SKVC

Second external evaluation regarding compliance to the

The Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG-2015)

Self-evaluation report

2016 November

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A-Z list of abbreviations

AMVK	Commission for Higher Education Institutions' Reviews
EHEA	European higher education area
CEEN	*Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education*
Centre, SKVC	Centre for quality assessment in higher education
EQF	European qualifications framework for Life-Long Learning
ENIC	*European Network of Information Centres in the European Region*
ENQA	*European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education*
ESF	European Social Fund
ESG	*Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*
EQAR	*European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education*
INQAAHE	*International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education*
Law	Law on Higher Education and Research of the Republic of Lithuania adopted on 30 April 2009 effective since 12 May 2009 except for the Articles the entry into force of which was postponed (see *official Gazette,* 2009, No 54-2140). The new version of Law adopted on 29 June 2016 and effective from 1 January 2017.
KPMPC	Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre
LMT	Lithuanian Research Council
LTQF	Lithuanian Qualifications Framework
MOSTA	Research and Higher Education Monitoring and Analysis Centre
NARIC	*National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union*
SPAK	Commission for Appeals against Study Programme Evaluation
SVK	Commission for Study Programme Evaluation
Ministry	The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania
Council	Council of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education
Government	The Government of the Republic of Lithuania

1. FOREWORD

Since its establishment in 1995, the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (further - SKVC, the Centre), acts as a national quality assurance agency and as a foreign qualifications' academic recognition and information centre. The main objective of the Centre's activities is to achieve harmonization of Lithuanian system of studies with the principles of the European Higher Education Area. Our goals are to encourage the quality of higher education and to promote quality culture, to increase internationalisation and to create favourable conditions for study and professional activities as well as for the free movement of persons.

The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education is the only agency for Lithuanian higher education quality assurance, we focus on the quality of first and second cycle study programs. SKVC also participates in quality assurance of transnational provision: we are responsible for the activities of Lithuanian universities and colleges abroad (if such activities occur), in addition, we monitor activities of foreign higher education institutions in Lithuania. However, the Centre is not the only agency empowered to operate in Lithuania – according to the Law, other quality assurance agencies can carry out the evaluations of study programmes; SKVC will issue an accreditation decision on that basis as well.

Nevertheless, the external quality assurance activities are exceptional in a sense, that evaluation and accreditation make only a part of all Centre's the activities (although a very large one). At the same time, we also support higher education institutions efforts to improve quality of studies, raise public awareness of quality, and encourage taking responsible choices of further studies.

We carry out external assessment and accreditation of higher education institutions (state and private universities and colleges, branches of foreign institutions in Lithuania) as well as of currently running and new study programs. We provide recommendations for the improvement. The activities of SKVC as quality agency also include advice on questions

> **SKVC works to increase competitiveness of Lithuanian higher education and clarity of its qualifications**

of self-evaluation, law application, publishing of evaluation results (notwithstanding the responsibility of HEIs to make those results public as well), production of analyses, organisation of training, seminars and other events, drafting of legislation pertaining to the field of studies, and projects. We are the members of the academic community in Lithuania, we contribute to its activities. We see higher education primarily as a public good, so we participate in different public discussions and forums, and as an expert organisation we represent Lithuania abroad.

This self-evaluation report is the basis for the second external review to confirm the Centre's compliance with *The Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG-2015). The first one was coordinated by the ENQA and its positive results led to the full membership in ENQA from 2012 and (in the same year) to the listing on EQAR, the register on trustworthy external quality assurance agencies. Panel's recommendations allowed us to set new ambitious goals to implement the expectations of ESG. The progress report (2014) highlighted how we took note of expert recommendations and improved our activities.

The main objectives of the second external review are to exercise public accountability, to improve the Centre's activities on the basis of self-evaluation and expert recommendations. It also aims to once again confirm the membership in ENQA and EQAR by a way of us proving to be a reliable, transparent agency, which meets international quality standards. We believe this is important not only to us, but also to our partners in Lithuania and abroad. Quality is not static, it requires constant effort. We are open to change, since we accept the premise that we can do more and better or we can work differently. Learning from reflection of our own activity, as well as from the experiences of others and from the external remarks is very important to us.

2. DEVELOPMENT OF THE SELF-EVALUATION REPORT

Separate sections in the self-evaluation report describe Lithuanian higher education system and SKVC work, its main activities as a quality assurance agency and the background. The report further analyses how the Centre complies with the ESG part 3, and how the Centre and the whole external quality assurance system in Lithuania meets the expectations and requirements of ESG part 2. The document also focuses on the progress achieved on the basis of panel's recommendations after the first review and presents the developments in improvement of the Centre's activity, we do this by describing the specific means used and the results achieved.

This report has been prepared by the self-evaluation group that included senior management – Nora Skaburskienė, Acting Director and Aurelija Valeikienė, the Deputy Director (self-evaluation team leader); middle level management – Ieva Vaiciukevičienė, Head of Legal and General Affairs Division; Almantas Šerpatauskas, Head of Study Evaluation Division; Eimantė Bogdan, Deputy Head of Study Evaluation Division; Rima Žilinskaitė, Deputy Head of Qualifications Assessment Division; and chief specialists from the two departments conducting quality assurance agency activities – Tautvilė Tunaitienė, Institutional Review Division and Aušra Leskauskaitė, Study Evaluation Division.

The self-evaluation was done over a period of several months; minutes of the working group meetings have been taken. Colleagues worked on different sections of the text, the content of which has been discussed during the general meetings of the group and the feedback has been provided. We have analysed publicly available self-evaluation reports of other quality assurance agencies, as well as agency external assessment reports; we looked in detail at the decisions of ENQA Board, at the expectations of EQAR and at the interpretation of ESG.

We have carried out internal consultations with all SKVC employees, who have contributed to the SWOT analysis and the present self-evaluation report, also consultations with our highest governing body, i.e. the Council. Moreover, members of all three advisory institutions (Commission for Study Programme Evaluation, the Commission for HEI Reviews, and the Committee for Appeals against Study Programme Evaluation) have been consulted with. During the meetings we have got feedback from the main external stakeholders, i.e. students, higher education institutions, employer representatives, experts. We have arranged separate consultations with the leaders of universities, colleges, quality managers of both types of higher education institutions. Data from the Centre's strategic plan and its monitoring, annual activity reports, results of the thematic analyses and survey results, official statistics have been used for the analysis.

The self-evaluation report has been written in Lithuanian and then translated to English.

3. LITHUANIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM AND ACTIVITIES OF THE CENTRE

The current Lithuanian higher education system is the result of a process that lasted for more than 25 years. The aim of the process was to create and develop the system of the independent country. The preparation for the restructuring started already at the Soviet time, during the national upheaval period from 1988. The higher education reforms were launched after the reestablishment of Lithuania's Independence in 1990.

The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education was established in 1995. The Centre was entrusted with the task of organising peer evaluation of research and teaching activities of the higher education institutions, evaluation of higher education qualifications and provision of information relating to the recognition of qualifications. This became the basis for further development of the external quality assessment in Lithuanian higher education system and for its internationalisation.

In 1999, Lithuania joined the Bologna Process and three study cycle system (launched in 1993-1994) was further strengthened and developed taking into consideration countries needs and requirements of the Bologna Process. The quality assurance system in higher education was successfully further applied and developed, transparency measures have been introduced (including creation of the state register of study programs and educational institutions, free automatic issuing of diploma supplement, ECTS-based credit system), the national qualifications framework LTQF has been created, international collaboration in research and higher education has been increased and strengthened.

> **Lithuanian higher education system is based on the principle of compatibility with the standards of the European higher education area and sees itself as an integral part of the European higher education area**

> **Academic freedom and autonomy are among the principles on which the higher education system rests**

As defined in Law on Higher Education and Research of the Republic of Lithuania (2009, 2016) (further on – the Law) the aim of research and higher education is to satisfy and protect public interests. The state regulation of the higher education system is implemented to achieve this goal. The regulation covers setting principles of systems' management, organisation and oversight; defining quality assurance principles for research and higher education; describing legal basis for the establishment, ending and restructuring of research institutes and higher education institutions; award and recognition of higher education qualifications; management, activity planning and stirring of research and higher education institutions; rights and obligations of lecturers, researchers and students, etc.

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According to the Law, research and higher education policy:

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Is developed by:	Is implemented by:
The Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania	The Government
	The Ministry of Education and Science and other ministries
	Lithuanian Research Council [LMT] (carries out expert activities, evaluation and financing of research activities, academic recognition of third cycle qualifications)
	The State Studies Foundation (administers loans, grants, study fees)
	SKVC (acts as an external quality assurance agency in higher education and as an academic information and foreign qualifications' recognition centre)
	Office of Ombudsman for Academic Ethics and Procedures (deals with complaints regarding infringements of academic ethics and procedures)

Other institutions empowered by the Government and Ministry of Education and Science and other institutions:
Research and Higher Education Monitoring and Analysis Centre [MOSTA] (organizes and carries out analyses and monitoring of research and entire higher education system)
Agency for Science, Innovation and Technology [MITA] (coordinates national and international research and experimental development programs, and implements measures promoting innovations)
Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre [KPMPC] (evaluates the quality of vocational training, oversees implementation of Lithuanian Qualifications Framework)

The President of the Republic of Lithuania also contributes to the formation of education policy by submitting draft legislation projects and by participating during draft legislation debate in the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania.

General legislative hierarchy is in force in the Republic of Lithuania, which is also applicable in the area of research and higher education:
1) Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania – the highest legally binding law;
2) Ratified International Treaties;
3) Laws of the Republic of Lithuania;
4) Resolutions by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania;
5) Orders by the Minister of Education and Science;
6) Orders by the Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education.

The Constitutional court of Lithuania monitors the compliance of Lithuanian laws with the Constitution. The Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania is responsible for the compliance of hierarchically lower laws to the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania.

SKVC collaborates with different institutions in its activities. We constantly meet with colleagues at the Ministry of Education and Research (further on – Ministry) regarding questions of law application or the draft proposals (it was particularly important in the last few years when drafting new Law on Higher Education and Research and related documentation); we discuss different subject matters relating to the activities of higher education Institutions and the Centre's work; joint meetings allow to coordinate activities with other institutions. We provide information on the accreditation of the study programs to the Centre of Information Technologies in Education (ITC) and to the Association of Higher Education Institutions for general admission (LAMA BPO). We constantly exchange information with the Lithuanian University Rector's Conference (LURK), Director's Conference

Cooperation with other institutions is a part of the Centre's daily activities

of Lithuanian Colleges of Higher Education (LKDK) as well as participate in their meetings. MOSTA provides the Centre with the data on learning resources of the higher education institutions; LMT provides information on doctoral places and on the results of the formal evaluation of the research. This data is important in the institution review area. For the institutional review, the Centre communicates with the Academic Ethics and Procedures ombudsman to obtain his conclusions on the academic ethics assurance practices in the specific institutions. We receive information from the State Security Department, which is important in assessing persons who intend to establish a new HEI or a branch of a foreign provider in Lithuania.

The Centre cooperates with student organisations (Lithuanian Student Union, Vilnius University student Association), as well as with the employer associations. We participate in the meetings of The Education Council and The Higher Education Council – two advisory bodies on formation and implementation of state policies. As mentioned before, SKVC maintains working relations with other organisations, including the Centre for Information Technologies in Education (ITC), which is responsible for the maintenance of information systems and registers in education, as well as with the Education Supply Centre of the Ministry of Education and Science (ŠAC), which administers preparation and implementation of national education programs and projects, takes care of various supplies for education sector. The Centre also works with Lithuanian Quality Management and Innovations Association (LKVIA), which has a division, uniting quality managers within HEIs.

Lithuania does not have an inspection body for education. Among its other activities, the National Audit Office of Lithuania audits all organisations carrying out Education policies as well as research and higher education institutions by executing random financial and activity audits. There are three other organizations sharing responsibilities over the quality assurance in education: The National Agency for School Evaluation externally assures the quality of secondary education; The Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre (KPMPC) assures the quality of vocational training, Lithuanian Research Council (LMT) assesses research and artistic production, grants rights to conduct doctoral studies.

State higher education institutions (universities are established by Seimas and Colleges are established by the Government) are public institutions, whose main objective is to serve public interests. Natural and legal persons (except state and municipality institutions and organisations) can set up higher education institutions. In this case it would be non-state higher education institutions that are given the status of the public body or Joint stock company (JSC). Lithuanian laws allow establishing private higher education institutions. Serving and protecting of public interests is assured by the management, administration, maintenance and monitoring processes that set requirements, obligatory to follow for all higher education institutions (both state and non-state). Non-state higher education in Lithuania started at the turn of the millennium, but there was no volatile growth and subsequent contraction as in some other post-Soviet countries. The long term trend is that 10 percent of all students choose to study in a non-state sector. Franchise and validation mechanisms are not foreseen in Lithuanian higher education. Only one branch of a foreign higher education institution operates in the country (Poland's Bialystok university branch, faculty of Economics and Informatics). The European Humanitarian University, having its roots in Belarus, views itself as a liberal arts institution in exile, it currently operates as a private Lithuanian higher education institution.

> **Lithuanian higher education system is binary and consists of university and college sectors**

The system has been unitary up to the year 2000 (only the university sector was active, most of the research institutes have been separate from universities). Starting 2000, the system became binary, i.e. the sector of colleges has been introduced. According to the Department of Statistics, in 2015-2016 academic reference year 39 772 students studied in colleges (82 percent in state and 18 percent in non-state), and 93 524 students studied in universities (95 percent in state and 5 percent in non-state). The general trend of recent years is that each year colleges lose ~2000 and universities – 7000 students. This demographic decline will last till 2020, then the numbers are likely to increase slightly.

The two sectors are clearly identified by the Law:
- there are two types of higher education institutions: universities (22 universities, 14 of them are state universities) and colleges (22 colleges , 12 of them are state colleges);

- there are two types of study programmes: university (1440 programmes[1]) and college (451 programmes);
- university and college qualifications are different; colleges award professional bachelor's degree, while universities award bachelor's, master's and doctor degree;
- college studies prepare for professional activity and award qualification based on the applied research and (or) art activity; university studies focus on universal general education, theoretical knowledge and the highest standard professional abilities.

There are non-degree studies offered, but only in certain study fields, including medicine, odontology, veterinary medicine, and pedagogics. Non - degree pedagogical and residency studies focus on professional skills, award professional qualification and prepares for practical activities.

Higher education institutions have autonomy to manage academic, administrative, economic and financial activities on the grounds of self-governance and academic freedom; however, autonomy must be balanced with the accountability to the public, the founders and members of a legal person. Autonomy of higher education institutions is expressed through their rights; while accountability to the public, the founders and members of a legal person – through defined obligations. Rights and obligations are set by the Law.

> **The quality of the studies is ensured by the licencing and by the internal evaluation and external evaluation and accreditation of the higher education institutions and study programmes; the system is based on the international standards**

Quality of studies is assured using different means:
- provision of studies and engagement in related activities in Lithuania are licensed, i.e. it is necessary to obtain a license to conduct such an activity. The Centre gives its conclusion on the institutions readiness to conduct higher education and activities related to provision of studies, on this basis the Ministry decides whether to grant a license or not.
- Regular external evaluation and accreditation of the higher education institutions and study programmes is carried out, i.e. there are procedures to determine whether the evaluated objects meet the minimum quality requirements. The Centre conducts external evaluation of the institutions, and I and II study cycle programmes according to the procedures defined by the Law; decision on accreditation is made upon completion of the external evaluation. According to the Law, the higher education institutions can apply to any EQAR quality assurance agency for the external evaluation of the study programmes.
- An important part of quality assurance system is the input from the higher education institutions under assessment. To stimulate further development, the higher education institutions have introduced systems of internal quality assurance; this way increasing in-house capacity for self-reflection and development.
- The Lithuanian Research Council carries out the evaluation of higher education institutions readiness to conduct doctoral education, supervises III cycle studies and evaluates research production and artistic activities.
- The Ministry and MOSTA monitor the general accessibility and quality of education and research.
- The Ministry, the Centre, MOSTA, LMT and other institutions have obligations to consult higher education institutions and bodies implementing higher education policies according to their field of responsibility.

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[1] Data on higher education institutions and study programes are kept in the official and public register of study programes and qualifications. University study programes include bachelor's, master's and integral programes as well as non-degree study programmes (residency and pedagogical).

- Preventive actions are implemented by the Ministry, the Centre, MOSTA, LMT and other institutions.
- Disciplinary actions are defined (e.g. targeted assessment could be initiated by the Ministry).
- Improvement-oriented measures for development of quality (e.g. using training opportunities, promotion of excellence and other means).

The three cycle system is applicable to degree study programmes - professional bachelor's, bachelor's, master's, doctor. College studies are conducted only at the first study cycle, after successful completion of such studies, professional bachelor's degree is awarded (I cycle in terms of Bologna, LTQF level 6). University studies are of all three cycles, upon graduation respective awards are made – bachelor's degree (I cycle, LTQF level 6), master's degree (II cycle, LTQF level 7), research doctor or art doctor degrees (III cycle, LTQF level). Master's degree can be awarded

Lithuania has 8 level qualifications framework related to the European qualifications framework. The system of degree study programmes is based on three study cycle structure

after following integrated studies (include first and second study cycles). After finishing non-degree studies, professional qualifications are bestowed, no academic degrees are given.

There is a hierarchy defining the learning outcomes: Lithuanian qualifications framework; study cycle descriptions; study field descriptions; finally, each programme has a description of its learning outcomes

The study cycle description, approved by the order of the Ministry in 2011, defines learning outcomes typical for each study cycle (i.e. including qualification(s) associated with the cycle). The learning outcomes of each cycle and qualification are expressed through such categories as knowledge application; ability to conduct research; special skills, personal skills, and social skills. The main qualitative differences between the study cycles are defined in the study cycle descriptions that are based on the European qualifications framework (EQF) and the descriptions of EHEA framework (Dublin descriptors). The structure of the higher education system is shown in a scheme[2].

Studies can be carried out according to the accredited study programmes that are included into the Register of study programmes, training programmes and qualifications (only the accredited programmes are included into the Register). Between 2010 and the end of 2016, Lithuania had a very extensive system of study classification. 6 main study areas (technological sciences, physical sciences, biomedical sciences, social scieces, arts, humanities) were divided into study field groups (15), study fields (139), and further – into branches of studies (total 568). Degree study programmes were carried out according to the approved study fields, divided into the respective study areas. The study fields could also consist of branches, i.e. a smaller study program division unit, combining programmes in the same field based on the different study goals. The study programmes must meet

Qualifications are regulated at a state level and are based on the defined learning

general and specific requirements (or only general, if no specific requirements are approved). General and specific requirements for the specific study field program are defined in the subject benchmark statement (field group, area) approved by the Ministry.

Up until the end of 2016 the study field was indicated when awarding a degree (e.g. bachelor in Philology, Master's in Physics) or branch could have been listed (e.g. bachelor in Applied mathematics, Bachelor in International Business, Master's in Demography). As mentioned, professional qualification is awarded after completion non-degree studies (i.e., teacher, doctor, dentist, veterinarian). Professional qualification can be

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[2] http://www.skvc.lt/default/en/education-in-lithuania/higher#system

awarded after graduation from the first or second cycle studies alongside (professional) bachelor's or master's degrees. This is possible only if the programme prepares specialists of regulated professions. In this case a competent institution that deals with a regulated profession must approve the study programme and award of a professional qualification (e.g. the Ministry of Education and Research must approve teachers' professional qualifications). During the time of this self-evaluation by SKVC, drafting of a classification of study fields was in progress, and discussions on how to list the academic degrees took place.

From 2012, the Centre was coordinating the preparation of the new generation of subject benchmark statements. 53 statements have been written until the end of 2016. The subject benchmark statement is a key document, which serves as guidelines for the higher education institutions when preparing new or improving existing study programmes. It provides references on the formation of learning outcomes for new programmes, as well as for improvement of old programmes, it provides a broad definition of boundaries of study fields, lists requirements for study programme implementation. Then, every study program has a description. It lists the goals that are directly related to the learning outcomes of the programme and a corresponding qualification (knowledge, abilities and skills). Study programs in Catholic theology study field must meet the requirements set by both Lithuania and The Holy See.

The national credit system is based on ECTS

From September 1, 2011 the study load is measured by new credits based on ECTS system. One national credit equals to 1 ECTS credit. Professional bachelor study programme consists of at least 180 and not more than 210 credits (that translates into 3 to 3.5 years of full time studies). The load of bachelor studies is not less than 210 and not more than 240 credits (that equals 3.5 to 4 years of full time studies). Master's studies have at least 90 and not more than 120 credits (that equals 1.5 to 2 years of full time studies). The load of integrated (first and second cycle) studies is from 300 to 360 credits (this pertains to medicine, architecture, law studies). Doctoral studies usually last between 4 and 6 years; the usage of ECTS credits is limited and diploma supplement is not issued.

The state higher education institutions get mixed financing, i.e. it gets funds from the state budget and from the student fees. The funds from the state budget can be allocated to non-state higher education institutions only in certain cases, e.g. to subsidize provision of so called unique study programmes. Study fees can be compensated by the state if a student demonstrates very good study results. Students can apply for the state or state supported loans, social loans and other support funds.

4. SKVC HISTORY, PROFILE AND ACTIVITIES

Quality in our view is fitness for purpose. It is multidimensional and requires agreement from the main stakeholders in higher education, this agreement rests upon the expert evaluation

SKVC is an independent body financed from the state budget. Observing its realm of responsibilities, SKVC implements Lithuanian state policy on research and higher education. It also ensures that Lithuanian study system is coordinated with the standards of the European Higher education Area. We are the central public administration body whose activities extend across the country.

The main initiative in the establishment of the Centre came from the Ministry and from the members of academic community. The events on the international level and the mediation of other institutions were the biggest influences. The Centre was established on the 24th January,

1995 by the order of the former Minister for Research and Education; the Centre has been granted legal person's right. The Centre's main activities did not change since 1995: the Centre acts as a national quality assurance agency in higher education and as an academic information and foreign qualification recognition center. SKVC started regular external evaluations in 1998-1999 academic year, foreign experts were invited from year 2002. Up to the year 2009, the Centre carried out research and art evaluation activities, however, after the higher education reform in 2009 the Centre's functions have been reviewed and LMT became responsible for such evaluations. All activities that the Centre used to perform in relation to the promotion of mobility of researchers were also transferred to the LMT. The Centre's Statute is approved by the order of the Minister for Research and Education.

25 legal acts are directly related to the Centre's activities. Depending on the provisions of The Law, SKVC can be asked by the Government or the Minister for Research and Education to prepare regulatory documents for different areas. The Law and SKVC Statute define the main goals of the Centre, which are:

- To promote the quality of higher education institutions activities through external evaluation of institutions and study programmes as well as through accreditation;
- To create favourable conditions for the free movement of persons by organising and performing the assessment and recognition of foreign higher education qualifications, and to carry out other functions of the designated ENIC/NARIC centre (the network of European National Information Centre and National Academic recognition information centre) in the Republic of Lithuania.

From 2002, the Centre is an institution of public administration, which is a subject for legal regulation and control by the Public Administration Law, the Civil Service Law, the Law on Budget Structure, the Public Procurement Law, the State Language Law, the Personal Data Protection Law, etc. The Centre's internal working practices are defined by the general work regulations, by the regulations of different divisons and by various rules within the divisions, e.g. procedure of organizing business trips, rules for serving incoming clients, simplified rules for public procurement, etc.

Within the limits of its competencies, The Centre is authorised to make legally binding decisions for natural and legal persons, i.e. to issue individual administrative acts. The Centre makes formal decisions as follows:
- As a quality assurance agency –
  - On the external evaluation and accreditation of a study programme;
  - On the review and accreditation of the activity of higher education institutions;
  - On the evaluation of the application of higher education institutions to obtain a license to provide studies and conduct activities related to studies;
- As a qualifications' recognition centre –
  - On the recognition of foreign qualifications (access qualifications, as well as higher education qualifications corresponding to the level 6-7 of EQF/LTQF classification).
  - On the transfer of grades and establishment of comparability between subjects taught in secondary schools.

From year 2010 till September 1st, 2016, the Centre, acting as a quality assurance agency, has:

- Evaluated more than 50 higher education institutions (26 of them were universities and 24 colleges) and issued 51 time accreditation of HEIs;
- Carried out evaluation of 842 new study programs; made 735 decisions on the accreditation of the new study programs (107 times evaluation procedure has been terminated or programs did not receive accreditation due to a negative result) [ex-ante procedure];
- Evaluated 1411 on-going study programmes and made 1478 decisions on the accreditation of the current study programs (including decisions on the basis of other EQAR registered agencies) [ex-post procedure];

- Evaluated 4 applications to establish higher education institutions or their branches, or to obtain a permission to conduct higher education studies or study related activities;
- Organized more than 150 training, consultation seminars and discussions on various higher education quality questions (from 2011);

The Centre's functions, financing and other activities, in us acting as a quality assurance agency, have not changed in the last five years; the development has been consistent. The new edition of The Law was adopted in the middle of 2016 and will be implemented from the 1st of January, 2017. There will be a transitional period to prepare the entire higher education system for the changes. These preparations have already started at the legislation drafting stage. At the time of self–evaluation, the new edition of SKVC Statute has been prepared, presented for the approval to the founder and the Council.

Professionalism and quality; independence and impartiality; respect and trust; collaboration – these are values that we follow in our activities

The Centre's logo is a registered trademark. It uses a golden cut that represents approaching towards perfectionism. The logo and its different artistic variations are used in external and internal communications (e.g. in presentations, reports, publications, etc.). Claret and yellowish are our branded colours. The internet address of SKVC (both in Lithuanian and in English) is: http://www.skvc.lt/. The Centre's *Facebook* profile is for communications with the students and the higher education institutions.

SKVC structure and management

According to the SKVC Statute[3], last revised in November 2016, the Council of the Centre and the sole manager, i.e. the Centre's director, are collectively responsible for the management of the Centre. According to The Law, the Council of the Centre is composed of 11 members. Following the 2009 version of the Law, the SKVC Council members were appointed for a period of 6 years, one member was appointed by each of the following institutions: the Seimas (at the recommendation of the Committee on Education, Science and Culture), the Government, the Minister for Education and Research, the Lithuanian Research Council together with the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, university senates, academic councils of colleges, Lithuanian students' associations, the Lithuanian Council of Culture and Arts, the Confederation of Lithuanian Industrialists, the Lithuanian Chamber of Industry, Commerce and Crafts, and the Knowledge Economy Forum. The composition of the Council is announced by the Minister for Research and Education. The second Council in the Centre started its operations on 5th of January, 2016. Currently, discussions are held if, taking due consideration of slightly modified wording of the new Law, adopted in 2016, the Council of SKVC should be re-assembled by end of 2016 or early 2017.

Students and employers as stakeholders are included into all activities: legislation drafting, decision making within the Council and our advisory bodies', in peer review of higher education institutions and study programmes, in follow-up and other events

The Council debates questions within the limits of its competencies and makes decisions during the meetings. The Council participates while electing the Centre's director, approves SKVC vision and mission statements, approves strategic activity plan submitted by the Director, debates and makes proposals relating to the annual activity plans, approves annual activity reports and carries out other functions defined in the Statute.

