

# HAKA Quality Handbook

## Table of contents

- Introduction..... 3
- Self-definition, mission statement, vision, and values..... 4
  - The Self-Definition..... 4
  - Mission, Vision, Values ..... 4
- 1. MANAGEMENT AND FUNCTIONING OF THE ORGANISATION ..... 5
  - 1.1. HAKA’s main activities and structure..... 5
    - Main activities ..... 5
    - The structure ..... 5
    - The working teams ..... 6
  - 1.2. The Supervisory Board ..... 8
  - 1.3. Assessment Councils ..... 10
    - Expectations for the members of the Assessment Councils: ..... 10
    - Secretaries of the Assessment Councils ..... 11
    - Developing and motivating the members of Assessment Councils ..... 11
  - 1.4. HAKA secretariat ..... 11
    - Expectations for A HAKA STAFF MEMBER..... 12
    - Filling the posts and the selection process..... 12
    - Supporting the induction of a new staff member ..... 13
    - Development interviews ..... 13
    - The motivation system ..... 13
    - Division of work and workload..... 14
  - 1.5. Experts ..... 15
    - Application and Selection Procedures for assessment experts ..... 15
    - Expectations for an assessment expert..... 16
    - Developing and motivating evaluation experts ..... 17
  - 1.6. Resource management ..... 18
    - The financial resources..... 18
    - Working environment and tools ..... 19
  - 1.7. Planning of development..... 19
  - 1.8. Reporting..... 21

<b>2. CORE ACTIVITIES</b> .....	22
2.1 Initial and ongoing development of quality assessment models .....	22
2.2 Implementation of the Quality Assessment Model .....	24
Planning of assessment periods .....	25
Supporting educational institutions throughout the evaluation process .....	25
Establishment of assessment committees .....	27
Conducting assessment interviews and visits .....	28
Assessment decision.....	29
Contestation of assessment decisions and procedures .....	31
Follow-up of evaluations .....	33
Collecting feedback and planning of improvement activities in quality assessments .....	36
2.3 Analyses by HAKA .....	37
2.4 Domestic development activities .....	38
2.5 International development activities .....	39
<b>3. COMMUNICATION</b> .....	40
3.1. Internal communication .....	40
3.2. External communication .....	40
3.3. Review of internal and external communication and improvement activities.....	42

## Introduction

### What and how do we do to be reliable partners and to achieve excellence in our activities?

This is HAKA Quality Handbook, which contains the most important **principles negotiated and agreed** between HAKA employees, which guide us in the performance of the Agency's core activities and various tasks to ensure highest quality. The aim is not to regulate specific activities of HAKA or HAKA employees that are already described in different guidelines (e.g., assessment guidelines) or supporting material (e.g., guidelines for HAKA staff, assessment panels, assessment coordinators). The Quality Handbook is primarily a quality assurance **tool** for our activities, which helps to ensure that all HAKA employees are aware of the agreed principles and adhere to them in their daily work. In addition, the Quality Handbook helps our target groups and partners to better understand according to which quality principles HAKA is carrying out its core activities.

In agreeing on the principles of internal quality, we have been guided by HAKA's self-definition, mission statement, vision, and values. Furthermore, our activities are also based on the continuous quality improvement model: planning of activities — implementation — evaluation of results — improvement (see Figure 1). We define quality as meeting the ever-changing expectations of internal and external stakeholders in the field of education (educational institutions, learners, employers, government) in terms of input, process, and output.

Figure 1. PDCA model



To ensure that the Quality Handbook is up to date, we update its content at least twice every year.

## Self-definition, mission statement, vision, and values

### THE SELF-DEFINITION

HAKA is the competence hub for the quality of education. Our mission is to carry out quality assessments, thematic analyses and other quality system development activities in higher education, vocational, general, and adult education.

We put the right of learners to high-quality education and the reliability of Estonian education at both national and international level at the heart of our activities.

We are guided by the development guidelines and agreements in the field of education in Europe and Estonia across all our activities. In assessment activities and analyses, we ensure a competent, objective and open-minded approach. All the most important processes of the organisation are structured according to the principles of co-creation, we value constant mutual learning and the dissemination of acquired know-how in society.

### MISSION, VISION, VALUES

**THE MISSION:** We empower educational institutions and other partners in advancing the quality of learning and teaching and supporting learner development.

**THE VISION:** We inspire the enhancement of quality culture in the field of education.

We base our activities on HAKA values:

**COMPETENCY:** We have up-to-date and relevant expertise in the field of quality assessment. We are self-directing learners and develop our skills and knowledge in a way that is fit-for-purpose. The foundation of our activities is equal treatment, impartiality, objectivity, and an evidence-based approach.

**OPENNESS:** We are open to change; we seek new solutions, and we value the diversity/divergence of smart solutions. We share our know-how in a way that is fit-for-purpose and suits the needs of the target audience.

**CO-CREATION:** We value mutual learning and the joint creation of new knowledge involving both educational institutions and other partners. We develop a shared understanding of quality culture and the role of all parties in its development.

**SYSTEMIC APPROACH:** We look at the field of education as a whole and follow the mantra of continuous improvement in all our activities. We combine objectives and activities into a coherent whole and evaluate the effectiveness of our work based on its real impact.

# 1. MANAGEMENT AND FUNCTIONING OF THE ORGANISATION

## 1.1. HAKA's main activities and structure

HAKA is an independent structural unit of the Education and Youth Board (**Harno**). HAKA's functions and structure are stipulated in the HARNO statutes.

### MAIN ACTIVITIES

The main activities of HAKA are summarised in the following table:

*Table 1 Main activities of HAKA*

HIGHER EDUCATION	VOCATIONAL EDUCATION	CONTINUING EDUCATION	GENERAL EDUCATION
Institutional accreditation		Development of a quality enhancement system	Developing a system for enhancing the quality of general education
Initial and re-assessment of study programme groups	Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups	Assessment of the quality of continuing education (Estonia)	Development of a methodology for quality assessment of general education
Accreditation of study programme groups (cross-border)	Initial and re-assessment of study programme groups	Accreditation of continuing education study programmes (cross-border)	Carrying out quality assessments (piloting)
Thematic reviews			
DEVELOPMENT OF STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES, TRAINING, THEMATIC ANALYSES, INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT			

### THE STRUCTURE

According to the Statutes, HAKA consists of the following structural units:

- The Supervisory Board
- The Secretariat
- The Higher Education Assessment Council (HEQAC)
- The Vocational Education Assessment Council (VEQAC)
- Continuing Education Assessment Council

Appeals Committees are affiliated with Assessment Councils.

HAKA is headed by the Director of HAKA, elected by the Supervisory Board and with whom the Director-General of Harno concludes an employment contract. Experts and assessment committees are not mentioned in the HAKA structure, but they play a vital role in the implementation of all the main activities of HAKA and therefore we have identified them in the HAKA structure below (see Figure 2).

HAKA is independent in its substantive activities but, like other Harno entities, uses the following Harno support services:

- accounting services
- administrative support
- IT support (RIT)

- Human Resources Partners and Employee Motivation Package
- Document Management System Pinal

Figure 2. Structure of HAKA



HAKA operates on the principle of a dynamic **network organisation** involving external partners on a regular basis, allowing the organisation to be flexibly transformed to adjust to the constantly changing external environment. The external partners of the network organisation — assessment experts in the context of HAKA — bring know-how without which HAKA would not be able to carry out its tasks. The network organisation is characterised by a high degree of mutual trust based on shared values and guaranteed by the regular and effective exchange of knowledge and experience and the application of information and communication technologies.

The building blocks of the network organisation are **working teams**, which are divided into **sector specific, cross-sectoral and development teams**. Assessment committees operate as temporary working teams affiliated with the sectoral working teams.

### THE WORKING TEAMS

The objective: To ensure the smooth functioning of the organisation and the achievement of its objectives without rigidly defined substructures.

HAKA as a network organisation consists of working teams. The working teams are divided into three categories:

#### 1) Sector-specific working teams:

- Higher education working team

- Vocational education working team
- Continuing education working team
- General Education working team

The task of sector-specific working teams is **to design, carry out, analyse, and improve quality assessments**. Each HAKA staff member **responsible** for coordinating the work of assessment committees will (as a rule) participate in two sector-specific working teams according to the agreed division of labour.

The work of the working team is led by an Assessment Director (unless otherwise agreed) whose task is to ensure the smooth carrying out of all evaluations in the field, a common approach, comparability of assessment results, organisation of Assessment Councils and sharing of best practices. In addition to HAKA staff members, the relevant **Assessment Councils** are affiliated with the sector-specific working teams. An assessment committee is a **'temporary working team' affiliated with the sector-specific working team**.

For example: The VET working team is run by the VET Assessment Director and comprises all HAKA staff members, who coordinate quality assessments in VET in a given year. The Vocational Education Assessment Council and its Appeals Committee, as well as the *ad hoc* assessment panels of external experts, belong to that working team.

**2) Cross-sectoral working teams:** This includes horizontal working teams:

- Assessment Directors' working team
- Assessment coordinators' working team
- Analyses working team
- Quality culture working team (Quality Handbook)
- Communication working team

The task of cross-sectoral working teams is (a) to ensure comparability of approaches across different sectors, (b) to share best practices, (c) to plan work, to monitor its implementation and to analyse performance.

**3) Development teams:** We form development teams to implement specific development activities and/or achieve strategic goals. This includes international development projects (including cross-border assessments), a working team to promote the quality of digital education, a working team for reviewing the higher education standard of, etc.

The composition of the working teams depends on what has been agreed in the context of development interviews. The composition of the working teams for the beginning of the upcoming calendar year will be approved together with the work plan in January. The task of managing working teams is set out in the job description (in the case of sector-specific working teams) of individual HAKA staff members.

**Responsibility of the managers/leaders of working teams:**

- Targeted and efficient organisation of work of the working teams (needs-based but with a clearly planned timeframe)
- Planning of the annual work plan and division of tasks in the responsibility area of the working team

- Preparation of the six month and annual reports of the working team (responsibility area) for the purposes of internal and external reporting of HAKA
- Participation in HAKA management

The managers/leaders of working teams form **HAKA's management**, where the proposals for working teams' annual plans and workload distribution are discussed and agreed. The management team permanently includes the Director and the Director for Development. The management is steered by the Director of HAKA and the management meets at least 4 times per year.

