



High-quality online education
across the world

Accreditation handbook v 1.6

www.ecicel.org/accreditation/

CONTENTS



01	ABOUT US	PAGE 02
02	ACCREDITATION	PAGE 04
03	ACCREDITATION PROCESS	PAGE 06
04	CLIENTS SUPPORT	PAGE 09
05	APPEALS	PAGE 10
06	COMPLAINS	PAGE 11
07	FEES AND EXPENCES	PAGE 12
08	CONTACT	PAGE 13

This handbook is valid for inspections taking place from 1 April 2022 until the release of the next edition. Any amendments to the terms and procedures set out in this handbook necessitated by, for example, change in legislation, before the release of a new handbook will be notified to all accredited providers and clearly posted on the website www.ecicel.org.

1. ABOUT US

1.1 INTRODUCTION

European Centre of Independent Certification in E-Learning (ECICEL) was founded by a group of distance education providers in Latvia in 2010.



After an agreement by the Council in 2013, accreditation procedures were revised in order to standardise its criteria while referencing to understood benchmarks.

We have now witnessed tremendous growth in the international student migration market. Additionally, the number of institutions seeking international students has significantly grown. There's a need for a robust and transparent approach towards ensuring that colleges only recruit appropriately qualified students. At the same time, colleges should also be qualified to provide the best possible experience, allowing students to achieve their fullest academic potential.

WHO WE ARE

European Centre of Independent Certification in E-Learning (ECICEL) is an international professional association governed by Council and officers. It was established in 2010 to enhance professionalism in the distance learning industry that includes maintaining the standards of the education system and promoting the best practice of modern administrative science in pedagogy. ECICEL community has about 87 active members across the globe. These are universities, colleges and private institutions.

ECICEL essentially provides accreditation services to colleges, schools, training organizations, and universities worldwide. What's more, these accreditation services vary depending on the institution in question. With over 15 years of experience in the field, ECICEL offers a unique in insight into the online global education market.

WHAT WE DO

European Centre of Independent Certification in E-Learning (ECICEL) offers a variety of services at different levels under the Distance Learning Quality Standard. These are:

- Membership Association
- Accreditation Service
- Personnel Certification
- Policies and Procedures Guidance
- Events and Conferences
- Support

SUCCESS THROUGH QUALITY.



1.2 OUR PHILOSOPHY

The challenges of the XXI century to the modern education system require new approaches to teaching and learning. Nowadays in the context of a globalised society, well-defined education policies and effective school management are prerequisites for the social, economic, and cultural development of the countries. In this sense, quality in educational organizations plays a significant role and it is a key factor in the effective functioning of organizations.

The modern approach to the quality management of education at all institutional levels is something that we are not only developing and spreading across the globe but also inspired by. Essentially, our philosophy promotes the best practice of modern administrative science into pedagogy and its application to the education unit, to operate efficiently and achieve the expected goals.



2. ACCREDITATION

Accreditation is based upon the inspection of the full range of the institution's provision and supporting activities, together with a detailed consideration of the institution's documentation, which helps to ensure that operations of the institution is maintained at an acceptable level.

2.1 ABOUT ACCREDITATION

The primary goal is to assess the institution's delivery and qualifications, not just one particular program. That said, ECICEL doesn't credit educational courses or programs. More importantly, ECICEL doesn't confer the approval of a specific program offered by an institution or even degree-awarding powers of the said institution. Typically, ECICEL offers Accreditation to different educational providers, including universities, colleges, schools, training organizations, and online and distance learning providers. On top of that, ECICEL also is capable of providing Accreditation to departments and faculties within a more prominent university or college.

2.2 ACCREDITATION PRINCIPLES

ECICEL is internationally known for its quality standards for colleges, schools, universities, and distance learning providers. Through its international accreditation services, this body was founded to bring independent unbiased information to students, institutions, and the higher education world. Additionally, ECICEL has well-defined objective benchmarking.

Undoubtedly, the accreditation process performed by ECICEL is independent and completely unbiased. Professional and experienced inspectors undertake the process. Even though the process considers the facilities, resources, and other factors available in the institution, the primary focus is on the whole student experience. Additionally, the inspection also involves the staff's expertise.

However, the accreditation process is holistic, focusing on the entirety instead of individual programs offered in the institution. Therefore, institutions can approach ECICEL for Accreditation regardless of the specific discipline they focus on. The whole idea is not to just award a one-kite-off mark but rather to recognize the institution's expertise when providing a quality educational experience to students.

