

SPECIAL ACCESS



This document is part of a set of guidelines that relate to accreditation. In particular it contains the *Guidelines for Special Access* that provide special criteria and procedures, beyond the normal requirements, for access to higher education.

We offer this update as a tool in helping our stakeholders progress toward greater fitness for service, for God's greater glory in Europe.

ECTE Review committee

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1. – SPECIAL ACCESS GUIDELINES

1.1 – Normal access requirements¹

The ECTE requires that institutions admit students whose academic potential allows them to achieve the academic objectives of the graduate profile. Clear academic admission standards are published by institutions for each programme, specifying the required previous level of study. These admissions standards will be aligned with comparable higher education access. Normally, the following academic access standards should be referred to:

- CERTIFICATE/DIPLOMA: Completion of secondary education.
- PROFESSIONAL BACHELOR: Completion of secondary education.
- ACADEMIC BACHELOR: National "First Cycle" university access requirements.
- POSTGRADUATE CERTIFICATE: Bachelor or equivalent.
- PROFESSIONAL MASTER: Vocational bachelor or equivalent.
- ACADEMIC MASTER: Academic bachelor or equivalent. National "Second Cycle" university access requirements.

In general, institutions should require standard access qualifications to higher educational programmes that are in line with national and international standards.

It is however possible to consider the following special provisions for access to higher education.

¹ See *Standards and Guidelines for ECTE Accreditation*, B.4.1

1.2 - Special access cases

MATURE STUDENTS

If a mature applicant can demonstrate that his/her professional or personal experience has produced results comparable to the outcomes of a given certification, admission to higher education should be considered. For a bachelor level programme, for example, this might apply to a mature student who is over 21 and has not attempted to achieve standard entry qualifications in the last 5 years.

In the case of a substantial use of mature student access, institutions will need to develop specific questionnaires, student self-evaluation reports and procedures for collecting and demonstrating professional and personal experiences.

EQUIVALENCY EXAMINATION

One useful tool to verify the fitness of mature students is the equivalency examination. Where this solution is adopted, students without the necessary legal requirements (generally adult students) may sit for an examination that proves their ability to study at the higher educational level. Institutions that choose to devise equivalency examinations must do so in consideration of the final outcomes of their degree programme and of the necessary knowledge, understanding and learning skills required to perform successfully in a higher education programme of study.

In the case of substantial use of an equivalency examination, institutions will need to provide models of the examination that will be used. The examination should include two components: one whereby the general level knowledge is certified and the other which certifies the academic skills of the candidate. This second part is very important and may include, for example, the reading of texts of selected difficulty with subsequent evaluation of the degree of understanding, interpretation and critical thought. Writing and language proficiency should also be examined.

PROPAEDEUTICAL TRAINING

Another possible solution for students without the necessary formal access qualifications is to offer “propaedeutical” training. This is especially useful in Europe at the moment because there are so many differing entry points from which theological institutions wish to attract students. Since there are no entry requirements at all into this kind of propaedeutical training, institutions should be reasonably rigorous so that only those who genuinely demonstrate their ability to benefit from the institution’s level of studies eventually pass.

In the case of substantial use of a propaedeutical year, institutions will need to develop objectives for this programme, a set of learning outcomes the programme seeks to achieve and the detailed curricular plan to be used. The duration and content of this curriculum must also be specified and evaluated by the ECTE in advance of its implementation.

2. MONITORING PROCEDURES FOR SPECIAL ACCESS

Where liberal use is made of these special provisions there is the risk of lowering the standard of admission requirements. Institutions might be tempted to devise a rather simple equivalency examination to increase their student numbers. Since many students study hard to obtain their necessary access qualifications, wherever an equivalency examination is administered, it must be extensive, rigorous and truly authenticate a student’s ability to operate at the necessary level. Care must be taken that this provision does not contribute to lowering of both class and overall degree levels. Institutions should be rigorous in keeping

high standards and in channelling failing students into other preparatory opportunities. The ECTE therefore asks institutions to consider special provisions for mature students, but at the same time to take care that the quality of their degrees is not diminished. The ECTE will reserve itself the right to revise and correct excessive flexibility or severity.

It is generally suggested that special access in any programme be limited to 25% of the student body. The ECTE will monitor the procedures used in special access provisions to ensure that high standards are maintained. In general institutions will be required to:

1. Explain the circumstances and the reference to national criteria justifying the use of special provisions for access;
2. Indicate which solution(s) the institution intends to adopt and why (mature students and equivalency examination, propedeutical year, etc.);
3. Outline in detail the procedures, programmes and materials it will use in implementing these special provisions.
4. In their Annual Progress Reports institutions must give a brief description of each student admitted through special provisions. Institutions should monitor the achievement of those admitted under special access and compare their final grades with students admitted under normal access. If the grades are consistently and significantly lower, then a tightening of their use of special access is in order.

These Guidelines have been approved by the ECTE Council, 28 November 2019 and are valid until their revision.

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