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[3] http://www.skvc.lt/default/en/administrative-information/skvc-statute

Three advisory bodies operate in the Centre: Commission for Study Programme Evaluation (SVK), Commission of Higher Education Institutions' Review (AMVK), and Commission for Appeals against Study programmes Evaluation (SPAK). SVK and AMVK analyse the viability of the expert reports and advise the Centre's director on their quality. SPAK is a pre-litigation institution for external evaluation of study programmes, which deals with the higher education institutions appeals regarding the results of the external study programme evaluation. The higher education institutions, students and representatives of employers are included into the formation of the commission as the main stakeholders. The structure of the Commission is rotated and is publicly available alongside the Standing Order on the Centre's website.

According to The Law adopted in 2009, the SKVC director was elected in 2010 by public competition for a period of five years. The Director is responsible for the activities of the Centre. He carries out all administrative functions, passes legislation, represents the institution, cares for intellectual, physical and financial resources, ensures rational and cost-effective use of funds and assists and performs other functions set in the Statute. The Director is accountable to the Council and the Minister. According to the Law passed in 2016, the Director will be elected for 4 years by public competition and the procedures defined within the Civil Service Law so that at least half of the members of the selection commission were members of the Council of the Centre. According to The Law, a person may be elected as the Director for no more than two consecutive terms.

The number of employees in the Centre increased from 3 to 39 between 1995 and 2016. The team is young, but it has enough work experience, so energy goes well hand in hand with professionalism. Most of our employees are public servants, others (working on the projects) have fixed term contracts. The Centre is divided into divisions: Study Programme Evaluation Division and Institutional Review Division carry out the functions of the quality assurance agency; functions of Lithuanian ENIC/NARIC are performed by the Qualifications Assessment Division. There are also two other Divisions – for Legal and General Affairs and Finance. The structure of the Centre is available on the website[4].

The vision of the Centre is: The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education as an influential generator, implementer and disseminator of ideas in quality of higher education enhancement and regarding promotion of internationalization in Lithuania and in Europe.

Internationalisation is a particular feature of Centre's activities

Cooperation within the country and abroad

International relations are very important in SKVC activities. The Centre is a member of the international quality professionals' networks like ENQA, EQAR, CEENQA, and INQAAHE. It also participates in joint projects and partners with similar organisations abroad. We are members of different international working groups. Our specialists have been and still are members of Bologna process expert group in Lithuania. SKVC has received international recognition for its activities abroad. Our employees share their knowledge with institutions of higher education and other bodies. Most of our peers are foreigners, which create the feeling of "internationalization at home".

The Centre is proud of a really high level of internationalisation: foreign experts participate in the Council of the Centre, in our various evaluation processes, follow-up activities and other events. More than 90 per cent of expert panels are international, composed of Lithuanian and foreign experts. As mentioned above, experts from abroad also participate in other aspects of SKVC work, including governance and follow-up.

The Centre actively cooperates with its national partners on the questions of quality assurance. Our partners with whom we have signed agreements and with whom we constantly relate are: Lithuanian Student Union

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[4] http://www.skvc.lt/default/en/structure

(LSS), Vilnius University Student Association (VUSA), the Education Exchange Support Foundation (ŠMPF), Research and Higher Education Monitoring and Analyses Centre (MOSTA), Rector's Conference of Lithuanian universities and Directors Conference of Lithuanian colleges (LKDK), Centre for Information Technology in Education (ITC), Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre (KPMPC). The agreements with these institutions are of general nature, defining the exchange of information, and readiness to engage in certain activities jointly. Specific conditions including financial part are subject for separate agreements. The Centre willingly communicates and collaborates with many organisations even when agreements are not signed, we also positively respond to the media requests to provide data or commentary.

By our mandate, SKVC is not an institution formulating the policy, but rather an expert organisation actively participating in the development and improvement of legal acts regulating higher education. Our employees are members of different inter-institutional working groups and constantly participate in non-formal consultations. With the expert help we have implemented and continue to implement the systematic improvements to the regulations of the Lithuanian higher education (e.g. this way descriptions of the three study cycles and different study fields have been prepared).

When evaluating joint study programmes, the Centre has referred to the principle of the JOQAR project: it has addressed foreign quality assurance agencies with a proposal to cooperate when conducting a review the results whereof would be used to accredit programmes in all countries which provide this joint study programme. Regrettably, no joint review has been carried out yet. Cooperation with other agencies has been limited to the involvement of experts from certain countries only. Despite this, SKVC has communicated the evaluation results to quality assurance agencies of those countries; however, no information on the further use of these results has been received.

Catholic study programmes of the study field of Theology are subject not only to the requirements laid down in Lithuania, but also to the ones defined by the Holy See. The relationship of these jurisdictions is such that general requirements apply to the study programmes of the field of Theology to the extent they do not contradict the requirements defined by the Holy See. The external review of priest seminaries is conducted by the Holy See's Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality in Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (AVEPRO). It conducts the external review of priest seminaries together with the external evaluation of study programmes according to the AVEPRO criteria. The decision regarding accreditation of a priest seminary and its study programmes is made by SKVC on the basis of the evaluation report produced by AVEPRO. This way, both priest seminaries were accredited in 2015.

To date the Centre has conducted one institutional and study programmes evaluation abroad (a private HEI in Slovenia); the evaluation has been carried out on the basis of the ESG principles and SKVC methodologies, except for those parts that are not applicable to foreign entities (e.g. conformity with Lithuanian legislation).

External reviews of SKVC

SKVC, as a quality assurance agency, has received its first external evaluation by foreign experts in 2012. A positive evaluation allowed SKVC to become a full member of ENQA and it also allowed applying for the registration in EQAR. The 2014 progress report is provided as an annex to this report.

SKVC as a national ENIC/NARIC centre carried out self-evaluation in 2015 and was externally evaluated by the international expert group in 2016. Everything has been done according to the SQUARE methodology, standards and guidelines. We are proud to communicate that SKVC activities have been very positively evaluated[5].

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[5] More information about this external evaluation is available on http://www.skvc.lt/default/en/projects#SQUARE

5. SKVC ACTIVITIES ENSURING THE QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

SKVC is in charge of external quality assurance of Lithuanian higher education, and this translated into many more activities than just performing evaluation procedures. The mandate of the national quality assurance agency entails a pre-condition of remaining at critical distance from provider institutions, however, also includes the responsibility of co-contributing towards the development of the higher education system and the local academic community in Lithuania. This is challenging both intellectually and administratively, but also presents very interesting opportunities.

Thus, towards the ENQA external review and EQAR membership purposes, in the paragraphs below, we describe the entirety of what it is that we as quality assurance agency do. Other lines of work, related to acting as an academic information and recognition center, serving as member of ENIC/NARIC networks, do not fall under the external review Terms of Reference and are further omitted.

> **External quality assurance is not equal to conducting evaluation procedures, in includes much more**

While pursuing its activities, the SKVC implements the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. One of the activity goals of the Centre is to promote the quality of Lithuanian higher education as well as the quality culture, thus contributing to the improvement of higher education quality in Lithuania and beyond. In order to implement this goal, the SKVC conducts external reviews of HEIs and their study programmes both in Lithuania and abroad, evaluates HEI applications in order to obtain licences to act as higher education providers and perform other activities related to higher education, consults on the issues of quality improvement, cooperates with different target groups, makes information on its activities available publicly, shares the best practice during training and events, and keeps society and other stakeholders constantly informed about the outcomes of external review.

The activities of the Centre as a quality assurance agency:

- *Institutional review and accreditation of HEIs in Lithuania and abroad.* In Lithuania, this review is carried out seeking to create preconditions for the improvement of performance of a higher education institution, promote its quality culture, inform founders, academic community and society about the quality of performance of a higher education institution, and on the basis of evaluation findings provide recommendations regarding the improvement of HEI performance. Review is conducted according to four evaluation areas: strategic management; studies and lifelong learning; research and (or) art activities; impact on the region and the development of the country. The performance of branches of foreign higher education institutions established in Lithuania is reviewed very similarly, yet these branches are not accredited.

- *External evaluation and accreditation of new study programmes* (*ex-ante*): the goals of this evaluation are to evaluate the preparation of a higher education institution to launch a study programme, its conformity to legal regulations and the provisions of the European Higher Education Area, create preconditions for the improvement of a study programme and develop quality culture. Study programme evaluation is conducted having evaluated programme aims and learning outcomes, curriculum design, staff, facilities and learning resources, study process and student assessment, programme management.

- *External evaluation and accreditation of ongoing study programmes* (*ex-post*) in Lithuania and abroad. The goals of this evaluation are to evaluate the quality of provision of a study programme, its conformity to legal regulations, the provisions of the European Higher Education Area and the commitments of HEIs, create preconditions for the improvement of a study programme and develop the quality culture. Study programme evaluation is conducted having evaluated programme aims and learning outcomes, curriculum design, staff, facilities and learning resources, study process and student assessment, programme management.

- *Evaluation of applications for a license to provide higher education and perform activities related to higher education*: the goal of this evaluation is to assess founders' preparation to provide higher education, research (artistic) activities as well as to provide other services related to higher education. The purpose of this evaluation is to ensure that higher education services are only provided by those providers who meet the requirements for higher education institutions, are qualified, have adequate resources and are able to guarantee quality performance results. Evaluation is conducted having examined the descriptions of qualification requirements of teachers and other HEI staff, the facilities and learning resources available in the higher education institution and the financial plan.

- *Consultations regarding evaluation procedures*: SKVC has been constantly providing consultations (on the site, by phone or e-mail) to HEIs and other stakeholders about evaluation procedures and other relevant issues. The Centre's representatives also take part in tv or radio programmes, give interviews to journalists, prepare publications on such topics as improvement of higher education and its quality, as well as internationalisation. The Centre does not promote the specific commercial products or systems (e.g. ISO, EFQM, LEAN, the Common Assessment Framework, etc.) and does not propose individual managerial and administrative solutions. Performance improvement recommendations are presented in a summarised form on the basis of external review results, the analyses conducted by the Centre and drawing on foreign experiences.

The Centre contributes to the national definition of learning outcomes and to the guarantee of validity of qualifications granted in Lithuania

- *Facilitation in exchanging the best international practices*: SKVC organises various training events, seminars, discussions or conferences aimed at sharing the best practice and know-how, also discussing the remaining challenges, development of practices by learning from others locally and abroad. We invite international speakers, and participants come not only from Lithuania but also from other countries. SKVC staff takes part in international projects related to higher education quality assurance (e.g. ALIGN, BIHTEC, etc.) and in ENQA working groups.

- *Analytical activities and proposals for the improvement of higher education quality, participation in the legislative process*: SKVC has been continuously collecting various statistical data, conducting post-review analyses and overviews, participating in various national and international working groups regarding the quality of higher education and submitting proposals for its improvement. Collected information and proposals are provided to various stakeholders and higher education policy-makers. The Centre has also been actively participating in the drafting and improvement of national legislation governing higher education, e.g. as already mentioned, when implementing the project "Development of the system of descriptors regulating higher education" 53 descriptors of different study fields (sometimes called subject benchmark statements) have been prepared; these are used by HEIs when designing and improving study programmes, and by experts when externally evaluating study programmes. The staff is involved in the work of various working groups of the Ministry of Education

and Science or other institutions, and regularly takes part in non-formal consultations regarding the improvement of legislation.

- *Making evaluation results available publicly*: the results are introduced in various events (e.g. in the annual higher education exhibition), while communicating with pupils', students', teachers' and other organisations, as well as through mass media. Since information on the performance of HEIs is useful to future and current students as well as graduates, other stakeholders and society, the aim is to inform about the results of SKVC activities and accumulated knowledge as many concerned parties as possible; therefore, all evaluation reports (including negative ones) produced by experts are made public on SKVC website.

- *Communication and cooperation with different target groups of SKVC (pupils, students, employers, HEIs)*: provision of individual consultations, sharing of available information and the best practice related to quality assurance in training, seminars, conferences. The Centre uses various information dissemination channels and means to maintain constant communication with students' organisations, schools, foreign organisations, related public authorities, and business structures. One more type of target audience has been lately distinguished – these are quality agencies of other countries. The Centre reaches these agencies through messages posted in the ENQA, CEENQA, INQAAHE newsletters, we make efforts to be highly visible there.

6. SKVC QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES AND METHODOLOGIES

One of the core functions of the Centre as an agency for assuring quality in higher education is external evaluation and accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes, which generates the biggest volume of work and requires the most of the organisation's resources. In implementing these functions, the Centre follows the provision set out in the Law that quality assurance in higher education is based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The Centre's external evaluation model covers the following stages:
- Preparation of the self-evaluation report of the HEI;
- Setting up of an expert panel;
- Examination of the self-evaluation report;
- Visit to the HEI;
- Preparation of the draft evaluation report and its presentation to the HEI;
- Analysis of the HEI's comments on factual errors;
- Drawing up the final evaluation report;
- Scrutiny of the evaluation report with the relevant advisory committee,
- Decision on accreditation;
- Publication of the evaluation report;
- Follow-up (with the HEI playing the key role);
- Filing of and examination of appeals, if any, before any decision is made on accreditation.

This external evaluation model applies to institutional review of HEIs and evaluation of on-going study programmes. This model is fully in line with the ESG principles.

In the case of new study programmes, this model applies where the programme needs the detailed external evaluation procedure in accordance with the Procedure approved by the Minister of Education and Science that took effect in 2011. Decisions on accreditation of new study programmes are made subject to:

- a simplified (in-house) programme evaluation;
- or detailed external evaluation of the programme with a visit.

In the event of the simplified evaluation of a new study programme, the Centre establishes the appropriateness of provided documents; looks at conformity of the scope of the programme to the legislative requirements, compliance to the requirements of the qualification to be awarded, study area, field and branch (if any) with the List of Study Areas and Fields in Higher Education and the List of Qualification Degrees and the List of Study Branches Comprising Study Fields, and assesses the need for the detailed external evaluation of the programme. If no deficiencies are found, this evaluation results in the accreditation of the study programme. Where the Centre identifies any deficiencies during the evaluation, the procedure for the accreditation decision is suspended until such deficiencies are rectified (within a given term).

The detailed external evaluation of a new study programme is carried out in the following cases:

- if a new study programme is submitted by a newly established HEI that is not yet accredited on the basis of the external review report;
- if a new study programme is submitted by a HEI whose last institutional external review was negative;
- if within the preceding three years a study programme in the same study field and cycle as the new study programme of that HEI had negative evaluation and was not accredited;
- if the HEI does not provide studies in the given study field and wishes to pen a new study programme;
- if the HEI established in the Republic of Lithuania intends to implement the study programme through a foreign branch;
- if the HEI implements another study programme in the same study field and study cycle as the new study programme, but has not submitted it for evaluation and/or accreditation two months before the expiry of the accreditation of that study programme(s), or its accreditation period was extended.

In 2014-2016, the detailed external evaluation was conducted in connection with roughly one third of the submitted new study programmes.

Elements of the external evaluation model are established in the Law, while external evaluation procedures, criteria and requirements are detailed in the Government Resolution (in the case of institutional review of HEIs), orders of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania (in the case of study programmes) and methodologies prepared by the Centre (in the case of evaluation of both – of all types of study programmes and HEIs). All these documents are publicly available on the webpage of the Centre and the database of legal acts of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania. As the need arises, the methodologies are improved, also with contributions from the academic community, employer representatives and advisory institutions of the Centre. When approving a new legal document, the date of entry into force is normally determined so that HEIs still have time to adjust to the new requirements. All processes commenced, but unfinished before the date when the new document becomes effective, are usually finalised in accordance with the preceding procedure.

In external evaluation of HEIs and study programmes we form international teams (including experts from Lithuania and foreign countries) or Lithuanian expert panels. The principles and process of expert selection are regulated by the Procedure for Expert Selection approved by the Director of the Centre. Expert nominations may be proposed to the Centre by research and higher education institutions, Lithuanian Students' Union and/or European Students' Union, professional associations, creative industries or other types of organisations, public authorities, business and industrial companies or organisations interested in trained specialists, other Lithuanian and foreign expert institutions. Persons who meet qualification requirements for expert can put forward their own candidacy by filling in an application form on the Centre's webpage. Information about experts is continuously collected and reviewed in the internal information system of the Centre.

For institutional reviews of HEIs, only international expert teams are set up. In the case of on-going study programmes, evaluation may involve either international or Lithuanian expert teams depending on the type of study programmes concerned, however, mixed teams represent the absolute majority. Expert teams for the HEI review and evaluation of on-going study programmes (ex-post) include representatives of stakeholders and students. The evaluation of new study programmes (ex-ante) usually involves two Lithuanian experts from different research and higher education institutions; lately a student was added to the team.

> **More than 90% of evaluations are conducted by mixed Lithuanian and foreign expert teams**

All experts engaged in evaluations are required to complete an impartiality declaration of the pre-determined form notifying of any potential conflict of interest and to sign a non-disclosure commitment until the end of evaluation. It should be noted that HEIs are informed in advance of the experts planned to be invited to evaluations, thus, HEIs can reasonably argue in writing that experts who, in their view, might have interests or be biased, should not be allowed to take part; however, these are isolated cases.

Also, the Centre carries out the evaluation of documents concerning the authorisation to provide higher education or engage in related activities. This evaluation seeks to establish whether the HEI or the branch of a foreign HEI has sufficient material and human resources to provide higher education or engage in related activities. For the purpose to evaluate application documents, the Centre sets up, according to its established procedure, an expert team comprising at least three experts from different institutions.

Following the receipt of application documents to obtain an authorisation to provide higher education or engage in related activities, the Centre first requests the State Security Department to submit its conclusion as to whether the intended activities of the HEI or the branch of a foreign HEI represents any threat to national security. Subject to the confirmation of the State Security Department that the intended activities of the HEI or the branch of a foreign HEI are not regarded as a threat to national security, a procedure is commenced in relation to the examination of documents, including a visit at the planned place of provision of higher education. As soon as the Centre draws up a reasoned evaluation report on application documents, the Ministry of Research and Education makes a decision on authorisation to provide higher education and engage in related activities taking into account conclusions of the State Security Department and the Centre's report.

7. CENTRE'S INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Since 2012, the Centre has been using a formal internal quality management system, which was developed on the basis of international standards ISO 9001 and ISO 9004, as well as the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. In 2016 SKVC performed a comprehensive review and is currently updating its quality management system.

SKVC has in place planning, operational control, feedback and reporting mechanisms. The Centre has its approved mission, vision and values. The quality policy, which is made public, sets out the obligations of the management in terms of continuous improvement of service quality of the Centre. The quality policy gives emphasis to data and information analysis based decision-making, cooperation with both external partners and within the Centre, public information about the Centre's operational objectives and results.

In 2013, a strategic action plan was prepared for the period of 2014-2016, and in 2016 the preparation of a new strategic plan for 2017-2019 commenced as part of the self-evaluation process.

Measures and indicators set out in the strategic plan are transposed into detailed annual working plans of SKVC[6]. Monitoring meetings on implementation of the strategic plan are held on a yearly basis; and working plan control meetings take place quarterly. Annual reports are made public and the text of the report is published every year; a long version and a summary annual report are produced.

For the purpose of regular monitoring of activities and discussion of current matters, the Centre arranges a weekly meeting of all employees and a daily brief administration meeting. The Study Programme Evaluation Division and the Institutional Review Division organise weekly meetings jointly to discuss not only current issues, but also challenges arising during evaluations and possible solutions. Minutes at the meetings of the divisions are taken, the protocols are stored on the Centre's intranet. This ensures uniform practice in external evaluation. The Centre employs a document management system encompassing all types of processes and documents.

As regards operational control, internal audits of selected processes are annually organised and performed by the staff trained specifically for this purpose. Audit results are used to improve the Centre's activities: each report ends with recommendations, which are subsequently discussed within the circle of colleagues concerned and accordingly implemented.

SKVC has a functioning internal and external feedback mechanism the results of which are exploited in enhancing operations. The internal feedback covers:
- joint weekly meetings of all employees;
- weekly meetings of the divisions (minutes taken);
- daily administration meetings;
- staff surveys.

SKVC has in place planning, operational control, feedback and reporting mechanisms

The external feedback is collected through:
- expert surveys (regular; the results are generalised and presented at the meetings of the divisions);
- HEI surveys (regular, the results are generalised and presented at the meetings of the divisions);
- meetings with experts following institutional review visits;
- feedback questionnaire forms after training and events;
- follow-up visits.

SKVC makes annual analyses of its activities and draws up yearly reports, which are presented to the Council of SKVC and made publicly available. In addition, thematic analyses are prepared and published.

8. INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Internationalisation is the essential feature and the precondition for the success of the Centre. With regard to its vision, SKVC not only sees itself as a proactive player at the national and regional level, but also has as its aim to contribute to quality assurance in higher education across Europe. Therefore, since its establishment, the Centre actively participates in the activities of international organisations through membership in five international networks – CEENQA, ENQA, INQAAHE, also ENIC and NARIC – by engaging in both their activities through a variety of projects and working groups and management, which means that considerable attention is

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[6] Strategic and annual plans are publicly available at: http://www.skvc.lt/default/lt/veikla/planavimo-dokumentai (LT)

paid to international participation and that the organisation has capacities available to that end. Membership in networks and professional relations also help to find and engage competent reviewers from a number of foreign countries in evaluations, follow-up activities and events.

The Centre, which in 2000 was one of the promoters of the regional network CEENQA, contributes to the organisation of network events (e.g. seminar in Vilnius in 2009) and takes part in projects (e.g. Almantas Šerpatauskas, Head of the Study Programme Evaluation Division was involved in the ALIGN project; Nora Skaburskienė, Acting Director participated in the BIHTEK project as an expert). Aurelija Valeikienė, SKVC Deputy Director formerly was a member of the CEENQA Board, the honorary treasurer of the network, and was also elected the President of the network. Nora Skaburskienė, as a current member of the CEENQA Board, takes an active part in events and projects of the network.

As a priority, since 2000 the Centre has also been involved in ENQA activities in diverse forms, at the outset as an associated member, and since 2012 - as a full member. In 2013 the general assembly of ENQA members was organized in Vilnius. Aurelija Valeikienė was a member of the ENQA Board, also worked as an expert on several occasions, delivered speeches and moderated discussions at various international events. Acting Director of the Centre Nora Skaburskienė, presently a member of the ENQA Board, having experience in the evaluation of quality agencies, was invited to take the floor at various international events. It should be noted that a few employees of the Centre were or currently are involved in a number of informal working groups of ENQA, including on impact of quality assurance (Nora Skaburskienė); staff development (Grytė Ruzgė, Agnė Tamošiūnaitė, Aurelija Valeikienė); stakeholder involvement in quality assurance (Almantas Šerpatauskas); excellence (Aušra Rostlund and Eimantė Bogdan, Deputy Head of the Study Programme Evaluation Division); review of the external review model for quality agencies, compliance of quality agencies with ESG requirements and links between quality assurance and qualification recognition (Aurelija Valeikienė). Nora Skaburskienė and Aurelija Valeikienė, who are included in the database of ENQA trained experts, have also participated in external reviews of other quality agencies in EHEA.

An important direction for SKVC development is the generation of new ideas in the area of quality assurance in higher education and qualifications' recognition. An example of this is the involvement of the staff of the Centre in such working groups as the ENQA working group dedicated to the improvement of the external review model for quality agencies (with contribution from Aurelija Valeikienė). SKVC activities are closely related to the adoption and dissemination of best international practices, also active contribution to their formation (for example, through joint publications, including such authors as Nora Skaburskienė, Aurelija Valeikienė, Almantas Šerpatauskas, Aušra Rostlund, Eimantė Bogdan). This not only guarantees professionalism of the organisation, but also allows for educating the public on the subject of quality in higher education, qualifications assessment and recognition.

Starting from 1995, the Centre was or still is a coordinator of total 21 project and a partner in other 29 projects financed by the European Commission, European Social Fund, foreign governments, other funds and state budget of Lithuania under various programmes

The newest example of innovative approaches, linking quality assurance and recognition of qualifications (thus, the two functions of SKVC) – in response to the expectations under ESG 1.4 – is the recently started international LIREQA project (more on it in chapter 14 on future developments).

SKVC has bilateral cooperation agreements with other quality agencies in the European Higher Education Area, including ANECA (Spain), AQ Austria (Austria), ASIIN (Germany), HAC (Hungary), NAA (Russia), NCEQE (Georgia), NCPA (Russia), PKA (Poland), IQAA (Kazakhstan), HEA (Bosnia and Herzegovina). It should be pointed out that not all bilateral relations are determined by and restricted to those agreements, as there are additional activities going on. For instance, we have accepted visitors from Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia and also have been

invited to events there. In 2014-2015 we have contributed towards implementation of the Twinning project in Bosnia and Herzegovina, led by colleagues in Austria; in 2016 – in another Twinning project in Armenia, led by colleagues in Finland; in both cases – related to development of QA capacities in the respective countries. In 2016 the Centre joined as a partner the project designed to strengthen the Latvian quality agency (AIC) and provide it assistance in preparation for ENQA review and compliance with the criteria for an EQAR registered agency. We positively respond to the invitations from all agencies to nominate experts for reviews and evaluations.

We see potential for developing and intensifying relations with Nordic quality agencies, and the dialogue has already been ongoing to that end.

As a quality assurance agency, the Centre was not active in foreign countries between our two external reviews, until now only one institutional review and study programme evaluation process was finalised in Slovenia. It is important that it was carried out in accordance with the working principles applied by SKVC in Lithuania and in conformity with ESG, including the publication of evaluation results. Inquiries from foreign HEIs encouraged the Centre to set out and publish criteria for evaluations in foreign countries.

The Centre also participates in INQAAHE events and communication, but otherwise it is not an active participant of the network because of the related costs.

9.   COMPLIANCE WITH PART 3 OF STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

9.1   ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

> **Standard:**
> Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.
> **Guidelines*:***
> To ensure the meaningfulness of external quality assurance, it is important that institutions and the public trust agencies. Therefore, the goals and objectives of the quality assurance activities are described and published along with the nature of interaction between the agencies and relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the scope of the agencies' work. The expertise in the agency may be increased by including international members in agency committees. A variety of external quality assurance activities are carried out by agencies to achieve different objectives. Among them are evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities at programme or institutional level that may be carried out differently. When the agencies also carry out other activities, a clear distinction between external quality assurance and their other fields of work is needed.

The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education performs external quality assurance activities on a regular basis, as described in paragraph 2 of the ESG, namely drafts and updates methodologies by involving all interested parties in this process; ensures the reliable, useful, pre-defined, consistently implemented and publicly available processes of external quality assurance; the external quality evaluation is carried out by

teams of experts, which involve academics, students and employers; any conclusion or decision that is made on the basis of external evaluation outcome is based on clear and publicly available criteria. All evaluation reports developed by the experts are made public; they are clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other stakeholders. Decision on accreditation adopted on the basis of the evaluation findings are published together with the evaluation report. Regularity of external evaluations and thereto related activities is established by the Law, which is a supreme legal act regulating the research and higher education activities in the Republic of Lithuania.

