

APPROVED

by the Study Accreditation Committee
in the meeting of 20 December 2017; Minutes No. 16

Designed according to Subparagraph 8.5 of
the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 407
“Regulations on Accreditation of Institutions of
Higher Education, Colleges and Study Directions”
of 14 July 2015

Methodology for Assessing Study Directions

I. General provisions

1. The Methodology for Assessing Study Directions (hereinafter - Methodology) shall specify the procedure and provide methodological support for the assessment of study directions. The procedures described in the Methodology shall ensure the quality assessment of studies in compliance with the national regulatory enactments as well as the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (hereinafter - ESG).
2. The assessment of study directions shall be organised by the Accreditation Department, hereinafter the Quality Agency for Higher Education (hereinafter - Agency) of the Academic Information Centre (hereinafter - Centre) - in compliance with the Law on Institutions of Higher Education, Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 407 “Regulations on Accreditation of Institutions of Higher Education, Colleges and Study Directions” of 14 July 2015 (hereinafter - Cabinet Regulations No. 407), and Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 409 “Price-list of Paid Services Provided by the Foundation “Academic Information Centre”” of 14 July 2015 (hereinafter - Cabinet Regulations No. 409).
3. The main parties involved in the assessment process of studies in their operation shall comply with the following principles:
 - 3.1. unbiased and fact-based findings;
 - 3.2. confidentiality;
 - 3.3. respect towards other parties involved in the assessment process;
 - 3.4. neutrality;
 - 3.5. collaboration.
4. The main parties involved in the assessment process of studies shall be as follows:

- 4.1. higher education institution/college;¹
- 4.2. Agency;
- 4.3. Study Accreditation Committee (hereinafter - Committee);
- 4.4. Committee for Assessment of Study Directions (hereinafter - experts group);
- 4.5. Higher Education Quality Assurance Council (hereinafter - Council).

II. Rights and obligations of parties involved in accreditation of study direction

5. The higher education institution/college shall:
 - 5.1. in compliance with Cabinet Regulations No. 407, submit to the Centre at least six months before the deadline of the accreditation term, the application for the accreditation of the study direction (hereinafter - application for accreditation), attaching the Self-Assessment Report of the study direction prepared according to the Guidelines for the preparation of a Self-Assessment Report of Study Directions (hereinafter - Guidelines for preparation of Self-Assessment Report) designed by the Agency, and in compliance with the provisions specified in the Law on Institutions of Higher Education and other regulatory enactments, as well as the Methodology for the accreditation of the study direction;
 - 5.2. may within three working days, request the rejection of the experts by submitting to the Centre a justified written application, which shall specify the reasons for such rejection of each rejected expert;
 - 5.3. take part in the coordination and organisation of the on-site visit of the experts group;
 - 5.4. upon the request by the Agency or the experts group, provide access to informative support/infrastructure of the study direction, including library resources, material and technical provision, final theses (if any), examination materials, and other resources;
 - 5.5. be responsible for provided information that it fully describes the study direction to be assessed;
 - 5.6. ensure adequate conditions, premises, and equipment during the on-site visit;
 - 5.7. during the on-site visit of the experts group, be prepared to demonstrate to the experts group evidences which substantiate the information provided in the Self-Assessment Report.

6. The Agency shall:
 - 6.1. design and in its operation use the Methodology and procedures complying with the ESG;
 - 6.2. design the Guidelines for preparation of Self-Assessment Report and the Guidelines for the preparation of the Joint Report of the Group of Experts for

¹ The term 'higher education institution /college' used herein is applicable to all higher education and science institutions referred to in the Law on Institutions of Higher Education in which academic and professional study programmes are implemented, as well as which are engaged in science, research and artistic creation (universities, higher education institutions, academies, institutes, and colleges).

