



CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

STRATEGIC PLAN

2017–2019

Vilnius

2016

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INTRODUCTION

The Centre will continue pursuing the same two objectives in the strategic planning period 2017–2019, i.e. to promote the quality of activities of Lithuanian higher education institutions and create favourable conditions for the free movement of persons. These objectives are achieved through the activities of an external quality assurance agency and the work of an academic recognition and information centre.

New amendments to the Law on Higher Education and Research have also brought changes in the activities of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education. There has been transition from the assessment of individual study programmes to the assessment of study fields; the second cycle of the assessment of activities of higher education institutions has commenced; the conditions for obtaining an authorisation to conduct studies and carry out activities related thereto have been made more stringent; the evaluation of substantiation of the need for the study programme and student employability has become stricter. All these changes require a lot of work with regard to drafting new legal acts and discussing these with the academic community and other stakeholders. However, we believe that the experience accumulated by the Centre will contribute to the successful start of new processes, understanding their importance for the improvement of quality culture in higher education, as well as enhancement of internationalisation and trust in Lithuanian higher education.

In late 2015 and early 2016, the SKVC carried out self-evaluation of compliance of its activities as the ENIC/NARIC centre and also underwent an external review in accordance with the System of Quality Assurance for the Recognition Networks (SQUARE) Standards and Guidelines. The international expert team evaluated the Centre's activities very well, identified its areas for improvement and suggested topics for discussion with the founder's and other organisations in the field of education. In 2016, the SKVC conducted the analysis of its activities as a quality assurance agency while preparing for the external review regarding compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), organised by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and scheduled for 2017. Therefore, the Centre has carried out a detailed analysis of all its processes and the SWOT analysis. With a view to obtaining opinions of major stakeholders about SKVC activities, meetings with students' and employers' representatives, heads of universities and colleges, employees of higher education institutions responsible for quality as well as members of the advisory bodies of the Centre were organised. This has led to a better understanding of directions for activity improvement and envisaging of priority activities.

The strategic plan is based on the provision that the SKVC acts as a national centre of competence in the field of qualifications acquired in Lithuania and abroad and quality assurance, and is an active member of international professional communities: ENQA, CEENQA, INQAAHE, ENIC and NARIC. With regard to the above, we seek to more widely inform all stakeholders about the Centre's services and performance results, give advice based on facts about the quality of activities of higher education institutions as well as quality of studies therein, recognition of foreign qualifications as well as qualifications awarded in Lithuania. We aim at providing objective and comprehensive information about assessment results without creating short-term sensations. We will use collected data to develop analytical activities and provide a greater diversity of analyses. The SKVC further seeks to strengthen cooperation with students, pupils, higher education institutions, employers and the general public.

The first part of the strategy describes the SKVC as an institution, presents its vision, mission and values. The second part acquaints with activity aims and long-term as well as medium-term objectives. The third part formulates specific activities for 2017–2019 as well as expected outcomes.

The activities and outcomes envisaged in the new strategy will be transposed in the annual work plans. Digitisation of provided public services will help to better inform the applicants about the course of the process, whereas the new measure for publishing results will facilitate study evaluation related information search for users.



Renaldas Jurkevičius, Chair of the Council



Nora Skaburskienė, Acting Director of the SKVC

ABOUT THE CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) is a public administration body, established on 24 January 1995, which implements the Lithuanian national policy of research and higher education within its competence. The Ministry of Education and Science established the Centre as an independent budgetary organisation. The Centre has been planning its activities with regard to the strategic goals of long-term national development and the needs for fulfilment of international commitments of Lithuania.

The Law on Higher Education and Research and the SKVC Statute define the following main objectives of the Centre:

1. To promote improvement in the quality of studies and activities and quality culture of higher education institutions, increase internationalisation by organising external review, accreditation, consultations, publishing, carrying out follow-up activities after the external review and analysing the results of related activities;
2. To create favourable conditions for the free movement of persons by performing academic recognition of education and qualifications concerning higher education acquired according to education programmes of foreign states and international organisations in the Republic of Lithuania and providing related information.

