4	Concludes contract; proposes visit dates	Assigns project manager; confirms schedule
5	Drafts and submits self-assessment report with appendices	Checks completeness; requests missing items
6	Reviews and comments on proposed panel	Compiles review panel; discloses composition; manages conflicts of interest
7	Organises the visit internally and with ECLBS	Plans and confirms the visit; forwards additional information requests
8	Hosts the visit; provides interlocutors and documents	Panel conducts visit; gives oral initial feedback
9	Receives draft assessment report	Panel drafts report without decision recommendation
10	Submits written statement on the draft	Panel considers statement; finalises report with recommendation
11	—	EACC takes the accreditation decision
12	Receives report and, where applicable, certificate and conditions	Publishes assessment report and register entry
13	Provides proof of fulfilment of conditions, if any	Verifies fulfilment; EACC confirms; documents amended

16. The individual steps

16.1 Enquiry, application and contract

The institution completes and returns the **ECLBS Programmatic Accreditation Application Form**. ECLBS then issues a non-binding quotation and agrees the desired timetable. A preparatory discussion on the content and stages of the procedure is available before application and is recommended for first-time applicants.

Admissibility screening covers membership standing, state approval or authorisation, legal entitlement to award, and completeness of the application.

16.2 Self-assessment report

On conclusion of the contract, the institution prepares a self-assessment report (SAR) describing all relevant aspects of the programme. Programmes submitted as a cluster are described in a single SAR.

The SAR follows the structure of the applicable cycle handbook: *Objectives; Admission; Contents, Structure and Didactical Concept; Academic Environment and Framework Conditions; Quality*

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Assurance and Documentation — or, for doctoral programmes, the six-chapter doctoral structure.

Length. The SAR, excluding appendices, must not exceed **80 pages**. In a cluster procedure, **20 additional pages per further programme** are acceptable. For non-degree provision in Categories A and B, the limit is **40 pages**, with 10 additional pages per further provision in a cluster.

Prior procedures. The institution reports the results of any accreditation or evaluation procedure concluded in the **last three years**, and the measures taken in response. ECLBS may take these into account.

Detailed drafting guidance and the full appendix list are given in the *ECLBS Self-Assessment Report (SAR) Guidelines*.

On submission of the SAR and settlement of the charges then due, ECLBS assigns a **project manager** as the institution's contact and opens the evaluation. The first step is a completeness check; missing documents or information are notified in good time for submission.

16.3 Composition of the review panel

The panel is composed so that all areas relevant to the procedure are covered: subject-specific, structural and formal, and social aspects.

An ECLBS review panel comprises **at least four members**:

- **two academic experts**, of whom one holds a professorship at a university and one at a university of applied sciences or an equivalent professionally oriented institution;
- **one expert from professional practice** in the relevant field;
- **one student representative**, enrolled in or recently graduated from a programme at a comparable level, who is independent of the institution under review;

together with **one country or system expert** familiar with the higher education area concerned, where the panel members do not already provide that expertise.

The panel is complemented by:

- an **expert in distance and online learning**, for blended-learning or distance-learning programmes;
- an **expert in cooperative studies**, for cooperative, double, joint or franchise programmes;
- for **doctoral procedures**, at least two members who are active doctoral supervisors with a current research record, one of whom chairs the panel;
- for **non-degree procedures**, at least one member with current standing in the occupation or sector addressed, and, where the provision includes a practical, technical, laboratory, clinical or workshop component, one member competent to inspect those facilities and their safety arrangements.

ECLBS maintains a pool of proven international experts from academia and professional practice. All panel members are trained in the ECLBS criteria and procedure, and sign confidentiality and conflict-of-interest declarations.

Conflict of interest. A person may not serve on a panel who has, within the preceding five years, been employed by or held office at the institution; has taught, examined, consulted or held a contractual relationship with it; has been a candidate for appointment there; is a close relative of a person in a relevant role; or has any financial interest in the outcome.

The institution is informed of the proposed composition in good time and may object on grounds of possible partiality, stating reasons. A well-founded objection results in modification of the panel. **The final decision on the composition of the panel rests with ECLBS.**

16.4 Assessment of the self-assessment report

On confirmation of the panel, the members receive the SAR and appendices for assessment. Requests for additional information are forwarded to the institution in good time through the project manager. All communication between the panel and the institution passes through the project manager.

16.5 The visit (on-site or online)

The visit is normally conducted **no sooner than twelve weeks** after submission of the self-documentation, to allow the panel adequate preparation time.

The panel interviews, in **separate** sessions:

- institutional management;
- programme management and the programme director;
- full-time and part-time teaching staff;
- students of the programme;
- administrative and support staff;
- graduates, where the programme has produced them;
- representatives of cooperating institutions and enterprises, where relevant.

Different interlocutors must be chosen for the individual interviews; duplication caused by individuals holding several functions must be avoided. **Student interlocutors must not be employed by the institution in any capacity** (for example as tutor or student assistant), and must be selected without the involvement of teaching staff who assess them.

The visit normally lasts **two to four days**, and longer where more than three programmes are assessed. It concludes with **oral initial feedback** from the panel on the conformity of the programme with the relevant requirements. This feedback is preliminary and does not anticipate the EACC decision. **Online visits.** An online or hybrid visit may be agreed where justified. The institution must ensure equivalent access to interlocutors, documentation and facilities, including a live or recorded tour of teaching, laboratory and library facilities. Confidentiality of student interviews must be technically assured.

Schedule and composition of the meetings depend on the programme profile and the availability of interlocutors and are agreed between the institution and the project manager.

In urgent cases, the visit may exceptionally be scheduled before submission of the SAR; the project leader for programme accreditation must be contacted as early as possible.

16.6 The assessment report

Drawing on the SAR, any additional information and the insights gained during the visit, the panel drafts an assessment report. The report follows the structure of the applicable cycle handbook and contains, for each criterion, the panel's rating, the evidence relied on and the reasoning. It states any proposed conditions and recommendations, and concludes with a decision recommendation to the EACC.

The draft report is sent to the institution **without the decision recommendation** for a written statement. The institution may identify aspects it considers inaccurately represented or assessed and supply corrective evidence. The panel reconsiders the criticised aspects and amends the report where warranted, before the report is finalised and forwarded to the EACC together with the institution's statement.

16.7 Timing

Depending on prior agreement, **four to six months** may elapse between the visit and the EACC decision. The EACC meets **two to four times a year**; meeting dates are published on the ECLBS website. Institutions should indicate on conclusion of the contract which EACC meeting they are targeting, so that a schedule can be built and resources reserved.

Part V — Decision, Outcomes and Follow-up

17. Decision-making and outcome of the procedure

The EACC considers the assessment report and the institution's statement and decides on the accreditation. The decision categories are:

- **Accreditation**
- **Accreditation with conditions**
- **Refusal of accreditation**

A positive outcome results in accreditation for the following periods:

Outcome	Accreditation period
Accreditation with conditions	1–2 years
Interim accreditation, or accreditation with conditions	1–3 years
Initial accreditation	2–5 years
Re-accreditation	3–5 years
Premium Seal accreditation	6–7 years

The EACC determines the exact period within the applicable range, having regard to the maturity of the programme, the robustness of its internal quality assurance, the number and nature of any conditions, and the stability of staffing and resources. The reasons for the period set are recorded in the decision.