All external evaluations organised by the Centre are repeated on a regular basis. External evaluation of the ongoing study programmes, on the basis of which the study programme is accredited, was launched in 1999-2000. The evaluation of all ongoing study programmes in Lithuania, depending on the last evaluation results, is carried out every 3 or 6 years.

The Centre seeks to implement its mission, which is publicly available, and values in the Strategic Plan (covers medium term) and in annual operating plans by formulating the tasks related to external quality assurance, and by appointing responsible persons. Moreover, the quality assurance agency prepares working plans for 2 -3 years that provide for the scope of evaluations, types and number of events, required human and financial resources, larger procurements, as well as resources for improvement of qualification and for business trips. This ensures that the agency's goals are reflected in the daily work. The monitoring of activities is carried out and changes are recorded every quarter; financial statements are quarterly based and are of several types. Detailed annual activity reports are prepared, which are made public and submitted to the founder.

The Centre constantly seeks to ensure transparency of its activities and trust between the member of research and higher education institutions and the public. One of the SKVC operating principles is to ensure the involvement of social partners in the work and governance of the Centre. The representatives of employers and students not only take part in the expert teams evaluating study programmes and higher education institutions, they are also involved in the advisory institutions operating in the Centre and together with the representatives from universities, colleges, the Ministry make the Commission for Study Programme Evaluation, the Appeals Commission for Study Programmes, and the Commission for Higher Education Institutions Review.

The Council of the Centre involves persons delegated by different institutions, such as the Lithuanian University Rectors' Conference, the Lithuanian College Directors' Conference, the Lithuanian Students' Union, the Lithuanian Culture and Art Council, the Lithuanian Confederation of Industrialists, the Lithuanian Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Crafts Associations, the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, the Association *Knowledge Economy Forum,* the Minister of Education and Research of the Republic of Lithuania, the Science Council of Lithuania together with the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences and the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania. Since 2016, a member from abroad (Latvia) is included in the Council of the Centre.

Reviews of the Lithuanian higher education institutions (institutional review) for the first time started in 2000 when higher postsecondary schools were restructured into colleges. Legal acts valid at that time envisaged that within four years from the start of its operation the review of a college had to be performed; so since 2004 the review has been in process how colleges have fulfilled the requirements set out during their establishment. However, the review of universities took place only on their own initiative, taking advantage of the opportunities offered by international organizations (e.g., the EUA institutional evaluation programme, the OECD's international higher education management programme, and the Salzburg Seminar). In preparation for a new type of institutional review the Centre has ordered an international comparative study to ground the benefit of such type of procedures. In 2011 the institutional review of higher education institutions started, during which in four years period the evaluation of all universities and colleges operating in Lithuania was completed. Depending on the review results, a repeat evaluation of the higher education institution is organized 3 or 6 years after the first evaluation.

Over the period 2012-2016 (until 1 October) the number of evaluations of study programmes performed by the Centre in Lithuania totals as follows (on the basis of data the Centre):

In 2012 – 421 (out of them 229 current and 192 new study programmes);
In 2013 – 448 (out of them 319 current and 129 new study programmes);
In 2014 – 378 (out of them 285 current and 93 new study programmes);
In 2015 – 257 (out of them 192 current and 65 new study programmes);
In 2016 (until 1 October) – 251 (out of them169 current and 82 new study programmes).

It should be noted that the lower number of evaluations, for example in 2016, does not mean a smaller workload, as analysis were performed, legislation drafted and similar.
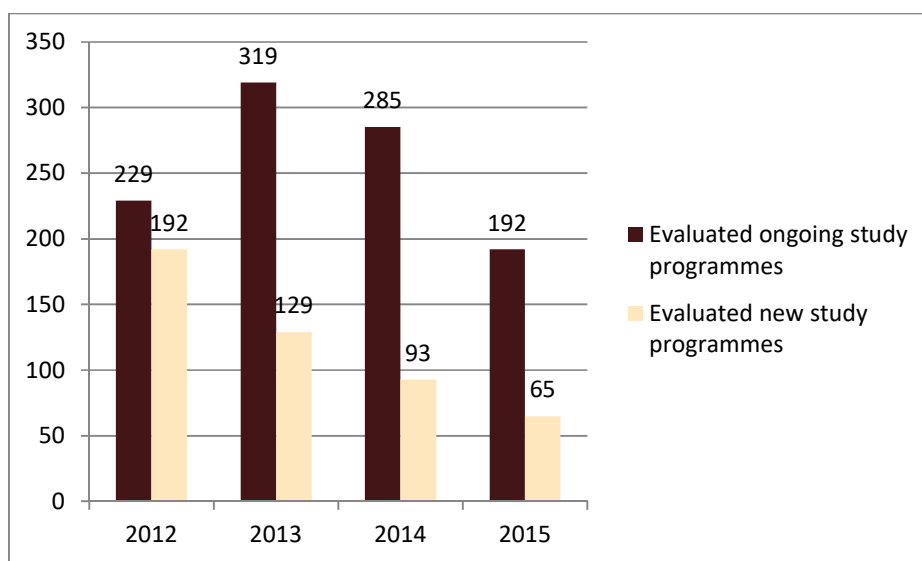
Number of reviews of higher education institutions:
- In 2012 – 14 visits, 8 higher education institutions accredited;
- In 2013 – 12 visits, 11 higher education institutions accredited;
- In 2014 – 19 visits, 17 higher education institutions accredited;
- In 2015 – 4 visits, 11 higher education institutions accredited;
- In 2016 (until 1 October) –1 visit, 3 higher education institutions accredited.

As in the case of study programme evaluations, the lower number of institutional reviews does not mean a lower workload for the staff, because at that time there were no activities and visits of review teams organised; while the meetings of follow-up activities were held and analysis conducted.

During the period from 2012 to 2016 the Centre has completed evaluation of 3 study programmes and one institutional review abroad.

Representatives of the Centre provide consultations to the higher education institutions on the issues related to any evaluation process organized by the Centre. Consultations are organized considering the need when representatives of higher education institutions come to the Centre or its representatives go to the higher education institutions; advice is provided by phone and e-mail as well.
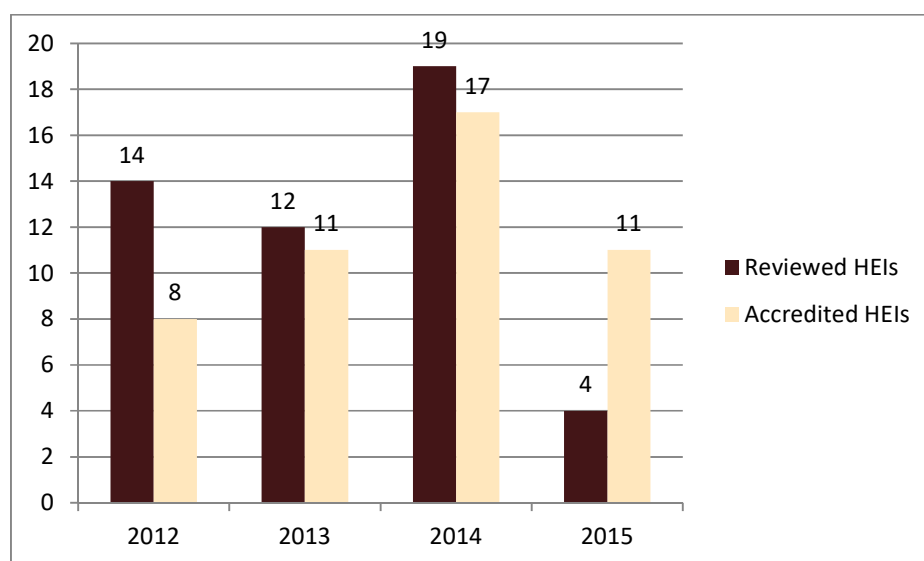
As mentioned above, in order to achieve its objectives the Centre organizes evaluations of study programmes and institutional reviews as well as carries out other activities, namely organizes international and national conferences, training courses, prepares analysis and operational reviews. Every year various events for the higher education community on relevant topics are arranged. Over the period of the last six years, the Centre as a quality assurance agency organized over 150 different events. The main of them are as follows:

- 2011 - 8 training courses for producers of self-evaluation reports;
- 2012 – 1 international event (*International Practice In Developing Descriptions of Study Fields - Implications for Lithuania*), 8 training for producers of self-evaluation reports;
- 2013 – 3 international events (4th ENQA as the General Assembly, the meeting of quality assessment agencies of the Baltic States and *Creating a Network of Quality: What Can we Learn from Each Other*), 5 training courses for producers of self-evaluation reports;
- 2014 – 3 international conferences for representatives of higher education institutions (*Effective Internal Study Quality Assurance: Appropriate Involvement of Stakeholders; Quality Improvement of Pedagogical Study Programmes through the Follow-up Activities;* the *Bologna Process Achievements and Challenges*), 1 international training for employers, and 3 training courses for those who are in charge of producing self-evaluation reports within HEIs;
- 2015 – 2 international conferences for representatives of higher education (*Internal Quality Assurance: Interaction of Central Administration and Academic Units* and the *Implementation of Student-Oriented Studies in the Lithuanian Higher Education: View of Students and Teachers*), 1 international training for social partners and 2 trainings for producers of self-evaluation reports;
- 2016 - 2 international conferences for representatives of higher education institutions (*Implementation of European Higher Education Area Quality Assurance Standards and Guidelines (ESG-2015): Challenges to Respond to Innovation; Internationalism and Quality: the Importance of Leadership in Finding a Right Balance*), the meeting of quality assessment agencies of the Baltic States, 2 trainings for producers of self-evaluation reports and 1 training for representatives of employers.

It should be noted that events are taking place not only in Vilnius, but also in other locations of HEIs (e.g., training on drafting of self-evaluation reports).

More information about the analysis and reviews performed at the Centre in 2011-2016 could be found in Chapter 9.4.

9.2   ESG 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS

> **Standard:** Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.
> **Guidelines:** In particular when external quality assurance is carried out for regulatory purposes, institutions need to have the security that the outcomes of this process are accepted within their higher education system, by the state, the stakeholders and the public.

SKVC is a budgetary institution with the public administrative authorisations for the entire Lithuanian higher education sector (both public and private higher education institutions (at the university and college level). As mentioned before, decisions of the Centre have a binding force.

Main functions of the Centre are described in publicly available legislation: the Law on Higher Education and Research and its detailing legal acts (Resolutions of the Government, orders of the Minister of Education). Such a regulation guarantees the clarity and coverage of its activities. The Centre has a defined basis to legally operate. Functions of the Centre are described in detail in publicly available lower level legislation, namely its Statute.

Activities of the Centre have a clear legal background. We are recognised abroad as a quality agency, the operation of which substantially complies with ESG

The following two main functions performed by the Centre are singled out: external evaluation and accreditation of HEI and their study programmes, the evaluation of applications to conduct studies and evaluation of activities relating to studies; counseling; public presentation of conclusions and analysis; academic recognition of foreign qualifications and provision of information.

In 2016, a new version of the Law on Higher Education and Research[7] maintaines similar functions of the Centre (as in the previous external review). Both editions of the Law endorsed in 2009 and in 2016 provide for regularity of external evaluations (both for study programmes and institutions) (in 2009, Art. 42(2), 44(1); in 2016, Art. 49(3), 48(3)). The new Law endorsed in 2016 more clearly defined the status of SKVC in the higher education system and its importance to the system has obviously increased.

Given the fact that accreditation of study programmes and institutions is mandatory, SKVC, as an institution implementing this function, creates the conditions for lawful implementation of studies that is related to financing of the institutions implementing the programmes.

As already referred to, from 2002 SKVC became an entity of public administration; therefore its activities are regulated by a large degree by the Law on Public Administration, the Law on Civil Service, the Law on Budgetary Institutions, the Law on Public Procurement, as well as the relevant resolutions of the Government on organization of the work of state institutions.

Being a part of the public sector, the functions performed by the Centre are subject to audit from time to time with the aim to decide on their scope and necessity. In 2014, while implementing decision of the Strategic Committee of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania on optimization of the public sector (coordinated by the Ministry of Economy), *inter alia,* the functions of the institutions subordinate to the Ministry of Education and Science were reviewed, including those of SKVC and MOSTA. The Centre has provided

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[7]New edition of the Law will come into force on 01-01-2017.

explanations about the specifics of its activities and relevant organizations abroad. In 2015 it was decided that functions of the Centre and other organisations are not duplicated and there is no need for reorganisation.

The Centre, as EQAR registered quality assurance agency and as a member of ENQA, CEENQA and INQAAHE, is officially recognized abroad.

9.3   ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE

Standard: Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.
**Guidelines*:*
Autonomous institutions need independent agencies as counterparts.
In considering the independence of an agency the following are important:
- Organisational independence, demonstrated by official documentation (e.g. instruments of government, legislative acts or statutes of the organisation) that stipulates the independence of the agency's work from third parties, such as higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholder organisations;
- Operational independence: the definition and operation of the agency's procedures and methods as well as the nomination and appointment of external experts are undertaken independently from third parties such as higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholders;
- Independence of formal outcomes: while experts from relevant stakeholder backgrounds, particularly students, take part in quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agency.
Anyone contributing to external quality assurance activities of an agency (e.g. as expert) is informed that while they may be nominated by a third party, they are acting in a personal capacity and not representing their constituent organisations when working for the agency. Independence is important to ensure that any procedures and decisions are solely based on expertise.

SKVC operates as an independent and autonomous body evaluating the quality of studies, which assumes full responsibility for its own activities and consequences of these activities. The institutional independence is evidenced by: organisational independence, operational independence, independence of formal decision-making, and tradition of communicating with the stakeholders.

> **SKVC both *de jure* and *de facto* operates as an independent quality assurance agency**

First of all, the independence of SKVC is guaranteed by the institution's management structure: the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education is managed by a sole governing body, namely the Director, and a collegial management body - the Council of Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereinafter referred to as the Council). SKVC director is elected on a competitive basis by a committee composed mostly of the SKVC Council members. Staff of the Centre is selected independently, by public competition according to the set procedures valid for civil service or labour relations in the public sector. The Centre ensures the consistency of public and private interests, it does not employ persons with close family relations, all civil servants declare their interests, income and assets.

The Council is composed of representatives delegated by different institutions and organizations, including representatives of employers and students. Composition of the Council is formally announced by the Minister of Education and Science, but the Chairman of the Council and his deputy are elected by the Council members. The Council acts in accordance with its approved Regulation and following the principles of collegiality (the

issues for discussion are drafted, discussed and then followed by voting) and openness (both working plans and activity reports are publicly available). As a rule, at least one meeting per quarter is held and upon the need electronic meetings are organised. Neither political considerations nor economic interests dominate in the Council; members of the Council must mandatory publicly declare their interests. The Council has a secretary, who is an employee of the Centre.

Secondly, the Centre organizes its activities itself and takes care of the necessary resources. The Centre has registration of a separate legal entity, on its own behalf disposes of bank accounts, has its own official stamp with the State symbol of Vytis. The mark of the Centre (the golden cut with the organization's acronym) is patented. The Centre manages the State-owned facilities by the right of trust that are separate from structures of the founder, higher education institutions or business. Some part of information resources (e.g. computer licenses) are provided in a centralised way through the Centre of Information Technologies in Education and in the future it is planned that procurements of IT will be more centralized on the state level and this is a general trend typical not only to the education sphere.

Thirdly, independence of the institution is evidenced by legal acts: the Law on Higher Education and Research identifies us as a part of the higher education system, responsible for external evaluation and accreditation. Centre's activities in more detail are regulated by the Regulations, the subordination is stated in the institutional chart, and each employee has a job description. Legal acts of different level explicitly describe participants of the evaluation process, its stages, terms and other conditions thus providing a basis for the same interpretation and practice. According to the Procedure for Selection of Experts approved by the order of SKVC Director the Centre, irrespective of higher education institutions, the Ministry and other government institutions, selects experts to carry out evaluations, so the nomination and appointment of experts is independent of third parties. It is important to note that all the experts performing the task must complete the declaration of interests presented by SKVC and a promise not to disclose information and indicate their potential conflict of interest if there is a situation that could hinder the expert be impartial and objective in performing the task. Higher education institutions have the right to request replacing a member of the expert team if present evidences for being the expert bias. To deal with such a request (there are only some cases during a year) an internal *Ad hoc* Commission is formed in order to evaluate the circumstances and advise the Director of the Centre on the necessity to replace the expert. Higher education institutions are notified of the examination results of any request. For example, in 2015-2016, six letters were received from the higher education institutions requesting to change member of the expert panel. Having examined these letters at the *Ad-hoc* Commission, the Centre has rejected the requests five times because the higher education institution has failed to provide evidence which proves a possible expert's conflict of interest and being bias and improper qualification and only once changed the member of the expert team having regard to the arguments presented by the higher education institution.

Decisions on accreditation are made irrespective of the opinion of the Ministry of Education and Research or higher education institutions and are based on the evaluation reports prepared by experts (evaluation results) and after hearing opinion of the Commission for Higher Education Review or the Commission for Study Programmes Evaluation on the validity of conclusions. The cases for defending the interests of students of the study programme and urgent measures for improving the quality, if a decision not to accredit is made, are discussed in individual meetings where proposals to extend the accreditation period are discussed. There are no cases where the decision made by SKVC on evaluated study programme or institution's accreditation would have been withdrawn by the Centre itself or other institutions.

The Centre operates in a small academic community; and if the "telephone law" exists or subjective decisions are made these facts will be widely known. The Centre protects its reputation and in all cases remains impartial and objective, although sometimes receives various criticisms. Recently, more attention in the Lithuanian

public management sector is paid not only to compliance to the principles of ethics of civil servants but also the prevention of corruption. For that purpose, in 2016 the institutions, including the Centre, were commissioned to announce agendas of heads on their website also all external meetings, to publish business trips of the staff, as well as other information. Throughout the organization it is planned to carry out a separate corruption risk assessment and provide for additional prevention measures. To this end, a working group was set up at the end of 2016.

It is important that individual administrative acts of SKVC, as an institution, on evaluation of study programmes are appealed against to independent pre-trial institutions and courts: the Appeals Commission of Study Programmes, the Chief Administrative Disputes Commission, the Vilnius Regional Administrative Court, the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania, but not to political or governance institutions. The only exception is the appeals against the review of higher education institutions and against the application to issue authorisation to conduct studies and thereto related activities. These issues are discussed at the Appeal Commissions set up by the Ministry (in each case a separate commission). Currently, different delegation of responsibility is being discussed with regard to appeals of higher education institutions on institutional review.

An important element in the activities of the Centre is consultations with the Ministry, the Council of the Centre and other stakeholders. The final decisions, however in accordance with the principles on public administration, are taken by the SKVC Director, who is responsible for the performance of the Centre.

9.4   ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

> **Standard:** Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.
> **Guidelines:** In the course of their work, agencies gain information on programmes and institutions that can be useful beyond the scope of a single process, providing material for structured analyses across the higher education system. These findings can contribute to the reflection on and the improvement of quality assurance policies and processes in institutional, national and international contexts. A thorough and careful analysis of this information will show developments, trends and areas of good practice or persistent difficulty.

Thematic analysis of evaluation findings has long been one of the weaknesses of SKVC and mostly limited to a summary of evaluation findings, their publication in the SKVC annual activity report, a summarized overview of study programmes evaluated by experts and its publication in the website as well as by specific articles. After the external review made in 2012, more attention has been paid to this activity and evaluation results have been started to be analysed and publicised selecting a certain theme. Annually, when discussing the work for the next year with SKVC employees themes are discussed and planned how evaluation results will be analysed.

After the first ENQA external evaluation the Centre more focused on analytical activities

Annually, summaries of evaluation results are performed and presented in the **annual SKVC activity reports**. They present information on how many study programmes and of which study fields, higher education institutions were evaluated and what decisions were taken. Summarised information is also presented about the positive features of study field programmes highlighted by experts, problem issues and trends.

Expert teams having evaluated the greater number of study programmes of the same study field also prepare a summarised *overview of evaluated study field programmes*. It evaluates the situation and trends of a respective study field studies implemented in the Lithuanian higher education, draws attention to the best examples a majority should follow, as well as systematic quality gaps of studies, provide proposals regarding the evaluation, better regulation of studies, etc.

Over the past few years when delegating annual tasks to employees managing staff of the Centre provided for possible thematic analysis and assigned to one or more staff members to carry it out. Depending on nature, the analysis can be performed both individually and in a team. Themes of analysis are usually discussed with SKVC staff taking into account the evaluations performed over the recent few years, trends, topical issues that are relevant to a wider range of institutions. Thematic analyses are prepared by SKVC employees; only the overview of evaluated study field is prepared by expert team performing the evaluation of study programmes of that field.

ESG and the Law oblige SKVC and higher education institutions to publish evaluation reports. Evaluation reports and decisions made by SKVC are published on the website www.skvc.lt. In order to encourage higher education institutions to strengthen the implementation of this obligation SKVC periodically conducts *reviews on publicity of evaluation results in higher education institutions*. Such reviews were conducted in *2011, 2013 and 2015*. Overview is made how institutions publish the evaluation results, to what extent and similar. Examples of best publicity of evaluation results are singled out. All reviews on publicity of evaluation results are available on the SKVC website and presented in different topics in the newsletters.

In 2013, SKVC prepared *Overview of External Evaluation Results of Study Programmes by Field for the Period 2010-2013*. It summarizes evaluation results of each study area out of 6 highlighting both the positive features of the study area programmes and those subject to improvement.

At the request of the Ministry of Education and Science, in 2014 SKVC prepared the *Overview of Evaluations of Study Programmes in the Field of Pedagogy and Education*. Based on it the Ministry launched changes in education of teachers.

In 2015 SKVC prepared and translated into English even a greater number of review surveys[8]. The following was prepared during that period:
- *Quantitative and qualitative analysis of study programmes accredited twice in succession for three years of study over the period 2010-2014,*
- *Analysis of the study programmes which received the highest evaluation (in 2010-2015),*
- *Evaluation results of study programmes by study area in 2000-2009 and in 2010-2015*(only in Lithuanian),
- *Joint Study Programmes and their Assessment, 2010-2015,*
- *Analysis of new study programmes submitted to SKVC in 2010-2015,*
- *Publicity of Conclusions of Study Programme's External Evaluation in Lithuania (2015 period)*
- *Review of excellence at the level of individual subject disciplines in 2014-2015.*

At the beginning of 2017 it is planned to publish these analyses by a separate publication in Lithuanian and English.

In 2016 the *Analysis of Institutional Review of Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions over the Period 2011-2015* was completed. It gives an overview of the first institutional review results of higher education. The analysis is published as a separate bilingual publication (in Lithuanian and English). Institutional review results in 2016 were analysed in another aspect, namely comparing the *Evaluation Results of Colleges in 2004-2008*

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[8] http://www.skvc.lt/default/en/quality-assurance/analysis

and in 2011-2015. In autumn 2016 the ***Overview of Internal Quality Assurance Systems in Higher Education for 2011-2015*** was completed.

Reviews, analyses, studies, as well as evaluation reports are published in the SKVC website, newsletters, publications, presented at conferences, meetings with targeted audiences (conferences of rectors, principals of colleges, MES, etc.). Evaluation results are also publicised while cooperating with the mass media, for example, in Internet portals (delfi.lt, 15min.lt), interviews in LRT radio, television (TV3, LNK, Baltic TV), in press (the magazine REITINGAI, the weekly *Lithuanian Health*) and others. Both specific data and summarised information on evaluation results from different aspects are presented for dissemination.

The staff prepare individual and joint publications for the peer-reviewed academic journals, for example:

- S. Pivoras and N. Skaburskienė prepared article *Changing External Quality Assurance: Higher Education Case in Lithuania*(published in the journal *Organizacijų vadyba: sisteminiai tyrimai*, No. 62, 2012);
- N. Skaburskienė article in English *Lessons learned: improving an external quality assurance system,* published in The Journal of the European Higher Education Area (December 2014).

Staff of the Centre takes part in the ENQA working groups, also contributes to preparation of progress or final reports summarizing publications of these groups:

- *The Concept Of Excellence In Higher Education*(2014) available at http://www.enqa.eu/indirme/papers-and-reports/occasional-papers/ENQA%20Excellence%20WG%20Report_The%20Concept%20of%20Excellence%20in%20Higher%20Education.pdf, at present the information about the concept of excellence in different countries is further developed for the quality forum in 2016;
- Fourth ENQA Survey on quality procedures in the European higher education area and beyond – Internationalisation of quality assurance agencies (2015), available at http://www.enqa.eu/indirme/papers-and-reports/occasional-papers/enqa_oc_22.pdf
- Staff Development Group – report of the group (2014), available at http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/SDG-final-report.pdf and *Quality Assurance Professional*
- *Competencies Framework* (2016), available http://www.enqa.eu/indirme/papers-and-reports/occasional-papers/ENQA%20Competencies%20Framework.pdf
- Impact of quality assurance for higher education (2016), published http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Impact-WG-Final-Report.pdf

9.5   ESG 3.5 RESOURSES

Standard: Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.
Guidelines: It is in the public interest that agencies are adequately and appropriately funded, given higher education's important impact on the development of societies and individuals. The resources of the agencies enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance activities in an effective and efficient manner. Furthermore, the resources enable the agencies to improve, to reflect on their practice and to inform the public about their activities.

Staff

As of 1 September 2016, the Centre's staff totalled to 40[9], out of whom 17 are working for the quality assurance agency, 11 administrative staff and 12 work for the ENIC / NARIC Centre. In principle, total number of staff at the Centre over the period 2012-2015 remained stable: in 2012, 42 worked for the Centre, in 2013 – 40, in 2014 – 40, in 2015 – 38. Study Programme Evaluation Division has the Head as well as Deputy and total number of employees is 14. Institutional Review Division consists of three employees. The staff of the Centre is quite young, namely in 2016 the average age of employees is 33 years old.

Most of the Centre's staff are civil servants (total of 27) and their number is set by the Government. During the period from the first ENQA evaluation the number of jobs set by the Government due to the state budget savings during the after-crisis period decreased by 2 positions. It is for several years already when the Centre taking advantage of the planned state projects funds has a possibility to employ people under the employment contracts and thus adjust the volume of work, but this requires a careful planning in advance. SKVC makes an advance planning of funding for external evaluations required for 2-3 calendar year, regularly reviews the staff workload, adjusts it according to the need what allows smooth implementation of external evaluations and other functions in accordance with legal provisions. Study programmes external evaluation is planned in advance by grouping programmes by field of study. Most of new study programmes are accredited after completion of a simplified procedure.

