# ENQA AGENCY REVIEW:
# CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT
# IN HIGHER EDUCATION (SKVC)

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21 JUNE 2017

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In February 2017, the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) in Vilnius (Lithuania) underwent an external review coordinated by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). This is the second external review of SKVC as a quality assurance agency. SKVC has been a full member of ENQA since October 2012, and is applying for renewal of ENQA membership. SKVC has been listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) since December 2012, and is also applying for renewal of EQAR listing.

This external review report is the result of the review process based on the SKVC's self-assessment report and an external assessment including a site visit in Lithuania, Vilnius. An external review panel appointed by ENQA evaluated the way in which and to what extent SKVC fulfils the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The panel analysed all three activities considered to be within the scope of the ESG, whether in Lithuania or abroad: (a) study programme evaluation and accreditation; (b) evaluation and accreditation of higher education institutions (HEI); (c) evaluation to determine HEIs' eligibility to offer higher education. The panel also took into account progress made since the 2012 review and issues put forward by EQAR when admitting SKVC to the register.

The panel found that SKVC as a quality assurance agency is much appreciated by all stakeholders. SKVC manages to involve them all in many different ways. There is a high degree of trust in the quality assurance procedures and the outcomes of the external evaluations. This is exceptional when one realizes that higher education in Lithuania has moved from a former Soviet system into the European Higher Education Area. This important evolution and the pro-activeness of the country partly explain SKVC's involvement in a wide variety of international activities. At the same time, the panel supports the view of some stakeholders that SKVC should find the right balance between the local context and new international developments.

Referring to the underlying principles for quality assurance in the Bologna era the panel urges SKVC to revise its procedures for external evaluations starting from HEIs' full responsibility for the quality of their programmes. A gradual move from quality control towards an enhancement led peer-review is required and will also support the development of a quality culture. Furthermore, both the Ministry of Education and HEIs would support a more integrated approach of programme and institutional evaluations.

The panel established that SKVC has followed-up on all the recommendations made in 2012 and most of them have been fully addressed. The agency, for instance, has exerted itself in collecting feedback, formal and informal, internal and external, and put a lot of effort in the analysis and follow-up. Also the involvement of students and employers in quality assurance matters has clearly improved. And concerns about independency have been properly addressed. The panel's view is that SKVC has made considerable progress since the 2012 review although certain uncertain issues remain and need further attention. The main areas of development pertain to resources (ESG 3.5) and methodologies fit for purpose (ESG 2.2).

This reports, therefore, also provides recommendations for action. The panel recommends improvement in five areas: financial planning to at least guarantee the funding of the agency's core activities; a revision of SKVC' methodologies to further reduce bureaucracy and make procedures more effective and efficient; a more structural approach for thematic analyses focusing on stakeholders' needs; a more consistent decision-making process based on trust in the expert teams; and a more specific complaints procedure.

The panel concludes that SKVC is in compliance with the ESG. The agency is fully compliant with eight standards, and substantially compliant with five standards.

The level of compliance for each ESG is as follows:

*Fully compliant*
3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance
3.2 Official status
3.3 Independence
3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct
3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies
2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance
2.3 Implementing processes
2.4 Peer-review experts
2.6 Reporting

*Substantially compliant*
3.4 Thematic analysis
3.5 Resources
2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose
2.5 Criteria for outcomes
2.7 Complaints and appeals

# INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (Studijų Kokybės Vertinimo Centras, SKVC) with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). It is based on an external review conducted from December 2016 until May 2017.

## BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW AND OUTLINE OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

### BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

ENQA's regulations require all member agencies to undergo an external cyclical review, at least once every five years, in order to verify that they act in substantial compliance with the ESG as adopted at the Yerevan ministerial conference of the Bologna Process in 2015.

As this is SKVC's second review, the panel is expected to provide clear evidence of results in all areas and to acknowledge progress from the previous review. The panel has adopted a developmental approach, as the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* aim at constant enhancement of the agencies.

This review covers the standards in the ESG parts 2 and 3 individually, differentiating between types of activity when relevant. The SKVC activities under review are listed in the self-assessment report (pp. 17-18), the ENQA Terms of Reference (Annex 3), and the EQAR confirmation of eligibility (Brussels, 26 July 2016).

Within the scope of the ESG are the following three activities:
   a) Activity 1: external evaluation and accreditation of study programmes (current and new) in Lithuania and abroad;
   b) Activity 2: external evaluation and accreditation of higher education institutions (HEI) in Lithuania and abroad;
   c) Activity 3: evaluation to determine HEIs' eligibility to offer higher education.

   Including a number of supporting activities:
   d) International activities;
   e) Consultations to HEIs about evaluation procedures;
   f) Improvement of higher education quality;
   g) Publication and communication.

Other activities not directly related to SKVC as a quality assurance agency do not fall under this external review.

EQAR explicitly states that SKVC's third activity (evaluating new HEIs) is within the scope of ESG, and should be covered in the external review. The panel noted, however, that no such evaluations have taken place in the period under review. Furthermore, EQAR points out that 'based on the information in your [SKVC] application, the external evaluation and accreditation of study programmes and higher education institutions are interlinked. Since the accreditation decisions are made based on the external evaluation (of programmes and higher education institutions) the two steps together form the external quality assurance activity and can thus be addressed jointly.'

### MAIN FINDINGS OF THE 2012 REVIEW

Five years ago, SKVC underwent its first external review. The 2012 panel found SKVC as a quality assurance agency substantially compliant with the ESG 2005. The panel also made recommendations which SKVC adequately addressed in the 2014 progress report.

The level of compliance for each ESG is as follows:

*Fully compliant*
2.2 Development of external quality assurance processes
2.3 Criteria for decisions
2.7 Periodic reviews
3.2 Official status
3.3 Activities
3.4 Resources
3.5 Mission statement
3.6 Independence

*Substantially compliant*
2.1 Use of internal quality assurance procedures
2.4 Processes fit for purpose
2.5 Reporting
2.8 System wide analyses
3.1 Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education
3.7 External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies
3.8 Accountability procedures

*Partially compliant*
2.6 Follow- up procedures

Annex 1 gives a more complete overview and further details of the 2012 outcomes.

REVIEW PROCESS
The 2017 external review of SKVC was conducted in line with the process described in the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference.

The panel for the external review of SKVC was appointed by ENQA and composed of the following members:

−   Jacques Lanarès PhD (chair), Vice Rector for Quality, Human Resources and Development of Teaching, Professor in the Faculty of Social & Political Sciences, University of Lausanne, Switzerland [EUA nominee];
−   Michèle Wera MA (secretary) , Policy Advisor, Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO), the Netherlands [ENQA nominee];
−   Saulius  Vengris PhD, Vice Rector for Strategic Affairs, Vilnius Academy of Arts, Lithuania [ENQA nominee];
−   Marija Vasilevska BA, Master's student, Faculty of Law Iustinianus Primus, Skopje, Macedonia [ESU nominee].

The actual review started with SKVC providing ENQA with its self-assessment report (SAR; November 2016). After the ENQA pre-screening and a slight revision the SAR was submitted to the panel (December 2016). Via e-mail, the panel exchanged individual comments, formulated questions and drafted a programme for the site visit. The final programme was agreed upon a week prior to the visit (17 February 2017).

ENQA organised a preparatory telephone briefing for the panel (25 January 2017) providing additional information on the procedure. Prior to the site visit the review chair and the review secretary had regular contact, also with the SKVC liaison officer and the ENQA coordinator.

During a four-day site visit in Vilnius (21 – 24 February 2017), the panel met with management, staff, students, HEIs and other relevant stakeholders. These interviews in 15 different sessions offered ample opportunity to discuss and verify the findings in the SAR, and to gather more specific evidence. Meetings of the panel with SKVC management and stakeholders were very helpful for a more in-depth understanding of the agency's quality assurance activities and its quality system at large. The openness, enthusiasm and readiness of the SKVC director and her team were much appreciated. The panel also studied additional documents and visited the SKVC premises. At the end of the visit, the panel passed judgement on compliance for each ESG. Scores used are fully, substantially, partially compliant or non-compliant. A final de-briefing meeting with SKVC completed the site visit.

The external review report describes the outcomes of the review including the evidence, an analysis and the conclusion for each ESG separately. In the report, the panel addresses and analyses compliance with the ESG in three main areas: the external evaluation and accreditation of (a) programmes and (b) HEIs, in Lithuania and abroad, and (c) the evaluation of HEIs' eligibility to offer higher education. Where relevant the report differentiates between these activities. The report clearly highlights the commendations and recommendations. Also, special attention is paid to the progress made since the 2012 review, and to the issues marked by EQAR when SKVC was admitted to the Register. Good use was made of the template for the report provided by ENQA.

All panel members contributed to the writing process. After agreement of the review chair
(16 March 2017) the report was submitted to ENQA for a last check. The final draft of the external review report (19 April 2017) was sent to Vilnius for comment on factual accuracy, if any (21 April 2017). After revision of the report following the comments of the agency (5 May 2017) the review chair submitted the final report (12 May 2017) to ENQA.

During the entire process, the panel was assisted by Anaïs Gourdin, ENQA Project and Finance Officer and ENQA coordinator of the SKVC review.

**Self-assessment report**
The SAR deals primarily with SKVC's two main activities being the external evaluation and accreditation of both programmes and HEIs, in Lithuania and abroad. Information in the SAR on the third activity (the evaluation of HEIs' eligibility to offer higher education) is limited, mainly due to the limited number of procedures until now. In fact, in the period under review SKVC did not receive any applications for licencing and as a consequence conducted no related activities. Even so, prior to the site visit SKVC completed the SAR including more specific information on this third activity. The SAR is posted on the SKVC's website, both in English and Lithuanian.

The SAR is well structured, informative and useful in explicating the agency's compliance with the ESG. The document shows a good balance between descriptive elements and critical self-analysis. Appendixes are relevant and limited. At various stages during the site visit, the panel received additional documents and various updates. This was informative but not always conducive for a smooth process.

Overall, the self-evaluation process has been an inclusive one. The SAR was a joint effort of a small group consisting of SKVC staff members. Both internal and external stakeholders made significant contributions to the self-assessment. This was confirmed in the various interview sessions during the review. Asked about the costs and benefits of going through the process of producing a SAR, the working group found that it offered a larger and broader scope of analysis of the agency's quality assurance activities seen from different angles. It also improved the communication, both internal and

external, both formal and informal, and stimulated teamwork within and across SKVC's quality assurance divisions.

## HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY[1]

### HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

From the mid-1940s until 1991, higher education in Lithuania followed the Soviet system of higher education. Lithuania implemented educational reforms in the early 1990s and a three-study cycle system was introduced in 1993-1994. By adopting the Law of 15 October 1998, Lithuania ratified the Council of Europe and the UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (widely known as the 1997 Lisbon Recognition Convention, LRC).  In 1999, Lithuania joined the Bologna process.

In 2000, ten years after Lithuania broke away from the Soviet Union, a binary system of higher education was introduced. The Law on Higher Education and Research (2009, 2016 Law) defines these two sectors:

- there are two types of HEIs: 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) and college (451 programmes);
- university and college qualifications are different; colleges award professional bachelor's degree; 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.

The law also defines state and private HEIs. Private institutions must have a government's permit to operate. All study programmes are listed in the register of the Ministry of Education and Science (ministry).

The state HEIs get mixed financing: from the state budget and from the student fees. The funds from the state budget can be allocated to non-state HEIs only in certain cases, e.g. to subsidise 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 state or state supported loans, social loans and other support funds.

Statistics show that, using 2015-2016 as reference year, 39.772 students studied in colleges (82% in state; 18% in non-state), and 93.524 students studied in universities (95% in state; 5% in non-state). The trend of recent years is that each year colleges loose ca. 2.000 and universities ca. 7.000 students. This demographic decline will last until 2020; then the numbers are likely to increase slightly.

### QUALITY ASSURANCE

Quality assurance in Lithuania started with the founding of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education in 1995. This centre and its operations became the basis for further development of quality assurance in Lithuania.

When Lithuania joined the Bologna process in 1999, the quality assurance system was further developed. In 2010, for instance, Lithuania issued a description of a Lithuanian Qualification

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[1] Largely based on the information in the SAR, the SKVC website and the SKVC presentations on day 1 of the site visit.

Framework (LTQF). The framework defines eight levels of education analogous to the European model. In 2011, the new credit system with ECTS was introduced.

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 including HEIs. Other organisations with responsibilities for external quality assurance in education: The National Agency for School Evaluation assures the quality of secondary education; the Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre (KPMPC) assures the quality of vocational training; and the Lithuanian Research Council (LMT) assesses research and artistic production, and grants rights to conduct doctoral studies.

### THE CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (Studijų Kokybės Vertinimo Centras, SKVC) was established in 1995. SKVC organised evaluations of research and teaching activities of HEIs and of higher education qualifications, and provided information on the recognition of qualifications. SKVC's main activities have not changed since then: it acts as a national quality assurance agency in higher education and as a centre for academic information and foreign qualification recognition. SKVC started regular external evaluations in 1998-1999. Since 2002, SKVC is an institution of public administration. In 2009, some tasks were transferred to LMT. Institutional reviews started in 2011.

SKVC's statute is approved by the order of the Minister for Research and Education. SKVC can also be asked by the government or the minister to prepare drafts of regulatory documents for different areas. The law and SKVC's statute define the main goals of the centre, which are:
− To promote the quality of HEIs' activities through external evaluation and accreditation of institutions and programmes;
− 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 in Lithuania.

Activities performed by SKVC as a quality assurance agency are: the external evaluation and accreditation of programmes; the review and accreditation of HEIs; and the evaluation of the application of HEIs to obtain a license to provide studies and conduct activities related to studies. As a qualifications' recognition centre SKVC takes decisions on the recognition of foreign qualifications, and the transfer of grades and establishment of comparability between subjects taught in secondary schools.

From 2010 until 1 September 2016, SKVC has in its capacity as quality assurance agency:

− Evaluated more than 50 HEIs (26 universities and 24 colleges) and granted 51 HEIs accreditation;
− Evaluated 842 new programmes and took 735 accreditation decisions (107 evaluation procedures were terminated or programmes were not accredited due to a negative result);
− Evaluated 1.411 on-going programmes and took 1.478 accreditation decisions (including decisions on the basis of other EQAR registered agencies);
− Evaluated 3 programmes and 1 HEI abroad.

The 2016 Law has been implemented on 1 January 2017, and 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.

## SKVC'S ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE

The council (11 members) and the director are collectively responsible for SKVC's management. SKVC has three advisory bodies: the Commission for Study Programme Evaluation (SVK), the Commission of Higher Education Institutions' Review (AMVK), and the Commission for Appeals against Study programmes Evaluation (SPAK).

The centre has several divisions. The Study Programme Evaluation Division and Institutional Review Division carry out the functions of the quality assurance agency; the Qualifications Assessment Division performs the tasks of ENIC/NARIC. There are also two supporting divisions for Legal and General Affairs and Finance.

SKVC has a staff of 40 professionals working in various divisions. Per 1 September 2016, 17 employees are working for SKVC as a quality assurance agency, 12 employees are engaged in other lines of work, and the administrative staff consists of 11 employees.

SKVC collaborates with many different institutions and meets regularly with, for instance, the Ministry of Education and Research (ministry), the Lithuanian University Rector's Conference (LURK), Director's Conference of Lithuanian Colleges of Higher Education (LKDK),  Research and Higher Education Monitoring and Analysis Centre (MOSTA), the Education Council, the Higher Education Council, students organisations (e.g. Lithuanian Student Union and Vilnius University Student Association) and employers' associations.

## SKVC'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES

SKVC performs the evaluation of programmes (on going and new) and HEIs, in Lithuania and abroad, and applications to establish new HEIs in Lithuania. The accreditation decisions are based on external evaluation reports. Programmes and HEIs can be accredited for three or six years; programme accreditation can also be denied. New study programmes are accredited for a period of one year longer than the full duration of the programme.

The external evaluation is based on a self-evaluation report prepared by the HEI. For the external evaluation, SKVC assembles expert teams: local or international teams for programme evaluation; international teams for institutional review. The key stages in the evaluation process include: a self-evaluation report, a site-visit, an evaluation report (preparation of the evaluation report, its discussion at the advisory committee and publication), and follow-up activities. External evaluation reports are public through the SKVC website.

During an institutional evaluation, the HEI is assessed for quality in four areas; the outcome is either positive or negative. The quality of an on-going programme is assessed in six areas on a four-point scale. All new programmes are checked for compliance with legal requirements. New study programmes must undergo comprehensive external evaluation in six areas under certain conditions. Such evaluation is conducted by teams of two experts with relevant experience in the field and, since the end of 2016, also a student member.