Through Accreditation by ECICEL, students and parents will make more informed decisions when selecting schools, colleges, and universities. Additionally, the institutions will also demonstrate their readiness and quality qualifications when offering distance learning to international students. The Accreditation allows students and parents to have a holistic and honest picture of what they should expect from the institutions.

2.3 AREAS OF OPERATIONS

During this accreditation process, here are the following areas that will be assessed:

- Health and Safety
- Student Welfare
- Course delivery: learning and teaching
- Awards qualifications
- Quality assurance and enhancement



2.4 THE BENEFITS

Getting Accreditation by ECICEL is not a one-time process. ECICEL is determined to maintain and develop partnerships with its accredited institutions to help them grow internationally and within their country. On-going development with accredited institutions will also incorporate events and conferences on topics that improve quality of education.

- Improve quality of education and make sure your institution meets specifically designed international standards.
- Proudly display the ECICEL seal on your website. Students can validate your institution via our website 24/7.
- Better commitment to providing quality courses, practices and culture to learners and staff.
- You can confidently promote your institution, knowing your commitment to excellent education is affirmed.
- Your organisation enjoys the guaranteed status and added exposure to your target audience by being endorsed by ECICEL.
- Support and guidance from ECICEL help you strengthen and grow your institution.



3. ACCREDITATION PROCESS

The ECICEL accreditation process involves an inspection of the institutions supporting activities, provisions, and documentation that help ensure the efficiency of the learning process within the institution. Any institution considering getting accredited by ECICEL should submit their application form on the official ECICEL website. Documentation copies of the institution should accompany this application form.

STEP

PREPARATION

1

An institution seeking accreditation status prepares materials that effectively display the institution's accomplishments. The institution often creates a written report of its accomplishments, making sure to highlight specific achievements that help it meet the standards of the accrediting agency.

STEP

APPLICATION SUBMISSION

2

Applications for Accreditation must be made online on the ECICEL site (www.ecicel.org/accreditation_application) or must be addressed to: K. Valdemara Street 19, Riga, LV-1010, Latvia. The applicant must be confident of meeting all the accreditation requirements and applications must be made supplying all available information requested in the application form.

STEP

REGISTRATION FEE PAYMENT

3

When the application is accepted, you will receive a payment invoice for the registration fee. The fastest way to process your payment is by using our secure PayPal Payment System. We accept Visa, MasterCard, and American Express. This fee will be refunded in full if your application is declined by the ECICEL Board.

STEP

APPLICATION REVIEW

4

Once received, your application will be reviewed to ensure that all basic criteria are met.



STEP

5

ASSESSMENT

After reviewing of the application our staff will schedule a date of the initial assessment that is mutually agreeable. A team of ECICEL-trained assessors visits the institution site, LMS, conducts interviews with teaching staff (optionally), reviews policies and procedures to determine compliance with standards, operations, and reports its findings to the Commission for final determination of accreditation status.

STEP

6

DECISION IS REACHED

After the previous steps are completed, the ECICEL Board calls their assessors to review the collected information and affirm or deny accreditation status of the institution.

STEP

7

DUES PAYMENT

When the institution is approved, you will receive a payment invoice for the first year. The fastest way to process your payment is by using our secure PayPal Payment System. We accept Visa, MasterCard, and American Express.

STEP

8

CONTINUOUS REVIEW

By accepting accreditation status from a recognized accreditation organization, an institution agrees to uphold the quality standards set by the accreditation organization. The accredited institution also agrees to periodically submit to an accreditation renewal review. Because of this set-up, Accreditation is often an ongoing process, and schools must continually prove that they are meeting high quality educational standards year after year.

3.2 ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE

The Accreditation Committee features ECICEL officers who will decide how to award the Accreditation to a particular institution. These officers are interested in inconsistency and knowledge-based decision-making with impressive backgrounds in the field.

Additionally, maintaining or withdrawing the accreditation award is based on the following:

- Evidence provided by the official agencies,
- Reported evidence by the reporting inspectors after an inspection visit
- Reports arising from complaints and appeals and documentation of the institution in question.

3.3 INTERIM ACCREDITATION

Once the Accreditation advisor has thoroughly reviewed the accreditation report, the report moves to the Accreditation Committee, which will decide on one of the following outcomes:

- Awarding an interim accreditation that will not exceed 12 months

- In case of weakness within the institution, the committee will defer and give the institution a chance to rectify in a period of not more than three months. Generally, the institution will be given requirements they should meet. When the institution meets these requirements, it is then awarded Accreditation. The conditions might be completed by the provision of photographs or additional documentation. However, if the Accreditation Committee decides there's a need for further assessment, there'll be an extra charge for the visit.
- Refuse the award of Accreditation on the inspectors believe that there are severe shortcomings in the service provision of the institution. The institution, however, has the right to appeal, and the procedure is set out clearly in Section 5.

