



NATIONAL CENTRE
FOR PUBLIC ACCREDITATION

REGULATIONS

ON PUBLIC ACCREDITATION
OF CLUSTERS OF BASIC PROFESSIONAL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES



PUBLIC ACCREDITATION

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REGULATIONS

on public accreditation of clusters of basic professional educational programmes

1. Definitions

- 1.1. Public accreditation of clusters of educational programmes (hereinafter - accreditation) is evaluation and recognition of the quality of delivery of basic professional educational programmes included in a cluster, quality and level of education and training of graduates who have completed such programmes delivered by an educational institution, in accordance with the NCPA's standards of public accreditation, which are harmonized with European standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education ESG¹, requirements of professional standards and labour market requirements applicable to specialists, workers and employees of the relevant profile with the consideration of the Federal State Educational Standards.
- 1.2. A cluster of basic professional educational programmes is a group of related basic professional educational programmes from one field of study of one or more levels of professional education (secondary vet, bachelor, specialism, master and postgraduate), which can be professionally evaluated by one expert panel.
- 1.3. The cluster of basic professional educational programmes can comprise from 2 to 7 basic professional educational programmes of every level of education².

2. General provisions

- 2.1. The present Regulations determine methods of organizing and conducting public accreditation by the National Centre for Public Accreditation (hereinafter NCPA) of clusters of basic professional educational programmes (hereinafter clusters of educational programmes) delivered by an educational institution regardless of its departmental affiliation and organizational and legal form.
- 2.2. The standards and procedures of accreditation comply with the current Russian legislation in the sphere of education (the Federal Act of the Russian Federation of 29 December 2012, N 273-Φ3 «On Education in the Russian Federation») and the general principles and documents of the Bologna Process.
- 2.3. NCPA acts as an institution designated by employers, their associations and the professional community to conduct accreditation of clusters of educational programmes delivered by an educational institution.
- 2.4. The goal of public accreditation is to establish considerable (outstanding) achievements of an educational institution delivering the cluster of educational programmes, which reflect advanced trends in the global development in the sphere of education, science and industry; to give recommendations for the enhancement of education quality and establishment of the quality culture in an educational institution; and to inform the general public about the educational institution delivering a cluster of educational programmes in compliance with NCPA's standards of accreditation.
- 2.5. The key principles of accreditation are social and professional character of external evaluation, voluntary involvement, independence, objectiveness and competency, openness, credibility and relevance of information on the accreditation procedures; periodicity of procedures; collegiality of decision making and transparency of decisions.

¹ Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area (<http://www.enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/>)

² As proved by NCPA's ten-year experience of conducting cluster accreditation the optimal number of programmes in a cluster without compromising the quality of evaluation should not exceed seven programmes for every level of education.

- 2.6. In order to be eligible for accreditation of the cluster of educational programmes an educational institution should be licensed, recognized by professional, academic and scientific community; its programmes should have undergone mandatory control procedures for compliance with the requirements of the Russian Legislation: state accreditation, state control (supervision) of educational programmes. At least one educational programme of the cluster under accreditation should occupy top positions in public rankings or all educational programmes of the cluster under accreditation should have been recommended by the Regional Rectors' council, or by the Federal Educational and Methodological Association, or by employers or by a field-specific ministry.
- 2.7. An educational institution has the right to be informed about the standards, criteria, procedures and dates of conducting accreditation.
- 2.8. An educational institution has the right to recall the application at any stage of the accreditation procedure before the accreditation decision is made.
- 2.9. Accreditation costs are incurred by the educational institution.
- 2.10. Information on conducting and results of separate stages of accreditation is confidential for the third party.

3. The procedure of accreditation

- 3.1. Time limits, conditions and financial provision of accreditation are determined by the contract between NCPA and the educational institution.
- 3.2. Under the contract with NCPA the educational institution has the right to be provided with instructive and methodological materials on the procedures of accreditation.
- 3.3. The educational institution organizes and conducts self-evaluation of the cluster of educational programmes and prepares a self evaluation report. The main purpose of this process is to analyze whether the programmes under evaluation meet the standards of accreditation.
- 3.4. NCPA advises the educational institution on the issues arising during the preparation for accreditation and in the process of self-evaluation of the cluster of educational programmes.
- 3.5. The self-evaluation report is submitted to NCPA in Russian and English (if necessary) not less than 35 days before the external review of the cluster of educational programmes.
- 3.6. NCPA has the right to return the self-evaluation report of the cluster of educational programmes to the educational institution for follow-up revision, refuse to organize and conduct the external review if the self-evaluation report of the cluster of educational programmes does not comply with the Guidelines for self-evaluation of study programmes.
- 3.7. NCPA determines and agrees with the educational institution the time limits and the schedule of the external review of the cluster of educational programmes.
- 3.8. The external evaluation of the quality of implementation of a cluster of educational programmes (hereinafter – external review); the quality and the level of training of graduates, who have completed such programmes, for compliance with the standards of accreditation, is conducted by the External Review Panel.
- 3.9. Forms of conducting the external review:
 - On-site;
 - Distance;
 - Combined.

