

Designed according to Subparagraph 2.1 of
Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 795
“Regulations on Licensing of
Study Programmes” of 11 December 2018

Methodology for Organising Licensing of Study Programmes

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I. General provisions

1. The Methodology for Organising Licensing of Study Programmes (hereinafter – Methodology) shall specify the procedure for organising the assessment of study programmes and the assessment of changes in the licence of a study programme. The Methodology is designed in accordance with the provisions of the Latvian regulatory enactments and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (hereinafter – ESG).
2. The assessment of study programmes shall be organised by the Accreditation Department, hereinafter referred to as the Quality Agency for Higher Education (hereinafter – the Agency) of the Academic Information Centre (hereinafter – the Centre) in compliance with the provisions of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education, Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 795 “Regulations on Licensing of Study Programmes” of 11 December 2018 (hereinafter – Cabinet Regulation No. 795) and Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 778 “The Price-List of Paid Services Provided by Foundation "Academic Information Centre"” of 11 December 2018 (hereinafter – Cabinet Regulation No. 778).
3. The procedure of licensing a study programme shall last four months as of the date, the application has been received.
4. The Agency in its operation shall comply with the following principles:
 - 4.1. unbiased and fact-based findings;
 - 4.2. confidentiality;
 - 4.3. respect towards parties involved in the assessment process;
 - 4.4. neutrality;
 - 4.5. collaboration.
5. The parties involved in the licensing process of a study programme are as follows:
 - 5.1. higher education institution/college ¹;
 - 5.2. Agency;
 - 5.3. Study Quality Committee (hereinafter – Committee);
 - 5.4. Appeals Committee;
 - 5.5. experts and observers.
6. The rights and obligations of the parties involved in the process of licensing a study programme are set out in Annex 1 of the Methodology.

¹ Term “higher education institution /college” used herein is applicable to all higher education and science institutions referred to in the Law on Institutions of Higher Education in which academic and professional study programmes are implemented, as well as which are engaged in research and artistic creation (universities, higher education institutions, academies, institutes, and colleges).

II. Licensing of study programme

1. Application for licensing of study programme:

- 1.1. To receive a licence for the implementation of the study programme in the study field² of the higher education institution/college, the higher education institution/college shall submit to the Agency the application and the study programme description prepared in compliance with the Guidelines for the preparation of the description of the study programme³ designed by the Agency (hereinafter – the Guidelines).
- 1.2. The information and opinions referred to in the subparagraphs of Paragraph 15 of Cabinet Regulation No. 795 shall be additionally attached to the application for licensing of the study programme in the new relevant study field of the higher education institution/college (except for a state-founded higher education institution/college).
- 1.3. If a joint study programme is submitted for licensing, the information and agreement referred to in Paragraph 14 of Cabinet Regulation No. 795 shall be additionally attached to the application.
- 1.4. The higher education institution/college shall submit to the Agency the application and documents attached hereto in electronic format and shall sign it with a secure electronic signature in compliance with the provisions set out in the Electronic Documents Law.
- 1.5. The Agency, having received the application, shall review the submitted documents for the compliance with the requirements of regulatory enactments, requirements of this Methodology and Guidelines designed by the Agency.
- 1.6. If the higher education institution/college has not submitted all necessary information, the Agency shall request the higher education institution/college in written to submit the missing information. The requested information shall be submitted by the higher education institution/college to the Agency within 20 calendar days since this has been requested. The invoice for licensing of the study programme and information about the Agency's employee who shall coordinate the assessment process (hereinafter – assessment coordinator) shall be attached to the request for additional information.

² From 2012 till August 2020 the term “Study Directions” and “Joint report” was used in English translations of regulatory enactments. Since August 2020 it was replaced to “Study Field” and “Joint opinion” for usage in English by State Language Centre.