#### **HAKA's horizontal positions and their main tasks**

The **Director**: strategic management, human resource management, financial management, reporting.

The **Director for Development**: launching of national and international development projects and, where appropriate, the management of development projects; leading the working team for thematic analyses; Deputy Director.

The **Information Manager**: planning and implementation of internal and external communication, leading the working team for communication.

The **educational technologist**: "Introduction" of digital solutions that enhance HAKA's work processes and development activities (including training) and supporting colleagues in their implementation.

The **project coordinator**: financial reporting, document management, invoicing, and procurement.

#### **In the overall governance of HAKA's activities, the following is essential:**

- HAKA's weekly meetings with the following objectives:
  - Sharing of information with colleagues on major activities, outcomes, topical issues from outside the organisation and published studies.
  - Learning from each other's experience.
  - Discussing and finding solutions to the problems identified.
  - Taking decisions to change the way the work is organised (to update the employee guidelines) or to supplement guidelines and other documents. If necessary, follow-up activities will be agreed.
- Planning and reporting meetings for HAKA management.
- Regular needs-based meetings of working teams.
- HAKA Summer Development Seminar: a mid-term review of the results of the first semester and a discussion on some topical issues that need to be resolved before the beginning of the next semester.
- HAKA Winter Development Seminar: a stocktaking of the results of the year and discussions on the priorities for the next year's work plan.
- Development interviews with HAKA employees at least once a year (November-December, before the winter seminar), if necessary, interim interviews in June.

## **1.2. The Supervisory Board**

**Purpose/Role:** The Supervisory Board is a body composed of representatives of the main stakeholders of HAKA, whose task is to ensure the independence of the activities of HAKA, to approve the HAKA Development Plan and Annual Report and to make recommendations on developments and activities.



## Composition and tasks

The formation of the Supervisory Board and its functions are defined in Chapter 4 of the Statutes of the Estonian Education and Youth Board *Estonian Quality Agency for Education*.

The Supervisory Board

- Elects the members of the Assessment Councils, the members of the Appeals Committees and the Director of HAKA.
- Approves the HAKA Development Plan and Annual Report.
- Makes recommendations on HAKA development directions and development activities.
- Approves the procedure for the election and removal of the Director of HAKA.
- Proposes and approves proposals for amendments to the provisions of the Statute.

The composition of the Supervisory Board is approved by the Ministry of Education and Research (MER) for 4 years. After that, important stakeholder representatives of HAKA will again be able to nominate their representatives to the Supervisory Board. HAKA's **main stakeholder representatives** are:

- ✓ Ministry of Education and Research
- ✓ Estonian Rectors' Conference
- ✓ Estonian Conference of Rectors of Universities of Applied Sciences
- ✓ Estonian Association for Advancement of Vocational Education
- ✓ Federation of Estonian Student Unions
- ✓ Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund
- ✓ Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- ✓ Estonian Employers' Confederation
- ✓ Estonian Student Councils Association (as of autumn 2022)
- ✓ Estonian School Heads Association (as of autumn 2022)

The Supervisory Board comprises up to 11 members and no organisation is represented by more than two members. The Supervisory Board shall elect a Chairperson and a Vice-Chair from among its members.

In accordance with the decree approving the Supervisory Board, the meeting of the Supervisory Board shall be convened by the Chairman or, in his or her absence, by the Vice-Chair as necessary.

The technical organisation of the work of the Supervisory Board and the recording of its meetings are the responsibility of the Secretary of the Supervisory Board, who shall be appointed by the Director of HAKA from among the staff members of HAKA. The Supervisory Board shall agree on the dates and main topics of meetings for each upcoming semester. As a rule, meetings of the Supervisory Board shall be held once every two months. The HAKA secretariat prepares discussion papers and draft decisions for the Supervisory Board.

### Related documents:

- ✓ Directives of the Minister of Education and Research concerning the approval of the composition and rules of procedure of the Supervisory Board (available on HAKA website)

- ✓ Statutes of the Education and Youth Board

### 1.3. Assessment Councils

**Purpose/Role:** The main task of the Assessment Council is to adopt assessment decisions. The purpose of an Assessment Council shall be to ensure that quality assessment decisions are justified and comparable at system level.

The HAKA secretariat is responsible for creating the conditions for the high-quality work of the Assessment Councils, ensuring timely and proper preparation of the materials for and the smooth organisation of the sessions.

The HAKA structure includes the Higher Education Assessment Council (HEQAC), the Vocational Education Assessment Council (VEQAC) and the Assessment Council for Continuing Education (CEQAC). The remit and formation principles of assessment councils are governed by legislation.

#### EXPECTATIONS FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE ASSESSMENT COUNCILS:

- 1) Expertise in their field and in quality of education.
- 2) Independence, objectivity, impartiality, an evidence-based mindset.
- 3) Responsibility, confidentiality.
- 4) Adherence to the HAKA values: *The basis for action is equal treatment, impartiality, objectivity and an evidence-based approach. We develop a shared understanding of quality culture and the role of all parties in its development. We value the diversity/divergence of smart solutions. We combine objectives and activities into a coherent whole and evaluate the performance of our work based on its real impact.*

The **Procedure for the Formation of the Higher Education Assessment Council** is provided for in the Statutes of the Education and Youth Board (§ 24) and the Procedure for the Formation of the Higher Education Assessment Council and the Appeals Committee. The **Procedure for the Formation of the Vocational Education Assessment Council** is provided for in the Statutes of the Education and Youth Board (§ 24), the Procedure for the Formation of the Vocational Education Assessment Council and the Appeals Committee, and in the legal acts regulating Vocational Education and Training (e.g., § 14<sup>1</sup> of the Vocational Education Institutions Act). The procedure for the formation of both Assessment Councils and their Appeals Committees lays down the principles for the selection of the members and the formation of the Assessment Councils and the Appeals Committees and the rules of procedure of the Appeals Committees.

The work of Assessment Councils is regulated respectively by the Rules of Procedure of the Higher Education Assessment Council and the Rules of Procedure of the Vocational Education Assessment Council, which provide for the administration, management, conduct of meetings, adoption of decisions, organisation of meetings, minutes of meetings, challenging of decisions and actions of the councils and other organisational matters.

In the event of an Appeal against a decision of the Assessment Council, the Council shall involve the Appeals Committee, the general principles of the composition and operation of which are described in the procedures for the formation of assessment councils and in the assessment guidelines, as well as in the relevant internal guidelines for the handling of appeals.

## SECRETARIES OF THE ASSESSMENT COUNCILS

The secretaries of the Assessment Councils shall keep an eye on the date of expiry of the term of office of the Assessment Councils and the Appeals Committees and shall ensure that the procedure for the formation of a new composition is initiated in a timely manner. The secretary of the Assessment Council shall initiate the nomination of candidates for the new composition at least two months before the end of the term of office. Candidates can be submitted within 3 weeks from the public call for nominations.

## DEVELOPING AND MOTIVATING THE MEMBERS OF ASSESSMENT COUNCILS

- In order to deepen the knowledge of members of the Assessment Councils in the field of quality assessment of vocational and higher education, we offer induction training in the field of quality assessment both to entire new compositions of the Assessment Councils and to the individual members, who may join later.
- We offer all members the opportunity to participate in an assessment visit as an observer to gain a better understanding of the actual assessment process.
- We involve members in trainings for experts as well as trainings for schools (including in the role of a trainer).
- We offer them participation and presentation opportunities at thematic international conferences, seminars, and workshops, organise study visits to external agencies where possible or necessary, involve Assessment Councils in regular joint seminars with the Baltic and Nordic agencies, and recommend Council members as experts to other agencies.

We demonstrate appreciation to the members of the Assessment Councils in a number of different ways: members are remunerated according to the number of meetings and assessment decisions; members may receive different souvenirs, e.g. at the end of the calendar year; up to twice a year, we organise joint meetings of the Assessment Councils, which include self-enhancement opportunities in the form of teamwork.

### Related documents:

- ✓ Statutes of the Education and Youth Board
- ✓ Vocational Education Institutions Act
- ✓ Procedure for the Formation of the Higher Education Assessment Council and the Appeals Committee
- ✓ Rules of Procedure of the Higher Education Assessment Council
- ✓ Procedure for the Formation of a Vocational Education Assessment Council and the Appeals Committee
- ✓ Rules of Procedure of the Vocational Education Assessment Council
- ✓ Guide to handling of an Appeal
- ✓ Assessment guidelines for all sectors (except general education)

### 1.4. HAKA secretariat

**The objective:** staff members are motivated, demonstrate initiative, constantly develop themselves professionally.

## EXPECTATIONS FOR A HAKA STAFF MEMBER

- 1) **Adherence to the HAKA values.**
- 2) **Knowledge of the field of education.** Knowledge of development trends in the field of education (including the education strategy) both in Estonia and in the international context. Understanding the functioning of the Estonian education system.
- 3) **Understanding of quality.** Knowledge of quality assurance and quality culture. Knowledge of various quality assessments in Estonia and an overview of examples of international best practices.
- 4) **Understanding the role of HAKA** in promoting the quality culture of educational institutions. Knowledge of HAKA regulations, including substantive understanding of the standards and criteria.
- 5) **Knowledge of learning and teaching.** Knowledge of curricula, curriculum development, learning outcomes-based approach to curriculum development. Ability to apply the modern learning approach (pedagogical skills, ability to support the learner's learning).
- 6) **A self-directing learner.** Digital competence and individual learning skills that allow for the efficient and effective performance of work tasks (see also <https://digipadevus.ee/oppija-digipadevusmudel/>). Self-management skills (including work planning, self-discipline, time management, goal setting). Being willing to constantly learn and develop oneself. Being willing to admit mistakes, learn from mistakes and have the courage to change.
- 7) **Teamwork.** Teamwork skills, including in an international team. Responsibility, dutifulness. Solution oriented approach. If necessary, quickly adapting and coping with different types of tasks.
- 8) **Information processing and communication.** Analytical skills, the ability to distinguish important bits among information overload, the ability to see the big picture, critical thinking, the ability to process information. Ability to listen and make oneself understood both in writing and orally to the relevant audiences. Public speaking skills. Knowledge of Estonian at least at level C1, English at least B2 and (preferably) knowledge of Russian at minimum A2 level.