On average, 1 employee from the Study Programme Evaluation Division over a year organizes the work of 7 expert teams evaluating study programmes. One employee is constantly dealing with new study programmes submitted by higher education institutions (due to specificity of flexible legal regulation it is impossible to regulate exact number, because institutions may submit a study programme they intend to implement at any time), if needed, more human resources are involved. It is expected that in 2017 about 200 study programmes will be evaluated; and the evaluation of new study programmes will continue (on demand). Starting from 2018, it is planned that evaluations will be conducted by study fields; therefore the work will be focused on drafting of legal acts.

One employee at the Institutional Review Division during the period 2015 - 2016 organized in average the work of 1-2 review teams reviewing the activities of higher education institutions. Currently institutional assessments are not very intense, as the finalisation of the first cycle of external evaluations is being performed; however the period 2012-2014 was much more intense when 1 coordinator had in average to coordinate the work of 6 review teams per year. It is expected that in 2017 more work will be focused on drafting of legal acts for the second cycle, since the first assessments under the new methodology is expected to start at the beginning of 2018. The remaining three repeat institutional assessments will be organised as well.

The Centre, although being a hierarchic structure, is a democratic organisation by its internal culture

Taking into account the specifics, operating environment and complexity of the SKVC work as well as the need to ensure independence at work, there is a requirement that all of the Centre's staff should have a university degree. As of data in September 2016, most of the staff have second-cycle degree qualification and Master's qualification degree or equivalent education (Level 7 by LQF and ECS) (24 people), 12 employees have Bachelor's qualification degree or equivalent education (level 6 by LQF and ECS), and 1 employee has a doctor of science degree (level 8 by LQF and ECS).

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[9] 5 employees (civil servants) are on maternity leave; however their functions are continued and taken over by temporary employed employees (or civil servants).

The staff of the Centre have and is constantly improving their professional and general competencies necessary for proper fulfillment of their functions (planning, control over fulfillment of functions, development and so on.). Training is organised for the entire Centre (e.g., stress management at work, team building, sustainable development principles) and specialised training for the staff dealing with quality assurance (e.g., concept and evaluation of study outcomes, organization of professional work) and for other staff (e.g., legislation in financial, legal and personnel areas, resolution of conflicts, etc.). Only in 2015, SKVC employees received 84 certificates of competence development.

Focus on staff issues is reflected in the Centre's Strategic Plan for 2014-2016, which identifies the measures to achieve strategic goals: improvement of internal communication and creation of a staff motivation system. Planned measures are being implemented. Although the motivation system is created, it is impossible to start its implementation, because the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania during the preparation of self-evaluation has approved only some of the documents enacting the new social model: the Labour Code recast (expected to be effective from 1 January 2017) while the Law on Civil Service is still pending.

Internal communication at the Centre is under constant improvement despite the fact that employees' surveys indicate this area being subject to improvement. At present, permanent awareness of the staff is ensured by organizing weekly general meetings of all employees, daily meetings of the management staff, organizing various events, meetings at the division level, and so on. Lawyers prepare and disseminate daily overviews of legal acts relevant to the Centre; public relations specialist performs media monitoring and by e-mail sends periodical news on education to all employees. Informal team building events are held.

Within its possibilities the Centre creates conditions for its employees to develop and improve their competencies at the professional seminars and training sessions, which are held both in Lithuania and abroad. This is also a part of the non-financial motivation. Since the Centre is a member of few international organizations and networks relevant to higher education quality assurance activities (ENQA, INQAAHE, CEENQA) the SKVC employees participate in their General Assemblies, seminars and forums. As a rule, one Agency employee per calendar year takes part in one training (or event) abroad; the management encourages staff initiatives to improve their competencies at the events in Lithuania as well, for example, conferences organised by higher education institutions and other public events. The change should be noted that after the first evaluation by ENQA more internal trainings and events are organized focused on professional competences, and more employees have an opportunity to participate in the international events.

Turnover among the SKVC staff is quite significant mainly related to personal reasons (e.g. maternity leave), young age of employees and self-aspirations (e.g. continuing onto master degree or doctoral studies; from the public sector moving to the private; start working in higher education institutions). Although there are no great opportunities for vertical career at the Centre, however, it should be noted that the persons currently occupying position of director of the Centre, head and deputy head of the Study Programmes Evaluation Division, head of the Institutional Review Divisions, all are the employees of the Centre, and have been selected to those posts by a way of competition or have been promoted after a special performance review. Managing staff of the Centre assume that the turnover of staff does not pose a threat to proper performance of the functions. There is a mentoring and internal training system for the development and improvement of competencies of new employees. Various types of informal teamwork and sense of community is also encouraged.
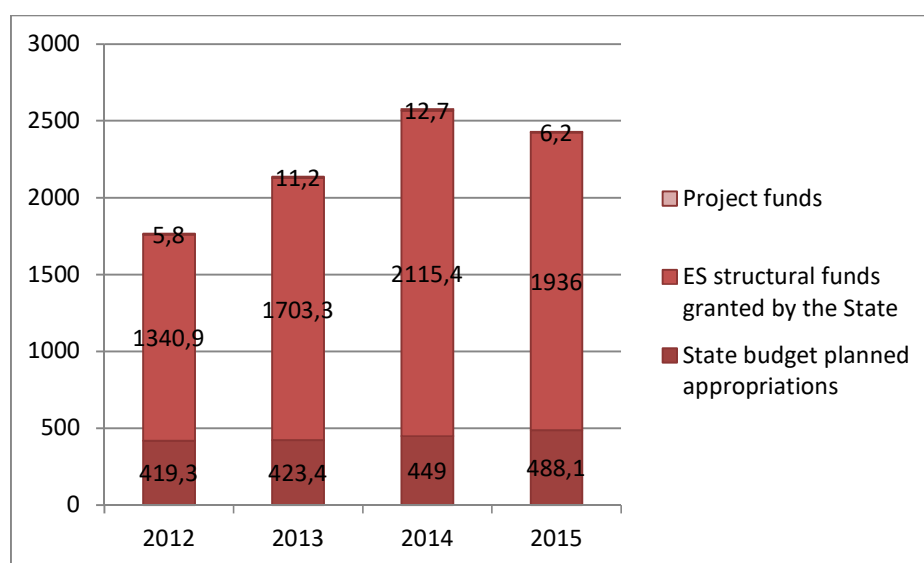
Financial resources

SKVC is financed from the State budget of the Republic of Lithuania: planned appropriations from the State budget and EU structural funds projects funds are granted in a way planned by the State. The Centre also receives funds by participating in various types of national and international projects and organizing external

evaluations abroad. The Centre's annual budget is approved for one year along with the State budget; however the costs for external evaluations are planned for 2 years ahead. Budgets for ongoing project are approved for the whole duration of the project. Such a model guarantees timely financing of the activities.

The currently received budget ensures sufficient funding for external evaluations, but the budget is not enough to cover the full translation of evaluation reports into the Lithuanian language.

State authorised authorities perform the control over the Centre's activities, financial and economic activities in the manner prescribed by laws of the Republic of Lithuania and other legal acts. Apart from other activities, projects implemented by the Centre are audited on a regular basis. No major deficiencies in any review or audit have been identified.

Funds received by the Centre in 2005–2011 (thous. LTL). Source: SKVC statistics.

Material resources

The SKVC office is located in Vilnius, Alberto Goštauto street house number 12. Premises have been transferred to the Centre for management and use free of charge. The Centre must use its own funds to pay the maintenance costs. At present, the Centre occupies a total area of 1,285.03 square meters, of which 937.22 sq. m. are offices, rooms adjusted to the work of employees and the common use area make 347.81 sq. m. The resources from 2012 have increased: new additional premises received, general infrastructure of the agency and working places have been improved. Such positive changes ensure more effective fulfillment of the functions related to quality assurance and other functions. In 2017 it is planned to repair the additional spaces transferred in 2016, what will improve working conditions of the Centre's staff and experts.

The staff have access to the internal computer network; its biggest advantage is that the employees can work and access their papers from anywhere in the world having an Internet connection. In 2015 a new document management system was launched that guarantees more efficiency in agreeing upon documents, what is especially convenient for coordinators of evaluations when they go for a visit. It is also possible to assign tasks and follow up their implementation. This allows better organising of the internal work within the institution.

SKVC have adequate material resources to ensure the performance of activities. Care is taken that they are improved on regular basis or substantially upgraded. For example, in 2015-2016 the Centre significantly

upgraded its hardware; in 2017 it intends to acquire modern conference equipment and tools for interactive organisation of business events.

However, the situation with regard to adequacy of the SKVC financial resources, as well as the staff proportionality, both in quality assurance and performing other functions established by legal acts, is ambiguous, so this issue is under continuous focus of the management.

9.6   ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Standard: Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.
Guidelines: Agencies need to be accountable to their stakeholders. Therefore, high professional standards and integrity in the agency's work are indispensable. The review and improvement of their activities are on-going so as to ensure that their services to institutions and society are optimal.
Agencies apply an internal quality assurance policy which is available on its website. This policy - ensures that all persons involved in its activities are competent and act professionally and ethically;
- includes internal and external feedback mechanisms that lead to a continuous improvement within the agency;
- guards against intolerance of any kind or discrimination;
- outlines the appropriate communication with the relevant authorities of those jurisdictions where they operate;
- ensures that any activities carried out and material produced by subcontractors are in line with the ESG, if some or all of the elements in its quality assurance activities are subcontracted to other parties;
- allows the agency to establish the status and recognition of the institutions with which it conducts external quality assurance.

Agency's quality assurance system

From 2012 SKVC has a formally operating internal quality assurance system. In the process of developing this system the Centre's quality policy has been approved as well as quality manual and process descriptors. In response to the comments made by experts of the previous external review, some small-scale processes were combined, and the number of processes reduced from 18 to 14. In addition, some process descriptors have been improved (e.g. of communication, performance reporting and self-evaluation).

SKVC strategic plan is developed for three years. It was decided that a longer-term plan is not appropriate, as it becomes less specific. Originally the strategic plan was updated annually; however later, following the proposal of the Centre's Council, it was decided to fix the planning period, to fully report for it and then start a new period. The strategic plan provides for a detailed list of planned activities and indicators. These activities and indicators are then specified in the annual activity plans. The strategic plan is approved by the SKVC Council.

Annual planning of activities is carried out at several levels – division and institution. Staff members performing different tasks are involved in planning and preparing of projects since it is an important source of funding for the Centre. SKVC annual activity plan is discussed at the SKVC Council and published.

General results of activities of all divisions of the Centre are collected and reviewed upon the need, but at least once a quarter. Internal meetings for monitoring the projects are held upon the need; however in average once a quarter. Every Tuesday general meetings of the Centre's staff are held, where the most important work of the previous and the current week are discussed, as well as problematic issues, achievements are highlighted, presentations from business trips are made (review of presentations, discussions). Not only the managing staff speaks there but also the staff dealing with specific activities (e.g., coordinator of the evaluation presents the visit to a HEI and its results). This activity guarantees awareness raising and cohesion; employees are informed about the colleagues' activities in other divisions and important issues beyond the Agency.

In order to ensure integrity of implementation of the processes, in 2013 the meetings of Study Programmes Evaluation and Institutional Review Divisions are recorded and Minutes of the Meeting are prepared, the issues discussed and decisions taken are recorded as well. As the meetings discuss difficulties encountered during the evaluations and other important issues, it is essential that all staff members are aware of the ways agreed to solve the problems. This contributes to the professional development of staff and smoother organization of the work.

Quality Management Model of the Centre singles out four groups of processes:

- leadership (operational on strategic level and budget planning, self-evaluation organization, performance reporting);
- core (institutional review of higher education institutions, evaluation of study programmes, follow-up activities after evaluation, evaluation of foreign qualifications gained at institutions relating to higher education, evaluation, carrying out of activities of the designated member to the ENIC/NARIC networks);
- supporting (management of documents and records, personnel management, management of resourcing, cooperation, public relations management, and project management);
- processes for improvement (feedback control, internal quality audit, management of corrective and preventive actions).

Annually, the selected processes are audited and thereafter their results are discussed and, if necessary, the analysed processes or their descriptions are improved. For example, after the audit of institutional review conducted in 2015 it was noticed that not all the references/links provided by HEIs on the activity improvement plans placed on the Centre's website are active. Higher education institutions often reorganise their websites and move the evaluation documents, so it is necessary to regularly check whether the links are active. After the audit it was decided within the Division that all references/links to the activity improvement plans of higher education institutions must be check at least once every six months.

In 2016 a substantial reorganisation of the internal quality system has started. The reform aims to ensure that the system is more integrated into the daily activities of the Centre and becomes an integral part of the work and avoid drafting many different additional documents.

SKVC collects and analyses feedback from interested groups on a regular basis:
- electronic surveys after the institutional review of higher education institutions and external evaluation of study programmes;
- from experts (by electronic surveys and during the face-to-face meetings);
- from participants of follow-up meetings. Such meetings are organised after each institutional review of a higher education institution;
- participants of training or other events.
Main activities are being improved on the basis of feedback analysis.

Once or twice a year the feedback from SKVC employees is collected in a way of electronic questionnaires. Survey results are presented and discussed at the joint meetings. Personal achievements of the staff are discussed during the annual review, as well as the goals and indicators to be achieved are discussed and identified.

Understanding the fact that maximum benefit is achieved through direct communication with experts, therefore the Centre's managing staff after each institutional assessment meet the review panel and together discuss the assessment process. After the meeting the experts submit their proposals in writing to improve the process. Having summarized the feedback after the first institutional review cycle, this process was improved, for example, supporting material, namely a mapping tool, was prepared for experts to get ready for a visit, recommendations developed for producers of self-evaluation reports, which explain in more detail what information should be analysed at the self-evaluation, what annexes must be provided and so on.

To perform the study programmes evaluation and institutional assessment SKVC calls for independent experts, who are selected according to the expert selection criteria set out in the Experts Selection Procedure. The first Experts Selection Procedure was approved in 2007, later it was updated and supplemented according to the need and the last time amended in 2016. While setting up a Review panel, the candidates to it are discussed together with the managing staff of the Centre and the Division. As already mentioned, having a request of the higher education institution to replace any expert, an *Ad-hoc Commission* is formed, which submits a proposal to the Director, and correspondingly a HEI is notified thereof. Minutes of the Meeting are prepared of the Commission meetings. Most of the review panels are international (include experts from Lithuania and foreign countries) and include representatives of employers and students.

Employees are constantly updating the internal database of experts, which includes all experts who have participated in SKVC evaluations, as well as the experts proposed by external institutions or who have offered themselves. This is the main source for selection of experts.

The Centre uses document management system DocLogix, which ensures sound management of document flows, assigning and monitoring of tasks. We have not explored all the possibilities of the document management system yet, so it will be improved in the future. In principle, there is no paper correspondence with the organizations in Lithuania, the documents are transmitted by e-mail, in addition we start using the state e-post system.

SKVC accountability is implemented through publicly available annual activity reports, quarterly and annual financial reports submitted to the founder, and through project activity reports.

Quality policy

The Quality Policy is available on the SKVC website. It describes the management's commitments to improve the quality of services provided by the Centre. Quality policy is the continuation of SKVC mission and vision and values, it is also supported by the Work Regulations, the Experts Selection Procedure, evaluation methodology and recommendations. Quality policy distinguishes the following areas:
- Professional implementation of the evaluation procedures and decision making based on data and information analysis,
- Cooperation with the evaluation process participants,
- Use of international experience in the work of the Centre,
- Professional personnel,
- Awareness raising of the public,
- Improvement of the quality system on a regular basis.

SKVC ensures that all those involved in the work of the Centre are competent and perform their activities in a professional and ethical manner. This is achieved through:

- selection of employees for employment purposes (all selections are made by the Commission established in advance);
- training of new employees (each new employee participates in the internal trainings, he/she is assigned a mentor);
- professional development (training, participation in events);
- definition of the roles of evaluation coordinator and the experts (guide for the coordinator, description of roles of experts);
- selection of experts according to predefined criteria (Experts Selection Procedure, declaration of conflict of interests, setting up of the *Ad Hoc* Commission in case the HEI requests to replace the expert);
- training of experts (training courses for employers, students, review teams; sending of the information materials package before the assessment);
- evaluation of the experts' work (opinion of the Review Team leader about the work of panel members, records of the coordinator about the quality of experts' work in the internal system);
- ongoing monitoring and dissemination of information on the legislation relating to activities of SKVC and the information from mass media on the education issues to the employees of SKVC.

Due to our activities related to academic information and recognition (as a member of ENIC / NARIC networks) the Centre is familiar with the phenomenon of diploma and accreditation mills. We protect our reputation, so we are not interested in just doing an assessment abroad. In addition, we operate as a national quality assurance agency, which primarily focuses on quality improvement of the Lithuanian higher education and this is the major workload. In 2015, the principles for selection of foreign higher education institutions were defined and those who are interested in our services we ask to fill out the application. Moreover, before agreeing to start the assessment we make sure that a higher education institution operates in its country legally. In case of assessment in Slovenia, we have communicated with both the local quality assurance agency and the higher education institution in order to fully clarify the assessment context and expectations of the organisations.

9.7   ESG 3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES

Standard:
Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.
Guidelines: A periodic external review will help the agency to reflect on its policies and activities. It provides a means for assuring the agency and its stakeholders that it continues to adhere to the principles enshrined in the ESG.

Obligation to be externally reviewed, including publishing of results of the evaluation, is stated in ESG and in the Law on Higher Education and Research, and also the Statutes of ENQA. For the first time, the Centre was externally reviewed by the ENQA experts in 2012. ENQA external review findings were presented and discussed with the Centre's Council and employees.

Experts have presented recommendations to the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education as well. Following them, SKVC should develop the follow-up activities between the reviews, also should increase the involvement of students and employers in the evaluation of study programmes and institutional reviews performed by the Centre.

After the visit of external review members and before receipt of conclusions, the Director has issued an Order and approved the plan for improvement of specific activities in 2012-2013, including specifications directed to solve the weaknesses, indicators to evaluate the achievements, and nominated responsible persons.

> **After the review 2012 the Centre made an activity improvement plan which identified the areas of improvement, measures and implementation timeframe and indicators**

The plan indicated four main areas for improvement:
- improvement of the feedback system;
- creation of follow-up activities system;
- increased involvement of students and employers in the external evaluation;
- development of activities and raising awareness of its results.

Feedback system created

Until 2012, SKVC gathered feedback and recorded it informally, namely, discussions were held at the meetings and seminars how to improve the SKVC processes, experts provided proposals to coordinators on how to improve the organization of assessments or recorded in the evaluation reports. However, systematic feedback collection was missing.

The self-evaluation has evidenced that in order to improve the processes there is a great need of systematically collected feedback from all participants in processes. Therefore, electronic questionnaires were developed and after each evaluation the representatives of higher education institutions and experts are asked to complete them. The feedback collected on annual basis is analysed and the summarized data is presented to the SKVC managing staff and employees. Taking into account analysis of the above, challenges and performance improvement measures are formulated.

While improving the feedback collection we also looked upon how this process is organized by other foreign quality assurance agencies. The experience of the Dutch agency NVAO is noteworthy, namely to talk more about the performance improvement at the meetings (with both the higher education institutions and the experts). Such practice was also applied to SKVC activities – after each institutional review we organise a meeting with the review team and discuss not only the results of the review but the review procedures and issues subject to improvement. Experts, especially those from foreign countries, are always willing to give a piece of good advice on how to better organize the evaluation process.

Follow-up activities for effective implementation of experts' recommendations

The second area to be improved is the creation of follow-up system; since after the review performed in 2012 it was identified as the weakest area. We understand the follow-up activity as a whole of actions/measures of SKVC and higher education institutions which aim at implementing the recommendations made during the external evaluation.

Until 2012, we have maintained the view that higher education institutions have a positive attitude towards the recommendations made by the experts and following them they improve their operations. However, the

repeated evaluation of study programmes and analysis on how the higher education institution took into account the previous recommendations of experts evidenced that the institutions implementing the programmes often ignore the reports prepared of experts.

In was agreed that the Centre for evaluation of study programmes will use the following follow-up methods:
- will require a higher education institution to prepare a report on implementation results of the action plan or progress report and publish it (one and a half year after the accreditation decision taken);
- will organise seminars for higher education institutions on the follow-up activities.

Students and the public will be more aware of the programme improvement process if the higher education institution, the study programmes of which have been accredited, announces what actions have been taken to implement the experts' recommendation and what outcomes have been achieved.

In case of institutional review another way has been selected, namely, to publish the improvement plans and measures as well as to visit the already reviewed higher education institution. In the SKVC website along with the evaluation reports we also place links to the activity improvement plans announced by the higher education institutions. We are pleased to note that significant progress has been noticed in some higher education institutions, and in some cases the negative external evaluation has helped to consolidate the internal forces to make changes. However, we have also faced the facts that the activity improvement plans were developed because SKVC required them but no interest on the part of the institution itself; and such plans did not become a part of general strategic plans of the institution or other plans. We understand that, however, the ultimate responsibility for activities lies within the higher education institution, which operates on the principles of academic autonomy and self-governance. External accountability, among other measures, will be implemented through the external quality evaluation and it is one of the instruments. In the beginning of 2016, the Centre together with the Lithuanian Bologna experts developed guidelines to students on how they can get involved in the quality improvement. An article was published in the media on that issue, as well as in the Centre's website there are suggestions to students what they need to know how to influence the quality of studies.

> **We have developed guidelines for students how to get involved in the internal quality improvement and external evaluation**

Students and employers in the Review Teams

The third area for improvement was the involvement of students and employers into the external evaluation. Various documents of the European Higher Education Area note that it is extremely important to involve all stakeholders in the quality assurance, such as teachers, students, employers and others. In previous years, almost all review teams for SKVC assessments consisted of merely academic staff or researchers. Thus, already in 2011 when drafting the self-evaluation report it was decided to increase the involvement of students and employers in the external evaluation. First of all, we started to organize more training, where students were introduced to the quality assurance purposes, methods and evaluation process. Such training helps students to prepare for equal contribution to the work of review teams. During 2012, students were involved in all review teams, both in evaluation of study programmes and review of higher education institutions, and at present they participate in all review teams performing the institutional review and the study programmes evaluations. More attention is also given to involvement of employers. In 2012 they participated in 64 % of the review teams evaluating the study programmes and all institutional review teams. Currently they are involved in all review teams performing the institutional review and study programmes evaluation.

The involvement of representatives of these two stakeholders in the assessment helps to better understand the needs of students and employers, as well as to evaluate the higher education institution or study

programme in the view of these aspects. To attract employers to the review teams is quite difficult due to their high level of busyness; however we devote a lot of efforts for that issue and succeed to achieve that in this way a higher education institution is encouraged to take greater account of the business or industry expectations, both public and private, and they consider that studies should better meet the needs of economy and society's development.

More attention to publicity

The work of SKVC is very important, but there is some doubt about its further impact if awareness of its activities is very poor. Experts who have reviewed the Centre noted that it was necessary to increase awareness of how the study programmes or higher education institutions have been evaluated, because it would help people choosing studies and would be a good source of information for employers looking for future employees. Therefore, the fourth area for improvement: to raise awareness of our activities and its results.

The Centre publicise its activities via various information channels, takes part in exhibitions and other events; prepares periodic newsletter; organizes events on quality assurance issues; drafts press releases; publishes articles on issues relating to quality of higher education; and provides overviews of evaluation results and analyses.

As mentioned above, in 2012-2013 SKVC organized a series of discussions about internal quality assurance systems in higher education institutions. In order to attract more people to be interested in, the events took place not only in Vilnius but also in Kaunas. Employees of higher education institutions shared their experience in developing or improving the internal quality assurance systems, discussed other topics related to quality assurance. Representatives of the higher education institutions took an active part in these events and gave a positive feedback on them, as well as presented proposals on topical issues.

In 2012, an article about the SKVC internal quality management system was published in the journal *Viešasis administravimas [Public Administration]* of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania. Abstracts of SKVC organized discussions and events of the international workshop were published in the magazine issued by Vytautas Magnus University *Quality of Higher Education* (orig. *Aukštojo mokslo kokybė*). Annual activity report of SKVC summarized the conclusions of evaluations and included analysis on them made.

The staff of the Centre will continue to actively participate in the events organized by higher education institutions and by students where presentations are delivered and discussions are held on quality assurance issues. Analytical work and publicity will remain a priority in the future.

10. COMPLIANCE WITH PART 2 OF STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

Below, self-evaluation of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education of its compatibility with every part of the ESG is presented and changes made after the first external evaluation are introduced.

10.1   ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

> **Standard**: External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.
>
> **Guidelines**: Quality assurance in higher education is based on the institutions' responsibility for the quality of their programmes and other provision; therefore it is important that external quality assurance recognises and supports institutional responsibility for quality assurance. To ensure the link between internal and external quality assurance, external quality assurance includes consideration of the standards of Part 1. These may be addressed differently, depending on the type of external quality assurance.

In accordance with the Law and ESG, the primary responsibility for quality assurance falls on the higher education institution, while the mission of the quality assurance agency is to provide assistance to higher education institutions in implementing responsibility for internal and external stakeholders, and in improving quality. We consider the task of implementing a public interest to have access to quality higher education and to receive clear information about its condition as our function.

As it was already mentioned in this self-evaluation, the SKVC carries out evaluations of on-going study programmes (ex-post), new study programmes (ex-ante) and institutional review. Evaluations are carried out in accordance with the evaluation methodologies developed by the Centre, which are published in the state register of legislation [10] and on the Centre's website[11]:

- Methodology for development of the descriptor of the new study programme, its external evaluation and accreditation;
- Methodology for evaluation of on-going study programmes;
- Methodology for Review of activities of a Higher Education Institution

The fact that the methodologies were developed taking also ESG into consideration is directly indicated in the methodologies, general provisions. But it is more than a mere declaration, because compatibility of the methodologies with the ESG-2015 provisions is reflected through the evaluation criteria and information requested from higher education institutions. The last harmonisation of methodologies for evaluation of institutions and study programmes with the ESG was carried out in early 2016.