HEIs can also ask another quality assurance agency that is enlisted in EQAR to evaluate their programmes. The accreditation decision (based on the external evaluation report) is taken by SKVC. In the case of institutional evaluations, SKVC is the only agency authorised to do so.
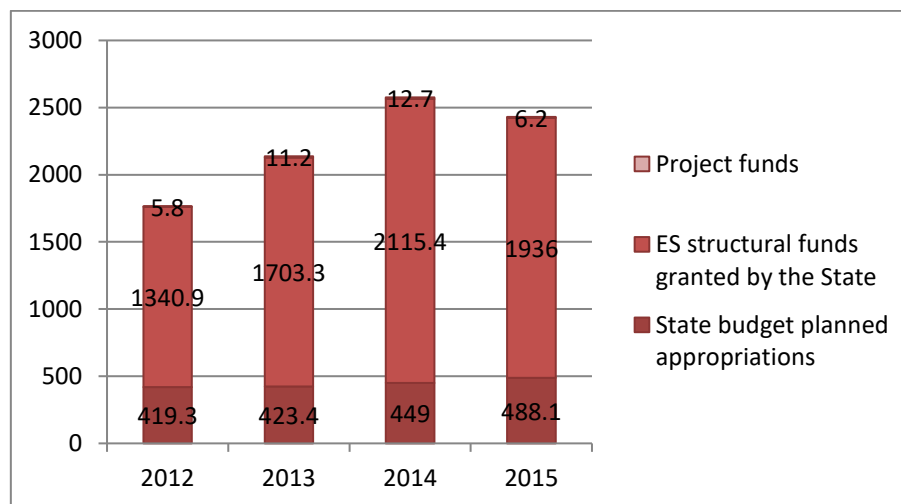
Internationalisation is high on the national agenda and in the work of SKVC. The main purpose of the international activities is to support implementation of the core functions of SKVC as both quality assurance agency and as the ENIC/NARIC centre. SKVC international connectedness is manifested in diverse ways: SKVC staff contributes towards the common goals of national reforms and to the

Bologna Process as experts; SKVC participates actively in ENQA; SKVC engages in capacity building in quality assurance in other countries by taking part in projects; SKVC staff are recognized as professionals abroad (e.g. ENQA pool of experts and ENQA Board members).

Lastly, SKVC point out that for 50 years under the Soviet regime, Lithuania was cut off from the democratic world, its development was brutally interrupted, mobility of academics and other professionals was restricted and strictly controlled, access to literature and other research resources was very limited (especially in social sciences and humanities), and possibilities to engage in joint research projects were minimal, and etc. By inviting reviewers from abroad, SKVC makes sure that teaching and provision of studies in general are following the international trends. SKVC hopes helping HEIs to re-establish connections with peers abroad, and being once again part of the free world.

## SKVC'S FUNDING

SKVC is financed from the state budget and EU structural projects funds. The annual budget is approved for one year along with the state budget; the costs for external evaluations are planned for two years ahead. Budgets for on-going projects are approved for the whole duration of the project.



*Funds received in 2012–2015 (thousand LTL). Source: SKVC statistics.*

# FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF SKVC WITH THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (ESG)

## ESG PART 3: QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

### 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.

**2012 External review**

Standard 3.1 Use of external quality assurance procedures: substantially compliant.

Standard 3.3 Activities: fully compliant.

Standard 3.5 Mission statement: fully compliant.

**Evidence**

*Activities*

The SAR states that all SKVC's activities under review, whether in Lithuania or abroad, are based on the ESG, and established processes and criteria. These are stipulated in a set of documents for each activity[2]: each methodology contains the procedure, how evaluations should be carried out, and this is legally binding. In addition to the methodology for institutional reviews, SKVC has produced advice on conducting the self-evaluation, which is not legally binding. All evaluations (except for new programmes depending on the outcomes of the institutional evaluation) include a self-evaluation report, an external review by an independent panel of experts, a panel report, a formal decision and a follow-up procedure. Outcomes of the evaluations including the panel reports are published on the SKVC website.

As a quality assurance agency, SKVC undertakes external quality assurance procedures on a regular basis. Statistics in the SAR (pp. 27-28) show an impressive number of external evaluations of both study programmes and HEIs over the period 2012-2016. SKVC performed four evaluations abroad (in Slovenia) and no licensing procedures in the said period. Evaluations are repeated every three or six years depending on the outcomes of the previous procedure. This cycle of evaluations is specified in the 2016 Law[3] and the SKVC methodologies. The new type of evaluations for groups of programmes and HEIs will start in 2018. For institutional reviews, that will be the second cycle. Evaluations abroad and licensing procedures are performed on request. Once a HEI is found eligible to offer higher education, it will also be subject to a recurrent external evaluation.

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[2] - Programme evaluation and accreditation: Methodology for Evaluation of Higher Education Study Programmes (2011; revised 2016); Methodology for Drafting the Descriptions of a Proposed Study Programme, and for Conducting External Evaluation and Accreditation Thereof (2011; revised 2016); Principles and Procedures for Study Programme Evaluation in SKVC (latest version 2017).
- Institutional evaluation and accreditation: Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education (2010; revised 2016); Procedure for the External Review of Higher Education Institutions (2010); Accreditation Procedure of Higher Education Institutions (2010).
- Evaluations abroad: Methodology for Evaluation of Study Programmes Implemented at Foreign Higher Education Institutions (2015); Methodology for Evaluation of Foreign Higher Education Institutions (2015).
- Licensing evaluation: Methodology and Procedure in Lithuanian (2009).
[3] Law on Higher Education and Research of the Republic of Lithuania (2009; revised 2016).

Two SKVC divisions perform the external evaluations: the Study Programme Evaluation Division and the Institutional Review Division. These divisions are also responsible for the numerous activities supporting SKVC's work as a quality assurance agency. Over a period of six years (2011-2016), the centre organised over 150 of such events including different types of training courses, seminars and (inter)national conferences (SAR, pp. 28-29).

Especially the number of consulting and international activities stands out. The consulting function to both HEIs and government is explicitly mentioned in the ministerial order regarding the agency's statue (e.g. Article 13). This is done by participating actively in debates on educational reforms and quality assurance issues upon invitation of the ministry. And SKVC offers guidance and assistance to HEIs at various occasions and in various forms, for example when preparing for an evaluation procedure.

Internationalisation in particular is considered as a strength and an opportunity in the SWOT-analysis (SAR, p. 71). This again follows the SKVC's statue with in most articles direct reference to the ESG and the international context of higher education and quality assurance. Article 10.10 for example explicitly deals with SKVC's function related to good practice in other countries and an increase of international content in higher education. The SWOT mentions five international oriented strengths and opportunities (SAR, p. 71). In three documents made available during the site visit, SKVC gives further details on its international activities.[4]

### *Policy*
The agency's mission in the strategic plans reads as follows: '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 its qualifications.' The website further explains the aims and objectives of the activities: '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, and seek compatibility of the Lithuanian higher education system with the provisions of the European Higher Education Area.'

The mission statement is translated into a mid-term strategic plan, working plans and annual activity plans. In doing so, the agency's policy is made operational. The latest strategic plan[5] came available end 2016 after completion of the SAR. Other relevant policy documents are the *Quality Policy* and the *Quality Manual[6]*, both published in 2011. A revised version of the manual will be finalised in the summer 2017. All policy documents are posted on the SKVC website.

### *Stakeholders*
According to the SAR, the agency makes sure to include all relevant stakeholders in its governance and work. Various documents underpin this claim: the various resolutions of the government, the SKVC's statute as a quality assurance agency[7], the methodologies and the regulations of advisory commissions[8] (as listed in annex 4 and in the SAR, pp. 74-5).

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[4] Regarding International Relations (2017); SKVC Partnership Projects List (1997-2018); SKVC Projects Coordinated List (2001-2018).
[5] Strategic Plan 2014-2016 (2014); Strategic Plan 2017-2019 (2016).
[6] http://www.skvc.lt/default/en/strategy_policy/quality-policy/quality-policy

[7] Statute of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (Minister of Education and Science, 2005; revised 2016).
[8] Regulations of the Higher Education Evaluation Commission (SVK; 2011); Regulations of the Higher Education Institutions Review Commission (AMVK; 2011); Regulations of the Appeals Commission for Study Programmes (SPAK; 2008, revised 2015).

The panel scrutinized a sample of minutes[9] showing that stakeholders meet at regular intervals and are actively engaged in the agency's activities. Stakeholders including students and employers are not only represented in the council and the various advisory bodies. They also take part in discussions for new approaches, training activities, information sessions and other events related to quality assurance in higher education.

Following the 2012 external review, SKVC saw to it that especially students became more actively involved in all external evaluations. For a more detailed analysis, the panel refers to the discussion of Part 2 of the ESG, more specifically ESG 2.4.

The panel also noted that SKVC puts considerable effort in attracting international expertise. Experts from abroad participate in both programme and institutional evaluations. And the SKVC's statute calls for one council member being 'an international expert residing and working outside the Republic of Lithuania' (article 19).

During the interviews, all stakeholders confirmed their trust in SKVC as an agency of quality assurance. HEIs, students, employers and experts alike were confident in the way SKVC operates and contributes to the improvement of the quality of higher education in Lithuania. Stakeholders confirmed their input and feedback is taken seriously (see also ESG 3.6). HEIs displayed a strong belief in the professionalism of the agency and the added value of external revaluations. At the ministry, the panel learned that SKVC is considered as one of the most important bodies in higher education. In the SWOT, the cooperation and support of the ministry is considered a strength (SAR, p. 71). Good use is also made of SKVC's international network to further develop higher education. This is not only to the benefit of academics and students, but also to the ministry itself.

**Analysis**
*Activities*
Ample evidence is presented of the fact that SKVC is performing regular external quality assurance activities based on the ESG. SKVC has defined legal frameworks accompanied by guidelines for each activity, also when operating outside Lithuania. Most documents have recently been revised (July 2016) and are easily accessible on the website. The panel will discuss the compliance with the individual standards on external quality assurance in more detail under a separate heading in this report (Part 2).

The panel discussed in great detail two supporting activities: internationalisation and consultation. In accordance with its statue and the expectation of its stakeholders, SKVC is clearly very active on the international scene of quality assurance, which is positive in itself. Both the ministry and HEIs confirmed to benefit from SKVC's international experience and expertise. At the same time, the panel supports the view of some stakeholders that SKVC should find the right balance between the local context of HEIs transforming from a former Soviet educational system to the Bologna era on the one hand, and the new developments in Europe supporting this transformation on the other hand. It seems that SKVC is well aware of this challenge despite the international ambitions. Even so, the panel feels that SKVC's first priority lies with quality assurance in Lithuania within the EHEA, and in this order.

SKVC has a consulting function to fulfill towards both the government and HEIs. Initially the panel felt some friction between SKVC's role as assessor and as consultant or expert. The combination of both roles might at one stage create a possible conflict of interest. During the site visit, however, the panel

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[9] Minutes of council meetings, and meetings of the three advisory commissions (in Lithuanian).

learned that SKVC manages to keep a critical distance. The panel will at several occasions in the report return to this dual role.

The ministry is in the middle of reorganising the Lithuanian higher education and it appreciates SKVC's input in the process. The agency's international expertise and the recommendations of external experts following institutional evaluations have been and still are a stimulus for further developments. The ministry declares that not all recommendations are implemented but they are always considered in the best interest of Lithuanian higher education. As mentioned before, the pace and extent of change are to be taken into account.

The advisory role towards HEIs is probably more complicated given SKVC's explicit guidance in producing the HEIs' self-evaluation report. SKVC methodologies and guidelines clearly describe the procedure delineating tasks and responsibilities. The panel acknowledges that HEIs benefit from this support as they have little experience with quality assurance. Especially the analytic character of the self-evaluation report and the involvement of all stakeholders (students in particular) in their internal quality assurance system can be challenging for HEIs. Even so, the panel judges that for the next cycle of evaluations HEIs can more heavily rely on their past experience and their own professionalism. It might be the right time for SKVC to step back and exercise more restraint in offering advice. Growing trust in HEIs' quality systems might also reduce SKVC's number of detailed and demanding rules and regulations. It would reinforce HEIs' autonomy in matters of quality assurance. And it would certainly reduce SKVC's workload. The panel will later return to this topic.

SKVC has also other duties which are clearly distinct from its quality assurance activities. Two staff divisions perform the programme and institutional evaluations; a third division is responsible for the other fields of work as described in the introductory chapters on the organisational structure of the agency. There is no evidence that these activities – quality assurance and other – are intertwined.

### Policy
The panel scrutinized the available documents (strategic plan including mission, working plan, activity plans, activity reports, quality policy, and quality manual) and considered these appropriate as a logical sequence of policy statements and operational tools. The panel found the strategic plan concise and meaningful. Special attention is paid to follow-up activities also ensuing the outcomes of the 2012 review. The panel will return to the quality policy and quality manual under ESG 3.6.

Strategies encouraging the development of a quality culture are less apparent. During the interviews, the panel observed that the topic was not broadly discussed or given much attention. Only few stakeholders were aware of what the notion of quality culture entails. Some SKVC documents mention quality culture; the SKVC quality policy, however, does not. Given the importance of quality culture for the further improvement of the quality of higher education, the panel suggests putting this topic more prominent on the agenda. The panel also invites all stakeholders to invest in a strong quality culture sharing the same quality values.

SKVC manages to involve all stakeholders, both internal and external, both national and international. Documentary study and discussions with stakeholders confirm their active involvement in the agency's governance and work. In recent years, special efforts have been made to engage students, employers and international stakeholders. SKVC also makes full use of the stakeholders' input. This is much appreciated by the stakeholders. The panel concludes that SKVC established a structural and effective relationship with its stakeholders, and has been successful in engaging all stakeholders in the dynamics of the agency.

**Panel commendation**
SKVC manages to establish a considerable degree of trust. International stakeholders, including council members and experts, are actively involved in the agency's governance and work.

**Panel conclusion: fully compliant.**

**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.

**2012 External review**
Standard 3.2 Official status: fully compliant.

**Evidence**
Being an entity of public administration, SKVC's activities are regulated by Lithuanian national laws. The Law on Higher Education and Research of the Republic of Lithuania provides a concise legal basis of SKVC as a quality assurance agency in higher education. The 2016 Law[10] replaces the 2009 edition, and is in force per 1 January 2017. This law defines SKVC's status as an independent body, its decisions being binding (SAR, pp. 29-20).

The ministerial *Order regarding the Approval of the Statute of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education* (14 November 2016 No V-1002)[11] pursuant to Article 22 of the aforementioned law and Article 6 of the Law on Budgetary Bodies of the Republic of Lithuania further stipulates the provisions, rights, duties, funding and organisation of activities of SKVC as a public institution for the implementation of the policy on higher education quality.

Early 2016, the updates of all methodologies were introduced to the public and after regulation became legally binding. These documents have been officially published in the Lithuanian Registry of Legal Acts, and are posted on the SKVC website.

As an EQAR registered agency, SKVC is officially recognized abroad. SKVC is member of ENQA, CEENQA and INQAAHE.

During the interviews, stakeholders confirmed accepting SKVC's official status as a quality assurance agency, and thus accepting the outcomes of its external evaluation and accreditations procedures. According to the SAR (pp. 66-67), appeals are mostly related to unfavourable evaluation outcomes. This was confirmed during interviews. The majority of appeals is rejected as ungrounded. No appeals were lodged against breaches of evaluation procedures.

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[10] https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/1a9058e049b311e6b5d09300a16a686c (in Lithuanian)
[11] http://www.skvc.lt/default/en/administrative-information/skvc-statute

**Analysis**

The legal basis for the agency's activities is well defined. SKVC is established by legislation and is formally recognised by the Ministry for Education and Science, which is the responsible public authority in Lithuania. Decisions of SKVC have a binding force. All applicable frameworks (methodologies) have been endorsed by the main stakeholders. Given their positive assessment of the agency's work and their confirmation of accepting the outcomes of the external evaluations, the panel concludes that SKVC holds the required official status.

**Panel commendations**

SKVC is recognised in its role as quality assurance agency and fully supported by its stakeholders, both internal and external, both national and international.

**Panel conclusion: fully compliant.**

**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.

**2012 External review**

Standard 3.6 Independence: fully compliant.

*Recommendation: 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 council's position as the body ensuring SKVC's independence.*

**Evidence**

*Organisational independence*

The 2016 Law and the SKVC's statute regulate the organisation of the Lithuanian quality assurance agency safeguarding its independence. These regulations include terms for the nomination and appointment of the director and the council members. The agency's statute explicitly states that 'Members of the Seimas [parliament], the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, political appointees and the civil servants and employees of the Centre may not be appointed as members of the Council of the Centre' (Article 20). It also says that members shall 'adhere to the code of ethics [...], act independently, [and] refrain from disclosing confidential information' (Article 31).

SKVC also cherishes the values of 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' (*Strategic Plan 2017-2019*, p. 8).

The recommendation in the 2012 review pertaining to the council's status of independence were discussed within the council but did not result in any adjustments. When debating this with the panel, council members confirmed that they see no need for changing the regulations. The SAR also mentions the active involvement of the council in the revision of the 2016 Law, and the council's continuous willingness to discuss any concerns related to SKVC (p. 93). The members of the council whom the panel met during the site visit, pointed out that all interest groups are represented in the council, and this diversity of council members further guarantees SKVC independence not only towards the ministry but also and especially towards HEIs. The council sees to it that all stakeholders are heard. Members confirmed having no role in the external evaluations or the accreditation decision-taking

procedures; they discuss the quality assurance system (e.g. follow-up activities or ESG 2015), not individual cases. Perusal of minutes of various council meetings give no indication of possible conflicts of interest.

The 2012 review also questioned the role of the governmental Research and Higher Education Monitoring and Analysis Centre (MOSTA) in the evaluations clouding the overall criteria and process. Following suggestions of SKVC and HEIs, the role of MOSTA was revised and a relevant amendment of the governmental resolution became into force in 2014 (SAR, p. 94). This is also apparent in the revised methodologies. MOSTA provides data about the learning resources to SKVC for use of the expert teams, and refrains from making any assessment (see also ESG 2.7).