## FILLING THE POSTS AND THE SELECTION PROCESS

To implement HAKA's mission and vision and achieve its objectives, we involve an optimal number of competent staff to ensure that all areas of HAKA's activities are adequately staffed.

**The process:** The Director shall submit the request for the creation of the post together with a justification and a reference to the specific source of funding to the Director-General of Harno. The position shall be created by a decision of the Director-General of Harno on the proposal of the Director of HAKA. Posts shall be filled by means of an open call. We publish the call on the HAKA and Harno websites, Facebook and LinkedIn, share it on relevant lists, and directly with potential applicants.

The first selection of candidates will be made on the basis of the submitted documents (CV, letter of motivation, written assignment). The selection committee comprises at least three HAKA employees, if necessary, we will involve a Harno human resources partner. We will inform all candidates of the outcomes of the first selection round and agree on the interview times with the candidates who have been selected to the second round. Before the interview, we ask all candidates to fill in the self-assessment questionnaire and send it two days before the interview to the contact indicated in our competition announcement. In addition, we ask candidates to provide a solution to some of the problems related to the main tasks of the post, to analyse the compliance of some educational

institutions with individual assessment criteria, or to perform another task related to the specificity of the job.

The candidate's (proven) alignment with the expectations is decisive in the selection of staff. When making the selection, we consider the self-assessment, additional information obtained through the interview (in which we try to identify the candidate's attitudes and test oral communication skills in English and, where appropriate, Russian) and the quality of the written work (with an emphasis on analytical skills, reasoning skills using correct language, digital competence, word processing skills). The selection shall be made by a selection committee composed of at least three members, consisting, as a rule, of the Director, Director for Development, and the head of the relevant working team. Any HAKA staff member can join the selection board interviews with candidates. We rule out any discrimination based on sex, racial or other grounds.

### SUPPORTING THE INDUCTION OF A NEW STAFF MEMBER

The integration of a new employee into the work culture and work processes of HAKA must be quick, smooth, and purposeful.

**The process:** For the new employee, the Director of HAKA appoints a mentor who will help to familiarise the new colleague with the activities of HAKA, the information needed for work, documents and internal document management system used within HAKA, and everything related to the organisation of work. To do this, the new employee will, for example, talk to the sectoral Directors to understand who is doing what and how. It is also desirable that during the first three months all HAKA employees have personally interacted with the new employee and have gotten to know him/her better. The mentor's tasks are listed in the 'HAKA employee guidelines' document.

With the new employee, the Director holds weekly chats, where the new employee can share his or her concerns and positive remarks about the induction, propose good ideas to improve the efficiency of work processes, discuss training opportunities, etc.

### DEVELOPMENT INTERVIEWS

Development interviews make it possible to take stock of an employee's professional progress and offer opportunities for new challenges; receive feedback on the management, organisation and division of tasks within HAKA; identify priorities for activities and training needs for the following year.

**The process:** Development interviews take place at least once a year in November-December. If necessary, the Director of HAKA will conduct so-called interim interviews with the employees at the end of June. The interview shall be based on the employee's self-assessment of the objectives set in the previous period and the training needs identified. We use the digital environment PlanPro for development interviews. Based on the development interviews, we will define priorities for the activities for the next period and the need for new training.

**Review:** A summary of the results of the development interviews is prepared by the Director of HAKA and shared with all HAKA employees. The development interviews and their summary provide, among other things, collective input from HAKA employees for the preparation of the work plan for the following calendar year. Proposals regarding management, organisation of work and division of tasks will be discussed at HAKA meetings and, if necessary, we will make changes.

### THE MOTIVATION SYSTEM

The motivation system consists of several activities within HAKA that shape a collaborative, learning-oriented and supportive organisational culture, and Harno's motivation package, which includes various employee-friendly perks (reimbursement of spectacles, reimbursement of costs of purchasing a new phone etc.).

**HAKA's activities:** 1) development seminars (summer seminar, winter seminar); 2) collaboration seminars with other agencies and other events (Christmas parties, birthdays); 3) peer recognition, including at HAKA meetings; 4) performance bonuses for outstanding results related to the main activities.

In addition, HAKA employees are eligible for the Harno motivation package, more about which can be read on the Harno Intranet.

**Review:** The Director of HAKA receives feedback from employees on the motivation package during the annual development interviews, where employees will be able to express their opinion on the system and its functioning. The input and suggestions received from staff members will be discussed when making conclusions on the outcomes of development interviews, and the motivation package is amended or supplemented if necessary.

### DIVISION OF WORK AND WORKLOAD

The division of work and the calculation of loads is transparent, tasks clear and working arrangements flexible.

There is a clear division of responsibilities among HAKA staff, with each employee having at least two main responsibilities and being part of at least two working teams. For example, the Information Manager, the Educational Technologist, and the Training Manager also perform the role of assessment coordinators. The Assessment Director is also occasionally in the role of assessment coordinator. Coordination of the work of the committees is not included in the tasks of the Development Manager and the Director, but random co-ordinator work is not ruled out in these positions either.

For the different types of assessments, the volume of coordination work involved varies, which is why the calculation of the total workload of each employee is very individual. During the month following the development interview, the volumes of coordination for the next period and other tasks will be agreed. The load can be unevenly distributed over days and months — the employee will make sure that his or her average three-month load remains within the normal range.

Additional tasks exceeding the agreed load can be compensated for with days off or an extra remuneration can be agreed. It is strictly recommended to make up for working during a weekend with a day off during the working week (indicating the day off in the calendar and specifying for what date and work the time off is taken).

Everyone can use the home office option if this is reasonable and feasible from the point of view of the performance of their duties. In doing so, we follow the agreed rules set out in the document *HAKA Employee Guidelines*.

**Review:** The Director receives feedback on the workload and the division of work during the development interviews. If the cumulative overtime workload of HAKA staff becomes equal or higher than 1.0 full time equivalent over the year, the Director of HAKA shall propose to the Director-General of Harno the creation of an additional post.

### Related documents:

- ✓ Statutes of the Education and Youth Board
- ✓ The Applicant's Self-Assessment Questionnaire
- ✓ Procedure for the Formation of the Higher Education Assessment Council and the Appeals Committee
- ✓ Rules of Procedure of the Higher Education Assessment Council
- ✓ Procedure for the Formation of the Vocational Education Assessment Council and the Appeals Committee
- ✓ Rules of Procedure of the Vocational Education Assessment Council
- ✓ Directives of the Minister of Education and Research concerning the approval of the composition of the Supervisory Board of HAKA and the rules of procedure of the Supervisory Board
- ✓ HAKA Employee Guidelines
- ✓ HAKA Employee Competence Model Implementation Guide (*to be developed in autumn 2022*)
- ✓ HAKA Development Plan
- ✓ Guide to the handling of Appeals
- ✓ Guidelines for assessment coordinators
- ✓ Assessment Guidelines for all sectors (except general education)

### 1.5. Experts

**The objective:** experts are motivated, and the outcome of their work provides valuable feedback and input into the promotion of quality in the field of education.

HAKA's aim is to cooperate with experts with appropriate expertise and experience and to ensure that the expert selection procedure is transparent and fair. HAKA's experts include

- assessment experts,
- mentors
- members of development teams.

An assessment expert is a professional in the field, who carries the HAKA values in quality assessment.

### APPLICATION AND SELECTION PROCEDURES FOR ASSESSMENT EXPERTS

- In most areas, Assessment Directors and/or assessment coordinators work together with professional or trade associations and bodies, occupations councils and sectoral representative organisations to find experts, asking them to recommend potential sectoral experts to specific assessment committees.
- One can apply to become an assessment expert by filling in and submitting an application on the HAKA website. The application form for higher education experts is available in Estonian and English, for the remaining sectors the application form is available in Estonian. Application forms developed based on similar principles ensure the receipt of uniform information on the expertise, experience, and motivation of all candidates. Upon submission of the application, the applicant gives consent to the processing and storage of his or her (personal) data to HAKA.
- Applications for expert positions are stored in the HAKA website content management system, which is managed by the Information Manager, who will include experts meeting the application requirements in the database of the relevant sector. The databases for each sector are managed by people agreed for each sector. All applicants will receive an automatic notification of successful submission of data upon submitting the form.

- The competence and the adequacy of experience of experts applying for expert positions in vocational education and training as well as continuing education will be assessed by a selection committee. Assessment methods may vary: on the basis of documents, interviews or group discussions, case resolution, etc., the method(s) of assessment will be agreed in advance. The Assessment Director or coordinator responsible for recruiting experts will, after the decision of the selection board has been taken, send a reply to all candidates thanking them for applying and stating whether the person was selected or not. In the event of non-selection, an explanation shall be included.
- In higher education, we use the HAKA database of higher education experts, recommendations from other agencies and experts, information on experts with previous experience on the website of various international professional and trade associations and competent assessment organisations on experts with previous quality assurance experience. We also search for information about experts with previous experience from the European evaluation results database DEQAR and other agencies' websites. In order to find a student member to a specific assessment committee, we also disseminate the call for applications through the Student Quality Network and ask the ESU for recommendations. The suitability of experts is assessed by the higher education working team.
- The assessment guidelines describe in which cases an expert cannot participate in the panel due to a potential conflict of interest. The expert confirms in the contract to be concluded with him/her that he/she has no ties with the educational institution under assessment that would constitute a potential conflict of interest.
- All assessment experts undergo training prior to the evaluation, the participation in which is a prerequisite for participation in the assessment process. During the training, we give an overview of the level of education to be assessed, introduce the assessment criteria and the evaluation process, and discuss HAKA's expectations for experts.
- Nobody is discriminated based on sex, racial or other grounds when selecting assessment experts.

### EXPECTATIONS FOR AN ASSESSMENT EXPERT

Our expectations for an expert in all evaluations are as follows:

- **Impartiality and an evidence-based approach:** The expert is free from prejudice and independent and his/her assessments are clearly substantiated. In the event of any bias, the expert/coordinator shall immediately withdraw from the composition of the panel.
- **Partnership and cooperation:** The expert respect the other members of the committee as well as the representatives of the educational institution under assessment, and remains polite and impartial in all circumstances. The expert shall ensure that there is a friendly working atmosphere at committee meetings and the evaluation visit. The expert's body and verbal language always express an open and supportive attitude towards the institution that is assessed.
- **Confidentiality:** The expert shall not disclose to third parties any information which has become known to them during the evaluation process and during the deliberations of the Committee and which is not reflected in the Committee's consensual final report. The expert continues to keep the information confidential after the end of the evaluation process.