³ Guidelines for the Preparation of the Description of the Study Programme are available at http://aika.flowin.lv/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Vadlinijas-studiju-programmas-raksturojuma-izstradei_2019.pdf

- 1.7. The Agency shall decline to review the application, informing the applicant thereon, if:
 - 1.7.1. fee for licensing of the study programme has not been paid within the specified deadline;
 - 1.7.2. all requested information has not been submitted;
 - 1.7.3. documents have not been prepared in compliance with the requirements for the preparation of documents as specified in regulatory enactments.
- 1.8. The assessment procedure shall be started by the Agency when the fee for licensing of the study programme has been paid, all information which has been requested by the Agency has been received and the submitted documents have been prepared in compliance with the requirements for the preparation of documents set out in regulatory enactments.

2. Request for opinions from other organisations

- 2.1. The Agency shall request and receive from state registers and registers of the Ministry of Education and Science the information about the higher education institution/college included therein, required for licensing of the study programme.
- 2.2. The Agency shall request the State Education Quality Service to provide, within 10 working days, the information on violations of regulatory enactments detected in the activities of the higher education institution/college during the previous year and their elimination within the deadline set out by the State Education Quality Service.
- 2.3. The Agency shall request the Latvian Council of Science to provide an opinion on the academic doctoral study programme submitted for licensing in compliance with the provisions set out in Paragraph 7 of Section 16 of the Law on Scientific Activity.
- 2.4. The Agency may request an opinion on the study programme to be licensed from the relevant council of sectoral experts, a professional sectoral organisation, or sectoral ministry that supervises the relevant industry if no relevant council of sectoral experts is established.
- 2.5. The Agency shall request the coordinator for the recognition of professional qualification to provide, within one month, an opinion on the study programme for the regulated profession and shall invite him/her to take part in the Committee meeting in the status of an observer if the study programme is associated with the regulated profession.

3. Selection and approval of experts

- 3.1. The study programme shall be assessed by three experts, of which:
 - 3.1.1. one is a representative delegated by the Student Union of Latvia (hereinafter – SUL),
 - 3.1.2. one is a representative delegated by the council of sectoral experts if a professional study programme is submitted for licensing and the relevant council of sectoral experts is established, or a representative delegated by the Employers' Confederation of Latvia (hereinafter ECL) if no relevant council of sectoral experts is established or an academic study programme is submitted for licensing.
 - 3.1.3. one is an expert of the respective industry of the relevant study programme to be licensed.

- 3.2. The Agency shall request the SUL and the Latvian Trade Union of Education and Science Employees (hereinafter – LTUESE) to delegate, within 10 working days, an observer (without the voting rights) to participate in experts' visits to higher education institutions/colleges. The observers shall act in accordance with the procedure ⁴ set out by the Agency and they shall bear their own costs.

- 3.3. The criteria and principles for the selection of experts are specified in rules “Criteria and Principles for the Selection of Experts” approved by the Centre and available on the Agency's website ⁵.

- 3.4. The Agency shall, within three working days after the experts' approval, inform the higher education institution/college about the approved experts and observers.

- 3.5. The higher education institution/college may, within three working days, express rejection towards the approved experts, by submitting to the Agency a written justified rejection, which explains reasons for rejection with regard to each expert.

- 3.6. The Agency shall, within 10 working days since the rejection has been received, review the rejection and, if this rejection is recognised as justified, the Agency shall approve other experts and inform the higher education institution/college thereof.

- 3.7. The Centre shall conclude an agreement with the experts for performing the assessment. An expert's confirmation about non-existence of a

⁴ *The procedure for participation of observers in the assessment procedures [2019]/ Website of the Agency: http://aika.flowin.lv/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Noverotaju-dalibas-kartiba-novertesanas-proceduras_2019.pdf*

⁵ *Criteria and Principles for the Selection of Experts are available at: http://www.aika.lv/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Ekspertu_atlases_kriteriji_principi_LV.pdf*

conflict-of-interest⁶ and about compliance with the confidentiality liabilities shall be attached to the agreement.

- 3.8. The observers shall sign the confirmation about non-existence of a conflict-of-interest and compliance with the confidentiality liabilities.

