

Procedure for accreditation of curriculum groups of vocational education and training

I. General provisions

1. This procedure is based on § 13, § 19 (4) and § 58 of the Vocational Educational Institutions Act and on the Minister of Education and Research regulation entitled "*Conditions of and procedure for accreditation of formal studies of vocational education*" (draft).
2. Accreditation of curriculum groups of vocational education and training (hereinafter accreditation) is the external evaluation of the curriculum groups in a school conducted by external independent assessors.
3. Accreditation is funded from the resources of the '*Developing and applying the system of national recognition for vocational educational institutions' activity (code 1.1.0501.08-0005) of the 'Internal development of vocational studies 2008-2013' programme (hereinafter the Programme) of the 'Internal updating of vocational studies and quality assurance' measure of the 'Lifelong learning' priority direction of the 'Application plan for developing human resources' of the ESF.*
4. The Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency (EKKA) compiles a schedule for conducting accreditation by year and curriculum group.

II Areas and criteria for assessment

5. Accreditation assesses the functioning of teaching work, management and leadership, staff management, cooperation with interest groups and resource management at present and their sustainability in future.
6. In assessing teaching work, the following assessment criteria are taken as a basis:
 - 6.1. Compiling and developing curricula (incl. curricula for in-service training) is based on the needs of interest groups and the curriculum strategy.
 - 6.2. The organisation and development of study and teaching process supports the achievement of the goals of curricula (organisation and assessment of teaching organisation, incl. internships and practical work in the working environment; supporting integration with teaching organisation; online studies; granting professions and the relevance and application of documentation).
 - 6.3. Implementing and developing the study and teaching process supports the development of students in attaining the learning outcomes provided in the standard of vocational education (study methods based on learning outcomes and the needs and characteristics of learners; integrating, developing and assessing key and professional competences; results related to the development of students; etc.)
 - 6.4. The support system and its development supports the student (supporting the student's learning capabilities, development of reflexive and social capabilities; supporting students with special educational needs, incl. a support system for students with learning and behavioural difficulties; supporting adult students; and analysing the development of students, using individual studies where necessary, incl. using VÕTA).
7. In assessing management and leadership, the following criteria are taken as a basis:
 - 7.1. The leadership and management of the curriculum group is efficient and supports its sustainability (justified changes in managing the curriculum group taking place during the reporting period; including the panel of advisers, students and teachers in managing the curriculum group; clearly determining areas of responsibility; communication at different levels; targeting and harmonising the activities of the curriculum group with general strategies; contributing to achieving the school's mission, vision and strategic goals, feedback on and assessment of the management of the curricula group; etc.).

8. In assessing staff management, the following criteria are taken as a basis:

8.1. The staff of the curriculum group conform to requirements and support the group's sustainability (appraisals; staff-related results, incl. teachers with vocational qualifications).

8.2. Development and support of staff are based on the current and future needs of the curriculum group (self-evaluation of staff; conformity of in-service training to needs; effectiveness of training; methodological and education technology support for teachers; taking results of staff development into account in teaching; etc.).

9. In assessing cooperation with interest groups, the following criteria are taken as a basis:

9.1. Cooperation with external interest groups supports the sustainability of the curriculum group (defining the interest groups and areas of cooperation, purposeful involvement and collecting and considering feedback; cooperation with internship companies and institutions and other educational institutions; etc.).

10. In assessing resource management, the following criteria are taken as a basis:

10.1. Resource management supports the achievement of the goals of the curriculum group (incl. financial resource management; relevance of the material technical and IT base and its expedient use in achieving study goals; coverage of curricula with teaching materials; etc.).

11. Assessment of key results of a curriculum group is based on the following activity indicators for vocational educational institutions established with Regulation no. 49 of the Minister of Education and Research of 24 August 2010 'Activity indicators of pre-school child care institutions, basic schools, upper secondary schools and vocational educational institutions':

11.1. fulfilling state-commissioned training and completing studies;

11.2. application of graduates on the labour market;

11.3. further studies of graduates;

11.4. passing vocational exams;

11.5. providing training to target groups; and

11.6. other indicators of the productivity of studies.