18. Decision rules

Essential criteria. Every essential criterion () *must achieve at least* Meets quality requirements*. Where an essential criterion is not met, a corresponding **condition** is imposed.

Other criteria. A non-essential criterion rated *Does not meet quality requirements* does not jeopardise accreditation and gives rise to a **recommendation**.

Award of the ECLBS Quality Seal (Bachelor and Master). The seal is awarded where:

- a maximum of **seven** essential criteria are not met; **and**
- criteria **1.1** and **3.1.1** are both met.

Refusal (Bachelor and Master). Accreditation is refused where:

- more than seven essential criteria are not met; **or**
- criterion 1.1 or criterion 3.1.1, or both, are not met.

Following a refusal, a new application for the same programme may be lodged only after a **blocking period of one year** from the date of the decision.

Doctoral programmes. The seal is awarded where a maximum of **five** essential criteria are not met and criteria D1.1, D3.2 and D5.1 are all met. Refusal follows where more than five essential criteria are not met, or where any of D1.1, D3.2 or D5.1 is not met. The same one-year blocking period applies.

Non-degree provision. The seal is awarded where criteria N1.1, N1.5 and N3.1 are all met and the number of unmet essential criteria does not exceed **four** for Categories A and B, or **six** for Categories C and D. Refusal follows where the applicable ceiling is exceeded or any non-negotiable criterion is not met. The Premium Seal is available only for Categories C and D. The same one-year blocking period applies.

Award of the ECLBS Premium Quality Seal. The Premium Seal is the highest level of ECLBS programmatic accreditation. It is awarded, for an accreditation period of **6–7 years**, only where **all** of the following are satisfied:

- the programme is **established and has produced graduates**;
- **no essential criterion** is rated *Does not meet quality requirements*;
- a maximum of **five non-essential criteria** are rated *Does not meet quality requirements*;
- the assessment report contains **no conditions**; and
- the panel records that results in study and teaching **considerably exceed** the ECLBS quality criteria.

The Premium Seal provides prospective students, current students, graduates, other higher education institutions and employers with reliable orientation on the outstanding quality of the programme.

19. Conditions and recommendations

Deadline. The deadline for meeting conditions is normally **twelve months** from the date of the decision. In well-founded cases it may be reduced or extended by a maximum of **six months**.

Proof of fulfilment. Fulfilment must be evidenced within the deadline, normally by submitting the relevant documents — for example an amended admission regulation, a revised module description, an appointment letter or a signed cooperation agreement. The documents, together with a statement by the review panel, are submitted to the EACC for confirmation and discussed at its next meeting.

Where the conditions are **exclusively formal** — for example a pending formal approval of examination regulations already assessed as adequate in substance — ECLBS processes the documents without consulting the panel.

If the EACC regards the conditions as met, this is recorded in a decision, and the accreditation certificate and the assessment report are amended accordingly.

Extension. Where the institution cannot demonstrate fulfilment within the deadline, a **single** application for extension (maximum six months) may be granted in reasonable cases.

Failure. If the conditions are not met within the original or extended deadline, the accreditation of the programme is **withdrawn**.

Recommendations are not binding, but the institution is required to report on their implementation in the next procedure, and failure to have considered them is taken into account at re-accreditation.

20. Certificate, seal and publication

On a positive decision, ECLBS issues the assessment report and the accreditation certificate to the institution. The certificate states the programme title, degree awarded, mode of study, delivery location(s), the type of accreditation, the accreditation period with start and expiry dates, and any conditions with their deadlines.

The complete assessment report is published on the ECLBS website, together with a register entry recording the decision, the period, the conditions and their status. Refusals and withdrawals are recorded in the register.

Use of the seal. The seal may be used only in relation to the accredited programme, only for the period of validity, and only in the form supplied by ECLBS. It may not be used to imply institutional accreditation, and it may not be used by a partner or franchisee in relation to unaccredited provision. Misuse is a ground for withdrawal.

21. Monitoring and substantial changes

The institution must notify ECLBS without undue delay, and in any event within 30 days of the internal approval of the change, of any substantial change to an accredited programme, including:

- change of degree title, programme name or qualification level;
- change of more than **one third** of the curriculum or of the credit structure;
- change of mode of delivery (for example from on-campus to distance or blended);
- addition or change of a delivery location, partner, franchisee or awarding arrangement;
- loss or material change of state approval or authorisation;
- departure of the programme director or a material reduction in the teaching complement;
- material deterioration in financing, facilities or learning resources.

Notification is made on **Form M1 (Substantial Change Notification)**.

ECLBS assesses whether the change is compatible with the existing accreditation. It may accept the change, impose conditions, require a supplementary review, shorten the accreditation period, or require a new procedure.

A short **annual monitoring return** may be required, comprising updated statistical data, evaluation results and confirmation that no substantial change has occurred. The return is made on **Form M2 (Annual Monitoring Return)**.

22. Suspension and withdrawal

Accreditation may be suspended or withdrawn where:

- conditions are not met within the deadline or extended deadline;
- ECLBS membership lapses, is suspended or is terminated;
- state approval or authorisation is lost or lapses;
- a substantial change renders the accredited profile materially inaccurate and is not remedied;
- the institution provided false, incomplete or misleading information in the procedure;
- the seal is misused;
- the institution obstructs monitoring or a supplementary review.

Withdrawal is decided by the EACC after the institution has been given the opportunity to comment, normally within 30 days. A withdrawal decision is subject to appeal under §23. Students enrolled at the date of withdrawal are, so far as the institution is able, to be enabled to complete the programme; the institution must present teach-out arrangements.

23. Right of statement, appeal and complaint

Direct communication. ECLBS strongly recommends direct communication if issues arise during the procedure. Many matters are resolved as the procedure progresses and misunderstandings can be clarified.

Statement on the draft report. Within the response to the draft assessment report, the institution may

highlight aspects it considers inaccurately represented or assessed. Before the EACC decides, the panel revisits the criticised aspects and may amend the report.

Appeal. If the institution considers that the assessment report and its recommendations remain inadequately reasoned, it may submit a **reasoned appeal to ECLBS within one month** of receiving written notification of the decision. The EACC, after obtaining a statement from the experts, reconsiders the programme and the institution's submissions. If the committee accepts the institution's arguments, the accreditation decision may be amended directly.

If no agreement is reached, the **ECLBS Appeal Committee** examines the procedure, its outcomes and the grievances raised, and issues a reasoned recommendation to the EACC in an appeal procedure. On the basis of that recommendation the EACC reconvenes and reaches a final resolution at a subsequent meeting.

The Appeal Committee is composed of persons who were not involved in the original procedure or decision. Its members do not include any member of the review panel concerned.

Complaints. Complaints about the conduct of a procedure, the behaviour of experts or staff, or adherence to published timelines are made in writing to the ECLBS Secretariat and are handled separately from appeals against decisions. A complaint does not suspend the procedure.

24. Data protection and records

Personal data collected in a procedure are processed only for the purposes of the procedure, on the applicable legal basis, and are retained in accordance with the ECLBS retention schedule. Panel members and staff are bound by confidentiality. Documents supplied by the institution are not disclosed to third parties except as required for publication under §20 or by law.