The Ministry of Education and Science established SKVC as an independent budgetary organisation. Funds, their use and financial audits are all regulated in the SKVC's statute (Chapter V).The director acting on behalf of SKVC is fully responsible for its finances within the budgetary limits set by that same ministry. She 'maintains intellectual, tangible and financial resources of the centre' (Article 34.17), and reports on the agency's finances to the council (Chapter IV).

### *Operational independence*
Every evaluation procedure is conducted following a predetermined and strict set of rules and regulations. These are laid down in various publically available documents such as the methodologies, the procedures and principles, and the regulations for the commissions. All these documents are listed in the List of References of the SAR (pp. 74-75) and in annex 4 of this report.

Individuals involved in SKVC activities act in a personal capacity and cannot work representing their constituent organisations. This basic principle is particularly relevant to SKVC staff members and experts. The code of conduct is part of the working regulations for staff members, and mentions impartiality and confidentiality amongst the main values.

The methodologies provide the legal framework for experts in all external reviews – evaluations of programme and HEIs, in Lithuania and abroad, and licensing procedures – with guiding principles of objectivity, impartiality, respect for fellow experts, confidentiality and cooperation. SKVC's selection procedure for experts[12] is again applicable for all evaluations, and guarantees that experts are solely selected because of their expertise. Chapter V of this procedure explains in details the requirements of impartiality and confidentiality. SKVC sees to it that nomination and appointment of experts are independent of third parties. A mechanism of no-conflict-of-interest is in place. Experts sign a declaration of impartiality and confidence[13], and by doing so declare to follow the code of ethics. This code is an integral part of the procedures and principles, also stating that 'reviewers should neither assume the roles of inspectors nor consultants of HEIs, but act as critical, but friendly external experts'. If a potential conflict of interest occurs, the selection procedure foresees appropriate actions (Article 31). HEIs testified that they have a clear preference for international experts not only for their expertise but also for their independency. Also, SKVC see this as a clear advantage. Especially academics and employers for programme evaluations pose a challenge in matters of independency because of the small size of the country and of the academic community. The panel further refers to ESG 2.4 when discussing peer-review experts.

Recently, integrity and impartiality are also on the agenda in the public management sector in Lithuania. In 2016, institutions including SKVC were requested to publish more specific information on their activities. Recently an internal working group was set up to analyse corruption risks and define

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[12] Description of Experts' Selection Procedure (2016)
[13] Expert's Declaration of Interests and a Promise Not to Disclose Confidential Information (2017).

precautionary measures to be taken (SAR, p. 31). SKVC staff members also take part in an international working group on integrity in education (SAR, p. 70).

*Independence of formal outcomes*

By law, SKVC can grant accreditation to HEIs and programmes. These decisions are solely based on external quality assurance evaluations by expert teams reporting on the evaluation results. The SKVC director takes the formal accreditation decision upon advice of the responsible SKVC advisory body. There is no evidence that third parties have any interference in SKVC's decision-making process.

**Analysis**

The panel finds that legislation clearly establishes the independence of SKVC. The management structure, the methodologies and procedures for external evaluations including the nomination and appointment of experts, and the agency's responsibility for the decision-making confirm a sufficient level of independence. Individuals involved in SKVC's quality assurance activities (council members, staff, and experts) are supposed to follow the code of ethics including independency as one of the guiding principles. When asked, however, not all experts were aware of the existence of such a code.

The panel also learned from stakeholders that they are confident that evaluative operations are conducted with full respect of independency. This is certainly not an easy task given the size of the country and the language barriers if one cannot rely on international experts for all procedures.

Responding to the 2012 recommendation SKVC asserts that the council is fully aware of its responsibilities as a safeguard of the agency's independency. The panel is confident that this is the case on the basis of the minutes of council meetings, and the discussions with the council and other stakeholders. Not once an issue pertaining to independence was mentioned. The panel appreciates that council members too are required to observe the SKVC's code of conduct. The council also saw to it that eventually the acting director has been appointed as director to the satisfaction of all stakeholders.

Also, the relationship with MOSTA has changed considerably since the 2012 review. Expert teams make good use of the data provided by MOSTA, and beyond that MOSTA has no further involvement in the external evaluations. The panel is satisfied with the way this issue has been resolved. Not all stakeholders, however, are yet fully aware of this particular change in the procedure.

The financial responsibilities and independency of the director are clearly described in the agency's statute. The budget, however, leaves little room for innovation as becomes clear from the annual activity plans. Structural funds are limited and project funds are labelled. Even so, the director can decide independently on what the statute describes as 'the rational and economical use of funds' (Article 34.17). When discussing SKVC's resources under ESG 3.5, the panel will further elaborate on the financial position of the agency.

Also with reference to the evidence and analysis under ESG 3.1, the panel establishes SKVC's independent position in its dual role as consultant and assessor due to the strict regulations laid down in the legal frameworks and procedures for external evaluations, and the involvement of external, and very often international, experts. The panel draws the same conclusion regarding SKVC offering expert advice to the government with reference to the relevant legislation and the ministry's balanced approach to problems and SKVC's input. The panel will again refer to this issue when reviewing Part 2 of the ESG, more particularly ESG 2.1 and ESG 2.2.

The panel finds that SKVC takes adequate measures to ensure the independency of experts. The panel understands the preference for international experts because of independency reasons, and

encourages SKVC to keep investing in its international network. This becomes all the more urgent when individual programme evaluation will be replaced by evaluations per field.

**Panel conclusion: fully compliant.**

### ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

> Standard:
> Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

**2012 External review**
Standard 2.8 System-wide analysis: substantially compliant.

*Recommendation: 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.*

**Evidence**
The SAR mentions the SKVC annual activity reports including summaries of evaluation results, thematic reviews, and articles (all by SKVC staff), as well as summarised overviews of study field programmes (by experts). The majority of reports listed in the SAR (pp.33-35) concern the evaluation of study programmes. As institutional evaluations started later the number of analytical reports is rather limited. The panel scrutinized two reports[14] presented by SKVC as being representative of the work done.

Both strategic plans make reference to thematic analyses. The *Strategic Plan 2017-2019* expresses SKVC's intention 'to develop analytical activities and provide a greater diversity of analyses' making use of the already collected data.  SKVC plans four analyses on a yearly basis. The SKVC management and staff discuss themes when setting the agenda for the upcoming year. The 2017 work plan lists topics, timeline, actors, budget and dissemination. Further details are given in an additional document[15] made available at the site visit. A procedure for a thematic analysis as a structured process is not in place.

A separate publication[16] funded by the EU contains SKVC's most recent thematic analyses  in both Lithuanian and English. Analytical reports are published on the website of the agency.[17] Outcomes of the analyses are also disseminated through newsletters, publications, seminars and meetings, making good use of mass media and SKVC's international network of quality assurance agencies. As an active participant in various ENQA working groups, SKVC contributes in the joint efforts to analyse and report on quality assurance issues. A most recent example is the publication: *Impact of Quality Assurance for Higher Education* (ENQA, 2016)[18].

**Analysis**
SKVC has clearly taken actions following the 2012 recommendations. The panel has seen ample proof of thematic analyses having become a key ingredient in the agency's work. Generating four in-depth analyses on a yearly basis, however, seems rather ambitious considering the investment even when

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[14] Higher Educations' External Evaluation Conclusions Publicity Overview (2016); Analysis of 2011-2015 External Review of Higher Education Institutions in Lithuania (2016).
[15] Regarding ESG 3.4 Thematic Analysis (February 2017)
[16] Collection of Higher Education Evaluation Overviews (2017).
[17] http://www.skvc.lt/default/en/quality-assurance/analysis
[18] http://www.enqa.eu/wpcontent/uploads/2016/05/Impact-WG-Final-Report.pdf

project funded. A well-defined structured process for the production and identification of topics of such reports might help in setting clear goals and standards. Also, the use of a template for reporting can be considered.

Upon perusal of two analyses, the panel found these were highly informative showing developments, good practice and recommendations. Also good reference is made to the developments in the EHEA. However, based on the evidence provided, the panel cannot qualify all reports presented in the SAR under this rubric as thematic analyses. With reference to the 2012 recommendation, the panel reiterates that annual reports in general miss the focus of a thematic analysis. Annual reports by nature are predominately descriptive, offering a broad overview of last year's activities and not necessarily dealing with one or two key issues.

In its mission and strategy, SKVC aims at contributing to the enhancement of the quality of higher education.  Sharing good practice in internal quality assurance and more generic higher education topics is one way of obtaining that goal; hence thematic analyses. The panel could not detect a direct link between the strategic plan(s) and the themes for analysis. Choices have not been made explicit. Topics seem to deal primarily with quality assurance matters and less with content-related issues in higher education. Inquiries into issues of concern with students, HEIs or the general public might be useful. Students, whom the panel met, for example, suggested students' assessment and teaching methods as interesting topics. This type of analysis would certainly appeal more to students compared to themes directly related to quality assurance. HEIs for instance look for good practice in strategic management. They are also interested in benchmarking reports across fields of study.

The panel also encourages the agency to make more use of the data available for a more in-depth analysis. A further investment in the upgrading of the database would be helpful, but funds are missing. In the SWOT analysis, the database is considered 'unreliable and inconvenient' (SAR, p. 71). The panel will return to this topic under ESGs 3.5 and 3.6.

Although dissemination activities take place in various forms, the relevance in the various contexts (programme, field, HEI, national and international) is not mentioned. Hence it remains unclear to what effect the outcomes of the analyses were disseminated. It would be desirable to have indicators showing efficiency of these activities. During the interviews, only few stakeholders, except for the ministry, were aware of the existence of such analyses and/or were able to give examples of their impact. It would help if target groups were clearly delineated in order to make sure the dissemination activity is useful.

Summarising the panel recognises that SKVC made progress since the 2012 review in the dissemination of the knowledge learned through its external quality assurance activities. Even so, the panel feels that thematic analyses need further attention in terms of procedures, topics, target audience and dissemination. The panel therefore concludes that SKVC is substantially compliant with the ESG standard on Thematic Analyses.

**Panel recommendation**
The agency should develop a procedure for the production of thematic analyses with the sole aim of contributing to the enhancement of the quality of higher education. Analyses need to focus on key issues relevant to a well-defined target audience. The agency might also want to reconsider the resources needed, both in human and financial terms, given the rather ambitious goals.

**Panel conclusion: substantially compliant.**

**ESG 3.5 Resources**

> Standard:
> Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.

**2012 External review**

Standard 3.4 Resources: fully compliant.

**2012 EQAR**

It should be addressed whether the financial arrangements guarantee the sustainability of SKVC's overall activity, including follow-up procedures and the publication of reports.

**Evidence**

SKVC is financed by the state budget of Lithuania and receives additional EU funds. The EU support is planned to be provided until 2021. Other funds are project based and therefore not structural. Activities abroad such as in Slovenia are fully covered by the applicant. SKVC is also subject to financial audits by state authorities. No deficiencies in any of these reviews have been identified.

The SKVC centre is located in Vilnius. Office space is paid for by the government; maintenance is paid for by SKVC. Since 2012, office space has been enlarged, and the general infrastructure and working places have been improved. Repairs of the additional spaces started at the end of 2016 and are scheduled to be completed by June 2017. SKVC also has plans for investments in modern conference equipment. The panel took a short tour of the facilities on the first day of the site visit.

In the period under review, the number of employees remained stable but the turnover is significant mainly due to the young age of employees (average of 33) seeking other opportunities (work, study, and personal aspirations). The high turnover certainly presents a challenge (SAR, p. 72). The panel also learned from the interviews with individual SKVC staff members that the two divisions responsible for programme and institutional evaluations work with little interaction. SKVC management clearly does not share that view and refers to several joint activities being part of daily routine.

An additional document[19] presented to the panel at the site visit, states that all SKVC activities pertaining to staff recruitment, training, promotion and etc. follow the provisions of civil service and the Labour code. These are also covered in the *Work Regulations* (in Lithuanian) and the *Quality Manual* of SKVC. Examples of such activities are thorough selection procedures for staff, competence based training plans for new and current staff members, annual evaluations and surveys of staff. In the trainings a variety of subjects is dealt with to develop competences in external evaluations (e.g. learning outcomes, the role of evaluation coordinator and report writing) and competences of a more general nature(e.g. team-building, stress management and motivation). Also, language courses are offered and literature on quality assurance is present. Often international experts will participate in these training sessions. A recent training involved quality assurance colleagues from the United Kingdom (QAA) and Norway (NOKUT).

Advance planning of workload ensures that the capacity needed for the tasks ahead is adequate. In recent years, the number of evaluations has decreased allowing SKVC to invest more time in supporting quality assurance activities such as analyses, international activities, drafting legal acts, etc. However, in the near future an increased volume of evaluations is expected leaving less room for other tasks. At the same time, SKVC sees trends within the higher education system in Lithuania, which will have an effect on SKVC as a quality assurance agency. HEIs may be encouraged to reduce the number

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[19] Regarding Staff Development (February 2017)

of programmes, resulting in less evaluation procedures, less SKVC work and less staff. Also, the next round of programme evaluation will be clustered in fields of study further reducing the workload.

In the 2012 external review of SKVC, concerns and uncertainties existed regarding the funding. Referring to this issue highlighted by EQAR, SKVC recognises the problem of sufficient funds for all its tasks. As mentioned before, a temporary reduced number of evaluations allowed SKVC to increase efforts and investments in other areas. More specifically EQAR marked out the follow-up procedures and the publication of reports. Also, SKVC sees the budget for translations as an area of attention; funds are clearly not enough to cover all expenses (SAR, p. 37). These issues will be discussed under ESG 2.3 and ESG 2.6.

Amongst its strengths, SKVC lists its staff being professional, familiar with project management, flexible and actively involved in international activities and recognised as such (SAR, p. 71). In the same SWOT analysis, four out of the six threats pertain to resources: a huge workload; long and bureaucratic personnel selection procedures due to the specificity of the public sector; a great dependency on EU financing; and insufficient funding from the state budget and limited possibilities to earn revenue. Also the database identified as a weakness is the direct result of lacking the necessary funds. A plan of action to deal with these risks was not presented.

**Analysis**

*Financial resources*
The panel looked in more detail into SKVC's funding and sustainability, also given EQAR's concern. The panel shares this concern as structural funds are decreasing and project funds are running out. It is regrettable that the wavering financial arrangements being recognised as a threat in the SWOT analysis are not addressed in the recently developed strategic plan or in any other policy document.

The panel discussed the agency's resources and financial sustainability with the ministry, the council and the SKVC management. The ministry recognizes the problem of cuts in the structural funds but expects substantial benefits, also financially, from reorganisations in higher education and its quality assurance system. Reducing the number of programmes, clustering programmes in study fields for evaluation purposes, further merging and/or closing down of HEIs, integrating programme and institutional evaluations, are just a few examples of a more efficient approach and a more resourceful use of funds. The general idea heard at the ministry is that restructuring the educational system will in the end reduce costs. The panel received the reassurance that the ministry will find a way to finance whatever quality assurance instruments are needed.

The council was also confident that the government will provide the necessary funds and that the problem will be solved eventually. Even so, the council considers the financial sustainability as a major concern. Again, a lot is expected from more efficiency in quality assurance procedures and the ministry's intention to reduce the number of HEIs and programmes. A last resort would be to ask HEIs to contribute in the financing of the quality assurance activities as is common in other countries.

The ministry already invited SKVC to take an active part in remodelling higher education in order to meet Lithuanian needs and international quality standards on the one hand, and to keep quality assurance affordable on the other hand. Also the panel encourages SKVC to continue discussions with the ministry about a structural state budget. It should be a top priority and a shared concern of the SKVC council and its management to ensure that sufficient structural funds are available for the agency's tasks with explicit reference to the SKVC's statute: 'The Centre shall be financed from the State Budget of the Republic of Lithuania' (article 37). Until so far neither the council nor the SKVC management has presented a financial plan to avert the imminent crisis. The panel urgently

recommends the council and the management to join forces and to take proper action. SKVC needs to evaluate its current financial situation, to develop realistic financial goals and to define priorities, to consider alternatives, to take well-considered conclusions and to act accordingly. This financial planning might have far-reaching consequences but it would help SKVC to at least guarantee the funding of its core activities including the continuous improvement of the agency's internal quality assurance. And it would certainly reinforce the agency's independency embodied in the function of the director as discussed under ESG 3.3.

*Human resources*

SKVC staff can be characterised as well qualified, young, flexible, and ambitious. Staff members display good knowledge of project management and have a wide experience within an international quality assurance context. Staff members whom the panel met during the site visit confirm their active involvement in a variety of quality assurance and supporting activities, including training sessions and (inter)national events. SKVC clearly invests in the training of its staff which is mainly project funded. SKVC's extensive international network is essential for staff development and offers a variety of opportunities. One topic the panel wants to suggest for future training is quality culture. It seems that not too many staff members are familiar with the concept; the same can be said of most SKVC's stakeholders. It seems that SKVC management and staff hold different views on the actual interaction between both quality assurance divisions. Even so, the panel encourages both divisions to keep working closely together and pool resources.

SKVC has difficulties in attracting senior staff and its efforts to reduce the high turnover have not been successful until so far. The agency deals with this phenomenon from a realistic point of view – young staff and hardly career opportunities – and takes proper measures to ensure continuation and consistency of performance. Such measures are a mentoring and internal training programme for new employees, informal teamwork, regular and varied training sessions, involvement in international activities, combined with a high sense of responsibility and loyalty.