During the on-site external review all experts visit a higher education institution.

During the distance external review experts do not visit a higher education institution.

During the combined external review a reduced External Review Panel visit a higher education institution.

Distance or combined forms are used when:

- force majeure circumstances occur (force majeure circumstances are emergency or unavoidable circumstances, which comprise: government bans, civil unrest, epidemics, blockade, embargo, earthquakes, floods, fires or other natural disasters),

- an expert can not take part in the on-site external review for reasons beyond NCPA control (expert's illness, default in providing visa, etc.).

During distance or combined external reviews members of the External Review Panel take part in the external review with the help of IT technologies.

The decision about the form of the external review is made by NCPA Director upon presentation of the Head of the Accreditation Office.

- 3.10. If the External Review Panel considers that the marks on the standards of certain educational programmes in the cluster³ significantly differ from the marks of the other programmes, the External Review Panel can exclude such programmes from the cluster without any repercussions for the whole cluster. Educational programmes excluded from the cluster are evaluated separately by the Review Panel and a separate Final Report is prepared on the outcomes of the review.
- 3.11. The External Review Panel prepares the Final Report on the results of the external review of the cluster of educational programmes.
- 3.12. NCPA sends the Final Report on the results of the external review of the cluster of educational programmes to the educational institution no later than a month after its completion. The educational institution may submit its comments within one week after the receipt of the Final Report on the external review of the cluster of educational programmes (only in case if there are technical or factual inaccuracies). NCPA does not enter into any discussions on the results of the external evaluation of the cluster of educational programmes.
- 3.13. On the basis of the analysis of documents and information presented by the educational institution, Self-evaluation Report of the cluster of educational programmes, Final Report on the results of the external review of the cluster of educational programmes NCPA prepares materials (Summary Report) for deciding on accreditation of the cluster of educational programmes at the meeting of the National Accreditation Board and publishes them on its official website in Russian and in English.
- 3.14. The decision on accreditation (denial of accreditation) of the cluster of educational programmes is made by the permanent collegial body – the National Accreditation Board and is recorded in the minutes.
- 3.15. On the basis of a decision on accreditation the educational institution receives the Certificate of Public Accreditation of the educational programmes included in the cluster for the period of up to 6 years.
- 3.16. The accredited educational programmes of the cluster are entered into the Register of Accredited Programmes of NCPA. The information on accredited

³ "A cluster is a specific system in which adding an element improves the operation, while excluding an element does not result in dramatic consequences for the system." E.I Sokolova The Definition of an "Educational cluster" in the conceptual field of contemporary pedagogics / Research e-journal Continuous education: XXI century". – Issue No2 (6). Available at: <https://i1121.petsu.ru/journal/article.php?id=2371>

educational programmes is published in the mass media, reference books and Internet.

- 3.17. The educational institution has the right to appeal the procedure of accreditation to the Appeals Committee.

