

APPROVED

by Order No V-7 of 20 February 2015
of the Director of the Centre for Quality
Assessment in Higher Education

Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review of Foreign Higher Education Institution

General provisions

1. The *Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review of Foreign Higher Education Institution* (hereinafter referred to as ‘the Methodology’) shall define the procedures to be followed in producing a self-evaluation report and the process, procedures, areas and criteria to be followed in an external institutional review of higher education institutions (hereinafter referred to as ‘the external/institutional review’) organised by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereinafter referred to as ‘the SKVC’), procedure of work organization of the expert team conducting the external review, principles of ethics and procedure for appeals.
2. The Methodology has been produced pursuant to the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area.
3. External reviews shall draw on the self-evaluation report, other documents of the institution, also data obtained during the on-site visit and other information on the performance of the higher education institution. The external review shall be conducted and all the documents shall be submitted in English language.
4. The purpose of external reviews shall be to create prerequisites for the improvement of the performance of higher education institutions and the promotion of their culture of quality, also to offer recommendations for the development of the activities of higher education institutions.
5. The SKVC and the institution (higher education institution, its branch, public institution or other) applying for external review shall make an agreement regarding the conditions of the external review (hereinafter referred to as ‘the Agreement’).

Evaluation principles, areas and criteria

6. The self-evaluation and external review of a high education institution shall be based on the following principles:

- 6.1. autonomy and accountability – account shall be taken of the balance between the autonomy and social responsibility of the institution of higher education;
- 6.2. contextuality – account shall be taken of the qualities of the institution’s mission, strategy and operating conditions;
- 6.3. holistic approach – account shall be taken of the interaction and compatibility of the areas being reviewed;
- 6.4. stakeholder involvement – representatives of the study system stakeholders (students, graduates, academics, employers and other social partners) shall be involved in the procedures of self-evaluation and evaluation;
- 6.5. unity of internal and external quality assurance – the internal quality assurance system and the external review must be based on mutually harmonised principles and public criteria, which also lie at the basis of the quantitative and qualitative indicators set by the institution for itself;
- 6.6. continuity – while conducting an institutional review of a higher education institution, account shall be taken of the previous evaluation and the follow-up performance.

7. An institutional review of a higher education institution shall assess the operation of the institution according to the following areas:

- 7.1. strategic management;
- 7.2. academic studies and life-long learning;
- 7.3. research and development, and (or) art activities;
- 7.4. impact on regional and national development.

8. Where the review covers from 7.2 to 7.4 review areas, it is necessary to analyse and evaluate their interaction with the relevant components of strategic management (7.1).

9. Criteria of strategic management shall include: the strategic plan's fitness for purpose, publicity, guarantees for its implementation and management effectiveness.

9.1. In order to ascertain the strategic plan’s fitness for purpose, its publicity and guarantees for implementation it is necessary to analyse the following:

- 9.1.1. alignment of the strategic plan with the higher education institution’s mission, the strategic documents of the national policy on research and studies, the principles of the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area;
- 9.1.2. validity and interoperability of the strategic plan components (analysis of the existing situation, strategic directions, purposes, objectives, implementation measures, resources, projected outcomes);

9.1.3. reasonableness and comprehensiveness of the quantitative and qualitative indicators of the strategic plan implementation;

9.1.4. relevance of the procedures for monitoring the strategic plan implementation;

9.1.5. adequacy of the information on the strategic plan implementation made available to the founders, stakeholders, the academic community and the public at large.

9.2. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the management of a higher education institution shall be based on the analysis of the following:

9.2.1. effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system for higher education studies (including policies on quality assurance, conformity of the qualifications to the national and European Qualifications Framework, enhancement of the quality of study programmes and student performance, improvement of the teaching staff competence, guarantees of support to students, organisation of data collection and published information);

9.2.2. appropriateness of the changes in the organisational structure to the implementation needs of studies, research and experimental (social, cultural) development and/or art activities;

9.2.3. process management – decision-taking effectiveness, distribution of responsibilities and accountabilities, allocation of resources, stakeholders (partner) involvement; orientation to strategic goals and outcomes;

9.2.4. management of human resources (analysis of needs, alignment with the implementation of the strategic plan, improvement of qualifications, involvement of the staff in the decision-taking process);

9.2.5. management of change (process optimisation) – analysis of process quality, prerequisites for improvement, risk analysis;

9.2.6. infrastructure (learning resources) management;

9.2.7. rationality of the use of the institution's funds for the attainment of its purposes;

9.2.8. procedures to ensure adherence to academic ethics.

