

Guidelines for Initial Assessment and Re-assessment of Study Programme Groups

Approved by the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education on 19.05.2020

I. General provisions

1. According to subsections 9 (2); (3); and 11 (3) of the Higher Education Act, and taking into consideration the Republic of Estonia's Standard of Higher Education, Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and other legislative and normative documents regulating quality assurance in higher education, the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher Education and VET (hereinafter *EKKA*) shall lay down and publish the requirements and procedure for conducting assessments in a study programme group and cycle of higher education (hereinafter *assessment*) in order to apply for the right to provide instruction in a study programme group and cycle of higher education (hereinafter *right to provide instruction*).
2. When an institution applies for the right to provide instruction, it is ascertained whether the quality of instruction meets the requirements laid down for the relevant cycle of higher education; and whether resources and sustainability are adequate for the provision of instruction.
3. When applying for the right to provide instruction for the first time, EKKA shall conduct an initial assessment of the study programme group and cycle of higher education (hereinafter *initial assessment*). In the case the right to provide instruction has been granted for a specified term, EKKA shall, within a specified period, conduct a re-assessment of the study programme group and cycle of higher education (hereinafter *re-assessment*).
4. Pursuant to subsection 9 (2) of the Higher Education Act, the higher education institution shall, in order to obtain the right to provide instruction, submit at least nine months prior to the start of the academic year an application to the Ministry of Education and Research, containing:
 - a) information about the study programmes, on the basis of which instruction is to be provided;
 - b) information about academic staff providing instruction, including their qualifications;
 - c) information about financing sources for the learning, teaching and research infrastructure and similarly for conducting the studies;

- d) reasoning underpinning the need to launch studies, including data about the prospective target group as well as endorsements by professional associations and bodies.

The Ministry of Education and Research shall assess compliance of the application with applicable regulations and shall relay the application to EKKA for assessment.

- 5. Information submitted by the educational institution, publicly available data on the Estonian Education Information System (www.ehis.ee) and on the Estonian Research Information System (www.etis.ee), and information received during a visit to the educational institution shall serve as the basis for initial assessment of a study programme group.
- 6. In the case of joint study programmes, initial assessment may be conducted without visiting educational institutions (hereinafter *simplified proceeding*) if the right to provide instruction is requested for a joint study programme for which the other partners have the right to provide instruction in the corresponding study programme group and academic cycle for an unspecified term; or in the case of a foreign educational institution, the study programme and/or the educational institution has unconditional national recognition granted by the country of location.
- 7. The costs of the assessment shall be borne by the educational institution applying for the right to provide instruction. The actual costs depend on the number of study programmes in the study programme group under assessment and the number of assessment experts in the expert panel. Assessment rates are published on the EKKA website (www.ekka.edu.ee).

II. Assessment areas and criteria for initial and re-assessment

- 8. EKKA conducts initial assessment and re-assessment using three assessment areas: I Quality of instruction; II Resources and III Sustainability. The Quality of instruction is divided into three sub-areas – Study programme; Learning and teaching; and Organisation of studies. The area of Resources also has three sub-areas – Academic staff; Learning and teaching environment; and Financial resources. When assessing sustainability, assessments for quality of instruction and resources are taken into account as well as further sustainability criteria.
- 9. The difference in the criteria for initial and re-assessment as a rule lies in the following: preparedness, capability and intentions of the higher education institution to meet the requirements for the study programme group and cycle of education for which the application has been submitted, are assessed in the course of initial assessment. Re-assessment is for assessing the extent to which these intentions have materialized and requirements have been met.