25. Internal quality assurance of ECLBS

Consistent with ESG Parts 2 and 3, ECLBS:

- publishes its criteria, procedures and decisions;
- trains, briefs and evaluates its experts, and maintains their declarations of interest;
- collects feedback from institutions and panels after every procedure;
- reviews this Handbook and the criteria sets on a **defined cycle of not more than five years**, and on an interim basis where the normative framework changes;
- consults students, employers, institutions and academic staff in that review;
- monitors the consistency of decisions across panels and cycles;
- publishes a periodic activity report.

Part VI — Governance: the bodies and the people

26. The ECLBS Accreditation and Certification Committee (EACC)

26.1 Status and function

The EACC is the decision-making body for all ECLBS accreditation procedures. It is autonomous in its decision-making. Neither the ECLBS board of trustees, nor the Secretariat, nor any member institution, may instruct the EACC as to the outcome of a procedure or vary a decision once taken, except through the appeal route in §23.

26.2 Composition

The EACC comprises not fewer than seven and not more than eleven voting members:

Seat	Number	Requirement
Academic members	3–5	Professorial or equivalent standing; at least one from a university and one from a professionally oriented institution; between them covering the main fields in which ECLBS accredits
Professional practice member	1–2	Senior standing in a relevant profession or sector
Student member	1	Currently enrolled or graduated within the preceding two years; full voting rights
Quality assurance member	1	Experience in external quality assurance in another agency or national system
International member	1	Resident and active outside the country of the ECLBS seat

A majority of voting members must be independent of ECLBS membership institutions in the sense that they hold no employment, office or contract with the institution under consideration.

26.3 Appointment and terms of office

Members are appointed by the ECLBS board of trustees on the recommendation of a nominations panel, against published criteria, for a term of **three years, renewable once**. Terms are staggered so that not more than one third of the committee changes in any year. The chair is elected by the members from among their number for a term of three years. The student member is appointed for **two years, renewable once**, on the nomination of a student body or through open call.

A member may be removed before the end of a term only for incapacity, sustained non-attendance, breach of the code of conduct in §30, or conviction of an offence bearing on fitness to serve, by decision of the board of trustees after the member has been heard.

26.4 Meetings, quorum and voting

Matter	Rule
Frequency	Not fewer than two and not more than four ordinary meetings a year; dates published on the ECLBS website not less than twelve months in advance
Extraordinary meetings	May be convened by the chair, or on the written request of one third of members, with fourteen days' notice
Quorum	A majority of voting members, and in every case including at least one academic member, the student member or a nominated student alternate, and either the

Matter	Rule
	professional practice member or the quality assurance member
Papers	Circulated not less than fourteen days before the meeting
Voting	One member, one vote. Decisions by simple majority of those present and voting; the chair has a casting vote only in the event of a tie
Abstention	Recorded; an abstaining member is counted for quorum but not among those voting
Recusal	A member with a declared conflict withdraws from the room for the item, is not counted in the quorum for that item, and does not receive the papers
Written procedure	Permitted only for confirmation of fulfilled conditions and for uncontested procedural matters, never for a first accreditation decision or a refusal
Minutes	Record attendance, declared conflicts, recusals, the decision, the reasons, the period set and the vote where not unanimous; approved at the following meeting

26.5 What the EACC may and may not do

The EACC may confirm, vary or reverse the panel's recommendation, and may set a period different from that recommended. Where it departs from the panel's recommendation it must **state its reasons in the decision**, and those reasons are published with the report.

The EACC may not introduce a new adverse finding on a criterion that the panel did not assess adversely without first referring the matter back to the panel and giving the institution the opportunity to respond. It may not take account of information not disclosed to the institution.

26.6 Referral back

Where the EACC considers the report insufficiently reasoned, internally inconsistent, or inadequate as a basis for decision, it refers the matter back to the panel with written instructions, and the decision is deferred to a subsequent meeting. The institution is informed of the referral and its effect on the timetable.

27. The Appeal Committee

27.1 Composition

The Appeal Committee comprises five members appointed by the board of trustees for terms of three years: a legally qualified chair; two academic members; one professional practice member; and one student member. **No person may sit who was a member of the review panel, or who participated in the EACC decision under appeal.** The Secretariat provides administrative support but does not participate in deliberation.

27.2 Jurisdiction

The Appeal Committee examines whether:

- the published procedure was followed;
- the criteria were correctly identified and applied;
- the findings are supported by the evidence before the panel;
- the institution's right to be heard was respected;

- the decision is adequately reasoned;
- the period or conditions set are proportionate to the findings.

It does **not** re-run the assessment or substitute its own academic judgement for that of the panel on a matter properly within the panel's expertise, unless the finding is one no reasonable panel could have reached on the evidence.

27.3 Procedure

Stage	Time
Appeal lodged, with reasons and any supporting evidence	Within one month of written notification of the decision
Acknowledgement and admissibility check	10 working days
Statement obtained from the panel	20 working days
Institution's comment on the panel statement	15 working days
Appeal Committee considers the papers; may hold an oral hearing	Within 60 working days
Reasoned recommendation to the EACC	15 working days after consideration
EACC reconvenes and resolves finally	At its next ordinary meeting

An appeal does not suspend the decision unless the Appeal Committee so directs. An oral hearing is held where the committee considers it necessary, or on the reasoned request of the institution; the institution may be accompanied.

27.4 Outcomes

The Appeal Committee may recommend that the appeal be dismissed; that the decision be varied as to outcome, period or conditions; or that the procedure or a defined part of it be re-run at ECLBS's cost. Its recommendation and the EACC's final resolution are published with the assessment report.

28. The Secretariat and the project manager

The Secretariat administers procedures, maintains the register and the expert pool, and services the EACC and the Appeal Committee. **It has no vote and takes no assessment decision.**

Each procedure is assigned a **project manager**, who is the institution's single point of contact and is responsible for: admissibility screening; the completeness check; assembling and briefing the panel; managing conflict-of-interest declarations; scheduling and organising the visit; routing all communication between panel and institution; ensuring the report is complete and internally consistent before it goes to the EACC; and monitoring conditions and deadlines.

The project manager attends the visit and the EACC discussion of the procedure, may advise on process and precedent, and **does not participate in the assessment or the vote.**

29. The expert pool

29.1 Recruitment and criteria

ECLBS maintains a pool of experts recruited through open call, nomination by member institutions, nomination by professional and student bodies, and direct approach. Appointment is by the Secretariat against published criteria, confirmed by the chair of the EACC.

Role	Minimum requirement
Academic expert	Doctoral qualification, or professorial standing; current or recent teaching and, for doctoral panels, supervision; publication or professional output in the field
Professional practice expert	Not fewer than five years at senior level in the relevant occupation or sector; current standing in the field
Student expert	Currently enrolled, or graduated within the preceding two years, at a level equal to or above that under review; no employment or office at the institution under review
Country / system expert	Detailed working knowledge of the higher education system, legal framework and qualifications framework of the jurisdiction of delivery
Distance and online learning expert	Demonstrable design, delivery or quality assurance experience in distance or online provision
Cooperative studies expert	Experience of joint, double, franchise or validated provision
Occupational / sector expert (non-degree procedures)	Current standing in the occupation addressed; where practical facilities are inspected, competence to assess equipment and safety

29.2 Training

No person serves on a panel before completing ECLBS induction training covering the criteria, the rating scale, evidence standards, interview technique, report writing, conflict of interest, confidentiality and data protection, and equality and non-discrimination. **Refresher training is required every three years**, and additional briefing is given before each procedure on the specific criteria set and programme type.