3.4 FULL ACCREDITATION

After the Accreditation Advisor has reviewed the final accreditation report, it will be assessed by the ECICEL Accreditation Committee, which will decide one of the following outcomes:

- they grant Full Accreditation for a term of not more than 12 months, after which it must be renewed.
- Postpone a decision if it is believed that there are any flaws in the institution's provision that could be addressed in a period of not more than three months. Typically, the institution will be given a set of conditions to complete, and Accreditation will be granted if it is determined that these have been met. Additional paperwork and/or images to confirm that any required improvements have been made may be used to satisfy the criteria. In some situations, the Accreditation Committee may determine that a second examination is required to establish that this is the case. There will be a fee associated with this visit.
- Deny Accreditation because the inspectors consider there are significant deficiencies in the provision. The institution has the right to appeal in this matter, and the processes for doing so are outlined in Section 5.

3.5 LISTING ON THE ECICEL WEBSITE

The institutions that get accredited are eventually listed in the ECICEL's registry. The list is regularly updated and can be used to confirm an institution's Accreditation via special form. Typically, the search result list includes information regarding the institution, including:

- Institution's name
- Country;
- Type of Membership;
- The certificate number;
- Issue date;
- Validity date.

3.6 USE OF ECICEL LOGO

The ECICEL logo and Logo use guidelines will be provided once the institution has been accredited. The accredited institutions are entitled to use the logo and other promotional ECICEL material as long as they retain their accreditation award. However, if the Accreditation is withdrawn, the logo and materials where it's been used will not be used further.

4. CLIENTS SUPPORT



TAKING CARE OF OUR CLIENTS

ECICEL has a unique and friendly call support system for all accredited institutions. The ECICEL's staff will always contact you several times a year to learn how your institution is fairing and offer assistance. ECICEL will additionally inform you of upcoming events and services that may be helpful.

The call line is also a chance to update ECICEL of any changes in the institution and stay in contact. It's also a requirement that all accredited institutions inform ECICEL of any significant operations changes in a timely manner. More importantly, all accredited institutions are required to complete the Annual Return adding information about the institution's operations over the year. These are typically sent by ECICEL staff just shortly before the anniversary within Accreditation and should be returned promptly.

Our support specialists are dealing with various inquiries from the institutional staff as well as students in a timely and efficient manner by covering all possible channels of communication:

- By phone +371 67 651 158 (Monday - Friday 10:00am - 5:00pm (UTC+2))
- By regular mail: K. Valdemara Street 19, Riga, LV-1010, Latvia
- By email at office@ecicel.org
- Via contact form on the site www.ecicel.org

5. APPEALS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

ECICEL recognizes that institutions denied Accreditation or whose Accreditation has been revoked or suspended should have access to a fair and timely appeal process. If the committee declines or withdraws the Accreditation, the in-charge Head of Accreditation must contact an institution's representative in 10 days, informing them of the decision, the rationale for it, and reminding them of their right to appeal.

Within ten days of receiving information on the Accreditation committee's decision, the institution representative should file for an appeal. However, you have to keep in mind that ECICEL still has the right to revoke Accreditation at any time, with or without an appeal. If an institution is deemed guilty of providing false information deliberately, its right to appeal is automatically taken away.

5.2 PROCEDURE

In some cases, an accreditation application may be rejected following the Stage 2 accreditation visit. In such a case, the institution representative may seek to review the inspection report. Also, they may request for submission of additional documentation in response to the grounds for rejection.

If there are members of the Accreditation committee who were absent during the initial meeting at which Accreditation was rejected, they will get the chance to review the report and possibly consider any new documentation.

The Accreditation Committee may still uphold the appeal, and in such a case, we will proceed to the third stage of the accreditation procedure. On the other hand, if the Accreditation Committee affirms the original decision, the institution will have the opportunity to appeal its Accreditation as indicated below;

An institution may seek an appeal hearing before the ECICEL Appeals Committee if the application for Accreditation is still rejected after the Stage 2 visit and a subsequent review or after the Stage 3 inspection visit. Also, the institution may seek a hearing if the Accreditation was revoked for any other reason besides providing the committee with false information intentionally.

It's the members of the accreditation committee who were never involved in the original decision-making that will serve on the Appeals Committee.

The appellant must submit a statement that outlines the basis of the appeal and any additional supporting material at least within 15 days of being notified of the possibility of filing for an appeal. After that, the Appeals Committee will try to convene within 15 days of receiving the appeal.

