



External review of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC)

DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE

2016

1. Background and Context

The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) is an independent state institution established by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania in January 1995. SKVC implements the national policy in research and higher education within its remit and contributes to the harmonisation of the Lithuanian higher education system with the principles of the European Higher Education Area.

The main objectives of SKVC are to promote the quality of activities of higher education institutions and to contribute to creation of favourable conditions for the free movement of persons. SKVC is the only external quality assurance agency responsible for all types of higher education institutions in Lithuania (state and private, university type and college of higher education type). SKVC also acts as a local ENIC/NARIC office carrying out academic recognition of foreign credentials and providing information on higher education systems and qualifications recognition.

This is a second external review of SKVC as external quality assurance agency.

SKVC has been a full member of ENQA since October 2012 and is applying for renewal of European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) membership. SKVC has been listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) since December 2012 and is applying for renewal of EQAR listing.

SKVC is also a full member of INQAAHE (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education) since 1997 and founding member of CEENQA Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education) [2000].

The website of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education is available (in Lithuanian and English) at: <http://www.skvc.lt/>.

2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

This review, will evaluate the way in which and to what extent SKVC fulfils the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG-2015)*.

Consequently, the review will also provide information to the ENQA Board to aid its consideration of whether membership of SKVC should be reconfirmed. The review panel is not expected, however, to make any judgements as regards granting membership.

This review is meant to provide information enabling EQAR Register Committee to make a decision on renewal of SKVC listing in EQAR.

2.1 Activities of SKVC within the scope of the ESG

In order for SKVC to apply for ENQA membership and for registration in EQAR, this review will analyse all activities that SKVC considers to be within the scope of the ESG, i.e. study programme evaluations and accreditations, evaluations and/or accreditation of higher education institutions. This is regardless of whether these activities are carried out within Lithuania or within other EHEA countries, and whether they are obligatory or voluntary.

3. The Review Process

The process is designed in the light of the *Guidelines for external reviews of quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area*.

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

- Formulation of the Terms of Reference and protocol for the review;
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel;
- Self-assessment by SKVC including the preparation of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to SKVC;
- Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report by the review panel;
- Scrutiny of the final evaluation report by the ENQA Review Committee;
- Analysis of the scrutiny by the ENQA Board and their decision regarding ENQA membership;
- Follow-up of the panel's and/or ENQA Board's recommendations by the agency, including a voluntary follow-up visit.

3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review team members

The review panel consists of not less than four members: one or two quality assurance experts, an academic employed by a higher education institution, student member, including at least one expert with good knowledge of Lithuanian higher education system and Lithuanian language. One of the members will serve as the chair of the review panel, and another member as a review secretary. Two of the reviewers are nominated by the ENQA Board on the basis of proposals submitted to ENQA by the member national agencies. The third external reviewer is drawn from a nomination provided by the European University Association (EUA) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE). The nomination of the student member comes from the European Students' Union (ESU).

In addition to the four members, the panel may be supported by the ENQA Secretariat review coordinator who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA expectations are met throughout the process. The ENQA staff member will not be the Secretary of the review and will not participate in the discussions during the site visit interviews.

Current members of the ENQA Board and EQAR Register Committee are not eligible to serve as reviewers.

SKVC is expected to receive the list of suggested experts with their respective curriculum vitae to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The experts will have to sign a non-conflict of interest statement as regards the SKVC review.

3.2 Self-assessment by SKVC, including the preparation of a self-assessment report

SKVC is responsible for the execution and organisation of its own self-assessment process and shall take into account the following guidance:

- Self-assessment is organised as a project with a clearly defined schedule and includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;
- The self-assessment report is broken down by the topics of the evaluation and is expected to contain, among others: a brief description of the national HE and QA system; background description of the current situation of the Agency; an analysis and appraisal of the current situation; proposals for improvement and measures already planned; a SWOT analysis; each criterion (ESG part II and III) addressed individually. All agency's QA activities (whether within their national jurisdiction or outside of it, and whether obligatory or voluntary) will be described and their compliance with the ESG analysed.
- The report is well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which SKVC fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the ESG and thus the requirements of ENQA membership.
- The self-assessment report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat who has 4 weeks to pre-scrutinise it before forwarding the report to the panel of experts. The purpose of the pre-scrutiny is to ensure that the self-assessment report is satisfactory for the consideration of the panel. The Secretariat will not judge the content of information itself but whether the necessary information, as stated in the ENQA Guidelines for External Review of Quality Assurance Agencies, is present. As this is the second review, the agency is expected to enlist the recommendations provided in the previous review and to outline actions taken to meet these recommendations. In case the self-assessment report does not contain the necessary information and fails to respect the requested form and content, the ENQA Secretariat reserves the right to reject the report and ask for a revised version within 4 weeks.
- The report is submitted to the review panel a minimum of six weeks prior to the site visit.

