

Guidelines for Accreditation of Study Programmes in Continuing Education

Approved by EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education on 11.04.2017.

Amended on 31.03.2022.

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I. General provisions

1. The purpose of accreditation of study programmes in continuing education (hereinafter referred to as *study programmes*) is to determine whether: the objectives of the study programme are clear and appropriate; the teaching methods and tools used in teaching facilitate the achievement of planned learning outcomes; sufficient resources are available to implement the study programme; the studies are organized in a professional manner; the provider regularly analyses the level of achievement of the objectives of the study programme and, if necessary, plans improvement activities.
2. Estonian Quality Agency for Education (hereinafter referred to as *HAKA*) shall assess the study programmes in five assessment areas: study programme and study programme development, learning and teaching, teaching staff, students, and resources, and based on the assessments make an accreditation decision.
3. The accreditation of study programmes is conducted according to the timetable drafted by HAKA and approved by the institution providing the study programmes (hereinafter referred to as *provider*).

II. Requirements for accreditation of study programmes

4. Study programme and study programme development

- 4.1 Educational needs of (different) target groups as well as results of educational and societal trends and market research are used for developing educational offer.
- 4.2 Objectives, expectations, requirements of stakeholders are identified and defined. The goals and content of the learning offer are relevant for the target group, they are tailored to the needs of students.

- 4.3 Relevant stakeholders, e.g., current and former students, teachers/trainers, funders and other relevant stakeholders are involved in the development of the educational offer. The study programme development takes into account feedback from students, employers, and other stakeholders.
- 4.4 Learning outcomes, including transversal skills, are clearly defined, match the educational goals and, if applicable, are linked with current professional practice.
- 4.5 The content and structure of the study programme are consistent with its objectives and learning outcomes.
- 4.6 Different parts of the study programme are logically integrated and form a coherent whole.
- 4.7 E-learning and blended learning offers are developed to cater to the needs and requirements of students and also to reach out to geographically dispersed target groups, if applicable.

5. Learning and teaching

- 5.1 Modern teaching methods with a strong student orientation are used in teaching. They are adapted to the needs and experiences of adult students.
- 5.2 Teaching content and learning process are linked to the learning outcomes on the respective level of the EQF, if applicable.
- 5.3 Teaching and learning materials (including e-learning materials) are up- to-date and appropriate to achieve learning outcomes.
- 5.4 Assessment of learning outcomes (including recognition of prior learning and work experience) is transparent and objective. Where necessary, digital technologies, among other means, are used for assessment.
- 5.5 The teaching process includes self-assessment and a formative performance assessment, i.e., an analysis of the individual student in his/her learning development.
- 5.6 Students and teachers' reflective feedback on the process and outcomes is collected, analysed, and taken into consideration on a regular basis.

6. Teaching staff

- 6.1. There is teaching staff with adequate qualifications to achieve the objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme, and to ensure quality and sustainability of the learning and teaching.
- 6.2. Practitioners participate in teaching the study programme.



- 6.3. The teaching staff have adequate teaching and digital competences in order to support the autonomy of students and ensure adequate and professional supervision.
- 6.4. The teaching staff periodically receive feedback on their performance and top up their professional, pedagogical, and digital skills.
- 6.5. Institutional structures and means of communication, information and cooperation ensure a good working climate and foster teamwork, including team-teaching, among teaching staff.

7. Students

- 7.1. Existing competencies and qualifications of students are assessed, and adequate placement is provided.
- 7.2. Both the graduates of the study programmes and their employers are satisfied with their professional preparation and social competencies of the graduates.
- 7.3. Detailed information on the educational offer (course programme) is made available to the potential students. It is spread sufficiently ahead of time before the start of courses.
- 7.4. Counselling and instruction respect adults' needs.

8. Resources

- 8.1. Adequate physical and financial resources support the achievement of objectives in the study programme.
- 8.2. State of the art and fit for purpose information and communication technological solutions, including study information system, document management system, online learning environment, support learning and teaching.
- 8.3. Digital learning and teaching as well as IT support is available to students and teaching staff.
- 8.4. Resource development is sustainable.