Newly trained experts serve their first procedure alongside an experienced panel member.

29.3 Appraisal and removal

After every procedure, the project manager, the panel chair and the institution complete a short evaluation of the panel's conduct. Evaluations are held on the expert's file and reviewed at least every three years. An expert may be removed from the pool for breach of the code of conduct, sustained unavailability, persistently inadequate contribution, loss of the standing on which appointment was based, or failure to complete refresher training.

29.4 Remuneration

Experts receive an honorarium and reimbursement of expenses on terms published on the ECLBS website, www.eclbs.eu. **Remuneration is fixed in advance and is not related in any way to the outcome of the procedure.** Experts may not accept any payment, gift, hospitality beyond ordinary courtesy, or offer of future engagement from the institution under review.

29.5 The register of experts

ECLBS maintains a register recording each expert's field, role, qualifications, training record, procedures served and declared interests. A summary of the pool — fields, roles and countries represented, without personal identifying detail — is published annually.

30. Code of conduct for experts, committee members and staff

Every person acting in an ECLBS procedure signs and is bound by the following.

- **Independence.** Act on your own judgement. Accept no instruction from ECLBS, from the institution, or from any member, sponsor or third party as to your findings.
- **Impartiality.** Assess against the published criteria only. Do not import the practices of your own institution as though they were the standard, and do not penalise a legitimate alternative approach because it is unfamiliar.
- **Conflict of interest.** Declare every interest under §31 before appointment and immediately on becoming aware of one. Where in doubt, declare. Withdraw when required. The declaration is made on **Form E1 (Declaration of Interest and Confidentiality)**.
- **Confidentiality.** Treat all documents, discussions and findings as confidential, before and after the procedure and without time limit. Do not retain, copy or reuse institutional material. Return or destroy material on request.
- **No personal advantage.** Accept no payment, gift, hospitality beyond ordinary courtesy, consultancy, employment or offer of future engagement from the institution. Do not use information obtained in a procedure for your own institution's or employer's advantage.
- **Respect.** Conduct interviews courteously and professionally. Interviews are for gathering evidence, not for demonstrating expertise, testing individuals, or expressing views on the institution.
- **Protection of interlocutors.** Do not attribute a statement to an identifiable student, junior staff member or graduate in the report or in feedback. Do not disclose to management what a student said.
- **Evidence.** Base every finding on evidence that is recorded and could be shown to the institution. Do not rely on rumour, reputation, league tables or your prior impression of the institution.
- **No prejudgement.** Form no conclusion before the visit is complete. Do not communicate a likely outcome to the institution at any stage; the oral feedback at the close of the visit is preliminary and must be framed as such.
- **Separation of roles.** Do not offer, and do not agree to provide, consultancy or advice to an institution you have assessed for a period of **two years** after the decision.
- **Non-discrimination.** Do not allow the nationality, religion, gender, ownership, size, private or public status of the institution to affect the assessment.
- **Report and record.** Report to the Secretariat any attempt to influence you improperly, any offer prohibited above, and any breach of this code by another participant.

Breach of the code is a ground for removal from the pool, for setting aside a procedure in whole or in part, and, for committee members, for removal from office.

31. Conflict of interest

31.1 Automatic disqualification

A person may not act in a procedure concerning an institution where, within the **preceding five years**, that person has:

- been employed by, or held any office, honorary title or visiting appointment at, the institution or any entity in the same group;

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- taught, examined, supervised or assessed at the institution;
- provided consultancy, training, audit or advisory services to the institution, whether paid or unpaid;
- applied for a post at the institution, or been approached about one;
- held a financial interest in the institution or in an entity contracting with it;
- co-authored, or held joint research funding with, a member of the programme team;
- studied at the institution, in the case of student and academic experts;
- been a member of a governing body, advisory board or validation panel of the institution.

A person is also disqualified where a **close relative or partner** is employed by, studies at, or holds office in the institution, and where the person has a professional or personal relationship with a member of the programme team of a kind that would cause a reasonable observer to doubt impartiality.

31.2 Declaration and screening

Every proposed panel member completes a written declaration against the list in §31.1 before appointment is confirmed, and re-declares immediately if circumstances change. The declaration is made on Form E1. The project manager screens declarations and refers doubtful cases to the chair of the EACC, whose determination is recorded.

31.3 Challenge by the institution

The proposed panel composition, with each member's institution, role and field, is disclosed to the institution not less than **four weeks before the visit**. The institution has **ten working days** to object, stating reasons. A well-founded objection results in modification of the panel. An objection based only on the expert's nationality, on the expert's institution being a competitor, or on a previously published academic opinion, is not well founded on its own. **The final decision on composition rests with ECLBS**, and the reasons for rejecting an objection are recorded and communicated.

31.4 Conflicts arising during the procedure

A conflict arising or discovered after appointment is declared immediately. Where a conflict is discovered after the visit but before the decision, the EACC determines whether the affected member's contribution can be isolated, whether the report must be re-drafted without it, or whether the procedure must be re-run at ECLBS's cost.

32. Roles and responsibilities

Activity	Institution	Project manager	Panel	EACC	Appeal Cttee
Confirm membership and eligibility	Provides evidence	Decides	—	—	—
Classify the procedure and criteria set	Proposes	Decides	—	—	—
Prepare the self-assessment report	Responsible	Advises	—	—	—

Activity	Institution	Project manager	Panel	EACC	Appeal Cttee
Completeness check	Supplies missing items	Decides	—	—	—
Compose the panel	May object	Proposes	—	Chair rules on doubtful conflicts	—
Assess the criteria	Provides evidence	Facilitates	Decides	May refer back	—
Conduct the visit	Hosts	Organises	Conducts	—	—
Draft the assessment report	Comments	Quality-checks	Responsible	—	—
Recommend outcome and period	—	—	Recommends	Decides	—
Impose conditions and set deadlines	—	—	Proposes	Decides	—
Confirm fulfilment of conditions	Provides proof	Verifies formal conditions	Statement on substantive conditions	Confirms	—
Publish report and register entry	—	Executes	—	—	—
Determine an appeal	Lodges	Administers	Provides statement	Resolves finally	Recommends
Suspend or withdraw accreditation	May comment	Prepares the case	May be consulted	Decides	Hears appeal

Part VII — Procedural rules of general application

33. Language

The language of procedure is **English**, unless another language is agreed in the contract. Documents in another language are accompanied by a translation of the parts relied on, certified where ECLBS so requires. Interviews may be conducted through an interpreter arranged and paid for by the institution; the interpreter must be independent of the programme team, and the panel may require a different interpreter for student interviews.

Where the programme is delivered in a language no panel member reads, ECLBS appoints at least one panel member competent in that language, since the panel must be able to examine teaching materials, examination scripts and student work directly.

34. Communication and service of documents

All communication between the panel and the institution passes through the project manager. **Direct contact between the institution and panel members concerning the procedure is not permitted** at any stage, and must be reported by either party if attempted.

