

Guidelines for Initial and Re-assessment of Study programme Groups in Vocational Education

Approved by the Quality Assessment Council for Vocational Education of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education on 1 July 2019.

Amended by the Quality Assessment Council for Vocational Education of the Estonian Quality Agency for Education on 30 June 2022.

I. General provisions

1. Based on § 10, § 11, § 12 (1), § 14 (5) and (6), and § 58 (7) of the Vocational Educational Institutions Act, these guidelines outline the requirements and procedures for conducting the assessment required to receive the right to provide instruction in a new study programme group, and to renew the right to provide instruction upon the expiry of the latter.
2. The assessment required to provide instruction in a new study programme group (hereinafter *initial assessment*) and the re-assessment conducted in case right to provide instruction was granted to a school for a specified term (hereinafter 're-assessment') shall be carried out by the Estonian Quality Agency for Education (hereinafter *HAKA*).
3. To pass an initial assessment, the educational institution providing vocational education (hereinafter 'school') shall submit an application to the Ministry of Education and Research no later than six months before the planned commencement of studies.
4. To pass re-assessment, the school shall submit an application and an internal assessment report (hereinafter *self-evaluation report*) of the study programme group to the Ministry of Education and Research no later than six months before the expiry of the right to provide instruction.
5. The costs of initial assessment shall be covered by the applicant for the right to provide instruction. An assessment shall be conducted after the costs of

assessment have been covered in time. Upon the establishment of a state school, the costs of assessment shall be covered by the Ministry of Education and Research. In study programme groups in which as of 31 August 2019 the right to provide instruction was granted to a school for a specified term, the costs of re-assessment shall be covered by the Ministry of Education and Research.

II. Initial assessment of a study programme group

6. When conducting initial assessment of a study programme group, HAKA shall judge whether the learning outcomes of the draft study programme are achievable and whether they are in conformity with the requirements of vocational education standard; whether there is a sufficient number of positions for teaching and education staff complying with the planned qualification requirements in the study programme group; whether the resources necessary for conducting studies in the study programme group are adequate; whether the study to be opened is sustainable pursuant to the development plan and/or other strategic documents; and whether the study to be opened is purposeful.

Standards and criteria for initial assessment

7. **Learning outcomes defined in the draft study programme are achievable and comply with the standard of vocational education:**
 - 7.1. draft study programme complies with the standard of vocational education and, if such documents exist, with other national and/or international legislation regulating this profession;
 - 7.2. learning outcomes defined in the draft study programme meet the competency needs of the labour market and, if such document exists, with professional standards for the relevant qualification level;
 - 7.3. the volume of the draft study programme, the share of main and optional modules, student workload for practical work, traineeship and individual work, as well as planned forms of study, are relevant and support the achievement of the objectives of the learning outcomes.
8. **There is a sufficient number of positions for teaching and education employees complying with the planned qualification requirements in order to provide instruction in the study programme group:**
 - 8.1. qualification requirements set for planned teaching and education employee positions comply with the specifics of the study programme;
 - 8.2. there is a sufficient number of planned positions in order to provide instruction.



9. Resources necessary for providing instruction in the study programme group are adequate:

- 9.1. the study environment of the study programme group is sufficient for the achievement the learning outcomes;
- 9.2. health and safety are ensured in the rooms planned to use for studies.

10. The study to be opened is evidence-based, purposeful and sustainable:

- 10.1. the study to be opened complies with the goals outlined in the school's development plan;
- 10.2. the study to be opened is purposeful in view of the labour market forecast and the existence of potential students;
- 10.3. the study to be opened is evidence-based and necessary in the opinion of the local government association and social partners relevant to the study programme group.

11. To pass an initial assessment, the school submits the following documents to the Ministry of Education and Research no later than six months before the planned commencement of studies:

- 11.1. study programme complying with the requirements provided for in the legislation;
- 11.2. list of teaching and education employee positions that comply with qualification requirements;
- 11.3. health and safety assessment by competent authorities and the planned study rooms' compliance with safety requirements;
- 11.4. the development plan of the school.
- 11.5. a written opinion of the advisory body of the school on opening formal education in a new study programme group;
- 11.6. a written opinion of the local government association on the need to open formal education in a new study programme group;
- 11.7. written opinions of social partners relevant to the study programme group on the need to open formal education in a new study programme group.

12. In addition to the documents mentioned in clause 11, the initial assessment shall also take into account information acquired during the assessment visit of the school and available relevant data in the Estonian Education Information System (www.ehis.ee).



III. Re-assessment of a study programme group

13. In addition to the aspects mentioned in clause 5, the re-assessment shall also evaluate the implementation of the study programme.