Since its establishment, the SKVC performs two main functions:

- **An external quality assurance agency.** It carries out the external assessment of higher education institutions and studies provided therein, which is used as the basis for accrediting higher education institutions and study programmes provided by them. In implementing this activity, the SKVC has become a reliable and recognised agency for evaluating higher education quality. By inviting Lithuanian and foreign experts – academicians, students, and professionals – to carry out external assessment, the SKVC contributes to the systematic improvement of higher education quality. By contributing to the promotion of quality culture in higher education, the Centre provides consultations assisting higher education institutions to prepare for external reviews. The SKVC has been paying a lot of attention to the organisation of follow-up activities, because evaluation does not end with the production and publishing of the evaluation report; it is very important that recommendations provided by experts be implemented, and evaluation reports and results be made available to all stakeholders. When performing external quality assessment, the SKVC accumulated a lot of data about the activities of higher education institutions, which are used to carry out various analyses and overviews.

- **An academic recognition and information centre.** The SKVC performs the functions of such a centre since 1999 and has accumulated considerable experience. The Centre performs evaluation and academic recognition of foreign access qualifications and higher education qualifications and carries out information, methodological and consultation activities in the area of national education systems and awarded qualifications, thus assisting higher education institutions, employers and other legal entities to adopt decisions regarding comparability of foreign qualifications for studies or professional activities. The Centre also monitors the decisions taken by higher education institutions on the academic recognition of foreign qualifications, seeking to ensure application of the general principles and criteria, established in the Lisbon

Recognition Convention, in all institutions performing academic recognition in Lithuania. The Centre also fulfils the function of developing competences of evaluators of foreign qualifications: each year it organises training to higher education institutions, employers or other stakeholder groups, if necessary, on relevant issues in the field of recognition. The Centre actively participates in international projects aimed at designing methodological and information tools for the solution of issues related to qualification recognition. The Centre transfers gained knowledge by consulting and providing information to Lithuanian higher education institutions, employers, other legal entities, as well as natural persons.

In 2009, the SKVC started systematic activities – coordination of preparation of study field descriptors. They are important for the entire higher education system, since they are the underlying documents referred to by higher education institutions when preparing new or improving existing study programmes of a certain study field. These descriptors provide the key guidelines how to formulate the learning outcomes of a new study programme or improve the learning outcomes of the existing study programme, describe study fields and define the requirements for the implementation of study programmes. The descriptors are also referred to by Lithuanian and foreign experts who evaluate study programmes. Study field descriptors supplement the hierarchical structure of the learning outcomes typical of higher education in Lithuania, i.e. the Description of the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework approved by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania and the Descriptor of Study Cycles approved by the Minister of Education and Science. The plans include further preparation of descriptors of the remaining study fields (not yet covered) and organisation of updates and discussions on already approved study field descriptors.

For the implementation of key objectives, an appropriate SKVC structure has been established and approved at the meeting of the SKVC Council. In 2016, the SKVC had 27 job positions for civil servants, one job position for a person on a labor contract and 13 project-based job positions. Such an optimum number of employees enables adequate allocation of functions, responsibilities and scope of work among structural units, ensuring proper representation of each area and implementation of the Centre's mission. The SKVC structure is presented in Annex 2.

Seeking to achieve its aim, the SKVC has been actively and systematically cooperating with higher education institutions, students, employers and other concerned institutions. The Centre provides organisations with individual consultations and shares available information as well as the best practice in training, seminars and conferences, covering both quality assurance and recognition of foreign qualifications. The aim is to inform the biggest possible concerned audience about activity results and accumulated knowledge; therefore, various information dissemination channels and measures are used to maintain constant contact with student organisations, secondary education schools, communities abroad, related public authorities and business structures. Although stakeholders provide a positive feedback about SKVC activities, in order to improve public awareness of activity results more efforts will be exerted to make SKVC activities public. Thus, the Centre has drawn up the communication plan aimed at a more systematic development of these activities.