Documents are served electronically to the addresses notified in the application. A document is treated as served on the working day following transmission. The institution must notify any change of contact within five working days.

35. Deadlines and computation of time

Rule	Provision
Working day	A day other than a Saturday, Sunday or public holiday at the seat of ECLBS
Computation	The day of the triggering event is not counted; the period ends at 17:00 CET on the last day; where the last day is not a working day, the period ends on the next working day
Institution's response to panel questions	10 working days
Institution's statement on the draft report	20 working days, extendable once by 10 working days on reasoned request
Objection to panel composition	10 working days from disclosure
Appeal	One month from written notification
Proof of fulfilment of conditions	12 months from decision; one extension of up to 6 months
Notification of substantial change	Without undue delay, and in any event within 30 days of the internal approval of the change

A deadline missed by the institution without a granted extension entitles ECLBS to proceed on the material before it. Repeated failure to meet deadlines is a ground for suspending the procedure under §36.

36. Withdrawal, suspension and lapse

Withdrawal by the institution. The institution may withdraw at any time before the EACC decision, by written notice. Withdrawal after the panel has been appointed is recorded in the register as a

withdrawal, without assessment findings. Charges already incurred remain payable, and no sum already paid is refundable, on the terms of the accreditation contract. **Withdrawal after the visit does not prevent ECLBS recording that a procedure was withdrawn at that stage.**

Suspension by ECLBS. A procedure is suspended where ECLBS membership lapses or is suspended; where charges then due remain unpaid after written reminder; where the institution fails to supply the self-assessment report or required information within the agreed time; or where the institution is subject to an investigation by a competent authority material to the assessment. The institution is notified with reasons and told what is required to resume.

Lapse. A procedure suspended for **twelve months** lapses. A lapsed procedure may be restarted only by fresh application.

Material change during the procedure. Where the programme is materially altered after submission of the self-assessment report, ECLBS may require a revised report and reschedule the visit, at the institution's cost.

37. Force majeure

Where a visit or meeting cannot proceed because of circumstances outside the control of either party — natural disaster, public health emergency, civil disturbance, travel prohibition — the parties agree a revised date, or convert an on-site visit to an online visit under §16.5. Neither party is in breach by reason of the delay. Where the disruption persists beyond six months, either party may terminate on the financial terms in the contract.

38. Cluster procedures

A cluster comprises programmes sharing substantial curricular, structural, staffing or governance elements — for example a Bachelor and a consecutive Master in the same field, or a family of specialisations sharing a common core.

Aspect	Rule
Single self-assessment report	Yes, with a programme-specific section for each programme
Length	80 pages plus 20 pages per further programme
Panel	Augmented where the fields diverge; a single chair
Visit	Extended beyond four days where more than three programmes are assessed
Report	One report with common findings and a distinct, complete set of criterion ratings for each programme
Decision	A separate decision for each programme. One programme may be accredited and another refused
Periods	Set individually; they need not coincide

Programmes may not be clustered solely to reduce cost where they do not share the elements above. The project manager determines at admissibility whether a proposed cluster is genuine.

39. Cross-border and transnational provision

Where a programme is delivered outside the country in which the awarding institution is established, or is delivered by a partner, franchisee, branch campus or licensed centre, the following apply in addition to the criteria.

- The **awarding institution** is the applicant and bears responsibility for academic standards, whoever delivers.
- The institution must evidence that the provision is **lawful in the country of delivery**, and identify the competent authority there and the status of the provision under its law.
- Where the provision is not recognised in the country of delivery, or is recognised only for limited purposes, this must be stated in the self-assessment report **and** in public information to students.
- The panel assesses the **delivery location**, not merely the awarding institution. Where delivery occurs at more than one location, the visit covers a sample determined by ECLBS, and ECLBS may require additional visits at the institution's cost.
- Written agreements must allocate responsibility for admission, teaching, assessment, examination boards, student records, complaints and award, and must give the awarding institution effective powers of monitoring and termination.
- Equivalence of the student experience across locations — teaching quality, resources, support, assessment standards — must be evidenced, not asserted.
- ECLBS applies the **UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education**.

An accreditation granted in these circumstances names the delivery locations covered. **Provision at a location not named is not accredited**, and the seal may not be used in relation to it.

40. Joint and coordinated procedures with other agencies

Where a programme is subject to procedures by ECLBS and another agency, ECLBS may agree a joint or coordinated procedure — a single self-assessment report, a joint panel, a single visit and separate decisions — provided the criteria of both agencies are assessed in full and the institution consents to the sharing of documents. The arrangement is recorded in a written protocol disclosed to the institution before it begins.

ECLBS may take into account the findings of a recent procedure by another recognised agency, where the criteria overlap and the report is supplied in full. **It does not adopt another agency's conclusions without assessment**, and the ECLBS decision is always its own.

41. Confidentiality and embargo

All participants are bound by confidentiality. The institution may not publish the draft report, the panel's oral feedback, or any indication of the likely outcome before the decision is published. ECLBS does not disclose the identity of student interlocutors or attribute statements to identifiable individuals.

After publication, the institution is free to publicise the outcome, provided it does so accurately, states any conditions attaching, and does not quote the report selectively so as to misrepresent the findings.

42. Records, retention and data protection

Record	Retention
Application, contract and correspondence	10 years from the end of the accreditation period
Self-assessment report and	10 years from the decision

Record	Retention
appendices	
Panel working papers and interview notes	3 years from the decision
Assessment report and decision	Permanently
Register entries	Permanently
Conflict declarations and panel evaluations	6 years from the procedure
Appeal and complaint files	10 years from resolution
Personal data of interlocutors	3 years, or until the procedure and any appeal conclude, whichever is later

Personal data are processed only for the purposes of the procedure, on the applicable legal basis, and are not transferred to third parties except as required for publication under §20 or by law. Data subjects may exercise their rights of access, rectification, erasure where applicable, and objection by writing to the Secretariat. The institution is responsible for informing its own staff, students and graduates that their personal data may be processed in the procedure.

Part VIII — Applying the criteria consistently

43. How the rating scale is applied

The rating attaches to the **criterion**, not to the institution's effort or intention. The question is always: on the evidence, is the benchmark met at the reference date?

Rating	Test the panel applies	Typical evidence position
Exceptional	The benchmark for "Exceeds" is met, and the arrangement constitutes international good practice that other institutions could learn from	Enhanced practice, evidenced over time, with demonstrated effect and external validation or recognition
Exceeds quality requirements	Every element of the "Meets" benchmark is met and every element of the "Exceeds" benchmark is met	Systematic, documented, reviewed, and shown to have effect — not merely present
Meets quality requirements	Every element of the "Meets" benchmark is met	Present, documented, operating, evidenced
Does not meet quality requirements	Any element of the "Meets" benchmark is not met	Absent; present only as intention or draft; present but not operating; present but not evidenced
Not relevant	The criterion cannot apply to this programme type	Reason recorded in the report

Four rules govern application.