Standards and criteria for re-assessment

14. Learning outcomes defined in the study programme are achievable and comply with the standard of vocational education:

- 14.1. study programme complies with the standard of vocational education and, if such documents exist, with other national and/or international legislation regulating this profession;
- 14.2. learning outcomes defined in the study programme meet the competency needs of the labour market and, if such documents exist, with professional standards for the relevant qualification level;
- 14.3. the volume of the study programme, the share of main and optional modules, student workload for practical work, traineeship and individual work, as well as forms of study, are relevant and support the achievement of the objectives of the study programme;
- 14.4. the organisation of studies including practical work and traineeship is based on the specificities of students and forms of study, and it supports students in achieving their learning outcomes;
- 14.5. contents and methods of study, as well as assessment criteria and methods, are cohesive and support students in achieving their learning outcomes.

15. The study programme has teachers with relevant qualification, including practitioners and competent traineeship supervisors:

- 15.1. teaching and education employees, including practitioners and traineeship supervisors, have qualifications that comply with the requirements; the volume of work of teachers and job positions are pre-planned;
- 15.2. professional and occupational development of teachers is focused on the study programme, the needs of learners, feedback from the stakeholders and self-evaluation.

16. Resources necessary for providing instruction in the study programme group are adequate:

- 16.1. the learning environment, including materials, tools and technology are sufficient and support the students in achieving their learning outcomes;
- 16.2. health and safety are ensured during the study process.

17. The study is evidence-based, purposeful and sustainable:

- 17.1. the study complies with the goals outlined in the school's development plan;



- 17.2. the study takes into account the needs of the labour market, the forecast for potential students, and is sustainable.
18. For a re-assessment, the school shall prepare a self-evaluation report according to guidelines established by HAKA.
19. The re-assessment of study programme group shall take into account the self-evaluation report submitted by the school, available relevant data in the Estonian Education Information System (www.ehis.ee), and information acquired during the assessment visit of the school.

IV. Organisation and schedule of initial and re-assessment

Formation and tasks of Assessment Committees

20. To conduct a re-assessment, HAKA shall start forming an assessment committee within one month after the Ministry of Education and Research has forwarded to HAKA the request by a school and documents needed for the assessment.
21. If necessary, HAKA may ask for further information from the school or employers connected with the study programme group to be assessed. HAKA shall make all acquired information available both to the Committee and the school to be assessed.
22. No later than one month before the assessment visit, the HAKA Secretariat shall forward to members of the Committee all documents submitted by the school, the self-evaluation report in case of re-assessment, and any further information that may be required.
23. The Assessment Committee (hereinafter 'Committee') shall comprise at least three members and include representatives of employers in the fields of the study programme group under assessment, and experts of vocational education.
24. HAKA shall choose Committee members following the principles of:
 - 24.1. avoiding conflicts of interest;
 - 24.2. choosing Committee members from different organisations.
25. A member of the Committee shall:
 - 25.1. know the functioning of the vocational education system, be familiar with trends and organisational principles of vocational education;
 - 25.2. have management and/or development experience in the field of the study programme group under assessment and/or in the field of vocational education;



- 25.3. preferably have experience in teaching and/or supervision (including traineeship supervision) in the field of vocational education;
 - 25.4. preferably have completed a study programme development, internal and/or external assessment or quality management training, and preferably have internal and/or external assessment experience;
 - 25.5. be independent in their work and not represent the interests of the organisation they belong to.
26. A Committee member shall confirm by signature in their contract for services an obligation to maintain the confidentiality of information that has become known to them in the course of assessment, and a lack of conflicts of interest. If a conflict of interests occurs, the Committee member shall inform the Director of HAKA immediately and remove themselves from the work of the Committee. A conflict of interest is presumed to be present in the following cases:
- 26.1. a Committee member has an employment or other contractual relationship with the school under assessment at the time of assessment, or they have had an employment relationship with the school within three years prior to the assessment visit;
 - 26.2. a Committee member is participating in the work of a decision-making or advisory body of the school under assessment at the time of assessment;
 - 26.3. a Committee member is studying in the school under assessment, or graduated from it less than three years ago;
 - 26.4. any member of school staff connected to the study programme group under assessment is a person closely related to a Committee member (spouse or life partner, child or parent).
27. The HAKA Secretariat shall notify the school of the composition of a Committee, and the school may give its opinion on it within five working days.
28. The Director of HAKA shall approve the final composition of a Committee by his or her order and appoint a chairperson of the Committee. The Director of HAKA shall appoint a Secretary to each Committee who is a member of the Committee. The appointed Secretary can also be one of HAKA's employees.
29. The objective of the Committee is to analyse the compliance of the study with requirements and provide an assessment and recommendations for improvement on the basis of the analysis. The analysis shall take into account the documents submitted by the school (self-evaluation report in case of re-assessment), available relevant data in the Estonian Education Information System (www.ehis.ee), and information acquired during the assessment visit.