INITIAL ASSESSMENT	I QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION	RE-ASSESSMENT
1. Study programme 1.1. Launching and developing of the study programme is based on the Development Plan of the higher education institution, national development plans and analyses (including labour market and advisability analyses) and strives for top quality. 1.2. Employers and other stakeholders of the study programme group are involved in the study programme's development. 1.3. The study programme meets the requirements and trends in international legislation that regulate the professional field and if a professional standard exists, takes into consideration the acquisition and implementation of the knowledge and skills described therein. 1.4. The learning outcomes of the study programme are equivalent and comparable to the learning outcomes of the academic cycles of higher education described in Annex 1 of the Standard of Higher Education. 1.5. Different parts of the study programme form a coherent whole. The title of the study programme is consistent with the content and the structure; and content of the study programme supports the acquisition of the objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme. 1.6. The joint study programme and cooperation agreement thereof meet the requirements set in subsections 11 and 19 of the Higher Education Act.		1.1. Launching and developing of the study programme is based on the Development Plan of the higher education institution, national development plans and analyses (including labour market and advisability analyses) and strives for top quality. 1.2. Employers and other stakeholders (incl. students) of the study programme group are involved in the study programme's development. 1.3. The study programme meets the requirements and trends in international legislation that regulate the professional field and if a professional standard exists, takes into consideration the acquisition and implementation of the knowledge and skills described therein. 1.4. The learning outcomes of the study programme are equivalent and comparable to the learning outcomes of the academic cycles of higher education described in Annex 1 of the Standard of Higher Education. 1.5. Different parts of the study programme form a coherent whole. The title of the study programme is consistent with the content and the structure; and content of the study programme supports the acquisition of the objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme. 1.6. The joint study programme and cooperation agreement thereof meet the requirements set in subsections 11 and 19 of the Higher Education Act.
2. Learning and teaching		

<p>2.1. Conditions for admission and graduation are clear and transparent; requirements to prospective students stem from prerequisites for the completion of the study programme.</p> <p>2.2. Academic staff members to be involved are aware of the objectives of the study programme and their role in achieving these objectives.</p> <p>2.3. Planned study methods motivate learners to take charge of their studies and achieve learning outcomes.</p> <p>2.4. Appropriate methods and means (incl. the use of digital technologies) are planned for the assessment of learning outcomes; assessment is transparent, objective and supports the development of students.</p> <p>2.5. The content and volume of independent work and practical training (in the case of doctoral studies, implementation of professional activities) support the achievement of learning outcomes of the study programme.</p> <p>2.6. The academic staff members to be involved have adequate teaching and digital competences in order to support the autonomy of students and ensure adequate and professional supervision.</p> <p>2.7. The level and volume of research, development and creative activities of academic staff to be involved is sufficient to provide instruction and supervise academic work by students in the appropriate cycle of higher education.</p>	<p>2.1. Conditions for admission and graduation are clear and transparent; requirements to prospective students stem from prerequisites for the completion of the study programme.</p> <p>2.2. Academic staff members are aware of the objectives of the study programme and their role in achieving these objectives.</p> <p>2.3. Study methods motivate learners to take charge of their studies and achieve learning outcomes.</p> <p>2.4. Appropriate methods are used for the assessment of learning outcomes; assessment is transparent, objective and supports the development of students. Where necessary, digital technologies among other means are used for assessment.</p> <p>2.5. The content and volume of independent work and practical training (in the case of doctoral studies, implementation of professional activities) support the achievement of learning outcomes of the study programme.</p> <p>2.6. The academic staff members have adequate teaching and digital competences in order to support the autonomy of students and ensure adequate and professional supervision.</p> <p>2.7. The level and volume of research, development and creative activities of academic staff is sufficient to provide instruction and supervise academic work by students in the appropriate cycle of higher education.</p>
<p>3. Organisation of studies</p>	
<p>3.1. The organisation of studies is unambiguously regulated and information thereof publicly available; it allows to cater for the needs of different learners as well as specificities of the study programme group.</p>	<p>3.1. The organisation of studies is unambiguously regulated and information thereof publicly available; it allows to cater for the needs of different learners as well as specificities of the study programme group.</p>