4. The assessment visit

- 4.1. The aim of the visit shall be to obtain as much information on the study programme as possible to perform a comprehensive and unbiased assessment of the study programme in compliance with the requirements specified in Paragraph 5 of Section 55² of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education , Methodology and Guidelines for the preparation of the joint opinion of the experts, as well as to obtain justification for the information provided in the description of the study programme, as well as to make additions to recent findings and observations.
- 4.2. The assessment coordinator shall provide the experts with the application of the higher education institution/college and binding information if no rejection of experts has been expressed by the higher education institution/college within the deadline specified by the Agency and the experts has confirmed the non-existence of a conflict-of-interest.
- 4.3. The assessment coordinator shall prepare a draft agenda of the assessment visit and, after it is coordinated with the experts, shall submit it to the higher education institution/college for approval and any additions.
- 4.4. The Agency shall, before the assessment visit to the higher education institution/college, organise training for the experts, available also for observers. The following questions shall be discussed during the training:
- 4.4.1. aims and objectives of the assessment;
 - 4.4.2. work schedule of the experts and agenda of the visit;
 - 4.4.3. Methodology and Guidelines for the preparation of the joint opinion of the experts;
 - 4.4.4. the regulatory enactments regulating the assessment of study programmes;
 - 4.4.5. context of the respective higher education institution/college and study field.

⁶ Conflict-of-interest does not occur if:

- 1) the expert/observer is not employed and has no other contractual relations with the higher education institution, a study programme of which is being assessed, or has not been employed by this higher education institution within the last 2 years before the assessment visit.
- 2) the expert/observer is not a member of a decision-making or advisory institution of the higher education institution, a study programme of which is being assessed.
- 3) the expert/observer does not study in the higher education institution, the study programme of which is being assessed, and has not graduated from this institution within 2 years before the assessment visit.

The person involved in the implementation of the study programme and the relevant study field to be assessed, is not the father, mother, grandmother, grandfather, son/daughter, grandson/granddaughter, adoptee, adoptive parent, brother, sister, stepbrother, stepsister or spouse of the expert/observer.

- 4.5. The higher education institution/college shall ensure adequate conditions, premises, and equipment for organisation of the assessment visit, as well as provide the access to the informative support (including libraries), study facilities, material and technical, and financial provision of the study programme and the relevant study field, as well as other resources upon the request of the Agency or experts.
- 4.6. The experts shall visit the higher education institution/college (including branches thereof, in which the implementation of the study programme submitted for licensing is planned) and assess the study programme. During the assessment visit, the experts shall meet the management of the study programme, the management of the higher education institution/college and/or respective structural unit, and the teaching staff, as well as potential representatives of employers.
- 4.7. A representative of the higher education institution/college may take part only in sole meeting with the experts, except cases where such an option has been previously discussed and agreed with the assessment coordinator. The meeting with the teaching staff shall take place in the absence of the representatives of the management of the higher education institution/college.
- 4.8. Persons who study in the higher education institution/college and/or are employed therein, shall not take part in the interviews with employers and/or the representatives of professional organisations.
- 4.9. During the experts' visit, the higher education institution/college may prepare a presentation if it does not contain the information included in the study programme description attached to the application. If presentations contain the information that was already submitted, the assessment coordinator, subject to an agreement with the experts, may ask the higher education institution/college not to demonstrate such presentations in order to use time allocated for the meeting effectively.
- 4.10. Experts' meeting with the representatives of the higher education institution/college shall include both a question-and-answer session and an interactive discussion between the experts and the representatives of the higher education institution/college. The aim of the meeting is to obtain the necessary information for the analysis of the requirements and the relevant criteria thereof specified in the Guidelines for the preparation of the joint opinion of the experts, and for the preparation of the joint opinion of the experts.
- 4.11. In the end of the visit, the experts shall mutually discuss the outcomes of the visit and findings gained, as well as inform the representatives of the higher education institution/college about the main conclusions.