4. Review Panel

- 4.1. In order to conduct external review of a cluster of educational programmes NCPA forms a Review Panel of 3-5 independent experts who are qualified specialists on quality evaluation of the programmes included in the cluster and quality and level of education and training of graduates who have completed such programmes; and who have relevant practical managerial experience in the sphere of education or economy:
- foreign experts – representatives of academic community;
 - Russian experts – representatives of academic community;
 - a Russian expert – a representative of professional community (employers);
 - a Russian expert – a student representative (an undergraduate, a postgraduate);
- 4.2. If an educational institution applies for accreditation of several clusters of educational programmes, a Review Panel is formed for each cluster.
- 4.3. Independent experts – representatives of academic community including international experts shall be nominated by accrediting bodies or public and professional bodies, organizations, unions, associations, foundations, whose sphere of activities is connected with education and (or) research. The criteria for selection of experts, representatives of academic community, work experience in the sphere of education, research and industry; work experience in leadership positions (head of the educational institution or its structural subdivision); academic degree and title; professional competency in the field of the educational programme under review; the knowledge of the main provisions of the Bologna process; participation in the procedures of public accreditation (optional); attending a training programme for experts in public accreditation.
- 4.4. Independent experts – representatives of professional community (employers) shall be nominated by professional organizations – the key stakeholders in graduates' employment, relevant ministries (departments), or employers' unions. The selection criteria are: competency and work experience in leadership positions in the field of activity that is relevant to the educational programmes in the cluster under review, the knowledge of the main provisions of the Bologna process; participation in the procedures of public accreditation (optional); attending a training programme for experts in public accreditation.
- 4.5. Independent experts – representatives of student community (undergraduates, postgraduate students) shall be nominated by student organizations and unions or by external educational institutions. Selection criteria are: recommendation of the institutional administration; good knowledge of regulatory and legal framework in the sphere of higher education; good knowledge of the basic principles of the Bologna process, participation in the procedures of public accreditation (optional); attending a training programme for experts in public accreditation.
- 4.6. The Expert Panel should be composed in such a way so that the qualification of experts corresponded to the level of education, specialities and the field of study in order to make it possible for one expert panel to professionally evaluate every educational programme included in the cluster.
- 4.7. Every expert signs a no conflict of interests document and a contract with NCPA on participation in the external review of a cluster of educational programmes.

- 4.8. The key principles of an expert's work are honesty, commitment, good faith, objectiveness, confidentiality in the work with documents.
- 4.9. The composition of the Review Panel is agreed with the educational institution under review. The educational institution has the right to reject proposed candidates with the explanation of reasons for rejection.
- 4.10. Experts are personally responsible for objectiveness and reliability of evaluation and conclusions, timeliness of expertise and preparation of materials for the Final Report on the results of the review of a cluster of educational programmes.
- 4.11. An expert has the right to request and receive necessary additional materials, documents and information concerning accreditation, to voice and defend his/her opinion on the evaluation of an educational programme, the quality and the level of education and training of the graduates who have completed the programme included in the cluster under review; to discuss the Final Report on the results of the external review.
- 4.12. NCPA appoints the Chair of the Review Panel from among the Panel members, , having a higher level of qualification in accordance with the selection criteria.
- 4.13. The Chairperson of the Review Panel manages the activity of the External Review Panel. The Chair of the Review Panel agrees the time limits and the schedule of the site-visit with NCPA and the educational institution, bears responsibility for the fulfillment of the external review schedule and preparation of the Final Report on the results of the external review of the cluster of educational programmes.
- 4.14. The Review Panel works in the educational institution for 2-3 days. After the site-visit the Chair of the Review Panel presents an oral report on the results of the review to the management of the educational institution (department). The Report is prepared on the agreed opinions of all Panel members and contains main conclusions of the Panel on the outcomes of the review of the cluster of educational programmes.
- 4.15. In case of force majeure circumstances when an expert is unable to take part in the site visit (illness, visa denial, etc), this expert can perform a desk review.
- 4.16. After the review of the cluster of educational programmes the External Review Panel prepares the Final Report on the results of the external review. The Final Report is based on the analysis of the self-evaluation report, presented documents and information, interviews with representatives of professional community, students, postgraduates, doctoral students, employees and management of the educational institution. The Final Report includes the section – "Conclusion of the External Review Panel", which represents explicit collegial decision on conformity or nonconformity of the cluster of educational programmes to NCPA's standards and involves opinions of separate Panel members, if such opinions differ from the general conclusion.
- 4.17. The Final Report on the review of the cluster of educational programmes is signed by the Chair of the Review Panel and submitted to NCPA, which forwards the Report to the educational institution.

5. The National Accreditation Board

- 5.1. The National Accreditation Board is a standing collegiate body of NCPA.
- 5.2. The National Accreditation Board is elected by the General Meeting of the Founders and is comprised of 20 to 30 members. One third of the Board members retire every five years and new members are elected.
- 5.3. Representatives of Russian and foreign educational institutions, public and professional bodies, unions, foundations, associations (including international ones), whose activities and interests are connected with education and/or research, may be elected to the National Accreditation Board. The Board is formed

with the consideration of the gender balance.

- 5.4. The following responsibilities fall within the competencies of the Board:
- consideration and decision-making of the outcomes of quality assurance procedures of the cluster of educational programmes;
 - consideration and approval of regulations on public accreditation of the cluster of educational programmes, processes, procedures and methodology of public accreditation, and the rights granted to the organization delivering the educational programmes or/and graduates who completed such programmes.
- 5.5. The composition, rules of establishment, competency, and procedure of work of the National Accreditation Board are determined by the Regulations on the National Accreditation Board.