<p>3.2. Practical training (in doctoral studies applied professional activities) is regulated, requirements for the completion of practical training have been laid down and preliminary agreements concluded with organisations offering opportunities for practical training.</p> <p>3.3. The higher education institution has in place rules for academic recognition as well as for recognizing prior studies and work experience.</p> <p>3.4. Students have access to counselling (study and career counselling and preferably psychological counselling); measures for monitoring and supporting academic progress of students have been devised.</p> <p>3.5. The higher education institution has devised a plan for fostering international (including virtual) mobility among students enrolled in the study programme group.</p> <p>3.6. The higher education institution implements fair and transparent rules for dealing with complaints.</p> <p>3.7. Plans are in place for regular internal assessment of study programmes by the higher education institution, including the analysis and taking into account of feedback from various stakeholders (students, alumni, employers, academic staff).</p>	<p>3.2. Practical training (in doctoral studies applied professional activities) is regulated, requirements for the completion of practical training have been laid down and preliminary agreements concluded with organisations offering opportunities for practical training.</p> <p>3.3. The higher education institution has in place rules for academic recognition as well as for recognizing prior studies and work experience; these are implemented in the study programme group under assessment.</p> <p>3.4. Students enrolled in the study programme group have access to counselling (study; career and preferably psychological counselling); there are effective measures in place for supporting academic progress of students and preventing premature leaving.</p> <p>3.5. Students enrolled in the study programme group participate in international (including virtual) mobility programmes.</p> <p>3.6. Fair and transparent rules for dealing with complaints are used in the study programme group.</p> <p>3.7. Regular internal assessment is conducted in the study programme group, including the analysis and taking into account of feedback from various stakeholders (students, alumni, employers, academic staff).</p>	
INITIAL ASSESSMENT	II RESOURCES	RE-ASSESSMENT
4. Academic staff		
<p>4.1. Requirements for academic staff are based on the Higher Education Standard and further rules put in place by the higher education institution, procedures for the selection and recruitment of staff are fair and transparent.</p> <p>4.2. The qualifications of prospective academic staff members meet the requirements laid down in legislation</p>	<p>4.1. Requirements for academic staff are based on the Higher Education Standard and further rules put in place by the higher education institution, procedures for the selection and recruitment of staff are fair and transparent.</p> <p>4.2. The qualifications of academic staff members meet the requirements laid down in legislation as well as those stemming from the specificities of the study programme group and academic cycle.</p>	

<p>as well as those stemming from the specificities of the study programme group and academic cycle.</p> <p>4.3. The number of academic staff to be involved in the study programme group is adequate and enables achieving the objectives of the study programmes as well as the learning outcomes.</p> <p>4.4. Prospective academic staff members regularly engage in continuing education at institutions of higher education or research from abroad, take part in international research projects and deliver presentations at high level conferences.</p> <p>4.5. The higher education institution has plans for creating opportunities for continuing education and personal development (including for topping up digital skills) for academic staff members involved in the study programme group, including for benefitting from international mobility opportunities.</p>	<p>4.3. The number of regular academic staff in the study programme group is adequate and enables achieving the objectives of the study programmes as well as the learning outcomes.</p> <p>4.4. Academic staff members regularly engage in continuing education at institutions of higher education or research from abroad, take part in international research projects and deliver presentations at high level conferences.</p> <p>4.5. Regular academic staff members have undergone required attestation and/or received regular feedback on their performance; and have been topping up their professional, pedagogical and digital skills.</p>
<p>5. Learning and teaching environment</p>	
<p>5.1. There are facilities (lecture rooms, labs, seminar rooms, rooms for independent work by students etc.) available for studies and study-related research, development and creative activities; these are adequately furnished and equipped with up-to-date equipment needed for achieving the objectives of the study programmes; or alternatively concrete financing decisions/projects exist in order to meet the extended needs.</p> <p>5.2. The making available of up-to-date textbooks; research publications and other study materials as well as providing access to research databases necessary for conducting studies, research, development and creative activities in the study programme group is ensured.</p>	<p>5.1. There are facilities (lecture rooms, labs, seminar rooms, rooms for independent work by students etc.) available for studies and study-related research, development and creative activities; these are adequately furnished and equipped with up-to-date equipment needed for achieving the objectives of the study programmes.</p> <p>5.2. Research, development and creative activities in the study programme group are supported by adequate amount of up-to-date and pertinent textbooks, research publications and other study materials, access to research databases is ensured.</p> <p>5.3. 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.</p>