- 4.12. During the assessment visit, the representatives of the higher education institution/college shall not take part in the breaks (coffee breaks, lunches), unless proposed otherwise by the experts.

5. Preparation of joint opinion of experts

- 5.1. After the assessment visit, the experts shall:
- 5.1.1. prepare the joint opinion of the experts according to the deadline specified by the Agency in compliance with the Guidelines for the preparation of the joint opinion of the experts designed by the Agency ⁷;
 - 5.1.2. mutually agree on the evaluation of the assessment requirements and the criteria thereof, in compliance with the requirements of regulatory enactments and Part 1 of the ESG;
 - 5.1.3. agree on the wording used in the joint opinion, acceptable for all experts. If experts have different opinion about any of the criteria or requirements, it shall be indicated in the respective chapter of the joint opinion, by indicating expert's name, surname, dissenting opinion, requirement/criterion and the relevant justification;
 - 5.1.4. in the joint opinion, the experts shall describe both positive and negative aspects, providing a detailed justification for all statements. The experts shall analyse each assessment criterion and requirement and formulate conclusions, specifying strengths and weaknesses of the higher education institution/college with regard to the way how the assessment criterion and the requirement in the study programme has been met;
 - 5.1.5. in the joint opinion, the experts shall provide recommendations for the elimination of the deficiencies found (on a short-term basis) and for the improvement of the study programme (on a long-term basis);
 - 5.1.6. amend the prepared opinion at the instruction of the Agency;
 - 5.1.7. perform other tasks related to the assessment of the study programme.
- 5.2. The correlation and evaluation of the criteria and requirements is explained in Annex 2 of the Methodology.
- 5.3. The Agency shall review the joint opinion of the experts and may ask the experts to amend it.
- 5.4. The Agency shall send the joint opinion of the experts to the higher education institution/college.

⁷ Guidelines for the preparation of the Joint opinion of the Experts for the Assessment of the Study Programme are available at: http://aika.flowin.lv/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Studiju-programmas-novertesanas-ekspertu-kopiga-atzinuma-izstrades-vadlinijas_2019.pdf

6. Procedure for taking decision and appealing

- 6.1. The Agency shall inform the respective higher education institution/college about the date, time and place, the application is to be reviewed. The higher education institution/college may delegate not more than two representatives for the participation in the Committee meeting. Upon request by the Committee, the Agency may invite to the Committee meeting the expert/-s who assessed the study programme.
- 6.2. At the request of the chairperson of the Committee, the Agency may invite the representatives of the ministries of the relevant industries or experts delegated by the respective ministries, to the Committee meeting, if the Committee reviews the application for licensing of a study programme in the industry, in which the respective ministry is competent as well as may invite experts of the industries who have advisory rights.
- 6.3. The Agency shall invite, to the Committee meeting, the coordinator for the recognition of professional qualifications who is obliged to take part in the Committee meetings as an observer if the study programme is associated with the regulated profession.
- 6.4. The Committee shall review the documents submitted by the higher education institution/college, joint opinion of the experts, and other information available to the Committee, and shall take the decision on licensing or the refusal to license the study programme.
- 6.5. A decision on licensing the study programme shall be taken if it meets the following requirements:
 - 6.5.1. the study programme meets the requirements specified in the Law on Institutions of Higher Education and other regulatory enactments;
 - 6.5.2. the qualification of the academic staff and visiting professors, visiting associate professors, visiting docents, visiting lecturers and visiting assistants meets the conditions for implementing the study programme and requirements of regulatory enactments;
 - 6.5.3. study facilities, informative support (including library), financial, material and technical provision meet the conditions for implementing the study programme;
 - 6.5.4. content and mechanism for the implementation of the study programme to be licensed meet the aims of the study programme, tasks and learning outcomes to be achieved;
 - 6.5.5. the factual circumstances correspond to the information provided;
 - 6.5.6. violations of regulatory enactments, before the date of taking the decision, detected by the competent authorities in the activities of the higher education institution/college during the previous year are eliminated within the deadline set by these authorities;