Compatibility of the evaluation methodologies applied by the SKVC with the ESG-2015 provisions is reflected in the comparison table given below:

Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European higher education area	Clauses of the methodology of new study programmes demonstrating conformity to the ESG requirements	Clauses of the methodology of on-going study programmes demonstrating conformity to the ESG requirements	Clauses of the institutional review methodology demonstrating conformity to the ESG requirements
	Assessed field, clause	*Assessed field,* clause	
Part 1. Standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance			
1.1 Quality assurance policy	*59. Aims and learning outcomes of the programme 59.2.;* *63. Study process (planned) and its evaluation 63.4.*	*58. Aims and learning outcomes of the programme 58.3.;* *62. Study process and its evaluation 62.7.; 62.8.; 62.9.; 62.10.*	*8. Evaluation criteria of strategic management 8.2.1.*

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[10] https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/en/index
[11] http://www.skvc.lt/default/en/lawacts

1.2. Development and approval of study programmes	*59. Aims and learning outcomes of the programme 59.2.;* *64. Programme management 64.2.*	*58. Aims and learning outcomes of the programme 58.3.;* *63. Programme management 63.3.; 63.4.;*	*8. Evaluation criteria of strategic management 8.2.1., 8.2.9.* *9. Evaluation criteria of studies and life-long learning 9.1.4., 9.2.3.*
1.3. Student-oriented learning, education and evaluation	*63. Study process (planned) and its evaluation 63.3.; 63.4.*	*62. Study process and its evaluation* *62.2.; 62.6.; 62.10.*	*8. Evaluation criteria of strategic management 8.2.9, 8.2.10.* *9. Evaluation criteria of studies and life-long learning 9.2.3.*
1.4 Student admission, study process, recognition and issue of diplomas	*63. Study process (planned) and its evaluation 63.1.* *64. Programme management 64.1.*	*62. Study process and its evaluation* *62.1.; 62.2; 62.5.;* *63. Programme management 63.6;*	*8. Evaluation criteria of strategic management 8.2.1.* *9. Evaluation criteria of studies and life-long learning 9.2.4., 9.2.7.*
1.5 Lecturers	*61. Staff 61.2.; 61.4.* *60. Curriculum design 60.3.; 60.5.;*	*60. Staff 60.5.; 60.6.;* *59. Curriculum design 59.4.; 59.6.;*	*8. Evaluation criteria of strategic management 8.2.4.* *9. Evaluation criteria of studies and life-long learning 9.2.6.*
1.6 Study resources and support for students	*61. Staff 61.1.; 61.2.* *62. Facilities and learning resources 62.1.; 62.2.; 62.3.; 62.4.*	*60. Staff 60.1.; 60.2.;* *61. Facilities and learning resources 61.1.; 61.2.; 61.3.; 61.4.* *62. Study process and its evaluation 62.4.; 62.5.;*	*8. Evaluation criteria of strategic management 8.2.1.*
1.7 Information management	*64. Programme management 64.1.; 64.2.; 64.3.*	*63. Programme management 63.1.; 63.2.; 63.3.; 63.4.; 63.5.; 63.6.* *62. Study process and its evaluation 62.7.;*	*8. Evaluation criteria of strategic management 8.2.1.* *9. Evaluation criteria of studies and life-long learning 9.1.3.*
1.8 Public information		*58. Aims and learning outcomes of the programme 58.1.;* *63. Programme management 63.2.; 63.3.; 63.4.; 63.6.;*	*8. Evaluation criteria of strategic management 8.1.5., 8.2.9.*
1.9 Ongoing monitoring and periodic evaluation of study programmes	*59. Aims and learning outcomes of the programme 59.1.; 59.3.* *60. Curriculum design 60.5.* *63. Study process (planned) and its evaluation 63.3.* *64. Programme management*	*58. Aims and learning outcomes of the programme 58.2.; 58.4.;* *59. Curriculum design 59.6.* *62. Study process and its evaluation 62.6.; 62.8.;*	*9. Evaluation criteria of studies and life-long learning 9.2.3, 9.2.5.*

	64.1.; 64.2.	63. Programme management 63.3 63.4 63.6	
1.10 Periodic external quality assurance			*8. Evaluation criteria of strategic management* 8.2.8. *10. Evaluation criteria of education and/or art activities* 10.2.4. *11. Evaluation criteria of the impact on regional and national development* 11.6.

Any evaluation is based on self-evaluation carried out by a higher education institution, during which the higher education institution analysed its activities, demonstrated assurance by the institution of the quality of studies and other activities, internal quality assurance measures applied. The SKVC evaluation methodologies serve as guidelines for higher education institutions to be followed during evaluation of their activities, which are subsequently subject to evaluation by experts. Upon completion of evaluation of programmes or higher education institution, experts submit recommendations on improvement of the study programmes and other activities. It must be noted that, for example, the evaluation methodology of study programmes of the SKVC not only indicate the information to be provided and analysed in the self-evaluation, but also contain examples of additional information that can be analysed in pursuit of better revelation of the quality of the programme. Besides, higher education institutions may provide also information other than mentioned in the methodology as mandatory or recommended, which the institutions may consider as highly important in revealing the qualitative aspects of the object under evaluation.

During institutional review, much attention is focused on strategic management evaluation, since it determines internal quality assurance, and on compliance of its procedures with the set goal.

Exercising their autonomy, higher education institutions are free to choose internal quality assurance system to implement according to their needs, specifics of activities and organisational culture. The methodologies applied by the SKVC were reviewed according to the ESG-2015 in order to ensure consideration of every single aspect of the ESG-2015 in one or another way.

Following the recommendation given during the last evaluation by the ENQA to give stronger support to higher education institutions through proper organisation of internal quality work, the Centre organised a cycle of events for the representatives of the higher education institutions, which were held both inside the premises of the SKVC and by visiting universities. During the seminars in 2012–2013, the representatives of different higher education institutions, administrative and academic staff introduced their quality management systems in details and specific quality assurance measures applied; the events were very highly evaluated by the participants as experience sharing forums. In addition to the above-mentioned events, seminars specifically for quality managers of higher education institutions are organised on chosen relevant topics, identified by the Centre and as requested by the representatives of universities and colleges. Thus, taking the recommendation given by the ENQA experts into consideration, non-formal network of quality professionals is being mobilised in Lithuania.

During the ESG development stage in 2014, the Centre organised special discussions for introducing planned ESG novelties to the representatives of both universities and colleges; prepared analytical materials for the academic journal Quality in Higher Education (*Aukštojo mokslo kokybė*) published in Lithuania. In 2015 and 2016, events were organised with speakers from foreign and international organisations, representatives of quality agencies and higher education institutions and students invited, which were aimed at discussing the challenges of implementation of the new ESG.

To promote the ESG-2015, the Centre had this document translated into Lithuanian

Besides, the results of the analyses conducted by the Centre's staff, including of management and quality management of higher education institutions, were introduced at various joint events (e.g. at the events organised to discuss the progress of the implementation of the Bologna process in 2013 and 2016, in Lithuania), and at the meetings of the associations of higher education institutions (e.g. at the meeting of the Lithuanian College Directors' Conference in 2016). Such involvement allows the Centre to act as an intermediary in the higher education system, which was emphasised by higher education institutions on a number of occasions that they would like to see and also apply evaluation and analysis results for quality improvement.

10.2   ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

Standard: External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.
Guidelines: In order to ensure effectiveness and objectivity it is vital for external quality assurance to have clear aims agreed by stakeholders.

The aims, objectives and implementation of the processes will:
- bear in mind the level of workload and costs that they will place on institutions;
- take into account the need to support institutions to improve quality;
- allow institutions to demonstrate this improvement;
- result in clear information on the outcomes and the follow-up.
The system for external quality assurance might operate in a more flexible way if institutions are able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance.

The quality assurance model for research and higher education is established in the top level legal act – Law on Research and Higher Education. The Lithuanian legislative process itself and its mandatory elements guarantee joint discussion of the objectives of external evaluation with all interested parties. Perspective evaluation plans (annual and biennial) are sent to higher education institutions for their attention and comments in order to coordinate interests and opportunities of all parties.

All external evaluation methodologies developed by the SKVC are subject to discussion with stakeholders. First of all, any draft method is discussed inside the SKVC with all employees of the division. It is followed by subsequent discussions with the Ministry of Education and Science, SKVC Council, academic community. The draft methodology is sent to the Lithuanian University Rectors' Conference, the Lithuanian College Directors' Conference, Lithuanian Students' Union, all higher education institutions, main employers' organisations. The draft is also published on the website of the Centre. This way, opinions of all stakeholders are received. Comments and suggestions are analysed and draft methodology is amended accordingly. Final methodology is

considered in the SKVC Council and approved by the order of the SKVC Director and published. The process of discussions is inevitably time-consuming, but this way interests of different sides are considered.

Revision of the Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education in 2016 can serve as a specific example of this process. First of all, the draft methodology was developed by the working team of the SKVC. The draft was publicly introduced to all interested parties (published on the website, emailed to all higher education institutions, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Lithuanian University Rectors' Conference, the Lithuanian College Directors' Conference, the Employers' Association). The draft was amended according to the comments received. Later, the document was considered at the meeting of the SKVC Council and discussed with the Ministry of Education and Science. Final amended methodology was approved by the SKVC Council and by the order of the SKVC Director and published. All higher education institutions were informed about the amended methodology.

Despite completion of external evaluation processes in formal decisions on accreditation in Lithuania, the objective of external evaluation is more than just establishment of compliance with the legal requirements. All methodologies (for evaluation of both activities of higher education institutions and of study programmes) contain the criteria that are crucial for quality activities of higher education institutions or for quality of study programmes. When establishing criteria, the requirements of legislation, ESG and good international practice, stakeholders' opinions are taken into consideration. Therefore, evaluation reports contain analysis by crucial criteria of the activities of an institution. Very important objective of expert evaluation is to give recommendations to higher education institutions on improvement of their activities or study programmes. During repeated evaluation, changes made following experts' recommendations are considered. A higher education institution is promoted to carry out ongoing improvement of its activity quality this way. Excellence examples in institutional review reports have been always presented since the beginning of such review back in 2011, and were introduced into the evaluation of study programmes from 2014. It must be noted that reports contain a separate part dedicated to recommendations since the very beginning of external evaluation organisation in 1998.

All evaluation reports contain a part dedicated to examples of good practice and excellence and recommendations on activity improvement

Since 1998–1999, it was observed during regular evaluations of study programmes that evaluation results of many years tend to be very similar despite study field – approximately half programmes receive positive evaluation and are accredited for the maximum term of six years, slightly fewer or more than half of the programmes receive comments regarding quality and are accredited for the term of three years, approximately 3–5 per cent of the programmes fail to receive accreditation.

In order to strengthen the impact of external evaluation and taking foreign experience into consideration, a new type of evaluation – institutional review of higher education institutions was initiated in the Law, in 2009. Political reason of this step was to urge higher education institutions to focus greater attention on strategic management, to carry out internal reforms at a faster pace. Evidently, the new type of evaluation served as a consolidating factor in the communities of higher education institutions when making preparations for such consolidated evaluations of organisations, while negative evaluation results *inter alia* encouraged universities and colleges either to implement immediate reforms, to improve their activities, or to reorganise themselves at their own initiative. Discussions held during follow-up with the management of higher education institutions and their activity improvement plans following evaluation also show that this objective, i.e. promotion of changes, is implemented.

New study programmes usually are launched with the credit of trust [12], while further intensity of evaluation – every six or three years – essentially depends on the performance results demonstrated by the higher education institution. Thus, external evaluation load differs.

After starting evaluating higher education institutions as institutions in 2011, they must analyse their strengths and weaknesses, evaluate their planned activity perspectives, their compliance with the mission and vision of the institution, national priorities. Prior to external evaluation, the SKVC organises visits to the higher education institution to be evaluated, during which issues relevant to the institution can be discussed, recommendations on which evidences should be provided in the self-evaluation report can be given. The Centre also organises regular training for developers of self-evaluation of study programmes, which also helps to discuss relevant issues and to recommend which aspects should be elaborated when drawing a report, etc. Higher education institution is also provided with an opportunity prior to the visit to provide latest information about changes made after the self-evaluation report presentation.

Six months after each external evaluation of a higher education institution, the SKVC staff meets representatives of the evaluated institution. At the meetings, external evaluation process, adequacy of the applied evaluation methodology, benefits of the given recommendations to the higher education institution are discussed. It has been observed that usually positive attitude to the institutional review methodology and process is expressed at the meetings, emphasising that the established criteria provide an opportunity for individual evaluation of the activities of every higher education institution, taking its mission, strategic priorities into consideration. The survey of higher education institutions conducted in 2015, following the first institutional review cycle, supports the same observation, during which 84 per cent universities and 95 per cent colleges described the external evaluation process as clear. But during the meetings it was also discovered that institutions must continue working on adequate quality self-evaluation reports, which would be of analytical rather than of descriptive nature, what was noted by both expert team and the Centre. Attention on improvement of self-evaluation quality and analytical approach is focused when drawing separate training courses for self-evaluation developers.

Each external evaluation is followed by the survey of the representatives of higher education institutions, and experts by completing anonymous questionnaires http://skvcsurvey.lt.ridikas.serveriai.lt/index.php/38341?lang=en). Upon completion of each institutional review, the SKVC management meets the experts team and discusses the evaluation process. All collected information is analysed, discussed and appropriate amendments in the methodologies are made, if needed. For example, taking the opinion of

The SKVC collects feedback about applied evaluation methods, applied methodologies on a regular basis

experts and representatives of higher education institutions into consideration, guidelines[13] were drawn for developers of self-evaluation prior to institutional review. With these guidelines drawn, compliance with the planned objective of external evaluation can be achieved and load of higher education institutions can be reduced, since they contain interpretation of the established criteria and advice on what will be considered during the evaluation. The guidelines also clearly establish the list of required annexes to be provided, which

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[12] In most cases, accreditation is carried out upon presentation and examination of documents through application, without external evaluation, save for the exceptional cases stipulated in the methodology.

[13] Legislation and methodological support by the procedures are available on the website, in the columns dedicated to each type of evaluation: - institutional review http://www.skvc.lt/default/en/quality-assurance/institutional-review, evaluation of study programmes: http://www.skvc.lt/default/en/quality-assurance/study-programme-evaluations, new study programmes: http://www.skvc.lt/default/en/quality-assurance/study-programme-evaluations

was coordinated with both experts and representatives of higher education institutions. Preparation of excessive amount of documents for external evaluation can also be avoided.

In recent years, more various data about the higher education system has been collected in the country: registers of students and lecturers were introduced; information about the actual facilities and resources of higher education institutions is collected, etc. All data is stored in the state register – Education Management Information System (EMIS). Since the data for several years has been collected already, therefore the SKVC is considering the possibility of using systematised data in external evaluation. Analyses of data on both the general state of the system and on the activities of a higher education institution could be provided to the experts, thus reducing the amount of data to be provided by higher education institutions in self-evaluation reports and allowing them to focus more attention on their analysis.

For Lithuania, being a small country, it is highly important that external evaluation would consider not only national but also international context, thus preventing conflicts of interest that could arise in a small academic community. Considering the above-mentioned reasons, the SKVC hires mainly foreign experts. Such evaluations require appropriate experience and subject knowledge from the experts, their selection and training is one of the priority areas of SKVC activities. At present, the database of experts by the Centre contains about 2 500 local and foreign experts, the database is continuously supplemented and updated.

10.3   ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

Standard: External quality evaluation processes should be reliable, useful, predefined, consistently implemented and published. They include:
•   self-evaluation or its equivalent;
•   external evaluation, which usually includes a visit to a higher education institution;
•   reports, as a result of external evaluation;
•   consistent follow-up.
Guidelines: External quality evaluation if conducted in professional, consistent and transparent manner ensures its acceptability and effect. Depending on the model of external quality assurance model, a research and higher education institution creates prerequisites for external quality evaluation by conducting self-evaluation and collecting other evidence-based materials. Written documents usually are supplemented with information obtained during interviews with various stakeholders, during a visit. Information collected during the evaluation is summarised in the reports (cf. Provision 2.5), drawn by external experts (cf. Provision 2.4). External quality assurance does not end with evaluation reports drawn by experts. Reports contain expressive guidelines for further actions to be taken by a higher education institution. Agencies are consistently carrying out follow-up by reviewing actions implemented by the higher education institution. The type of follow-up depends on the model of external quality assurance.

External evaluation model – self-evaluation report, visit, publication of evaluation reports and follow-up – has been applied since the very beginning of evaluations conducted by the Centre.

Evaluation process of on-going study programmes is the following:

Analysis of self-evaluation report

Members of the expert team individually analyses self-evaluation report and its annexes

Expert team draws preliminary programme evaluation report

~ 1 month before the visit

→

First day

Expert team attends training organised by the SKVC before the visit

Expert team make preparations for the visit

→

Visit to the HEI

Expert team checks and revises information provided in the self-evaluation report, collects evidences for their insights

duration depends on the number of study programmes to be evaluated, but no longer than five working days

→

Drafting report

Expert team prepares draft report

SKVC reviews the draft and requests the experts to elaborate it, if needed

Expert team elaborates the draft according to the SKVC's comments

within one month after the visit

↓

Preparation of final report

HEI reviews the draft report and makes comments on any factual errors detected in it (if any)

Expert team, after considering the comments (if any) made by the HEI, prepares final programme evaluation report

within two weeks

→

Accreditation procedure

The Study Evaluation Committee approves or rejects final programme evaluation report

SKVC makes a decision on accreditation based on programme evaluation report

⇢

Appeal procedure

HEI has the right to make an appeal

The Appel Committee examines the appeal and programme evaluation report and makes a decision on satisfaction (rejection) of the appeal and further procedure

↓

Follow-up

HEI within one year and a half after the completion of the external programme evaluation draws a report on the progress of implementation of the recommendations describing actions implemented by the HEI in consideration of the recommendations

SKVC publishes prorgress report on its website next to the study evaluation report

Similar steps exist in the institutional review of higher education institutions. The Centre applies this model when conducting evaluations both in Lithuania and abroad. External evaluation of higher education institutions and programmes is carried out on a regular basis. Periodicity of evaluations is established in the Law and orders of the Minister of Education and Science. Following the first external evaluation of the Centre, more attention was focused on follow-up stage – methodical recommendations on follow-up were drawn for higher education institutions, special thematic events (see below) were organised.

Self-evaluation

Higher education institution is held responsible for self-evaluation (preparation of programme description for new study programmes). Methodologies developed by the Centre contain requirements and recommendations how study programme self-evaluation report (programme description in case of new study programmes) should be presented, what information it should contain. Self-evaluation report on on-going study programmes also must contain information how recommendations given during previous evaluation were respected. The Centre organises seminars for staff of higher education institutions to explain the course of self-evaluation and presentation of its results for the evaluation conducted by the Centre. Higher education institutions are also offered consulting by phone, e-mail or at the Centre upon individual request. Universities and colleges are informed in advance about the deadlines for submission of self-evaluation reports, they are published.

Preparation for evaluation

At least one month before the visit, comprehensive methodical materials needed for making preparations for evaluation are submitted to expert team. When on-going study programmes and higher education institutions are under evaluation, experts attend one day seminar where they are introduced to and receive answers about the Lithuanian higher education system, legal framework, evaluation process, accreditation requirements, visit procedure, evaluation report requirements and decision making procedure. Prior to the visit to a higher education institution, expert team prepares preliminary reports, questions to discuss during the visit.

Visit

Visit of the expert team to a higher education institution is carried out according to the agenda agreed with the higher education institution in advance. During the visit, the expert team meets target groups:

- when evaluating *new study programmes*, experts meet the administration of a HEI or its unit, programme description developers, lecturers who are intended to give lectures in the new programme, stakeholders interested in the intentions to train specialists, they also make themselves familiar with learning and teaching resources to be used during implementation of the study programme;
- when evaluating *on-going study programmes*, experts meet the administration of a HEI or its unit, self-evaluation report team, programme lecturers, students, graduates, stakeholders, they also make themselves familiar with learning and teaching resources, students' yearly and final theses, examination papers;
- when evaluating a *higher education institution*, experts meet the administration of the higher education institution, representatives of the Academic Council or the Senate, self-evaluation team, lecturers, students, graduates and stakeholders, they also make themselves familiar with the infrastructure of the HEI, documents needed for evaluation. Upon experts' request, separate meetings by four fields subject to evaluation can be organised during the visit.

Evaluation of the application for a license to provide higher education and to conduct relevant activities does not start until a conclusion is issued by the State Security Department (VSD) that the institution is not a threat to the national security. Once the VSD confirms that the institution is not a threat to the national security, experts start evaluating new study programmes by the institution. If programmes receive positive evaluation, visit to the institution planning to provide studies is organised. The visit is organised following the same principles as in case of evaluation of study programmes and HEI.

In all cases, in the end of the visit the expert team discuss the visit results inside the team and orally introduces the initial observations to the community of the HEI.

Reports

Once the visit is completed, the expert team prepares a draft evaluation report, which is sent to the HEI. The HEI can make itself familiar with the draft evaluation reports and make its comments regarding factual errors in the evaluation reports, if any. In case of new study programmes and in case of evaluation of applications for a license to provide higher education and to conduct relevant activities, the expert team can suggest amendments to the programme, application in the draft evaluation reports. Expert team must examine the comments and/or amendments made by the HEI and to draw final evaluation reports. The reports are submitted to the Commission for Study Programme Evaluation (in case of evaluation of study programmes) or Commission for HEI Reviews (in case of review of HEI) for consideration. The Commission (consisting of employees of research and higher education institutions, state institutions, representatives of employers or trade unions (organisations), students) examines the evaluation reports drawn by the expert team to satisfy

itself that they are objective, comprehensive and valid. Upon approval by the Commission, the evaluation reports are sent to the HEI, if no approval is given, they are returned to the expert team for elaboration.

If the HEI disagree with the final evaluation reports received, it may lodge an appeal. Appeals regarding study programmes are handled by the Commission for Appeals against Study Programme Evaluation, composed of persons delegated by the Lithuanian University Rectors' Conference, the Lithuanian College Directors' Conference, the Lithuanian Research Council, the Lithuanian Association of Private Higher Education Institutions and the Lithuanian Students Union. Appeal against the HEI review reports or applications for a licence to provide higher education and to conduct relevant activities is submitted to the Ministry of Education and Science, which forms a commission to handle to the appeal.

If the HEI agrees with the evaluation reports (or if the Commission for appeals rejects the appeal as ungrounded), the Centre decides on accreditation of a study programme, HEI, and publishes the evaluation reports on the website of the Centre. In case of evaluation of the applications for a license to provide higher education and to conduct relevant activities, the Centre submits a report to the Ministry of Education and Research advising to issue authorisation to provide studies.

Follow-up

At follow-up stage, the higher education institution is the main player responsible for rectification of any shortcomings established during the external evaluation of study programmes, higher education institution, and implementation of activity improving measures and their publicity.

> **Following the first ENQA external evaluation, the Centre focuses more attention on follow-up**

In 2014, in order to strengthen the effect of the evaluations of on-going study programmes and new study programmes, the Centre developed methodological follow-up recommendations for HEI, which suggest that one and a half year after the external evaluation reports on on-going study programme came into effect and within six months from the commencement of the implementation of new study programme reviewing the actions implemented to improve the study programme, i.e. which changes to the programme were planned, implemented or intended to be implemented and preparation of a progress report on the implementation of the recommendations and submission of its electronic version to the Centre. Progress reports on the implementation of external evaluation recommendations are published on the Centre's website together with the evaluation reports.

When conducting external evaluation of an on-going study programme, progress achieved by the HEI in implementing the recommendations made by the experts during the previous evaluation is taken into consideration.

Recently, the Centre organises annual events on relevant follow-up aspects for higher education community. The events are attended by students' representatives (including post-graduates) and foreign experts, representatives of HEI share their experience of implementation of recommendations following expert evaluation.

In case of institutional review of HEI, once the external review is completed the HEI plans measures for rectification of any shortcomings established during self-evaluation and external review, improvement of HEI's activities. Higher education institution must publish improvement measures. References to activity improvement plans of a HEI are published also on the website of the Centre. Meetings of the Centre and HEI representatives are also held to discuss the measures and their implementation progress reports.

10.4   ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS

Standard:
External quality assurance must be conducted by external expert teams with one student(s) involved.
Guidelines:
Wide-ranging competences of experts form the basis for external quality assurance. They contribute to the Agency's work by looking from different perspectives – research and higher education institutions, academics, students and employers/practising professionals.
In order to secure value and consistency of experts' work, they:
– are carefully selected;
– have adequate skills and competences to perform the job;
– are properly trained and/or instructed.
The Agency ensures impartiality of experts by implementing a mechanism preventing conflict of interests.
Inclusion of international experts into external quality assurance, for examples, by joining expert teams, is welcomed, since their involvement adds additional value to development and implementation of processes.

External reviews of HEIs and study programmes organised by the SKVC are carried out with independent experts involved. Experts are invited to evaluations in accordance with the Procedure for Expert Selection approved by the Order No. V-41 of the SKVC Director of 14 August 2015. All candidates of experts and their CVs are discussed with the management of the SKVC and only those experts who have the experience required for evaluation of specific study programmes or HEI are selected to expert teams. All experts involved in evaluations sign impartiality and confidentiality declarations, the Centre sings service agreements with experts. According to the expert selection principle, the same expert team may not consist of several experts representing the same institution or coming from the same foreign country. Besides, experts with professional experience matching the profile of the higher education institution to be reviewed (especially, considering sectors – university or college) or field of study programmes to be evaluated are selected. Efforts are made to ensure experts coming from different geographical regions and representing various educational traditions. This way, expert team composing persons with different experiences and high competences is formed.

In 2011–2016, nearly all external evaluations were conducted by international expert teams. Experts are invited from a big variety of countries. In case of institutional review, the requirements established in the Law is that all expert groups must be mixed, composing of both local and foreign experts. In case of study programme evaluation, when deciding whether expert team should compose of local or mixed experts, the criteria of expediency and rationality are observed, and efforts are made to avoid conflict of interests.

Expert teams panels are formed to ensure involvement of academics, students and business representatives (of both private and public and non-governmental sectors) in the team. Business and student representatives with good command of English are included into international expert panels.

