

EKKA QUALITY MANUAL

The Foundations for EKKA's Work

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INTRODUCTION

The Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency (EKKA) is a leading competence centre in the field of external evaluation of educational institutions in Estonia. EKKA acts in accordance with agreements and trends in the European education sphere, likewise possessing information about trends and best practices outside Europe; applies up-to-date know-how tailored to the local context; and employs analyses of the results of external quality evaluations to enhance competitiveness of the Estonian educational system.

EKKA's **mission** is to support the development of a culture of quality in the field of education and enhance the openness and competitiveness of the Estonian society thereof.

EKKA's **core process** is the external assessment of educational institutions which includes the following **key activities**:

- 1) Institutional accreditation of higher education institutions (IA)
- 2) Quality assessment of study programme groups
- 3) Initial assessment of study programme groups
- 4) Re-evaluations of transitional evaluations
- 5) Accreditation of study programme groups in vocational education and training (VET)

The key activities are accompanied and supported by the following **support activities**:

- Training of assessment experts
- Counselling and training of educational institutions
- Communication of evaluation results to the general public
- Analysis of evaluation results and submitting recommendations for improvement to the educational institutions and the Ministry of Education and Research
- Participation in international networks related to external evaluation of educational institutions

The national and internal regulations as well as international agreements that constitute the basis for EKKA's activities are published and regularly updated on EKKA website <http://ekka.archimedes.ee/en/regulations/>.

EKKA's activities are based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (a translation into Estonian is also available on EKKA website).

EKKA'S CORE VALUES

- Impartiality:** consistent application of the principle of equal treatment in all activities;
- Competence:** competent assessment experts; commanding up-to-date know-how of one's field; engaging in constant professional development;
- Cooperation:** involving partners and accommodating their needs in a balanced manner to achieve the best results possible, applying shared values in team work; collaborative learning and teaching at international level;
- Openness:** clarity and comprehensibility of assessment procedures, public availability of assessment results; flexible adaptation to changes in the environment.

EKKA builds its internal quality assurance system and external evaluation processes on the **Continuous Quality Improvement** approach according to which the quality is a continuous improvement. The organisation's desire for its activities and the results thereof to meet the needs and expectations of both internal and external stakeholders serves as the basis for that continuous quality improvement.

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF EXTERNAL EVALUATION

- 1) External evaluation procedures are in accordance with the legislation and strategies of the Republic of Estonia as well as with international trends, and respect the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.
- 2) The primary purpose of external evaluation is to provide educational institutions with feedback that supports their development.
- 3) All principal stakeholders of external evaluation contribute to the process of developing evaluation policies and procedures; in particular educational institutions slated for evaluation in the future.
- 4) The focus of external evaluations is on the core processes of an educational institution; in the case of institutional accreditation, the focus is on the management and functioning of the organisation as a whole, along with the coherence between the two, and how they each relate to the organisation's strategic objectives.
- 5) When evaluating educational institutions, experts assess them from national as well as international perspectives.
- 6) When developing regulations for external evaluation, EKKA follows the logic of the Quality Cycle (PDCA): the processes of planning, implementation, assessment and improvements.
- 7) Requirements and indicators are formulated in a way that allows the assessment of input, processes and output, and guides higher education

institutions to compare themselves with similar higher education institutions in Estonia and abroad.

- 8) EKKA's use of resources is economical and efficient: the primary purpose of external evaluation must be achieved with the investment of minimum time, finances and human resources.

1. MANAGEMENT AND FUNCTIONING OF THE ORGANISATION

1.1. PLANNING OF DEVELOPMENT

The objective: to direct the activities of all relevant parties into achieving common goals.
Principles: relevance, flexibility and ambition.

In planning development activities we follow, among others, the following regulations of Archimedes Foundation: Strategic Management, Implementation of the Quality Management System and Monitoring, Analysis and Improvement.

1.1.1. STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT PLAN PREPARATION:

We —

- analyse the Estonian and international contexts;
- ask “if and why we are needed”;
- formulate/review our mission — what is the purpose of our existence? EKKA’s mission is very much formulated by law, but it can be elaborated;
- assess our resources and capabilities to achieve our mission;
- define ourselves — who we are in a given moment, how we relate to the context;
- formulate our vision — where we are heading, what we want to become ;
- formulate/review our objectives — what objectives must be achieved to realise our vision;
- define indicators through which we know that we have achieved our objectives and/or moved in a right direction, and we define benchmarks or deadlines for achieving objectives;
- plan activities for each calendar year by objectives, on the basis of which we will prepare a work plan which is amended on a continuous basis;
- estimate the need for supplementary resources and allocate those in our budget.

1.1.2. INCLUSION

- All EKKA employees participate in drafting of development and action plans.
- Main stakeholders (higher education institutions, the Ministry of Education and Research, students) have provided input into the development process of the new external evaluation system and EKKA’s statutes as well as the drafting of EKKA’s

mission statement and key activities. EKKA surveys stakeholder satisfaction with its activities and their expectations through various feedback instruments on a regular basis; making amendments to its development plan based on the findings.

- Based on the draft development and action plans, EKKA quality assessment councils discuss the strategy in two sessions: first reading and approval; and subsequently feedback and modification as needed.
- The draft development and action plans are discussed by the Management Board of the Archimedes Foundation, feedback will be gathered and amendments made.
- The development and action plans are discussed at a meeting of the Management Board of the Archimedes Foundation, feedback is gathered and amendments made.
- The development plan approved by EKKA quality assessment councils will be published.
- Review and further amendments: on the basis of needs (changes in the environment, feedback received etc.), but at least once a year: at EKKA development seminar and at the meetings of assessment councils subsequent to the development seminar.

1.2. HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Objective: in order to achieve its goals, EKKA employs an optimum number of competent specialists (permanent staff, members of quality assessment councils, experts) who are motivated and engage in constant professional development.

1.2.1 EKKA PERMANENT STAFF

- Defining the necessary EKKA permanent staff composition and set of competences that would be necessary to achieve EKKA's mission and objectives — identifying the competences needed to perform EKKA's functions, and the organisational structure and number of employees that would best ensure the achievement of EKKA's objectives.
- The principle: new positions are created based on the need for additional competencies arising from objectives of the development plan or upon increase in the workload in specific areas.
- Defining main areas of responsibility for each EKKA employee: Each employee has up to three main areas of responsibility based on his or her competencies, and co-responsibility in each area is delegated to one more colleague. In addition to their main areas of responsibility, all EKKA employees, except for the Accountant, (also) participate in implementing the core process. The implementation of this principle is reviewed once a year at an EKKA meeting on the basis of the development seminar and development interviews.
- When planning assessment periods, managers of key work areas estimate the workload of coordinators/assistants to the assessment committees, and EKKA will involve assistants from outside EKKA in the evaluation process as needed (a common

practice in transitional evaluation, accreditation of vocational education and training, re-evaluation). All assistants undergo EKKA trainings together with the experts.

