

Requirements and procedure for accreditation of study programmes in continuing education

Approved by the EKKA Quality Assessment Council on April 11, 2017

I. General Provisions

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

II. Requirements for accreditation of study programmes

5. Study programme and study programme development

- 5.1. Educational needs of (different) target groups as well as results of educational and societal trends and market research are used for developing educational offer.
- 5.2. Objectives, expectations, requirements of stakeholders are identified and defined. The goals and content of the learning offer are relevant for the target group, they are tailored to the needs of participants.
- 5.3. Relevant stakeholders, e.g. current and former participants, teachers/trainers, funders and other relevant stakeholders are involved in the development of the educational offer. The study programme development takes into account feedback from participants, employers, and other stakeholders.
- 5.4. Learning outcomes, including transversal skills, are clearly defined, match the educational goals and, if applicable, are linked with current professional practice.
- 5.5. The content and structure of the study programme are consistent with its objectives and learning outcomes.
- 5.6. Different parts of the study programme are logically integrated and form a coherent whole.
- 5.7. E-learning and blended learning offers are developed to cater to the needs and requirements of participants and also to reach out to geographically dispersed target groups, if applicable.

6. Learning and teaching

- 6.1. Modern teaching methods with a strong participant orientation are used in teaching. They are adapted to the needs and experiences of adult learners.
- 6.2. Teaching content and learning process are linked to the learning outcomes on the respective level of the EQF, if applicable.
- 6.3. Teaching and learning materials (including e-learning materials) are up-to-date and appropriate to achieve learning outcomes.
- 6.4. Assessment of learning outcomes (including recognition of prior learning and work experience) is transparent and objective.
- 6.5. The teaching process includes self-assessment and a formative performance assessment, i.e. an analysis of the individual student in his/her learning development.
- 6.6. Participants' reflective feedback on process and outcome is gleaned on a regular basis.

7. Teaching Staff

- 7.1. There is teaching staff with adequate qualifications to achieve the objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme, and to ensure quality and sustainability of the learning and teaching.
- 7.2. Practitioners participate in teaching the study programme.
- 7.3. The teaching staff is engaged in professional and teaching-skills development.
- 7.4. The teaching staff periodically review their performance, development and training needs.
- 7.5. Institutional structures and means of communication, information and cooperation ensure a good working climate and foster teamwork, including team-teaching, among teaching staff.

8. Participants

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

9. Resources

- 9.1. Resources (infrastructure, facilities and equipment, learning and teaching materials, financial resources) support the achievement of objectives in the study programme.
- 9.2. Resource development is sustainable.

III. Self-Evaluation of study programmes

10. The provider shall conduct self-evaluation of study programmes and prepare a self-evaluation report according to the *Template for the self-evaluation report*.

11. The provider shall finalize the self-evaluation report and send it to the coordinator no later than two months before the assessment visit.

IV. Formation of Assessment Committees

12. Assessment committees (hereinafter referred to as 'committees') shall have at least three members. A committee shall comprise an employer representative, a training expert in the respective field of specialization and an expert in the field of quality assurance.

13. Requirements for members of an assessment committee:

- 13.1. members of an assessment committee shall be independent, they shall not represent neither the interests of the organisation they belong to, nor the interests of any other third parties;

- 13.2. members of an assessment committee shall confirm by signature an obligation to maintain the confidentiality of information that has become known to them by reason of their membership in an assessment committee and the lack of conflicts of interest. A conflict of interest is presumed to be present in the following cases:

- a committee member has an employment or other contractual relationship with the provider under evaluation at the time of assessment, or he or she has had an employment relationship with that provider within three years prior to the assessment visit;
- a committee member is participating in the work of a decision-making or advisory body of the provider under evaluation at the time of assessment;
- a committee member is studying at the provider under evaluation, or graduated from it less than three years ago;
- the membership connected with the study programme of the provider under evaluation includes a person closely related to a committee member – spouse or life partner or a family member;

- 13.3. members of an assessment committee shall know the functioning of the continuing education system and the legislation that regulates it the respective country, and they are familiar with the trends in continuing education worldwide;

- 13.4. members of an assessment committee shall have past experience in management and/or development in the area of a given study programme, and/or they have undergone training related to external quality evaluation and they shall preferably have past experience in external evaluation of education;

- 13.5. members of a committee shall have the necessary teamwork skills to conduct the assessment.