10. Criteria for the evaluation of the conditions for studies and for life-long learning comprise their alignment with the requirements for the country's higher education and harmonisation with the principles of the European Higher Education Area.

10.1. In order to ascertain the suitability of the conditions for studies and for life-long learning, it is necessary to analyse the following:

10.1.1. alignment of the qualifications awarded under the study programmes (including joint programmes) and in the course of life-long learning with the institution's mission and strategic documents, also with the needs of the national economy and social and cultural development;

10.1.2. variety of life-long learning forms and conditions;

10.1.3. the system of monitoring the employment and career of graduates and its contribution to the improvement of the studies;

10.1.4. cooperation with the institution's academic, social and business partners and their impact on the life-long studies and learning provided by the higher education institution (including the development of new and the improvement of old study programmes).

10.2. In order to ascertain how well the conditions for studies and for life-long learning align with the provisions to date of the European Higher Education Area and the EU documents relating to higher education, it is necessary to analyse the following:

10.2.1. alignment of the strategic documents relating to studies and life-long learning with the provisions of the European Higher Education Area and the EU documents relating to higher education;

10.2.2. dynamics of the international (incoming and outgoing) mobility of teaching staff and students and its impact on the activities of the higher education institution;

10.2.3. recognition pursuant to the Lisbon Recognition Convention of the qualifications, periods of studies abroad, non-formal competences.

11. Evaluation criteria for research (applied research) and/or art activities comprise their relevance, international links and harmonisation with the provisions of the European Research Area.

11.1. In order to ascertain the relevance of research (applied research) and/or art activities, it is necessary to analyse the following:

11.1.1. alignment of research (applied research) and/or art activities with the institution's mission and strategic documents;

11.1.2. alignment of research (applied research) and/or art activities (and cycle 3 study programmes) with the priorities of the national and/or regional economic, cultural and social development;

11.1.3. impact of academic, social and business partners on the research (applied research) and/or art activities of the higher education institution.

11.2. In order to ascertain the international links of research and development and/or art activities of the universities and their alignment with the provisions of the European Research Area, it is necessary to analyse the following:

11.2.1. alignment of the higher education institution's strategic documents relating to research and/or art activities with the priorities of the European Research Area;

11.2.2. participation in international research and/or art projects;

11.2.3. researchers' and/or artists' international mobility and the impact of the visiting researchers and artists on the research and/or art activities of the higher education institution.

12. Criteria for assessing the institution's impact on the national and regional development comprise the effectiveness and relevance of its contribution and impact on the economic, cultural, social and environmental development. The institution's impact may take various forms including but not limited to the following: applied research and/or transfer of research outcomes to businesses, public institutions, non-governmental institutions; popularisation of science (art), diffusion of modern culture and cultural heritage; both internal and external activities directed to socially excluded groups; environmental protection and sustainable use of resources and other practical projects within the institution and the local community. In order to evaluate the impact on the national and regional development, it is necessary to analyse the following:

12.1. measures of impact in the institution's mission and strategic documents;

12.2. effectiveness of the implementation of specific measures of impact;

12.3. alignment of the impact with the priorities of the national and/or regional economic, cultural and social development;

12.4. inclusion of themes pertaining to national and regional development in students' training practice and graduation projects;

12.5. recognition of the participation of the teaching and administrative staff in voluntary service activities (including participation in elected professional bodies (boards, committees, strategic planning working groups, etc.) also participation in voluntary organisations which are not directly related to the staff's professional activities).

13. The additional evaluation areas and (or) criteria can be set in the Agreement.

Self-evaluation and the production of the self-evaluation report

14. Responsibility for the conduct of self-evaluation and the production of the self-evaluation report shall rest with the higher education institution.

15. Higher education institutions shall conduct self-evaluation according to the procedures defined by themselves with due regard to the purpose, objectives and areas covered by the self-evaluation process.

16. If necessary, the SKVC shall give advice on issues relating to the production of the self-evaluation report.

17. The self-evaluation report must demonstrate the institution's capacity for self-analysis and critical evaluation of its own work and for projection of prospects for improvement. The statements in the self-

evaluation report should be based on quantitative and qualitative evidence. The report should present information required for external review.