- Based on need and specificities of tasks, EKKA employees have the possibility to use tele-working (i.e. home office). Tele-working is agreed with the Director of EKKA, indicated in the EKKA shared calendar and communicated to other colleagues.
- Taking on extra tasks and the payment of top-up remuneration thereof is agreed prior to undertaking of additional tasks.
- If work needs to be undertaken during week-ends or national holidays, the employee will be granted days off as compensation as agreed with the Director of EKKA.

The division of tasks and responsibilities is stipulated in job descriptions.

An overview of the main responsibilities of employees is given in Table 1

TABLE 1. EKKA STAFF: POSITIONS AND ASSIGNMENT OF DUTIES

POSITION	AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY	PARTICIPATION IN THE CORE PROCESS	NETWORKING AND PROJECTS	ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES
DIRECTOR	Strategic management, personnel management; financial management; reporting.	Launches and leads development teams; analyses assessment activities; communicates assessment results to the public; trains experts.	Represents EKKA at ENQA; represents EKKA at various national working groups and networks; member of the Management Board of Archimedes Foundation; counsels and trains personnel of higher and vocational education institutions.	General management of the ESF programmes (planning, budgeting, negotiating etc.).
ASSESSMENT DIRECTOR, SECRETARY OF THE ASSESSMENT COUNCIL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION	Process manager for the assessment of study programme groups; Secretary of the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education.	Coordinates assessments of study programme groups; counsels assessment committees; analyses feedback and makes recommendations for modifying regulations for assessments; and prepares analyses of evaluation periods. Manages risks in assessment of higher education.	Member of the committee for registering study programmes at the Estonian Education Information System; Member of the Council of the Russian quality agency; communication and explanation of assessment results to the public.	Responsible for the water cooler at the EKKA office.
ASSESSMENT DIRECTOR,	Process manager for the accreditation of study	Coordinates accreditations of study programme groups	Represents Estonia in the EQAVET working group;	Administers and reports on the ESF programme KUKVA;

SECRETARY OF THE ASSESSMENT COUNCIL FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION	programme groups in vocational education and training; Secretary of the Quality Assessment Council for Vocational Education and Training.	in vocational education and training; trains experts; prepares analyses. Manages risks in assessment of vocational education.	counsels personnel of vocational education institutions; communication and explanation of assessment results to the public.	organises trainings and seminars.
ASSESSMENT DIRECTOR, ANALYST	Process manager for institutional accreditation (IA) EKKA analyst: analyses of feedback and assessment results. Administration of web databases.	The coordinator for IA; organises and conducts trainings for experts. Develops, administers and reviews evaluation platforms; develops, administers and reviews the feedback system; coordinates follow-up activities in higher education; coordinates the work of assessment committees in higher education.	Represents EKKA at CEENQA; Cooperates with higher education institutions in managing the web database of study programmes; engages in communication and explanation of assessment results to the public.	Organises trainings and seminars; takes care of plants at the EKKA office.
LAWYER	Draws up legal documents; prepares and administers contracts.	Draws up draft decisions for the Quality Assessment Council; ensures the compliance of assessment regulations with national legislation and regulations on the assessment of higher education.	Cooperates with lawyers of the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research in amending legislation; gives legal advice to educational institutions and experts in issues relating to external evaluation; responds to requests for information.	Maintains the EKKA contracts register; draws up certificates of transfer deeds.
ASSESSMENT COORDINATOR (higher education)	Coordinates the work of assessment committees.	Additionally: assessing the compliance of EKKA's activities with the agreed	Leads the team of assessment coordinators (study programme groups	Manages documents (as a substitute); organises trainings and seminars.

	Administration of EKKA's internal quality assurance system.	rules and imposed requirements.	and IA). Receiving international delegations (agenda planning and execution).	
ASSESSMENT COORDINATOR (vocational education)	Organises accreditations in vocational education and training; coordinates the work of assistants and secretaries, ensures the quality of the process.	Additionally: assessing the compliance of EKKA's activities with the regulations in force.	The network of assistants and secretaries of assessment committees. Receiving international delegations.	Manages documents; organises trainings and seminars, EKKA office management.
INFORMATION MANAGER	External communication of assessment results; develops and administers the EKKA website.	Coordinates the work of assessment committees; preparing statistical background information for the committees.	Participates in the communication working group of Archimedes; launching and administration of the student network for quality assurance.	Seminars/trainings to secondary school pupils and higher education students.
DIRECTOR OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	Launching and implementing international projects.	Imports best international practices.	Council member of INQAAHE; Council member of the Kazakh quality agency; counsels and trains personnel of higher education institutions.	Organises trainings and seminars.
ACCOUNTANT	Budgeting, accounting and financial reporting.		Financial Department of Archimedes.	Draws up payment applications for ESF programmes.

Selection: By public competition. The selection procedure is based on the following principles: EKKA employees are competent in their areas of responsibility, capable of taking initiative, cooperation and self-development oriented; they manage pressure and stress well, are open to changes, proficient in different forms of communication (correspondence, presentations, teamwork, negotiations, etc.), have excellent command of English.

Development: Development interviews are conducted once a year. Objectives: to support employees' professional development; to get feedback on staff management, organisation of work and allocation of tasks; and to identify the priorities and training needs for the following year. The basis: employees' self-evaluations based on the objectives set and training needs identified in the previous year. The result: priority activities and new training needs have been identified for the next period. Suggestions concerning management, organisation of work and allocation of tasks are discussed at EKKA meetings, and changes made as needed.

Each EKKA employee fills in his or her training sheet in Web Desktop on a regular basis, evaluating among other things the effect of his or her trainings.

Motivating: The aim is to recognise employees for their contributions to the achievement of common objectives; encourage their initiative and responsibility for the organisation's well-being and its image; and increase loyalty. Tools: 1) corporate events: Christmas parties, summer picnics, birthday celebrations, cooperation seminars with other agencies and development seminars with quality assessment councils; 2) recognition at EKKA meetings; 3) recognition at festive gatherings of Archimedes Foundation; 4) possibility to receive days off from work; 5) bonuses for outstanding performance relating to key activities.

1.2.2 MEMBERS OF EKKA QUALITY ASSESSMENT COUNCILS

Selection: Procedures for formation of the Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education are provided for in laws regulating higher education (e.g. [§ 10 of the Universities Act](#)) and in the [Procedure for Formation of EKKA Quality Assessment Council](#). The formation of the Quality Assessment Council for Vocational Education and Training is described in laws regulating vocational education and training (e.g. [§ 13 of the Vocational Educational Institutions Act](#)) the Procedure for Formation of EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Vocational Education and Training.

Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education: EKKA will publicly announce a call for candidates. The compliance of candidates' profiles with the set requirements shall be assessed by the EKKA Director and Secretary of the Assessment Council, and members of the Assessment Council shall be selected by the Supervisory Board of Archimedes Foundation in line with the relevant procedure in force.

Quality Assessment Council for Vocational Education and Training: The principles for founding the Assessment Council are stipulated in the Vocational Educational Institutions Act. The composition of the Assessment Council is established by way of a decree by the Minister of Education and Research.

Development: EKKA will provide members of quality assessment councils with introductory trainings related to external quality assessment; involve them in trainings for experts (including as trainers); offer them opportunities to participate and make

presentations at international thematic conferences; will organise one study visit to a foreign agency during each term if possible; invite the quality assessment councils in regular joint seminars with the Finnish, Latvian and Lithuanian agencies; and recommend them as experts to other agencies.

Motivating: recognition at the end of each calendar year. By providing remuneration according to the number of sessions participated in and assessment decisions taken. Joint events of the higher and vocational education assessment councils taking place once or twice each year will include activities that enhance teamwork.

1.2.3 EXPERTS

Competent experts are the key to professional external evaluation. EKKA aims to find and maintain relationships with domestic and foreign experts, depending on the specificities of particular external assessments.

SELECTION PROCEDURES

Domestic experts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is an application form on the EKKA website (in Estonian and in English for higher education experts, only in Estonian for vocational education experts), which can be used for applying to become a higher or vocational education expert (available likewise when there are no ongoing calls for interest), alternatively pre-prepared CV-s can be submitted, if these include information pertaining specifically to assessment (i.e. previous assessment experience, English proficiency level etc.). • Public competition will be based on assessment timetables and the specifics of evaluations. An open call for applications will be tailored to a specific target-group (modified to take into account differences among students, employers and representatives of higher education institutions). The coordinator/Assessment Director will also make targeted offers to specific people who will be invited to participate in the public competition. • For better results in finding experts, Assessment Directors and/or assessment coordinators will cooperate with professional associations, professional councils and employers' organisations by asking them to nominate potential candidates from their organisation to specific assessment committees. • The Assessment Director shall send a reply to all participants in a competition, thanking them for their participation and informing them on whether or not they were selected. In the case of being selected, the reply will include the time for the next training and an invitation to participate in it. In the case of not being selected, the reply will include the reasons for it.
Foreign experts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreign experts of higher education can apply for the position of an assessment expert by submitting an application form available on the EKKA English language website.

- For institutional accreditation and quality assessment of study programme groups, EKKA will employ foreign experts who have been recommended by other agencies, other foreign experts or who have been entered into the EKKA foreign expert database.
- Websites of various international professional associations and competent quality evaluation organisations serve as another valuable source of information on experts with past experience in quality assessment, and EKKA's Assessment Directors may make a direct offer to any such listed expert.
- When selecting experts from the EKKA foreign expert database, the specifics of a particular assessment as well as feedback on the expert's previous work (feedback from the chair of an assessment committee and the assessment coordinator) will be taken into account.

PROCEDURES FOR THE FORMATION OF ASSESSMENT COMMITTEES

<p>Re-evaluation/ transitional evaluation and initial assessment of study programme groups</p>
<p>Differences compared to the procedures described above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A committee comprises of four to five experts, one being a student and one an employer representative. A committee may be composed of local experts if the required competence is available in Estonia. • If the EKKA database does not contain appropriate candidates, EKKA will announce a public competition in order to find experts for a specific evaluation (also using other support activities which are described above under <i>Selection procedures for local experts</i>).
<p>Institutional accreditation and quality assessment of study programme groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When choosing committee members, the coordinator will ensure that all necessary competencies required by objectives of a specific assessment and by the specifics of the educational institution under evaluation, would be represented in the committee, and that the committee members have no conflicts of interest. An invitation to participate in the work of an assessment committee will include the list of duties of a member/chairperson of the assessment committee, a timetable for the assessment process and a request to confirm the absence of a conflict of interest (according to the definition of conflict of interest in the regulations for the respective assessment). • Requirements for committee members are described in EKKA assessment regulations. EKKA prioritises experts with past assessment experience and those to whose work EKKA has received positive feedback. • When choosing experts from among local employers for a committee which will assess a specific study programme group, the coordinator will cooperate with appropriate professional associations, professional councils or employers' organisations inviting them to nominate suitable candidates for assessment committee members. • The Secretary of the EKKA Quality Assessment Council will inform the Council

about the planned composition of a committee; the Council members may make suggestions for replacing members of the committee or adding members to it.

- After the preliminary composition of a committee has been discussed with the Quality Assessment Council, the coordinator will send information about the committee composition to the relevant higher education institution for their approval. The higher education institution has the right to dismiss members of the committee (the motion to dismiss has to be reasoned). If the reasons are valid, EKKA will find substitute members and seek approval of the committee composition from the educational institution.
- The Director of EKKA will approve the final composition of the committee by his or her written decision subsequent to the approval by the higher education institutions under assessment.
- The Communication Manager will add information on the assessment committee composition onto the EKKA website.

Accreditation of vocational education and training

- The Director of EKKA will, by his or her written decision, form a selection committee which includes at least two members of the Quality Assessment Council for Vocational Education and Training, and one representative of a professional association, employer organisation or professional council related to the study programme group under evaluation. The EKKA Assessment Director (for VET) will be the secretary of that committee.
- The selection committee will choose from amongst candidates the individuals who best comply with the set requirements for the assessment period in terms of their expertise as employers or in the domain of pedagogy.
- As a rule, an assessment committee comprises of four experts or, including an employer and an education expert. Preference is given to education experts active in a field close to the study programme group under assessment.
- The EKKA Assessment Director will determine preliminary compositions of committees for each educational institution, taking into consideration requirements for the calibration of the committee and for the absence of conflicts of interest. The compositions of assessment committees will be approved by the selection committee and, after the relevant schools have also agreed to the preliminary compositions, the Director of EKKA will finalize those compositions by his or her written decision.
- The Communication Manager will add information on the assessment committee composition on the EKKA website.

Development: Providing trainings for experts on a regular basis (in addition to introductory trainings, the so-called refresher trainings); and counselling throughout the evaluation process.

Incentivising: competitive salaries; letters of appreciation and recognitions awarded at the end of term seminars, including thanking the employers of experts.

1.3. RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

INFRASTRUCTURE

The objective: to provide EKKA employees, quality assessment councils and assessment committees with an inspiring and comfortable work environment, equipped with modern technical tools and information systems.

Employees of EKKA permanent staff are involved in the management of the infrastructure in order to optimise operating costs and share responsibility for designing the work environment.