III. Self-evaluation of study programmes

9. The provider shall conduct self-evaluation of study programmes and prepare a self-evaluation report according to the Template for the self-evaluation report.
10. The provider shall finalize the self-evaluation report and send it to the coordinator no later than two months before the assessment visit.



IV. Formation of expert panels

11. Expert panels (hereinafter referred to as *panels*) shall have at least four members. A panel shall comprise an employer representative, a representative of students, a training expert in the respective field of specialization and an expert in the field of quality assurance.
12. Requirements for members of an expert panel.
 - 12.1. members of an expert panel shall be independent, they shall not represent neither the interests of their employer/the educational institution they are enrolled in, nor the interests of any other third parties;
 - 12.2. members of an expert panel shall confirm by signature the obligation to maintain the confidentiality of information that has become known to them through their membership in the panel and the lack of conflicts of interest. A conflict of interest is presumed to be present in the following cases:
 - a panel member has an employment or other contractual relationship with the provider under evaluation at the time of assessment, or he or she has had an employment relationship with that provider within three years prior to the assessment visit;
 - a panel member participates in the work of a decision- making or advisory body of the provider under evaluation at the time of assessment;
 - a panel member is studying at the provider under evaluation, or graduated from it less than three years prior to the assessment;
 - the staff or affiliated bodies of the study programme of the provider under evaluation includes a person closely related to a panel member – spouse or partner or a family member;
 - 12.3. members of an expert panel shall know the functioning of the continuing education system and the legislation that regulates it in the respective country, and they are familiar with the trends in continuing education worldwide;
 - 12.4. members of an expert panel shall have past management and/or development experience in the area of the given study programme, and/or they have undergone training related to external quality evaluation and they shall preferably have past experience in external evaluation of education;
 - 12.5. members of an expert panel shall have the necessary teamwork skills to conduct the assessment.
 - 12.6. members of an expert panel shall be proficient in the working language of the assessment.
13. Duties of members of a panel include the following:



- 13.1. reviewing the self-evaluation report of the higher education institution;
 - 13.2. examining documents that regulate the accreditation of study programmes;
 - 13.3. completing an assessment training provided by HAKA;
 - 13.4. participating in the meetings and discussions of the panel;
 - 13.5. contributing to the drafting of the assessment report before the assessment visit;
 - 13.6. participating in the drafting of recommendations and the assessment report;
 - 13.7. examining the comments of the higher education institution on the assessment report and considering them when drafting the final assessment report;
 - 13.8. performing other tasks related to assessment activities according to the division of tasks among the members of a panel;
 - 13.9. adhering to the agreed deadlines.
14. Duties of the chairperson of a panel include the following:
- 14.1. chairing the meetings of the panel;
 - 14.2. dividing tasks among members of the panel;
 - 14.3. chairing the panel during the visit;
 - 14.4. after the visit, giving preliminary feedback of the panel to the provider;
 - 14.5. ensuring that the opinion of the panel is well-reasoned;
 - 14.6. preparing and approving the assessment report.
15. The provider has the right to present its position on the composition of an expert panel.
16. The Director of HAKA shall approve the final composition of the panel and appoint a chairperson of the panel and an assessment coordinator.
17. An assessment coordinator (hereinafter referred to as *coordinator*) is a support person of a panel and an administrator of the assessment process whose main duty is to ensure the smooth functioning of the assessment process on the basis of the requirements and the timeframe provided in this document.
18. HAKA shall enter into contracts for services with members of a panel.