3.3 A Site Visit by the Review Panel

SKVC will draw up a draft proposal of the schedule for the site visit to be submitted to the review panel at least two months before the planned dates of the visit. The schedule includes an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review panel during the site visit, the duration of which is 2,5 days. The approved schedule shall be given to SKVC at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews. A limited number of interviews might be conducted by connecting on-line.

The review panel will be assisted by SKVC in arriving in Vilnius, Lithuania.

The site visit will close with an oral presentation and discussion of the major issues of the evaluation between the review panel and SKVC.

3.4 Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report

On the basis of the review panel's findings, the review secretary will draft the report in consultation with the review panel. The report will take into account the purpose and scope of the evaluation as defined under articles 2 and 2.1. It will also provide a clear rationale for its findings with regards to

each ESG standard. A draft will be first submitted to the ENQA review coordinator who will check the report for consistency, clarity and language and it will be then submitted to SKVC within 11 weeks of the site visit for comments on factual accuracy. If SKVC chooses to provide a statement in reference to the draft report it will be submitted to the chair of the review panel within two weeks after the receipt of the draft report. Thereafter the review panel will take into account the statement by SKVC, finalise the document and submit it to SKVC and ENQA.

The report is to be finalised within three months of the site visit and will be about 40 pages in length.

SKVC will also provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation applying for membership and the ways in which SKVC expects to contribute to the work and objectives of ENQA during its membership. This letter will be discussed along with the final evaluation report.

4. Follow-up Process and Publication of the Report

SKVC will consider the expert panel's report and will publish it on its website once the ENQA Board has made its decision. The report will also be published on the ENQA website, regardless of the review outcome and decision by the ENQA Board. The report will be published on EQAR website as well.

SKVC commits to preparing a follow-up plan in which it addresses the recommendations of the review panel and to submitting a follow-up report to the ENQA Board. The follow-up report will be published on the ENQA website, in addition to the full review report and the Board's decision.

The follow-up report will be complemented by a small-scale visit to the agency performed by two members of the original panel (whenever possible). This visit will be used to discuss issues, based on the ESG, considered as of particular importance or challenge by SKVC. Its purpose is entirely developmental and has no impact on the judgement of membership and/or compliance of the agency with the ESG. Should the agency not wish to take advantage of this opportunity, it may opt out by informing the ENQA Review Coordinator about this.

5. Use of the report

ENQA shall retain ownership of the report. The intellectual property of all works created by the expert panel in connection with the review contract, including specifically any written reports, shall be vested in ENQA.

The review report is used by the Board of ENQA for the purpose of reaching a conclusion on whether SKVC has met the ESG and can be thus admitted/reconfirmed as a member of ENQA.

The report will also be used for other purposes, such as registration on EQAR, and is designed so as to serve these two purposes. However, the review report is to be considered final only after being approved by the ENQA Board. Once submitted to SKVC and ENQA and until the decision by the Board is made, the report may not be used or relied upon by SKVC, the panel and any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. SKVC may use the report at its discretion only after the Board has approved the report. The approval of the report is independent of the decision on membership.

The Chair of the panel shall remain available to respond to questions of clarification or further information from the EQAR Register Committee and the ENQA Secretariat is copied in all such requests.

6. Budget

SKVC shall pay the review related fees as specified in the agreement between the external review coordinator and the SKVC.

It is understood, that the fee of the follow-up visit is included in the overall cost of the review and will not be reimbursed in case the agency does not wish to benefit from it.

In the event of a second site visit required by the ENQA Board and aiming at completing the assessment of compliance, and should the agency accept a second visit, additional fees will be charged.

7. Indicative Schedule of the Review

Agreement on terms of reference	October – November 2016
Appointment of review panel members	November 2016
Self-assessment completed	November 2016
Pre-screening of SER by ENQA coordinator	October – November 2016
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	December 2016
Briefing of review panel members	December 2016 – January 2017
Review panel site visit	February 2017
Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening	April 2017
Draft of evaluation report to SKVC	April 2017
Statement of SKVC to review panel if necessary	April 2017
Submission of final report to ENQA	May 2017
Consideration of the report by ENQA Board and response of SKVC	May – June 2017
Publication of report	July 2017