During the interviews, stakeholders appeared to be satisfied about the expertise of the SKVC staff. The ministry commends SKVC for its know-how and experience, also in an international setting. Also the feedback after evaluation procedures received from HEIs and experts is favourable. If there is criticism, it relates to the rules and regulations, and not to the professional behaviour of staff.

A persistent problem for the agency, however, is the limited capacity and the 'huge' workload. At present, SKVC can just cope but not more than that. Also the ministry pointed out that SKVC is mainly dealing with quality assurance procedures and less with the enhancement of quality and the development of a quality culture.

Of course, SKVC makes good use of the EU project funds including staff capacity but this source will run dry in the near future. And these projects also have considerable demands in terms of deliverables, which in turn call for extra capacity. SKVC claims to be selective in the choice of projects, but two lists of projects show there are many[20]. Also SKVC's active involvement in the international network of quality assurance puts extra pressure on the small team. Even so, SKVC manages to obtain considerable EU sums to the benefit of higher education in Lithuania at large, and the agency in particular.

Summarising the panel finds that, although the current financial situation of SKVC suffices to carry out the basic work, the uncertain financial arrangements being recognised as a threat in the SWOT analysis are not adequately addressed. Also with reference to the shared concern about the agency's

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[20] SKVC Partnership Projects List (1997-2018); SKVC Projects Coordinated List (2001-2018).

sustainability already expressed in the 2012 external review and by EQAR the panel concludes that SKVC is substantially compliant with the ESG standard on Resources.

**Panel commendations**

The staff is SKVC's most valuable asset, and can be characterised as well-qualified, young, and flexible with a high sense of responsibility and loyalty.

SKVC is successful in raising substantial EU project funds and makes good use of its international network.

**Panel recommendation**

The panel recommends SKVC developing a financial plan as a joint effort of both council and management. This financial planning demands an analysis of the current financial situation, realistic financial goals and priorities, well-considered conclusions and a rigid implementation. This plan might have far-reaching consequences but it would help the agency to at least guarantee the funding of its core activities.

**Panel conclusion: substantially compliant.**

**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.

**2012 External review**

Standard 3.8 Accountability procedure: substantially compliant.

**2012 EQAR**

Issues related to the systematic collection and analysis by SKVC of both internal and external feedback should be addressed.

**Evidence**

As mentioned before, SKVC works with strategic plans, working plans and annual activity plans. All these plans are discussed in staff meetings before approval and put into practice. Annual activity reports, quarterly and annual financial reports are submitted to the ministry, and project activity reports are publicly available (in Lithuanian). Following the 2012 review, the internal quality assurance system was revised. In 2016, another revision started to ensure that SKVC's internal quality assurance processes are more integrated into the daily activities. Key words are 'more simple' and 'user friendly' (SAR, p. 95).

Leading principles are the 2015 ESG and the 2016 Law. SKVC organised several meetings with internal and external stakeholders to discuss new development in the EHEA, also with input of international experts. And SKVC staff participated in the 2016 EQUIP training for stakeholders on the consequences of the introduction of the 2015 ESG. The methodologies and principles for the different types of evaluation procedures have recently been updated following the 2015 ESG and the 2016 Law.

SKVC relies on a number of safeguards to guarantee that all those involved in quality assurance activities work according to strict quality standards of professionalism and integrity. Examples given in the SAR (p. 41) are selection of experts according to predefined criteria, and training and evaluation of these experts (see also ESG 2.4); selection and training of new employees (see also ESG 3.5); and familiarity with the phenomenon of diploma and accreditation mills. Documents underpinning these

safety measures are, for example, the SKVC's statute with reference to non-discriminating actions (Chapter III, Article 14.1), the declaration of conflict of interest with reference to the code of conduct (see also ESG 3.3), the aforementioned minutes of meetings of the council and the advisory bodies, and various training and information material.

To ensure consistency in the decision-making two evaluation commissions advise on the external reports. Upon their advice, the director takes the formal accreditation decision. The statues[21] of the Commission for Study Programme Evaluation[22] (evaluation and accreditation of current and new programmes) and the Commission of Higher Education Institutions' Reviews (evaluation and accreditation and licensing of HEIs) stipulate their function, organization and procedures. For more details, the panel refers to ESG 2.5.

In 2012, EQAR asked for a more systematic collection and analysis of both internal and external feedback. Following-up on this recommendation, SKVC created a feedback system providing systematic input from all relevant stakeholders in the evaluation processes. Electronic questionnaires are used for different types of procedures and different types of stakeholders, both external and internal. Also other possibilities are explored such as feedback sessions with experts and HEIs immediately after an institutional evaluation. Analysis of the results are the basis for improvement measures. Both HEIs and experts appreciate the feedback sessions, the results of which are visible in the revised methodologies and guidelines, and the evaluation tools. Training and briefing sessions have been improved on the basis of feedback as experts testified (e.g. differentiating between professional and academic bachelors, between colleges and universities; two-days training for student members; training seminars not only in Vilnius but also in the region). Other examples are the introduction of a mapping tool for experts and a list of mandatory annexes in the HEIs' self-evaluation report (SAR, p. 95).

Lastly, the SWOT also refers to some weaknesses related to its internal quality assurance processes in general, and its management system ('overformalised'), external communication (insufficiently active) and database (unreliable and inconvenient) in particular (SAR, p.71). SKVC recognizes that greater efforts are required to meet these challenges of improvement. The current manual, for example, is based on the internal quality system developed with external consultants according to ISO standards. An update of the manual is being prepared and should be available by the summer of 2017.

**Analysis**
Since the previous external review, SKVC has made considerable progress in a number of internal quality processes. The panel established that SKVC invests a lot in its internal quality assurance processes with a revision of its system in 2012 and another revision in 2016, following the 2015 ESG and the 2016 Law (see also ESG 2.2). Wanting to maintain high standards SKVC constantly reviews and improves its work. SKVC organizes an annual internal review session to consider all the feedback received, and takes appropriate action. Outcomes and follow-up activities are shared with stakeholders, for example by e-mail, as verified by the panel.

SKVC presents convincing evidence how the review and improvement of its activities work in practice. The SAR gives examples of effective evaluations resulting in improved procedures (p. 39). These reviews are based on both internal and external feedback. The panel examined this claim and found it justified. Also in various interviews, the panel learned that quality improvement is an on-going

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[21] Statute of the Study Programme Evaluation Commission (2010; revised 2011); Statute of the Higher Education Evaluation Commission (2010; revised 2011).

[22] Also referred to as Study Programme Evaluation Commission, and Higher Education Evaluation Commission.

concern and that SKVC follows-up on the feedback. Informal feedback is taken into account as confirmed by staff and external stakeholders. Referring to the 2012 outcomes of the external evaluation and EQAR's concern related to the feedback mechanisms the panel is confident this has been properly addressed. SKVC exerts itself in collecting feedback, formal and informal, internal and external, and puts a lot of effort in the analysis and follow-up. Based on the evidence presented the panel finds that the feedback loop operates.

The panel has no reason to doubt the professionalism or the integrity of the people involved in the agency's quality assurance activities. SKVC takes satisfactory measures to ensure that work is done in a professional and ethical manner. The extensive training of experts and (new) staff, the sets of documents for each procedure, the de-briefing sessions with internal and external stakeholders after each site visit are just a few examples in support of this assessment.

One point of attention is the role of the evaluation commissions in the decision-taken process. For an in-depth discussion and appraisal the panel refers to ESG 2.5.

**Panel commendation**
SKVC exerts itself in collecting feedback, formal and informal, internal and external, and puts a lot of effort in the analysis and follow-up.

**Panel conclusion: fully compliant.**


**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.

**2012 External review**
Standard 3.8 Accountability procedure: substantially compliant.

**Evidence**
SKVC undergoes periodic external evaluations and audits following both national (2016 Law and the agency's statute, Article 16.4) and international regulations (ENQA and EQAR). Following the positive outcomes of the 2012 review, SKVC became member of ENQA and was registered in EQAR. In 2014, a follow-up report was submitted.

Early 2016, SKVC started working on its application for the second external review coordinated by ENQA. A SAR was produced (November 2016), a site visit was organised (February 2017) and the review procedure is envisaged to be finalised in July 2017.

The 2012 review identified four major areas of improvement: feedback mechanism (ESG 3.6); follow-up activities (ESG 2.3); student involvement (ESG 2.4); reporting (ESG 2.6). Evidence regarding improvement measures and results are to be found under the respective standards in the report.

**Analysis**
With the participation of SKVC in two subsequent external reviews, the agency complies with the standard on the Cyclical External Review of Agencies.

Since the 2017 review will also acknowledge progress from the 2012 review, the aforementioned four areas of improvement and measures taken have been or will be dealt with explicitly when discussing the respective standards. With cross-referencing the panel hopes to avoid overlap in the report. It

suffices here to state that evidence shows that SKVC has adequately responded to the 2012 recommendations.

**Panel conclusion: fully compliant.**

## ESG PART 2: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

### 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.

**2012 External review**

Standard 2.1 Use of internal quality assurance procedures: substantially compliant.

*Recommendation: 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.*

**Evidence**

SKVC presents a mapping for the external evaluation of new and current programmes, HEIs and HEI's eligibility to offer higher education (SAR, pp. 46-48). A more detailed mapping was presented at the site visit. The mapping below is a summary with reference to sections in the methodology per activity and per ESG.

| Part 1. IQA Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European higher education area (ESG) | 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 methodology of **institutional review** demonstrating conformity to the ESG requirements | Clauses of the Guidelines for evaluation of the Application for a **license** to provide higher education and to conduct relevant activities demonstrating conformity to the ESG requirements |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1.1 Quality assurance policy** | *63.4; 64.1-3.* | 62.9-10; 63.1-4. | *8; 8.2.1; 8.2.8.* | *3.* |
| **1.2. Development and approval of study programmes** | *59.2-5; 60.2-4; 64.1; 64.2.* | 58.1-6; 59.3; 63.1-3; 63.5. | *8; 8.2.1; 8.2.9; 9; 9.1.4; 9.2.3.* | *3.* |
| **1.3. Student-oriented learning, education and evaluation** | *60.3; 63.2; 63.3; 63.4; 64.2.* | 59.4; 60.5; 62.2-3; 63.2; 62.5-6; 62.9-10 | *8; 8.2.9-10; 9; 9.2.3.* | *1.* |
| **1.4 Student admission, study process, recognition and issue of diplomas** | *63.1; 63.3; 64.1.* | 62.1-9; 63.6. | *8; 8.2.1; 9; 9.2.4; 9.2.7.* | *Evaluation form for new study programmes.* |
| **1.5 Lecturers** | *61.1-4; 60.5.* | 59.6; 60.1-6. | *8; 8.2.4; 9; 9.2.6.* | *2 and Evaluation form for new study programmes .* |
| **1.6 Study resources and support for students** | *61.1-2; 62.1; 62.2-4.* | 60.1-2; 61.1-4; 62.4-5. | *8; 8.2.1; 8.2.6-7.* | *4.*<br>*5.* |
| **1.7 Information management** | *64.1-3.* | 63.1-6; 62.7-8. | *8; 8.2.1; 8.2.8; 9; 9.1.3.* | *3.* |
| **1.8 Public information** | *11.3; 59.2; 63.1.*<br>*The Law on Research and Higher Education, Article 41, part 1 and 2 (2009);* | 58.1; 63.2; 63.6. | *8; 8.1.5; 9.2.9.* | *3.* |

| | *Article 46 part 3 (2016).* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic evaluation of study programmes** | *59.1-3; 60.5; 63.3; 64.1-3.* | *58.2-4; 59.6; 62.6; 62.8; 63.1-3; 63.5.* | *9; 9.2.3; 9.2.5.* | *3.* |
| **1.10 Periodic external quality assurance** | *The Law on Research and Higher Education, Article 42 (2009); Article 48 (2016).* | *The Law on Research and Higher Education, Article 42 (2009); Article 48 (2016).* | *8; 8.2.8; 10; 10.2.4; 11; 11.6.* | *All established HEIs are subject to the institutional review procedure* |

In the mapping, also reference is made to the 2016 Law (valid per 1 January 2017) indicating that accreditation of study fields will be performed at least once every seven years. Under the former 2009 Law, external evaluation of an individual programme would result in a programme accreditation at least once every six years. All stakeholders consider the shift from programme evaluation towards field evaluation as a major change in the quality assurance system.

The SAR relates that all methodologies have been adopted to the 2016 Law and the 2015 ESG. SKVC organised or participated in several meetings with stakeholders to introduce and discuss the new ESG. Also the challenges of implementation were debated. An example of such event is the meeting of the Lithuanian College Directors' Conference in 2016 (SAR, 48-49). At the site visit, HEIs appeared to be very well informed about the 2015 ESG and to embrace them as guiding principles. The panel will return to this topic under ESG 2.2.

HEIs and other stakeholders experience the external evaluations performed by SKVC as useful and relevant for the further enhancement of the quality of higher education in Lithuania. HEIs confirmed not all institutions and programmes have the same level of development in quality assurance. Differences between public and private HEIs are not apparent; colleges seem to be more flexible in adopting new ways of quality enhancement. During the site visit, however, the panel also learned that strategic management of HEIs in general is still poorly developed, and this has its consequences for the internal quality assurance systems within HEIs. The 2012 review also pointed this out as an area of concern. HEIs themselves would welcome a thematic analysis of the topic (see also ESG 3.4) to learn from each other and/or international experts.

Following the 2012 recommendation, SKVC has undertaken several supporting activities for HEIs including students, academics and quality assurance staff. Stakeholders confirmed that these consultations and training sessions have an enhancement led approach. Both SKVC staff and HEIs declare to benefit from these consulting activities in various ways: HEIs are better prepared for the evaluations; follow-up procedures are closely monitored; feedback is more easily given and SKVC can respond more directly; informal communication between parties is beneficial for an overall better understanding of the procedures. SKVC also managed to mobilise a rather informal network of quality assurance professionals within HEIs as suggested in the 2012 review.

**Analysis**
The panel confirms the direct link between internal (ESG Part 1) and external (ESG Part 2) quality assurance. The panel scrutinized the methodologies for all SKVC's quality assurance activities and found that all standards of Part 1 of the ESG are included. The detailed mapping (29 pp.) provided by SKVC proved to be very helpful in this respect, and gave a comprehensive overview of sections, subjects and underlying criteria for each activity separately. Evaluations abroad follow similar procedures for programmes and HEI, and are hence covered in the mapping.

The panel is also positive about the effect of the external evaluations and their apparent impact on the enhancement of the quality of higher education as testified by stakeholders. The panel encourages SKVC continuing the open dialogue with HEIs about quality assurance.

**Panel conclusion: fully compliant.**

**ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE**

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|---|
| Standard: <br> 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. |

**2012 External review**
Standard 2.2 Development of external quality assurance procedures: fully compliant.

Standard 2.4 Fit for purpose: substantially compliant.

*Recommendations:*

− *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. (ESG 2.2)*
− *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. (ESG 2.4)*

**2012 EQAR**
It should be addressed whether SKVC has detailed its decision-making process for accreditations and reviewed its practice in which accreditation decisions are taken by a single person (Director).

**Evidence**
As mentioned before, the quality assurance model is based on Lithuania legislation and the ESG. SKVC designed methodologies (legal frameworks) and principles (guidelines) for each quality assurance activity: evaluation of programmes and HEIs, also abroad, and licensing evaluations.

In the current quality assurance system, there is no direct link between programme and institutional evaluation and accreditation except for the new programmes. These programmes are subject to a simplified or a more detailed evaluation depending on the outcomes of the institutional accreditation. At the site visit, SKVC management explained that programme and institutional evaluations have different goals and different impact factors. At the same time, the ministry expressed the explicit wish of combing the two procedures (see also ESG 3.5). In this transitional situation, evaluations of study fields will replace the evaluation of individual programmes. The ministry expects that, when the internal quality assurance system of HEIs has proven to work adequately, HEIs in Lithuania will organise their own programme evaluations. Also HEIs favour a more integrated approach; some experience the 'burden' of quality control more than the benefits of quality enhancement given the number of procedures.

All SKVC quality assurance procedures have been developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders, and the SAR gives ample examples of stakeholders' involvement. This is mainly done through open discussions as part of a rigid consultation process (p. 49). SKVC recognizes that the consulting process can be time-consuming but this is inevitable. By now, regular contacts with stakeholders are established as testified at the site visit, by stakeholders in general and the ministry in particular.

Special reference is made in the SAR and the additional information made available at the site visit to the recent adjustments in the SKVC methodologies and various guidelines following the 2016 Law and the new ESG. Two examples: HEIs need to assure that studies are student-oriented[23], and that the information about the study programme is public, relevant and easily accessible[24]. As already mentioned, SKVC discussed the 2015 ESG with stakeholders at a number of occasions. In the meetings with the panel, stakeholders showed a great interest in the ESG and the new developments. When asked about the changes in the ESG, student-centred learning and follow-up procedures were the examples most often mentioned.

HEIs do not contribute financially to the external evaluation and accreditation process except for the production of the self-evaluation report and the facilitation of the site visit. It has been noted before that the self-evaluation reports are not always reflective (ESG 3.1) despite the much appreciated efforts of SKVC. Experts especially find that they receive too much factual information. Furthermore, the panel learned that additional details in the self-evaluation reports are required following the 2015 ESG. The panel also examined a kind of checklist for legal requirements[25] to be covered in the self-evaluation reports and the external evaluation.