6. Accreditation decision making

- 6.1. The decision on accreditation of the cluster of educational programmes or denial of accreditation and on the terms and conditions of accreditation shall be taken by the National Accreditation Board based on the Summary Reports prepared by NCPA. The National Accreditation Board makes one of the following decisions:
- to accredit the cluster of educational programmes for the full term of 6 years;
 - to accredit the cluster of educational programmes for the reduced term of 4 or 2 years. In this case the institution has to rectify deficiencies;
 - to deny accreditation of the cluster of educational programmes.
- 6.2. The terms and conditions of accreditation of the cluster of educational programmes are as follows:
- the cluster of educational programmes is not accredited if at least one standard receives a D mark (non-compliance);
 - the cluster of educational programmes is accredited for 2 years if more than 3 standards receive a C mark (partial compliance);
 - the cluster of educational programmes is accredited for 4 years if 3 standards receive a C mark (partial compliance);
 - the cluster of programmes is accredited for a full term of 6 years in all other cases.
- 6.3. The decision on accreditation or denial of accreditation and on the terms and conditions of accreditation of educational programmes excluded from the cluster shall be taken by the National Accreditation Board on each educational programme individually in accordance with the Regulations on public accreditation of a basic professional educational programme ⁴
- 6.4. The final decision on accreditation of a cluster of educational programmes is made by the National Accreditation Board on a collegiate basis and can differ from the recommended decisions indicated in 5.2 of the present Regulations (with the account of opinions of the Board members and additional information about a certain educational programme and evidence presented).
- 6.5. In the event of conflict of interests which can affect the completeness and objectivity of decisions the Board member must make it known before the beginning of the meeting and he/she shall not participate in the voting. All declarations of the Board members are recorded in the minutes of the Board meetings.
- 6.6. The decisions of the Board are documented in the minutes, which are signed by the Chairman and the Secretary of the Board.

⁴ A cluster is a special system, in which an additional element improves its operation, while removal of an element does not result in fatal consequences / Sokolova E.I. The term «innovation education cluster» in the conceptual field of modern pedagogy/ Scientific online journal «Lifelong education: the XXI century». – Issue No 2 (6). Available at: <https://i1121.petrsu.ru/journal/article.php?id=2371>

7. Accreditation Certificate

- 7.1. Upon making a decision by the National Accreditation Board on accreditation of a cluster of educational programmes NCPA:
 - issues the Accreditation Certificate of public accreditation of the cluster of educational programmes (hereinafter Accreditation Certificate) signed by the Chair of the National Accreditation Board and Director of NCPA;
 - provides the educational institution with the electronic logo of NCPA.
- 7.2. Designing, producing, accounting for and storing of the Accreditation Certificate blanks are carried out by NCPA.
- 7.3. The period of validity of the Accreditation Certificate is no more than 6 years.
- 7.4. The electronic logo of NCPA is valid for the period of the Accreditation Certificate validity.
- 7.5. In case of re-registration or reorganization the educational institution notifies NCPA in the written form and encloses documentary evidence for reissuance of the Accreditation Certificate.
- 7.6. In case of loss or damage of the Accreditation Certificate the educational institution applies in written form to NCPA for issuing a duplicate of the Accreditation Certificate.
- 7.7. In case of breach of the Russian legislation, failure to comply with the requirements set by the present Regulations NCPA on the decision of the National Accreditation Board has the right to declare accreditation invalid and recall the Accreditation Certificate.

8. Appeals and complaints

- 8.1. In case of a breach of the accreditation procedure the educational institution delivering the cluster of educational programmes has a right to lodge an appeal with the independent Appeals Committee against the accreditation decision (denial of accreditation) on the cluster of educational programmes, or the terms and conditions of accreditation.
- 8.2. An educational institution, experts and persons involved in the accreditation procedure have the right to lodge an appeal and/or complaint, against any decisions and/or action (inaction) of experts, members of the National Accreditation Board, NCPA's staff at any stage of the accreditation procedure.
- 8.3. An educational institution has the right to lodge an appeal against any final decision of the National Accreditation Board or the part of it, which affects the interests of an educational institution.
- 8.4. A complaint regarding procedural or other issues can be filed at any stage of the accreditation procedure: self-evaluation, review, decision-making.