30. Tasks of Committee members:

- 30.1. to familiarise themselves with documents regulating the assessment of study programme group and to complete HAKA's assessment training;
- 30.2. to analyse documents and materials related to the study programme group;
- 30.3. to participate in Committee meetings and discussions;
- 30.4. to prepare and participate in the assessment visit;
- 30.5. to participate in the compilation of the assessment report;
- 30.6. to perform other tasks related to assessment according to the division of tasks;
- 30.7. to respect deadlines agreed upon in the Committee.

31. Tasks of the chairperson of the Committee:

- 31.1. to draw up the work plan of the Committee;
- 31.2. to decide on the division of tasks of Committee members;
- 31.3. to chair Committee meetings and discussions;
- 31.4. to lead substantive preparation of the assessment visit and Committee's work during the visit;
- 31.5. to provide initial feedback to the school after the visit;
- 31.6. to ensure the validity of the Committee's assessments and proposals;
- 31.7. to collaborate with the Secretary of the Committee in preparing the assessment report and to approve the report;
- 31.8. to inform the Director of HAKA of Committee members' contributions.

32. Tasks of the Secretary of the Committee:

- 32.1. to familiarise themselves with documents regulating the initial assessment of study programme groups and to complete HAKA's assessment training;
- 32.2. to analyse documents and materials related to the study programme group;
- 32.3. to participate in Committee meetings and discussions;
- 32.4. to prepare and participate in the assessment visit;



- 32.5. to relay information between the Committee, the school and the HAKA Secretariat;
 - 32.6. to verify that schedule is respected and agreed topics are addressed during the assessment visit;
 - 32.7. to compile the assessment report with the contribution of Committee members and in compliance with documents submitted by the school and data collected during the assessment visit;
 - 32.8. to perform other tasks related to assessment according to the division of tasks;
 - 32.9. to respect deadlines agreed upon in the Committee.
33. HAKA shall conclude contracts for services with members of the Committee and cover any transport and accommodation costs incurred in the performance of their duties.

Assessment visit

34. The HAKA Secretariat shall coordinate the time of the assessment visit with the school and members of the Committee no later than 10 working days prior to the visit.
35. An assessment visit lasts up to two working days.
36. The HAKA Secretariat shall prepare a schedule for the visit in cooperation with the school, the chairperson and the Secretary of the Committee. The HAKA Secretariat shall confirm the final schedule for the visit with the school no later than five working days prior to the visit.
37. Head of the school shall ensure the availability of information material deemed necessary by the Committee and adherence to the working conditions of Committee members according to the agreed schedule of the visit.
38. The visit is conducted in accordance with HAKA's Guidelines to schools for organising assessment visits.
39. Members of the Committee shall familiarise themselves with auxiliary information materials provided by the school, complying with the confidentiality requirement.
40. During the visit, members of the Committee have the right to and the school shall enable them to:
 - 40.1. speak to members of the school's Advisory Board, representatives of the management, employees, students and partners;



- 40.2. access the school's documents;
 - 40.3. observe the school's working and study environment;
 - 40.4. in the case of re-assessment, visit the study programme group's different forms of study and traineeship.
41. After the assessment visit, HAKA shall ask the school to provide written feedback within five working days about Committee members' preparation, the relevance of their questions and other important aspects in the format established by HAKA. HAKA shall consider the feedback when choosing members to future assessment committees and planning assessment visits.

Assessment report and recommendations by the Committee

42. In the assessment report, the Committee shall:
- 42.1. provide a concise analysis of the study to be opened on the basis of standards and criteria defined in clauses 6–9 in case of initial assessment, or of the quality of instruction on the basis of standards and criteria defined in clauses 13–16 in case of re-assessment, as well as recommendations for improvement;
 - 42.2. give an assessment, on the basis of the analysis, to the compliance of instruction with each standard (hereinafter 'partial assessment'), stating whether instruction:
 - 42.3. conforms to a required standard;
 - 42.4. partially conforms to a required standard; or
 - 42.5. does not conform to a required standard.
43. Committees' assessments shall preferably be adopted by consensus. If consensus is not reached, a simple majority of members of the Committee shall make the decision, and the dissenting view(s) together with the reason(s) shall be included. In the event of a tie, the vote of the chairperson of the Committee shall prevail.
44. The Committee shall present the results of the assessment as an assessment report in the format established by HAKA (*Vocational education study programme group initial assessment report form; Vocational education study programme group re-assessment report form*). The chairperson of the Committee shall electronically forward the assessment report to the HAKA Secretariat within ten working days after the assessment visit. The HAKA Secretariat shall check the correctness of the drawing up of the assessment report and, with the approval of the Committee chairperson, forward it to the school for comments within five working days.