- **The benchmarks are cumulative.** "Exceeds" is not an alternative route to a pass; it is a higher standard resting on the "Meets" standard. A criterion cannot be rated *Exceeds* if any element of *Meets* is unfulfilled.
- **Partial fulfilment is not fulfilment.** Where a benchmark has several elements and one is absent, the rating is *Does not meet*. The panel records which element failed, and that is what the condition addresses.
- **Intention is not implementation.** A policy adopted but not yet operating, a regulation in draft, a committee constituted but not yet met, a survey designed but not yet run — none of these meets a benchmark expressed in the present tense. They may reduce the severity of the condition and shorten its deadline.
- **Absence of evidence is a finding.** Where the institution asserts an arrangement but cannot evidence it, the criterion is not met. The panel must, however, have given the institution a fair opportunity to produce the evidence — through the completeness check, the additional-information request, the visit, or the statement on the draft report.

Recording. Every rating is accompanied in the report by the evidence relied on and the reasoning. A rating without reasoning is not a finding and will be referred back by the EACC.

44. Conditions and recommendations distinguished

	Condition	Recommendation
Arises from	An essential criterion rated <i>Does not meet</i>	A non-essential criterion rated <i>Does not meet</i> , or an enhancement opportunity identified by the panel
Binding	Yes	No

	Condition	Recommendation
Deadline	Yes — normally 12 months	No
Consequence of non-fulfilment	Withdrawal of accreditation	Reported on at the next procedure; taken into account at re-accreditation
May be imposed on non-negotiable criteria	Never	Not applicable

Drafting conditions. A condition must state precisely what must be done, by when, and what will be accepted as proof. A condition that merely restates the criterion — “the institution must meet criterion 3.2.2” — is not usable and will be referred back. Compare:

- *Not usable:* “The examination regulations must be improved.”
- *Usable:* “The institution shall submit examination regulations, formally approved by the competent body, which (a) regulate the recognition of periods of study completed at other institutions in accordance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention, and (b) provide for an ECTS grading table. Proof: the approved regulations and the minute of approval, within twelve months of the decision.”

A condition must be **within the institution’s power to fulfil**. Where fulfilment depends on a third party — a ministry approval, a partner signature — the condition is framed around what the institution can do and the deadline reflects the external timetable.

Fulfilment is reported on **Form C1 (Fulfilment of Conditions Report)**.

45. Assessing programmes without graduates

A programme with no graduates is assessed against the **same criteria** and to the **same standard**. What changes is the evidence available, not the benchmark.

Criterion type	What the panel examines instead of outcome data
Workload feasibility	The calculation, the assessment calendar, comparator programmes, and the arrangements for reviewing workload once the first cohort runs
Employability	Labour-market analysis, employer engagement, the design of practical components, and destinations from comparable provision
Evaluation and quality assurance	The instruments, the schedule, the responsibilities, and evidence that the system works elsewhere in the institution
Success and graduation rates	Projections, their basis, and the monitoring arrangement that will detect divergence
Alumni activities	The plan, its resourcing, and the point at which it will begin

The panel must **not** rate a criterion *Not relevant* merely because the programme has no history, and must **not** rate it *Meets* merely because the institution intends to do the right thing. The test is whether the arrangement is designed, resourced, scheduled and owned.

46. Assessing provision delivered by partners

Where any element of the programme is delivered by a partner, franchisee, validated centre or other third party, the panel examines:

- the **written agreement**, and whether it allocates responsibility for standards unambiguously;
- the **due diligence** performed before the partnership was formed, and its periodic renewal;
- the **monitoring** actually carried out — visits, moderation, data returns, reports — and evidence that it happened;
- **equivalence of the student experience**, including staffing, resources, support and assessment standards at each location;
- **who admits, who teaches, who assesses, who moderates and who awards**, and whether students are told;
- the **exit arrangements** protecting enrolled students if the partnership ends.

An institution that cannot evidence active monitoring of a partner does not meet criterion 4.3.1 or 4.3.2 as applicable, whatever the quality of the agreement on paper.

47. Consistency and calibration

To secure consistency of judgement across panels, fields and cycles, ECLBS:

- issues a **panel briefing note** before each procedure covering the criteria set, the programme type and any recurring interpretive issues;
- requires the project manager to **quality-check** every draft report for completeness, internal consistency, evidence-based reasoning and usable conditions before it goes to the institution;
- convenes an **annual calibration workshop** for experts, working through anonymised cases and comparing ratings;
- reports to the EACC annually on the **distribution of ratings and outcomes** by field, cycle, panel and country, and investigates unexplained divergence;
- maintains an internal **interpretation note** recording settled readings of criteria that have proved contentious, which is disclosed to institutions on request;
- reviews a sample of concluded procedures each year against the published criteria and procedure.

Part IX — Standard documents

48. Structure of the assessment report

Every assessment report follows this structure. Departure from it is a ground for referral back.

Section	Content
1. Procedural record	Type of procedure; criteria set applied; dates of application, contract, SAR submission, completeness check, visit and report; panel composition with roles and affiliations; conflicts declared and how resolved; interlocutors met, by group and number; documents examined
2. Programme profile	Objective, level, credit, duration, mode, delivery locations, partners, intake, staffing — as established by the panel, not as claimed
3. Findings by criterion	For every criterion: the rating; the evidence relied on; the reasoning; and, where not met, what precisely is missing
4. Summary of ratings	Table of all criteria with ratings; count of essential criteria not met; confirmation of the position on the non-negotiable criteria
5. Conditions	Each condition drafted to the standard in §44, with deadline and proof required
6. Recommendations	Each recommendation, with the criterion it arises from
7. Strengths	Practice the panel considers worth recording, whatever the outcome
8. Institution's statement	Reproduced or summarised, with the panel's response to each point and a record of amendments made
9. Recommendation to the EACC	Outcome, period and reasons

49. Content of the decision

The EACC decision states: the institution and programme; the type of procedure; the outcome; the period with start and expiry dates and the reasons for the period set; the conditions with deadlines and proof required; the recommendations; where the EACC departed from the panel's recommendation, the reasons; the appeal route and time limit; and the date of the decision and the meeting at which it was taken.

50. Content of the certificate

The certificate states: the awarding of the ECLBS Quality Seal or Premium Quality Seal; the institution; the programme title and the degree or credential awarded; the level and credit; the mode of study; **each delivery location covered**; any partner or awarding arrangement; the type of accreditation; the period with start and expiry dates; whether conditions attach and, if so, that they are listed in the decision; the certificate number and the date of issue.

The certificate additionally carries the following statement:

This certificate confirms accreditation of the named programme at the named delivery locations. It is not accreditation of the institution.

A certificate issued where conditions attach is **marked as such** and is reissued unmarked when the EACC confirms fulfilment.

51. The public register

ECLBS maintains a public register recording, for every procedure: the institution and country; the programme, level and delivery locations; the type of procedure; the decision and its date; the period with start and expiry dates; the conditions and their status — outstanding, fulfilled, or not fulfilled; a link to the full assessment report; and the current status — accredited, accredited with conditions, expired, suspended, withdrawn, refused, or withdrawn by the applicant.

A standing note appears at the head of the register in the following terms:

Every entry in this register records the accreditation of a named programme at named delivery locations. ECLBS offers programmatic accreditation only. No entry constitutes accreditation, recognition or endorsement of an institution as a whole.

Refusals, withdrawals and suspensions are recorded and remain on the register, with the date and the ground. Entries are updated within 20 working days of the event.