18. The self-evaluation report shall comprise the following parts: introduction, analysis of the higher education institution's activities by each area to be reviewed and the annexes.

19. The self-evaluation report shall analyse the activities of the higher education institution taking into account the presented data of the past six years. Where the higher education institution has existed for a shorter period of time, the report should present the data on the entire period of its existence.

20. The higher education institution shall submit to the SKVC a request for an external review of its performance and its self-evaluation report by sending them in the electronic (DOC or PDF) format by e-mail kokybe@skvc.lt.

21. The SKVC shall make sure that the self-evaluation report has been drawn up according to the requirements of the Methodology and, within 20 days of the receipt of the report, shall notify the higher education institution of any amendments required.

22. The higher education institution shall submit a corrected version of the self-evaluation report within 20 days of the receipt of information on the irregularities found in the report.

23. Two weeks before the visit at the latest, the higher education institution may submit to the SKVC information on any the material changes that have taken place at the institution since the submission of the self-evaluation report.

External review procedures

General principles

24. The external review of a higher education institution shall be carried out by an expert team set up by the SKVC.

25. The work of the expert team shall be organised by the leader of the team, who shall chair the meetings of the team, set tasks for the team members and bear the general responsibility for the team's work.

26. The work of the expert team shall be coordinated by an employee or a civil servant appointed by the SKVC.

27. In performing an external review of a higher education institution, experts shall be guided by the following principles of ethics:

27.1. Objectivity principle. An expert shall be fair and objective in his/her efforts to achieve the aims of the review and to evaluate the higher education institution. While expressing his/her opinion, formulating conclusions and taking decision, an expert shall draw on the Methodology, precise facts and information and his/her own competence and relevant experience.

27.2. Impartiality principle. In evaluating a higher education institution, an expert shall act as an impartial and independent person and shall not represent any institution.

27.3. The principle of respect for the participants of the evaluation exercise. During a review, an expert shall act with good grace, as a professional, shall not abuse his/her functions of an expert and shall not use any financial, psychological or any other pressure. An expert shall treat the participants of the review exercise as persons capable of taking responsibility for their actions therefore, when referring to the strengths and weaknesses of the institution, an expert shall refrain from advice on what, in his opinion, could lead to the best solutions.

27.4. Confidentiality principle. All the information relating to the review (issues considered at meetings, opinions offered by other participants of the review, the self-evaluation report and documents provided for evaluation) shall be used strictly for the purposes of the review and may not be divulged for any other purpose.

27.5. Cooperation principle. As a member of the external review team, an expert shall seek common aims with the other members of the team and shall carry out his/her assignments in a timely manner. In his/her relations with the higher education institution, an expert shall make every effort to help the institution enhance its culture of quality and shall seek to develop mutual understanding.

27.6. Reliance principle. During the evaluation the information submitted by the higher education institution is treated truthful unless other objective data states otherwise.

27.7. Analysis principle. The analysis of submitted documents and data obtained during the on-site visit is conducted during the evaluation.

28. Experts who do not respect the ethical principles or do not fulfil their tasks according to the requirements or by their action or inaction discredit the SKVC shall be removed from the review team according to the procedure set in their contract with the SKVC.

Preparation for the review

29. The expert team shall be set up according to the published procedure for expert team selection.

30. The SKVC shall notify the higher education institution about the composition of the expert team by fax or by e-mail. Within five working days of the receipt of the notification on the intended composition of the expert team, the higher education may submit a motivated proposal to replace a member or members of the intended expert team. The SKVC shall consider the proposal received and notify the higher education institution about the decision taken. In cases when the higher education institution does not submit a proposal to change the composition of the expert team within the period specified herein, it shall be deemed that the higher education institution has approved of the composition of the expert team.

31. The SKVC shall organise training for the experts to help them understand the purpose and objectives of the review and the legal acts governing evaluation.

32. The experts shall receive the self-evaluation report from the SKVC in terms set in the Agreement. In cases when some members of the expert team change due to the reasons beyond the SKVC's control and it is impossible to submit information to the new members of the expert team within the period specified herein, information shall be submitted immediately after the inclusion of the new experts into the expert team.

33. The visit of the expert team at the higher education institution shall be organised by the review coordinator appointed by the SKVC, who will decide on the schedule of the visit by coordinating it with the higher education institution and the expert team.