HEIs are less critical about the administrative requirements. They value precise and clear instructions, and are most willing to deliver whatever is needed, if not more. Surveys show that they are less inclined to think in terms of bureaucracy. At the same time, HEIs shared their views with the panel on a more integrated approach of programme and institutional evaluation. HEIs also expect to profit in more than one way from the field evaluations as of 2018. Furthermore, HEIs referred to the so-called institutional accreditation without the self-accrediting power that normally comes with it. Some also mentioned the potential discrepancy between quality control and quality enhancement as most HEIs still struggle with management issues (e.g. weak leadership, immigration, cuts in the budget, and too many programmes for a diminishing student population).

Outcomes of external evaluations and the follow-up activities are either incorporated in the expert reports or published separately. All relevant information is available on the website of both SKVC and HEIs, as verified by the panel.

**Analysis**
With reference to the 2012 review, the panel finds progress has been made. The consulting process with stakeholders has been streamlined, their input has been taken into account when revising the methodologies, and the panel agrees with SKVC that a good understanding with the ministry in particular is crucial also in view of the expected changes in the quality assurance system. The updating of methodologies has cost considerably less time compared to passing new documents.

But evidence also shows that further action is called for. In the opinion of the panel, the risk of bureaucracy is still present and current practice in general jeopardises a balanced inter-relation

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[23] Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education (2016), Article 9.2.3.
[24] Methodology for Evaluation of Higher Education Study Programmes (2016), Article 63.6.
[25] Summary of Legal Requirements for Higher Education Study Programmes in the Republic of Lithuania (2016).

between quality assurance and quality enhancement. Based on the evidence provided (SAR, supporting documents, interviews, evaluation reports, etc.) the panel estimates that institutional evaluations are based on a peer-review and are primarily enhancement led. Programme evaluations, however, are less so. The panel also finds the missing link between institutional and programme evaluations both illogical and undesirable. The quality of a HEI defines the quality of the programme and vice versa; in higher education one cannot exist without the other. Also stakeholders have to deal with various documents which are alike and yet different for each type of evaluation procedure.

The panel urgently advises SKVC to take decisive steps and move from quality control towards a real peer-review with the purpose of quality improvement and a clear focus on priorities. This is particularly relevant for the evaluation of programmes. Also a more integrated approach of programme and institutional evaluations is desirable and feasible, even within the present legislation. All stakeholders the panel met at the site visit seemed to support this approach. The council explicitly expressed its concern related to quality control and an imminent bureaucracy. With joint efforts, it should be possible to revise the basic procedures and guidelines starting from HEIs' autonomy with the ultimate aim of quality enhancement. The various documents for each individual quality assurance activity show apparent overlap and redundancy, and border on bureaucracy. The panel feels that in a number of ways documents (simplification, integration, reduction, language etc.) can be made more user-friendly. SKVC also expressed this intention in the SAR (cf. ESG 3.6).

Lastly the panel considered EQAR's concern about one person (the director) taking the final accreditation decision. This particular issue has been properly addressed although the decision-making process in itself raises other questions. The panel will analyse this issue in more detail under ESG 2.5.

Summarising the panel finds that in many respects progress has been made since the 2012 review. However, the risk of bureaucratic procedures is still present and current practice in general jeopardises a balanced inter-relation between quality assurance and quality enhancement. The panel therefore concludes that SKVC is substantially compliant with the ESG standard on Designing Methodologies Fit for Purpose.

**Panel recommendation**
The panel recommends SKVC revising its methodologies starting from HEIs' full responsibility for the quality of their programmes. A move from quality control towards an enhancement led peer-review is required, also in support of the development of a quality culture. Furthermore, SKVC should take the initiative for a more integrated approach of programme and institutional evaluations. Further integration and simplification of the various procedures will also help reducing bureaucracy and making procedures more fit for purpose.

**Panel conclusion: substantially compliant.**


### ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

Standard:
External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include:
- a self-assessment or equivalent
- an external assessment normally including a site visit
- a report resulting from the external assessment
- a consistent follow-up

**2012 External review**
Standard 2.6 Follow-up procedures: partially compliant.

Standard 3.7 External quality assurance criteria and processed used by the agencies: substantially compliant.

*Recommendation: 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 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. (ESG 2.6)*

**Evidence**
As mentioned before under ESG 3.1, the SKVC methodologies and principles and/or guidelines are published on the agency's website and describe all steps in the external evaluation process: a self-evaluation report, an external evaluation including a site visit by independent experts, an evaluation report and a follow-up procedure. Since the 2012 review, SKVC has further specified this last step including a progress report and a visit for institutional reviews.

Previously under ESG 3.1 and ESG 2.2, the panel noted that stakeholders find the self-evaluation reports rather descriptive.  HEIs welcome the guidance and assistance offered by SKVC in the production of the reports but the results are still disappointing according to all concerned. Too factual, too many details, too many annexes, and above all lacking in analysis. SKVC claims that the quality of the reports has improved considerably by the end of the first cycle of institutional reviews; a rough estimate would be that one third meets the expectations.

Expert teams conduct a site visit after having scrutinised the documents and participate in training or briefing sessions organised by SKVC. The methodologies and principles and/or guidelines stipulate with whom the panel will meet. Members of the HEI community wishing to meet the panel have the opportunity to do so. These visits follow a pre-defined programme, which can be adjusted if needed. At the end of the visit, the expert team agrees on the outcomes of the external assessment, and relates the initial observations to the applicant. Both HEIs and experts expressed towards the panel their satisfaction about the open dialogue with a genuine peer-reviewed approach, especially in the institutional evaluations.

After the site visit, the expert teams draft an external evaluation report. SKVC offers a template for the various reports and screens the drafts before these are finalised. For more detailed information on reporting, the panel refers to ESG 2.4 and ESG 2.5.

Following the 2012 review, SKVC developed follow-up procedures for all quality assurance activities. Also the 2015 ESG had a positive effect on the further specifications. After an institutional review, SKVC organises a follow-up visit. HEIs find this very instructive. HEIs are required to present an improvement plan and/or to report on the progress made at programme level. HEIs publish the improvement plans following the external evaluations on their website; the SKVC places a link to the document next to the experts' report. Most HEIs recognise the added value of these follow-up requirements. Progress made since the last evaluation is always taken into consideration in the next

evaluation. In case of a negative programme evaluation, HEIs need to present a follow-up plan ensuring that the remaining students can graduate. Follow-up topics are regularly discussed during events in which all stakeholders or a target audience (e.g. quality assurance staff) participate; HEIs are also invited to present a topic. The panel scanned the programmes of some of these events (e.g. on leadership in 2016). An area of development put forward by the SKVC management is the involvement of students and employers in these follow-up activities.

In addition to recommendations for the HEI under review, reports at institutional level also contain recommendations more general in nature intended for Lithuanian authorities. As above-mentioned, the ministry is very much interested in the opinion of external experts on higher education in Lithuanian and considers their advice valuable for further developments. (cf. ESG 3.1)

Accreditation decisions as the formal outcomes of most external evaluations are posted on the SKVC website together with the experts' reports, as verified by the panel. Consistency of processes and outcomes is based on a multi-layered system of check-and-balances as will be explained under ESG 2.5.

**Analysis**

Under ESG 3.1, the panel already established that, whether in Lithuania or abroad, all evaluations (except for new programmes depending on the outcomes of the institutional evaluation) include a self-evaluation, an external evaluation, a panel report and a follow-up procedure. Relevant documents including outcomes (evaluations reports and accreditation decisions) are posted on the SKVC website.

SKVC is aware of the need of HEIs taking full responsibility for improvement measures. Also HEIs acknowledge that they are in the lead. Site visits are coordinated by SKVC staff and do so in good co-operation with HEIs.

Experts confirm to feel well prepared for participating in the external evaluations. And they are equally content about the final outcomes of the evaluations. Overall HEIs are satisfied with the competences of the experts and the quality of the reports. This was confirmed in the meetings with the panel; also the feedback after site visits is mostly positive. For a more detailed analysis and evaluation of both topics the panel refers to ESG 2.4 and 2.6. Also the issue of language and translations will be discussed under ESG 2.6. It suffices here to state that requirements for experts and reporting are more than adequate.

As a result of the 2012 recommendations, SKVC has clearly increased its efforts in developing appropriate and effective follow-up procedures and implementing activities as described above. After scrutiny of relevant documents (methodologies and principles, evaluation reports, follow-up reports, agendas of seminars and other events, etc.) and testimonies of stakeholders, the panel concludes that appropriate follow-up processes are in place ensuring that HEIs take proper action for continuous improvement. The panel advises SKVC to continue investing in the follow-up, especially at programme level.

With reference to the other 2012 concerns, the panel finds that the institutional reviews have an indisputable focus on the evaluation of HEIs resulting in an expert report with recommendations for follow-up actions. Given the stage of development of higher education in Lithuania, the panel fully understands the ministry's interest in experts' opinions following the institutional reviews.

**Panel conclusion: fully compliant.**

> Standard:
> External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

**2012 External review**

Standard 2.4 Processes fit for purpose: substantially compliant.

Standard 3.7 External quality assurance criteria and processed used by the agencies: substantially compliant.

*Recommendation: 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. (2005 ESG 2.4)*

**2012 EQAR**

It should be addressed whether SKVC has extended the involvement of students to all external review expert groups, including those working in English language.

**Evidence**

The SAR states that all external evaluations including applications to obtain license and reviews abroad are carried out by a team of independent experts. Experts are invited to evaluations in accordance with SKVC's procedure for expert selection[26]. This document sets the principles and processes for the selection and stipulates the special requirements for each type of evaluation.

The SKVC director decides on the composition of the expert team as proposed by the SKVC coordinator assigned for that particular evaluation procedure and having taken into account further advice of an informal SKVC group and the comments put forward by the HEI, if any. A procedure is in place if HEIs object to the proposed composition of the expert team; this procedure is regulated in the methodologies. On an annual basis, the agency received not more than three requests to replace experts. According to the SAR (p. 68), all requests were denied lacking sufficient evidence for conflict of interests or potential bias.

Experts participating in evaluations sign an impartiality and confidentiality declaration with reference to the code of conduct[27]. This code values ethics such as respect for all participants, objectivity, and cooperation. Also during the training of experts, SKVC emphasises the importance of ethical behaviour during the external evaluations.

All expert teams (except for new programme evaluations) involve academics, a student member and one social partner. Experts are drawn from the SKVC database with at present some 2 500 experts, both from Lithuania and abroad.[28] Experts in the database must comply with requirements listed in the procedure for expert selection. An SKVC group of staff members is responsible for the upkeep of the database. The panel viewed the call for experts and its specifics on the SKVC website.

Since the 2012 review, SKVC managed to interest more students and employers in participating as experts. This is mainly the result of separate training courses for these particular groups. In 2016, the SKVC databank holds amongst others some 150 potential student members and 80 social partners (SAR, p. 59) having participated in the SKVC training in 2012-2016. At the site visit, the panel learned

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[26] Description of Experts' Selection Procedure (2016).
[27] Expert's Declaration of Interests and a Promise Not to Disclose Confidential Information (2017).
[28] http://www.skvc.lt/default/en/quality-assurance/call-for-experts.

that attracting representatives from the labour market remains a challenge. They find the procedures time-consuming and the fees uninviting; they have no natural affinity with higher education and quality assurance; or have a personal interest in the HEI or programme/study field under review. In due time when study fields evaluation start, also the selection of independent local academics might pose a problem.

The 2016 Law determines that expert groups for institutional evaluations should be composed of both local and international experts; this is not the case for programme and licensing evaluations. Even so, figures show that progressively also experts from abroad participate in programme evaluations. In 2011, 73% of the programmes were evaluated by international expert teams; in 2015, this was 99.5%. The largest percentage of foreign experts involved in SKVC procedures is British (SAR, 57). International experts are also invited, when in Lithuania, to actively participate in SKVC events and to discuss new development in higher education and quality assurance, and to share good practice.

New programmes are evaluated by smaller teams of local experts including a student. Given the scope of this type of evaluation, employers are not represented. Sometimes, however, academics are practicing professionals, thus incorporating both perspectives.

Students confirm that especially international experts are well qualified to participate in the evaluations given their broad experience both in quality assurance and/or study field. On the downside: some international experts are less aware of the social and cultural aspects of higher education in Lithuania. Local experts testified assisting their international colleagues in understanding the Lithuanian context of the evaluation. And international experts praised the merging of two – the western and former Soviet – educational cultures and systems.

The agency undertakes several activities to train its expert teams in accordance with the stipulations in the methodology for each type of evaluation. At least one month before the site visit the experts receive the self-evaluation report together with an extensive information package. On the first day of the visit, SKVC organises an introductory training (except for experienced experts). This training covers the educational system, the legal regulations and requirements, the various steps in the evaluation process, the requirements for the evaluation reports, the decision-making process, and the follow-up procedures. The panel perused the training material which is continuously updated (e.g. 2015 ESG) and incorporate the feedback of experts (e.g. more attention for dual system). During the training also the expected behaviour of experts is considered. As above-mentioned students and employers receive additional training.

**Analysis**
SKVC finds the procedure for the selection and nomination of experts appropriate. The agency is fully responsible for the selection and there is no evidence of influence on the procedure. Experts are solely selected on the basis of their competences.

All relevant perspectives are represented in the expert teams. Efforts to involve more students and employers have been successful but the future also holds new challenges: the funding of international experts and the availability of independent local experts. The panel agrees with SKVC that the local community of employers and academics can be small (e.g. in the arts and medicine). Under ESG 3.3, the panel already mentioned that HEIs testified to prefer international experts not only for their expertise but also for their independency.

At the same time, HEIs confirmed to be satisfied with the competences of the teams irrespective of the nationality of the individual experts. Also experts themselves are content with the teams in which they participate; they appreciate the mix of new and experienced members, and of local and

international colleagues. Under ESG 2.2 and 2.3, the panel already noted that both HEIs and experts appreciate the peer-reviewed approach, especially in the institutional evaluations.

SKVC is very successful in attracting highly qualified experts including students from abroad as a direct result of its international networking activities. Stakeholders clearly appreciate their input. Fees for international experts, however, can be problematic if not covered by EU funded projects. This is especially challenging for programme evaluations, and should be part of the financial planning (ESG 3.5). Another concern the panel wants to share with SKVC is the number of international emeriti professors. HEIs value their experience but have a strong preference for active academics whom they consider as their true peers.

The panel established that all experts receive appropriate training. Exemption from intensive training is justified if experts are experienced; in that case, they are briefed before the actual site visit takes place. Training material shows that all relevant topics are properly dealt with. The panel appreciates that for each procedure experts are trained and/or briefed as a team. Experts confirmed that the first day together as a team is essential for a smooth process although sometimes students feel left out during the actual site visit. This would certainly be an issue for SKVC to follow-up on. Despite the intensive training, some experts find the evaluations a challenge because of the many documents to go through and the very strict and detailed legal requirements. This issue has also been discussed under previous ESGs (cf. 2.2 and 2.3) and refers back to the tendency towards bureaucracy. Experts, and not only social partners, also find the evaluation procedure including the training sessions time-consuming and demanding.

Later in this document, the panel will discuss the outcomes of the external evaluations performed by the expert teams. At this stage it suffices to state that the panel feels confident about the evaluation reports produced by the experts (ESG 2.6), and that SKVC could further support experts in applying criteria consistently (ESG 2.5).

In the interviews with the panel, stakeholders mentioned the dual system as a point of attention. This is particularly relevant for the colleges. Some international experts find they lack the know-how, HEIs feel experience with a binary system should be one of the requirements when composing an expert team, and SKVC is in the process of adjusting its processes following the stakeholders' feedback. This is a clear example pertaining to experts illustrating that the feedback loop works. Others examples are the regional training sessions for local experts and techniques for effective interviewing as part of the training.

Referring to the 2012 recommendation and EQAR's concern about the involvement of students, the panel concludes that SKVC has adequately addressed this issue. Students participate in all expert teams for all types of evaluations, whether in Lithuania or abroad. In case of language problems, SKVC engages English-speaking students from outside Lithuania. Student members told the panel they have mixed experiences about their actual involvement in the evaluation. Their active participation seems to depend largely on the chair of the team. SKVC could be more supportive in this respect.

**Panel commendations**
SKVC manages to engage highly qualified international experts including students in most evaluation procedures.

SKVC developed an intensive all-round training programme for experts and offers a specialised training session for each expert group, which is much appreciated by stakeholders.

**Panel conclusion: fully compliant.**

**ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES**

> Standard:
> Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

**2012 External review**

Standard 2.3 Criteria for decisions: fully compliant.

Standard 3.7 External quality assurance criteria and processed used by the agencies: substantially compliant.

**Evidence**

Formal decisions on programme and institutional level are based on Lithuanian legislation and the criteria to be found in the relevant SKVC methodologies and principles which are publicly available, as verified by the panel. The same procedures and criteria apply to Lithuanian HEIs offering or wanting to offer programmes abroad.

SKVC also grants programme accreditation based on evaluations conducted by other EQAR registered quality assurance agencies. In the period of 2010-2016, four HEIs made use of this possibility involving four agencies: AHPGS, EVALAG, ACQUIN (all three from Germany) and AVEPRO (Vatican). The agencies must apply similar procedures and use the SKVC criteria in their external evaluations. And in 2015, SKVC conducted an institutional review and three programme evaluations in Slovenia.