Review: at development interviews, feedback from members of quality assessment councils and assessment committees. Discussion of those results at EKKA meetings and planning improvements as needed: immediate improvements when resources are available; major developments will be included in the budget for subsequent periods.

FINANCES

The objective: EKKA's core process and related development activities are covered by sufficient funds and the use of resources is economical and efficient: the primary purpose of external assessment must be achieved with minimum time, financial and human resources needed to meet objectives.

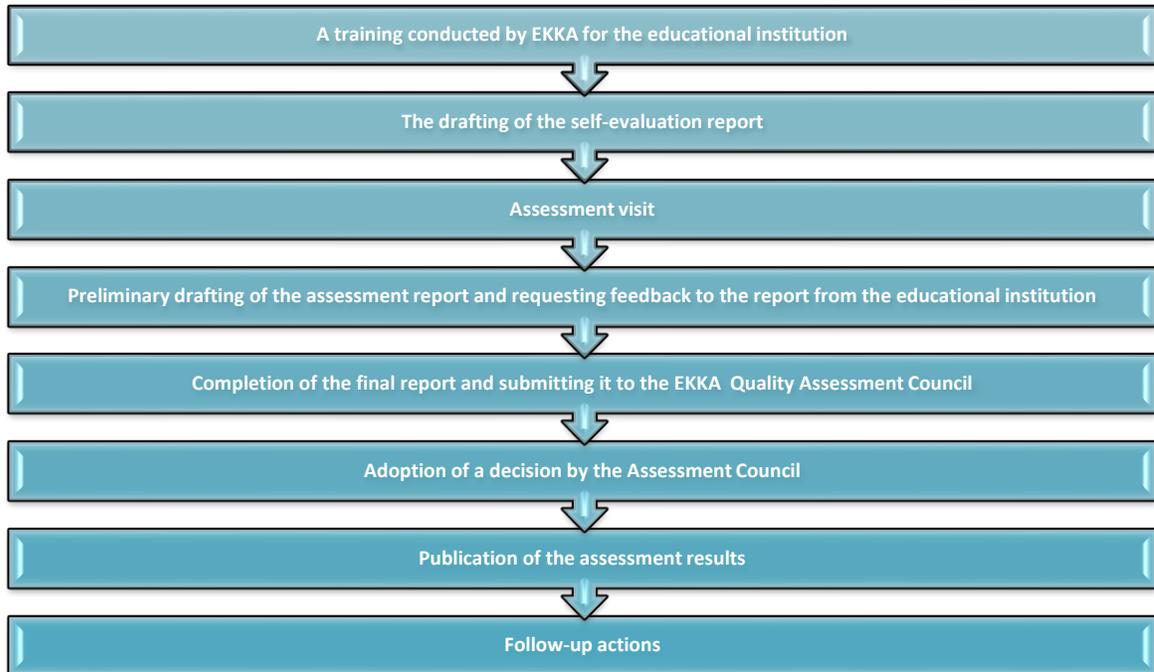
Planning: the Director of EKKA will prepare a long-term plan of EKKA's key activities (regular external evaluations) for five to seven years and coordinate it with the sponsor (the Ministry of Education and Research, through its Department of Higher Education and Office of Vocational Education). Short-term planning and budgeting are regulated by the Foundation document *Strategic Planning*.

Additional resources for EKKA's development activities are sought from different projects.

Review: the Accountant will prepare a report on the discharge of the budget on as required but at least twice a year. Once a year the Director of EKKA will, together with the Accountant, prepare activity and financial reports and submit them to the Management Board of the Archimedes Foundation.

2. CORE PROCESSES

EKKA's activities (institutional accreditation, assessment of study programme groups, accreditation of study programme groups in VET) follow the classic PDCA cycle based assessment model.



Specific requirements and assessment procedures are described in the following assessment regulations published on the EKKA website and subject to review and amendments by the Assessment Directors:

[Conditions and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation](#)

[Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education](#)

[Accreditation of Study Programme Groups in Vocational Education and Training](#)

On top of that there are other types of assessments (initial assessment, re-evaluation of study programme groups) that don't follow this classic approach. When a higher education institution applies for the right to conduct studies under a new study programme group, EKKA will conduct an initial assessment of that study programme group on the basis of written information submitted by the higher education institution, and an assessment visit. The written information will include a compliance analysis on learning outcomes of study programmes with those in the Standard of Higher Education, descriptions of the organisation of practical training as well as student and teaching staff mobility, among other things. Specific requirements and assessment procedures are described in the following assessment regulations, the reviewing and amending of which is the responsibility of the Assessment Directors:

[Requirements and Procedure for Transitional Evaluation and Re-evaluation of Study Programme Groups](#)

[Guidelines for Initial Assessment of Study Programme Groups](#)

2.1. PLANNING OF CORE PROCESSES

DEVELOPMENT OF REGULATIONS

General principles: to involve all principal stakeholders (first and foremost those to be assessed) in the development of regulations, to avoid substantial overlaps between different types of assessments, and to save time for both those under assessment as well as the assessors, without compromising the quality of results.

- Preliminary activities: to identify stakeholder expectations for the planned quality assessment: educational institutions, employers, government, learners and individuals who continue to pursue education. Different formats will be used — focus group interviews, seminars, written questionnaires.
- Development of regulations will be preceded by the following activities: preparing a background analysis, learning of best practices, and developing basic principles.
- To develop a regulation, the Director of EKKA will convene a working group that includes representatives of all stakeholders. A draft approved by the working group, along with an explanatory memorandum will be sent by EKKA to all stakeholders (all relevant educational institutions, learners, employers' and entrepreneurs' organisations, professional associations and government bodies) requesting their feedback.
- Based on the feedback received, the leader of the working group will revise the initial draft and subsequently coordinate the changes with members of the steering group.
- The Assessment Director will send the agreed draft to the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for approval.
- EKKA will inform those who provided feedback about all proposed and implemented amendments.
- EKKA Quality Assessment Council will approve the regulation at its meeting. The Communication Manager will then communicate the information to all interested parties, taking into account the specifics of target groups.
- The new regulation is tested in the course of a pilot assessment which is followed by an analysis of the assessment process with a view to detect and be able to avoid shortcomings during subsequent assessments.
- The approved regulations, together with their explanatory memoranda, are publicly available on the EKKA website.

PLANNING OF ASSESSMENT PERIODS

- In the case of regular assessments, Assessment Directors will draft an assessment timetable. The timeframe of assessments depends on the results of previous assessments and the specificities of the assessment process.
- While preparing the timetables, Assessment Directors will cooperate with one another and ensure that too much burden would not fall on any educational institution in any given period; take into account the current state of an educational

institution's infrastructure development and possible structural changes; take into account suggestions made by the Ministry of Education and Research; and distribute EKKA's work load over different years as rationally as possible.