All students included into expert teams panels are equal members of the team. Despite being responsible for insights within their competences during evaluation, they have the same voice as other experts in decision making process. The Centre tends to include mainly local students into expert teams, but students from abroad are also included into institutional review or programme evaluation, when it is expedient according to the object subject to evaluation and suitable candidates are available.
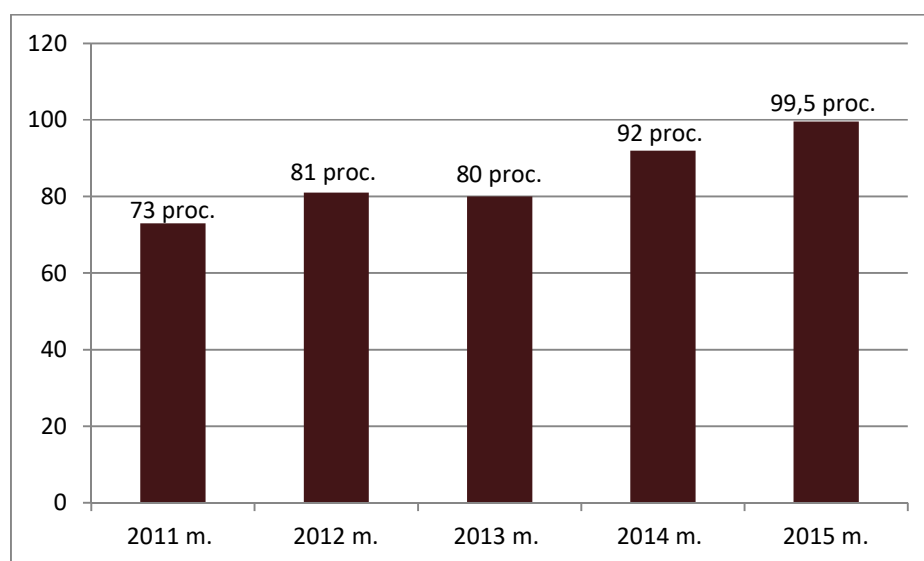
Picture: Per cent of on-going study programmes, which were evaluated by international expert teams, in the total number of study programmes evaluated in the year in question
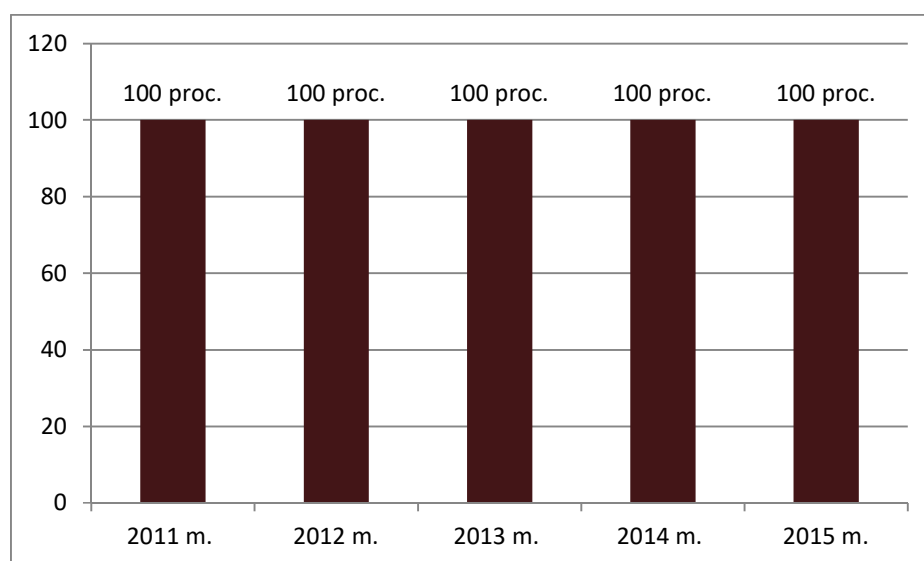
Picture: Per cent of institutional reviews, which were conducted by international expert teams, in the total number of institutional reviews conducted in the year in question

For example, experts from the following countries participated in the evaluations of on-going study programmes in 2015:

Other Northern European countries 10
Other Southern European countries 13
Non-European countries 1
Other Western European countries 5
Other Eastern European countries 1
Other Central European Countries 17
Lithuania 92
Latvia 9
Germany 9
Portugal 9
Ireland 9
Poland 10
Finland 10
Netherlands 11
Estonia 15
Great Britain 23
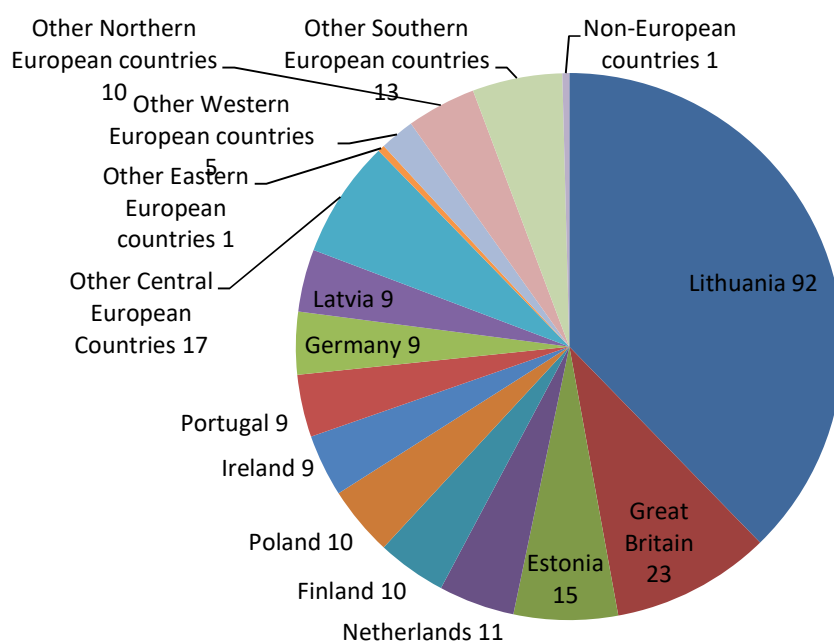
Institutional reviews in 2011-2015 were conducted by experts from the following countries:

Other Western European countries 5
Other Eastern European countries 7
Other Central European countries 9
Other Southern European countries 4
Other Northern European countries 8
Non-European countries 4
Germany 18
Switzerland 7
Ireland 23
Lithuania 86
Finland 7
Poland 5
Netherlands 12
Estonia 17
Great Britain 43
Austria 10
Denmark 7
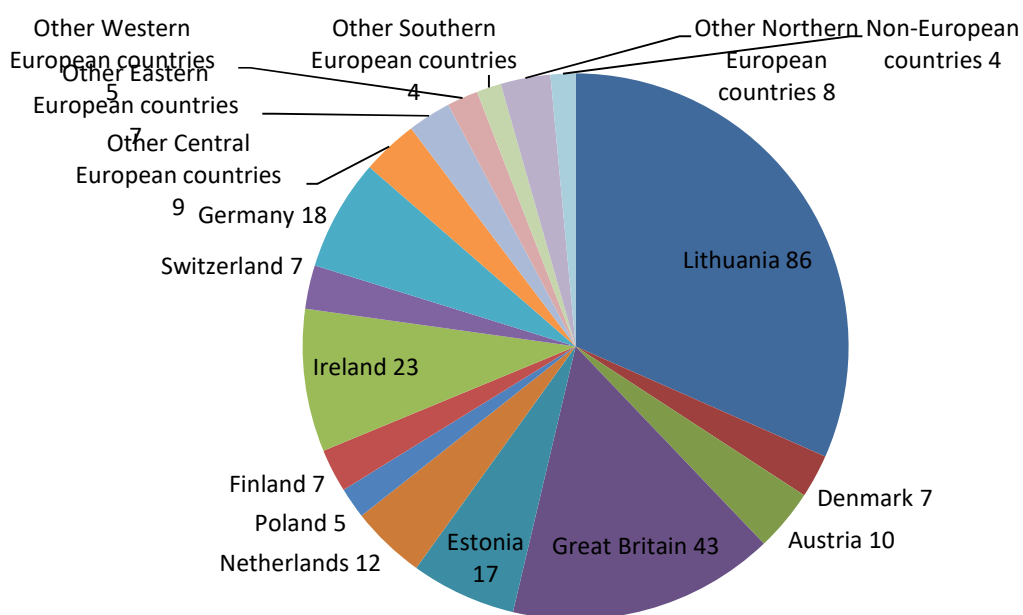
Data about experts who participated or may participate in evaluations is stored in the SKVC database which has over 2 500 experts at present. Main information about experts, including their working experience and CVs, as well as their previous participation in evaluations, is collected in the database. Experts interested in evaluation can nominate themselves also on the SKVC website (http://www.skvc.lt/default/en/quality-assurance/call-for-

experts). A few times a year, the Centre addresses various Lithuanian organisations and foreign quality agencies inviting them to nominate experts for evaluations. Because of turnover – some experts retire, others lose status (e.g. students), other change jobs, etc., expert search and selection, as well as training, is an ongoing process.

Every year, separate training courses are organised on external evaluation of study programmes and HEI for different groups of experts – students and employers. The purpose of training is to ensure that representatives of employers and students later joining expert teams understand the objectives, context and procedures of evaluation, are capable of teamwork. In 2012–2016, the SKVC organised five training courses of future experts for stakeholders (80 stakeholders were trained in total), and seven training courses for students (159 students were trained in total), on 1 September 2016, there were 143 trained students from different HEI and study fields available for evaluation on the database.

In order to ensure proper training of experts for evaluation, several measures are taken. First of all, upon receipt of self-evaluation reports from HEI, they are sent to experts together with systematised information about the Lithuanian educational system, external quality assurance system, various information related with the study programme or higher education institution to be evaluated. On the first day of experts' visit, usually introductory training is organised for experts at the SKVC, unless the expert team composes of experts who have already conducted a number of evaluations and such training is inexpedient. During training, SKVC employees give presentations to experts on the Lithuanian educational system, legal regulation, requirements for study programmes and higher education institutions, evaluation process, requirements for evaluation reports, accreditation decision-making, also hold discussions and answer questions. The materials of presentations delivered to experts are regularly updated (on a yearly basis, before a new academic year), by reviewing and supplementing information depending on the field of studies or higher education institution to be reviewed, as well as taking into consideration experts' observations expressed during previous surveys about the contents and quality of studies, changed situation in the Lithuanian higher education and specific HEI. During training, not only fields, objectives, model of evaluation are highlighted to experts, but it is also discussed which behaviour of experts during evaluation is considered by the Centre as ethical and proper.

When evaluating new study programmes (*ex-ante* procedure), the criteria of expediency and rationality are observed. Descriptions of new study programmes contain programme developers' presumptions how in their opinion the study programme will be implemented. Therefore, new study programmes are evaluated by smaller Lithuanian expert teams composed of 2–3 members. According to the criteria of rationality and expedience, and considering the scope of this type of evaluation, no representatives of employers are included into expert teams, but sometimes academics are practicing professionals, thus incorporate both perspectives. Students to panels for new programme evaluations are invited starting end of 2016. The SKVC when organising evaluation of new study programmes makes sure that experts are properly trained and have all knowledge needed for such evaluation – consults them during preparation for evaluation and discusses all evaluation-related matters before the visit.

The Centre includes foreign experts not only into external evaluations of HEI and study programmes, but also invites them to deliver presentations and share experience at follow-up and other international events which are organised every year. At the events, foreign experts not only deliver presentations but also participate in discussion groups, where HEI representatives share their experiences about the relevant problems of improvement of HEI management and study programmes.

In 2014–2015, when doing evaluations abroad, the same principles of expert selection and work organisation were observed as when organising institutional reviews in Lithuania: an international expert team was formed, candidates to which were discussed with the Centre's management, experts signed service agreements and

impartiality declarations, they were provided with methodological evaluation information and training for them was organised, expert groups were invited into discussions. Mixed Lithuanian and foreign expert team was composed of members with managerial, academic working experiences, and business representatives and a student.

10.5   ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

Standard: Any reports or decisions made on the basis of external evaluation results must be based on clear and publicly available criteria that were applied consistently, irrespective whether the process is or not directed to formal decision-making.
Guidelines: External quality evaluation, and in particular its results, have significant impact on institutions or their programmes under evaluation and regarding which decisions are made. For the reasons of impartiality and reliability, external quality evaluation results are based on predetermined and publicly available criteria which are applied consistently and are based on evidences. Depending on the system of external quality evaluation, evaluation results can differ, e.g. can be presented as recommendations, assessments or formal decisions.

Formal decisions made by the Centre on evaluation and accreditation of study programmes and HEIs are based on publicly available and accessible criteria.

Criteria of and decisions on evaluation of study programmes and HEI

The procedure for evaluation and accreditation of study programmes and higher education institutions and potential decisions are established in the Procedure for the External Evaluation and Accreditation of Study Programmes approved by the Order of the Minister of Education and Research, the Procedure for External Review of Higher Education Institutions and the Procedure for Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions approved by the resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania. Evaluation criteria for study programmes and higher education institutions are established in the methodologies approved by the Centre Director's order:
- Evaluation criteria for *new study programmes* are established in Methodology for development of the descriptor of new study programmes, its external evaluation and accreditation ;
- Evaluation criteria for *on-going study programme*s are established in Methodology for on-going study programme evaluation;
- Review criteria for *higher education institutions* are established in Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education.

The above-mentioned legal acts are publicly available (on the Centre's website, Register of Legislation), thus enabling higher education institutions and experts to make themselves familiar with the procedures: how evaluation is carried out, which criteria apply, which decisions are possible.

The Centre focuses special attention on training of experts to make sure they understand and unanimously interpret the established criteria when conducting evaluation of study programmes and higher education institutions, their reports are based on evidences, while decisions made are clear and transparent. It must be noted that decisions are adopted by consensus, i.e. upon unanimous agreement of all experts. If any expert disagrees with the team's opinion, he/she prepares a separate reasoned opinion which is enclosed to the evaluation reports; nevertheless it is a very rare case (in the last five years, there was one case in the evaluation of new study programmes and two cases in institutional review). The Centre reviews evaluation reports if they are properly prepared.

Validity of study programme and HEI evaluation reports is considered in the Centre's advisory institutions – Commission for Study Programme Evaluation (for on-going and new study programmes, when their external evaluation is required), Commission for Higher Education Institutions Review. The Centre's Director makes the decision on accreditation/refusal to grant accreditation for study programme or higher education institution following the Procedure for External Evaluation and Accreditation of Studies (in case of evaluation of on-going and new study programmes) or the Procedure for Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions (in case of review of HEI), at experts' proposal and recommendation of the Commission for Study Evaluation (SVK) or Commission for Higher Education Institutions Review (AMVK). Once decision on accreditation (refusal to grant accreditation) of study programme or higher education activity is made, the HEI is notified about the decision. Information about the decision on accreditation of study programme or higher education institution or reports on evaluation of study programme or higher education institution are published on the Centre's website. The Centre Director's orders regarding evaluation of study programmes or HEI are published on the Centre's website and in the Register of Legislation.

Final evaluation decision is recorded with the sole signature of the Centre's Director attached, but prior to that the tiered decision-making system with many persons involved is implemented

It must be noted that despite decisions on accreditation of study programmes and higher education institutions are being signed by the sole-person managing body of the Centre – Director, as established for public administration institutions, the whole procedure ensuring collegial consideration of decisions to be made exists in order to ensure objectivity and validity. Draft evaluation reports prepared by the expert team, first of all, are reviewed by evaluation coordinator, after which the draft is sent to a higher education institution to make itself familiar with it and comment on factual errors. Taking the comments of the HEI into consideration, the expert team amends the reports if needed. Then they are considered as final and submitted either to the Commission for Study programme Evaluation (SVK) or the Commission of Higher Education Institutions Review (AMVK) for consideration. Upon approval of the experts' evaluation reports by the SVK or AMVK, the Centre makes a decision on accreditation of the programme or higher education institution. If the Commission disagrees with the evaluation reports, they are sent back to the expert team for elaboration, following which they are submitted to the SVK for re-consideration. In the rare cases, when the SVK disagrees with the experts' reports for the second time, internal *Ad hoc* commission is formed, which advises the Director, who makes the final decision, which the HEI can appeal against. There has not been a case yet, when the AMVK would not agree with the experts' reports.

In 2016, taking into consideration the ESG amendments and the amendments to the Law initiated by the President of the Republic of Lithuania, which obligated to consider the needs of economic, social, cultural development of the country when evaluating study programmes of state higher education institutions, the Centre amended and supplemented the evaluation criteria of study programmes and HEIs. Draft amendments to the evaluation methodologies of study programmes and HEIs were published on the Centre's website, opinion regarding the amendments was sought from the higher education institutions, Students' Union, Centre's Council, Ministry of Education and Research. In July 2016, the amendments to the Methodologies for development of the descriptor of the new study programme, its external evaluation and accreditation, for Evaluation of on-going study programmes and for Conducting Institutional Review in Higher Education Institutions were approved by the orders of the Centre Director.

Evaluation of applications for a licence to provide higher education and to conduct relevant activities

Evaluation of applications for a license to provide higher education and to conduct relevant activities is organised in accordance with the Procedure for the issue of licences to provide higher education and to

conduct relevant activities approved by the Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania (2009) and the Procedure for dealing with applications for a license to provide higher education and to conduct relevant activities approved by the Order of the Minister of Education and Science (2010). The latter legal act establishes evaluation criteria, methods of evaluation and the appeals procedure. Upon evaluation of the application for a license to provide higher education and to conduct relevant activities, experts submit report and proposal regarding the evaluation to the Centre. The Centre submits the evaluation reports to the higher education institution and to the Ministry of Education and Science. The Centre publishes the evaluation reports on its website. Decision to issue (to refuse to issue) a license is made by the Ministry, notifying the higher education institution and the Centre in writing.

Accreditation of study programmes based on the evaluation conducted by the other Agency

Higher education institution can apply to the Agencies of other countries for evaluation of its on-going and new study programmes. But the Centre makes the decision regarding accreditation exclusively on the basis of the reports drawn by the Agencies included into the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). In such event, Programme evaluation must be conducted by the fields and the scale established in the Procedure for Evaluation and Accreditation of Study Programmes (if the structure of reports do not comply with the fields established in the above-mentioned procedure, it must be indicated in the reports which evaluation fields in the Agency's reports comply with the fields established in the Procedure for Evaluation and Accreditation of Study Programmes). Evaluation reports drawn by the other Agency not more than one year ago can be submitted to the Centre. If the programme meets the legal requirements and receives positive evaluation, the Centre makes a decision on programme accreditation. The Centre applies high standards to the quality of the reports of evaluation conducted by the Centre and other Agencies, therefore if the quality of the evaluation reports conducted by the other Agency is questioned, the Centre reserves the right to discuss it with the Agency that conducted the evaluation and to appeal to the EQAR.

Four higher education institutions used the opportunity to choose agencies from the EQAR in the period of 2010–2016. Applications were made to four foreign agencies: AHPGS, EVALAG, ACQUIN (all three from Germany) and AVEPRO (Vatican). The latter agencies evaluated 65 study programmes in total. It must be noted that 63 study programmes evaluated by foreign agencies for quality assessment in higher education commissioned by the Lithuanian HEI received accreditation for six years and only two study programmes for three years.

Not only Lithuanian but also higher education institutions of other countries of the European Higher Education Area are free to commission national or foreign agency to conduct evaluation. In 2015, the Centre conducted institutional review of Slovenian higher education institution Alma Mater Europaea and evaluation of three study programmes in the field of management provided by the latter HEI. International expert teams formed by the Centre drawn the evaluation reports and specific recommendations. Both review and evaluation were conducted not for the purpose of accreditation but in order to improve the quality of institutional activities and study programmes.

Evaluation of study programmes intended to be provided by a Lithuanian higher education institution in its affiliate based in a foreign country

According to the Procedure for the External Evaluation and Accreditation of Study Programmes approved by the Minister of Education and Research, if a higher education institution established in the Republic of Lithuania plans to provide study programme in its affiliate based in a foreign country, the new study programme is subject to external evaluation. New study programmes to be provided in the affiliates based in foreign countries are evaluated according to the same model as applies to the new study programmes in

Lithuania, which are subject to external evaluation. So far, only one Lithuanian higher education institution attempted to provide studies abroad.

In 2013, private higher education institution – West Lithuanian Business College submitted its intention to provide study programme in the field of Management to the Centre for evaluation. The programme was supposed to be provided in the capital of Ireland – Dublin. Under the cooperation agreement, the programme was supposed to be provided by the lectures of the West Lithuanian Business College by using facilities and learning resources of three private Irish colleges (English Language Academy, Infinity Business College, College of Business and Service Management). In April–May 2013, the Lithuanian expert team formed by the Centre visited Klaipėda, where the West Lithuanian Business College is based, and Dublin. In Klaipėda, the experts met the representatives of administration of the college, programme description developers, lecturers to be involved in the programme. In Dublin, the expert team met the representatives of the partners of the West Lithuanian Business College in Dublin, made themselves familiar with their facilities and learning resources to be used when providing the study programme. After the visits, the expert team drawn programme evaluation reports which were considered at the Commission for Study Programme Evaluation.

10.6   ESG 2.6 REPORTING

Standard: All evaluation reports drawn by experts should be made publicly available in their full volume, clear and accessible to academic community, external partners and other interested persons. If formal decision is made by the agency based on evaluation reports, the decision must be made publicly available together with the evaluation reports.

Guidelines:
Evaluation reports drawn by experts serve as a basis for an institution to carry out follow-up after the external evaluation. Evaluation reports also serve as a source of information about the institution's activities to society. In order to make sure that the reports serve as a basis for follow-up actions, they must be clear and concise in terms of structure and language and contain the following:
– context description (to be able to identify the institution in specific context);
– description of a relevant procedure, including description of the expert team;
– evidences, analysis and results;
– reports;
– good practice examples noticed in the higher education institution;
– recommendations for follow-up process.
Preparation of a summary of evaluation reports can be useful.
Factual accuracy of evaluation reports can be improved, if the research and higher education institution is invited to identify incorrect facts prior to preparing final evaluation reports.

During all external evaluations organised by the SKVC, experts prepare evaluation reports which in their full version are published and publicly accessible on the Centre's website and in the state Register of Studies, Teaching Programmes and Qualifications (AIKOS). Evaluation reports are always published together with the decision regarding accreditation of a HEI and study programmes. Higher education institutions also have an obligation to publish evaluation reports. From 2016, decisions on study programme accreditation are published also on the website of the Association of Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions for General Admission (www.lamabpo.lt). On the website, candidates can learn how the study programmes they are interested in are accredited. It must be noted that in addition to publication of evaluation reports of on-going study

programmes and institutional review reports and accreditation decisions, from 2015 reports of new study programmes are also made public in full volume with the decision made by the Centre's Director on study programme accreditation based on the latter reports.

In pursuit of consistency of all reports drawn by experts, templates of reports are provided to experts, which include structural parts of reports, such as: context description of the institution under review or study programme under evaluation, description of evaluation procedures and expert team's members, analysis of the study programme under evaluation or higher education institution and evidences collected during the evaluation, examples of excellence, with expert team's recommendations for activity improvement in the end of reports. A summary of reports is presented in the end of the evaluation reports of on-going study programmes. Significant attention for quality reports is paid also during experts' training – both organising training for stakeholders and students to be included into future expert teams, and delivering speeches to experts involved in evaluations.

To make sure that evaluation reports reflect the opinion of all experts, during the evaluation procedure experts are provided with an opportunity to discuss preliminary reports before their visit to higher education institutions, as well as during the visit. Following the visit to HEI, experts are invited to discuss evaluation results for the whole day. Communication of experts when preparing final reports continues after the visit – they communicate by email. Once the evaluation reports are complete, experts attach their signatures thus confirming the compliance of the reports with their opinion. In very exceptional cases (there was less than 1 per cent of all evaluations since 2012), if any expert objects the opinion of the whole team, he/she is invited to present his/her opinion as an annex to the reports.

Taking the comments of experts into consideration and in pursuit of quality reports, in recent years the template of reports of on-going study programmes was amended by including into it separate parts of examples of excellence in study programmes, summary of reports, as well as introduction containing basic information about the higher education institution and evaluation process.

Once the visit to a higher education institution is finished, expert team prepares draft reports within approximately one month and coordinates them with the Centre. Centre's representatives review the reports and if their structure, contents, style of writing do not meet the established requirements return the reports to experts for amendments. Upon approval of the draft reports, they are sent to the higher education institution which can make comments regarding incorrect facts contained in the evaluation reports. Upon receipt of the HEI's comments, experts decide what corrections or specifications need to be done to make the reports accurate, clear and comprehensible to the higher education institution. If the evaluation was conducted by international expert team, reports are drawn in English. The full text of institutional review report is translated into Lithuanian, in case of evaluation of on-going study programme, summary, examples of excellence and experts' recommendations are translated, and if the study programme receives negative evaluation, the full text of the report is translated.

Once all evaluation processes are completed, reports of the evaluation of study programmes and institutional review are published on the SKVC website, full text of the institutional review report is published together with the summary of the report with systematised key information contained in the report. The purpose is to ensure that the reports are comprehensible to all interested groups.

The objective of the Centre is to make the evaluation reports drawn during external evaluation serve as a basis for improvement of higher education institution's activities and study programme provision. Approximately half year after the preparation of the institutional review reports, a meeting is held between the Centre's representatives and the management of the HEI to discuss the last review and steps planned to be taken in

order to eliminate the shortcomings identified in the review reports. Activity improvement plan of the higher education institution is published on its website, the Centre places a link to this plan on its website, next to the published review reports. A novelty was introduced in 2016 – in case of on-going study programmes, study programme providers are requested to present a progress report specifying the activity improvements that were successfully implemented while waiting for the next evaluation.

The SKVC regularly monitors publication of the reports of HEI and study programmes on the websites of HEI checking how the HEI are making the reports of their study programmes evaluation and institutional review publicly available. Every two years, review of publicity of evaluation results in higher education institutions is carried out, which contains key trends and problems of publicity of evaluation results.

The Centre publishes the following on its website:
- Reports of evaluations of on-going study programmes: http://pluto.skvc.lt/StudyProgramResults.aspx, http://www.skvc.lt/default/en/quality-assurance/study-programme-evaluations/evaluation-reports
- Evaluation reports of new study programmes: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1sfnD6KFyLqoFWDu0fZ-2BJEo9qFYGB2kBEbU62u6W74/edit#gid=1771030468
- Institutional review reports: http://www.skvc.lt/default/en/quality-assurance/institutional-review/am-evaluation_reports

It should be noted that in autumn 2016, the public tender for website extension services was launched in order to improve publication of study programme evaluation reports and to make it more user-friendly.

When organising evaluations in foreign countries, the same principles of report preparation and publication as in organising evaluations in Lithuania are observed – experts are provided with templates of evaluation reports, methodological materials, conditions for visit discussion are created, joint opinion of the expert team is presented in the reports. Reports are published on the SKVC's website:
- Reports on evaluations of on-going study programmes: http://www.skvc.lt/default/en/quality-assurance/study-programme-evaluations/evalution-reports-other
- Reports on institutional review: http://www.skvc.lt/default/en/quality-assurance/institutional-review/-alma-mater-europaea-evaluation-reports.

The Centre also reminded a higher education institution based abroad about the duty to publish evaluation reports on its website by publishing reports on every evaluation, as well as to carry out appropriate monitoring, and gives recommendations on publicity improvement. Having received a report from the evaluated university on how the institution considered expert recommendations, we also published it on our website.

10.7   ESG S 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

Standard:
Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.
Guidelines: In order to safeguard the rights of the institutions and ensure fair decision-making, external quality assurance is operated in an open and accountable way. Nevertheless, there may be misapprehensions or instances of dissatisfaction about the process or formal outcomes. Institutions need to have access to processes that allow them to raise issues of concern with the agency; the agencies, need to handle such issues in a professional way by means of a clearly defined process that is consistently applied.

A complaints procedure allows an institution to state its dissatisfaction about the conduct of the process or those carrying it out.

In an appeals procedure, the institution questions the formal outcomes of the process, where it can demonstrate that the outcome is not based on sound evidence, that criteria have not been correctly applied or that the processes have not been consistently implemented.

Following the appeal procedure, a research and higher education institution can contest formal process results, when it can prove that the result is not based on solid evidences, that criteria were not properly applied or that processes were not carried out consistently.

Methodology of evaluation of **on-going and new study programmes** states that if higher education institutions disagree with the evaluation results, they can lodge an appeal to the Centre within 30 days from the dispatch of the evaluation reports. Commission for Appeals against Study Programme Evaluation handles evaluation reports, composed of persons delegated by the Lithuanian University Rectors' Conference, the Lithuanian College Directors' Conference, the Lithuanian Research Council, the Lithuanian Students Union, the Lithuanian Association of Private Higher Education Institutions, organisations uniting employers. Appeal is handled within 60 days from its receipt. After handling the appeal, the Commission for Appeals makes one of the following decisions:

1. to satisfy the appeal and to instruct the Centre to carry out actions indicated by the Commission for Appeals;
2. to satisfy the appeal partly and to instruct the Centre to carry out actions indicated by the Commission for Appeals;
3. to reject the appeal and to leave the decision of the Centre in effect.