In the area of quality assurance, the Centre has been actively cooperating with national and foreign partners. The SKVC has concluded cooperation agreements with the Research and Higher Education Monitoring and Analysis Centre (MOSTA), the Rectors' Conference of Lithuanian University Colleges (LKDK), the Lithuanian Students' Union (LSS), Vilnius University Students' Representation (VUSA), the Education Exchanges Support Foundation (ŠMPF), the Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre (KPMPC) as well as the Centre of Information Technologies in Education (ITC). The SKVC also participates in the networks in Europe (ENQA, CEENQA, NARIC) and the world (ENIC, INQAAHE), fosters

bilateral relations with various sister organisations, and plans to develop and expand these relations in the future.

The SKVC is constantly changing to keep pace with the the development of higher education. However, the increasing volume of assessment of study programmes and the growing scope of individual mobility may present a challenge due to the limited nature of financial and human resources and infrastructure development to us.

International cooperation plays a particular role in SKVC activities – the Centre is a member in international networks and is involved in joint projects as well as partnerships with similar organisations of other countries. Due to its active operation beyond the territory of Lithuania, the SKVC has become known and is valued on the international arena, while its employees contribute to capacity building and professional development of Lithuanian higher education institutions and other organisations.

In 2015, the SKVC expanded its quality assurance activities abroad. It organised institutional review and the reviews of study programmes of management at a higher education institution in Slovenia. The external review resulted in recommendations for the improvement of performance and study programmes of the higher education institution. SKVC methodologies were tested for the first time in the process of transnational review.

The planned improvement of SKVC activities through digital technologies will lead to the better performance of activities and services, greater satisfaction of target group needs. A variety of analyses will be prepared in order to increase efficiency of external assessment.

The SKVC ai to achieve that external assessment makes a positive impact on Lithuanian higher education and that services related to the recognition of foreign qualifications reduce obstacles to academic mobility and internationalisation.

VISION

The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education is an influential generator, implementer and disseminator of the ideas of the improvement of quality and enhancement of internationalisation in higher education in both Lithuania and the rest of Europe.

The SKVC aspires to become an expert organisation operating at the international level and recognised by partners. The important direction of the Centre's development is generation of new ideas with respect to assurance of quality in higher education and recognition of qualifications. SKVC activities are inseparable from the adoption and dissemination of the best international practice as well as active contribution to its formation. All this not only determines professionalism of the organisation, but also provides prerequisites for educating the public on the issues of quality of studies and assessment and recognition of qualifications. Thus, in its vision the SKVC sees itself not only as an active player on the national and regional arena, but also declares its aspiration to contribute to quality assurance in higher education across Europe.

VALUES

- **Professionalism and quality.** Competent and efficient implementation of functions; quality of activities is achieved through analysis of work done, continuous learning and experience sharing;
- **Independence and impartiality.** We are an independent organisation; our operation is based on the principles of transparency, publicity and impartiality, following the pre-defined and announced criteria and procedures; our decisions are based on facts and their evaluation;
- **Respect and trust.** We respect the official state language; we respect the choice of persons and institutions, gather their feedback and seek to assist them in their own improvement;
- **Cooperation.** We base our operation on partnership within the organisation as well as with stakeholders both in Lithuania and abroad.

MISSION

To create favourable conditions for the improvement of higher education quality in Lithuania and the free movement of persons in the world with the aim of enhancing competitiveness of Lithuanian higher education and clarity of qualifications.