9. Follow-up

- 9.1. After the National Accreditation Board makes a decision on accreditation of the cluster of educational programmes NCPA within a month:
 - Publishes on the NCPA's website the materials of the National Accreditation Board meeting (presentations, minutes);
 - Enters the information of accredited educational programmes included in the cluster in the Register of accredited programmes placed at NCPA's website. Publishes information on accredited programmes in mass media, reference books and Internet;
 - Forwards to the educational institution delivering the cluster of educational programmes a copy of the minutes of the National Accreditation Board containing the information about the accreditation decision to the educational

- institution delivering the cluster of educational programmes; electronic logo of NCPA; the original of Accreditation Certificate;
- Sends to the members of the External Review Panel an information letter with a link to the section of the NCPA's website containing the materials of the National Accreditation Board meeting (presentations, minutes);
 - Sends to the members of the National Accreditation Board an information letter with a link to the section of the NCPA's website containing the materials of the National Accreditation Board meeting (presentations, minutes).
- 9.2. In case of a decision by the National Accreditation Board to deny accreditation of the cluster of educational programmes NCPA sends to the educational institution delivering the educational programmes included in the cluster a letter with the justification of the decision. The educational institution has a right to apply for re-accreditation not less than a year after the first application. The application is reviewed according to the standard procedure.
- 9.3. In case of a reduced term of accreditation of the cluster of educational programmes (4 or 2 years) the educational institution has to:
- submit to NCPA a plan of actions (road map) on addressing recommendations of the External Review Panel and the National Accreditation Board 60 days after a decision on accreditation on the cluster of educational programmes. NCPA examines the plan for 15 days and, if necessary, informs the educational institution about necessary changes and/or additions to the plan;
 - submit to NCPA a report on corrective actions which have been undertaken to address the recommendations in accordance with the plan once the reduced term of accreditation of the cluster of educational programmes (4 or 2 years) has expired.
- 9.4. After considering the Report on corrective actions at a meeting of the National Accreditation Board a decision may be taken on extending the accreditation term of the cluster of educational programmes for 2 years (in certain cases, an additional site visit by 1-2 experts could be recommended).
- 9.5. In case of a failure of the institution to submit to NCPA a plan of actions (road map) within 60 days on addressing recommendations of the External Review Panel and the National Accreditation Board, NCPA has the right to suspend or retract accreditation of the cluster of educational programmes (repeal the Accreditation Certificate).
- 9.6. In case of a full term accreditation (6 years) of the cluster of educational programmes the educational institution has to submit to NCPA a plan on improvement of the cluster of educational programmes with the account of comments and recommendations of the External Review Panel (if available) within a month after the decision on accreditation.
- 9.7. On the expiry of the full period of accreditation (6 years) the educational institution has the right to apply for re-accreditation of the cluster of educational programmes. In this case the educational institution delivering the cluster of educational programmes is required to include the information on how the recommendations of the External Review Panel (if applicable) have been addressed.
- 9.8. NCPA keeps a register of accredited educational programmes, which serves as a tool for monitoring the implementation of decisions of the National Accreditation Board. If necessary NCPA provides methodological support and consultations to help prepare a report on corrective actions.
- 9.9. NCPA in advance (no less than a month) reminds the educational institution to submit the report on corrective actions and sends guidelines on the preparation of the report on corrective actions to the educational institution.

10. The use of accreditation results

- 10.1. Public accreditation of the cluster of educational programmes in specialities and fields of study, whose term of validity expires no earlier than the end of the academic year, and which are assigned admission quotas, is taken into consideration when assigning admission quotas for studying on the programmes of higher education and the programmes of secondary vocational education (Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of the RF of 1 April 2015 N 340 «*On approval of the Regulations on competition on distribution of admission quotas for professions, specialties and areas of training and (or) aggregated groups of specialties and areas of training for education on the educational programmes of secondary vocational and higher education out of the federal budget*»).
- 10.2. The information about public accreditation of the cluster of educational programmes is considered during the procedure of state accreditation.
- 10.3. Stakeholders (secondary school leavers, employers) use the information on public accreditation when making a choice of an educational programme included in the cluster.
- 10.4. The educational institution delivering the accredited educational programmes included in the cluster has a right:
 - To publish information about its public accreditation of the cluster of educational programmes including the NCPA's logo, on its site, on information stands, in learning and teaching materials of the relevant programmes, in information newsletters.
 - To use the information about public accreditation of the cluster of educational programmes for advertising purposes;
 - To refer to the information about public accreditation of the cluster of educational programmes in education and qualification documents issued to graduates who completed the accredited educational programme.
 - To submit the information about public accreditation of the cluster of educational programmes to the accrediting body of the state accreditation.
- 10.5. On the basis of the outcomes of public accreditation ratings (rankings) may be compiled of accredited educational programmes included in the cluster with the identification of educational institutions delivering these programmes.