52. Use of the ECLBS Quality Seal

Rule	Provision
Scope	The seal relates to the accredited programme at the named delivery locations only
Period	Use is permitted only during the period of validity and ceases on expiry, suspension or withdrawal
Form	Only the artwork supplied by ECLBS, unaltered in proportion, colour or wording; the period must appear with the seal
Prohibited	Representing the seal as institutional accreditation, state recognition, or a degree-awarding entitlement; using it for unaccredited programmes; use by a partner or franchisee in relation to unaccredited provision; use on materials for a delivery location not named on the certificate
Conditions	Where accreditation carries conditions, public reference to the seal must state that conditions attach until they are confirmed fulfilled
Expiry	All use must cease within 30 days of expiry or withdrawal, including from websites, prospectuses, signage and social media
Enforcement	Misuse is a ground for withdrawal under §22 and for publication of a correction notice on the register

Part X — Administration of this Handbook

53. Entry into force and transitional provisions

This Edition enters into force on the date of approval by the EACC and applies to:

- every application lodged **on or after** that date; and
- every procedure already under way in which the self-assessment report has **not yet been submitted**, unless the institution elects in writing within 30 days to complete under the previous guidelines.

Procedures in which the self-assessment report has been submitted continue under the previous guidelines. **Accreditations granted under previous guidelines remain valid for their stated periods**; the monitoring, substantial-change, suspension, withdrawal, seal-use and register provisions of this Edition apply to them from the date of entry into force.

Conditions imposed under previous guidelines continue on their original terms.

54. Review of this Handbook

This Handbook and the criteria sets are reviewed on a cycle of **not more than five years**, and on an interim basis where the normative framework changes materially. Review includes consultation with member institutions, students, employers, academic staff and experts, and an analysis of the ratings and outcomes data under §47. Proposed amendments are published for comment for not less than 60 days before adoption, except where a change is required by law.

Amendments do not apply retrospectively to procedures already under way, save where they are more favourable to the institution.

55. Document control

Field	Entry
Document	ECLBS Accreditation Handbook (General)
Edition	1.0
Status	Approved by the ECLBS Accreditation and Certification Committee
Supersedes	All previous ECLBS programmatic accreditation guidelines, assessment guides and procedural notes
Owner	ECLBS Secretariat
Next scheduled review	Not later than five years from entry into force

Edition	Date	Principal changes
1.0	—	First consolidated edition. Introduces cycle-specific criteria sets including doctoral and non-degree; membership eligibility; governance, expert pool and code of conduct; monitoring, substantial change, suspension and withdrawal; the public register; seal-use rules; procedural rules of general application

Annex A — Glossary

Term	Meaning
Accreditation	A decision that a programme meets the ECLBS quality standards, conferring the right to use the ECLBS Quality Seal for a stated period
Accreditation with conditions	Accreditation granted where one or more essential criteria are not met, subject to binding conditions with deadlines
Appeal Committee	The body constituted under §27 to examine appeals; excludes anyone involved in the original procedure
Awarding institution	The institution legally entitled to confer the qualification, which is the applicant in every procedure
Blocking period	The one-year period after a refusal before a new application for the same programme may be lodged
Category (A–D)	The classification of non-degree provision by notional learning hours under the Non-Degree Handbook §3
Cluster accreditation	Accreditation of several related programmes in a single procedure, with a separate decision for each
Code of conduct	The obligations in §30 binding every expert, committee member and staff member
Completeness check	The screening of a submitted self-assessment report for missing documents or information, before evaluation opens
Condition	A binding requirement imposed where an essential criterion is not met, to be fulfilled within a set deadline
Conflict of interest	A circumstance under §31 disqualifying a person from acting in a procedure
Cross-border provision	Provision delivered outside the country of establishment of the awarding institution; see §39
Cycle	The first (Bachelor), second (Master) or third (doctoral) cycle of the QF-EHEA
EACC	ECLBS Accreditation and Certification Committee, the decision-making body
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
Essential criterion (*)	A criterion that must achieve at least <i>Meets quality requirements</i> ; failure results in a condition
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2015)
Initial accreditation	Accreditation of a running programme not previously accredited by ECLBS
Interim accreditation	Accreditation of a programme concept before the programme starts
Lapse	The termination of a procedure suspended for twelve months; see §36
Learner	The person enrolled in non-degree provision, where “student” would be inapt
Micro-credential	A small-volume credential, normally Category A under the Non-Degree Handbook

Term	Meaning
Non-negotiable criterion	A criterion on which conditions may never be imposed and whose failure results in refusal: 1.1 and 3.1.1; D1.1, D3.2 and D5.1; N1.1, N1.5 and N3.1
Notional learning hours	The total time a typical learner needs to achieve the outcomes, including contact, directed and independent study, workplace learning and assessment
Panel	The review panel constituted under §16.3 to assess a programme
Peer review	Assessment by qualified peers in dialogue with the institution, as distinct from desk audit
Premium Seal	The highest level of ECLBS programmatic accreditation, valid 6–7 years; conditions in §18
Programmatic accreditation	Accreditation of a named programme at named delivery locations; the only form of accreditation ECLBS offers
Project manager	The ECLBS officer administering a procedure and acting as the institution's single point of contact
QF-EHEA	Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area
Re-accreditation	Accreditation of a programme currently or recently holding ECLBS accreditation
Recommendation	Non-binding advice arising from a non-essential criterion assessed as not met
Referral back	The return of a report to the panel by the EACC under §26.6
Refusal	A decision that accreditation is not granted; recorded on the register; blocking period applies
Register	The public record of ECLBS decisions maintained under §51
SAR	Self-Assessment Report
Substantial change	A change to an accredited programme requiring notification under §21
Suspension	The temporary cessation of a procedure under §36, or of an accreditation under §22
Teach-out	Arrangements enabling enrolled students to complete where provision ceases
Withdrawal (of accreditation)	The removal of an accreditation in force, under §22
Withdrawal (of application)	The institution's termination of a procedure before decision, under §36

Annex B — Indicative timeline

Milestone	Indicative timing
Application submitted	T
Admissibility confirmed, offer issued	T + 2–4 weeks
Contract concluded, project manager assigned	T + 4–8 weeks
SAR submitted	T + 3–6 months
Completeness check concluded	SAR + 2–4 weeks
Panel appointed and disclosed	SAR + 4–6 weeks
Visit	SAR + not less than 12 weeks
Draft report to institution	Visit + 6–10 weeks
Institution's statement	Draft + 4 weeks
Final report to EACC	Statement + 4 weeks
EACC decision	Visit + 4–6 months
Publication of report and certificate	Decision + 4–6 weeks
Proof of conditions due	Decision + 12 months (extendable by up to 6 months, once)

Annex C — Document set

Document	Function
ECLBS Accreditation Handbook (this document)	Governance, eligibility, procedure, decisions, appeals
ECLBS Accreditation Handbook — Bachelor Programmes	Criteria set for the first cycle
ECLBS Accreditation Handbook — Master Programmes	Criteria set for the second cycle
ECLBS Accreditation Handbook — Doctoral Programmes	Criteria set for the third cycle
ECLBS Accreditation Handbook — Non-Degree Programmes	Criteria set for short courses, micro-credentials, certificates, awards and diplomas
ECLBS SAR Guidelines	How to write and evidence the self-assessment report
ECLBS Application Form	Entry point to the procedure
ECLBS Accreditation Contract	The contract concluded under §16.1; records the charges applicable
Form M1 — Substantial Change Notification	Notification under §21
Form M2 — Annual Monitoring Return	The annual return under §21
Form C1 — Fulfilment of Conditions Report	Proof of fulfilment under §19
Form E1 — Declaration of Interest and Confidentiality	The declaration under §§30–31
ECLBS website — www.eclbs.eu	Fee amounts and payment terms

