

INDEPENDENCE, CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND INTOLERANCE PREVENTION POLICY



This document lays out the ECTE policy and strategy for independence, conflict of interest and intolerance prevention. This takes place in the context ESG 3.3 related independence.

INDEPENDENCE

The ECTE operates independently in full autonomy from other bodies and is fully responsible for its operations and outcomes.

Although the association is governed by the General Assembly and operates within a peer-accreditation scheme, accreditation decisions are performed by the ECTE Council independently, with no influence or interference from the General Assembly, from the institutions that are the beneficiaries of the accreditation or from other stakeholders.

VETs (Visitation Evaluation Teams) are nominated and appointed independently from third parties such as higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholders. VETs make recommendations to the ECTE Council by means of written Review Reports following on-site visits, but do not participate in the accreditation decision-making processes. Both the independence of the reviewers and the independence of decisions are thus safeguarded.

Other measures to guarantee independence are found in a number of ECTE policies and procedures.

The following table depicts areas of organizational, operational and formal outcomes independence in the ECTE.

ECTE independence analysis

	Organizational independence	Operational independence	Independence in formal outcomes
Approving statutes, budget, electing Council, approving accreditation standards, strategic plan approval	General Assembly		
Engaging procedures and methods		General Assembly and Council	
Nomination and appointment of external experts		Council	
Accreditation decisions			Council

All personnel (Council members, staff and VET) are required to commit to this policy, which is included in the *No Conflict of Interest Declaration*.¹

¹ See <http://ecte.eu/ga/forms/no-conflict-of-interest-declaration/>

SAFEGUARDING INDEPENDENCE FROM OTHER ACTIVITIES

In addition to quality assurance, the ECTE also performs activities related to networking and development. These are carefully regulated to safeguard the infringement of independence in the ECTE's quality assurance activities.

NETWORKING

The ECTE's networking activities include, for example, membership expansion, the organization of events, the sharing of information, project management and fundraising and participation in other networks.

The recruitment of new regular members gives no unfair advantage to institutions that, at a later date, should wish to enter the accreditation process. Membership in the ECTE represents, in fact, the first phase in the accreditation process to which all institutions submit. It is possible, however to remain an ECTE member and not enter the accreditation process.

When the ECTE organizes events, these are open to the public and participation therein does not influence the quality assurance processes of institutions engaged in or entering into the accreditation process. Likewise, when the ECTE is involved in the management or fundraising for specific projects, it does not receive nor grant privileged treatment to institutions, nor allow their participation to influence accreditation processes. The same applies to participation in broader higher educational networks or international networks of theological education.

Where doubts should arise concerning the infringement of independence in the ECTE's quality assurance activities from networking activities these are discussed on a case-by-case basis by the ECTE Council.

DEVELOPMENT

The ECTE's development activities include, for example, the production and sharing of resources, corporate training and partnership with the ICETE Academy.

The production of resources and sharing thereof are public activities that offer no advantages in terms of quality assurance processes nor do they generate conflict of interest related to those producing or benefitting from the resources. The same applies to the corporate training that the ECTE offers during its General Assemblies which is entirely voluntary and unmonitored.

Since 2019, the ECTE undersigns and organizational payment plan with the ICETE Academy and offers it as a membership benefit to all its member institutions. The ECTE has participated in the founding and is involved in the current leadership of the ICETE Academy. The academy remains however an independent organization and the ECTE has no financial returns. Although the ECTE encourages faculty or staff of ECTE institutions to take courses and become fellows of the ICETE Academy as part of their staff development plans, individuals take courses independently from any monitoring or interests related to the ECTE's quality assurance processes.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The ECTE *No Conflict of Interest Declaration*² is meant to prevent situations where doubt is cast on an accreditation recommendations or decisions because those involved might not be fully impartial.

To ensure that the VETs performing review visits and the ECTE Council that is responsible for making the final accreditation decisions are free of conflict of interest, VETs and Council members (on being elected) will be asked to fill out and sign the *No Conflict of Interest Declaration* that includes a declaration to decline review involvement should conflict situations arise. Should Council members be involved as VET members in reviewing an institution or programme, they will abstain from the accreditation decision-making process related to the review. ECTE staff also sign the declaration.

In deploying the VET teams, care is taken to safeguard operational independence in practice, in defining procedures and methods and nominating experts. The ECTE will not send experts to visit institutions with whom they have proven close relations. Generally speaking, VET teams will also have an international composition so as to avoid regional competition or conflicts of interest.

INTOLERANCE PREVENTION POLICY

The ECTE intolerance prevention policy refers to the work of Council members, staff and VET members with ECTE institutions, other Council and staff.

ECTE personnel commit to act respectfully of other persons and to give the same opportunities regardless, for example, of race, color, gender, age, disability, theological convictions, political opinion or social origin.

ECTE personnel commit to maintain accreditation decisions and judgments unrelated to agreement/disagreement with the theological convictions of the parties involved.

All personnel (Council members, staff and VET) are required to commit to this policy, which is included in the *No Conflict of Interest Declaration*.³

This policy has been approved by the ECTE Council, 16 March 2021 and is valid until its revision.

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² See <http://ecte.eu/ga/forms/no-conflict-of-interest-declaration/>

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