

by the Committee for Licensing of Study Programmes
in the meeting of 20 December 2017; Minutes No. 17

Designed according to Subparagraph 2.1 of the Cabinet of
Ministers Regulations No. 408
“Regulations Regarding Licensing of Study Programmes”
of 14 July 2015

Methodology for Organising Licensing of Study Programmes

I. General provisions

1. The Methodology for Organising Licensing of Study Programmes (hereinafter – Methodology) shall specify the procedure and provide methodological support for organising the assessment of study programmes. The procedures described in the Methodology shall ensure the quality assessment of study programmes 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 programmes shall be organised by the Accreditation Department, hereinafter referred to as the Quality Agency for Higher Education (hereinafter – the Agency) of the Academic Information Centre (hereinafter – the Centre) in compliance with the Law on Institutions of Higher Education, Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 408 “Regulations Regarding Licensing of Study Programmes” of 14 July 2015 (hereinafter – Cabinet Regulations No. 408) and Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 409 “The Price-list of Paid Services Provided by the Foundation "Academic Information Centre"” of 14 July 2015 (hereinafter – Cabinet Regulations No. 409).
3. The Agency in its operation shall comply with the following principles:
 - 3.1. unbiased and fact-based findings ;
 - 3.2. confidentiality;
 - 3.3. respect towards parties involved in the assessment process;
 - 3.4. neutrality;
 - 3.5. collaboration.
4. The parties involved in the licensing process of study programme are as follows:
 - 4.1. higher education institution/college¹;

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

- 4.2. Agency;
- 4.3. Committee for Licensing of Study Programmes (hereinafter – Committee);
- 4.4. experts;
- 4.5. Higher Education Quality Assessment Council (hereinafter – Council).

II. Rights and obligations of parties involved in licensing process of study programmes

5. The higher education institution/college shall:
 - 5.1. submit to the Agency the application for licensing of the study programme (hereinafter – the application) in the study direction of the higher education institution/college, attaching the description of the study programme hereto in compliance with the provisions set out in Cabinet Regulations No. 408 and the Guidelines for the Preparation of an Application for Study Programme Licensing and Description of Study Programme designed by the Centre, provisions specified in the Law on Institutions of Higher Education regarding the study programme and other regulatory enactments as well as requirements set out in the Methodology for licensing of study programmes;
 - 5.2. shall take part in the coordination and organisation of the experts' on-site visit;
 - 5.3. 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;
 - 5.4. upon the request of the Agency or experts, shall provide access to informational support/infrastructure of the study programme, including library resources, material and technical provision and other resources;
 - 5.5. be responsible for provided information that it fully describes the study programme submitted for assessment;
 - 5.6. shall ensure adequate conditions, premises, and equipment for organisation of the on-site assessment visit.

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 the Preparation of the Joint Report of the Experts for the Assessment of the Study Programme (hereinafter – guidelines for preparation of joint report of experts) and publish them on the Agency's website;
 - 6.3. approve three experts for the assessment of the study programme (hereinafter – experts);
 - 6.4. the Agency may approve the representatives of the Student Union of Latvia and the Latvian Trade Union of Education and Science Employees (hereinafter – LTUESE) to participate in experts' on-site visits in the higher education institutions/colleges and branches thereof in the status of observers (without the voting rights);