45. School may electronically forward its reasoned comments signed by the Head of the school to the HAKA Secretariat within 10 working days after the receipt of the draft assessment report. The Committee shall examine the comments and consider them when elaborating the final assessment report.
46. The chairperson of the Committee shall forward the final assessment report to the HAKA Secretariat electronically within five working days after the receipt of the comments. The HAKA Secretariat shall forward the final assessment report to the school that was assessed.
47. The HAKA Secretariat shall forward the assessment report and the comments of the school, as well as, in case of re-assessment, the study programme group's self-evaluation report to the HAKA Quality Assessment Council for Vocational Education.
48. Guidelines for initial assessment and re-assessment of study programme groups in vocational education, a guide to schools for organising assessment visits, and assessment report forms are available on HAKA's website.

V. Decision by the HAKA Quality Assessment Council for Vocational Education

49. The HAKA Quality Assessment Council for Vocational Education (hereinafter 'Assessment Council') shall base its decision on the assessment report, in case of re-assessment also the self-evaluation report, comments by the school received within a specified time, Committee's partial assessments, as well as additional materials submitted at the Assessment Council's request.
50. In case of contradictions in the assessment report or inadequate justification, the Assessment Council shall have the right to return the report to the Committee to be reviewed and clarified. The Committee shall review the report within five working days after its receipt and return it with clarifications to the HAKA Secretariat.
51. The Assessment Council shall base its final decision and its proposal to the Minister of Education and Research on the following principles:
 - 51.1. if all four of the Committee's partial assessments are 'conforms to a required standard', the Assessment Council shall decide that 'the quality of instruction conforms to a required standard', and propose to the Minister of Education and Research to grant the school the right to provide instruction in the study programme group without a term;
 - 51.2. if at least one of the Committee's partial assessments are 'does not conform to a required standard', the Assessment Council shall decide that 'the quality of instruction does not conform to a required standard', and propose



to the Minister of Education and Research not to grant the school the right to provide instruction in the study programme group;

51.3. if all four of the Committee's partial assessments are 'partially conforms to a required standard', the Assessment Council shall consider the activities and areas for improvement of the study programme group and decide that 'the quality of instruction partially conforms to a required standard', and propose to the Minister of Education and Research to grant the school the right to provide instruction in the study programme group for three (3) years, or decide that 'the quality of instruction does not conform to a required standard', and propose to the Minister of Education and Research not to grant the school the right to provide instruction in the study programme group;

51.4. if one to three of the Committee's partial assessments are 'partially conforms to a required standard', and the other partial assessments are 'conforms to a required standard', the Assessment Council shall decide that 'the quality of instruction partially conforms to a required standard', and propose to the Minister of Education and Research to grant the school the right to provide instruction in the study programme group for three (3) years.

52. The HAKA Secretariat shall forward the decision by the Assessment Council to the Ministry of Education and Research, the school and members of the Committee within 10 working days after the date of that decision, and publish the decision along with the assessment report on its website within five working days from forwarding it.

53. If, as a result of the third re-assessment, the school is not granted the right to provide instruction in the study programme group without a term, the right to provide instruction shall terminate with the expiry of the term.

VI. Requests for Explanation and Memoranda Concerning Conduct of Initial Assessment

54. If a person concerned has a doubt that HAKA or a Committee has not followed the rules described in these Guidelines when organising and conducting an initial assessment of study programme groups, they may file an appropriate request for explanation or memorandum with the Director of HAKA who shall provide a reasoned written response within 30 days after the date of registration of the request.

55. If the person who filed the request does not agree with the response by the Director of HAKA, they may submit a request for explanation or memorandum to the Management Board of the Archimedes Foundation, who shall review the



explanations of both parties and submit its opinion on the issue raised in the request within 30 days after the date of registration of the request.

56. If a person concerned disagrees with the substantive grounds of the decision of the Assessment Council, they may present a complaint to the Council within 30 days of receipt of the decision. The Assessment Council shall forward the complaint to the Appeals Committee of the HAKA Quality Assessment Council for Vocational Education who provides the Assessment Council with an unbiased written opinion regarding the validity of the complaint within 5 days after receiving the complaint. The Assessment Council shall issue a reasoned reply to the complaint within 30 days of receipt of the complaint, taking also into account the reasoned opinion of the Appeals Committee.