- 6.5.7. the study programme is in compliance with the study field into which it is planned to be included.
- 6.6. If the Committee has taken the decision to license the study programme or to introduce changes to the licence of the study programme, the Agency, within 10 working days since the Committee's decision has been taken, shall send the relevant decision to the higher education institution/college, and a copy of the decision to the Ministry of Education and Science. If the Committee has taken the decision to license the study programme, the Agency shall send to the higher education institution/college the licence of the study programme (Annex of Cabinet Regulation No.795) prepared by the Agency and signed by the Committee's chairperson together with the decision on licensing the study programme. The Agency shall publish the information on licensing and the joint opinion of the experts on the Agency's website.
- 6.7. The Agency shall issue the licence to the higher education institution/college, as well as register it. If the Committee has taken the decision to license a joint study programme, the Agency shall prepare the licence of the study programme for each higher education institution/college that implements the joint study programme and shall register such a licence of the study programme under a single number.
- 6.8. The Committee shall take the decision on the refusal to license the study programme in accordance with the provisions of Paragraph 4 and 7 of Section 55² of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education if the study programme does not meet any of the requirements referred to in Sub-chapter 6.5 of Chapter 6 of Part II of the Methodology.
- 6.9. The Study Quality Committee shall take the decision on the refusal to license the study programme. If the Study Quality Committee takes the decision on the refusal to license the study programme, the higher education institution/college shall be entitled to submit an application for licensing the study programme of the relevant study field only after the higher education institution/college has eliminated the deficiencies detected by the Study Quality Committee.

7. Follow-up activities:

- 7.1. After the assessment process and taking the decision on licensing of the study programme, the higher education institution/college shall perform activities, the aim of which is to improve the quality of the study programme, eliminating the deficiencies detected during the assessment process and specified in the joint opinion of the experts, and implementing the recommendations given by the experts.

- 7.2. During the assessment and accreditation process of a study field or upon inclusion of a licensed study programme in the accreditation form, the experts shall review and assess whether the deficiencies detected in the process of licensing have been eliminated and the recommendations given for the study programme have been implemented.

8. Complaints and appeals

- 8.1. If, during the assessment process, the experts or higher education institution/college detect any violation in the assessment process or unethical conduct of the parties involved in the assessment process, a complaint may be expressed to the assessment coordinator, or it could be submitted in written to the Agency.
- 8.2. The decision taken by the Committee may be contested in the Appeals Committee by submitting an application to the Centre. The decision taken by the Appeals Committee may be appealed in the court in compliance with the procedure set out in the Administrative Procedure Law.
- 8.3. The operating principles and procedures of the Appeals Committee are defined in the Appeals Procedure of the Appeals Committee.

III. Making changes in the licence of the study programme

1. Making changes in the licence of the study programme shall be applicable to study programmes which are not accredited.
2. In order to make changes in the licence of the study programme, the higher education institution/college shall, within 30 calendar days after making changes, submit to the Agency an application for making changes in the licence of the study programme. A brief justification of changes shall be attached to the application.
3. The higher education institution/college shall submit the application and documents attached hereto in electronic format and shall sign it with a secure electronic signature in compliance with the provisions set out in the Electronic Documents Law.
4. The Committee shall take a decision on making changes in the licence of the study programme if the following information has changed:
 - 4.1 Name of the higher education institution/college and number of the registration certificate of the higher education institution/college;
 - 4.2 Legal address of the higher education institution/college, its telephone number, e-mail and official electronic address if an official electronic address account is activated for the higher education institution/college;
 - 4.3 name of the study programme;

- 4.4 name of the relevant study field of the study programme
 - 4.5 code of the study programme in accordance with the Latvian Education Classification;
 - 4.6 amount of the study programme, duration of the implementation of the study programme, study type and form, specifying in particular distance-learning, and language of the implementation;
 - 4.7 admission requirements;
 - 4.8 degree to be acquired, professional qualification to be awarded, or degree and name of the professional qualification;
 - 4.9 address where the study programme will be implemented specifying whether the study programme will be implemented by a higher education institution or its branch, college or its branch).
5. If the higher education institution/college implements a joint study programme, the Committee shall take a decision on making changes in the licence of the study programme if the following information has changed:
- 5.1 information on the compliance of the study programme with the provisions of Paragraph 2 and 3 of Section 55¹ of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education Institutions;
 - 5.2 the written agreement with the higher education institution/college involved in the implementation of the study programme regarding creation and implementation of the joint study programme.