- 6.5. organise the experts' work, including experts' on-site visits in the higher education institutions/colleges, branches thereof, participate in these, as well as ensure obtaining of the necessary information and reviewing of the submitted documents;
 - 6.6. organise experts' training both before the on-site assessment visit and during the whole academic year subject to prior announcement thereof;
 - 6.7. ensure the documentation and archiving of the licensing process;
 - 6.8. publish information on licensing of study programmes on the Agency's website;
 - 6.9. provide information and advice in issues of quality assurance of study programmes;
 - 6.10. analyse the outcomes of higher education quality assessment and give recommendations for the improvement thereof;
 - 6.11. develop principles for the selection of the Committee members;
 - 6.12. organise meetings of the Council and Committee, request and receive the necessary information from state registers;
 - 6.13. participate in the work and activities of institutions of the European Higher Education Area in the area of quality assurance in higher education;
 - 6.14. perform other activities related to the improvement and quality assurance in higher education.
7. The Committee shall operate in compliance with the Rules of Procedure of the Committee for Licensing of Study Programmes and perform the following tasks:
 - 7.1. review the application for licensing of the study programme submitted by the higher education institution/college;
 - 7.2. discuss, analyse and evaluate the joint report of the experts;
 - 7.3. take the decision to licence the study programme or to refuse to license the study programme based on the application and documents attached thereto, joint report of the experts, as well as other information available to the Committee;
 - 7.4. take the decision to cancel the licence;
 - 7.5. request (if necessary) additional information from higher education institutions/colleges and relevant state authorities necessary for licensing;
 - 7.6. obtain advice from experts, if necessary;
 - 7.7. the chairperson of the Committee shall invite representatives of the ministries of the related industry or experts delegated by ministries to the respective meeting if the Committee reviews an application for licensing of a study programme in the relevant industry within the competence of the respective ministry, as well as may invite industries' experts who have advisory rights;
 - 7.8. visit, if necessary, the higher education institution/college to inspect the actual circumstances in the higher education institution/college within the licensing process of the study programme.
8. The experts in their activities shall comply with 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 facts, observations and their personal competence;

- 8.2. neutrality – when assessing a study programme, the expert shall act independently. The expert shall not represent the interests of the higher education institution/college, study direction or other party;
- 8.3. respect towards the 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 programme;
- 8.4. confidentiality – all information related to the assessment (opinion 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 shall be open to collaboration with other experts. The experts 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 the quality culture.

9. The Council shall:

- 9.1. perform strategic management and planning to organise licensing of study programmes in the Agency;
- 9.2. approve the criteria for the selection of Committee members;
- 9.3. approve the composition, chairperson, and deputy chairperson of the Committee;
- 9.4. approve the Rules of Procedure of the Committee.

III. Licensing of study programme

10. Application for licensing of study programme:

- 10.1. To receive a licence for the implementation of the study programme in the study direction of the higher education institution/college, the higher education institution/college shall submit to the Agency the application signed by the rector of the higher education institution or director of the college, and the study programme description shall be attached hereto, prepared in compliance with the Guidelines for the preparation of the description of the study programme designed by the Centre ² (hereinafter – the guidelines).
- 10.2. The following information shall be included in the application:
 - 10.2.1. name of the higher education institution/college and number of registration certificate of the Register of Educational Institutions;
 - 10.2.2. legal address, phone number and e-mail address of the higher education institution/college;

² *Guidelines for the Preparation of the Description of the Study Programme are available at: <http://www.aika.lv/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Licencēšanas-iesnieguma-un-studiju-programmas-raksturojuma-izstrādes-vadlīnijas.pdf>*

10.2.3. information about the study programme as follows:

- a) name;
- b) name of the relevant study direction;
- c) code in compliance with the Latvian Education Classification;
- d) amount and duration of the implementation of the study programme in credit points (hereinafter – CP);
- e) type and form of studies – the duration of full-time studies, type of studies, form, specifying, in particular, distance-learning, if applicable;
- f) language of implementation of studies;
- g) admission requirements;
- h) degree to be acquired, professional qualification to be awarded or name of degrees and professional qualifications;
- i) name and code of profession in the classification of occupations, relevant Cabinet Regulations (to be specified if it is a professional study programme);
- j) place of implementation (specifying, whether the study programme will be implemented by the higher education institution or branch thereof, college or branch thereof);
- k) name, surname, degree and/or professional qualification, position, e-mail and contact phone of the director;
- l) name, surname, degree and/or professional qualification, position, e-mail and contact phone of the person, authorised by the higher education institution/college who shall deal with licensing-related issues.