- **Responsibility:** The expert follows the prescribed timeframe throughout the evaluation process, is available by e-mail if necessary and respects the division of tasks agreed within the Committee.

**We ensure that experts that meet the characteristics of a good expert are used in the following ways:**

- The selection procedure - is based on experience from previous cooperation, feedback from experts and the institutions assessed, recommendations from other agencies, we give candidates who meet formal requirements the opportunity to prove their suitability in group or individual interviews and/or training (if the formation of committees follows the training of experts).
- Through training and continuous support - we explain the characteristics of a good expert during the training of experts and constantly emphasise it throughout the evaluation process.
- By providing feedback - the expert's work is evaluated by colleagues from the same panel, who have participated in the evaluation visit and by the Committee coordinator. Feedback will be taken into consideration when making further decisions on the selection of experts.

#### DEVELOPING AND MOTIVATING EVALUATION EXPERTS

We offer experts a variety of development opportunities to motivate them to actively contribute to the assessment and to improve their knowledge and skills in quality assessment.

For this purpose:

- We have developed a common understanding at HAKA of what is the learner-centred approach and assessment that supports the development of the learner and how we apply them in our activities.
- We have agreed principles that support the work of the panels and provide feedback to the assessment committee both during the evaluation and at the end of the evaluation process (e.g., feedback on the draft assessment report, informing experts about the feedback received from the institution on the evaluation visit).
- We support the development of each expert by way of formative assessment of: 1) experts' expertise in quality assessment and 2) motivation to actively contribute to the evaluation. We provide the experts with feedback to support their learning and development throughout the process.
- We carry out an initial training of experts. We only involve in assessment panels experts who have completed a HAKA evaluation training. The format of training for experts may vary according to the target group and the purpose of the training. The Assessment Directors have discussed and agreed on the principles of training of experts. In each area of evaluation, the Assessment Director shall ensure that expert training is carried out based on agreed principles. The panel training will be carried out by the Assessment Director of the relevant sector and/or the coordinator(s) of the specific panel. We involve experienced experts in expert training as trainers.

- We prepare guidelines for experts in the form of interactive learning materials.
- We encourage experts to learn from each other e.g., during training, expert mentoring, experts with experience in the same committee with beginners.
- We recommend experts to other agencies.
- We issue electronic letters of gratitude to experts at the end of the evaluation to thank them for their participation in the evaluation.

**Review:** We analyse the work done (assessment reports, trainings, feedback) and carry out needs-based improvement activities, e.g., regarding the content of the training, changes to guidelines.

**Related documents:**

- ✓ Guidelines for experts
- ✓ Guidelines for coordinators

## 1.6. Resource management

**The objective:** The resources available to HAKA (work environment, tools, financial resources) are sufficient to carry out the core activities effectively and eagerly. The use of resources is economical and efficient.

### THE FINANCIAL RESOURCES

HAKA's activities are funded from various sources:

- state budget resources (RE).
- assessment fees for the right to provide instruction in higher and vocational education.
- The European Social Fund (ESF).
- cross-border quality assessments.
- international projects.

Regarding the state budget funds (approximately 1/4 of HAKA budget), the Director of HAKA submits an application to the Ministry of Education and Research (MER) every year, which will be discussed at the negotiations between MER and Harno. The application is based on the costs related to quality assessments, development costs and the fixed costs of HAKA secretariat. Planning and budgeting are regulated by MER's internal accounting rules and the performance model for financial accounting.

ESF resources are allocated according to the conditions for providing support for the specific measure and represent almost 2/3 of the total budget of HAKA. The ESF finances the advancement of quality in the field of vocational education, continuing education and general education.

Cross-border quality assessments (as a rule in higher education) are carried out on the basis of service contracts concluded with educational institutions abroad and the amount of the contract covers all costs related to the assessment and its administration. 10 % of direct personnel costs are accounted for as overheads.

International quality system development projects can be financed from both EU programmes (Twinning, Erasmus+) and service contracts with foreign institutions.

The financial accounting unit of the MER's Department of Budget and Financial Management coordinates the financial accounting activities between HAKA (Education and Youth Board) and the State Support Services Centre (RTK), as well as the implementation of the management accounting system and uniform accounting principles.

HAKA's accounting, personnel and payroll is dealt with by the RTK.

Reporting on Structural Funds (ESF): as an implementer, we submit payment applications once a month using the online environment of structural funds, as a partner, we submit payment requests to the implementer using the designated form. The interim report is submitted twice a year, reflecting performance and outcome indicators.

The discharge of the budget can be regularly monitored from the analysis software SAP Business Objects (SAP BO), the Head of Budget transmits the data at least once a month to the Director of HAKA. The HAKA Project Coordinator prepares a monthly budget discharge report according to the specific needs of HAKA.

## WORKING ENVIRONMENT AND TOOLS

The work environment at Tõnismägi 11 is equipped with ergonomic tools. For teleworking employees, we enable the creation of a similar working environment at their home office. We consider the possibility of a home office as a substantial perk. Therefore, if necessary, we cover the costs of furnishing the home office (e.g., additional monitor, keyboard). Since Tõnismägi 11 offices do not have desks/workstations for all HAKA employees, we cover the costs related to the acquisition of an ergonomic work chair for those HAKA employees, who have stated that they do not need a permanent workstation at the HAKA office.

A computer workstation is provided to HAKA employees by the State ICT Centre (RIT). For more details, please see the document *HAKA Employee Guidelines*.

We discuss and resolve issues related to the work environment and tools at HAKA meetings.

### Related documents:

- ✓ The Accounting Act
- ✓ Internal accounting rules of the Ministry of Education and Research
- ✓ Agreement on the provision of support services (operational model of financial accounting)
- ✓ ESF-funded projects — measure-specific legislation (conditions for granting grants, budget)
- ✓ International projects — agreements, budget
- ✓ HAKA Employee Guidelines

## 1.7. Planning of development

**The objective:** Direct the activities of all relevant actors towards the achievement of common objectives.

In the Development planning process, we are guided by the principles of openness, ambition, systemicity, co-creation and relevance.

### Principles of preparation of the Development Plan:

- Development planning is based on the Estonian and international context and analysis of the previous Development Plan and its outcomes.
- We ask, “Whether and why are we needed?”
- We define ourselves — who we are in the given moment, how we relate to the context, we review and, if necessary, redefine our core values.
- We review/define the vision — where we want to go, what we want to become.
- We review/define the mission statement.
- We review/define our values.
- We formulate our goals — which goals are needed to make the vision happen.
- We define how we know (assessment criteria and metrics) that we have achieved our goals and/or are moving in the right direction towards achieving them, including defining targets for one or another metric.
- We assess our resources and ability to achieve our goals, and, if necessary, review staffing.
- We plan activities for each calendar year by individual objectives, on the basis of which we prepare a work plan, which we amend and evaluate on a regular basis.
- We assess the need for additional resources and earmark the respective resources in the budget.

**The process:** We plan the development of HAKA in five-year cycles by drawing up a Development Plan. In the process of preparing the Development Plan, we review our mission, vision, and values, analyse their relevance, and update them if necessary.

The Development Plan is a maximum of 3-5 pages agreement on the mission and vision-based goals and values for a specific period. We complement the objectives with activity and performance indicators. The Development Plan is prepared by way of co-creation, into which we involve our partners and critical friends. The leader of the Development planning process is the Director of HAKA.

In order to achieve the goals, set out in the Development Plan, we prepare a work plan for each year, in which we agree on the main activities and the people in charge for their achievement. The Assessment Directors, Director for Development and the Director of HAKA are responsible for the preparation of the work plan, but all HAKA employees contribute to its creation, and we will supplement it as necessary. We will discuss the additions at HAKA’s regular meetings. We assess the implementation of the plan at HAKA development seminars twice per year, more often if necessary.

**Review:** We review the achievement of the objectives of the Development Plan once a year, prepare a summary and report it to the Supervisory Board of HAKA. All staff members contribute to this, but the overall responsibility lies with the sectoral Directors. Both the summaries of the implementation of the work plan and the Development Plan serve as input into the planning of new activities.

About one year before the end of the Development Plan period, we jointly prepare a new Development Plan under the leadership of the Director of HAKA. We agree on the principles and process of drawing up the Development Plan. The Development Plan is based on national and international strategies and

guidelines, analyses of HAKA activities, stakeholders' expectations (regular feedback from partners, surveys, and seminars), sectoral development trends and regulations.

We discuss the draft Development Plan with key stakeholders and coordinate it with the Assessment Councils. It is approved by the Supervisory Board and is available on HAKA website.

#### **Related documents:**

- ✓ The Development Plan
- ✓ Documents related to the Development Plan: report on the implementation of the Development Plan, work plans and reports on the implementation thereof.

## **1.8. Reporting**

**The objective:** HAKA's reporting is timely, informative, competent, and correct. There are no shortcomings in the reports.

The activities:

- 1) Preparation of the **6-month and annual report** for all HAKA activities in the Jira environment.

The Director of HAKA being the overall responsible, leaders of the working teams sharing the co-responsibility.

The Director shall forward the reporting modules in the Jira environment to the leaders of the working teams requesting these to be completed. All reports are visible to all leaders of working teams. We will discuss the summary report at the HAKA management meeting.

- 2) The **reporting of operations financed from the European Structural Funds** is defined in the Regulation on the conditions for granting support. The implementer submits to the implementing body a report using the template twice annually (by 20 January and 15 August) through the register.

The interim report shall contain in a clear and adequate manner the information requested. We submit the report to the implementing body via the register using the template prepared by the implementing body. We will submit the final report no later than 45 days after the end of the eligibility period. The final report shall also include an overview of the impact of the activities carried out on the cross-cutting topics.

- 3) **Reporting to the Supervisory Board:** At the meeting of the Supervisory Board in January, a summary is made of the performance of the activities of HAKA, together with the identification of strengths and improvement areas and the implementation of the budget. We prepare an executive summary of the report prepared in the Jira environment and of the discharge of the budget.
- 4) **Reporting to the Assessment Councils:** In January (as a rule at the joint meeting of the Assessment Councils), a summary is made of the performance of HAKA activities, together with highlighting the strengths and areas of improvement.