- Study Directions (hereinafter - Guidelines for preparation of joint report by experts group) and publish them on the Agency's website;
- 6.3. establish and approve an experts group of five experts for the assessment of the study direction;
 - 6.4. may approve the representatives of the Student Union of Latvia (hereinafter - SUL) and the Latvian Trade Union of Education and Science Employees (hereinafter - LTUESE) to participate in on-site visits by the experts group in higher education institutions/colleges and branches thereof in the status of observers (without the voting rights);
 - 6.5. organise the work of the experts group, including its on-site visits in higher education institutions/colleges and branches thereof, participate in these, as well as ensure obtaining of the necessary information and review of the submitted documents to assess the conformity of the study direction with the requirements of regulatory enactments (hereinafter - conformity assessment) set in Annex 8 to Cabinet Regulations No. 407 and in compliance therewith;
 - 6.6. organise the meetings of the Council and the Committee, as well as request and obtain the necessary information from the relevant state registers;
 - 6.7. organise the training of the experts both before the on-site visit and during the whole academic year subject to prior announcement thereof;
 - 6.8. ensure the documentation and archiving of the accreditation process;
 - 6.9. publish the information on the accreditation of study directions on the Agency's website;
 - 6.10. provide information and advice on issues of quality assurance of study directions;
 - 6.11. analyse the outcomes of the higher education quality assessment and give recommendations for the improvement thereof;
 - 6.12. participate in the work and activities of institutions of European Higher Education Area in the area of quality assurance in higher education;
 - 6.13. at the beginning of each year, publish on the Agency's website the list of study directions which are to be assessed in the relevant year.
7. The Committee shall operate in compliance with the Rules of Procedure of the Study Accreditation Committee and perform the following tasks:
 - 7.1. review the application for accreditation of the study direction submitted by the higher education institution/college;
 - 7.2. discuss, analyse, and evaluate the joint report by the experts group;
 - 7.3. take the decision to accredit the study direction or to refuse to accredit the study direction;
 - 7.4. take the decision to introduce changes to the forms of accreditation of study directions and feasibility of changes to the study direction in cases stipulated in Subparagraph 8.7 of Cabinet Regulations No. 407 and in compliance with the Methodology regarding the organisation of the evaluation process of the particular changes;
 - 7.5. obtain advice from the specialists of the experts group, if necessary;
 - 7.6. request from higher education institutions/colleges and the relevant state authorities additional information necessary for performing its activities;

- 7.7. visit the higher education institution/college, if necessary, to inspect the actual circumstances in the higher education institution/college within the accreditation process of the study direction or within the evaluation process of the feasible changes to the accredited study direction;
 - 7.8. make a proposal to the Minister for Education and Science for an extraordinary accreditation of the study direction.
8. The work of the experts group shall be based on the following principles:
- 8.1. unbiased and fact-based findings - the expert shall act in an honest and unbiased manner in their efforts to reach the aim of the assessment. When expressing their opinion, formulating conclusions or taking decisions, the expert shall rely on the facts, observations, and his/her personal competence;
 - 8.2. neutrality – within the assessment process of the study direction, the expert shall act independently. The expert shall not represent the interests of the higher education institution/college, the study direction or other party;
 - 8.3. respect towards other parties involved in the assessment process – within the assessment process, the expert shall act in good faith as a professional. The expert shall not exceed his/her powers as specified in his/her tasks. The expert shall treat the parties involved in the assessment process as persons capable of taking responsibility for their actions, therefore he/she shall rely on facts and observations when referring to the strengths and weaknesses of the study direction;
 - 8.4. confidentiality – all information related to the assessment (opinions of the interviewees, the Self-Assessment Report, and additional information provided by the higher education institution/college) shall be used exclusively for the assessment process;
 - 8.5. collaboration – each expert, as a member of the experts group, shall be open to collaboration with other members of the experts group. The collaboration of the experts shall be coordinated by the head of the experts group. The experts group shall develop mutual understanding with the representatives of the higher education institution/college and make efforts to assist the higher education institution/college to enhance quality culture.
9. The Council shall:
- 9.1. perform strategic management and planning to ensure the accreditation of study directions;
 - 9.2. approve the criteria for the selection of Committee members;
 - 9.3. approve the composition, chairperson, and the deputy chairperson of the Committee;
 - 9.4. approve the Rules of Procedure of the Committee.