10.3. The higher education institution/college shall submit to the Centre the application and documents attached hereto in paper format, and attaching the identical electronic version thereof on a data carrier or in 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 submitted in electronic format shall be signed with a secure electronic signature in compliance with the provisions set out in the Electronic Documents Law.

10.4. The Agency, having received the application, shall review the submitted document for the compliance with the requirements of regulatory enactments, requirements of this Methodology and guidelines designed by the Agency.

10.5. If the higher education institution/college has not submitted all necessary information, the Agency shall request in written to submit the missing information, accordingly extending the deadline for taking the decision in compliance with the procedure specified the Administrative Procedure Law. The relevant information shall be submitted by the higher education institution/college to the Agency within 30 days since this has been requested.

- 10.6. If the higher education institution has submitted for licensing a doctoral study programme, the Agency shall request the Latvian Council of Science to provide an opinion on the doctoral study programme submitted for licensing in compliance with the provisions set out in Paragraph 7 of Section 16 of the Law on Scientific Activity.
- 10.7. The Agency shall request and receive from state registers and registers of the Ministry of Education and Science the information about the higher education institution/college included therein, necessary for licensing of the study programme.
- 10.8. The Agency shall return the application to the higher education institution/college if:
- 10.8.1. fee for licensing of the study programme has not been paid;
 - 10.8.2. all required information has not been submitted;
 - 10.8.3. documents have not been prepared in compliance with the procedure for the preparation of documents as specified in regulatory enactments.
- 10.9. The assessment procedure shall be started by the Agency when the fee for licensing of the study programme has been paid, all information which has been requested by the Agency has been received and the submitted documents have been prepared in compliance with the procedure for the preparation of documents set out in regulatory enactments.

11. Selection and approval of experts

- 11.1. The study programme shall be assessed by three experts, one of which is delegated by the Student Union of Latvia, one is delegated by the Employers' Confederation of Latvia, and one – the expert of the respective industry of the relevant study programme to be licensed.
- 11.2. The Agency shall inform the Student Union of Latvia and LTUESE on an option to delegate, within 10 working days, their representatives to act in the status of an observer (without the voting rights) who may participate in experts' on-site visits in the higher education institutions/colleges.
- 11.3. The criteria and principles for the selection of experts are specified in the "Criteria and Principles for the Selection of Experts" approved by the Centre and available on the Agency's website³.
- 11.4. The Agency, when selecting experts of the relevant industry of the study programme, shall take into account the following aspects:
- 11.4.1. the expert shall have experience in the operation of internal quality assurance systems or external quality assessment in higher education;

³Criteria 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

- 11.4.2. the expert has competence in the relevant industry of the study programme to be assessed;
 - 11.4.3. elements that describe the study programme (e.g. level, form of implementation, language);
 - 11.4.4. study direction of the study programme to be licensed;
 - 11.4.5. type of the higher education institution (university, academy, higher education institution, college);
 - 11.4.6. non-existence of a conflict-of-interest.⁴
- 11.5. The Agency shall, within three working days after the experts' approval, inform the higher education institution/college about the approved experts and the Agency's employee who shall coordinate the assessment process (hereinafter – assessment coordinator). The higher education institution/college may, within three working days, express rejection towards the approved experts, by submitting to the Centre a written justified application, which explains reasons for rejection with regard to each rejected expert. The Agency shall review the application of the higher education institution/college, and if this application is recognised as justified, the Agency shall approve other experts in compliance with the established procedure, and inform the higher education institution/college about it.
- 11.6. The Centre shall conclude an agreement with the expert for performing the assessment. A confirmation about non-existence of a conflict-of-interest and confidentiality liabilities signed by the experts shall be attached to the agreement.
- 11.7. The Agency shall, before the on-site assessment visit in the higher education institution/college, organise training of the experts, available also for observers. During the training, the Agency shall inform the experts of:
- 11.7.1. aims and objectives of the assessment;
 - 11.7.2. work schedule of experts and agenda of the on-site visit;
 - 11.7.3. Methodology and guidelines for the preparation of the joint report of the experts;
 - 11.7.4. the regulatory enactments regulating the assessment of study programmes;

⁴ 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 on-site assessment 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, the 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.