- The assessment timetables are sent to educational institutions for their approval.
- The short term assessment timetable approved by the educational institutions constitutes a basis for EKKA's work. Amendments are made in the timetable on the basis of needs and requests by educational institutions. The timetables are available on the EKKA website, under the sections of the respective types of assessment.
- The Assessment Director will coordinate the time of the assessment visit at the educational institution prior to the formation of the assessment committee while simultaneously (for assessment of study programme groups) agreeing on the study programmes to be assessed and if applicable, those left outside the scope of the assessment. The specific visit dates shall be agreed between the educational institution and the assessment coordinator. In study programme group accreditation of VET, the visit date shall be fixed by the respective committee in the beginning of the assessment period.

2.2. IMPLEMENTATION OF CORE PROCESSES

ASSESSMENT COMMITTEES

- EKKA's assessment regulations include a) the principles for forming assessment committees and b) the requirements for members of an assessment committee; the former define the objective parameters for forming a committee (what EKKA is looking for), and the latter define specific requirements for the expertise of experts (bases for selecting a candidate). Both criteria may vary depending on the type of assessment.
- A good expert regardless of the type of assessment is characterised by the following:
 - **Impartiality and relying on evidence:** An expert is unprejudiced and independent, his/her statements are clearly reasoned/explained. An expert not only has to be objective but also has to appear objective. In case of any kind of bias becoming apparent, the expert shall resign from the committee.
 - **Partnership and cooperation:** An expert treats other members of the committee and representatives of the educational institution with respect, maintaining courtesy and discretion in all situations. An expert will make sure that the atmosphere during assessment visits is friendly and professional. The body language and choice of expressions will always convey an open and supportive attitude towards those under assessment.
 - **Confidentiality:** An expert shall not disclose to third parties information having become known to them during the assessment process and discussions within the committee but not reflected in the consensual final

report of the committee. The confidentiality is to be maintained also after the completion of the assessment process.

- **Reliability:** An expert will stick to the time frame set by EKKA throughout the assessment process, is reachable via e-mail if need be and will adhere to the distribution of tasks agreed within the committee.
- Procedures for the selection of assessment experts and for the formation of committees are described in the subdivision *Human Resources Management* of this Manual.
- EKKA will coordinate the preliminary composition of an expert committee with the higher education institution under assessment, taking into account the institution's justified requests for replacing any members.
- EKKA will inform experts about requirements concerning them and the essence of assessment procedures at training before the assessment. Undergoing the training is mandatory for all experts and a prerequisite for participating in the assessment.
- The format of a training may vary depending on the target group and objectives of the training:
 1. Trainings for potential domestic experts. Target group: representatives of higher education institutions, students and employers. Such trainings last for up to three days. The main difference in this training, compared with other EKKA expert trainings, is that (as a rule) experts do not yet know when they will be used in an assessment; therefore, materials from previous evaluations are used as illustrative material and serve as a basis for practical work. EKKA can also invite potential future experts to observe the work of an assessment committee.
 2. Trainings for experts in study programme groups of vocational education are (as a rule) conducted twice a year. Target group: experts selected for the assessment of a specific study programme group. The duration of trainings is up to three days. By the beginning of a training, higher education institutions will have submitted their reports on study programme groups, analyses of which will be integrated in the training. The composition of assessment committees will have already been determined by the time of the training.
 3. Introductory trainings for domestic experts belonging to international assessment committees but not having undergone an expert training are conducted as needed and, if possible, at least one month prior to an assessment visit.
 4. EKKA organises trainings for committees that include foreign experts one day before a site visit (primarily in the case of institutional accreditation and quality assessment of study programme groups). Before the training, the coordinator will have made available to the committee members all assessment related documents as well as the *Guidelines for Experts*.
- The assessment committee is supported by an assessment coordinator as a representative of EKKA permanent staff in higher education; in the case of

accreditation of study programme groups in vocational education, a secretary appointed from among the members of the committee or an assistant employed on a contractual basis will assume responsibility for the seamless running of the committee's work.

INSTITUTIONS' SELF-EVALUATION REPORTS

The effectiveness (benefits, impact) of external evaluation depends on the thoroughness, comprehensiveness, clarity and linguistic comprehensibility of self-evaluation reports by educational institutions. EKKA's contribution to educational institutions' self-evaluation reports is as follows:

- EKKA offers self-evaluation-related trainings to educational institutions. On top of that VET institutions can receive individual counselling from EKKA's contracted consultants. The consultants are not involved in assessment procedures.
- Educational institutions may request additional assistance from EKKA on how to interpret criteria or requirements, and/or on the planning of the self-evaluation process.
- EKKA receives self-evaluation reports (in English for institutional accreditation and study programme group assessment) three months prior to the assessment visits.
- In VET the educational institutions shall submit study programme group self-evaluation reports twice a year, two months before the start of the assessment period.
- The coordinator shall check the report, making sure that it contains all required information and annexes, that the report is in comprehensible English (for institutional accreditation and study programme group assessment). EKKA has the right to return the report to the educational institution for further amendments.
- The self-evaluation reports of study programme group assessments are not made public. The self-evaluation reports in institutional accreditation and study programme group accreditation in VET are published on EKKA website and database, in the case of IA the coordinator asks from the higher education institution whether they agree to the publication of the full self-evaluation report or they would prefer to publish a shorter version.

ASSESSMENT VISITS (PREPARATION AND EXECUTION)

- The coordinator will send the self-evaluation report, assessment forms and individual assignments to members of an assessment committee at least two months prior to the site visit.
- In VET accreditation the coordinator will make the study programme group report available to members of the committee in the assessment environment one month prior to the start of the assessment period.
- Members of an assessment committee will send their comments along with questions to be answered before or during the site visit to the coordinator, within

an agreed deadline after receipt of the self-evaluation report. The comments and questions will be submitted in free text format or written in the evaluation form according to the evaluation criteria (see evaluation forms on EKKA's website).