III. Accreditation of the study direction

10. Summary of sequence of accreditation procedures of study direction

- 10.1. In compliance with Paragraph 38 of Cabinet Regulations No. 407, the higher education institution/college shall prepare the application for accreditation, perform the self-assessment of the study direction, and, in compliance with the Guidelines for preparation of Self-Assessment Report designed by the Agency, prepare a Self-Assessment Report, and according to the procedure stipulated in Cabinet Regulations No. 407, submit it to the Agency.
- 10.2. The Agency shall review the application for accreditation submitted by the higher education institution/college and the attached documents, their conformity with the requirements set in Cabinet Regulations No. 407 and the Guidelines for preparation of Self-Assessment Report, and, if necessary, request in written the missing information (hereinafter - additional information). The higher education institution/college shall submit the additional information to the Agency within 30 days since this request has been made.
- 10.3. The Agency shall, within 10 working days since the application for accreditation has been received, or, if additional information has been requested – since the day, on which this has been received, evaluate the conformity of the study direction implemented in the higher education institution/college with the requirements of the regulatory enactments (hereinafter - conformity assessment), specified in Annex 8 to Cabinet Regulations No. 407.
- 10.4. The experts group shall perform the quality assessment of the study direction on the basis of the application for accreditation, the Self-Assessment Report, and the additional information submitted by the higher education institution/college, as well as the conformity assessment referred to in the Sub-paragraph 10.3, findings and conclusions obtained during the on-site visit by the experts group, the information obtained from the relevant state registers, the State Education Quality Service (hereinafter - SEQS), and the certification institutions, if any, regarding the study direction to be assessed, as well as the criteria for the assessment of the study direction and the Methodology set in Annex 9 to Cabinet Regulations No. 407, and prepare the joint report by the experts group on the study direction to be assessed, in compliance with the Guidelines for preparation of joint report by experts group, assessing quality according to the assessment criteria and providing analysis on aspects describing the relevant criteria.
- 10.5. The Committee shall review all documents, submitted by the higher education institution/college, the conformity assessment, and the joint report by the experts group, as well as a form with comments filled in and submitted by the higher education institution/college about the factual errors detected in the joint report by the experts group, if any, and the information provided by the SEQS and the certification institutions, if any, as well as the actual circumstances in the higher education institution/college, and other information provided to the Committee, if

necessary, and take the decision to accredit the study direction or to refuse to accredit the study direction.

- 10.6. In case the higher education institution/college does not agree with the decision taken by the Committee, the decision by the Committee can be contested in the Centre. The decision taken by the Centre can be appealed in the court in compliance with the procedure set out in the Administrative Procedure Law.

11. Application for accreditation of study direction

- 11.1. The higher education institution/college shall, at least six months before the deadline of the accreditation term, submit to the Agency the application for accreditation signed by the rector of the higher education institution or the director of the college. The application for accreditation shall be submitted together with the Self-Assessment Report of the study direction prepared in compliance with the Guidelines for preparation of Self-Assessment Report designed by the Centre, which forms an integral part of the application for accreditation.
- 11.2. The application for accreditation shall contain the following information:
- 11.2.1. name of the higher education institution/college;
 - 11.2.2. name of the study direction;
 - 11.2.3. names and codes of the study programmes in the relevant study direction in compliance with the Latvian Education Classification;
 - 11.2.4. duration and amount of the study programmes in the relevant study direction;
 - 11.2.5. language, type and form, including distance-learning, in which the study programmes in the relevant study direction are implemented, as well as the address of the place study programmes are implemented (higher education institution or branches thereof, or colleges, or branches thereof);
 - 11.2.6. admission requirements;
 - 11.2.7. degrees, professional qualifications or degrees and professional qualifications to be conferred after the acquisition of study programmes in the relevant study direction;
 - 11.2.8. name and surname, position, academic/science degree, e-mail address, and phone number of the person authorised by the higher education institution/college who shall deal with issues related to the accreditation of the study direction.
- 11.3. The higher education institution/college shall perform the self-assessment process in line with its internal procedures, and shall be responsible for an adequate performance thereof, and shall prepare the Self-Assessment Report within the set deadline. The content and structure of the Self-Assessment Report

shall comply with the requirements set out in the Guidelines for preparation of Self-Assessment Report.