During 2013–2015, 37 appeals against study programme evaluations were received in total. Ten of them were satisfied, while the others were rejected as ungrounded.

Results of the appeals lodged to the SKVC against study programme evaluations and their handling

Decisions of the Commission for Appeals	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Appeal satisfied	12	4	9	0	1	0	2	5	3
Appeal rejected	10	6	6	1	0	3	9	12	6
Total appeals:	**22**	**10**	**15**	**1**	**1**	**3**	**11**	**17**	**9**

Despite the rise in the number of appeals if compared with the previous period, in general context the number of appeals is small if compared with the total number of study programmes evaluated during the period (approximately 4 %), since the volumes of evaluations increased as well. Considering the fact that appeals are lodged only in the cases, when a study programme is refused accreditation or is accredited for three years only, it makes approximately 8 per cent on average (according to the statistics of 2013–2015) from all study programmes that were refused accreditation or were accredited for three years. The main arguments of appeals are related with ungrounded programme evaluation, in appellants' opinion. No appeals were lodged against breaches of evaluation procedures.

Appeals against institutional review. The procedure of making appeals against institutional review results is established in the resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania On the approval of the procedure of external evaluation of higher education institutions and accreditation of higher education institutions. Higher education institution can appeal against HEI review within 14 calendar days from its receipt in writing to the Minister, who forms a commission to handle the appeal. Appeals of higher education institutions must be

handled by the commission within 30 calendar days. Commission can decide to reject the appeal or to satisfy it and to instruct the authorised institution which made the decision on HEI review to re-evaluate the higher education institution within the term established by the commission.

In the period 2011–2015, the Centre evaluated 44 HEI in total, four of which being dissatisfied with the evaluation results lodged the appeals. Three appeals were rejected as ungrounded, while one was satisfied partly (in this case, a new external evaluation of the appellant was organised).

Courts regarding external evaluation. Because of external evaluation results, the Centre was a respondent in the cases in judicial institutions for five times in 2010–2016: two times because of institutional review results (2012); two times because of external evaluation of study programmes (in 2013 and 2015), and one time because of the report on preparation of HEI to provide studies and relevant activities (2013). Higher education institutions addressed the court objecting to the external evaluation results (e.g. evaluation of specific fields by points or "negative"), but neither of the complaints were satisfied; judicial institutions of the Republic of Lithuania stated that the decisions made by the Centre on institutional review and study programme evaluation were legitimate and grounded.

The SKVC as a third party participated also in the court sessions, when higher education institutions lodged a complaint against the procedure of external evaluation of HEI, and in particular legality of the decision made on the basis of evaluation of learning resources. The Court satisfied claims of the HEI, which served as a basis for amendment to the Government's resolution in 2014, after which results of evaluation of learning resources conducted by the MOSTA do not have direct impact on accreditation decisions.

Requests to replace experts. Upon receipt of information about the members of the expert team, HEI can make a grounded request to replace any member of the team. The request must be based on facts, potentially proving the conflict of interests of the expert and HEI under evaluation, non-objectivity of the expert, etc. This opportunity is comparatively rarely used by the HEI. For example, both in 2015 and in 2016, three requests to replace experts were received each year. In all such cases, *Ad hoc* commissions of the Centre's employees are formed for handling such requests, which examine validity of the requests. It must be noted that none of the requests made by HEI in 2015 and 2016 was satisfied, because of lack of clear evidences allowing to establish a conflict of interests or potential bias of the expert in respect of the HEI. In its turn, the Centre when conducting training to experts underlines to them the importance of ethical behaviour during external evaluation process.

11. INFORMATION AND OPINION OF STAKEHOLDERS'

The Centre has been constantly collecting and analysing feedback about conducted evaluation of study programmes and institutional performance from higher education institutions and experts involved in review teams. This feedback is collected through anonymous online surveys carried out after evaluation. Every year, survey results are summarised with a view to taking these into account during organisation of subsequent reviews.

> **Feedback surveys and consultations held during the self-evaluation process show that stakeholders positively evaluate the Centre's activities**

In 2016, while preparing for self-evaluation for an external review, the SKVC organised meetings with the main stakeholders, seeking to find out their opinions on the SKVC activities. Overall, six meetings

were held: with student representatives (from both the national union and independent representations of higher education institutions), university rectors, college directors, members of SKVC advisory institutions, representatives of the labour market, and HEI staff responsible for internal quality assurance.

The summary of the main findings of meetings with stakeholders and surveys conducted after each institutional review or an evaluation of study programme leads to the conclusion that HEIs and experts positively evaluate the SKVC performance. This is particularly evident from the analysis of the findings of an anonymous online survey, which become more favourable each year. Only the representatives of HEIs expressed some criticism regarding the SKVC performance during face-to-face meetings; however, they noted the positive role of the Centre in the Lithuanian higher education system and pointed out the following strengths: operational independence and competence, involvement of stakeholders in quality assurance processes and contribution to the development of quality culture. More detailed information on the results of meetings and online surveys is presented in an annex to this self-evaluation report.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS AND MAIN FINDINGS FROM PREVIOUS REVIEW AND AGENCY'S RESULTING FOLLOW-UP

In 2012, the ENQA expert panel stated that the Centre's activities comply with ESG-2005 as outlined below.

ESG 3.1 Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education – SUBSTANTIALLY COMPLIANT:
      ESG 2.1. Use of internal quality assurance procedures – SUBSTANTIALLY COMPLIANT
      ESG 2.2. Development of external quality assurance processes – FULLY COMPLIANT
      ESG 2.3. Criteria for decisions – FULLY COMPLIANT
      ESG 2.4. Processes fit for purpose – SUBSTANTIALLY COMPLIANT
      ESG 2.5. Reporting – SUBSTANTIALLY COMPLIANT
      ESG 2.6. Follow-up procedures – PARTIALLY COMPLIANT
      ESG 2.7. Periodic reviews – FULLY COMPLIANT
      ESG 2.8. System-wide analysis – SUBSTANTIALLY COMPLIANT
ESG 3.2 Official status – FULLY COMPLIANT
ESG 3.3 Activities – FULLY COMPLIANT
ESG 3.4 Resources – FULLY COMPLIANT
ESG 3.5 Mission statement – FULLY COMPLIANT
ESG 3.6 Independence – FULLY COMPLIANT
ESG 3.7 External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies – SUBSTANTIALLY COMPLIANT
ESG 3.8 Accountability procedures – SUBSTANTIALLY COMPLIANT
ENQA criterion – Miscellaneous – FULLY COMPLIANT

As already mentioned above, the findings of self-evaluation and recommendations presented by experts were used to identify four main areas of improvement.

1. **Improvement of the feedback collection system.** There have been plans to collect feedback from higher education institutions, experts and other concerned parties by means of electronic questionnaires. These plans have been implemented. The annual feedback data collected from HEIs and experts are analysed and discussed at the meetings of the staff of the quality agency. The data are presented in an annex to this report. Where necessary, amendments to the review process or legislation are made.

2. **Systematic follow-up.** The follow-up model has been envisaged to cover activities such as visits to HEIs, monitoring of higher education institution webpages, organisation of special seminars and discussions. These aspects have been currently fully realised. Furthermore, recommendations to HEIs regarding follow-up have been developed. The Centre began to enhance the monitoring of the implementation of recommendations regarding the follow-up of the study programmes.

3. **Involvement of students and other stakeholders in external quality assurance activities.** The Centre has developed plans to organise regular trainings to students and representatives of the world of work. Additionally, experts of these categories had to be involved in the evaluation of study programmes and HEIs to the maximum extent. Both measures have been fully implemented.

4. **Improvement of the SKVC performance and dissemination of performance results.** There have been plans to organise a number of events aimed at disseminating performance results (see Chapter 4 on the Centre's history and activities). Analysis and dissemination have been more intensive. A brand new website of the SKVC was launched in early 2015. Its functionality is improving and this task will extend to the year 2017.

As indicated in the 2012 Review Report, ENQA experts expressed the opinion that the Centre might wish to re-visit its Quality Policy to consider not just "how can we ensure continuous improvement of the quality of the Centre's services?' but instead ask 'which of the services that we do provide (and could provide) has the greatest (potential) impact on our mission (i.e. to contribute to the improvement of quality in Lithuanian higher education and the free movement of persons across borders)?' and then 'how can we prioritise and improve those services?".

Seeking to be useful to Lithuanian higher education institutions, we conduct surveys and always inquire not only about the quality of a specific activity (e.g. external evaluation of a study programme or a higher education institution, or feedback after the public event was organized), but also about suggestions and requests for the future, thus aiming at remaining relevant and important. The monitoring of implementation of the Strategic Plan reveals the significance of the Centre's cooperation with other organisations and the active engagement of its staff both in the Lithuanian higher education community and internationally for the Centre's mission. These factors guarantee implementation of the SKVC mission to be an influential generator, implementer and disseminator of the ideas of quality and internationalisation.

As already mentioned, the Centre took into account all recommendations presented by the ENQA panel during the first review and immediately produced a two-year operational improvement plan. The Progress Report submitted to the ENQA Board in 2014 and subsequently approved by it is enclosed as an annex to this self-evaluation report. The work done and the changes implemented in the period from 2014 to November 2016 are described in detail above. The Centre is ready to comment on the respective aspects of compliance with the ESG-2015 Standards and Guidelines to the expert panel upon their visit for the purpose of the second review.

13. SUMMARY OF THE SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths	Weaknesses
- Consistency and continuity of the Centre's activities - Ability to successfully work in the changing environment - Fast decision-making - Knowledge of project management - Professional staff - Systematic cooperation with stakeholders (HEIs, students, employers and educational organisations) - Cooperation with and support of the founder - Involvement of Lithuanian and foreign stakeholders (representatives of employers, students and academic experts) in the activities organised by the Centre and in decision-making - Positive feedback from stakeholders regarding the Centre's activities - Active international outreach and recognition	- Unreliable and inconvenient database for publishing and search on study programme evaluation reports - Overformalised internal quality management system - Poorly developed follow-up (in terms of study programmes) - Limited staff motivation possibilities due to the specificity of the public sector - Underdeveloped communication with employers' organisations - Insufficiently active external communication
Opportunities	**Threats**
- Enhancement of cooperation with Nordic countries - Participation in international projects - Implementation of activities in other states by conducting evaluations of study programmes and reviews of HEIs - Attracting and training of more new experts who are active and recognised - Strengthening of communication with representatives of the general education system (pupils, teachers, parents, career councellors) - Ongoing upgrade of IT and physical infrastructure	- Huge workload - Great dependency on financing from the EU Structural Funds - Insufficient funding of activities from the state budget and limited possibilities to earn revenue - Changing legal framework - Long and bureaucratic public procurement procedures due to the specificity of the public sector - Long and bureaucratic personnel selection procedures due to the specificity of the public sector

The SWOT analysis conducted in the process of production of this self-evaluation report has been used to draw up the draft SKVC Strategic Plan 2017–2019 which has not been completed and approved at the time of submitting this report but instead further discussed and specified with regard to the feedback provided by the staff and the Council.

14. CURRENT CHALLENGES AND AREAS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

The SKVC is constantly changing in line with the general development trends of higher education and the topical issues in the country. Looking ahead, the Centre faces multiple challenges: as an organisation and as a part of the Lithuanian higher education system and local community, to which we are primarily committed. At the same time, the SKVC also feels support from the founder and academic community, which makes us move forward with confidence.

Organisational needs partially remain the same: to pursue activities in accordance with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, act in a transparent, professional, qualitative and reliable manner while assuring external accountability of higher education in line with international standards, and meet the expectations of stakeholders to contribute to the improvement of higher education quality, increase of internationalisation, and enhancement of confidence in the national higher education system. Some necessary changes are daily and incremental (e.g., professional development of the Centre's staff, greater use of information technologies at work), whereas other factors are of wider and more systematic nature (e.g. collection of quantitative data, inclusion of the results of research and development, the use of this data together with longitudinal studies for quality assessment on the national and institutional levels).

Greater efforts will be required for the envisaged improvement of the SKVC activities through the optimisation of the quality management system, digitisation of activities and services, more active publicity and adjustment of external communication with regard to target groups, which will allow to better meet their needs. In order to enhance efficiency of external evaluation, the Centre plans to conduct studies of the impact of this evaluation on higher education and produce joint publications with foreign partners.

The increasing volume of evaluation of study programmes and the growing scope of individual mobility may present a challenge due to the limited nature of financial and human resources as well as infrastructure development. In accordance with the effective legal regulation, the SKVC must evaluate the programmes of all HEIs which apply to the Centre for evaluation and accredit all ongoing and new study programmes by the given deadlines. Therefore, for the last several years the Centre has been increasing its staff and taking care of their competence. Moreover, the Centre has to keep on addressing the issue of quality evaluation of medical residency.

However, the offsetting trends are also likely: the use of centralised mechanisms may encourage HEIs to reduce the number of study programmes, enhance their competences and specialisation, which may lead to

The Centre seeks to develop its competences as an expert organisation and enhance its role in the Lithuanian higher education system and at the international level

decreased workload and a respective decrease in the number of review coordinators employed in the Centre according to fixed-term contracts. A great share of the activities of the quality agency has been and is still financed with the ESF funds; this support is planned to be provided by 2021. Evidently, the Centre's top management discusses and will keep on coordinating activity funding issues with the founder and the Council, aiming at the state budget respectively balanced according to the activities and partial diversification of funding sources in the long run.

The Centre understands the ambiguous connections between quality and internationalisation; therefore, taking into consideration global trends and changes in Lithuania, we as quality assurance agency plan to keep on working

with HEI administration and teachers. The Centre will pay special attention to the audience of leaders and seek their greater awareness, involvement and proper managerial decisions. More intensive work has been started and will be pursued with regard to students, pupils and employers' organisations.

The Lithuanian higher education reform process is not yet over, with ongoing discussions over the issues of optimisation of the network of HEIs, the model of funding of studies, as well as the structure and management of the system of studies. The external evaluation findings and their analysis show that the implementation of the paradigm of student-oriented studies and realisation of the concept of the learning outcomes will be still relevant in the upcoming decade. At the national discussions, the SKVC sees itself as a moderate organisation that proposes decisions based on expert findings and the best international practice, able to provide alternatives on the basis, inter alia, of the analysis of its performance to date as well as the experience of foreign countries. The Centre does not formulate policy but instead implements it within its competence.

The changing legal environment poses a number of challenges during the transitional period when the old legal acts are still effective and the new ones are coming into force, thus giving rise to many questions when evaluating, accrediting and consulting HEIs and experts. As we can see from the external quality assurance history in Lithuania and other EHEA countries, both continuity of and changes in procedures are necessary so that self-evaluation and external review do not become a routine and do not lose their impact. The SKVC follows the provision that quality assurance must be fit for purpose, which changes depending on the period of development and the topical issues of higher education. In order not to lose effectiveness, interaction with other educational organisations and a dialogue with the Centre's stakeholders remain relevant factors. It is also important to ensure compliance with threshold quality requirements and offer measures to promote excellence.

Being a centre of academic information and recognition, the SKVC sees synergy between quality assurance and recognition of qualifications and not only due to implementation and evaluation of joint study programmes – internationalisation is a horizontal uniting element. The search for new solutions will be necessitated by the expectation under ESG 1.4 stating that external quality assurance should be used as a means to contribute to the right recognition of qualifications and of periods of studies. Accordingly, the knowledge of internal and external quality assurance principles has been of use to the Centre's staff while participating in the international project which resulted in the production of SQUARE standards and guidelines targeted at the community of credential evaluators, which serve as an analogue to ESG, a signpost for the quality assurance community.

At the time of completion of this self-evaluation report, we received a notification of European Commission funding awarded to the pan-European project "LIREQA: Linking Academic Recognition and Quality Assurance", bringing together four NARIC centres (SKVC, EP-Nuffic, NOKUT, AIC), three quality assurance agencies (CTI, ANECA, AQU Catalunya), the main Bologna stakeholders (ENQA, EUA, ESU), and distinguished individuals in the Advisory Board. LIREQA aims to contribute to fair recognition of qualifications by developing a set of recommendations to relate academic recognition and both internal and external quality assurance. SKVC will coordinate this project during the course of two years.

In the European Higher Education Area, recently greater attention is been payed to the issues of ethics and fraud in higher education. Therefore, the Centre will keep on developing cooperation with the concerned organisations in Lithuania, and has been involved in the Pan-European Platform on Ethics, Transparency and Integrity in Education (ETINED) coordinated by the Council of Europe, thus the SKVC will take part in dialogues at the international level.

The Centre is positively evaluated by colleagues and other organisations as a quality assurance agency; our expert competences are recognised; we are invited to take part in Lithuania and abroad, including European

Union partnership countries and other regions. The SKVC is pleased to be able to contribute to the building and development of colleagues' competences.

The Centre is interested in external quality reviews abroad according to its profile and, insofar as is possible, is ready to respond to invitations.

We seek to stay relevant in the local context which has been lately highly focussing on conformity of higher education to the needs of the labour market. At the same time, the Centre is conscious of the fact that employability and skills are just one among the four missions of higher education, and that higher education and its quality are sophisticated phenomena which cannot be too easily materialised and turned into instruments. Therefore, the SKVC will keep on focusing on the issues of personal development, covering intercultural competences, taking into account the needs of strengthening democratic civil society as well as the third mission of HEIs, including the aspects of sustainable development.

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16. LIST OF ANNEXES

1. SKVC organisational structure
2. Stakeholder opinion of SKVC activities
3. Progress report submitted to ENQA Board (2014)

SKVC ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Approved by Order No V-77 of 29 th October 2015 of the Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

ADVISORY BODIES

- Higher Education Evaluation Commission
- Study Programme Evaluation Commission
- Study Programme Appeal Commission

BOARD

DIRECTOR

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FINANCE DIVISION

STUDY PROGRAMME EVALUATION DIVISION

QUALIFICATIONS ASSESSMENT DIVISION

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW DIVISION
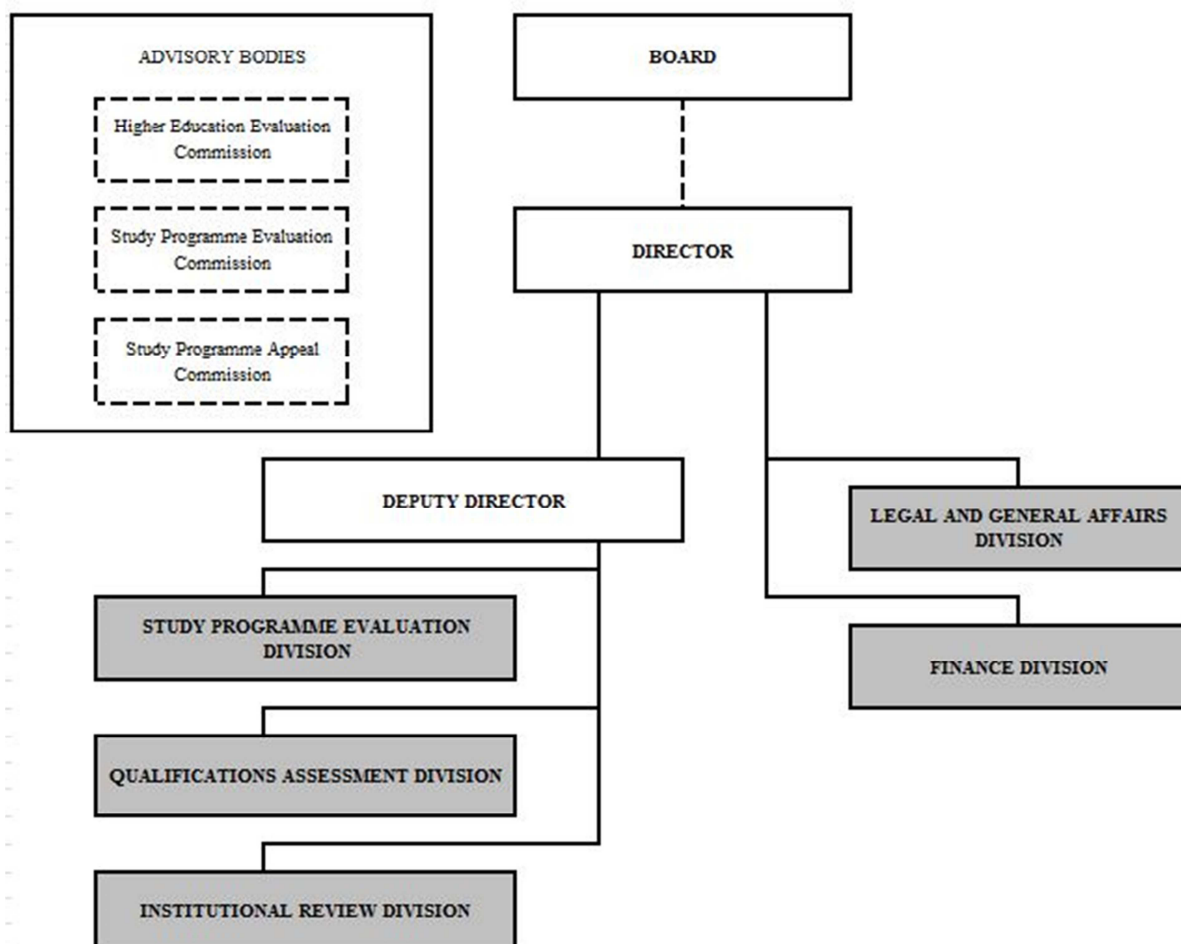
SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK FROM EXPERTS AND HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

This annex presents the summary of stakeholders' feedback about the SKVC performance. Information used for the analysis of feedback has been obtained from two sources:

- Meetings organised in the spring of 2016, while preparing for self-evaluation for the external review: with student representatives (both the national union and independent representations of higher education institutions), university rectors, college directors, members of advisory institutions, representatives of the labour market, HEI staff responsible for internal quality assurance (over 50 participants in total).
- Anonymous surveys of experts and HEIs conducted after each study programme and institutional review in the period from 2012 to 2015.

The following questions have been discussed with the stakeholders during the meetings organised while preparing for self-evaluation for the external review:

- Are the SKVC activities useful to Lithuanian higher education?

- Does the SKVC act as a controlling, assisting, advisory, ... body?

- Are the methods applied by the SKVC suitable (clear, transparent, effective, etc.) for the assessment of higher education quality: evaluation procedures, the review panel, the criteria specified in methodologies, etc.?

- Are the events organised by the SKVC, provided information and consultations useful to HEIs?

- Do the reviews conducted by the SKVC contribute to the improvement of Lithuanian higher education quality?

- What should be improved in the SKVC activities?

- What are the strengths of the SKVC?

- What are your expectations with regard to the SKVC?

The surveys of experts and HEIs after reviews are organised with the view of receiving feedback on the organisation of the external review process, the smoothness and objectivity of conducted reviews.

The survey of experts deals with the following issues: fitness for purpose of a self-evaluation report and annexes thereto, usefulness of methodological material provided by the SKVC, usefulness of training organised by the SKVC, organisation of visits, composition of the review team, professionalism of the SKVC coordinator, the work of the leader of the review team; besides, opinions on possible improvement of all these aspects are sought.

The survey of representatives of HEIs after reviews deals with the following issues: usefulness of methodological material provided by the SKVC, usefulness of consultations and training organised by the SKVC staff, suitability of evaluation areas and evaluation criteria, professionalism of the review coordinator appointed by the SKVC, suitability of organisation of visits, the level of preparation of the review team for evaluation, business-like communication, objectivity, clarity and usefulness of the evaluation report; besides, representatives are asked to suggest ways of improvement of all these aspects.

Summarised opinions on various aspects of the SKVC performance expressed by the participants of meetings and surveys are presented below.

SKVC ACTIVITY BENEFITS FOR THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

All stakeholders with whom meetings were organised while drawing up a self-evaluation report unanimously stated that the SKVC activities are useful to the national higher education system. Examples of benefits primarily concern the fact that the SKVC activities combine Lithuanian higher education with European experience and the Centre is one of the main disseminators of the Bologna Process ideas in Lithuania. HEI representatives point out that in the light of European experience the SKVC is similar to higher education quality assurance agencies of other countries and assert that the Centre's activities are necessary for the promotion of higher education quality culture in the Lithuanian higher education system. The following strengths of the SKVC activities have been pointed out during meetings with representatives of HEIs, students and employers:

- competent SKVC staff, able to consult HEIs on the issues related to evaluation and to ensure methodological and organisational assistance for experts;
- independence of the SKVC from the Ministry of Education and Science and transparent activities;
- involvement of students and employers in all evaluation related processes.

There have been quite a number of comments that the SKVC could not only organise the external reviews of HEIs and study programmes, but also intensify the analysis of the situation and prospects of higher education.

Students who attended the meeting welcomed the fact that the SKVC not only declares cooperation with students but in fact does actively cooperate with them. Students who participated in external reviews abroad and saw how student representatives were involved in quality assurance processes in those countries commended the SKVC for successfully developed and implemented cooperation with students.

The results of online surveys conducted after external reviews show that HEIs consider the evaluation report produced by experts to be useful for the improvement of the quality of study programmes and HEI performance (all tables present the overall results of surveys of study programme and institutional reviews). During the reference period, a total of 320 HEI representatives (in 2012 – 70; in 2013 – 100; in 2014 – 88; in 2015 – 62) and 506 experts (in 2012 – 108; in 2013 – 126; in 2014 – 179; in 2015 – 93) participated in the surveys.

Is the evaluation report useful for the improvement of study programmes and HEI performance?

	2012	2013	2014	2015
I do not agree	0%	0%	1%	0%
I partially agree	23%	22%	27%	16%
I agree	77%	78%	72%	84%

EVALUATION PROCESS

All participants of meetings organised during the self-evaluation process agreed that the evaluation process is logical and clear, yet they also drew the attention of the SKVC to certain shortcomings. According to students, HEIs often involve students in self-evaluation teams on merely a formal level and view these evaluations only formally and, in particular if the study programmes are accredited for six years, they exert no efforts to implement experts' recommendations. Furthermore, students noted that during study programme reviews there are social partners invited to meetings with experts by HEIs who have no idea as to which study programme is being reviewed, and that self-evaluation reports are sometimes copy-pasted.

The majority of HEI representatives who attended meetings assert that assistance and consultations provided by the SKVC staff are of particular use to them. This is also confirmed by the findings of online surveys of HEIs after reviews:

Has the SKVC staff provided you with adequate consultations on self-evaluation report related issues that were relevant to you?

	2012	2013	2014	2015
I do not agree	3%	1%	0%	2%
I partially agree	13%	13%	9%	13%
I agree	84%	86%	91%	85%

Has the coordinator appointed by the SKVC provided professional consultations on the issues of organisation of a site visit?