The panel examined the decision-making process in more detail given its impact, the important role of both advisory bodies and the earlier concern expressed by EQAR regarding the position of the director (see ESG 2.2). The SAR claims that the procedure ensures collegial consideration of decisions to ensure objectivity and validity. Every evaluation report by the expert team is reviewed by the SKVC coordinator, a draft is sent to the HEI to comment on factual errors, and after corrections, if applicable, the report is finalised. The report is then submitted to the programme or institution commission for consideration. Members of the commissions told the panel that also the self-evaluation report is sent for scrutiny. They also confirmed they meet once a month and decide on twenty to thirty evaluations per session. Representatives of HEIs and expert teams are usually present to give clarifications when needed. Also other experts can be invited to attend the meeting.

Upon 'approval' (SAR, p. 61) of the report by the commission concerned the SKVC director takes the formal decision. The statute says 'after examination the commission recommends the director to approve or reject the report' (Article 7). If the commission disagrees with the report – and this happens in 10% of the cases, the panel was told – the expert team is asked for elaboration after which the report is resubmitted for consideration. If the report is rejected a second time, an internal ad hoc committee of SKVC staff is formed. It advises the director, who takes the final decision.

Asked about the criteria for outcomes of the external evaluations, HEIs and experts found them clear and applied consistently. To ensure consistency in the outcomes of the external evaluations SKVC invests a lot in the training of its process coordinators and experts. Perusal of training material by the panel confirms that special attention is paid to the understanding of criteria and evidence-based conclusions. Experts named several layers to guarantee consistency of the evaluation: thorough selection procedures for experts; well-defined regulations, which are distributed beforehand; an intensive schooling for further clarification of the process and the criteria; SKVC staff being helpful in explaining any issues that might arise; and a full day follow-up meeting after each site visit.

Experts were less clear about how they decide on the grading for each criterion (from 1 to 4) when evaluating a programme. The final conclusion is the grand total of the scores. An institutional evaluation is either positive or negative. In most cases consensus is reached; cases with a minority position are very rare. Assessment rules as part of the SKVC methodology for evaluations were not presented.

The decision-making process by SKVC involves two advisory bodies as mentioned before under ESG 3.6: the Commission for Study Programme Evaluation (including new programmes, if applicable) and the Commission for Higher Education Institutions Review (including licensing) validate the experts' reports. According to their statues these commissions 'consider if the [...] reports submitted by the experts to the Centre are objective, comprehensive, [and] substantiated' (Article 6). The proceedings are stipulated in the aforementioned statues of both commissions.

Accreditation decisions are taken by the SKVC director; decisions to issue (or refuse) a license are made by the ministry. All decisions are taken upon advice of one of the two advisory commissions. When asked, the director confirmed to rely on both commissions for a sound judgment on the evaluation reports. The SWOT lists 'fast decision-making' amongst the strengths of the agency (SAR, p. 71). The decisions are posted on the SKVC website and in the State Register of Legal Acts[29].

The panel analysed some ten evaluation reports chosen at random covering both programme and institutional evaluation, in Lithuania and abroad. A report on licensing was not available as there has been no procedure in the period under review. For more evidence on reporting see ESG 2.6.

**Analysis**
The panel found all procedures in place allowing expert teams to evaluate programmes and HEIS according to explicit and pre-defined criteria. HEIs were also confident that the outcomes of the external evaluations were fair and evidence-based. Reports the panel scrutinised confirm this.

The minutes of meetings of both commissions read by the panel confirm the detailed and very thorough inspection of the evaluation reports. Minutes also include the final conclusion of the commission obtained by vote. Some members of the commission experience the work as very time-consuming as each member reads the self-evaluation report and evaluation report of at least five procedures per meeting. Asked about the necessity of reading the self-evaluation report, most members find this document to be the most interesting one offering them an inside view in the quality of the programme or HEI although they are critical about the analytic character of these reports. The members feel they have a good overall view on higher education and quality assurance given the representative composition of both commissions. A common framework of reference to approve or reject report is said to be based on joint experience.

Having heard the testimonies of stakeholders and having scrutinized the written evidence, the panel concludes that the decision-making process is complicated, costly and possibly biased. Commissions seem to go through the evaluation procedure again to ensure consistency in addition to the work done by the expert teams. The panel finds that the commissions should restrict themselves to a limited check of the equity and reliability of the outcomes of the evaluation, and leave the final decision to the director, not only in theory but also in practice. It would create clarity about responsibilities, ensure objectivity and save considerable time. As demonstrated above, many layers of consistency

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[29] In the SAR, also referred to as the Register of Legislation.

guarantee a valid outcome of the external evaluations. As such, this particular concern of EQAR under ESG 2.2 is adequately addressed.

The panel maintains that expert panels commissioned by SKVC need to be solely responsible for the evaluations reports, and should be trusted to produce reports with outcomes which are consistent and evidence-based. The quality of the reports discussed under ESG 2.6 endorses this claim. The panel therefore suggests improving the interpretation of the criteria in support of the experts' work. SKVC could further assist experts in providing them with more elaborate definitions for the scores. Each score could also be illustrated with a number of examples in its operationalisation. And the introduction of assessment rules can be helpful.

**Panel recommendations**
It is necessary to reinforce the trust in the outcomes of external evaluations performed by experts with the assistance of SKVC staff, and to recognise the director's responsibility in taking consistent and evidence-based decisions. As a consequence SKVC needs to reconsider the position of the advisory commissions in the decision-making process.

SKVC could further support experts in applying criteria consistently by providing definitions for the scores, illustrative examples and assessment rules. These should be included in the methodologies and guidelines.

The panel qualifies the criteria for outcomes as appropriate but the present decision-making process needs to be adjusted in full acknowledgment of both the outcomes of the external evaluation and the responsibility of the director.

**Panel conclusion: substantially compliant.**

**ESG 2.6 REPORTING**

Standard:
Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

**2012 External review**
Standard 2.5 Criteria for decisions: substantially compliant.

*Recommendations:*

- *The SKVC website should be reviewed so that reports are easily accessible to interested parties.*
- *Translation services should be used to 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.*

**2012 EQAR**
It should be addressed whether SKVC makes public all reports corresponding to applications of new programmes and new licensing requests.

**Evidence**
As mentioned before (ESG 2.5), the panel reviewed a selection of about ten experts' reports resulting from programme and institutional evaluations, in Lithuania and abroad, both in English and in Lithuanian.

Full evaluation reports of programme and institutional evaluations are posted and accessible on the SKVC website. The agency also publishes the accreditation decisions, as verified by the panel. In 2015, SKVC started publishing the full reports and decisions on new study programmes. HEIs also have an obligation to publish the reports of external evaluations. Every two years, SKVC reviews the publicity of evaluation results by HEIs. The panel read the most recent analysis (cf. ESG 3.4). One of the conclusions is that the 2015 results have remained quite similar to those of 2011 and 2013: the majority of HEIs publish the results either in full or partially; 30% has no information on its website about the outcomes of external evaluations.[30]

For reasons of consistency, the experts are provided with a template for the reports which slightly differs for each type of evaluation. They all cover the regular topics: context, procedure, evidence, analysis, conclusions, good practice and recommendations for follow-up. Not all templates include an executive summary. If need be, a minority opinion can be included as an annex to the report (only 1% of all evaluations since 2012; SAR, p. 64). The templates are amended at regular intervals following-up on the feedback of stakeholders (e.g. summary). Experts are said to make good use of the templates in all stages of the evaluation process. All templates were available for analysis at the site visit.

Drafting a report is a collective task of the expert team and part of the training. The SKVC coordinator offers assistance and sees to it that the report meets all requirements. Upon approval of the draft report HEIs are invited to comment on factual errors. After amendments, if any, the final report is sent to the evaluation commission for advice. This process of reporting is described in detail in the methodologies and principles and/or guidelines for each quality assurance activity.

Since evaluations, for the most part, are conducted by international expert teams, many reports are in English. The full reports of institutional evaluations are translated into Lithuanian; in the case of programme evaluations, only the summary, examples of good practice and the recommendations are translated. If the outcomes are negative, the full report is translated. The SAR states that the present budget is insufficient to cover the full translation into Lithuanian language (SAR, p. 37).

**Analysis**

Perusal of reports offered a good insight in the quality of the reports. The panel found the reports acceptable but not all were of the same quality and not all were based on the templates presented to the panel. Even so, the expert teams are well capable of producing reports with outcomes which are consistent and evidence-based. This conclusion also justifies the point of view regarding the role of the evaluation commissions in reviewing the reports as expressed by the panel under ESG 2.5.

Considering the 2012 recommendations and issues, the panel concludes that SKVC has addressed them adequately except for the translations. As indicated already under ESG 3.5, budgetary limits (also for translations) and financial sustainability need to be SKVC's priority in the years to come. As to the publication and accessibility of reports and external communication about the evaluation outcomes, the panel established that SKVC invests in both. The first results are visible (e.g. reports on new programmes are published since 2016); other activities are planned for but might be implemented with more urgency. Hence the panel's suggestions about communication under ESG 3.6.

**Panel conclusion: fully compliant.**

**ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS**

| Standard: |
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[30] Higher Educations' External Evaluation Conclusions Publicity Overview (2016).

> Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

**2012 External review**

Standard 2.7 Periodic reviews: fully compliant.

Standard 3.7 External quality assurance criteria and processes: substantially compliant.

**Evidence**

*Appeals*

The SKVC methodology for programme evaluation (Chapter V) states that if HEIs disagree with the formal accreditation decision, they can lodge an appeal with SKVC. The Programme Appeal Commission with representatives of HEIs, researchers, students and employers being the main stakeholders handles these appeals. Concurring with its statue[31], this SKVC commission can accede to the appeal, confirm it in part or reject it, and ask SKVC to act upon its decision accordingly. In the period 2013–2015, 37 appeals were received; ten were satisfied, and the others were found ungrounded. Statistics in the SAR show that the number of appeals is low (4%) and those appeals are lodged only when accreditation is not granted or only for three years. No appeals were lodged against breaches of evaluation procedures. The panel perused minutes of the commission meetings, and found them in accordance with the written and oral statements.

The procedure for appeals against formal accreditation decision on institutional level is established in a governmental resolution and covered in Chapter III of the SKVC procedures for the external evaluation of HEIs. The appeal is lodged with the minister, who forms an ad hoc committee to handle the appeal. In the period 2011–2015, SKVC evaluated 44 HEIs in total, four of which being dissatisfied with the outcomes lodged an appeal. Three appeals were rejected as ungrounded; one was satisfied partly (in this case, a new external evaluation of the appellant was organised).

The same appeals procedure with an ad hoc committee set up by the ministry applies for licensing decisions. This procedure is described in the guidelines for licensing (in Lithuanian), but has not been put into practice until so far.

The SKVC appeals procedure also includes the possibility of further appeal in compliance with the Law on Administrative Proceedings in Lithuania. The SAR mentions that SKVC has been respondent in five court cases filed by HEIs objecting to decisions. All appeals were rejected.

With reference to the 2012 review (cf. ESG 3.2), the panel has a special interest in SKVC's participation as a third party in a court case filed by a HEI about the legality of an evaluation decision based on the assessment of learning resources by MOSTA. The court satisfied the claim, and this led to an amendment of the government's resolution in 2014. As a result, MOSTA has no longer an impact on the accreditation decisions.

HEIs testified to be well informed about the appeals procedure, and find them satisfactory.

*Complaints*

The SKVC methodologies and principles for all quality assurance activities refer or stipulate appeals procedure, but there is no mentioning of complaints. The SAR only refers to HEIs' requests to replace experts in the review team, but the panel would not want to qualify these as complaints (see also ESG 2.4).

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[31] Statute of the Study Programme Appeal Commission (2008; revised 2015).

Asked about the complaints procedure, SKVC explained the aforementioned Law on Administrative Proceedings is applicable. Depending on the type of complaint, various procedures are in place going from informal problem solving by the SKVC staff to applying to the minister.

**Analysis**

The panel is satisfied about the appeals procedures available to HEIs for all external quality assurance activities. These procedures are well defined and easily accessible being part of the SKVC methodologies and principles. The panel also took good note of the limited number of appeals against formal decisions and of the fact that the majority was rejected. In the opinion of the panel, these findings confirm HEIs' trust in SKVC as an independent and professional quality assurance agency. It also shows that the appeals procedures are working adequately.

A complaints procedure in general terms is available following Lithuanian legislation, and is in theory also applicable to HEIs for quality assurance issues. Evidence presented confirms that complaints are properly dealt with but ad hoc. The panel misses a specific and clearly defined procedure for handling complaints about quality assurance processes. In the opinion of the panel, it is not very clear how HEIs can raise issues of concern and how SKVC handles these in a professional and consistent way. Information about the present complaints is not straightforward as it is part of a state Law. The panel finds this not helpful for a good understanding of the complaints procedure.

A complaints procedure in general terms is available to HEIs but it is not specified for quality assurance processes and not clearly documented. The panel therefore concludes that SKVC is substantially compliant with the ESG standard on Complaints and Appeals.

**Panel recommendation**

SKVC should supply a more specific complaints procedure as part of its quality assurance system. Information about the complaints procedure should be made easily accessible to HEIs.

**Panel conclusion: substantially compliant.**

# ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

The review panel wants to include in its report the following additional reflections and developmental recommendations which SKVC might wish to consider. These remarks have no impact on the evaluation of standards, and are therefore listed under a separate heading at the end of the report. In this way the panel's assessment of the individual standards are as clear as possible. At the same time, the panel does not want to miss the opportunity to share its views with SKVC in support of the further development of the agency.

## PEERS

The panel encourages SKVC to keep investing in its international network, also in order to engage independent experts from abroad. This becomes all the more urgent when individual programme evaluation will be replaced by evaluations per field. It will certainly limit the availability of independent local experts. The panel suggests creating an action plan to tackle this issue in a cost-effective way.

The selection of students, whom the experts will meet at the site visit, should be left to the expert team. Also the panel suggests reconsidering the engagement of PhD students as experts in SKVC procedures although this is common practice in some countries. The panel finds that PhD students cannot be considered as peers of bachelor or master students.

## INTERNAL QUALITY PROCESSES

The panel encourages the further development of some internal quality processes in terms of external communication, more flexible instruments and further digitalisation of the agency's activities and services.

The SKVC website needs to follow governmental regulations but the panel agrees with the stakeholders that it needs further improvement. External communication in general and students' needs in particular – both in content and form – would benefit from more focus. SKVC is encouraged to adjust its communication plan accordingly. Given the importance of the code of ethics, the panel also suggests posting the code as a separate document on the SKVC website. The panel acknowledges that the further digitalisation of the agency's activities and services is complex and costly. Nevertheless, SKVC should take up this challenge and develop a strategy and implementation plan. And although an update of the quality manual is being prepared the panel questions the functionality of this tool. SKVC might want to consider a toolbox with more flexible instruments for its internal quality assurance processes. This would also be more in line with the always-changing landscape of quality assurance and higher education.

## QUALITY CULTURE

The panel strongly suggests including the notion of quality culture in the discourse. The quality culture dimension in the present quality assurance system is still rather vague. In this context, the panel wants to reiterate the importance of HEIs' responsibility for the quality of their programmes. SKVC should also further invest in a more formal network of HEI staff concerned with internal quality assurance within their institutions.

At the start of the second cycle of external evaluations, the panel advises SKVC to refrain from offering additional assistance and to leave the initiative with HEIs; where it belongs. They could benefit, for instance, from exchanging good practice. The panel refers to its earlier appeal for SKVC to reconfirm HEIs in their autonomy and to diminish its advisory role substantially.

## REPORTING

In general, the panel advises SKVC to consider the outcomes of the EQArep project[32] including useful guidelines for summary reports and recommendation for comprehensive reports. In all reports read by the panel, some basic information was missing (e.g. functions and/or short résumés of experts, contact details of HEIs and SKVC, and details of some steps in the evaluation procedure). These can easily be added in the introductory chapters, also for future reference. Content-wise the panel observed that evidence presented was not always referring to the subject under review. This was particularly the case in the advisory reports for Slovenia. The reports on institutional reviews missed an executive summary. From the prospective of quality culture and SKVC's intention of reaching a broader, more general public, a summary as the opening chapter of the reports might tempt potential readers more easily. For this reason, the panel suggests moving the summary in the programme reports to the beginning of the document also because the summary will include the experts' final conclusions. For reasons of clarity and unambiguity, it might be advisable to separate the recommendations more general in nature intended for Lithuanian authorities from the external evaluation report, and list those in a separate document

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[32] *Transparency of European Higher Education through Public Quality Assurance Reports (EQArep). Final Report of the Project* (ENQA, 2014).

# CONCLUSION

In light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the review panel is satisfied that, in the performance of its functions, the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) in Vilnius, Lithuania, is in compliance with the ESG. The panel, therefore, recommends to the Board of ENQA that SKVC should have its membership in ENQA confirmed for a further period of five years.

Standards where full compliance has not been achieved are ESG 3.4, 3.5, 2.2, 2.5 and 2.7. These five standards are assessed as being substantially compliant. SKVC is recommended to take appropriate action, so far as it is empowered to do so, to achieve full compliance with these standards at the earliest opportunity.