- 5) **Among the Harno management**, the Director of HAKA shares current information about HAKA's activities, identified bottlenecks and best practices.
- 6) HAKA **has regular and needs-based thematic meetings with the relevant units of the MER**, the aim of which is, among other things, the ongoing exchange of information on the state of play of the agreed development activities.

As a good practice, in vocational education, we have implemented regular monitoring of activities in the form of a so-called monitoring spreadsheet during the evaluation year, so that the preparation of the report would be efficient and resource-mindful (an informative overview of results, statistics, etc. has already been aggregated). The Vocational Education Assessment Register is also a good tool for reporting (all statistics and results can be summarised as of 2019, can also be used as a tool for future projections).

**Review:** Feedback from the Supervisory Board and Assessment Councils on the relevance and content of reporting, which we will take into consideration when preparing the next report.

#### **Related documents:**

- ✓ Documents on the conditions for granting the grant
- ✓ Jira Planning and Reporting Module

## 2. CORE ACTIVITIES

### 2.1 Initial and ongoing development of quality assessment models

A quality assessment model is a systematic set of standards, quality criteria and quality assessment activities that support the development and advancement of quality culture in an organisation. Quality criteria are the benchmarks of the features of input, output, process, or parts thereof, on the basis of which it is possible to assess the extent to which the quality of activities or outcomes meets requirements based on the agreed expectations of different parties, including strategic objectives and legislation.

**The objective:** The design of assessment models is evidence-based, and the models take into account the changing needs of the sector. The assessment guidelines are appropriate, drafted in a clear manner on the basis of agreed principles, and allow for the evaluation activities to be carried out in a uniform manner, ensuring that the assessment is understandable, impartial and comparable.

#### **Development and piloting of evaluation models**

- The development of a new evaluation model is preceded by an analysis of the state of play, mapping of best practices (including international) to advance quality culture and the development of basic principles.
- We create an opportunity in the model to combine different types of assessments with the objective of saving the resources of the evaluatees and evaluators without compromising the quality of the outcome.

- During the preparatory phase, we identify the expectations of stakeholders (educational institution, current and potential learner, employer, state, etc.) in relation to the planned quality advancement activities. To do this, we use focus group interviews, seminars, questionnaires, surveys.
- In order to develop the assessment model, the Director of HAKA convenes a working group composed of representatives of all stakeholders and appoints its chair. The evaluation model agreed by the working group and its guidelines will be sent by HAKA together with an explanatory memorandum to all stakeholders (all relevant educational institutions, representative organisations of learners, employers and businesses, professional and trade associations and government agencies) for feedback. Based on feedback from the consultations, the head of the working group supplements the original version and coordinates the changes with the working group.
- The version agreed among the working group is forwarded to the relevant Assessment Council by HAKA's Assessment Director responsible for the area. The approved assessment model and its guidelines are published on the HAKA website.
- After approval of the model and the guidelines, the Assessment Director responsible for the process or the Director of HAKA will inform the stakeholders involved in the process about the adoption of the guidelines e.g., by e-mail, at seminars, training sessions, etc.
- The HAKA EQAR liaison shall notify EQAR of the entry into force of the new assessment guidelines falling within the scope of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area by submitting to EQAR a Substantive Change Report on the template provided by EQAR about the new type of assessment.
- The new assessment model will be tested in the course of assessment and feedback from different parties will be collected. Based on the feedback, the need for changes will be analysed, avoiding the situation where the evaluatees would be on an unequal footing. Amendments to the assessment guidelines shall enter into force once they have been approved by the Assessment Council.

#### **Updating and publication of assessment guidelines**

- The Assessment Directors are responsible for keeping the guidelines up-to-date and, if necessary, initiate the introduction of amendments to the guides. For substantive changes, e.g., concerning assessment criteria, we will consult stakeholders. Input for changes may come from legislative changes, proposals from educational institutions or feedback to evaluations, results of analyses or thematic evaluations, etc.
- Once the revised guide has been approved by the Assessment Council, the Secretary of the Assessment Council shall, where appropriate, inform the relevant Assessment Director of the revised guidelines. Based on the amendments, the Assessment Director will make the necessary changes to the assessment forms and make sure that the revised guidelines are translated into English, updated in the relevant HAKA shared folder and that they are published on the HAKA website by the Information Manager.
- Following the endorsement of the guidelines by the Assessment Council, the Assessment Director in charge of the process will communicate the changes/decisions adopted by the Assessment Council to all stakeholders, taking into account the specificities of the target groups.
- Upon the entry into force of significant substantive changes in the assessment guidelines falling within the scope of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, the HAKA liaison shall inform EQAR by submitting a Substantive Change Report.

### Related documents:

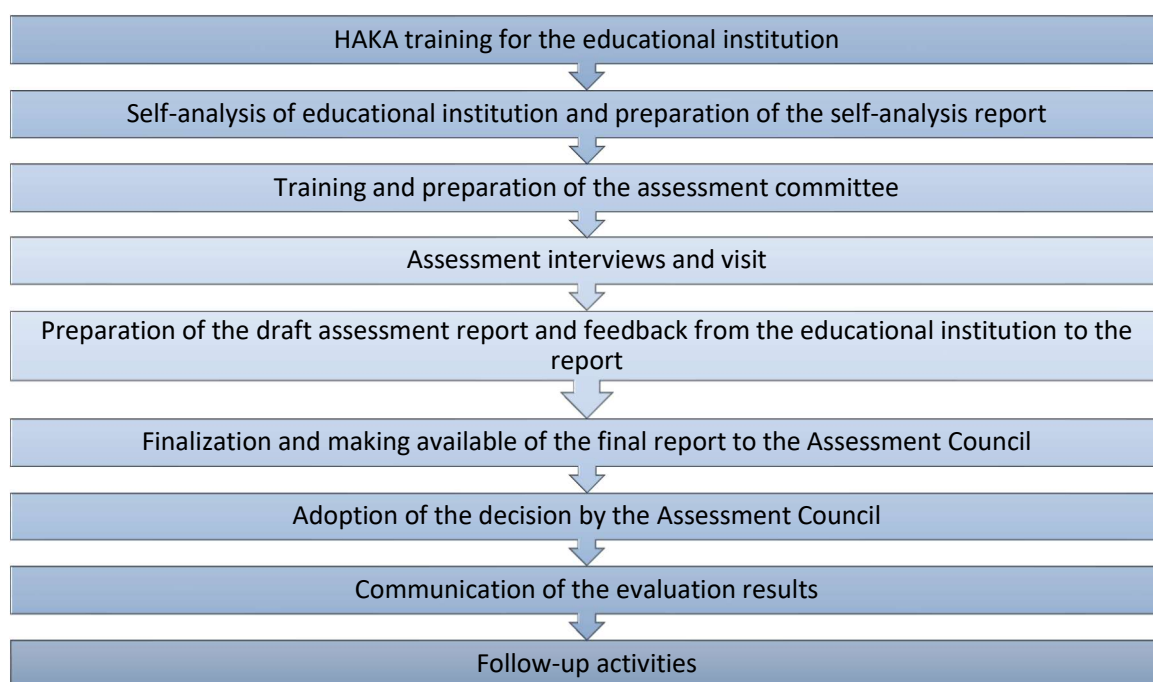
- ✓ Assessment guidelines

## 2.2 Implementation of the Quality Assessment Model

Quality assessment is a formative assessment aimed at supporting educational institutions in achieving the best quality: providing feedback, identifying the need for development support, acknowledging progress.

The various parts of the quality assessment process are set out in Figure 3 and are discussed in more detail below.

Figure 3. Evaluation model in all areas



The self-analysis of an educational institution is a self-assessment that constitutes part of the continuous cycle of improvement that is regularly applied in the process of setting goals, planning, implementing and improvement activities.

Internal quality assessment (including the self-analysis of the educational institution) and feedback from external evaluation experts help to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation and support the development of a quality culture aimed at continuous improvement and learning.



## PLANNING OF ASSESSMENT PERIODS

**The objective:** The planning of assessment periods takes into account the needs of the educational institutions and the internal resources of HAKA. Educational institutions have timely information on the long-term and shorter assessment periods (annual, six month).

### The activities:

- On the basis of the results of previous assessments (deadlines for re-assessment set in the assessment decisions), the Assessment Directors draw up schedules for institutional accreditation (higher education), reassessments (higher education and vocational education and training) and quality assessment of study programme groups (vocational education) per semester. Within the semester, the Assessment Directors will agree with the educational institutions on a specific week for the evaluation visit. The schedules for periodic assessments (institutional accreditation in higher education, quality assessment in vocational education) are published on the HAKA website. In the case of continuing education, the Assessment Director shall draw up an evaluation plan at least on a yearly basis and agree with the providers on the specific evaluation week.
- The educational institution has the possibility to undergo the assessment earlier than at the time specified in the previous assessment decision; for this purpose, a respective application must be submitted to HAKA.
- The Assessment Directors shall include in the timetables the initial assessments to be carried out at the request of the educational institutions, taking into account, when planning the time for the assessment visit, the need to complete the assessment by a set deadline.
- The Assessment Directors and the Director of HAKA discuss and plan the assessment coordinators according to the assessment schedule at least 4-5 months before the evaluation period, including harmonising the workloads between VET, higher education and continuing education assessments.
- The specific dates of the evaluation visit or assessment interview shall be coordinated between the coordinator of the assessment and the institution under assessment. The coordinator will forward the information on the dates of the assessment visit to the Information Manager, who will include the assessment visit dates in the public calendar on the HAKA website.

### Related documents:

- ✓ [Timetables for assessment periods](#)

## SUPPORTING EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS THROUGHOUT THE EVALUATION PROCESS

**The objective:** Support for educational institutions is well planned and based on agreed principles. The information to be shared is sufficient and timely.

In order to ensure that the assessment process goes smoothly and that educational institutions feel confident about the assessments and are well prepared, and all parties feel secure and good in the process, we establish communication with the educational institution undergoing an assessment well before the assessment process starts.

The aim of our support is to make sure that the educational institution

- understands the purpose of the assessment.
- is aware of the stages of the evaluation process.
- knows on which underlying documents the assessment is based.
- knows on the basis of which assessment criteria it will be assessed and understands the substance of those criteria.
- gets the best possible preparation for drafting the self-analysis report based on best practices.