III Schedule and organisation of accreditation

III. 1 Submission of accreditation application and curriculum group report & schedule

12. In order to participate in accreditation, the director of a school must submit an application to EKKA at least 12 months before the due date of expiry of the right to conduct studies in the corresponding curriculum group.

13. In order to participate in accreditation, the school must compile a curriculum group report based on internal evaluation with a maximum length of 15 A4 pages in the format established by EKKA. The school's council must approve and its director confirm the curriculum group report.

14. The director must submit the curriculum group report electronically to the EKKA office pursuant to the schedule of curriculum groups and schools:

14.1. by 1 February (curriculum groups accredited in 1st half of year);

14.2. by 1 July (curriculum groups accredited in 2nd half of year);

15. If necessary, EKKA may request additional data from employers or educational institutions connected with, or graduates of, a study programme group. EKKA makes all such information available to the assessment committee as well as to the school being assessed.

III. 2 Formation of assessment committees

16. EKKA forms assessment committees. The assessment committee has three or four members who are representatives of employers in the field corresponding to the curriculum group and experts in teaching work. Employees of the Ministry of Education and Research, school directors and employees of state agencies that assess the curricula of formal education in vocational education based on management contracts entered into with the Ministry of Education and Research or that develops vocational studies may not be members of the assessment committee.

17. In selecting members of the assessment committee, EKKA is guided by the following principles:

17.1. avoiding conflict of interests; and

17.2. members being selected from different organisations.

18. Requirements of members of assessment committee:

18.1. members of the assessment committee are independent in their work and do not represent the interests of the organisations of which they are part;

18.2. members of the assessment committee are aware of trends in vocational education in Estonia and the EU as well as the principles of their organisation;

18.3. members of the assessment committee have prior experience in management and/or development in the field related to the corresponding curriculum group and/or in the field of education;

18.4. members of the assessment committee are recommended to have undertaken training in internal and/or external assessment or quality management and to have experience in internal and/or external assessment; and

18.5. members of the assessment committee are recommended to have experience in teaching or instructing vocational studies (incl. instruction of internships).

19. Tasks of chairman of assessment committee:

19.1. managing the work of the assessment committee, incl. distributing tasks to committee members;

19.2. planning assessment visits with the EKKA office;

19.3. ensuring the substantiation of the committee's assessments and proposals;

19.4. being responsible for the proper compilation and timely submission of the assessment committee report; and

19.5. informing the director of EKKA of the contributions of individual committee members.

20. Members of the committee confirm with their signature that they will maintain the confidentiality of any information obtained in the course of assessment and the lack of any conflict of interests. If a conflict of interest arises, the member in question undertakes to immediately inform the director of EKKA and revoke their position on the committee. Conflicts of interest are presumed in the following cases:

20.1. A member of the committee has professional or other contractual relations with the school being assessed at the time of assessment or they had contractual relations with the school being assessed in the five years prior to the assessment visit.

20.2. A member of the committee is on the executive or supervisory board of the school being assessed at the time of assessment.

20.3. A member of the committee is studying at the school being assessed or graduated from it less than three years previously. The people involved in the study programme group of the school being assessed include a person close to a member of the committee (spouse/partner, child or parent).

21. The EKKA office approves the membership of the assessment committee with the school, which may provide its opinion on the membership within two (2) business days.

22. The director of EKKA confirms the final membership of the committee assessing the curriculum group of a specific school with a resolution. The director also appoints an assistant to the chairman of the committee and to the committee who is not a member of the assessment committee and whose tasks are likewise be approved by the director of EKKA with a resolution.

23. All members of and assistants to the assessment team undergo the curriculum group accreditation training organised by EKKA.

Work organisation of assessment committee

24. The EKKA office forwards the school's study programme group report(s) and any additional information, where necessary, to all members of the assessment committee by the day of training at the latest.

25. The assessment committee conducts an assessment of the curriculum group in the assessment areas provided in point 5 in regards to current and future assessment criteria, the school's activity and productivity indicators and a visit to the school.