- 11.4. The higher education institution/college shall submit to the Centre the application for accreditation and the Self-Assessment Report in paper format and attaching the identical electronic version thereof on a data carrier, or in an electronic format. The pages of the document submitted in paper format shall be numbered, and the whole document shall be stitched in such a way that the sheets cannot be separated. The application for accreditation submitted in electronic format shall be signed with a secure electronic signature in compliance with the provisions set out in the Electronic Documents Law. The documents shall be prepared and submitted in the official language and translated into English (translations of the documents by other organisations may be marked as ‘provisional translation’). In case of any disputes, the documents submitted in the official language shall prevail.
- 11.5. The Agency shall review the application for accreditation and the documents attached thereto, and, if necessary, request additional information in written, which shall be submitted by the higher education institution/college to the Agency within 30 days since this has been requested.
- 11.6. The application for accreditation shall be returned to the higher education institution/college if:
- 11.6.1. the accreditation fee has not been paid, as stipulated in Cabinet Regulations No. 409;
 - 11.6.2. all required information has not been submitted, as specified in Paragraphs 39 and 42 of Cabinet Regulations No. 407;
 - 11.6.3. the documents have not been prepared in compliance with the requirements for the preparation of documents as specified in the relevant regulatory enactments.

12. Review of submitted documents

- 12.1. The Agency shall start the assessment process when the accreditation fee has been paid, as specified in Cabinet Regulations No. 409, and all information requested by the Agency has been received, and the submitted documents have been prepared in compliance with the procedure for the preparation of documents as set out in the relevant regulatory enactments.
- 12.2. The Agency shall, within 10 working days since the application for accreditation or the additional information has been received, if requested perform the conformity assessment, as stipulated in Annex 8 to Cabinet Regulations No. 407.
- 12.3. Should the conformity assessment indicate any unconformities with the requirements stipulated in the relevant regulatory enactments, the Committee

shall consider, if such unconformity displays sufficient reason to take a decision to refuse to accredit the study direction or the accreditation process is to be continued.

- 12.4. The Centre shall request and receive from the relevant state registers information about the higher education institution/college included therein, necessary for the accreditation of the study direction.
- 12.5. The Centre shall request the SEQS, within 10 working days, to provide information regarding any violations by the higher education institution/college detected within the study direction to be assessed and in the implementation of the study programmes in the relevant study direction, as well as the activities performed by the higher education institution/college to eliminate such violations, and the received claims related to the implementation of the respective study direction and the study programmes in the relevant study direction.
- 12.6. The Centre shall request the certification institution (if the relevant profession can be certified by the relevant certification institution) or the Ministry of Defence (if the study programme is implemented in the field of military defence) to submit the assessment of the study programmes in the relevant study direction within 10 working days since the request has been received.

13. Establishment of experts group

- 13.1. The Agency shall approve the experts to be included in the experts group, its head and secretary, as well as the participation of the observers of the SUL and/or the LTUESE in the activities implemented by the experts group.
- 13.2. The criteria and principles for the selection of the experts shall be specified in the “Criteria and Principles for the Selection of Experts”² approved by the Centre and available on the Agency's website.
- 13.3. The experts group shall be composed of five experts, one of which is delegated by the SUL, one is delegated by the Employers’ Confederation of Latvia (hereinafter - ECL), and at least one is a foreign expert. The experts group shall be established in such a way as to ensure that the experts in general have the following competencies:
- 13.3.1. experience in the operation of quality assurance systems and qualification in a relevant industry of the assessed study direction;
 - 13.3.2. experience in the operation of internal quality assurance systems;
 - 13.3.3. qualification in a relevant industry of the assessed study direction;
 - 13.3.4. the head of the experts group shall have previous experience in the external quality assessment in higher education.

² *Criteria and Principles for the Selection of Experts are available at: http://www.aika.lv/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Ekspertu_atlases_kriteriji_principi_LV.pdf*

- 13.4. By establishing the experts group and approving the experts for the relevant assessment process, the Agency shall particularly consider the following aspects:
- 13.4.1. type of a higher education institution (institution of higher education/college);
 - 13.4.2. study direction and study programmes in the relevant study direction;
 - 13.4.3. assessment specifics (first/regular/extraordinary accreditation);
 - 13.4.4. non-existence of conflict-of-interest.³
- 13.5. The Agency shall ask the SUL and the ECL to delegate their experts for the assessment of the study direction, within 10 working days since the request has been received.
- 13.6. The Agency shall inform the SUL and the LTUESE on an option to delegate, within 10 working days, their observers, who may participate in the activities of the experts group without the voting rights.
- 13.7. The Agency shall, within three working days after the approval of the experts group, inform the higher education institution/college about the composition of the experts group and the Agency's employee who shall coordinate the assessment process (hereinafter - assessment coordinator).
- 13.8. The higher education institution/college may, within three working days, express rejection towards any member of the experts group, by submitting to the Centre a written justified application, which explains reasons for each rejected member of the experts group. The Centre shall, within two weeks, review the application submitted by the higher education institution/college and if the Centre recognises such application as justified, the Agency shall establish another experts group and inform the higher education institution/college thereof.
- 13.9. The Centre shall conclude an agreement on assessment with each expert. A confirmation about non-existence of a conflict-of-interest and confidentiality liabilities signed by the expert shall be attached to the agreement.