<p>5.3. State of the art and fit for purpose information and communication technological solutions, including study information system, document management system, online learning environment, have been envisioned in order to support learning and teaching. Digital learning and teaching as well as IT support is available to students and teaching staff.</p>	<p>Digital learning and teaching as well as IT support is available to students and teaching staff.</p>
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6. Financial resources		
6.1. The educational institution has adequate funds necessary for conducting high quality studies in the study programme group as well as for the provision of adequate and up-to-date support services and supporting the development of academic staff.	6.1. The educational institution has adequate funds necessary for conducting high quality studies as well as for the provision of adequate and up-to-date support services, for implementing learning and teaching related developments and for supporting the development of academic staff.	
6.2. The higher education institution has a strategy for raising funds needed for the advancement of the study programme group related research and development.	6.2. The higher education institution has sufficient funds for research and development activities related to the study programme.	
6.3. Financial reports for the higher education institution or keeper thereof are publicly available. Annual reports for the higher education institution or keeper thereof have undergone financial auditing unless stipulated otherwise in legislation.	6.3. The higher education institution has a long-term strategy for ensuring the sustainability of financial resources, including a risk analysis and financial projections. The strategy describes, among others, risks stemming from the operating environment and planned mitigating measures thereof.	
	6.4. Financial reports for the higher education institution or keeper thereof are publicly available. Annual reports for the higher education institution or keeper thereof have undergone financial auditing unless stipulated otherwise in legislation.	
INITIAL ASSESSMENT	III SUSTAINABILITY	RE-ASSESSMENT
Aggregated assessment: quality of instruction		
Aggregated assessment: resources		
7. Further sustainability criteria		
7.1. The higher education institution has a development plan along with an action plan aimed at ensuring the sustainability of high-quality studies in the higher education institution as a whole as well as in the study programme group under assessment. In the case of a brand-new higher education institution, a development plan and draft action plan exist.	7.1. Regular development planning and risk management are on-going in the higher education institution, aimed at ensuring the sustainability of high-quality studies in the higher education institution as a whole as well as in the study programme group.	
	7.2. Development trends for student admissions, graduations and budgetary resources indicate sustainability	

<p>7.2. When planning studies in the study programme group, the higher education institution has conducted a risk analysis and devised a long-term financial projection, which among other things includes the calculation of a student place, an analysis of risks stemming from the operating environment and planned mitigating measures thereof.</p> <p>7.3. The age structure of academic staff to be involved as well as share of young teachers ensures sustainability of instruction provision in the study programme group.</p> <p>7.4. In the case of doctoral studies, sustainability is achieved when doctoral studies in the study programme group are based on well-established fields of research and development within the higher education institution that have successfully undergone evaluation. Supervisors of doctoral theses are actively engaged in research and have supervised successfully defended doctoral theses.</p>	<p>of the higher education institution as a whole and the study programme group under assessment.</p> <p>7.3. The higher education institution has a long-term financial projection of financial resources needed for conducting high quality studies in the study programme group and sources for the provision thereof, which takes into account risks stemming from the operating environment.</p> <p>7.4. The age structure of academic staff as well as share of young teachers ensures sustainability of instruction provision in the study programme group.</p> <p>7.5. In the case of doctoral studies, sustainability is achieved when doctoral studies in the study programme group are based on well-established fields of research and development within the higher education institution that have successfully undergone evaluation. Supervisors of doctoral theses are actively engaged in research and have supervised successfully defended doctoral theses.</p>
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III. Formation of an expert panel