26. A visit to the school is mandatory for the committee and it lasts for 1-2 working days.

27. The assessment committee approves the time and action plan of the school visit with the school (hereinafter the school visit plan) at least 10 (ten) business days before the visit, and provides the school and EKKA office with the final school visit plan at least five (5) business days before the visit.

28. The director of the school organises the availability of the information deemed necessary by the assessment committee and the conditions necessary for the work of the committee members pursuant to the agreed plan for the school visit, or delegates this task to a competent employee.

29. The members of the assessment committee review the information provided by the school during the visit on site, adhering to the requirement of confidentiality. Members of the assessment committee have the right to:

29.1. talk to members of the school council, representatives of the owner, employees, students and key partners;

29.2. review school documents;

29.3. review the working and study environment of the school; and

29.4. observe various forms of study activities.

30. The assessments of the committee by area of assessment should preferably be based on consensus. If consensus is not achieved, the decision is based on a simple majority of votes of the committee members assessing the study programme group of the corresponding school, to which any justified objections are appended. If votes are distributed equally, the chairman of the committee has the casting vote.

31. Based on the assessments, the assessment committee submits a proposal to the assessment council on the areas of assessment and the key strengths and main areas of development of current and future views:

- 31.1. to accredit the curriculum group of the school for six (6) years;
- 31.2. to accredit the curriculum group of the school for three (3) years; or
- 31.3. not to accredit the curriculum group of the school.

32. Assessment results are formalised by the assessment committee in the format established by EKKA as the assessment committee report (*Assessment committee report*). The chairman of the assessment committee submits the report to the EKKA office electronically within 10 (ten) business days of the school visit.

33. The EKKA office sends the assessment committee report to the school for review within 15 (fifteen) business days of the school visit.

34. The school has the right to review the report within five (5) business days and electronically submit justified comments signed by the director to the EKKA office.

35. After receiving the comments of the school, the assessment committee compiles a final report and response to the school within five (5) business days and submits these electronically to the EKKA office with the chairman's signature.

36. The schedule, organisation of accreditation, study programme group report and assessment committee report forms are available on the EKKA website at www.ekka.archimedes.ee.

III. 4 Accreditation decision of assessment council

37. The Minister of Education and Research forms an assessment council. The council has up to 13 members, including:

- 37.1. representatives of the Ministry of Education and Research;
- 37.2. six experts from the various areas of professional studies set out in the standard of vocational education; and
- 37.3. representatives of central organisations of employers and other interested parties.

38. Of the experts indicated in point 37.2, three are appointed by the body of chairmen of professional councils set out in § 7 (2) of the Professions Act and three by the Minister of Education and Research.

39. The director of the school is not appointed to the assessment council.

40. The assessment council bases its accreditation decision on the assessments of areas set out in the assessment committee report, the accreditation proposal of the committee and its justification therefor, the comments of the school and any additional materials provided at the request of the assessment council.

41. In the event of discrepancies or lack of argumentation in assessments of areas by the committee, the assessment council has the right to return the assessments to the committee for further review and specification.

42. The assessment council adopts a decision to:

- 42.1. accredit the curriculum group of the school for six years;
- 42.2. accredit the curriculum group of the school for three years; or
- 42.3. not to accredit the curriculum group of the school.

43. Once the accreditation decision has been adopted, the assessment council makes one of the following proposals to the Minister of Education and Research:

- 43.1. to extend the right to conduct studies in the curriculum group by six years;

43.2. to extend the right to conduct studies in the curriculum group by three years; or

43.3. to refuse to extend the right to conduct studies.

44. The EKKA office publishes the curriculum group report, the assessment committee report and the assessment council's decision on its website.

IV. Challenging accreditation procedures conducted by EKKA and accreditation decision of assessment council

45. Accreditation procedures conducted by EKKA may be challenged if they fail to conform to the procedure provided in this document. Objections must be submitted to the management of the Archimedes Foundation within 30 days of the day the person learned of or should have learned of the procedure being challenged.

46. Challenging the accreditation decision of the assessment council is possible after the Minister of Education and Research has adopted an administrative decision regarding the extension of the right to conduct studies. The objection must be submitted pursuant to the objection reference provided in the relevant regulation of the Minister.