	2012	2013	2014	2015
I do not agree	0%	1%	2%	1%
I partially agree	9%	10%	8%	10%
I agree	91%	89%	90%	89%

Has the visit of the review team to the HEI been properly organised by the SKVC coordinator?

	2012	2013	2014	2015
I do not agree	0%	1%	0%	1%
I partially agree	6%	9%	5%	2%
I agree	94%	90%	95%	97%

Experts participating in reviews also express positive opinion about effective assistance by review coordinators:

Has the coordinator appointed by the SKVC provided professional consultations to experts?

	2012	2013	2014	2015
I do not agree	0%	0%	0%	0%
I partially agree	3%	0%	2%	7%
I agree	97%	100%	98%	93%

HEI representatives note that the evaluation process is sometimes protracted and they would like the evaluation report to be produced within a shorter period of time. HEIs would also like to receive more help with the follow-up in order to understand and implement experts' recommendations.

EXPERT SELECTION AND DRAFTED EVALUATION REPORT

The composition of the expert team and its drafted evaluation report receive controversial opinions from all stakeholders. On the one hand, most HEI and employers' representatives agree that expert teams are professional and appreciate their international experience as well as commend the SKVC for involving students and employers' representatives in all review related processes. However, there is no unanimous opinion as to the proportion of Lithuanian and foreign experts in the expert team. Some stakeholders consider that non-

involvement of Lithuanians in expert teams guarantees greater objectivity and the fact that study programmes and HEIs are not evaluated by competitors (this attitude is more popular among university representatives as well as the staff of quality divisions). However, according to others, foreign experts not always understand the specifics of Lithuanian higher education (more often stated by representatives of colleges and advisory bodies).

During the meetings, the SKVC has been proposed to exert more efforts in order to guarantee that visiting experts understand the legal framework regulating Lithuanian higher education, well perceive evaluation principles and behaviour during the visit, are younger and more active in academic activities, and that the evaluation report and recommendations provided by them are easier to implement. However, HEI surveys conducted after study programme and institutional reviews reveal that these problems are rare and in most cases experts are properly prepared for the visit, maintain a business-like tone of communication, objectively conduct evaluation and produce a clear evaluation report.

Have the experts been adequately prepared for the site visit to the HEI?

	2012	2013	2014	2015
I do not agree	4%	4%	0%	0%
I partially agree	17%	15%	11%	16%
I agree	79%	81%	89%	84%

Has the review team maintained a business-like tone of communication during the site visit?

	2012	2013	2014	2015
I do not agree	2%	2%	0%	0%
I partially agree	14%	13%	9%	11%
I agree	84%	85%	91%	89%

Has the review team objectively evaluated the study programme/higher education institution?

	2012	2013	2014	2015
I do not agree	4%	3%	3%	0%
I partially agree	29%	24%	24%	18%
I agree	67%	73%	73%	82%

Is the evaluation report clear?

	2012	2013	2014	2015
I do not agree	5%	4%	0%	0%
I partially agree	31%	26%	30%	23%
I agree	64%	70%	70%	77%

Experts participating in training organised by the SKVC staff before each evaluation assert that this training is useful to them and helps to prepare for the visit:

Is the training organised by the SKVC staff useful?

	2012	2013	2014	2015
I do not agree	3%	0%	1%	1%
I partially agree	17%	16%	8%	13%
I agree	80%	84%	91%	86%

The SKVC is also always interested in how other members of the review team evaluate their colleagues. In recent years almost all experts have claimed that the composition of the review team they belonged to has been adequate:

Is the review team composed of experts of an adequate competence?

	2012	2013	2014	2015
I do not agree	0%	0%	0%	0%
I partially agree	12%	5%	6%	6%
I agree	88%	95%	94%	94%

DISSEMINATION OF ACTIVITIES

The majority of persons who participated in discussions asserted that the training organised by the SKVC was useful, because the SKVC organises events taking into consideration the opinions of HEIs as to which event topics would be relevant.

HEI representatives expressed their opinion that they would like to have more training on the production of a qualitative self-evaluation report. The SKVC organises similar trainings several times a year and the analysis of feedback after these trainings reveals positive evaluation:

Have the trainings on the issues of producing a self-evaluation report, organised by the SKVC staff, been useful (if you have taken part in any)?

	2012	2013	2014	2015
I do not agree	5%	1%	2%	0%
I partially agree	22%	27%	30%	22%
I agree	73%	72%	68%	78%

HEI representatives would also like to have more training on student-oriented studies, strategic management, the specific evaluation areas, improvement of teachers' competences, as well as events presenting the examples of the best practice or inviting all providers of study programmes of the same study field and discussing the results of reviews of these study programmes.

All stakeholder representatives who participated in meetings with the SKVC stated that they highly appreciated the Centre's analytical information, overviews and analyses and expressed a wish to receive more information of this kind. However, according to discussion participants, the SKVC could improve its communication by taking advantage of the social media, more actively share articles and opinions on the education and research system, more clearly communicate the results of reviews and try to make information on performance results more understandable to the general public.

METHODOLOGICAL MATERIAL

The overall opinion of all groups participating in meetings is that the strength of the SKVC lies in the fact that the Centre has developed different methodologies for the evaluation of HEIs, ongoing and new study programmes and in the fact that the Centre has always involved representatives of HEI administrations, academic community and students in the processes of development and improvement of these methodologies (yet employers' representatives consider that they could be more actively involved in these processes). Methodological material is considered to be useful since it reflects international standards. The majority of HEIs which participated in the survey conducted by the SKVC after review also agree that provided methodological material is useful for the production of a self-evaluation report and improvement of study programmes:

Is the methodological material provided by the SKVC useful for conducting self-evaluation and improving the study programme/HEI performance?

	2012	2013	2014	2015
I do not agree	1%	0%	0%	1%
I partially agree	23%	19%	17%	10%
I agree	76%	81%	83%	89%

The survey findings reveal that HEIs consider the evaluation areas and criteria to be sufficient for quality evaluation:

Are the specified evaluation areas sufficient for the self-evaluation of quality of the study programme/HEI performance?

	2012	2013	2014	2015
I do not agree	2%	0%	0%	0%
I partially agree	21%	18%	17%	16%
I agree	77%	82%	83%	84%

Are the specified evaluation criteria by area adequate for the analysis of the quality of the study programme/HEI performance?

	2012	2013	2014	2015
I do not agree	3%	0%	1%	0%
I partially agree	34%	26%	18%	16%
I agree	63%	74%	81%	84%

The SKVC also conducts surveys of experts after external review and asks them about the usefulness of methodological material provided. Most Lithuanian and foreign experts agree that this material is useful:

Is the methodological material provided by the SKVC useful?

	2012	2013	2014	2015
I do not agree	0%	0%	0%	0%
I partially agree	10%	9%	8%	7%
I agree	90%	91%	92%	93%

The majority of experts participating in reviews also consider that the evaluation criteria formulated in methodologies are adequate:

Are the evaluation criteria by area adequate for the analysis of the quality of the study programme/HEI performance?

	2012	2013	2014	2015
I do not agree	2%	5%	2%	0%
I partially agree	28%	21%	33%	24%
I agree	70%	74%	65%	76%

However, opinions have been expressed that the evaluation indicators should be made clearer, the requirements for evaluation of research activities should be different with regard to universities and colleges, and different evaluation criteria should be formulated for public and private HEIs.

EVALUATION MODEL

All stakeholders agree that both the model of evaluation of HEIs and study programmes and the decision-making process are adequate, objective and efficient. All concerned parties commend the SKVC for efficient involvement of students and social partners in both the evaluation process and other procedures. Employers' representatives underscore that their involvement in expert teams which conduct reviews brings benefit to both HEIs and employers. A particularly positive feedback concerns the institutional review of HEIs and consultations provided by the SKVC staff who visit a higher education institution during the production of a self-evaluation report and after review to discuss the follow-up operational improvement plan.

The fact that the results of reviews organised by the SKVC are related to the accreditation decision according to the currently effective legislation receives the most controversial comments. Both university and college representatives claim that this evaluation model prompts HEIs to conceal their weaknesses and provide incomplete information in their self-evaluation reports, and that HEIs view the SKVC as a punishing rather than an advisory body.

To sum up, the following comments regarding the improvement of the evaluation model have been expressed by representatives of HEIs, students, employers and advisory bodies:

- The evaluation model of new study programmes is to be improved. The procedure currently in force, when a great share of new study programmes are accredited without external review, does not prevent 'copying' of study programmes or the fact that the commitments declared in documents differ from the actual fulfilment thereof. It is a welcome fact that a stricter requirement to substantiate the need for the new study programmes has been introduced as of the beginning of 2016. The Centre understands problems that may arise due to the fact that not all new study programmes are reviewed by external experts. However, changes in this field depend on the decisions adopted by the Ministry of Education and Science. The SKVC has submitted reasoned proposals regarding the necessity to change the existing practice and accredit new study programmes only after the external experts' review. In order to avoid plagiarism of study programmes and declared commitments that are far from reality, the requirement for a strong substantiation of the need for the study programme by the HEI when submitting the description of the new study programme has been introduced as of 2016. The amendment to the Law on Higher Education and Research enabled the Centre to legally suspend the accreditation procedure solely due to insufficient substantiation of the need for the study programme.

- Limited functions of advisory bodies. Members from the Commission for Study Programme Evaluation, the Commission for HEI Reviews and the Committee for Appeals against Study Programme Evaluation consider that these bodies are granted insufficient powers. Firstly, when examining the evaluation report, they have to check conformity of the text with evaluation, i.e. the quality of the report, rather than conformity of a higher education institution or a study programme to the defined evaluation criteria. Secondly, after the Committee for Appeals against Study Programme Evaluation approves of the appeal, the text of the evaluation report is returned to experts and the Commission for Study Programme Evaluation, thus the members of the Appeals Committee do not adopt any decision but rather focus on the quality of drawing up of the report. The process of filing appeals is not fully clear to HEI representatives. However, according to the SKVC, this designation of powers is adequate. Before 2009, the advisory bodies of the Centre had the right and possibility to change experts' decisions regarding accreditation. Yet this would then cause dissatisfaction of HEIs that persons who had not directly participated in evaluation adopted a different decision from the one passed by experts who had reviewed the programme and visited the HEI. Namely due to this dissatisfaction the SKVC has changed the procedure and entitled its advisory bodies to decide only on the completeness, objectivity and validity of the evaluation report.

- The follow-up model with regard to study programmes is to be improved. HEIs would prefer a greater contribution of the SKVC when improving study programmes according to experts'

recommendations. It should be noted that the Centre has been exerting efforts to develop this model. After an institutional review the Centre's representatives visit HEIs and discuss the operational improvement plan developed on the basis of experts' recommendations. Follow-up events are organised annually and the topics of these events are chosen with regard to experts' comments which are most often present in study programme evaluation reports. International lecturers and experts who participate in reviews are invited to these events to share their experience on possible solutions to the problems discussed.

- Self-evaluation reports drawn up by HEIs lack the analytical character and are often used by HEIs to praise themselves. According to advisory bodies, experts should focus on how a higher education institution is able to evaluate itself. If the institution is unable to do this, the evaluation results should be negative. Self-evaluation reports should also present external data. It should be noted that the Centre organises 2–3 trainings for the drafters of study programme self-evaluation reports per year and points out the importance of the analytical and critical nature of information presented therein. Analogical training is also organised with regard to institutional reviews. It should be noted that this training receives a great attention; 30 participants are invited to attend it every time. Since the number of those who wish to participate in self-evaluation report training is much bigger, the Centre tries to ensure that training is attended primarily by those HEI representatives who have the shortest deadline for drawing up a self-evaluation report. This training is planned to be organised each year. Other events targeted at HEIs and experts are also organised. For example, in 2015 the SKVC organised 24 follow-up seminars-discussions and 38 trainings for HEI representatives and experts. Over 650 persons participated in these events.

- Regarding the change of the evaluation model of study programmes, the Centre has been currently organising meetings with various concerned parties for the purpose of discussing the most suitable evaluation model for the transition to the evaluation of study programmes according to study fields, which meets the expectations of all stakeholders.

ROLE OF SKVC

During meetings with stakeholders, the SKVC representatives also inquired how they see the SKVC: as an evaluating, controlling, assisting, consulting or punishing body. According to HEIs, in some cases the SKVC activities are self-contradictory – the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education is both consulting and controlling, although according to the staff of quality divisions of HEIs, transition from a controlling to an assisting body has been lately observed. Meeting participants expressed an expectation that the SKVC activities become less dependent on procedures in the future and allow further development of activities promoting the culture of quality.

**SUMMARY REPORT ON SKVC'S IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ENQA PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS
IN RELATION TO MEETING MEMBERSHIP CRITERIA AND ESG**

- **Implementation of the ENQA recommendations on ESG Part 2**

ESG 2.1 Use of internal quality assurance procedures
(ENQA Criterion 1)
Standard:
External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

Panel Judgment	Recommendation	Actions
Substantial Compliance	SKVC noted in its SER that "*The level of development of the internal quality assurance systems in colleges and universities is quite different*." It is taking active steps to promote an increased awareness of the needs of IQA systems within HEIs; activities welcomed by the HEI representatives the Panel met. SKVC should continue in this work but will need to avoid any conflict-of-interest issues between their roles in supporting institutions that they subsequently evaluate. 'Networks' for senior staff concerned with IQA within HEIs, with good links to but separate from their QA agencies, have been established in a number of countries.	• Three seminars and discussions on internal quality assurance for HEIs representatives organized in 2012-2013 • Two presentations about the problems of internal quality assurance of HEIs made at two conferences • In 2013, a seminar for senior staff concerned with internal quality assurance (IQA) within HEIs organized with the participation of foreign speakers, who previously served as experts for SKVC • Analysis of problems of internal quality assurance in HEIs based on the reports from institutional review (2014) made, it was presented in the annual report of SKVC and published on the website in a pdf format. Further actions • Regular events for senior staff concerned with IQA within HEIs – at least one meeting every year is foreseen.

ESG 2.2 Development of external quality assurance processes
(ENQA Criterion 1 cont.)
Standard:

The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

Panel Judgment	Recommendation	Actions
Full Compliance	There is a stipulation that all methodologies must be reviewed by the Ministry and approved by the SKVC Council and the SKVC Director to ensure that all stakeholders are involved in the production of documents relating to evaluation. However, SKVC note that this requirement has its downside in that the process takes a long time, which delays response to the situation in hand and hold up changes in the methodologies according to the requirements of the time. Whilst it is acknowledged that this is outside the control of SKVC, but noting the constructive manner in which the Agency is able to work with the Ministry, it is recommended that consideration is given to streamlining consultation processes to facilitate more timely responses.	• Regular contacts with the political staff from the Ministry of Science and Education are established • During the post-evaluation period, there were no essential changes in the methodologies approved by the Centre. Small amendments were promptly harmonized with the SKVC Council and successfully applied. • SKVC submitted some proposals of changes for the Procedure for External Evaluation and Accreditation of Study Programmes approved by the Ministry of Education and Science. These proposals were immediately involved in the above mentioned legal act. Further actions • With the new Law on Higher Education and Research, to be discussed in the Parliament in autumn 2014, further changes to the external quality assurance arrangements are expected. Some or our proposals were already discussed with SKVC Council. We will engage in additional consultations with stakeholders as necessary.

ESG 2.3 Criteria for decisions
(ENQA Criterion 1 cont.)
Standard:
Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.

Panel Judgment	Recommendation	Actions
Full Compliance	none	None required

ESG 2.4 Processes fit for purpose
(ENQA Criterion 1 cont.)
Standard:
All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

Panel Judgment	Recommendation	Actions
Substantial Compliance	- SKVC should find ways to overcome perceived barriers to **student involvement** which prevents their full involvement in all activities. This may include a review of the current criteria for student involvement to widen the available pool. - SKVC should engage with stakeholders to ensure that guidelines for preparing SERs maintain an **acceptable balance between reflection and appropriate factual information** to avoid unnecessary bureaucracy.	• Since the second half of 2011, <u>every team</u> of experts evaluating study programmes or reviewing HEI's in its composition has a student representative on board. SKVC collaborates with single HEIS, the National Students' Union as well as with European Students' Union in attracting students as candidates to review panels. Students are now involved in all three advisory bodies of SKVC and the Council of SKVC. During site-visits experts' teams always meet students of the programme/institution in question. • The Methodology for Study Programme Evaluation states what required information <u>must be provided</u> in SER and what additional information <u>could be useful</u> to analyse. But the latter is up to HEI's to decide which additional information to provide, so the issue is discussed at trainings provided to HEI staff. • SKVC carries anonymous surveys after each evaluation and collects feedback from both HEIs and experts. This feedback shows that institutions do not have any complaints regarding unnecessary bureaucracy. Yet, experts indicate, that some institutions provide too much supplementary information which is not required by SKVC methodology. Therefore, SKVC limits the length of SER to 35 pages and asks to provide only those annexes that are required and not more. Further actions

		• The issue of quality of SERs will be constantly addressed both in trainings for HEI staff involved in internal QA, and in consultations for senior staff members of HEI in preparation for their institutional review.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3" style="background-color:#fce4c0;">ESG 2.5 Reporting (ENQA Criterion 1 cont.)
Standard:
Reports should be published and should be written in a style which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Panel Judgment

Substantial Compliance</td><td>Recommendation

• The SKVC website should be reviewed so that reports are easily accessible to interested parties.

• Translation services should be used to ensure that reports are understandable to non-English speakers.

• The panel noted the recent appointment of a member of staff to address PR issues and the intention of SKVC to make the results of the agency's work more 'accessible to the different relevant audiences through different forms of communication</td><td>Actions

• There is a clear link from the front page of SKVC to evaluation reports:

✓ regarding institutional review reports http://www.skvc.lt/content.asp?id=619 (LT) and http://www.skvc.lt/en/content.asp?id=323 (ENG)

✓ regarding study programme evaluations http://www.skvc.lt/content.asp?id=378 (LT) and http://www.skvc.lt/en/content.asp?id=452 (EN)

• Since autumn of 2011, summaries of all study programme evaluation reports are being translated into Lithuanian language and sent to HEIs. All HEIs also have a possibility to receive full reports in the language they have been originally written (Lithuanian or English). All institutional review reports (full length) are translated into Lithuanian and sent to HEI.

• For the common admission to HEIs in 2014, visibility of external review reports is improved by the way of including external review reports for study programmes in the State register of institutions, programmes and qualifications. This added to the greater accessibility of the external review results and user friendliness of access to the reports (notwithstanding the remaining possibility to</td></tr>
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	download them from SKVC website).
	• A communication plan was composed, discussed with relevant divisions within SKVC, and presented to the SKVC Council. Ideas regarding it's improvement gathered in the joint seminar of Nordic network of quality assurance agencies and Baltic agencies in mid-June 2014.
	Further actions
	• A new user-friendly SKVC website is being prepared so that information in it would be published in a more attractive way. The website should be ready by the end of 2014.
	• It is being planned that a new data base for publication of evaluation reports will be created by the end of 2015. The data base will be integrated into the new website.

ESG 2.6 Follow up-procedures (ENQA Criterion 1 cont.)
Standard:
Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

Panel Judgment	Recommendation	Actions
partial compliance	SKVC has identified approaches and activities that could improve follow-up but have been constrained both by financial and staffing issues and the rapid pace of change in which other matters had to be prioritised. With the prospect of a more 'stable' environment SKVC is encouraged to consider the most 'cost-effective' ways in which follow-up can be developed, both at the level of individual evaluations and in the cross-evaluation analyses that they are intending to initiate. The 'language issue' could remain a problem whilst there continues to be an expectation by some for the	• The models of the follow-up procedures after study programme evaluations and institutional reviews have been created. They were presented to and endorsed by the SKVC Council in December of 2012. • The first follow-up visit after the institutional review procedure was conducted in December of 2012. The first link to improvement plan of activities of HEI according to recommendations of external review panels was publish on SKVC and HEIS websites in December of 2012.The follow-up procedure was further discussed in the administration meeting in June of 2013. Till the end of June 2014, 18 follow-up visits to HEI have taken place.

	need for extensive 'bureaucratic' monitoring; identification of the most important/critical aspects and a focus on these should be considered as a means of improving impact of evaluations and support SKVC in its aim that The experts' proposals and recommendations are first and foremost intended for HEIs to help them improve quality.	• The first follow-up seminar in relation to study programme assessments was organized on 28th November of 2013. Further actions • Full-scale implementation of the follow-up model for the study programmes evaluation procedure has yet to be enforced. After 1,5 year of experts site-visit, HEI shall prepare progress report on implementation of experts recommendations and submit to SKVC. These progress reports will be published on SKVC and HEI's websites. • A follow-up seminar oriented towards the problems of teacher training is going to take place in October of 2014 with the participation of foreign experts

ESG 2.7 Periodic reviews (ENQA Criterion 1 cont.)
Standard:
External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.

Panel Judgment	Recommendation	Actions
Full Compliance	none	None required

ESG 2.8 System-wide analysis (ENQA Criterion 1 cont.)
Standard:
Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments, etc.

Panel Judgment	Recommendation	Actions
Substantial Compliance	Consultation with stakeholders should be undertaken to develop a more systematic production of summary reports based on stakeholder needs and with a clear focus rather than as part of the annual reporting cycle.	• A Communication plan was composed by Public Relations Officer, in consultation with staff members and SKVC Council. • Special newsletters for target audiences launched in 2013: one for prospective students, disseminated to high schools and one for prospective students who gained foreign qualifications was spread

		for Lithuanian communities abroad. Similar newsletters repeated in 2014.
		• Analysis of internal quality assurance systems within HEI was prepared.
		• Analysis of how HEI publish study programme evaluation results was made and published in the newsletter in 2013.
		• Analysis of applications to open new study programmes was done and presented to the Ministry of Education and Science in 2013.
		• In 2014, overview reports under six study areas encopassing study programme assessments, carried out during the period of 2010-2013, were published in a pdf format.
		Further actions
		• According to the plan, we aim at collecting feedback from different stakeholders about the new website.
		• We will further work to compile information about the needs of stakeholders regarding publication of evaluation reports. From 2014 on, early work plans will contain more detailed information regarding system-wide analysis planned.
		• As mentioned earlier, we will start a project of the development of the new data base for publishing study programme evaluation reports.

- **Implementation of the ENQA recommendations on ESG Part 3**

ESG 3.1 Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education (ENQA Criterion 1 cont.)
Standard:
The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

Panel Judgment	Recommendation	Actions
Substantial compliance	See table above	See table above

ESG 3.2 Official status (ENQA Criterion 2)
Standard:
Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external
quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which
they operate.

Panel Judgment	Recommendation	Actions
Full Compliance	none	None required

ESG 3.3 Activities (ENQA Criterion 1 cont.)
Standard:
Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

Panel Judgment	Recommendation	Actions
Full Compliance	none	None required

ESG 3.4 Resources (ENQA Criterion 3)
Standard:
Agencies should have adequate and proportionate resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality
assurance
process (es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures (and staff)
(Addition by ENQA for ENQA criterion)

Panel Judgment	Recommendation	Actions
Fully Compliant	none	None required

ESG 3.5 Mission statement (ENQA Criterion 4)
Standard:

Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.		
Panel Judgment	Recommendation	Actions
Full Compliance	none	None required

ESG 3.6 Independence (ENQA Criterion 5)
Standard:
Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

Panel Judgment	Recommendation	Actions
Full Compliance	The performance of the Council should be evaluated against their standing orders and steps taken to ensure that these are appropriate and that the Council members have the capacity to fulfil them. This would reinforce the Councils position as the body ensuring SKVCs independence.	• The Council was invited to consider whether the current functions of the Council are sufficient to carry out their activities effectively. During the meeting, the Council came to a view that all the current functions remain valid and did not propose to fix the new ones. • The Council actively discussed current changes in the legal acts of Lithuanian education system and strongly supported SKVC's independence as indicated in the amendments of the Law of Higher Education and Research. Further actions • Any strategic issues pertaining to the work or reform of SKVC will be discussed in the Council meeting and with the leadership of the Ministry.

ESG 3.7 External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies (ENQA Criterion 6)
Standard:
The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include:
– a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process
– an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency
– publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes
– a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

Panel Judgment	Recommendation	Actions
Substantial Compliance	The lack of clarity regarding the role of MOSTA clouds the overall criteria and process. Whilst acknowledging that SKVC have worked hard to develop these, and that resolution of the issue is not in their control the panel concluded that in this regard SKVC is substantially compliant.	• A revision of the Governmental Resolution on the Procedure of Institutional Review was started at the end of 2013. The role of MOSTA was revised. Following suggestions from SKVC and representatives of HEIs, and as also agreed by the Ministry of Education and Science, MOSTA will produce the data that will be used as an additional source of information both for HEIs and experts, but not as single decisive factor towards the final review outcome. The final decision of evaluation and accreditation will rest only with SKVC. A relevant amendment on the Governmental Resolution regarding institutional review procedure was made and entered into force on June 20, 2014. Further actions • In the new cycle of institutional review starting from 2015, a shift from compliance based approach to enhancement led evaluation will be implemented (as agreed with the Ministry and discussed with HEIs).

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3" style="background-color:#fde9cc">ESG 3.8 Accountability procedures (ENQA Criterion 7)
Standard:
Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Panel Judgment

Substantial Compliance</td><td>The panel found that whilst a number of mechanisms were in place to ensure accountability, the overall process could be more coherent. Much of the internal feedback is informal and does not contribute to the "collective memory" of SKVC meaning that if staff left employment their knowledge would not be institutionalised. Additionally, collection of external feedback has not been systematic and whilst it is acknowledged that plans are in place, the panel concluded that SKVC is</td><td>Actions

• In February of 2012, the electronic versions of questionnaires were developed to get the feed-back both from HEIs and experts in relation to institutional reviews, as well as for study programme evaluations. The data was analysed at the beginning of 2013 and 2014 and overview was produced and presented to administration of SKVC.

• Leadership of SKVC is meeting every group of experts of institutional review for feed-back session at the last day of the visit. The feed-back is used for improvement of the processes of</td></tr>
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	Substantially Compliant.	institutional review – for example, a mapping tool was compiled and being used for the reviews, a list of mandatory annexes was provided upon the recommendations from the experts, etc.
		• In summer of each year, information on the institutional review process and its updates are being sent to all the expert groups of institutional review, thus, to provide them with the feed-back on actions taken according to their recommendations.
		• In order to institutionalise staff knowledge, the minutes of weekly meetings of department staff started to be kept with the main points and decisions reached.
		• The whole system of internal quality assurance of SKVC is being reviewed in order to make it more simple and user friendly. Some of the processes were merged, reducing the total number from 18 processes to 14.
		Further actions
		• To finish the consolidation of internal quality assurance system by the end of 2014.

ENQA Criterion 8
i. The agency pays careful attention to its declared principles at all times, and ensures both that its requirements and processes are managed professionally and
that its judgments and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even if the judgments are formed by different groups;
ii. If the agency makes formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences, it should have an appeals procedure. The nature and
form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of the agency;
iii. The agency is willing to contribute actively to the aims of ENQA.

Panel Judgment	Recommendation	Actions
Full Compliance	none	None required

June 2014