In the case of support activities, we adhere to the following principles:

- The evaluation process shall be transparent for the institution: the institution knows why the assessment is carried out; what is expected of them and what and when will happen to them during this process; who evaluates them; on the basis of which criteria they are assessed and how.
- It is important to have good contact with the institution even before the assessment and to ensure that the necessary information is understood by all parties in the same way.
- We share with the educational institution best practices from past visits and experiences to support the institution in the context of their self-analysis and preparation of other documents and activities related to the assessment.
- Information about the process (e.g., on the HAKA website) is easily available and usable, practical and understandable, and the institution is aware of where it can find the necessary information when necessary, be it instructional and informative materials, information disseminated during the trainings or some other source.

The activities:

- Preparation of various guiding materials for the institutions undergoing assessment.
- Training sessions on the preparation of the self-analysis report and on the evaluation process (e.g., information seminar for continuing education providers) to explain the evaluation process.
- Using feedback from training providers to further improve the process.
- Counselling before and during self-analysis process, if necessary. HAKA may return the self-analysis prepared by the institution to the institution for further development.
- HAKA coordinators act as intermediaries between the institution and the assessment committee(s).
- In higher and vocational education, a meeting takes place between the institution's representative(s) and the HAKA coordinator before the assessment committee visit (whether physical or virtual) in order to agree on the details of the visit. There is no such pre-meeting in continuing education, nor does the committee have an on-site visit to the institution, instead the interviews are conducted online.

For the implementation of the support measures, we receive input from the following sources:

- Trainings and briefings prior to the assessments (oral and written feedback received).
- Summaries of assessment periods, which include statistics on the results of the completed assessment reports.
- Feedback from assessment experts and educational institutions.
- Coordinators' feedback throughout the process (regular meetings of coordinators to discuss matters during the assessment period: twice a year in higher education, once a month in vocational education, once a week in continuing education).

**Review:** We analyse the feedback given on the training courses in the sectoral working teams, discuss the results of the analysis in the working team of Assessment Directors and define the improvement activities.

#### Related documents:

- ✓ Guidelines for self-analysis

### ESTABLISHMENT OF ASSESSMENT COMMITTEES

**The objective:** The assessment committees are competent, effective in their work and assessment reports shall contribute to the advancement of quality in the institution.

#### The activities:

- In higher education, the assessment committee is assembled by the coordinator of the respective assessment, involving, if necessary, the Assessment Director, and taking into consideration the specificity of the assessment. In vocational education, initial committee compositions are planned by the Assessment Director together with the vocational education coordinator; the coordinator of the specific assessment committee is responsible for the recruitment of experts, in coordination with the Assessment Director, if necessary. In continuing education, the composition of the committees is planned by the Assessment Director; the coordinator of the specific assessment committee is responsible for the recruitment of experts, in coordination with the Assessment Director, if necessary.
- When forming an assessment committee, we follow a) the principles for setting up an assessment committee and b) the requirements for a member of the assessment committee as set out in the assessment guidelines.
- In addition to the requirements set out in the assessment guidelines, we also try to take into account, where possible, the following principles:
  - The composition of the committee includes experts that are new to HAKA and experts with previous evaluation experience, and possibly an expert or experts who have previously evaluated the same institution.
  - Each committee composed of foreign experts has at least one member with a deeper understanding of the Estonian context, if possible.
  - In order to avoid participation in assessment committees becoming routine for experts and the over-exploitation of experts, we deliberately leave assessment-free semesters to experienced experts.
- The composition of the assessment committees is subject to approval by the respective Assessment Councils. All committee compositions will be coordinated with the educational institution under assessment.
- For each evaluation, the Assessment Directors appoint coordinators from among HAKA staff members, who will support the Committee in their work and will act as liaisons between the institution under assessment and the Committee. The coordinator's tasks are set out in the coordinator's guidelines. If the HAKA staff member appointed to coordinate the assessment has links with the institution under assessment that constitute a potential conflict of interest as defined in the corresponding assessment guidelines, the staff member shall inform the Assessment Director as soon as possible and request to withdraw from the role of coordinator of the given assessment.

**Review:** At the end of each assessment period, we analyse the feedback from the institutions, other experts and coordinators regarding the work of the assessment committees and plan improvements.

#### Related documents:

- ✓ Assessment guidelines

- ✓ Guidelines for coordinators

## CONDUCTING ASSESSMENT INTERVIEWS AND VISITS

**The objective:** The assessment interviews and the evaluation visit support the preparation of a high-quality assessment report, which will be useful for the institution under assessment for their further development.

### The activities:

- The organisation of the evaluation visit shall be based on the specificities of the specific evaluation, including the format, duration, and topics to be addressed and the parties involved.
- In cooperation with the Committee and the institution, the assessment coordinator will select the relevant format of the visit (a site visit, an online visit or a combination of the two).
- The assessment committee shall follow the agreed principles for the evaluation visit and the evaluation interviews. The Assessment coordinator supports the panel in carrying out the visit in such a way that it fulfils its objective of obtaining additional information for the preparation of the assessment report.
- In each activity area, we have prepared guidelines for educational institutions, evaluation experts and coordinators for organising and conducting evaluation visits and evaluation interviews.

**Review:** We analyse feedback from educational institutions, coordinators and assessment committees regarding evaluation visits and evaluation interviews, and carry out needs-based activities, e.g., revision of the content of trainings, changes to guidelines.

### Related documents:

- ✓ Guidelines for experts
- ✓ Guidelines for educational institutions
- ✓ Guidelines for coordinators

## 2.2.5 Preparation of the assessment report

**The objective:** The assessment reports are of uniformly high quality. Educational institutions receive supportive expert feedback from the assessment report for their development activities.

### The activities:

- For all evaluations, we have developed assessment report templates that provide guidance on how to complete the report and that are available on the HAKA website. Guidance for the preparation of the report is also available in the guidelines for experts and coordinators.
- We have agreed across all education sectors on what constitutes a high-quality assessment report and what its features are.

- The assessment coordinator shall support and guide the assessment committee in the preparation of an assessment report, so that the report meets the criteria for a high-quality report.
- In addition to the assessment coordinator, at least one HAKA staff member will provide feedback to the draft assessment report. They have the right to submit proposals to the Committee to supplement the report. The principles for providing feedback on the report have been jointly agreed by the assessment coordinators.
- The assessment coordinator, the second reader of the report and the Director of HAKA, who signs off the final report do not interfere with the Committee's substantive assessments. The readers of the assessment report ensure that all aspects of the assessment criteria/standards are analysed, the information provided is based on information gathered and is evidence-based, the Committee's conclusions are clear and traceable, and that the analysis and assessments are consistent.
- The institution has the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft assessment report, including requesting clarifications and examples and correcting factual errors that the Committee then has the obligation to review.
- If, at the time of adoption of the assessment decision, it becomes evident that there are inconsistencies in the report or that the arguments put forward are insufficiently substantiated, the Assessment Council may send the assessment report back to the Committee for clarification.

#### **Review:**

The Assessment Directors shall supplement and amend the templates for the assessment reports as appropriate.

#### **Related documents:**

- ✓ Assessment report templates
- ✓ Guidelines for experts
- ✓ Guidelines for coordinators

### **ASSESSMENT DECISION**

**The objective:** assessment decisions are informed, substantiated, sufficiently reasoned and objective. Appeals against decisions are rare.

#### **The activities:**

- Assessment decisions are taken by the Assessment Councils.
- The decision-making of the Assessment Council is governed by the assessment guidelines and the rules of procedure of the Assessment Council in the relevant field.
- The assessment decisions are divided into two categories: 1) **final assessment decisions** (institutional accreditation; accreditation of study programme groups; accreditation of EQF levels 6 to 8 continuing education study programmes; quality assessment of vocational education study programme groups, quality assessment of continuing education study

programme groups) and 2) **proposals to the Minister of Education and Research** (initial and re-assessments in vocational and higher education).

- The secretary of the respective Assessment Council shall, in accordance with the rules of procedure of the Council, prior to the meeting give the members of the Assessment Council access via the HAKA cloud folder to the following materials: the institutions' self-analysis/information submitted for evaluation, the Committee's initial assessment report, the institution's comments to the initial report, the final Committee report and relevant additional material (assessment feedback from participants of assessment interviews, experts; background materials, which are also available to the assessed educational institutions during self-analysis, etc.).
- The decision-making process makes sure there is no conflicts of interest: a member of the Assessment Council, who has ties to the educational institution under assessment, shall leave the room for the time of the discussion and shall not take part in the vote on the relevant item on the agenda.
- The Assessment Council shall base its decision on the judgements, strengths and areas of improvement identified in the report of the Assessment Committee. The Assessment Council shall be consistent in the adoption of evaluation decisions, adopting decisions of similar weight in comparable circumstances. It is mandatory for the Assessment Council to substantiate its decisions and, if necessary, to indicate the most important areas of improvement.
- In the case of institutional accreditation, the Higher Education Assessment Council shall award a quality label to a higher education institution if (1) the Assessment Council adopts a decision to accredit the higher education institution for a period of seven years without a secondary condition, 2) the Assessment Council has imposed a secondary condition on the seven-year accreditation and this secondary condition has been deemed to have been fulfilled.
- The decisions of the Assessment Council shall be formalised in the form of minutes of the meeting of the Assessment Council, which shall be approved by the members of the Assessment Council who participated in the meeting; and signed by the member of the Assessment Council who chaired the meeting as well as the Secretary of the Assessment Council.
- After the minutes of the Assessment Council have been signed, the secretaries of the Assessment Councils shall send the minutes together with a cover letter and the final assessment report to all institutions mentioned in the minutes.
- After the institutions have been informed of their decisions, the minutes of the Assessment Council meeting will be published on the HAKA website. Individual assessment decisions will be formalised on the basis of the minutes in unaltered wording and the information manager will add them to the HAKA website together with the final assessment reports. Decisions and reports in higher education will be included in the DEQAR European Quality Assurance Results Database.
- In the case of domestic assessments, assessment decisions are generally adopted in Estonian. For cross-border assessments (in higher education), the decision will be taken in English.

Decisions on institutional accreditation adopted in Estonian will also be translated into English, and the translation will be added to the HAKA website upon completion.