11.7.5. context of the respective higher education institution/college and study direction.

12. The on-site assessment visit:

- 12.1. The aim of the on-site visit shall be to obtain as much information on the study programme as possible to perform a comprehensive and unbiased assessment of the study programme in compliance with the criteria specified in Paragraph 24 of Cabinet Regulations No. 408, Methodology and guidelines for the preparation of the joint report of the experts, as well as to obtain justification for the information provided in the description of the study programme, as well as to make additions to recent findings and observations.
- 12.2. The assessment coordinator shall prepare a draft agenda of the on-site assessment visit and, after it is coordinated with the experts, shall submit it to the higher education institution/college for approval and any additions.
- 12.3. The higher education institution/college shall ensure adequate conditions, premises, and equipment for organisation of the on-site assessment visit, as well as provide the access to the informative support/infrastructure of the study direction, material and technical provision, and other resources upon the request of the Agency or experts.
- 12.4. The experts shall visit the higher education institution/college (and also branches thereof, in which the implementation of the study programmes in the relevant study direction is planned) and assess the study programme. During the on-site assessment visit, the experts shall meet the management of the study programme, management of the higher education institution/college and/or respective structural unit, and the teaching staff, as well as potential representatives of employers. In the end of the on-site visit, the experts shall discuss among themselves the outcomes of the on-site visit, and findings and main conclusions shall be discussed with the representatives of the higher education institution/college.
- 12.5. A representative of the higher education institution/college may take part only in sole meeting with the experts, except cases where such an option has been previously discussed and agreed with the assessment coordinator. The meeting with the teaching staff shall take place in the absence of the representatives of the management of the higher education institution/college.
- 12.6. Persons who study in the higher education institution/college and/or are employed therein, shall not take part in the interviews with employers and/or representatives of professional organisations.
- 12.7. When hosting the experts' on-site visit, the higher education institution/college shall not be obliged to prepare presentations which include the information included in the study programme description attached to the application. If such

presentations have been prepared, the assessment coordinator, subject to an agreement with 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.

- 12.8. Experts' meeting with the representatives of the higher education institution/college shall include both a question-and-answer session, interactive discussion and exchange of opinions between the experts and representatives of the higher education institution/college provided that sufficient information is being obtained to analyse the assessment criteria and the relevant aspects thereof specified in the guidelines for the preparation of the joint report of the experts, and to prepare the joint report of the experts.
- 12.9. In the end of the on-site visit, the experts shall discuss the outcomes of the on-site visit, formulate a joint opinion about the way how the criteria and their describing aspects have been complied with, and shall discuss the findings of the on-site visit and main conclusions with representatives of the higher education institution/college, providing brief comments about the strengths of the study programme to be assessed and required improvements.
- 12.10. During the on-site assessment visit, the breaks (coffee breaks, lunches) shall be organised separately from the representatives of the higher education institution/college, unless proposed otherwise by the experts.

13. Preparation of joint report of experts:

- 13.1. After the on-site assessment visit, the experts shall:
- 13.1.1. prepare the joint report of the experts according to the deadline set by the Agency in compliance with the criteria specified in Paragraph 24 of Cabinet Regulations No. 408 and guidelines for the preparation of the joint report of the experts⁵ designed by the Agency;
 - 13.1.2. mutually agree on the evaluation of the assessment criteria and the aspects thereof, in compliance with the requirements of regulatory enactments and Part 1 of the ESG "Standards and Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance";
 - 13.1.3. agree on the wording used in the joint report, acceptable for all experts. If experts have different opinion about any of the assessment criterion, the dissenting opinion shall be indicated in the respective section of the joint report, by indicating expert's name, surname, dissenting opinion, assessment criterion and the justification of the dissenting opinion.
 - 13.1.4. in the joint report, the experts shall describe both positive and negative aspects, providing a detailed justification for all statements. The experts shall analyse each assessment criterion and its aspects and formulate conclusions, specifying strengths and weaknesses of the higher education