## COMMENDATIONS

The panel commends SKVC for:

- ESG 3.1 – Establishing trust and involving international stakeholders, including council members and experts, in its governance and work;
- ESG 3.2 – Being recognized in its role as quality assurance agency and being fully supported by its stakeholders;
- ESG 3.5 – Its staff being the agency's most valuable asset;
- ESG 3.5 – Raising substantial EU project funds and making good use of its international network;
- ESG 3.6 – Collecting feedback, formal and informal, internal and external, and analysis and follow-up;
- ESG 2.4 – Engaging highly-qualified international experts including students in most evaluation procedures;
- ESG 2.4 – Intensive all-round training of experts and specialised training of each expert group.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The panel recommends SKVC on the following issues:

- ESG 3.4 – The agency should develop a procedure for the production of thematic analyses with the sole aim of contributing to the enhancement of the quality of higher education. Analyses need to focus on key issues relevant to a well-defined target audience. The agency might also want to reconsider the resources needed, both in human and financial terms, given the rather ambitious goals.
- ESG 3.5 – The panel recommends SKVC developing a financial plan as a joint effort of both council and management. This financial planning demands an analysis of the current financial situation, realistic financial goals and priorities, well-considered conclusions and a rigid implementation. This plan might have far-reaching consequences but it would help the agency to at least guarantee the funding of its core activities.
- ESG 2.2 – The panel recommends SKVC revising its methodologies starting from HEIs' full responsibility for the quality of their programmes. A move from quality control towards an enhancement led peer-review is required, also in support of the development of a quality culture. Furthermore, SKVC should take the initiative for a more integrated approach of programme and institutional evaluations. Further integration and simplification of the various procedures will also help reducing bureaucracy and making procedures more fit for purpose.
- ESG 2.5 – It is necessary to reinforce the trust in the outcomes of external evaluations performed by experts with the assistance of SKVC staff, and to recognise the director's responsibility in taking

consistent and evidence-based decisions. As a consequence, SKVC needs to reconsider the position of the advisory commissions in the decision-making process.

- ESG 2.5 – SKVC could further support experts in applying criteria consistently by providing definitions for the scores, illustrative examples and assessment rules. These should be included in the methodologies and guidelines.

- ESG 2.7 – SKVC should supply a more specific complaints procedure as part of its quality assurance system. Information about the complaints procedure should be made easily accessible to HEIs.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The panel makes additional suggestions which SKVC may wish to consider when reflecting on its further development. These reflections and developmental recommendations concern the availability and the selection of peers, a number of internal quality processes, the notion of quality culture, and some reporting issues.

# ANNEXES

## Annex 1. 2012 and 2017 external reviews: a comparative overview of the findings

| ENQA Criterion/ESG | 2012 review | | 2017 review | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Level of compliance | Recommendations | Level of compliance | Recommendations |
| **ESG 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance (formerly ESG 2.1)** | **Substantially compliant** | 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. | **Fully compliant** | |
| **ESG 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose (formerly ESG 2.2 and ESG 2.4)** | **ESG 2.2 Fully compliant** <br><br> **ESG 2.4 Substantially compliant** | ESG 2.2 - 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. <br> ESG 2.4 <br> - 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. <br> - 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. | **Substantially compliant** | The panel recommends SKVC revising its methodologies starting from HEIs full responsibility for the quality of their programmes. A move from quality control towards an enhancement led peer-review is required, also in support of the development of a quality culture. Furthermore, SKVC should take the initiative for a more integrated approach of programme and institutional evaluations. Further integration and simplification of the various procedures will also help reducing bureaucracy and making procedures more fit for purpose. |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES (FORMERLY ESG 2.6 AND 3.7) | ESG 2.6 Partially compliant ESG 3.7 Substantially compliant | ESG 2.6 - 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 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. | Fully compliant | |
| ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS (FORMERLY ESG 2.4 AND 3.7) | Substantially compliant | ESG 2.4 – 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. | Fully compliant | |
| ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES (FORMERLY ESG 2.3 AND 3.7) | ESG 2.3 Partially compliant ESG 3.7 Fully compliant | | Substantially compliant | It is necessary to reinforce the trust in the outcomes of external evaluations performed by experts with the assistance of SKVC staff, and to recognise the director's responsibility in taking consistent and evidence-based decisions. As a consequence, SKVC needs to reconsider the position of the advisory commissions in the decision-making process.  SKVC could further support experts in applying criteria consistently by providing definitions for the scores, illustrative examples and assessment rules. These should be included in the methodologies and guidelines. |
| ESG 2.6 REPORTING (FORMERLY ESG 2.5) | Substantially compliant | The SKVC website should be reviewed so that reports are easily accessible to interested parties. Translation services should be used to 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. | Fully compliant | |
| ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS (FORMERLY ESG 2.7 AND 3.7 [GUIDELINE]) | ESG 2.7 Fully compliant | | Substantially compliant | SKVC should supply a more specific complaints procedure as part of its quality assurance system. Information about the complaints procedure should be made easily accessible to HEIs. |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **ESG 3.7 Substantially compliant** | | | |
| **3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE (FORMERLY ESG 3.1, 3.3, AND 3.5)** | **ESG 3.1 Substantially compliant ESG 3.3 & 3.5 fully compliant** | See table above. | **Fully compliant** | |
| **3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS (FORMERLY ESG 3.2)** | **Fully compliant** | | **Fully compliant** | |
| **3.3 INDEPENDENCE (FORMERLY ESG 3.6)** | **Fully compliant** | 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. | **Fully compliant** | |
| **3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS (FORMERLY ESG 2.8)** | **Substantially compliant** | 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. | **Substantially compliant** | The agency should develop a procedure for the production of thematic analyses with the sole aim of contributing to the enhancement of the quality of higher education. Analyses need to focus on key issues relevant to a well-defined target audience. The agency might also want to reconsider the resources needed, both in human and financial terms, given the rather ambitious goals. |
| **3.5 RESOURCES (FORMERLY ESG 3.4)** | **Fully compliant** | | **Substantially compliant** | The panel recommends SKVC developing a financial plan as a joint effort of both council and management. This financial planning demands an analysis of the current financial situation, realistic financial goals and priorities, well-considered conclusions and a rigid implementation. This plan might have far-reaching consequences but it would help the agency to at least guarantee the funding of its core activities. |
| **3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT (FORMERLY ESG 3.8)** | **Substantially compliant** | | **Fully compliant** | |
| **3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES (FORMERLY ESG 3.8 [GUIDELINE])** | **Substantially compliant** | | **Fully compliant** | |

**2ⁿᵈ ENQA Review of SKVC**

**Programme of the site visit**

**21–24 February 2017**

**Vilnius, Lithuania**

| DAY 1 – TUESDAY 21 FEBRUARY 2017 | | |
|---|---|---|
| **TIMING** | **MEETING** | **ATTENDEES** |
| 14.00 – 16.00 (120') | Panel meeting: kick-off review and preparations for day 2 (*closed meeting*) | Review Panel:<br>• <u>Dr Jacques Lanarès</u>, Vice Rector for Quality, HR and Development of Teaching, Professor in the Faculty of Social & Political Sciences, University of Lausanne, Switzerland – CHAIR<br>• <u>Ms Michèle Wera</u>, Policy Advisor, Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie (NVAO), the Netherlands – SECRETARY<br>• <u>Dr Saulius Vengris</u>, Vice-Rector for Strategic Affairs, Vilnius Academy of Fine Arts, Lithuania<br>• <u>Ms Marija Vasilevska</u>, Master's student, Faculty of Law Iustinianus Primus, Skopje, Macedonia<br>ENQA review coordinator – Ms Anaïs Gourdin |
| 16.00 – 17.00 (60') | Introduction to the Agency.<br>Venue: A. Goštauto g. 12, Vilnius. | A short tour of the premises.<br>Presentation about the HE and QA system in which SKVC operates by:<br>• Ms Nora Skaburskienė, Director<br>• Ms Aurelija Valeikienė, Deputy Director<br>• Mr Almantas Šerpatauskas, Head of Study Evaluation Division |
| 17.00 – 19.00 (120') | Panel meeting continued (*closed meeting*) | |
| 19.30 | Dinner (*panel only*) | |

| TIMING | MEETING | ATTENDEES |
|---|---|---|
| **DAY 2 – WEDNESDAY 22 FEBRUARY 2017** | | |
| 08.30 – 09.15 (45') | Session 1 – Director | Ms Nora Skaburskienė, Director |
| 09.30 – 10.15 (45') | Session 2 – Council of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education | <ul><li>Prof. dr Renaldas Jurkevičius, Chair of Council, Lithuanian University of Health Sciences (member delegated by the Lithuanian University Rectors' Conference)</li><li>Prof. dr Viktor Senčila, Vice-Chair of the Council, Lithuanian Maritime Academy (member delegated by the Conference of Directors of Lithuanian Colleges of Higher Education)</li><li>Prof. dr Jūras Banys, Department of Radiophysics, Vilnius University (member delegated by the Government)</li><li>Mr. Arminas Varanauskas, Director of Knowledge Economy Forum (member delegated by the Knowledge Economy Forum (non-profit, representing research, innovation and education areas)</li><li>Prof. dr Gediminas Vitkus, Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Vilnius University (member delegated by the Lithuanian Research Council and the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences)</li></ul> |
| 10.30 – 11.15 (45') | Session 3 – Team responsible for preparation of the self-assessment report (SAR group) | <ul><li>Ms Aurelija Valeikienė, Deputy Director (self-evaluation team leader)</li><li>Mr Almantas Šerpatauskas, Head of Study Evaluation Division</li><li>Ms Aušra Leskauskaitė, Study Evaluation Division</li><li>Ms Rima Žilinskaitė, Deputy Head of Qualifications Assessment Division</li></ul> |
| 11.30 – 12.30 (60') | Session 4 – Senior management *(translation will be provided)* | <ul><li>Ms Ieva Vaiciukevičienė, Head of Legal and General Affairs Division</li><li>Ms Elžbieta Kozlovska, Human Resources Manager</li><li>Ms Birutė Vaitkutė, Public Relations Manager</li><li>Mr Tomas Vainoras, Head of Finance Division</li></ul> |
| 12.30 – 13.30 (60') | Panel meeting during lunch (*closed meeting*) | |
| 13.30 – 14.15 (45') | Session 5 – Advisory bodies | <ul><li>Mr Linas Leonas, Deputy Head of Commission for Study Programme Evaluation (Lithuanian University of Health Sciences)</li><li>Ms. Rita Liepuonienė, Member of Commission for Study Programme Evaluation (Head of Studies Department of Vilniaus kolegija/University of Applied Sciences)</li><li>Prof. Habil. dr. Alfredas Račkauskas, Head of Commission for Study Programme Evaluation (Head of Department of Econometric Analysis, Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics, Vilnius University)</li><li>Dr Nijolė Zinkevičienė, Member of Commission of Higher Education Institutions' Review (Kauno kolegija/University of Applied Sciences)</li></ul> |
| 14.30 – 15.30 (60') | Session 6 – Study Programme Evaluation Division | <ul><li>Ms Kristina Maldonienė, Evaluation Coordinator</li><li>Ms Birutė Noreikaitė, Evaluation Coordinator</li><li>Ms Rasa Penkauskienė, Evaluation Coordinator</li><li>Mr Pranas Stankus, Evaluation Coordinator</li><li>Dr Ina Marija Šeščilienė, Evaluation Coordinator</li></ul> |

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| 16.00 – 17.00 (60') | Session 7 – Institutional Review Division | • Ms Nora Skaburskienė, Director, former Head of Institutional Review Division<br>• Ms Kornelija Bukantaitė, Evaluation Coordinator |
|---|---|---|
| 17.00 – 19.00 (120') | Panel meeting continued: wrap-up and preparations for day 3 (*closed meeting*) | |
| 19.30 | Dinner (*panel only*) | |

| DAY 3 – THURSDAY 23 FEBRUARY 2017 | | |
|---|---|---|
| **TIMING** | **MEETING** | **ATTENDEES** |
| 08.45 – 09.30 (45') | Session 8 – Ministry of Education and Science. Venue: A. Volano g.7, Vilnius. | • <u>Dr Giedrius Viliūnas</u>, Vice-Minister<br>• <u>Mr Tomas Daukantas</u>, Chancellor of the Ministry<br>• <u>Dr Albertas Žalys</u>, Director, Department of Higher Education, Science and Technology (SKVC Council member)<br>• <u>Ms Giedrė Pačėsienė</u>, Department of Higher Education, Science and Technology, Division of Higher Education Studies |
| 10.15 – 11.00 (45') | Session 9 – Higher education institutions (universities) | • <u>Dr Renata Bilbokaitė</u>, Šiauliai University (public university, located in Šiauliai) Director of Strategic and Quality Management Unit<br>• <u>Dr Valdas Jaskūnas</u>, Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs, Vilnius University – (public university, located in Vilnius) [former member of Commission for Study Programme Evaluation]<br>• <u>Dr, Nerijus Masiulis</u>, Dean of the Faculty of Sport Biomedicine, Lithuanian Sports University (public university, located in Kaunas)<br>• <u>Dr. Alvidas Šarlauskas</u>, Vice-Dean, International Relations and Study Centre, Lithuanian University of Health Sciences (public university, located in Kaunas); also Head of International Relations Group under the Lithuanian Conference of University Rectors<br>• <u>Dr Jurgita Vizgirdaitė</u>, Head of Department of Study Quality Assurance and Development, Kaunas University of Technology (public university, located in Kaunas) |
| 11.15 – 12.00 (45') | Session 10 – Higher education institutions (colleges) | • <u>Ms Skaistė Buivytė</u>, Quality Management, Šiauliai State College (public, located in Šiauliai)<br>• <u>Dr Nijolė Galdikienė</u>, Deputy Director for Strategic Development, Klaipėdos valstybinė kolegija / State University of Applied Sciences (public, located in Klaipėda)<br>• <u>Ms Aliona Sinicienė</u>, Deputy Rector for Academic Affairs, Utenos kolegija / University of Applied Sciences (public, located in Utena)<br>• <u>Ms Inga Stravinskienė,</u> Head of office of Strategic Planning and Study Quality Management (Kauno kolegija/University of Applied Sciences, public, located in Kaunas)<br>• <u>Ms Eugenija Vagnerienė</u>, Director of A. Graičiūnas School of Management (private, located in Kaunas)<br>• <u>Mr Nerijus Varnas</u>, Director of Kaunas University of Applied Engineering Sciences (public, located in Kaunas) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 12.15 – 13.15 (60') | Session 11 – Students | • <u>Mr. Paulius Baltokas</u>, President of Lithuanian Students Union, student at Vytautas Magnus University (Member of SKVC Council)<br>• <u>Mr Gabrielius Jakutis</u>, medicine student at Vilnius University (member of review panels of study programmes)<br>• <u>Ms Laura Jonušaitė</u>, philology and public administration student at Mykolas Romeris University (member of review teams both for study programmes and institutions)<br>• <u>Mr Rimvydas Labanauskis</u>, PhD student of economics at Vilnius Gediminas Technical University (member of review teams both for study programmes and institutions)<br>• <u>Mr Benas Gabrielis Urbonavičius</u>, PhD student of material engineering at Kaunas University of Technology (member of review teams for study programmes, speaker)<br>• <u>Mr Andrius Zalitis</u>, Vice-President of Lithuanian Students Union, law student at Mykolas Romeris University (member of Commission for Appeals against Study programmes Evaluation, member of institutional review teams, speaker) |
| 13.15 – 14.15 (60') | Panel meeting during lunch (*closed meeting*) | |
| 14.15 – 15.00 (45') | Session 12 – Experts (local) | • <u>Ms Jolanta Bareikienė</u>, Kauno kolegija/ University of Applied Sciences, (member of review teams both for study programmes and institutions)<br>• <u>Assoc. Prof. Dr. Aurelija Blaževičienė</u>, Lithuanian University of Health Sciences (participated in study programme evaluations)<br>• <u>Assoc. Prof. Dr Vitalija Gražienė</u>, Vilnius Academy of Arts, Vilniaus kolegija / University of Applied Sciences (participated in drafting subject benchmark statement, programme evaluations)<br>• <u>Dr Ivo Matzer</u>, CEO, ISM University of Management and Economics (member of institutional reviews)<br>• <u>Dr Natalija Norvilė</u>, lecturer of psychology of Mykolas Romeris University and business consultant at Addelse (participated in study programme evaluations)<br>• <u>Dr Milda Žukauskienė</u>, Vilniaus kolegija/University of Applied Sciences, (participated in drafting subject benchmark statement, programme evaluations) |
| 15.15 – 16.00 (45') | Session 13 – Experts (international) by <u>SKYPE</u> | • <u>Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c.  Andreas Knorr</u>, Chair of Economics, Economic and Transport Policy, German University of Administrative Sciences Speyer, Germany (member of review teams both for study programmes and HEIs)<br>• <u>Prof. Dr. jur. Jürgen Kohler</u>, former Rector of Greifswald University (participated in study programme evaluations and institutional reviews)<br>• <u>Prof Frank McMahon</u>, Former Director of Academic Affairs for Dublin Institute of Technology and former chair of the Irish Higher Education Quality Network, Ireland (member of review teams both for study programmes and institutions)<br>• <u>Assoc. Prof. Dr Trine Johansen Meza</u>, Head, Department of Health Sciences, Kristiania University College, Norway (member of study programme evaluations) |

| 16.15 – 16.45 (30') | Session 14 – Labour market | • Ms Danguolė Kiznienė, Deputy Director, J. Basanavičius Progymanasium (Vilnius), President of US-LT Alumni Association (member of study programme evaluation teams)<br>• Mr. Simonas Razminas, Head of Quality, "Adform" (member of study programme evaluation teams)<br>• Dr. Šarūnas Zigmantas, Head of Quality Control at TEVA SICOR BIOTECH (took part in drafting of a subject benchmark statement; member of ex-ante and ex-post study programme evaluation teams, member of Commission of Higher Education Institutions' Review)<br>• Dr Stasys Švagždys, Director of "Educo Lt" (member of review teams both for study programmes and institutions, member of Commission for Study Programme Evaluation) |
|---|---|---|
| 17.00 – 19.00 (120') | Panel meeting continued: wrap-up, preparations for day 4 and provisional conclusions (*closed meeting*) | |
| 20.00 | Dinner (*panel only*) | |

| DAY 4 – FRIDAY 24 FEBRUARY 2017 | | |
|---|---|---|
| TIMING | MEETING | ATTENDEES |
| 09.00 – 10.00 (60') | Panel meeting: final issues to clarify (*closed meeting*) | |
| 10.00 – 11.00 (60') | Session 15 – Director | Meeting to clarify any pending issues.<br>Ms Nora Skaburskienė, Director |
| 11.00 – 13.00 (120') | Final panel meeting including lunch (*closed meeting*) | |
| 13.00 – 14.00 (60') | Final de-briefing meeting with SKVC about the panel's preliminary findings | • Ms Nora Skaburskienė, Director<br>• Ms Aurelija Valeikienė, Deputy Director<br>• Mr Almantas Šerpatauskas, Head of Study Evaluation Division<br>• Ms Ieva Vaiciukevičienė, Head of Legal and General Affairs Division<br>• Ms Rasa Penkauskienė, Study Evaluation Division<br>• Ms Aušra Leskauskaitė, Study Evaluation Division |

Note: all meetings took place at SKVC premises, A. Goštauto g. 12, Vilnius; except the meeting with Ministry of Education and Research representatives, A. Volano g. 7, Vilnius.