It should be noted that the SKVC is actively involved in the development and improvement of the national legislation for higher education and implements the national external quality assurance policy in higher education. The SKVC forms the attitude towards higher education as public good bringing benefits to society and individuals and as a value encouraging conscious and responsible choice, providing objective information about education systems and their quality. Higher education quality is understood as the agreement between the academic community, employers' representatives and students regarding the aims, content, resources and measures, results; quality is also understood as constant (self-)improvement. The basis for quality is the interaction between teachers, students and the learning environment of the institution. Responsibility for the quality of higher education and the development of quality culture within the institution primarily lies with the higher education institution. The role of the SKVC is to promote these processes by defining quality assurance aims, evaluation criteria and indicators as well as analysing the impact of quality assurance.

The SKVC appreciates the benefits and challenges brought by academic and professional mobility to an individual and community. By performing the functions of an academic recognition and information centre (ENIC/NARIC) the SKVC acts as an intermediary and facilitator between individuals and institutions both in Lithuania and abroad. The Centre also performs an important role in increasing clarity and acceptance of foreign and Lithuanian qualifications, developing competences of qualifications assessment, implementing the best practice of recognition of foreign qualifications and ensuring consistency of these activities in Lithuania.

In its daily work the SKVC draws on the experience of the best international practice and promotes ongoing institutional and individual professional improvement. Engagement in higher education quality improvement process is sought to be based on professionalism, impartiality, cooperation and international practice.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE ACTIVITIES

The **SKVC undertakes** to promote the quality of Lithuanian higher education as well as quality culture, create favourable conditions for studies and professional activities, the free movement of persons, seek compatibility of the Lithuanian higher education system with the provisions of the European Higher Education Area, develop compatibility of the system of recognition of qualifications with provisions regarding recognition in Europe, raise awareness of stakeholders about the quality and internationalisation of higher education.

Medium-term SKVC objectives for 2017–2019:

With the goal to promote improvement in the quality of activities and quality culture of Lithuanian higher education institutions and raising awareness we aim:

- To complete the first cycle of re-evaluation of the activities of higher education institutions;
- To commence the second cycle of the assessment of the activities of higher education institutions;
- To switch to the assessment of study fields;
- To perform analyses of the results of study quality assessment;
- To further develop the system of study field descriptors;
- To organise training and consultations on the issues of higher education quality assurance.

With the goal to create favourable conditions for the free movement of persons we aim:

- To improve consistency and quality of evaluation and recognition of foreign qualifications;
- To ensure relevance of the academic recognition system with the needs of specific groups as well as new trends in the education and recognition;
- To increase harmonisation of the academic recognition system in Lithuania;
- To increase transparency of Lithuanian qualifications.

Seeking successful implementation of the objectives, the following measures for strengthening of organisation have been envisaged:

- To improve human resources management;
- To upgrade infrastructure;
- To digitise activities and services;
- To improve internal administration.

Activities per objective and their expected outcomes as well as performance measurement indicators are presented in the annex.

The medium-term objectives establish the main criteria for developing annual work plans. This plan comprises the whole of instruments for implementation of the strategy; it is drawn up for one year and is approved every year; also achievement of annual plans are reviewed yearly, progress on the strategic plan is measured yearly as well.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistency and continuity of the Centre’s activities • Institutional culture based on development and self-reflexion • Professional staff • Provision of services is based on methodologies, that are developed and meet international standards • Cooperation with stakeholders and the founder, and their involvement in different kinds of decision-making • Active international outreach and recognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient IT tools, no electronic public services provided • An imbalance between the demand for provided services and the resources for their provision • Lack of clarity of internal processes, standardisation and communication • Limited possibilities for motivation of staff • Insufficiently active external communication
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion of activities, development of competences and dissemination of experience through national and international relations • Development of digital services • More of analytical activities with regard to recognition and regulation of studies, their provision and assessment, as well as submission of related proposals • Services to new target groups (providers of foreign qualifications, refugees, etc.) • Development of competences of HEIs in the areas of recognition, internationalisation and quality assurance of higher education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in the legal environment (restructuring, assignment of new functions, cuts in budget and staff positions) • Lack of resources allocated for the fulfilment of functions (insufficient funding of functions commissioned by the state, allocated human and infrastructure resources) • Great dependency on fixed-term financing from the EU Structural Funds • External fluctuations in the demand for the scope of services