- Based on questions by the committee members, the coordinator will compile a list of individuals to be interviewed, and a draft timetable for the site visit.
- The coordinator will seek approval of the draft timetable from the committee members.
- No later than three weeks before the site visit, the coordinator will send the approved timetable to the contact person of the higher education institution under evaluation for agreement, including details about space requirements, catering, the number and profile of individuals participating in meetings, their nameplates etc.
- If possible, the coordinator will meet with the contact persons of the higher education institutions (especially in case of multiple study programmes being assessed) to discuss the details of the site visit (how to group people at interviews etc.). In IA the coordinator will invite the representative of the higher education institution to EKKA if possible or holds a phone conversation to thoroughly discuss the schedule and practical aspects of the visit.
- The coordinator will prepare worksheets for interviews, matching the questions sent by committee members with the areas of responsibility of interviewees.
- Before the site visit, the coordinator will request that the contact person of the higher education institution reply to any additional questions and return background information on interviewees (e.g. the name of a student, his or her specialty, academic year; employer's name, occupation, institution etc.).
- After the introductory training, the committee will once more review the questions to be asked during the first day of the site visit and roles will be distributed among the committee members (i.e. who chairs the interview, how are notes taken etc.).
- The coordinator will prepare badges with full names but without titles for all committee members. "Esimees" or "Chair" is added to the name of the committee's chairperson only.
- To save time, committee members will not introduce themselves at the beginning of an interview (except at the introductory meeting). The coordinator will notify the contact person of the higher education institution of this and request that everyone familiarizes themselves with the names, positions and professional affiliations of committee members and, if possible, that the contact person make the CVs available on site (i.e. on a table or on the wall in front of the interview room).
- As a rule no more than eight interviewees participate in any single interview.
- If necessary, the services of a professional interpreter will be enlisted. The higher education institution will inform EKKA of the need for interpreting and will make sure that the interpreter complies with rules set out by EKKA (no affiliation with the educational institution, professional qualification etc.).

- Committee members may split up for separate interviews, i.e. there may be parallel interviews, but there must be at least two committee members present at each interview.
- The experts will take notes as agreed amongst committee members at all interviews. IA interviews are recorded on a dictaphone if the interviewees agree to this — the coordinator will ask for their consent at the beginning of each interview.
- Each interview will be followed by a 10-minute break or a longer time for reflection (preferably combined with a coffee break, lunch, examination of documents).
- Representatives of a higher education institution do not participate in lunches or dinners. Coffee and lunches are preferably served in either the committee's work room or another separate room where committee members can have discussions without being disturbed. EKKA will pay for the catering of experts (in IA and study programme group assessment); VET experts will pay for their meals themselves.
- At the end of a site visit, preliminary findings (i.e. strengths and areas for improvement of the higher education institution which were agreed upon by all committee members) will be presented to representatives of the educational institution; if necessary, any open-ended issues can be clarified during this meeting (20–30 minutes). These summarizing meetings are preceded by discussion sessions amongst the committee members. In IA and accreditation of study programme groups in VET no further discussions between the committee and representatives of the higher education institution will take place; questions and discussion are welcomed at feedback meetings of study programme group assessments.
- Committee members are not allowed to accept gifts from higher education institutions. Souvenirs bearing the logo of the higher education institution are not considered to be gifts.
- The main role of the coordinator during the assessment visit is to ensure that the visit would run smoothly and that the higher education institution will have organised all aspects of the visit (interpreter, if needed, additional documents requested by the committee, an internet connection, catering etc.)
- The tasks of a coordinator or an assistant during the assessment procedure are described in detail and amended as necessary in the guidelines *Guidelines for a coordinator* and *Guidelines for an assistant*.

ASSESSMENT REPORTS

- EKKA has developed assessment report templates for all key activities which are available in electronic format on EKKA's website under the subsections of different types of assessment.
- The assessment report templates are reviewed and amended as needed under the responsibility of Assessment Directors.
- To ensure the high quality of assessment reports, a representative of EKKA permanent staff (the coordinator or Assessment Director) will offer support and

guidance to the assessment committee throughout the report drafting process. The role of the EKKA staff member has been described in the relevant assessment regulations.

- The Assessment Director or Director of EKKA will provide feedback on draft reports by assessment committees, being entitled to suggest corrections of factual inaccuracies, complementing the report if some aspects have been left uncovered or lack justifications as well as to linguistic editing.
- EKKA will not interfere with committees' substantive statements.
- Educational institutions will have an opportunity to submit clarifications on the assessment report, which the committee shall review. Draft reports, sent to the educational institutions for comments by the coordinator (in the case of institutional accreditation) or the Assessment Director of EKKA (in the case of VET accrediting), will not include the committees' final statements but only descriptions of strengths and areas for improvement.
- After a committee has reviewed the comments by a higher education institution and incorporated them in justified cases, the chairperson of the committee will coordinate the final assessment report with committee members and send an agreed version to the EKKA coordinator or evaluation expert by email, stating that this is the final version of the assessment report. The final version is approved by the Director of EKKA and is sent to the Quality Assessment Council and the educational institutions.
- Assessment reports that are forwarded to the EKKA Quality Assessment Council, should always express committees' common positions, i.e. adopted by consensus (or, in exceptional cases, accompanied by reasoned dissenting views). Dissenting views (if present) along with their reasons will be included in assessment reports.
- If the Quality Assessment Council finds contradictions in a report or deems it not adequately backed up by argumentation, the Council may return the report to the assessment committee for reviewing and clarifications.

DECISIONS BY THE QUALITY ASSESSMENT COUNCIL

- Members of the Quality Assessment Council can access the meeting documents in the document management system at least one week before its meeting, including institutions' self-evaluation reports, committees' draft assessment reports, comments to the draft reports by educational institutions, committees' final reports and relevant additional information (feedback on the evaluation period from educational institutions and experts; background information that was also available to educational institutions in the process of self-analysis, etc.)
- Conflicts of interest are prevented when making decisions: a member of the Quality Assessment Council who is affiliated with the educational institution under evaluation will leave the room for the duration of the discussion.
- The Quality Assessment Council will base its decisions on: strengths and areas for improvement of educational institutions identified in assessment reports (quality assessment of study programme groups); committees' component assessments (institutional accreditation); accreditation decisions (accreditation of vocational

education and training); or assessments regarding the conformity of the quality of instruction with the required standards (initial assessment of study programme group).

- The EKKA Quality Assessment Council will interpret assessment reports and adopt the subsequent decisions in a consistent manner, making similar decisions under comparable circumstances. It is therefore mandatory for assessment committees to justify their decisions and, if needed, to identify essential areas for improvement.
- Decisions and minutes of Quality Assessment Council meetings are published on the EKKA website. The decisions of IA and quality assessment of study programme groups are also translated into English and published in the English language section of the EKKA website. Digitally signed minutes of Quality Assessment Council meetings are retained in the document management system.
- For assessments conducted in Estonian (i.e. initial assessment, re-evaluation of a study programme group, accreditation of study programme groups) the coordinator shall inform the assessment committee of the decision taken by the Quality Assessment Council within a week from the finalizing of the minutes of the Quality Assessment Council meeting. In IA and assessments of study programme groups, the coordinator will inform the assessment committee of the decision by the Quality Assessment Council upon the receipt of its translation into English.

NOTIFYING EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS OF ASSESSMENT DECISIONS

- Upon the approval of the minutes of the Quality Assessment Council meeting, EKKA shall send the decision taken by the Quality Assessment Council along with the final assessment report to the head of the educational institution.