#### **Related documents:**

- ✓ Minutes and assessment decisions of the Assessment Councils
- ✓ The Quality Label Statute

### **CONTESTATION OF ASSESSMENT DECISIONS AND PROCEDURES**

**The objective:** The procedure for challenging assessment decisions is transparent and clear.

In the event of suspicion of illegality or not-fitness-for-purpose of the assessment activities or of the decision taken in respect of the assessed institution, it is possible for the assessed institution to request review, amendment, or annulment of the decision in accordance with the procedure laid down in the Administrative Procedure Act and HAKA guidelines, thereby offering a more resource-efficient alternative to judicial appeal. The processing of appeals gives us the opportunity to identify internal improvement opportunities and implement improvement activities.

#### **The activities:**

- All assessment guidelines provide for the possibility to challenge the assessment activities carried out if they have not been carried out in accordance with the procedure stipulated in the assessment guidelines. In the case of assessments leading to a final decision taken by the Assessment Council, the challenge shall be submitted to the Assessment Council. In the case of evaluations leading to a proposal to the Minister of Education and Research, a memorandum or a request for clarification shall be submitted to the Director of HAKA. In the case of initial and re-assessment of vocational education, if the educational institution does not agree with the written explanations of the Director of HAKA, he or she has the right to submit a request for explanation or a memorandum to the Vocational Education Quality Assessment Council, which shall forward it to the Appeals Committee of the Vocational Education Quality Assessment Council. The time limits are set out in the assessment guidelines and the assessment decision.
- In the case of assessments leading to a final decision taken by the Assessment Council, the educational institution shall also be able to challenge the assessment decision taken in respect of it, if the institution feels that the decision infringes its rights or freedoms. For this purpose, a challenge must be submitted to the Assessment Council in accordance with the procedure laid down in the Administrative Procedure Act.
- In the case of assessments, which result in a proposal to the Minister for Education and Research, if the person concerned does not agree with the substantive reasons for the assessment decision, the person concerned has the right to file a notice of opposition before the Assessment Council of HAKA, which shall involve the respective Assessment Council's Appeals Committee in the assessment of the merits of the opposition.
- In the case of appeals filed to the Assessment Council, the Assessment Council shall seek the opinion of the relevant Appeals Committee. The processing of appeals is regulated by the Administrative Procedure Act, the Procedures for the Formation of Assessment Councils and

Appeals Committees and the assessment guidelines in the respective field; and elaborated in the procedure of the Appeals Committee (under development).

- It is possible to challenge the final decisions of the HAKA Assessment Council in Tallinn Administrative Court pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Code of Administrative Court Procedure.
- In the case of initial and re-assessments where the final decision is adopted by the Minister of Education and Research or the Government of the Republic of Estonia, the educational institution has the possibility to challenge the final decision in court.

**Related documents:**

- ✓ Assessment guidelines
- ✓ Procedures for setting up Assessment Councils and Appeals Committees
- ✓ Administrative Procedure Act
- ✓ Code of Administrative Court Procedure



## FOLLOW-UP OF EVALUATIONS

**The objective:** The follow-up to the evaluations is relevant and will support the institution in future developments.

The primary objective of each of our evaluations is to provide feedback and recommendations to the institution under assessment for the enhancement and advancement of existing quality. We adhere to the principle that the responsibility for solving the problems identified in the assessment report and for continuous improvement activities lies with the evaluated institution, but we want to make sure that our assessments have an impact on the development of the institutions and that the assessed institutions, when planning their development, take into consideration the suggestions for improvement made during the evaluation.

The following table gives an overview of the follow-up activities of the evaluation process across different areas and types of assessments.

*Table 1 Follow-up activities in different areas*

THE ASSESSMENT	FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY(IES)	THE RESPONSIBLE BY HAKA	DECISION ON FOLLOW-UP
<b>HIGHER EDUCATION</b>			
Institutional accreditation	We request that the higher education institution provides an overview of the activities planned and carried out on the basis of the suggestions set out in the assessment report and their results 2 years after the adoption of the assessment decision.	The HEQAC Secretary	The HEQAC reviews the progress report submitted by the HEI and provides feedback on it.
The secondary condition of Institutional Accreditation	We will involve the members of the initial assessment committee in the assessment of the fulfilment of the secondary condition.	The HEQAC Secretary	The HEQAC adopts decision on fulfilment of secondary condition
Initial and re-assessment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) In the case of a fixed term right to provide instruction, a reassessment follows.</li> <li>2) In the case of the right to provide instruction without a specified term, the higher education institution shall, one year after the adoption of the assessment decision, provide the Assessment Council with a written overview of the activities planned and carried out on the basis of the suggestions set out in the assessment report and the results thereof. We take the evaluation results into consideration when</li> </ol>	The HEQAC Secretary	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The HEQAC will submit a proposal to grant the right to provide instruction in the relevant study programme group and cycle to the Minister for Education and Research.</li> <li>2) In the case of the right to provide instruction without a specified</li> </ol>

	selecting the sample of study programmes for institutional accreditation.		term, the HEQAC reviews the progress report and provides feedback on it.
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION			
Quality assessment	The VEQAC shall propose to the institution to submit to the Council a written overview of the activities planned and carried out on the basis of the recommendations set out in the assessment report and their results no later than 1 year (2 years where deemed necessary) from the adoption of the assessment decision.	The VEQAC Secretary	The VEQAC reviews the overview of the improvement activities presented by the institution and provides feedback on it.
Initial and re-assessment of VET	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) In the case of a fixed term right to provide instruction, a reassessment follows.</li> <li>2) In the case of a right to provide instruction without a specified term, the VET institution shall, one year after the adoption of the assessment decision, provide the Assessment Council with a written overview of the activities planned and carried out on the basis of the recommendations set out in the assessment report and the results thereof.</li> </ol>	The VEQAC Secretary	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Proposal to the Minister for Education and Research to grant the right to provide instruction in the relevant study programme group.</li> <li>2) In the case of the right to provide instruction without a specified term, the VEQAC reviews the progress report submitted by the VET institution.</li> </ol>
Continuing education			
Threshold-based assessment	The provider that received a negative assessment decision ( <i>the study programmes and training provision do not comply with the requirements of the Adult Learning Act</i> ) has 3 months from the date of becoming aware of the assessment decision to remedy the deficiencies referred to in the report. Once the provider has implemented the Committee's recommendations, it will send us a reassessment application indicating how and what it improved in its activities. If necessary, they will supplement the application with additional evidence.	Committee coordinator for the evaluation	The assessment committee (generally the same composition which also carried out the first evaluation) will determine whether the recommendations have been implemented and the shortcomings have been eliminated. Depending on the assessment by the committee, the decision may remain the same ( <i>the Study programmes and training provision do not comply with the requirements of the Adult Learning Act</i> ) or, if the provider has implemented the improvements, become positive ( <i>the study programmes and</i>

			<p><i>training provision comply with the requirements of the Adult Learning Act).</i> The decision on the reassessment shall be finalised and transmitted to the provider by the assessment coordinator. The decision shall be signed by the Director of HAKA.</p>
<p>Curriculum group-based assessment (Cooperation project with Unemployment Insurance Fund 2022-2023)</p>	<p>There are no follow-up activities for a provider that received a negative decision. A provider for which all the criteria have been assessed as “requirement fulfilled” will receive a positive decision and be issued with a virtual quality label. A provider, for which some of the criteria have been assessed as ‘substantially fulfilled’ and some as ‘requirement fulfilled’ will receive a positive decision, but the Council may, as a discretionary decision, impose on it secondary condition(s), upon the satisfaction of which the provider will also be awarded the Quality Label by the Assessment Council.</p>	<p>Committee coordinator for the evaluating</p>	<p>The Continuing Education Council shall adopt a decision. As a discretionary decision, secondary conditions may be imposed on the provider to improve the situation.</p>

**Related documents:**

- ✓ Institutional Accreditation Guidelines
- ✓ Guidelines for Initial and Re-Assessment of Study Programme Groups (higher education)
- ✓ Guidelines for the Quality Assessment of Vocational Education and Training

## COLLECTING FEEDBACK AND PLANNING OF IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITIES IN QUALITY ASSESSMENTS

**The objective:** Feedback is collected and used systematically and in a transparent manner for improvement activities.

### **The activities:**

- Feedback surveys are prepared by Assessment Directors in cooperation with the analyst, taking into account the specificity of the assessment.
- All feedback surveys are carried out and stored electronically.
- During the different stages of the assessment, we collect feedback from different parties as follows:
  - The organiser of the training requests feedback on trainings on self-analysis for the educational institutions and trainings for new experts after the training.
  - The designated assessment coordinator requests feedback from participants of evaluation interviews on the assessment visit and assessment interviews.
  - The coordinator/analyst requests feedback from experts on the evaluation process.
  - The analyst/Assessment Director requests feedback from assessment coordinators on the evaluation process.
  - Assessment Directors collect feedback on the entire evaluation process at higher education institutions' Institutional Accreditation follow-up seminars.
- During the evaluation period, regular meetings of coordinators and Assessment Directors are organised, with the aim of sharing experiences of working with the panels and supporting each other in finding solutions when problems arise.
- At least twice a year (at the end of both semesters), the analyst prepares summaries of the feedback received from participants of assessment interviews, experts and coordinators. The summaries are analysed by the Assessment Directors.
- The Assessment Directors also discuss the results of feedback surveys with each other in order to harmonise the practices applied in different areas where possible.
- In all areas, a summary of the evaluations and their results will be compiled on an annual basis, including an analysis of feedback and planned improvement actions on the basis thereof.
- Summaries of feedback from educational institutions, experts and coordinators, and changes proposed on the basis of the analysis thereof will be presented by the Director of HAKA at the meetings of the Assessment Councils and the Supervisory Board.

### **Review and improvement activities:**

- Based on the analysis of the feedback received from different parties, we discuss improvements in each field under the leadership of the Assessment Director and, if necessary, introduce changes to assessment guidelines, assessment templates, assessment procedures, procedures for coordinators, selection of experts, training of

experts, organisation of evaluation visits and interviews, etc. Where necessary, we supplement the guidance materials for educational institutions, experts, and coordinators.

- The Assessment Directors in cooperation with the analyst review the feedback questionnaires once a year and, if necessary, harmonise the content of the questionnaires across sectors.