THE OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES OF SKVC ACTIVITIES IN 2017–2019

Long-term objectives	Medium-term objectives	Activities	Expected outcome	2017	2018	2019
To promote improvement in the quality of activities and quality culture of Lithuanian higher education institutions and raise awareness	To accomplish the first cycle of re-assessment of the activities of higher education institutions	Organisation of the first cycle of re-assessment	All higher education institutions (those accredited for the period of three years) re-assessed	Two higher education institutions		
	To commence the second cycle of the external review of higher education institutions	Drafting of a new review methodology	The second cycle of the review of higher education institutions started	One review methodology produced		
		Discussion of the methodology with stakeholders		Two consultations organised; the draft document sent to stakeholders		
		Drafting of legal acts		Approved legal acts		
		Organisation of the second cycle of reviews			Five higher education institutions reviewed	Seven higher education institutions reviewed
To switch to the evaluation of study fields	Discussion of the evaluation model with stakeholders	Started application of the new evaluation model for ex-post evaluation of study programmes	Two consultations organised; the draft document sent to stakeholders			

		Amending of legal acts	according to the larger groups of fields	Approved legal acts		
		Organisation of assessments according to fields			10 study fields evaluated	10 study fields evaluated
		Creation and application of the model for the evaluation of residency studies		Methodology developed	Medical residency studies evaluated	Veterinary and Odontology residency studies evaluated
		Systematic follow-up activities		10 higher education institutions that implement and publish the outcomes of study field follow-up activities	10 higher education institutions that implement and publish the outcomes of study field follow-up activities	10 higher education institutions that implement and publish the outcomes of study field follow-up activities
	To perform analyses of the results of study quality assessment	Analysing evaluation results	Analyses on the external evaluation results performed	Four analyses conducted, one publication presenting six analyses published	Four analyses conducted	Four analyses conducted
		Dissemination of analyses to different SKVC target audiences		Four analyses published	Four analyses published	Four analyses published
	To further develop the system of study field descriptors	Organisation of preparation of new study field descriptors	New study field descriptors prepared	A project contract concerning the preparation of new descriptors signed	15 new descriptors prepared	15 new descriptors prepared

		Development of a system for the improvement of already approved study field descriptors	The existing study field descriptors updated	Five descriptors updated	Three descriptors updated	Three descriptors updated
To organise training and consultations on the issues of higher education quality assurance		Organisation of training for the producers of self-evaluation reports	Training events for the producers of self-evaluation reports and evaluators held. Thematic events for various target groups organised.	Two training events for the producers of self-evaluation reports held	Two training events for the producers of self-evaluation reports held	Two training events for the producers of self-evaluation reports held
		Organisation of training events to reviewers (academics, students, labor market representatives)		One training for labor market representatives and two training events for students held	One training for labor market representatives and two training events for students held	One training for labor market representatives and two training events for students held
		Organisation of thematic events on the issues of higher education quality assurance		Two thematic events organised	Two thematic events organised	Two thematic events organised

To create favourable conditions for the free movement of persons	To improve consistency and quality of evaluation and recognition of foreign qualifications related to higher education	Promotion of consistency and quality of recognition activities in higher education institutions: - monitoring of academic recognition decisions of higher education institutions - preparation of methodological/information tools designed for higher education institutions - training and consultations of higher education institution representatives, provision of recommendations	Created conditions for higher education institutions to ensure quality of recognition as well as develop competences in the field of qualifications and recognition	All academic recognition decisions screened; consultations to higher education institutions that carry out academic recognition provided to the extent of 100%; one training organised; five general recommendations on academic recognition developed; one report regarding academic recognition decisions of higher education institutions prepared to the Ministry of Education and Science	All academic recognition decisions screened; consultations to higher education institutions that carry out academic recognition provided to the extent of 100%; one training organised; five general recommendations on academic recognition developed; one report regarding academic recognition decisions of higher education institutions prepared to the Ministry of Education and Science	All academic recognition decisions screened; consultations to higher education institutions that carry out academic recognition provided to the extent of 100%; one training organised; five general recommendations on academic recognition developed; one report regarding academic recognition decisions of higher education institutions prepared to the Ministry of Education and Science
		Improvement of quality assurance of academic evaluation and	Clearer assessment procedure; the generic and	One process reviewed and optimised; two	Two employees who accomplished training	One process reviewed and optimised; two