APPEALS

- Institutions under evaluation have the right to submit comments about assessment reports before their final approval, which the assessment committees can take into account, when deemed justified, and which will also be made available to the EKKA Quality Assessment Council before it makes its decision.
- EKKA has introduced an appeals procedure for all assessment processes.
- In cases of assessment processes where the EKKA Quality Assessment Council acts as an administrative body (institutional accreditation and quality assessment of SPGs), any EKKA's procedure and/or decision may be challenged by an interested party by filing a challenge with the Council. Final decisions by the Council can also be challenged/appealed in court.
- In case of re-evaluation of study program groups and SPG accreditation in VET where the EKKA Quality Assessment Council's decision results in a proposal to the Minister of Education and Research, the procedures conducted by EKKA may be challenged by filing a challenge to the Management Board of Foundation

Archimedes. The final assessment by the EKKA Quality Assessment Council may be appealed in conjunction with the corresponding administrative decision taken by the Minister or the Government of the Republic of Estonia.

- In the case of initial assessment of SPGs where the EKKA Quality Assessment Council acts solely as an expert body, a possibility is provided for parties concerned if in doubt whether EKKA or an assessment committee has or has not duly followed the rules described in the *Guidelines for Initial Assessment of Study program Groups* when organising and conducting an expert analysis, to file a request for explanation or a memorandum to the Director of EKKA who will provide a motivated response in writing. If the requesting party is not satisfied by the response, they will have the right to address the Management Board of the Archimedes Foundation.
- Challenges and other complaints on assessment decisions or procedures by the EKKA Quality Assessment Council shall be forwarded to the Appeals Committee of the EKKA Quality Assessment Council, which shall provide an independent written opinion on the justification of the appeal to the body in charge of the appeal or complaint.
- EKKA's appeals procedure is detailed in EKKA's assessment regulations which are publicly available on the EKKA website.

3. REVIEW, FEEDBACK AND REVISION OF CORE PROCESSES

FORMATS FOR REVIEW

The review of EKKA's key activities is performed on several levels: regular meetings of EKKA permanent staff, EKKA development seminars, discussions at EKKA Quality Assessment Councils, annual reports to the Supervisory Board of the Archimedes Foundation, and aggregated analyses of assessment periods. Reviews are based on analyses of various feedback surveys, suggestions by experts and educational institutions under evaluation, examples of best practices throughout the world, subject-related publications, changes in the environment and legislation, etc.

FEEDBACK ON ASSESSMENT VISITS

EKKA requests feedback from higher education institutions and vocational education institutions after each assessment visit.

- Process managers of key activities, in cooperation with the colleague in charge of feedback and analysis (see the table *An overview of the main responsibilities of employees*, hereinafter the *Analyst*) will prepare questionnaires, taking into account the specifics of a particular evaluation. The Analyst will ensure that questionnaires for different evaluations would not differ from one another unnecessarily. If needed, the Analyst will convene all process managers to harmonise the questionnaires.
- The questions address the following sets of topics: the composition of a committee, thoroughness of committee preparation, relevance of questions asked, use of interview time, atmosphere of an interview, and the interviewees' opportunities to express their opinions. The questionnaires allow respondents to explain their replies and make suggestions in order to improve the assessment process. The questionnaires of all evaluations share a similar structure and rating scales.
- Within five working days after a site visit, the assistant/secretary/coordinator of an assessment committee will (by requesting the relevant link from the Analyst) send an electronic questionnaire to all interviewees who met with the assessment committee. Only feedback on the work of the assessment committee received before the draft assessment report is sent to the educational institution is taken into account.
- The Analyst will save the feedback on both the LimeSurvey account and EKKA's file server. An analysis is prepared by the Analyst and presented at EKKA's development seminar or (in case urgent intervention is needed) at an EKKA team meeting.

EXPERT FEEDBACK

- Assessment Directors, in cooperation with the Analyst, will prepare the questionnaires, taking into account the specifics of particular evaluations. The Analyst will ensure that questionnaires of different evaluations would not differ from one another unnecessarily. If needed, the Analyst will convene all process managers to harmonise the questionnaires.
- Questions address the following sets of topics: feedback on the preparation of the assessment process (training, assessment forms, assessment criteria), the organisation of work of the committee, and contribution of the chairperson and other members. Committee members may make suggestions for improving the assessment process. Chairpersons are requested to provide feedback on the contribution of other committee members.
- In the case of institutional accreditation, quality assessment and initial assessment of study programme groups, and as a rule re-evaluation (except when one committee assesses study programme groups of several higher education institutions during the same evaluation period) the coordinator/assistant will send an electronic questionnaire to experts immediately after sending a draft assessment report to the higher education institution.
- In the case of accreditation of vocational education and training, the Analyst will request feedback from all members of assessment committees and assistants at the end of assessment periods but prior to the adoption of decisions by the Quality Assessment Council.
- If an expert participates in several committees during the same assessment period and feedback received on assessment visits contains criticism, the Assessment Director or coordinator will intervene during the assessment period depending on the nature of the feedback received.
- The Analyst will save the feedback on both the LimeSurvey account and EKKA's file server. An analysis is prepared by the Analyst and presented at EKKA's development seminar or (in case urgent intervention is needed) at an EKKA team meeting.

ANALYSIS OF FEEDBACK RESULTS AND DISCUSSION ON SUGGESTIONS FOR REVISIONS

- The Analyst will prepare summaries of electronic surveys and charts showing comparisons with previous periods at the end of each assessment period.
- EKKA will compile summaries of feedback on experts (feedback from educational institutions on assessment visits, feedback from committee members and feedback from coordinators) at the end of each assessment period. All coordinators will insert relevant comments on experts in the expert database.

- Feedback summaries and amendments are discussed at EKKA meetings and changes are planned as needed.
- The Director of EKKA will also present feedback summaries and planned changes thereof at meetings of the Quality Assessment Councils.

FEEDBACK FROM EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS ON THE ENTIRE PROCESS

- Assessment Directors will organise feedback seminars for educational institutions, where educational institutions having undergone assessments will give feedback to EKKA on compiling self-evaluation reports, on the process of assessment and its impact. The Assessment Director/assessment coordinator will draw up a memo on the seminar, which will outline suggestions to EKKA on how to improve the assessment process. The submitted suggestions will be taken into consideration while planning for changes in the assessment procedures.
- The sets of topics for feedback seminars on different types of assessments follow a similar logic, containing an assessment on the comprehensibility of assessment criteria, the self-evaluation compilation process, relevance of the assessment visit and assessment report and an overall evaluation of the whole process.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

- In institutional accreditation and quality assessment of study programme groups, EKKA will request the higher education institution to submit, two years from the adoption of the assessment decision by the Quality Assessment Council, a written overview of actions planned or taken on the basis of the suggestions made in the assessment report and of the results thereof.
- As a result of institutional accreditation and quality assessment of study programme groups, the EKKA Quality Assessment Council will adopt administrative decisions, and may also impose secondary conditions within its decisions. If a secondary condition has been imposed, a subsequent follow-up procedure will take place within a set deadline, allowing the EKKA Quality Assessment Council to assess whether the condition has been fulfilled.
- In the case of accreditation of study programme groups in VET, re-evaluation of study programme groups in higher education and initial assessment of study programme groups, the EKKA Quality Assessment Council may decide that the aspects under evaluation conform only partially with the required standards, and a new assessment will therefore be undertaken within a shorter period of time. In the course of re-evaluations, assessment committees will examine how higher education institutions have managed to tackle the deficiencies and which improvement activities they have implemented.