³ A conflict-of-interest does not occur if:

- 1) the expert is not employed and has no other contractual relations with the higher education institution, a study programme of which is being assessed, has not been employed by this higher education institution within the last 2 years before the assessment on-site visit;
- 2) the expert is not a member of a decision-making or advisory institution of the higher education institution, a study programme of which is being assessed;
- 3) the expert does not study in the higher education institution, a study programme of which is being assessed, and has not graduated from this institution within 2 years before the on-site assessment visit;
- 4) the person involved in the implementation of the study programme and the relevant study direction to be assessed, is not the father, mother, grandmother, grandfather, son/daughter, grandson/granddaughter, adoptee, adoptive parent, brother, sister, stepbrother, stepsister or spouse of the expert.

14. Obligations of members of experts group before and during on-site visit

14.1. The head of the experts group shall:

- 14.1.1. be responsible for the work of the experts group in general;
- 14.1.2. before the on-site visit by the experts group, organise communication⁴ among the members of the experts group after having reviewed the documents;
- 14.1.3. before the on-site visit by the experts group, discuss the work schedule with the Agency;
- 14.1.4. before the on-site visit by the experts group, allocate the responsibilities among the members of the experts group;
- 14.1.5. conduct the meetings of the experts group;
- 14.1.6. during the on-site visit, conduct meetings with the target groups or appoint another member of the experts group to conduct the meeting.

14.2. The secretary of the experts group shall:

- 14.2.1. be responsible for the preparation of the joint report by the experts group, which shall be prepared in collaboration with other members of the experts group;
- 14.2.2. before the on-site visit, collect opinions and observations of the members of the experts group after having reviewed the documents;
- 14.2.3. during the on-site visit, collect the opinions and observations of all members of the experts group;
- 14.2.4. submit to the Agency the joint report by the experts group prepared in compliance with the Guidelines for preparation of joint report by experts group.

14.3. The members of the experts group shall:

- 14.3.1. review the documents regulating the accreditation of the study direction and, before the on-site visit, participate in the training organised by the Agency;
- 14.3.2. review the Self-Assessment Report of the higher education institution/college and other information related to the study direction to be assessed;
- 14.3.3. formulate opinion of different matters by including also the issues which need to be particularly addressed during the on-site visit, and submit the relevant documents electronically to the head of the experts group and assessment coordinator at least one week before to the on-site visit;
- 14.3.4. in case of a recurrent accreditation, evaluate, if the higher education institution/college has succeeded in preventing the deficiencies identified in the joint report by the previous experts group (or in the report by experts when licensing a study programme) and implementing the recommendations given by the experts group;

⁴ As by *videoconferencing, teleconferencing, e-mail, etc.*

- 14.3.5. prepare and submit to the assessment coordinator the list of additional information required from the higher education institution/college;
- 14.3.6. perform other tasks related to the assessment process in line with the allocated responsibilities among the members of the experts group;
- 14.3.7. participate in the on-site visit;
- 14.3.8. participate in the preparation of the joint report by the experts group.

14.4. The aim of observer's participation in the on-site visit is to gain observations on the assessment process and quality of the study direction. The observer shall comply with the principles of conduct specified for the experts in Paragraph 8 of this Methodology. During the meetings, the observer may, upon prior consent by the experts, ask questions to the target groups.

14.5. The assessment coordinator shall:

- 14.5.1. organise the assessment process, including:
 - a) communication with the experts group and the higher education institution/college;
 - b) dealing with legal issues in collaboration with the experts group;
 - c) organisation of transport and accommodation for the members of the experts group;
 - d) training of the experts before the on-site visit;
- 14.5.2. provide the access to the Self-Assessment Report to the experts group at least one month before the on-site visit in the higher education institution/college. If there are any changes to the composition of the experts group due to reasons not subject to the Agency's responsibility, the new members of the experts group shall be able to access the Self-Assessment Report upon their inclusion into the experts group.
- 14.5.3. prepare the agenda for the on-site visit and coordinate it with the experts group as well as the higher education institution /college;
- 14.5.4. coordinate the procurement of an interpreter, as necessary, should the higher education institution/college require one during the on-site visit;
- 14.5.5. engage in the planning of the work of the experts group;
- 14.5.6. request additional information from the higher education institution/college;
- 14.5.7. review the joint report by the experts group and request them to specify it, if necessary;
- 14.5.8. assist the experts group in dealing with issues related to assessment.