34. The higher education institution shall announce the date and the schedule of the visit on its website.

Visit at the higher education institution

35. Usually the visit lasts from 1 to 3 days. Other term sufficient to reach the goals of the review can be set in the Agreement.

36. During the visit, the expert group shall meet the administration of the higher education institution, the self-evaluation group, the teaching staff, students, graduates and social stakeholders. During the visit, the experts shall review the infrastructure of the higher education institution and all the documents necessary for the purposes of the external review.

37. The visit shall be deemed accomplished if at least 2/3 of the members of the expert group participate in it.
38. The higher education institution shall ensure that any member of its community wishing to meet the expert group can have an opportunity to do so.
39. The higher education institution shall ensure that the expert group has the appropriate premises and equipment necessary for its work and meetings.
40. During one visit, a member of the institution's community may participate only at one meeting with the expert group except for the cases coordinated with the representative of the SKVC in advance.
41. Meetings with graduates and employers may not be attended by the students or the staff members of the higher education institution.
42. If necessary, the higher education institution shall ensure the quality of interpreting services during the visit. The interpreter participates in the meetings with students only upon prior coordination with the representative of the SKVC.
43. At the end of the visit, the expert team shall discuss the outcomes of the visit at its meeting and shall brief orally the community of the institution on the preliminary observations.

Preparation of the report

44. The institutional review report shall include the analysis of the areas reviewed, proposals and recommendations for improvement of the performance of the higher education institution.
45. The overall judgement on each area reviewed can be put in the evaluation report in the cases set in the Agreement according these principles (scale):
- 45.1. Very good: the area is developed systematically and implemented effectively;
- 45.2 Good: the area substantially meets the requirements, there are no significant shortcomings;
- 45.3. Satisfactory: area meets the minimum requirements, there are shortcomings, which must be eliminated and the higher education institution is capable in doing it.
- 45.4. Non-satisfactory: there are significant shortcomings and because of them institution is not able to operate any more.

46. The expert team's conclusions and recommendations should be well motivated and based on the data contained in higher education institution's self-evaluation report, other documents provided by the institution, the information garnered during the visit and other official sources.

47. While formulating their conclusions, experts should try to arrive at a unanimous opinion. If it is impossible to reach a consensus, the formulations shall be adopted by the majority of votes while the dissenting opinions and the names of the dissenting experts should be documented and appended to the report.

48. The expert team shall produce a draft report and submit it to the SKVC by e-mail within a month after the visit at the higher education institution at the latest.

49. After familiarising with the draft report, the SKVC shall send the draft report by e-mail to the higher education institution in question, which is entitled to submit its comments regarding the factual errors contained in the draft report within 10 days of the draft report's dispatch.

50. The SKVC shall forward the higher education institution's comments to the expert team. The expert team shall examine the higher education institution's comments and adjust its report accordingly within 10 days and submit it to the SKVC.

51. According to the conditions set in the Agreement, the evaluation report can include the overall judgement on the activities of the higher education institution.

Examination and publication of the report

52. The SKVC shall examine the draft evaluation report in the Higher Education Evaluation Commission. The representative of the expert team and the representatives of the higher education institution may be invited to the sitting of the Higher Education Evaluation Commission when the need arises.

53. Upon approval of the draft report, the expert team shall submit the final evaluation report to the Authorised Agency.

54. The SKVC submits the evaluation report to the higher education institution.

55. The higher education institution shall announce the results of evaluation on its website.

Follow-up

56. For the implementation of the follow-up activities Agreement could foresee evaluation of the plan for improvement of activities of the higher education institution or results of its implementation.

57. Responsibility for its activities after the institutional review shall lie with the higher education institution.

58. After the external review, the higher education institution shall determine the measures for the elimination of the drawbacks found during the self-evaluation and external review and for the improvement of its overall activities. The higher education institution shall make such measures publicly available.

59. While reviewing the performance of the higher education institution the SKVC also evaluates how it took into account the drawbacks and recommendations for improvement of its performance specified in the previous external review (if it was arranged before) report.

Procedure for appeals

60. The higher education institution which disagrees with the decision of the external review may appeal within 14 calendar days against the decision submitting it to the SKVC. For each appeal examination the Committee is set up at the SKVC. The appeals of the higher education institution are examined according to the procedures set up by the SKVC.