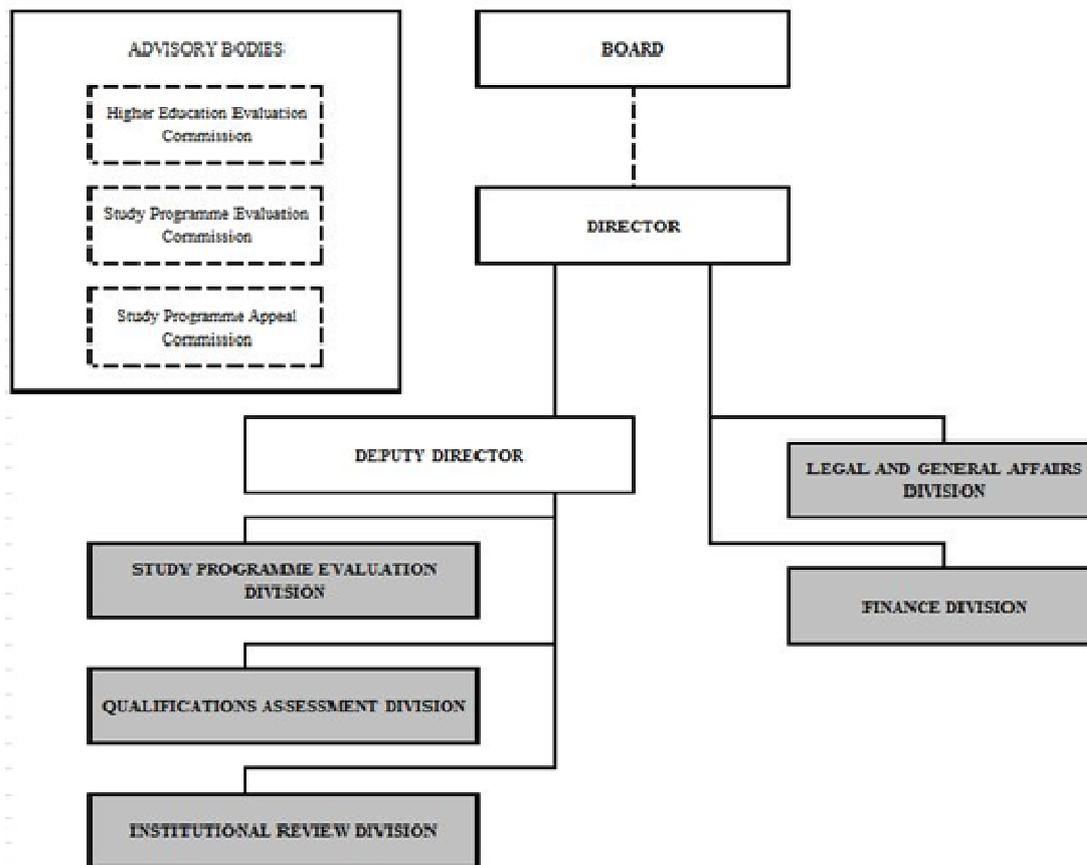
		recognition at the SKVC: - process review and optimisation - further development of competences of credential evaluators	specific professional competences of credential evaluators developed	employees who accomplished training		employees who accomplished training
		Digitalisation of the academic recognition service	Provision of an electronic service of evaluation and academic recognition	Preparation for the development of the electronic services provision environment (EPE)	The electronic services provision environment (EPE) developed	
To ensure compliance of the academic recognition system with the needs of specific groups as well as new trends in the education and recognition system		Development of the qualification recognition system for persons without documentation	Better conditions created for the evaluation and recognition of non-documented qualifications of refugees	Tested system of academic recognition of foreign qualifications for persons without documentation”	Improved system of academic recognition of foreign qualifications for persons without documentation	
		Further preparation for the implementation of automatic academic recognition among the Baltic countries	Adaptation of the recognition system for automatic recognition	Started to prepare relevant documents for the implementation of automatic recognition system	Documents for the automatic recognition system prepared	Implementation of the automatic recognition system started
		Preparation of recommendations regarding the assessment/recognition of informal learning (e.g. MOOCs) within the framework of an	Improved recognition of prior learning in Lithuania		Recommendations prepared	