14.6. The Agency shall, before the on-site visit in the higher education institution/college, organise training of the experts group available also for the observers. During the training, the Agency shall inform the experts of:

- 14.6.1. aims and objectives of the assessment;
- 14.6.2. work schedule of the experts group;
- 14.6.3. Methodology and Guidelines for preparation of joint report by experts group;

- 14.6.4. regulatory enactments that regulate the external assessment of the study directions;
- 14.6.5. higher education system in Latvia;
- 14.6.6. context of the respective higher education institution/college and study direction.

15. On-site visit

- 15.1. The aim of the on-site visit shall be to obtain as much information on the study direction and the relevant study programmes as possible, in order to perform a comprehensive and unbiased assessment in compliance with the assessment criteria specified in Annex 9 to Cabinet Regulations No. 407 and aspects listed under each assessment criteria specified in the Guidelines for preparation of joint report by experts group, which should be considered in the evaluation of these criteria as well as Methodology, and to obtain justification for assessments and information provided in the Self-Assessment Report, submitted by the higher education institution/college, and make additions to the recent findings and observations.
- 15.2. During the on-site visit, the experts group shall meet the representatives of the management of the higher education institution/college and/or the management of the respective structural unit, the team responsible for the preparation of the Self-Assessment Report, the teaching staff⁵, students, graduates, and representatives of employers and/or professional organisations.
- 15.3. Within one on-site visit, a representative of the higher education institution/college may take part only in sole meeting with the experts group, except cases where such an option has been previously discussed and agreed with the assessment coordinator. The meeting with the teaching staff and students shall take place in the absence of the representatives of the management of the higher education institution/college. Furthermore, no list of students shall be prepared during the respective meeting with the students.
- 15.4. Persons who study in the higher education institution/college and/or are employed therein, shall not take part in the interviews with the graduates and representatives of the employers and/or professional organisations.
- 15.5. During the on-site visit, upon request of the Agency or the experts group, the higher education institution/college shall make available the informative support/infrastructure of the study direction, including library resources, material and technical provision, final theses (if any), examination materials, and other

⁵The term 'teaching staff' used herein is applicable to the academic staff and visiting professors, visiting associate professors, visiting docents, visiting lecturers, and visiting assistants in the relevant higher education institution/college.

resources. The higher education institution/college shall also provide adequate conditions, premises and equipment for the assessment process of the on-site visit.

- 15.6. At the end of each working day, the members of the experts group shall discuss and summarise the obtained information and observations. On the last day of the on-site visit, the members of the experts group shall discuss the outcomes of the on-site visit, formulate joint opinion on the assessment criteria and aspects thereof, as well as discuss the findings and main conclusions made during the on-site visit with the management of the higher education institution/college, the teaching staff, and the representatives of the students.
- 15.7. The working language during the on-site assessment visit shall be English, unless otherwise agreed with the Agency. The higher education institution/college may involve an interpreter, subject to a previous agreement with the Agency before the on-site visit. The interpreter may not be involved in the implementation of the study direction to be assessed. The costs resulting from involving an interpreter shall be borne by the higher education institution/college.
- 15.8. During the on-site visit, the breaks (coffee breaks, lunch, dinner) shall be organised separately from the representatives of the higher education institution/college, unless proposed otherwise by the head of the experts group.
- 15.9. The meeting with the representatives of the higher education institution/college shall include both a meeting and an interactive discussion, and exchange of opinions among the representatives of the higher education institution/college and the members of the experts group, provided that the obtained information is sufficient to analyse the assessment criteria and the relevant aspects thereof specified in the joint report by the experts group and for the preparation of the joint report by the experts group.
- 15.10. When hosting the experts group, the higher education institution/college shall not be obliged to prepare presentations which include the information included in the Self-Assessment Report. If such presentations have been prepared, the assessment coordinator, subject to an agreement with the head of the experts group, may ask the higher education institution/college not to demonstrate such presentations in order to use time allocated for the meeting effectively.