10. In order to conduct an assessment, the Director of EKKA shall form an expert panel (hereinafter *panel*) and appoint an assessment coordinator.
11. The assessment coordinator (hereinafter *coordinator*) is an EKKA staff member. The coordinator provides support to the panel and manages the assessment procedure. The coordinator's main task is to ensure the smooth running of the assessment process on the basis of substantive requirements detailed in this document as well as making sure that the time frame is followed. The coordinator is not a member of an expert panel.
12. There are at least 4 members in a panel. The number of members depends on the number of study programmes and specializations within the study programme group under assessment.
13. The selection criteria for panel members followed by EKKA are as follows:
 - 13.1. Members of a panel are recognized experts in the vocation, profession or occupation, or outstanding practitioners in the fields of the study programme group under assessment, including from foreign countries, if needed.
 - 13.2. Members of a panel are chosen from different organisations.
 - 13.3. A panel includes at least one student or a person who has graduated (at the moment of the approval of the panel membership) from a higher education institution within the previous year.
 - 13.4. A panel includes at least one member from outside of higher education institutions.
 - 13.5. Members of a panel know the functioning of the higher education system and the legislation that regulates it; they are knowledgeable about trends in higher education in the European Union and sectorial strategies in Estonia.
14. Requirements to panel members:
 - 14.1. Members of a panel shall be independent; they shall not represent the interests of the organisation they belong to.
 - 14.2. A panel member is unprejudiced and has no conflict of interest with the higher education institution under assessment within the meaning of point 15.
 - 14.3. A panel member has teamwork skills necessary for the execution of the task.
 - 14.4. A panel member is proficient in the working language of the panel.
 - 14.5. A panel member preferably has prior experience of external assessment in higher education.

- 14.6. Academic panel members have participated in developing similar study programmes in various higher education institutions, have devised modern study materials and have international merits in research, development or other creative activities.
- 14.7. A non-academic panel member is a recognized expert and usually has experience in teaching or supervising in a higher education institution, or has taken part in the work of advisory or decision-making bodies of higher education institutions.
- 14.8. A student member of a panel has usually participated in the development of study programmes, or in the work of decision-making bodies of various levels at a higher education institution.
15. Members of a panel 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 conflict of interest. In the case of conflict of interest, a panel member shall, without delay, notify the Director of EKKA and withdraw from the work of the panel. A conflict of interest is presumed to be present in the following cases:
- 15.1. A panel member has an employment or other contractual relationship with the higher education institution under assessment, or he or she has had an employment relationship with that higher education institution within three years prior to the assessment visit.
- 15.2. A panel member is participating in the work of a decision-making or advisory body of the higher education institution under assessment at the time of assessment.
- 15.3. A panel member is studying in the higher education institution under assessment, or graduated from it less than three years ago.
- 15.4. A staff member or student connected with the study programme group of the higher education institution under assessment is closely related to a panel member.
16. In justified cases, EKKA may involve in panel members from abroad. In such cases, the working language of the panel is English. If the higher education institution wishes to use interpretation services during the assessment visit, the interpreter shall be coordinated with EKKA prior to the assessment visit. The interpreter must fulfil the following requirements: the interpreter has adequate training for providing consecutive interpretation (a Master's degree in interpretation, interpretation as an additional specialty, continuing education in the field of interpretation, etc.) and previous experience in providing consecutive interpretation; the interpreter is familiar with higher education terminology. The higher education institution books the interpretation services and covers the costs incurred.
17. EKKA shall notify an educational institution of the composition of a panel, and the educational institution may present its standpoint on it, furthermore, it may

request an additional member to be included in the panel, which is treated as a memorandum or request for explanation as defined in clause 33 of this document.

18. All panel members shall undergo EKKA's assessment training.

IV. Organisation of assessment and drafting of an assessment report

19. EKKA shall coordinate the time of visits to educational institutions (hereinafter *visits*) with the educational institution.

20. The assessment visit lasts for 1-3 days. The schedule for the assessment visit is drawn up by EKKA in collaboration with the higher education institution and chairperson of the panel.

21. The higher education institution under assessment shall make available to members of the expert panel an appropriately furnished room and shall enable throughout the assessment visit:

21.1. to have access to documentation of the higher education institution and its bodies, internal normative documents regulating and organising its activities;

21.2. to interview a sample of staff members and students from the higher education institution selected by the experts;

21.3. to have access to data pertaining to learning and teaching as well as to students, study materials and the study information system;

21.4. to have access to biographies (CVs) of teaching staff members; data on workloads, methodological work and research;

21.5. to examine the internal quality assurance system for learning and teaching;

21.6. to examine the state of the infrastructure at the higher education institution;

21.7. to have access to syllabi and substantive guidelines for learning and teaching;

21.8. to have access to student dissertations;

21.9. to have access to financial data for the higher education institution;

21.10. to have access to all forms of contact learning (lecture, seminar, lab class etc.);

21.11. to obtain, if and when necessary, information on other aspects of learning, teaching and research.