#### **Related documents:**

- ✓ Feedback questionnaires for all sectors (on trainings, for participants of evaluation interviews institutions, experts)
- ✓ The discussion points for the follow-up seminars
- ✓ Summaries of feedback received
- ✓ Summaries/analysis of evaluations and their results per year in all areas

## 2.3 Analyses by HAKA

#### **HAKA's analyses can be divided into:**

- 1) Analyses of evaluation periods (regular)
- 2) Thematic analyses (non-regular)
  - a. thematic reviews.
  - b. analyses that constitute a basis for strategic planning and development planning.
  - c. analyses and reports of international cooperation projects.

**The objective:** The analyses are based on needs, relevant, professional, and prepared within an agreed time frame.

#### **We prepare analyses to**

- Highlight developments, trends, examples of best practices and problem areas in the wider education system.
- Provide input into the preparation of educational policy decisions and actions or assess their impact and implementation.
- Assess the appropriateness of quality assessment policies, procedures, criteria and propose changes.
- Provide feedback to higher education institutions on the outcomes of quality assessment.

#### **The themes of analysis arise from:**

- Regular analyses of evaluation results.
- Feedback from different parties, e.g., about the need to change the evaluation process.
- Topical issues in society and education, e.g., assessment of continuing education, forced distance learning.
- Topics proposed by the MER, the Unemployment Insurance Fund, other partners or from (international) projects that relate to the objectives and priority activities of HAKA, e.g., the learning and teaching of foreign students, traineeships in vocational and higher education.

**The process:**

1. Identifying the analysis needs.
2. Identifying the resources needed to carry out the analysis.
3. The Director of HAKA approves the topic for the analysis and appoints the person responsible and, if necessary, the analysis team.
4. The analysis is carried out.
5. The results of the analysis are presented within HAKA.
6. Disseminating the results of the analysis.
7. Planning and implementation of follow-up activities based on the results of the analysis.

**Review:**

Each analysis will be reviewed by 1-2 HAKA staff members and the results will be discussed at HAKA meeting.

We publish the analyses on the HAKA website and disseminate information about them on social media channels.

Based on the purpose and content of the analysis, we consider the following follow-up activities:

- Informing target groups (mailing lists, direct emails).
- Organisation of a seminar, workshop, or training.
- Presentation of analysis at other seminars, including internationally.

The aim is to reach important target groups in order to maximise the usefulness of the analyses.

**Related documents:**

- ✓ [Guide to thematic review \(2020\)](#)

## 2.4 Domestic development activities

**The objective:** HAKA is a reliable and useful partner for all stakeholders in the field of education. HAKA's activities are fit-for-purpose, with a clear focus and contribute to the advancement of quality culture in Estonia.

**The activities:**

- We bring together various parties to discuss topical issues in the field of education that have emerged in society, including providing an umbrella view based on evaluation results, and encouraging reflection.
- We participate actively in law-making and policymaking in our area of expertise through various national working groups, e.g., convened for the purpose of developing and updating legislation.

- We are committed to ensuring that the quality of education is a prominent topic in society. With the support of quality ambassadors (experts, mentors, members of the Assessment Councils, Supervisory Board) and our work, we contribute to the promotion of quality culture in Estonian education.
- We assess our ability to participate in development activities based on our time and human resources at a particular point in time.
- National development activities stem from the objectives set out in the Development Plan and developments in the field of education and are specified in the annual work plans.

**Review:** The analysis of national development activities is carried out as part of the review of the annual work plans of the Development Plan.

Related documents:

- ✓ The Development Plan
- ✓ Work plans of the Development Plan

## 2.5 International development activities

**The objective:** Targeted international development activities support increase in the reliability, role and reputation of Estonian education. Participation in international development activities is based on analysis and contributes to the development of the Estonian education system.

**The activities:**

- ✓ We actively participate in the work of relevant international networks and organisations and cooperate regularly with, in particular, the quality agencies in our region.
- ✓ We ensure that the education provided by Estonian educational institutions abroad and the educational institutions of other countries operating in Estonia meet all the required quality standards.
- ✓ We offer a quality assurance and quality assessment system development service. To this end, we participate in or launch projects aimed at helping to develop quality assurance and quality assessment systems for higher education, vocational education, general education and adult education in other countries.
- ✓ Through cross-border quality assessment activities, we offer the service described as the *comprehensive education export package* (hereinafter referred to as the *service*), which includes both institutional accreditation and accreditation of study programmes and groups thereof.

**Principles for the implementation of activities:**

When planning international activities, we are primarily guided by the following:

- We are guided by the strengths of the organisation outlined in the Development Plan and the needs and challenges of the domestic education system.

- We prefer activities that are financially profitable for the organisation (except participation in the work of international networks and organisations, assessment activities of foreign branches of Estonian educational institutions or foreign educational institutions operating in Estonia) and/or which create added value in the form of learning opportunities for the organisation and the Estonian educational landscape in general.

### 3. COMMUNICATION

**The objective:** The communication is relevant, timely and fits the needs of the target groups.

#### 3.1. Internal communication

HAKA's **internal communication** objectives:

- Communication within HAKA is well organised and supports the achievement of the objectives of the Development Plan, and constitutes an integral part of the management of the organisation.
- Good internal communication improves day-to-day cooperation within HAKA and helps to maintain knowledge within the organisation. Systematical attention to documenting the experience and knowledge of HAKA employees supports consistent development of the organisation.

**Internal communication activities:**

- HAKA meetings are held on a weekly basis. All participants fill in, prior to the meeting, information in the meeting file that they deem necessary to share with their colleagues. We store the meeting files together with the decisions we have taken.
- The meetings of HAKA working teams (sectoral and cross-sectoral and development teams) are held as agreed and with the regularity deemed necessary.
- HAKA Information Manager participates in the Harno and MER's marketing and communication network.
- The Director of HAKA participates weekly in the Harno management meetings, drawing important input from the HAKA meetings. Information about the Harno management meetings is relayed to HAKA staff by the Director.
- More detailed agreements on internal communication are set out in the document *HAKA Employee Guidelines*.

#### 3.2. External communication

HAKA's **external communication** objectives:

- ✓ Target groups are informed about the outcomes of quality assessments of education.
- ✓ Learners' awareness of the requirements for the quality of learning and teaching has increased and an understanding of the role of the learner in ensuring the quality of learning has been developed.



- ✓ Decision-makers in the field of education take into consideration HAKA evaluation results when preparing different decisions (financing, structural changes, etc.).
- ✓ HAKA is internationally known.

External communication activities, target groups and messages until the end of 2022 are described in HAKA's external communication strategy.

#### **External communication activities:**

- HAKA news and press releases, as well as information about trainings, seminars, conferences and other communication events and active calls, are published in the news section of the website. We also distribute information via HAKA's Facebook page.
- Both our own and commissioned analyses and articles are published on the HAKA website. The Information Manager, in cooperation with colleagues, plans the publication and distribution of articles.
- We prepare and print paper copies of information materials, which we distribute at trainings, seminars, conferences, and other events organised by HAKA and partners. For experts and partners, we order thematic souvenirs with the HAKA logo as needed.
- We add evaluations, trainings, and other events to the web calendar on the HAKA website. The person responsible for the activity forwards this information to the Information Manager, who adds it to the website.
- Once a quarter, the Information Manager in cooperation with colleagues compiles the HAKA newsletter for partners and other interested parties.
- In the case of institutional accreditation, we issue a quality label to the higher education institution if they have been granted a 7-year accreditation. The quality label is a valued recognition among higher education institutions, which is being pursued and through this we increase our visibility and recognition among the target group.

#### **Disclosure of evaluation results**

- The minutes of the meetings of the Assessment Councils are published on the HAKA website. The secretary of the Assessment Council forwards the minutes to the Information Manager, who will add it to the website as soon as possible (no later than the next day from receipt).
- In addition to the minutes of the meetings of the Assessment Councils, the Assessment Council secretaries draw up separate assessment decisions for each evaluation. The secretary of the relevant Assessment Council informs the Information Manager when the assessment reports, assessment decisions and self-analyses of educational institutions may be published on the website. The above-mentioned documents shall be uploaded to the website by the Information Manager no later than one week after the final decision of the Assessment Council and the assessment report are sent to the educational institution. Self-analyses shall not be made public, except for the Self-Analysis reports in institutional accreditation of higher education institutions.

- The secretary of the Assessment Council, in collaboration with the Information Manager, prepares a news article for the website and Facebook page about meetings of the Assessment Council.
- We publish the assessment results on the HAKA website and in the assessment results database. For higher education assessments, the Information Manager adds to [DEQAR \(Database of External Quality Assurance Results\)](#):
  - Institutional accreditation decisions, reports and self-analysis reports (in both Estonian and English).
  - Initial and re-assessment decisions and reports (in Estonian and English).
- We issue a press release on IA (and other decisions of the Assessment Council with more news value). In the case of institutional accreditation, the press release contains a description of the strengths and areas of improvement set out in the decision of the Assessment Council and, if applicable, the secondary conditions. If the Assessment Council has awarded the quality label to a higher education institution, the press release will also include the relevant information. We coordinate the publication of the press release with the educational institution.
- Assessment decisions in higher education are translated into English and made available on the HAKA English website. Translations are procured by the HAKA translation service coordinator.

### 3.3. Review of internal and external communication and improvement activities

- At the beginning of each academic year, the Information Manager prepares a communication plan in the communication working team. The plan includes:
  1. An analysis of past activities and an assessment of the achievement of the objectives set.
  2. Communication objectives for the coming year by sector and target group and their relationship with the objectives of the HAKA Development Plan.
  3. Main activities for each month.
- Both internal and external communication activities are monitored regularly. The Information Manager monitors the traffic of the website, social media posts and media coverage using the appropriate automated tools. Both the weekly meetings of HAKA and overviews of employee cooperation interviews with the Director of HAKA provide input into the monitoring of internal communication. The results of analyses will be discussed at HAKA meetings.
- For further development and improvement of the Quality Label, we use the following input:
  - Information on ways in which the institutions present and use the quality label awarded to them (by publishing on websites, publications, distribution elsewhere, etc.)
  - Website traffic statistics (we can see which references to the HAKA website direct traffic to the HAKA website: i.e., reference to the Quality Label.
  - We plan to ask institutions in the future (e.g., in feedback seminars) whether the Quality Label is a symbolic tribute to them on the website or whether it has brought real benefits.

**Related documents:**

- ✓ HAKA External Communication Strategy 2020-2022
- ✓ The Quality Label Statute
- ✓ HAKA employee guidelines