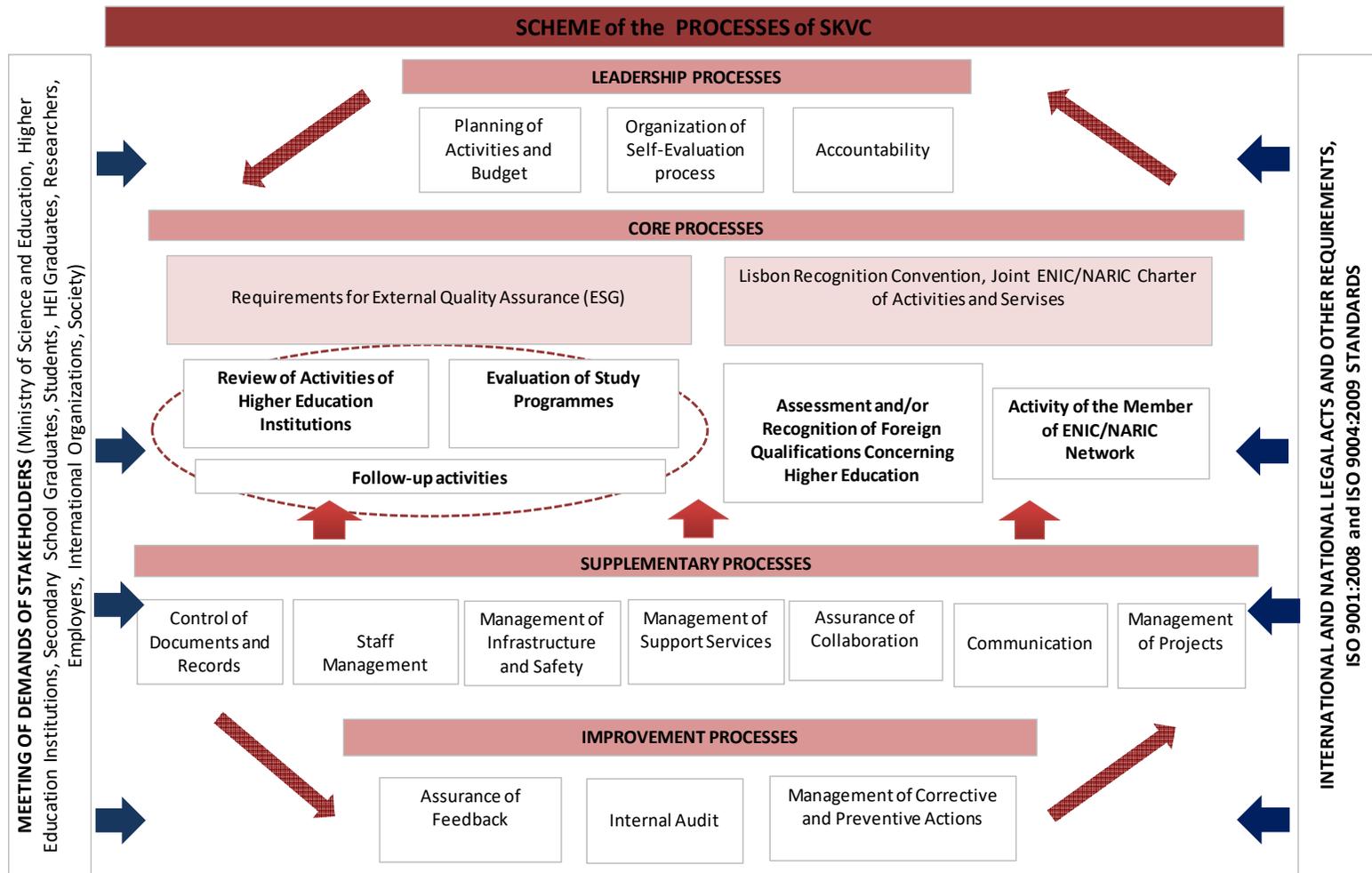
		international project				
	To increase harmonisation of the academic recognition system in Lithuania	Participation of the Centre in the creation and, as far as possible, implementation of a unified system of recognition of foreign qualifications in Lithuania	Better satisfaction of the needs of qualification holders and bodies who admit them (higher education institutions or employers)		Two measures designed for the creation of the system developed	
	To increase transparency of Lithuanian qualifications	Collection, systematisation and analysis of information on the Lithuanian education system, as well as preparation of the description of the Lithuanian education system	Better information provision on Lithuanian qualifications to local and foreign institutions	Description of the Lithuanian education system prepared	Description of the Lithuanian education system amended Based on the description, the information on the Lithuanian education system updated in English	Description of the Lithuanian education system amended Based on the description, the information on the Lithuanian education system updated in English