22. An expert panel shall give an assessment on the study programme group and the relevant cycle of higher education in three assessment areas: quality of instruction, resources and sustainability.
23. The assessments contain a description of the underpinning facts, analysis thereof and reasoning for the assessment. The assessment is based on the assessment report template for initial assessment or assessment report template for re-assessment, available on the EKKA website.
24. In the assessment report, the panel shall determine for each assessment area, whether the quality of instruction:
 - 24.1. conforms to the required standard;
 - 24.2. partially conforms to the required standard;
 - 24.3. does not conform to the required standard.
25. Judgements of the expert panel on the conformity of the quality of instruction, resources and sustainability to the required standard, are preferably passed on consensual basis. In the case of failure to reach a consensus, a simple majority is needed to take a decision.
26. The assessment coordinator shall electronically forward the draft assessment report to EKKA within ten workdays after the assessment visit. EKKA shall check conformity of the assessment report to the format requirements as well as whether all assessments are duly reasoned and, with the approval of the panel chairperson, forward it to the educational institution for comments within twenty workdays from the end of the assessment visit.
27. An educational institution may electronically forward its comments on the draft assessment report to the panel within ten workdays of receipt of the draft assessment report. The panel shall review the comments and take them into consideration when drafting the final assessment report.
28. The chairperson of the panel shall confirm and forward the final version of the assessment report electronically to EKKA within five workdays from receipt of comments from the higher education institution. EKKA shall forward the final assessment report to the higher education institution.
29. EKKA shall forward the final assessment report along with comments from the higher education institution to the Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education.

V. Decision by the EKKA Quality Assessment Council

30. The EKKA Quality Assessment Council shall base its decision on the assessment report, comments received from the higher education institution within a specified time, documents submitted for assessment by the higher education

institution, data from the Estonian Education Information System (EHIS) and Estonian Research Information System (ETIS) as well as additional materials submitted upon the request of the Assessment Council.

31. In case of contradictions in the assessment report or inadequate reasoning, the EKKA Quality Assessment Council shall have the right to return the report to the panel to be reviewed and clarified.
32. The Assessment Council shall consider the assessments by the panel and adopt a decision based on the following principles:
 - 32.1. If all three assessment areas have been deemed to 'conform to the required standard', the Assessment Council shall adopt a decision deeming the quality of instruction in conformity with the required standard and shall submit a proposal to the Minister for Education and Research to grant the higher education institution the right to provide instruction in the relevant study programme group and cycle of higher education.
 - 32.2. If at least one assessment area is deemed by the panel to 'not conform to the required standard', the Assessment Council shall adopt a decision deeming the quality of instruction not in conformity with the required standard and shall submit a proposal to the Minister for Education and Research not to grant the higher education institution the right to provide instruction in the relevant study programme group and cycle of higher education.
 - 32.3. If all three assessment areas are deemed by the panel to 'partially conform to the required standard', the Assessment Council shall weigh the study programme group's strengths and areas of improvement and adopt one of the following decisions:
 - a) adopts the decision that the quality of instruction partially conforms to the required standard, and shall submit a proposal to the Minister for Education and Research to grant the higher education institution the right to provide instruction in the relevant study programme group and cycle of higher education for one to three years; or
 - b) adopts the decision that the quality of instruction does not conform to the required standard and shall submit a proposal to the Minister for Education and Research not to grant the higher education institution the right to provide instruction in the relevant study programme group and cycle of higher education.
 - 32.4. If one assessment area is deemed to 'partially conform to the required standard' and the remaining areas to 'conform to the required standard', the Assessment Council shall weigh the study programme group's strengths and areas of improvement and adopt one of the following decisions:

- a) adopts the decision that the quality of instruction conforms to the required standard, and submits a proposal to the Minister for Education and Research to grant the higher education institution the right to provide instruction in the relevant study programme group and cycle of higher education; or
- b) adopts the decision that the quality of instruction partially conforms to the required standard and submits a proposal to the Minister for Education and Research to grant the higher education institution the right to provide instruction in the relevant study programme group and cycle of higher education for one to three years.