⁵ *Guidelines for the preparation of the Joint Report of the Experts for the Assessment of the Study Programme are available at: <http://www.aika.lv/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Ekspertu-kopīgā-atzinuma-izstrādes-vadlīnijas-studiju-programmu-licencēšanai.pdf>*

institution/college with regard to the way how the assessment criterion in the study programme has been met;

13.1.5. specify the prepared report at the instruction of the Agency, if necessary;

13.1.6. perform other tasks related to the assessment of the study programme.

13.2. The Agency shall review the joint opinion of the experts and may ask the experts to specify it.

13.3. The Agency shall submit the joint opinion of the experts to the higher education institution/college.

14. Procedure for taking decision and appealing

14.1. The Agency shall inform the respective higher education institution/college about the date, time and place, the application is to be reviewed. The higher education institution/college may appoint not more than two representatives for the participation in the Committee meeting. Upon request by the Committee, the Agency may invite to the Committee meeting the expert/-s who assessed the study programme.

14.2. The Agency shall invite representatives of the ministries of the relevant industries or experts appointed by the respective ministries, to the Committee meeting, if the Committee reviews the application for licensing of a study programme in the industry, in which the respective ministry is competent as well as may invite experts of the ministries who have advisory rights.

14.3. The Committee shall review the documents submitted by the higher education institution/college, joint report of the experts, information provided by the certification institutions, if any, and other information available to the Committee, and shall take the decision on licensing or the refusal to license the study programme, based on the joint report of the experts and taking into consideration the assessment criteria of the study programme and describing aspects thereof specified in the guidelines for the preparation of the joint report of the experts:

14.3.1. justification of creation of the study programme and compliance with the study direction and strategy of the higher education institution;

14.3.2. management of the study programme;

14.3.3. resources and provision of the study programme;

14.3.4. content and implementation mechanism of the study programme;

14.3.5. employment opportunities of the graduates;

14.3.6. compliance of the study programme with provisions of regulatory enactments.

14.4. The Committee has the right to inspect the actual circumstances in the higher education institution/college and review other information available to the Committee.

- 14.5. If the Committee has taken the decision to license the study programme or to introduce changes to the license, the Agency, within 10 working days since the decision has been taken, shall submit to the Ministry of Education and Science a copy of the decision and licence prepared by the Agency (Annex 2 to Cabinet Regulations No. 408).
- 14.6. The Ministry of Education and Science, within 10 working days since the copy of the decision taken by the Committee and the licence have been received, shall submit to the Agency the licence signed by the Minister for Education and Science.
- 14.7. The Agency shall issue the licence to the higher education institution/college, as well as register it.
- 14.8. The Committee shall take the decision on the refusal to issue the licence for the study programme in cases specified in Part 4 of Section 55² of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education.
- 14.9. The decision taken by the Committee may be contested in the Centre that has developed internal appeals procedure for appeals review set out in the Appeals Procedure of the Appeals Committee approved by the Centre ⁶. The decision taken by the Centre may be appealed in the court in compliance with the procedure set out in the Administrative Procedure Law.

15. Follow-up activities:

- 15.1. After the completed assessment process and taking the decision on licensing of the study programme, the higher education institution/college shall perform activities, the aim of which is to improve the quality of the study programme, eliminating the deficiencies detected during the assessment process and specified in the joint report of the experts, and implementing the recommendations given by the experts.
- 15.2. During the subsequent accreditation of the study direction, the Study Accreditation Committee shall assess whether the deficiencies detected in the assessment process have been eliminated and the given recommendations implemented.

Chairperson of the Committee for Licensing of Study Programmes

T. Volkova

⁶The Appeals Procedure of the Appeals Committee is available at: http://www.aika.lv/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Apelacijas_komisijas_nolikums_LV.pdf