V. Organisation of the work of expert panels

19. The provider receiving an expert panel shall appoint a contact person, who ensures smooth communication between HAKA and the provider.
20. An assessment visit to the provider shall last two to three days. The coordinator shall prepare a schedule for the visit in cooperation with the provider and the chairperson of the expert panel.
21. In the course of an assessment visit, the provider shall make an adequately furnished room available to the members of a panel and allow them to:
 - 21.1. access statutes and normative documents which provide for and govern the activities of the provider and its structural units;
 - 21.2. interview employees and students enrolled in the study programme(s) at the choice of experts;
 - 21.3. access information related to teaching, learning and students on the study programme(s); educational materials; and the study information system;
 - 21.4. access information related to the teaching staff concerning their CVs, workload, methodological work and research activities;
 - 21.5. examine the internal quality assurance system for learning and teaching;
 - 21.6. examine the of the infrastructure of the provider;
 - 21.7. access course syllabuses as well as regulations and guidelines related to the content of teaching and learning;
 - 21.8. access information related to the financial activities of the provider;
 - 21.9. visit any forms of contact learning (lectures, seminars, laboratory work, etc.);
 - 21.10. if necessary, obtain other information related to teaching and learning.
22. An expert panel shall evaluate the study programme(s) in five assessment areas: study programme and study programme development, learning and teaching, teaching staff, students, and resources (hereinafter referred to as *component assessments*).
23. Assessment report shall include a description and analysis of information underpinning the component assessments.
24. As a result of outcomes of an assessment area, an expert panel shall determine whether the component under evaluation:
 - 24.1. conforms to requirements;



- 24.2. partially conforms to requirements; or
- 24.3. does not conform to requirements.
- 25. HAKA shall forward the first draft of the assessment report to the provider no later than four weeks after the assessment visit.
- 26. The provider under evaluation has the right to provide comments to the draft assessment report within two weeks of receiving the draft report.
- 27. An expert panel shall analyse the comments submitted by the provider and formalise the final report within one week of receiving the comments.
- 28. It is recommended that component assessments of the report shall be adopted by consensus. If consensus is not reached, the decision shall be made by simple majority of members of an expert panel and the dissenting view(s) together with the reasons shall be included.
- 29. The HAKA Secretariat shall forward the final report of the expert panel and the comments of the provider to the HAKA Quality Assessment Council. The Quality Assessment Council shall adopt an assessment decision within two months of finalization of the assessment report.

VI. Final assessment by the HAKA Quality Assessment Council

- 30. The HAKA Quality Assessment Council (hereafter *the Council*) shall adopt a final assessment decision on a study programme at its session.
- 31. The Council shall base its final assessment on the component assessments by the expert panel and the comments by the provider received within the specified time, as well as additional materials submitted at the request of the Council.
- 32. In the case of contradictions in component assessments by an expert panel or inadequate reasoning, the Council shall have the right to return the assessment report to the expert panel to be reviewed and clarified; the panel shall review the component assessments within two weeks after their receipt and return them with additional explanations and reasons to the HAKA Secretariat.
- 33. The Council shall, on the basis of the final assessment report, base the accreditation decision on the following principles:
 - 33.1. If all five of the component assessments are “conforms to requirements”, the Council shall decide to accredit the study programme for a period of five years.
 - 33.2. If at least one of the component assessments is “does not conform to requirements”, the Council shall decide not to accredit the study programme.



- 33.3. If one to five of the component assessments are “partially conforms to requirements”, the Council shall analyse the strengths and areas of improvement of the study programme and decide to accredit the study programme for five years with conditions, or not to accredit the study programme.
- 33.4. If the Council weighs between two accreditation decisions and finds that if the provider were to satisfy certain conditions, a more positive decision would be possible, the Council may make that decision with a secondary condition, as defined in §53 of the Administrative Procedure Act. 43¹.1.
- 33.4.1. If the Assessment Council adopts a decision that contains a secondary condition, the Assessment Council shall list in its decision the specific shortcomings underlying the imposition of the secondary condition and shall set a deadline by which the provider shall submit a report on the progress on the shortcomings underlying the secondary condition.
- 33.4.2. HAKA shall involve 2-3 experts to evaluate the progress made on the secondary condition. HAKA shall conduct an assessment of progress made on the secondary condition within two months of the deadline set in the decision by the Council.
- 33.4.3. Experts assessing the progress made on the secondary condition, shall judge in their report whether the shortcomings identified in the secondary condition have been ‘fully eliminated’; ‘substantially eliminated’; ‘partially eliminated’; or ‘have not been eliminated’.
- 33.4.4. If all shortcomings have been fully or substantially eliminated, the Assessment Council shall adopt the decision that the secondary condition has been met. If all shortcomings have been partially eliminated, the Assessment Council shall analyse the gravity of the shortcomings and shall adopt the decision, that the secondary condition has not been met; or shall adopt the decision that the secondary condition has been met. If at least one of the shortcomings has not been eliminated, the Council shall adopt the decision that the secondary condition has not been met.
- 33.4.5. If the Council adopts the decision that the secondary condition has not been met, the Assessment Council can, based on §53 (3) of the Administrative Procedure Act, repeal the primary assessment decision; or impose a new secondary condition. According to §66 (2) and (3) of the Administrative Procedure Act, an administrative act which was lawful at the moment of issue may be retroactively repealed if an additional duty was related to the administrative act and the person has failed to perform it.