The Appeals Committee may dismiss the appeal, order for a new inspection at the expense of ECICEL, or even advise the Accreditation Committee to grant or restore Accreditation to the institution. The Chair of the Appeals Committee will report the meeting proceedings to the chief. Further, the ECICEL executive explains why that particular decision was made and further makes additional recommendations for the Accreditation Committee to consider.

At this point, the final decision rests with Appeals Committee, and there's no right of appeal beyond that. If an institution still wishes to appeal, they will need to pay an initial fully refundable fee, but only if the appeal is approved.

6. COMPLAINS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

ECICEL considers all legitimate and valid complaints against ECICEL-accredited institutions but only if the complainant has exhausted the available complaints procedures provided by the institution. All complaints must also be made to the ECICEL Customer Relations Manager in writing to be deemed authentic.

The complaint should describe the reason for the complaint and identify the complaint clearly. Of course, that should be related to the failure of the institution to meet the set accreditation criteria. ECICEL is unlikely to take into account complaints of any other form. But aside from that, ECICEL takes valid complaints seriously and will do everything possible to intervene and offer reliable and acceptable solutions to all involved parties.

All in all, ECICEL advises the students to always carefully review the refund and complaints procedure an institution offers before they commit to avoid any future misunderstandings. Also, ECICEL encourages employees to keenly analyse the employment contract and complaints procedure before they accept a job offer.

6.2 PROCEDURE

Once the ECICEL Customer Relations Manager receives a complaint, they will contact the complainant by letter requesting that the complaint be set out in a hard copy letter to the CRM signed and dated along with any other relevant documents. That includes;

- a written complaint detailing the nature of the issue and supporting evidence, such as the institution's response to their complaint or proof that a complaint was submitted to the institution
- any other documents/evidence to substantiate the complaint; ECICEL may also request additional supporting documents from the complainant to assist in the investigation of the complaint if necessary; full information will be provided

Also, the complainant confirms they've exhausted the complaints procedures the institution provides without still being able to resolve the raised issues to the satisfaction or that the available procedures are not relevant. Therefore, the complainant authorizes ECICEL to try and resolve the issue. Following all that, ECICEL then deals with the complaints as indicated below;

- ECICEL staff members individually log each complaint and acknowledge they've received it;
- they review provided documents, and in case additional documentation is required, the complainant is contacted to request for them;

- ECICEL contacts the institution's principal and requests them to investigate the specific complaint and provide relevant details within ten working days;
- the institution's representative is reminded that as part of the accreditation process, they need to cooperate to resolve complaints filed against their institution;
- the letter sent out to the institution's principal will also include details of the complaint(s) and suggestions for how to resolve them, initially by writing, then through a meeting if necessary;
- the Representatives' response will be scrutinized to guarantee that the institution has adhered to its accreditation commitments;
- ECICEL will then inform the complainant of the outcome and suggestions given to the institution

Both the complainant and the institution's principal will be notified when the conclusion of a complaint is reached or if there's a need for a more detailed investigation. In this case, ECICEL will appoint an inspector who will be tasked with making an announced visit to investigate the basis of the complaint at hand. Where applicable, the UK Visa and Immigration shall be notified of receiving a legitimate complaint and the status of ECICEL's attempts to solve it.

7. FEES & EXPENSES FOR ACCREDITATION



7.1. APPLICATION FOR ACCREDITATION

- EUR 50 - Application fee and other accompanying documents;
- EUR 400 - Annual Accreditation Fee for Private Institutions;
- EUR 500 - Annual Accreditation Fee for Universities;

The first yearly fee is required almost immediately after the full Accreditation and interim is declared. Further, annual accreditation payments will become payable on the anniversary of the initial period of the Accreditation.



PAYMENT OF FEES AND EXPENSES

After the final outcome of the application is revealed, institutions are obliged to pay all fees and expenses involved with the accreditation application. Institutions that fail to comply with the condition or fail to pay the annual fee within one month of the deadline will be considered to have dropped out of the accreditation process and will not be granted Accreditation. That also applies to institutions that fail to pay the invoiced fees on time and in accordance with the provisions of the invoice.



REFUND AND COMPLAINS

If an institution decides to withdraw from the accreditation process after submitting an application and paying fees to ECICEL, no fees will be reimbursed.

In case there's a need for an appeal, an institution must pay a EUR 300 deposit which will be reimbursed if the appeal goes through. All the same, you have to keep in mind that ECICEL maintains the right to change its fees at any time if it deems it necessary. Existing ECICEL institutions shall be notified in writing of any changes made to the accreditation fees.

OUR CONTACT



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