32.5. If two assessment areas are deemed to 'partially conform to the required standard' and one area to 'conform to the required standard', the Assessment Council shall adopt a decision that the quality of instruction partially conforms to the required standard and shall submit a proposal to the Minister for Education and Research to grant the higher education institution the right to provide instruction in the relevant study programme group and cycle of higher education for one to three years.

VI. Requests for clarifications and memoranda concerning organisation and results of initial or re-assessment

- 33.If a person concerned has a doubt that EKKA or an expert panel has not followed the rules described in these Guidelines when organising and conducting an assessment, he or she may file an appropriate request for clarification or memorandum with the Director of EKKA who shall provide a reasoned written response within 30 days of the date of registration of the request.
- 34.If a person concerned disagrees with the substantive grounds of the decision of the Assessment Council, he or she may present a challenge to the Council within 30 days of receipt of the decision. The Assessment Council shall forward the complaint to the Appeals Committee, which provides the Assessment Council with an unbiased opinion regarding the validity of the complaint within 5 workdays from receiving the complaint. The Assessment Council shall issue a reasoned reply to the challenge within 30 days of receipt of the challenge, taking also into account the reasoned opinion of the Appeals Committee.

VII. Simplified procedure for an application to provide instruction in a joint study programme that has undergone an assessment by a competent assessment entity.

- 35.The simplified procedure for applying for the right to provide instruction in a joint study programme can be applied in the case where the joint study

programme has previously undergone an assessment by a competent foreign assessment entity in accordance with the European Approach For Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes adopted by Ministers of the European Higher Education Area; and the higher education institution in Estonia applying for the right to provide instruction has participated in the assessment of the joint study programme.

36. Any entity registered with the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) is considered a competent foreign assessment entity.

37. In the case of a simplified procedure, the following derogations apply:

37.1. The higher education institution submits to EKKA an assessment report by the competent foreign assessment entity concerning the joint study programme along with an application to take into consideration in the initial or re-assessment the assessment report by the competent foreign assessment entity.

37.2. EKKA assesses whether the following eligibility conditions for simplified procedure have been met:

37.2.1. The assessment of the joint study programme has been conducted in accordance with the principles of the European Approach For Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes;

37.2.2. The assessment outcome for the joint study programme is positive;

37.2.3. The assessment report contains information on all aspects listed in subsection 9 (2) of the Higher Education Act;

37.2.4. The joint study programme meets the requirements stipulated in subsections 11 (1) and (2) of the Higher Education Act.

37.3. If all the requirements listed under points 37.2.1-37.2.4 have been met, the Director of EKKA shall propose to the Higher Education Assessment Council to follow the simplified procedure for the initial or re-assessment of the joint study programme and to adopt an assessment decision on the basis of the assessment report prepared by the competent foreign assessment entity and the analysis undertaken by EKKA on the conformity of the application for simplified procedure with the requirements listed under points 37.2.1-37.2.4.

38. If the decision by the competent foreign assessment entity on the joint study programme is positive, the criteria for simplified procedure are met and the Assessment Council does not identify contradictions or insufficient reasoning in the submitted documents, the Assessment Council shall adopt the decision that instruction in the joint study programme conforms to the required standard, and shall submit a proposal to the Minister for Education and Research to grant the higher education institution the right to provide instruction in the joint study programme of the relevant study programme group.

39. If the decision by the competent foreign assessment entity on the joint study programme is positive, but substantial shortcomings have been identified in the assessment report, the Assessment Council shall adopt the decision that the quality of instruction partially conforms to the required standard and shall submit a proposal to the Minister for Education and Research to grant the

higher education institution the right to provide instruction in the joint study programme of the relevant study programme group for one to three years.

40. If a person concerned wishes to challenge the procedures or decisions adopted by the Assessment Council described in this chapter, the procedure detailed in chapter VI shall be followed.

VIII. Implementing provisions

41. The amendments pertaining to the quality of digital learning and teaching under criteria 2.4, 2.6, 3.5, 4.5 and 5.3 for initial and re-assessment enter into force on 01.12.2022.