- 13.6. members of a committee shall be proficient in the working language of the assessment.

14. Duties of members of a committee include the following:

- 14.1. reviewing a self-evaluation report of the provider;

- 14.2. examining documents that regulate the accreditation of study programmes;

- 14.3. completing the assessment training provided by EKKK;

- 14.4. participating in the meetings and discussions of the committee;

- 14.5. contributing to the priming of the assessment report before the assessment visit;

- 14.6. participating in wording of recommendations and preparing the assessment report;

- 14.7. examining the comments of the provider on the assessment report and considering them when coordinating the output of the final assessment report;

- 14.8. performing other tasks related to assessment activities according to the division of tasks among the members of a committee;

- 14.9. adhering to the agreed committee deadlines.

15. Duties of the chairperson of a committee include the following:
 - 15.1. chairing the meetings of the committee;
 - 15.2. dividing tasks among the members of the committee;
 - 15.3. leading the committee during the visit;
 - 15.4. after the visit, giving the overview of provisional conclusions of the committee to the provider;
 - 15.5. ensuring that the opinion of the committee is justified;
 - 15.6. preparing and confirming the assessment report.
16. The provider has the right to present its position on the composition of the assessment committee.
17. The Director of EKKA shall approve the final composition of a committee by his/her order and appoint a chairperson of the committee and an assessment coordinator.
18. An assessment coordinator (hereinafter 'coordinator') is a support person of a committee and an administrator of the assessment process whose main duty is to ensure smooth functioning of the assessment process on the basis of the requirements and the timeframe provided in this document.
19. EKKA shall enter into contracts for services with members of a committee.

V. Organisation of Work of Assessment Committees

20. The provider who receives an assessment committee shall appoint a contact person who ensures the smooth communication between EKKA and the provider.
21. An assessment visit to the provider shall last two to three days. The coordinator shall prepare a schedule of the visit in cooperation with the provider and the chairperson of the assessment committee.
22. In the course of an assessment visit, the provider shall make an adequately furnished room available to the members of an assessment committee and allow them to:
 - 22.1. if necessary, access statutes and normative documents which provide for and govern the activities of the provider and its structural units;
 - 22.2. interview employees and participants in the study programmes at the choice of experts;
 - 22.3. access information related to teaching, learning and participants in study programmes; educational materials; and the study information system;
 - 22.4. access information related to the teaching staff concerning their CVs, work load, methodological work and research activities;
 - 22.5. examine the internal quality assurance system of learning and teaching;
 - 22.6. examine the condition of the infrastructure of the provider;
 - 22.7. access subject syllabuses/programmes as well as instructional documents related to the content of teaching and learning;
 - 22.8. access information related to financial activities of the provider;
 - 22.9. visit any forms of contact learning (lectures, seminars, laboratory work, etc.);
 - 22.10. if necessary, obtain other information related to teaching and learning.

23. An assessment committee shall evaluate the study programmes in five assessment areas: study programme and study programme development, learning and teaching, teaching staff, participants and resources (hereinafter referred to as 'component assessments').
24. Assessment report shall include a description and analysis of information that the component assessments are based upon.
25. As a result of a component assessment, an assessment committee shall determine whether the component under evaluation:
 - 25.1. conforms to requirements;
 - 25.2. partially conforms to requirements; or
 - 25.3. does not conform to requirements.
26. EKKA shall forward the first draft of the assessment report to provider no later than four weeks after the assessment visit.
27. The provider under evaluation has the right to provide comments to the draft assessment report within two weeks of receiving the draft report.
28. An assessment committee shall analyse the comments provided by the provider and formalise the final report within one week of receiving the comments.
29. It is recommended that component assessments of the report shall be adopted by consensus. If consensus is not reached, the decision shall be made by a simple majority of members of an assessment committee and the dissenting view(s) together with the reasons shall be included.
30. The EKKA Bureau shall forward the final report of the assessment committee and the comments of the provider to the EKKA Quality Assessment Council. The Quality Assessment Council shall make the assessment decision within two months of finalization of the assessment report.