External review of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC)
**TERMS OF REFERENCE**
2016

**1. Background and Context**

The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) is an independent state institution established by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania in January 1995. SKVC implements the national policy in research and higher education within its remit and contributes to the harmonisation of the Lithuanian higher education system with the principles of the European Higher Education Area.

The main objectives of SKVC are to promote the quality of activities of higher education institutions and to contribute to creation of favourable conditions for the free movement of persons. SKVC is the only external quality assurance agency responsible for all types of higher education institutions in Lithuania (state and private, university type and college of higher education type). SKVC also acts as a local ENIC/NARIC office carrying out academic recognition of foreign credentials and providing information on higher education systems and qualifications recognition.

This is a second external review of SKVC as external quality assurance agency.

SKVC has been a full member of ENQA since October 2012 and is applying for renewal of European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) membership. SKVC has been listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) since December 2012 and is applying for renewal of EQAR listing.

SKVC is also a full member of INQAAHE (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education) since 1997 and founding member of CEENQA Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education) [2000].

The website of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education is available (in Lithuanian and English) at: http://www.skvc.lt/.

**2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation**

This review, will evaluate the way in which and to what extent SKVC fulfils the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG-2015)*.

Consequently, the review will also provide information to the ENQA Board to aid its consideration of whether membership of SKVC should be reconfirmed. The review panel is not expected, however, to make any judgements as regards granting membership.

This review is meant to provide information enabling EQAR Register Committee to make a decision on renewal of SKVC listing in EQAR.

**2.1 Activities of SKVC within the scope of the ESG**

In order for SKVC to apply for ENQA membership and for registration in EQAR, this review will analyse all activities that SKVC considers to be within the scope of the ESG, i.e. study programme evaluations and accreditations, evaluations and/or accreditation of higher education institutions. This is regardless of whether these activities are carried out within Lithuania or within other EHEA countries, and whether they are obligatory or voluntary.

**3. The Review Process**

The process is designed in the light of the *Guidelines for external reviews of quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area*.

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:
- Formulation of the Terms of Reference and protocol for the review;
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel;
- Self-assessment by SKVC including the preparation of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to SKVC;
- Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report by the review panel;
- Scrutiny of the final evaluation report by the ENQA Review Committee;
- Analysis of the scrutiny by the ENQA Board and their decision regarding ENQA membership;
- Follow-up of the panel's and/or ENQA Board's recommendations by the agency, including a voluntary follow-up visit.

**3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review team members**

The review panel consists of not less than four members: one or two quality assurance experts, an academic employed by a higher education institution, student member, including at least one expert with good knowledge of Lithuanian higher education system and Lithuanian language. One of the members will serve as the chair of the review panel, and another member as a review secretary. Two of the reviewers are nominated by the ENQA Board on the basis of proposals submitted to ENQA by the member national agencies. The third external reviewer is drawn from a nomination provided by the European University Association (EUA) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE). The nomination of the student member comes from the European Students' Union (ESU).

In addition to the four members, the panel may be supported by the ENQA Secretariat review coordinator who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA expectations are met throughout the process. The ENQA staff member will not be the Secretary of the review and will not participate in the discussions during the site visit interviews.

Current members of the ENQA Board and EQAR Register Committee are not eligible to serve as reviewers.

SKVC is expected to receive the list of suggested experts with their respective curriculum vitae to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The experts will have to sign a non-conflict of interest statement as regards the SKVC review.

**3.2 Self-assessment by SKVC, including the preparation of a self-assessment report**

SKVC is responsible for the execution and organisation of its own self-assessment process and shall take into account the following guidance:

– Self-assessment is organised as a project with a clearly defined schedule and includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;

– The self-assessment report is broken down by the topics of the evaluation and is expected to contain, among others: a brief description of the national HE and QA system; background description of the current situation of the Agency; an analysis and appraisal of the current situation; proposals for improvement and measures already planned; a SWOT analysis; each criterion (ESG part II and III) addressed individually. All agency's QA activities (whether within their national jurisdiction or outside of it, and whether obligatory or voluntary) will be described and their compliance with the ESG analysed.

– The report is well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which SKVC fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the ESG and thus the requirements of ENQA membership.

– The self-assessment report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat who has 4 weeks to pre-scrutinise it before forwarding the report to the panel of experts. The purpose of the pre-scrutiny is to ensure that the self-assessment report is satisfactory for the consideration of the panel. The Secretariat will not judge the content of information itself but whether the necessary information, as stated in the ENQA Guidelines for External Review of Quality Assurance Agencies, is present. As this is the second review, the agency is expected to enlist the recommendations provided in the previous review and to outline actions taken to meet these recommendations. In case the self-assessment report does not contain the necessary information and fails to respect the requested form and content, the ENQA Secretariat reserves the right to reject the report and ask for a revised version within 4 weeks.

– The report is submitted to the review panel a minimum of six weeks prior to the site visit.

**3.3 A Site Visit by the Review Panel**

SKVC will draw up a draft proposal of the schedule for the site visit to be submitted to the review panel at least two months before the planned dates of the visit. The schedule includes an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review panel during the site visit, the duration of which is 2,5 days. The approved schedule shall be given to SKVC at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews. A limited number of interviews might be conducted by connecting on-line.

The review panel will be assisted by SKVC in arriving in Vilnius, Lithuania.

The site visit will close with an oral presentation and discussion of the major issues of the evaluation between the review panel and SKVC.

**3.4 Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report**

On the basis of the review panel's findings, the review secretary will draft the report in consultation with the review panel. The report will take into account the purpose and scope of the evaluation as defined under articles 2 and 2.1. It will also provide a clear rationale for its findings with regards to each ESG standard. A draft will be first submitted to the ENQA review coordinator who will check the report for consistency, clarity and language and it will be then submitted to SKVC within 11 weeks of the site visit for comments on factual accuracy. If SKVC chooses to provide a statement in reference to the draft report, it will be submitted to the chair of the review panel within two weeks after the receipt of the draft report. Thereafter the review panel will take into account the statement by SKVC, finalise the document and submit it to SKVC and ENQA.

The report is to be finalised within three months of the site visit and will be about 40 pages in length.

SKVC will also provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation applying for membership and the ways in which SKVC expects to contribute to the work and objectives of ENQA during its membership. This letter will be discussed along with the final evaluation report.

**4. Follow-up Process and Publication of the Report**
SKVC will consider the expert panel's report and will publish it on its website once the ENQA Board has made its decision. The report will also be published on the ENQA website, regardless of the review outcome and decision by the ENQA Board. The report will be published on EQAR website as well.

SKVC commits to preparing a follow-up plan in which it addresses the recommendations of the review panel and to submitting a follow-up report to the ENQA Board. The follow-up report will be published on the ENQA website, in addition to the full review report and the Board's decision.

The follow-up report will be complemented by a small-scale visit to the agency performed by two members of the original panel (whenever possible). This visit will be used to discuss issues, based on the ESG, considered as of particular importance or challenge by SKVC. Its purpose is entirely developmental and has no impact on the judgement of membership and/or compliance of the agency with the ESG. Should the agency not wish to take advantage of this opportunity, it may opt out by informing the ENQA Review Coordinator about this.

**5. Use of the report**
ENQA shall retain ownership of the report. The intellectual property of all works created by the expert panel in connection with the review contract, including specifically any written reports, shall be vested in ENQA.

The review report is used by the Board of ENQA for the purpose of reaching a conclusion on whether SKVC has met the ESG and can be thus admitted/reconfirmed as a member of ENQA.

The report will also be used for other purposes, such as registration on EQAR, and is designed so as to serve these two purposes. However, the review report is to be considered final only after being approved by the ENQA Board. Once submitted to SKVC and ENQA and until the decision by the Board is made, the report may not be used or relied upon by SKVC, the panel and any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. SKVC may use the report at its discretion only after the Board has approved the report. The approval of the report is independent of the decision on membership.

The Chair of the panel shall remain available to respond to questions of clarification or further information from the EQAR Register Committee and the ENQA Secretariat is copied in all such requests.

**6. Budget**
SKVC shall pay the review related fees as specified in the agreement between the external review coordinator and the SKVC.

It is understood, that the fee of the follow-up visit is included in the overall cost of the review and will not be reimbursed in case the agency does not wish to benefit from it.

In the event of a second site visit required by the ENQA Board and aiming at completing the assessment of compliance, and should the agency accept a second visit, additional fees will be charged.

**7. Indicative Schedule of the Review**

| Agreement on terms of reference | October – November 2016 |
|---|---|
| Appointment of review panel members | November 2016 |
| Self-assessment completed | November 2016 |
| Pre-screening of SER by ENQA coordinator | October – November 2016 |
| Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable | December 2016 |
| Briefing of review panel members | December 2016 – January 2017 |
| Review panel site visit | February 2017 |
| Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening | April 2017 |
| Draft of evaluation report to SKVC | April 2017 |
| Statement of SKVC to review panel if necessary | April 2017 |
| Submission of final report to ENQA | May 2017 |
| Consideration of the report by ENQA Board and response of SKVC | May – June 2017 |
| Publication of report | July 2017 |

| | |
|---|---|
| **2016 Law** | **Law on Research and Higher Education of the Republic of Lithuania (2016)** |
| **AMVK** | **Commission of Higher Education Institutions' Review** |
| **CEENQA** | **Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education** |
| **council** | **Council of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education** |
| **EHEA** | **European Higher Education Area** |
| **ENIC** | **European Network of Information Centres in the European Region** |
| **ENQA** | **European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education** |
| **ESG** | **Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area** |
| **ESU** | **European Students' Union** |
| **EUA** | **European University Association** |
| **EQAR** | **European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education** |
| **EQUIP** | **Enhancing Quality through Innovative Policy and Practice** |
| **government** | **Government of the Republic of Lithuania** |
| **HE** | **higher education** |
| **HEI** | **higher education institution** |
| **INQAAHE** | **International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education** |
| **ISO** | **International Organization for Standardization** |
| **KPMPC** | **Centre for the Development of Qualifications and Professional Training** |
| **LKDK** | **Director's Conference of Lithuanian Colleges of Higher Education** |
| **LMT** | **Lithuanian Research Council** |
| **LTQF** | **Lithuanian Qualification Framework** |
| **LURK** | **Lithuanian University Rector's Conference** |
| **ministry** | **Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania** |
| **MOSTA** | **Research and Higher Education Monitoring and Analysis Centre** |
| **NARIC** | **National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union** |
| **NOKUT** | **Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education** |
| **NVAO** | **Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders** |
| **SAR** | **self-assessment report** |
| **SPAK** | **Commission for Appeals against Study programmes Evaluation** |
| **SKVC** | **Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education** |
| **SVK** | **Commission for Higher Education Evaluation** |
| **QAA** | **Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education** |

**DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY SKVC (CF. LIST OF REFERENCE IN SAR)**

1. Republic of Lithuania Law on Higher Education and Research (2009) [in Lithuanian]
2. Republic of Lithuania Law on Higher Education and Research (2016; effective as of 01.01.2017) [in Lithuanian]
3. Statute of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (adopted in 2009, with relevant amendments, valid until 31.12.2016)
4. Statute of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (adopted on 14.11.2016, valid from 01.012017)
5. SKVC Strategic Plan 2014–2016
6. SKVC Strategic Plan 2017-2019
7. Order of the Minister of Education and Science on composition of SKVC Council [in Lithuanian]
8. Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania "On the Approval of the Description of the Procedure for the State Supervision of Performance of Higher Education Institutions" (2012; valid between 01.01.2013 and 31.12.2016, abolished as of 01.01.2017) [in Lithuanian]
9. Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania "On the Approval of the Description of the Procedure for Issuing Licences to Conduct Studies and Study-Related Activities and the Description of the Procedure for Issuing Licences to Conduct Study-Related Activities" (issued on 04.11.2009, amendments made 2010) [in Lithuanian]
10. Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania "On the Approval of the Description of the Procedure for the External Review of Higher Education Institutions and the Description of the Procedure for Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions" (2010)
11. Methodology for Drafting the Description of a New Study Programme, Its External Review and Accreditation (2011, last amendments made in 2015)
12. Methodology for Evaluation of On-going Study Programmes (applicable before 01.09.2016)
13. Methodology for the Evaluation of On-going Study Programmes (applicable as of 01.09.2016)
14. Methodology for Evaluation of Performance of a Higher Education Institution (applicable as of 01.09.2016)
15. Methodology for Evaluation of Performance of a Higher Education Institution (applicable before 01.09.2016)
16. Experts Selection Procedure (valid as of 15.11.2016)
17. Regulations of the Higher Education Evaluation Commission (SVK) (2011)
18. Regulations of the Higher Education Institutions Review Commission (AMVK) (2011)
19. Regulations of the Appeals Commission for Study Programmes (SPAK) (2008, latest amendments made on 17.09.2015)
20. SKVC Quality Manual (2011)
21. Quality policy (2011)
22. Reports of evaluations of on-going study: programmes http://pluto.skvc.lt/StudyProgram Results.aspx, http://www.skvc.lt/default/en/quality-assurance/study-programme-evaluations/evaluation-reports
23. Evaluation reports of new study programmes: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1sfnD6KFyLqoFWDu0fZ-2BJEo9qFYGB2kBEbU62u6W74/edit#gid=1771030468
24. Institutional review reports: http://www.skvc.lt/default/en/quality-assurance/institutional-review/am-evaluation_reports

**ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY SKVC**

25. Accreditation Procedure of Higher Education Institutions (2010)
26. Methodology for Evaluation of Study Programmes Implemented at Foreign Higher Education Institutions (2015)
27. Methodology for Evaluation of Foreign Higher Education Institutions (2015)
28. Higher Educations' External Evaluation Conclusions Publicity Overview (2016)
29. Analysis of 2011-2015 External Review of Higher Education Institutions in Lithuania (2016)
30. Summary of Legal Requirements for Higher Education Study Programmes in the Republic of Lithuania (2016)
31. SKVC Partnership Projects List (1997-2018)
32. SKVC Projects Coordinated List (2001-2018)
33. Report of the ENQA working group on the impact of quality assurance for higher education (ENQA, 2016)
34. Expert's Declaration of Interests and a Promise not to Disclose Confidential Information (2017)
35. Templates for evaluation reports for each type of evaluation procedure
36. Tools for experts: Functions of the institutional review expert team; Allocation of duties; Mapping tool the preparatory work for the site visit; Questions for target groups
37. Programmes of various SKVC events (seminars, conferences etc.)
38. Training materials for experts
39. Minutes of meetings of the council and the advisory commissions [in Lithuanian]
40. Presentations on Lithuanian Higher Education & SKVC at the service for quality and mobility (February 2017)
41. Updates of mapping ESG and SKVC methodologies for each activity (February 2017)
42. Informative documents regarding International Relations, Thematic Analyses and Staff Development (February 2017)
43. Collection of Higher Education Evaluation Overviews (2017)


**OTHER REFERENCE SOURCES USED BY THE REVIEW PANEL**

1. SKVC website [in Lithuanian and English]
2. EQAR Confirmation of Eligibility: Application for Renewal of Registration Application no. A48 of 11/07/2016
3. Transparency of European Higher Education through Public Quality Assurance Reports (EQArep). Final Report of the Project (ENQA, 2014)
4. Comparative Analysis of the ESG 2015 and ESG 2005 (ENQA/EQUIP, 2016)

**THIS REPORT** presents findings of the ENQA Agency Review of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC), undertaken in 2017.



**2017 ENQA AGENCY REVIEW**