Annex D — Mapping to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG 2015)

Part 1 — Internal quality assurance: where ECLBS criteria test it

ESG Part 1 standard	ECLBS criteria that assess it
1.1 Policy for quality assurance	5.1; 1.3.3; D6.1; N6.1
1.2 Design and approval of programmes	1.1; 1.2; 3.1.1; 3.1.2; 3.2.1; D1.1; D3.1; N1.1; N1.2; N3.1
1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	3.1.7; 3.2.3; 3.3.1; 3.3.2; 4.1.6; D3.2; D3.3; N3.5; N3.7
1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	2.1–2.6; 3.2.2; D2.1–D2.7; D5.7; N2.1–N2.4; N5.1–N5.3
1.5 Teaching staff	4.1.1–4.1.7; D4.2–D4.4; N4.1–N4.4
1.6 Learning resources and student support	4.1.6; 4.2.2; 4.4.1; 4.4.2; 4.5.1; D4.5; D4.6; N4.6; N4.7
1.7 Information management	0.3; 5.1; 5.2; D0.3; D6.4; N0.3; N6.4
1.8 Public information	5.3; 5.4; D6.6; N1.5; N2.2; N6.5
1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	5.1; 5.2.1–5.2.3; 0.3; D6.1–D6.3; N6.1–N6.3
1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance	The ECLBS procedure itself; §21 monitoring; §16 procedure

Part 2 — External quality assurance: where this Handbook provides for it

ESG Part 2 standard	Provision in this Handbook
2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance	Chapter 5 / D6 / N6 of the criteria sets; §16.2
2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose	§§11–14; §§3–4; Non-Degree Handbook §3 proportionality
2.3 Implementing processes	§§15–16; §§33–42
2.4 Peer-review experts	§16.3; §§29–31; student member mandatory
2.5 Criteria for outcomes	§§17–19; §§43–44
2.6 Reporting	§16.6; §48; §20 publication
2.7 Complaints and appeals	§23; §27

Part 3 — Quality assurance agencies: where this Handbook provides for it

ESG Part 3 standard	Provision in this Handbook
3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance	§§2, 5, 6, 25; publication of criteria and procedure
3.2 Official status	§1; ECLBS legal status and affiliations
3.3 Independence	§6.1; §26.1 autonomy of the EACC; §29.4 remuneration not outcome-related; §30 code of conduct

ESG Part 3 standard	Provision in this Handbook
3.4 Thematic analysis	§47 ratings and outcomes analysis; periodic activity report
3.5 Resources	§10; Secretariat and expert pool under §§28–29
3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct	§25; §30; §31; §47
3.7 Cyclical external review of the agency	§25; ECLBS submits itself to external review on a defined cycle

Annex E — Frequently asked questions

Who may apply? Only ECLBS members in good standing, that are public, state-approved or state-authorised, or in a documented process of state approval, and legally entitled to award the qualification. See §§7–9.

Which handbook applies to our programme? Bachelor, Master and doctoral programmes each have their own. Short courses, micro-credentials, certificates, awards and diplomas are covered by the Non-Degree Handbook, which classifies the submission by notional learning hours. If unsure, ask the Secretariat before applying; the project manager determines the criteria set at admissibility screening.

Does ECLBS accredit institutions? No. ECLBS offers programmatic accreditation only. No decision, seal or certificate constitutes accreditation, recognition or endorsement of an institution as a whole. See §2.

Can we apply for several programmes at once? Yes, as a cluster, provided they genuinely share curricular, structural, staffing or governance elements. See §38. Each programme receives its own decision.

What does the institution pay for? The submission fee, the process fee, the visit costs, the expert fees, and on a positive decision the accreditation fee. Amounts are published on the ECLBS website, www.eclbs.eu. Payment confers no entitlement to a positive outcome.

Are charges refunded if we are refused, or if we withdraw? No. Charges are not contingent on outcome. On a refusal, the submission fee, process fee, visit costs, expert travel and expert fees are not refunded. On withdrawal of the application, no sum paid is refunded. See §36 and the accreditation contract.

Our programme has no graduates. Can it be accredited? Yes — as interim accreditation if it has not started, or initial accreditation if it is running. It is assessed against the same criteria to the same standard; the evidence base differs. See §45.

How long does a procedure take? Typically 9–15 months from application to decision, depending on when the self-assessment report is submitted and which EACC meeting is targeted. See Annex B.

Can we choose our panel? No. You are told the proposed composition at least four weeks before the visit and have ten working days to object with reasons. A well-founded objection results in modification. The final decision rests with ECLBS. See §31.3.

May we contact the experts directly? No. All communication passes through the project manager, at every stage. See §34.

What if we disagree with the draft report? Submit a written statement within 20 working days. The panel reconsiders the criticised points and may amend the report before the decision. This is a substantive right and panels do amend reports. See §16.6.

What is the difference between a condition and a recommendation? A condition arises from an unmet essential criterion, is binding, and carries a deadline; failure to meet it results in withdrawal. A recommendation arises from an unmet non-essential criterion, is not binding, but must be reported on at the next procedure. See §44.

How many criteria can we fail and still be accredited? For Bachelor and Master programmes, up to seven essential criteria, provided criteria 1.1 and 3.1.1 are both met. For doctoral programmes, up to five, provided D1.1, D3.2 and D5.1 are met. For non-degree provision, four or six depending on category, provided N1.1, N1.5 and N3.1 are met. See §18.

Can conditions be imposed on the non-negotiable criteria? Never. If a non-negotiable criterion is not met, accreditation is refused.

What happens if we are refused? A new application for the same programme may be lodged after a blocking period of one year. The refusal is recorded on the public register.

Can we appeal? Yes, within one month of written notification, with reasons. See §§23 and 27.

Is the report published? Yes, in full, together with a register entry. You consent to this in the application. See §§20 and 51.

What must we tell ECLBS during the accreditation period? Any substantial change, without undue delay and in any event within 30 days — see §21 for the list, and Form M1. Also the annual monitoring return on Form M2 where required.

Can we use the seal on our website? Yes, for the accredited programme at the named delivery locations, during the period of validity, in the artwork supplied, with the period shown. Not for other programmes, not for unnamed locations, and not as though it were institutional accreditation. See §52.

What happens to our accreditation if our ECLBS membership lapses? A procedure under way is suspended; an accreditation in force may be suspended or withdrawn. See §§7 and 22.

We deliver through a partner abroad. What changes? The awarding institution applies and remains responsible for standards. The provision must be lawful in the country of delivery, agreements must allocate responsibility, equivalence across locations must be evidenced, and the panel assesses the delivery location. Only named locations are covered. See §39.

Have we already been assessed by another agency — does that help? ECLBS may take a recent report into account where the criteria overlap and the full report is supplied, and may agree a joint or coordinated procedure. It does not adopt another agency's conclusions without assessment. See §40.

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