VI. Final Assessment by EKKA Quality Assessment Council

30. The EKKA Quality Assessment Council (the Council) shall provide a final assessment decision on a study programme at its session.
31. The Council shall base its final assessment on the component assessments presented by the assessment committee, and the comments by the provider received within the specified time, as well as additional materials submitted at the request of the Council.
32. In case of contradictions in component assessments by an assessment committee or inadequate justification, the Council shall have the right to return the component assessments to the assessment committee to be reviewed and clarified; the assessment committee shall review the component assessments within two weeks after their receipt and return them with additional explanations and reasons to the EKKA Bureau.
33. The Council shall, on the basis of the final assessment, base the accreditation decision on the following principles:

- 33.1. If all five of the component assessments are “conforms to requirements”, the Council shall decide to accredit the study programme for a period of five years.
 - 33.2. If at least one of the component assessments is “does not conform to requirements”, the Council shall decide not to accredit the study programme.
 - 33.3. If all five of the component assessments are “partially conforms to requirements”, the Council shall analyse the strengths and areas of improvement of the study programme and decide to accredit the study programme for five years with conditions, or not to accredit the study programme.
 - 33.4. If three or four of the component assessments by an assessment committee are “partially conforms to requirements”, the Council shall decide to accredit the study programme for five years with conditions.
 - 33.5. If one or two of the component assessments by an assessment committee are “partially conforms to requirements, the Quality Assessment Council shall analyse the strengths and areas of improvement of the study programme and decide to accredit the study programme for a period of five years or to accredit the study programme for five years with conditions.
34. If the study programme is accredited for five years with conditions, the Council shall allow the provider a time period which is equal to twice the nominal length of the study programme to amend the deficiencies identified in the accreditation decision. The Council has the right to formulate an assessment committee to check the fulfilment of the conditions. If the conditions are met in a timely manner, the Council shall decide that the accreditation of the study programme for a period of five years remains in force. If the secondary condition is not met by the provider, the Council shall decide not to accredit the study programme.
35. The EKKa Bureau shall forward the final assessment by the Quality Assessment Council to the provider and the members of the assessment committee within ten working days after its adoption.
36. In case of full accreditation for five years, EKKa shall issue a certificate to the provider attesting the accreditation. The study programmes that have received an accreditation for five years with conditions shall be issued the certificate when the conditions have been met.

VII. Follow-up activities

36. One year after the issuing of the certificate, EKKa asks the provider to give the Council a written review of the planned and implemented activities deriving from the recommendations presented in the assessment report, as well as their results.

VIII. Contestation of evaluation proceedings conducted by EKKa and final assessments by the Quality Assessment Council

37. Evaluation proceedings conducted by EKKa may be disputed if the proceedings do not comply with the procedure provided for in this document. The challenge is filed with the EKKa Quality Assessment Council within 30 working days after the person filing the challenge became or should have become aware of the contested finding.
38. Complaints on the merits of the final decision adopted by the EKKa Quality Assessment Council may be forwarded to the Council within 30 working days after the decision is adopted. The Director of EKKa shall then forward the complaint to the EKKa Appeals Committee.

IX. Financing of accreditation

39. EKKA shall charge the provider a fee to meet the full costs of the accreditation. This includes the expert fees, a fee for the coordination and administration of the accreditation process, and travel and accommodation expenses. The expert fees and administrative overhead are determined by the EKKA Quality Assessment Council; travel and accommodation expenses are charged at cost. The approximate total of the whole review is payable by the provider to EKKA upon the signing of the contract. EKKA shall not undertake any further preparations for the accreditation review until the payment has been received.
40. The travel costs and the accommodation costs will be paid as real costs. Should the real travel and accommodation costs be lower than the amount paid in advance for these purposes, the provider will be reimbursed the difference. Should the real travel and accommodation costs exceed the amount paid in advance for these purposes, the provider shall pay the difference to EKKA.
41. Translation and interpretation are provided and the corresponding costs are covered by the provider. The interpreter must have preparation for consecutive interpretation in respective languages. The interpreter must not be involved with the provider under evaluation (have an employment relationship with the provider or study at the provider).
42. If the EKKA QA Council shall accredit the study programme for five years with conditions, the provider is obliged to cover the costs of the second review according to the same calculation described in clauses 39 and 40 and depending on the scope of conditions set by the Council.