34. The HAKA Secretariat shall forward the final assessment by the Quality Assessment Council to the provider and the members of the expert panel within ten working days from its adoption.
35. In the case of accreditation for five years without a secondary condition, HAKA shall issue a certificate to the provider attesting the accreditation. The study programmes that have received an accreditation for five years with conditions, shall be issued the certificate when the conditions have been met.
36. The assessment report together with the accreditation decision will be published on the HAKA website.

VII. Follow-up activities

37. HAKA assumes that the responsibility for eliminating shortcomings pointed out in the assessment report and for continuous improvement activities lies with the provider institution. HAKA requests that, one year after the accreditation decision was adopted by the Council, the provider who was granted accreditation for five years submit a written overview of its activities, planned, and implemented based on the recommendations made in the assessment report, along with the results of such activities.

VIII. Contestation of assessment proceedings conducted by HAKA and final assessments by the Assessment Council

38. A person who finds that his or her rights have been violated or his or her freedoms have been restricted by assessment procedures conducted by HAKA or by a decision made by the Council may file a challenge pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Administrative Procedure Act. The challenge shall be filed with the Council within thirty days after the person filing the challenge became or should have become aware of the contested finding.
39. The Council shall forward the challenge to its Appeals Committee who shall provide an unbiased opinion in writing regarding the validity of the challenge to the Council, within five days after receipt of the challenge. The Council shall resolve the challenge within ten days of its receipt, taking into account the reasoned opinion of the Appeals Committee. If the challenge needs to be investigated further, the deadline for its review by the Council may be extended by a maximum of thirty days.
40. The decision by the Council may be challenged within thirty days after the delivery of the final decision, filing an action with the Tallinn courthouse of the Tallinn Administrative Court pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Code of Administrative Court.



IX. Financing of accreditation

41. HAKA shall charge the provider a fee to meet the full costs of the accreditation. This includes the expert fees, a fee for the coordination and administration of the accreditation process, and travel and accommodation expenses. The expert fees and administrative overhead are determined by the HAKA Quality Assessment Council; travel and accommodation expenses are charged at cost. The approximate total of the whole review is payable by the provider to HAKA upon the signing of the contract. HAKA shall not undertake any further preparations for the accreditation review until the payment has been received.
42. The travel costs and the accommodation costs will be paid as actual costs. Should the real travel and accommodation costs be lower than the amount paid in advance for these purposes, the provider will be reimbursed the difference. Should the real travel and accommodation costs exceed the amount paid in advance for these purposes, the provider shall pay the difference to HAKA.
43. Translation and interpretation shall be provided, and the corresponding costs are covered by the provider. The interpreter shall be qualified in providing consecutive/simultaneous interpretation in the respective languages. The interpreter shall not have an employment relationship with the provider nor study at the provider.
44. If the HAKA Quality Assessment Council shall accredit the study programme for five years with a secondary condition, the provider is obliged to cover the costs of the second review according to the same calculation described in clauses 41-43 and depending on the scope of conditions set by the Council.