- EKKA offers higher and vocational education institutions opportunities to participate in seminars in order to present developments that have taken place in educational processes subsequent to assessments and on the basis of outlined areas for improvement and recommendations as well as to exchange best practices amongst one's peers.

ANALYSES OF EVALUATION PERIODS

- In addition to feedback summaries for shorter assessment periods, the Analyst will also analyse feedback trends and will prepare analytical overviews of results and areas for improvement from the assessment period.
- In the case of accreditation of study programme groups in vocational education and training, the Analyst will prepare an overview of assessment results for the entire study programme group, as well as of the feedback on the evaluation process.
- EKKA suggests topics for student final papers related to external evaluation, and topics on the impact assessment of external evaluation as topics for doctoral theses. EKKA employees are ready to act as co-supervisors or consultants.

REPORTING

- Once a year — while reviewing EKKA's development plan — Assessment Directors prepare overviews of assessments conducted within the year, and of their results; feedback on the assessment process (received during follow-up activities); and identify changes that were made based on that feedback, along with evidence of the impact of the assessments. Based on these overviews, the Information Manager of EKKA will prepare an EKKA annual report which will then be discussed at EKKA Quality Assessment Councils. The reports will be published on the EKKA website upon approval.
- The Director of EKKA submits an activity report to the Supervisory Board of the Archimedes Foundation on a quarterly basis, and annual activity and financial reports for the previous calendar year in the beginning of each calendar year.

INTRODUCTION OF CHANGES

Introduction of changes to existing regulations and procedures will take place as deemed necessary and on the basis of the review results.

4. COMMUNICATION

In the field of communication, EKKA follows among other rules, the foundation's Rules for Communication. The following paragraphs will outline specificities of communication by EKKA.

4.1 THE PUBLICATION OF ASSESSMENT RESULTS

MINUTES AND DECISIONS OF MEETINGS OF THE COUNCILS FOR HIGHER AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

- After the minutes have been signed, the secretary of the assessment council will add the minutes of the meeting along with the assessment decisions into Web Desktop, and consequently the public interface of the database.
- The Information Manager will add the minutes, decisions and assessment reports onto the EKKA website
- Assessment decisions are translated into English and made available on the English language version of the website. The translations are commissioned by the Lawyer and uploaded onto the website by the Information Manager.
- The secretary of the Assessment Council together with the Information Manager will write a news article on the assessment council decision and publish it on the EKKA website.

PRESS RELEASES ON DECISIONS ADOPTED BY THE COUNCILS FOR HIGHER AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

- The Information Manager will draw up press releases on Assessment Council decisions with wider public appeal.
- A press release always accompanies an Institutional Accreditation decision. The press release for an IA will include descriptions of strengths and areas for improvement mentioned in the assessment decision along with any secondary conditions imposed where applicable.
- The secretary of the Assessment Council will notify the educational institutions on the decisions taken on them. If and where necessary, EKKA will coordinate the publishing of the press release with the relevant educational institution.

SELF-EVALUATION REPORTS

- For IA self-evaluation reports are published on the EKKA website upon agreement with the educational institution subsequently to the adoption of the decision by the Assessment Council.
- Reports on study programme groups in vocational education are added to Web Desktop, the public interface of the EKKA database upon the receipt of the report by EKKA.

DECISIONS BY THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

- For initial and re-evaluations, the secretary of the Assessment Council will upload the relevant decisions taken by the minister to the EKKA database on Web Desktop.

THE EKKA QUALITY LABEL

- The EKKA Assessment Council for Higher Education awards the Quality Label to a higher education institution along with a 7-year institutional accreditation decision. The usage of the Quality Label is regulated in the Statute for the Quality Label and its application is monitored by the Assessment Director for Institutional Accreditation and Information Manager.

4.2. COMMUNICATION WITH EXTERNAL TARGET GROUPS

- Assessment results are available through the public interface of the Web Desktop database on the EKKA website. A database of study programmes has been created on the website to disseminate this information. The study programmes offered and assessment decisions taken are updated on a regular basis.
- Information needed by educational institutions under evaluation is available and up to date on the EKKA website. The Assessment Directors, Lawyer and Information Manager are in charge of maintaining and updating the information.
- To better inform representatives of higher education institutions on topics directly intended for them, an EKKA partner list has been created which includes vice rectors, heads of academic affairs, quality managers and others from all higher education institutions. Vocational education and training newsletters and the vocational education institution list are used to inform vocational education institutions.
- EKKA news and press releases are published under the *News* section of the EKKA website. More informal information, i.e. about events, trainings etc. is disseminated via the EKKA Facebook page.

- Analyses and articles compiled or commissioned by EKKA are published on the EKKA website. The planning and coordination is the responsibility of the Information Manager in collaboration with his/her colleagues.
- Hard copies of publications are prepared and printed if necessary. Publications are distributed at events organised by EKKA or its partners such as trainings, seminars, conferences etc. Thematic souvenirs bearing the EKKA logo are procured to be used as gifts to experts and partners.
- Yearly overviews of EKKA's activities are published in the Archimedes' Annual Reports. EKKA's Annual Report is available on the EKKA website.
- User statistics of the EKKA website is monitored by the Information Manager using Google Analytics software. Media coverage is followed using a media monitoring service. Analyses thereof are discussed at EKKA team meetings when necessary.

4.3 INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

EXPERTS' ELECTRONIC PLATFORMS

- EKKA uses widely spread and easy to use sharing platforms for collaboration, i.e. Google Drive, Dropbox as electronic platforms for experts.

INTERNAL INFORMATION SHARING

- Internal communication takes place at regular EKKA meetings. Decisions taken at meetings will be recorded on a file available on the EKKA server.
- The shared use of more important, frequently used and topical files, aggregated overviews and development and planning documents is facilitated by the use of EKKA Team Folder in Dropbox.
- EKKA staff members use and share the Archimedes Foundation's shared Google Calendar. On top of that, all employees use the corporate EKKA events calendar.
- The EKKA Information Manager participates in a Communications working group formed by the Archimedes Foundation and led by the Information Manager of Archimedes. The purpose of the working group is to harmonise communications procedures at Archimedes and share best practices in the field.