Measures to strengthen the organisation

Measures	Activities	Outcome	2017	2018	2019
To improve human resources management	Description of the procedure of adaptation of new employees and civil servants, identifying applied methods and procedures	Effective procedure of adaptation of new employees and civil servants	Draft procedure of adaptation of new employees and civil servants	Implementation of the procedure of adaptation of new employees and civil servants	Monitoring of the procedure of adaptation of new employees and civil servants, collection of feedback, and adjustment of the procedure, if necessary
	Optimisation of the professional development of staff	Internal and external training events held	Two internal staff training events held	One internal staff training held	One internal staff training held
To upgrade infrastructure	Renovation of the premises	Relocation of the SKVC to single premises	Renovation of the premises accomplished		
	Adaptation of the ICT infrastructure to the new premises	Working conditions guaranteed	Smooth telephone, internet and intranet connection		
To improve internal administration	Improvement of the Centre's activities according to the results of external assessments	Submitted and approved progress report	Approval of the ENQA Board Review of the Strategic Plan and Work Plan according to experts' observations	Implementation of experts' recommendations	Progress report on changes, taking account of experts' observations submitted and approved
	Improvement of corruption prevention measures within the institution	- Risk assessment report - Plan of risk management	Risk assessment report prepared Plan for risk management compiled		

STRUCTURE of SKVC





DOCUMENTS REFERRED TO WHEN DEVELOPING THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The SKVC Strategic Plan (2017–2019) has been developed having analysed a diversity of documents that define higher education quality and having reviewed the strategic plans of other similar organisations, as well as holding consultations with all employees of the Centre. The key documents referred to when developing the Strategic Plan are listed below:

- Republic of Lithuania Law on Education
- Republic of Lithuania Law on Higher Education and Research
- Resolution No. XII-745 “On Approval of the National Education Strategy 2013–2022” of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania of 23 December 2013
- Order No. ISAK-992 “On Approval of the Statute of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education” of the Minister of Education and Science of 1 June 2005 (with subsequent amendments)
- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (2015)
- System of Quality Assurance for the Recognition Networks (SQUARE) Standards and Guidelines (2015)
- Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention) [ETS No.165]