16. Preparation of joint report by experts group

- 16.1. After the on-site visit, the experts group shall:
- 16.1.1. participate in the preparation of the joint report according to the deadline set by the Agency;

16.1.2. prepare the joint report in compliance with the Guidelines for preparation of joint report by experts group, Methodology, Self-Assessment Report, conformity assessment, the information provided by the SEQS, certification institution, and the observers, if such information of the study direction to be assessed has been provided, outcomes of the on-site visit in the higher education institution/college, and the additional information provided by the higher education institution/college;

16.1.3. in the joint report, make recommendations for the elimination of the detected deficiencies (short-term recommendations) and improvement of the study direction and the study programmes in the relevant study direction (long-term recommendations);

16.1.4. mutually agree on the evaluation of the assessment criteria and the relevant aspects thereof in the joint report, in compliance with the Guidelines for assessment of the study direction and relevant study programmes designed by the Centre, and Part I of the ESG “Standards and Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance”;

16.1.5. agree on the wording which is acceptable for all experts (consensus). If the members of the experts group have different opinions about any on the assessment criterion, the dissenting opinion shall be indicated in the respective section of the joint report, by indicating the name and surname of the expert, dissenting opinion, the respective assessment criterion, and the justification of the dissenting opinion;

16.1.6. in the section for the assessment of the study direction, provide justification for the given recommendation for the accreditation term of the study direction;

16.1.7. prepare the joint report by the experts group in electronic format in English as well as submit the electronic and paper format. The paper-format version of the joint report shall be signed and submitted in duplicate;

16.1.8. describe in the joint report both the positive and negative aspects by evaluating each assessment criterion, analyse the available information by providing specific examples and references to the Self-Assessment Report designed by the higher education institution/college and the information obtained during the on-site visit. The experts group also shall analyse each assessment criterion and formulate conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses of the higher education institution/college regarding the way how the assessment criterion has been met;

16.1.9. provide a detailed justification for the statements, especially if the quality criterion has a negative assessment;

16.1.10. by evaluating the assessment criteria, maintain consistency between the criteria of the study direction and the study programmes (the assessment of each study programme must be relevant to the assessment of the study direction and vice versa).

16.2. The secretary of the experts group shall:

- 16.2.1. prepare the joint report by the experts group, by ensuring that the joint report reflects the joint opinion of the experts group and referring to the information sources specified in Paragraph 54 of Cabinet Regulations No. 407;
 - 16.2.2. ensure conformity of the joint report with the Guidelines for preparation of joint report by experts group⁶;
 - 16.2.3. submit the joint report to the Agency within the specified deadline;
 - 16.2.4. specify it at the instruction of the Agency, as necessary.
- 16.3. The Agency shall review the joint report by the experts group and may ask the experts group to specify it, if necessary.
- 16.4. The Agency shall submit the draft joint report by the experts group to the higher education institution/college.
- 16.5. The higher education institution/ college may, within 10 working days since the joint report has been received, may provide comments on factual errors detected in the joint report by the experts group by submitting to the Agency a form with comments by the higher education institution/college on the factual errors detected in the joint report by the experts group, in compliance with Annex 4 to Cabinet Regulations No. 407. The comments on the factual errors together with justification thereof shall be submitted to the Centre both electronically and in paper format in Latvian together with the respective translation thereof in English.
- 16.6. The Agency shall forward the comments by the higher education institution/college on the factual errors to the experts group.
- 16.7. The experts group shall review the comments by the higher education institution/college and may, within five working days since the comments have been received, make the necessary specifications and submit them to the Agency. Thereafter, the Agency shall submit the specified joint report to the higher education institution/college.

17. Procedure for taking decisions, contesting, and appealing

- 17.1. The decision on the accreditation of the study direction or refusal thereof (hereinafter - decision) shall be taken by the Committee. The Committee shall have a quorum, if at least four Committee members take part in the meeting. The decision-making procedure is specified in the Rules of Procedure of the Committee. If a Committee member faces a possible conflict-of-interest, he or she shall refrain from the participation in the decision-making procedure.

⁶ Guidelines for the Preparation of the Joint Report of the Group of Experts for Study Directions are available at: <http://www.aika.lv/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Studiju-virzienu-ekspertu-grupas-kopiga-atzinuma-izstrades-vadlinijas.pdf>

- 17.2. The Agency shall inform the respective higher education institution/college about the date, time, and place, the application for accreditation is to be reviewed. The higher education institution/college may appoint not more than two representatives for the participation in the meeting. Upon request by the Committee, the Agency may invite a representative (or representatives) of the experts group to participate in the Committee meeting.
- 17.3. The Agency shall invite representatives of the respective ministries or the experts appointed by such ministries to the Committee meeting, if the study directions to be discussed are relevant to the industry in which the respective ministry is competent, as well as experts from other industries who shall be entitled to exercise advisory rights to consult the participants of the meeting.
- 17.4. The Committee shall review the documents, submitted by the higher education institution/college, the conformity assessment, the joint report by the experts group, as well as a the form with comments provided by the higher education institution/college regarding the factual errors detected in the joint report by the experts group, if any, and the information provided by the SEQS and the certification institution, if any, as well as the actual circumstances in the higher education institution/college, and other information available to the Committee, and take the decision on the accreditation of the respective study direction and the accreditation term or rejection thereof.
- 17.5. The Agency shall prepare a draft decision, which shall be reviewed by the Committee members and, if necessary, which may be adjusted. The decision shall be signed by the chairperson of the Committee and submitted to the higher education institution/college within 10 working days after the day on which the decision was taken.
- 17.6. If the Committee has taken the decision on the accreditation of the study direction, the Agency shall, within 10 working days after taking the decision, submit a copy of the decision and the accreditation form of the study direction prepared by the Agency, as specified in Annex 11 to Cabinet Regulations No. 407, to the Ministry of Education and Science (hereinafter - Ministry).
- 17.7. The Ministry shall, within 10 working days since the copy of the decision and the accreditation form of the study direction have been received, submit to the Agency the accreditation form of the study direction signed by the Minister for Education and Science. The Agency shall submit the accreditation form of the study direction signed by the Minister for Education and Science to the higher education institution/college, as well as register it.
- 17.8. The decision taken by the Committee may be contested in the Centre according to the designed internal appeals procedure for appeals review set out in the

Appeals Procedure of the Appeals Committee approved by the Centre⁷. The decision taken by the Centre may be appealed in the court in compliance with the procedure set out in the Administrative Procedure Law.

18. Follow-up activities

- 18.1. After the completed assessment process and taking the decision on accreditation of the study direction, the higher education institution/college shall perform appropriate activities, the aim of which is to improve the study direction and to eliminate the deficiencies detected during the accreditation process of the study direction as well as to implement the recommendations for the improvement of the study direction given by the experts group.
- 18.2. The higher education institution or the college shall, within three months since the day on which the decision on the accreditation of the study direction has been taken, electronically submit to the Centre the plan on the implementation of the recommendations for the study direction given by the experts group (hereinafter - plan).
- 18.3. The Agency shall, within one month since the date, on which the plan specified in Paragraph 18.2 of this Methodology has been received, review the plan submitted by the higher education institution/college and, if necessary, request the higher education institution/college to specify it.
- 18.4. If the study direction is accredited for two years, the higher education institution/college shall submit electronically a report on implementation of the recommendations given by the experts group to the Agency, within the six-month period since the decision on accreditation of the study direction has been taken.
- 18.5. If the study direction is accredited for six years, the higher education institution/college shall submit electronically a report on implementation of the recommendations given by the experts group, within the twelve-month period since the decision on accreditation of the study direction has been taken.
- 18.6. The Agency shall, within the one-month period since the date, on which the report has been received, review the activities performed by the higher education institution/college to improve the study direction, as well as other information on the implementation of the study programmes in the relevant study direction. If fundamental deficiencies are detected, the Agency shall inform the Committee which shall decide on the accreditation status of the study direction.
- 18.7. The Centre has designed the internal procedure regulating the follow-up activities, set out in the Follow-up Procedure approved by the Centre.⁸

⁷ Appeals Procedure of the Appeals Committee are available at: http://www.aika.lv/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Apelacijas_komisijas_nolikums_LV.pdf

Chairperson of the Studies Accreditation Committee

T.Volkova

⁸ *Follow-up Procedure is available at: http://www.aika.lv/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Noteikumi_par_pecnovertejuma_aktivitatem_LV.pdf*