Annex 1 – Rights and obligations of the parties involved in the licensing process of study programme

1. The higher education institution/college shall:

- 1.1 subject to the Cabinet Regulations, Law on Institutions of Higher Education and other regulatory enactments related to the study programme and licensing thereof, submit to the Agency the application for licensing of the study programme (hereinafter – the application) in the study field of the higher education institution/college and the description of the study programme attached hereto in compliance with the Guidelines for the preparation of the description of the study programme designed by the Agency;
- 1.2 submit, in addition to the application, the information and opinions referred to in the subparagraphs of Paragraph 15 of Cabinet Regulation No. 795 if the study programme complies with the new study field of the higher education institution/college (except for a state-founded higher education institution/college);
- 1.3 submit to the Agency the application for making changes in the licence of the study programme within 30 calendar days after making changes if the information referred to in Paragraph 12 and 14 of Cabinet Regulation No. 795 (except for Subparagraph 12.10 of Cabinet Regulation No. 795) has been changed in the study programmes that are not accredited;
- 1.4 take part in the coordination and organisation of the experts' visit;
- 1.5 may, within three working days, request the rejection of the experts by submitting to the Agency a justified written application, which shall specify the reasons for such rejection with regard to each expert;
- 1.6 provide access to the informative support (including libraries), study facilities, and material and technical provision of the study programme, as well as other resources upon the request of the Agency or experts;
- 1.7 be responsible for provided information that it fully describes the study programme submitted for assessment;
- 1.8 ensure adequate conditions, premises, and equipment for organisation of the assessment visit;
- 1.9 may contest the decision taken by the Committee in the Appeals Committee and may appeal the decision taken by the Appeals Committee in the court in compliance with the procedure set out in the Administrative Procedure Law.

2. The Agency shall:

- 2.1 design and in its operation use Cabinet Regulation No. 795 and other relevant regulatory enactments, this Methodology and procedures complying with the ESG;
- 2.2 design the Guidelines for the Preparation of the Joint opinion of the Experts for the Assessment of the Study Programme (hereinafter – experts and hereinafter – guidelines for preparation of joint opinion of experts) and publish them on the Agency's website;

- 2.3 request other organisations to provide the information required for licensing of the study programme in compliance with the provisions of Cabinet Regulation No. 795;
- 2.4 approve three experts for the assessment of the study programme in accordance with the guidelines for the selection of experts;
- 2.5 request the SUL and LTUESE to delegate, within 10 working days, an observer (without the voting rights) to participate in experts' visits to the higher education institutions/colleges;
- 2.6 organise the experts' work, including experts' visits to higher education institutions/colleges, branches thereof, participate in these, as well as ensure obtaining of the necessary information and reviewing of the submitted documents;
- 2.7 organise experts' training both before the assessment visit and during the whole academic year subject to prior announcement thereof;
- 2.8 ensure the documentation and archiving of the licensing process;
- 2.9 publish information on licensing of study programmes and experts' opinion on the Agency's website;
- 2.10 provide information and advice in quality assurance issues with regard to study programmes;
- 2.11 analyse the outcomes of higher education quality assessment and give recommendations for the improvement thereof;
- 2.12 develop criteria for the selection of the members of the Committee and select candidates for the Committee's experts, as well as ensure technical and organisational work of the Committee upon licensing of study programmes;
- 2.13 participate in the work and activities of organisations of the European Higher Education Area in the area of quality assurance in higher education;
- 2.14 perform other activities related to the improvement and quality assurance in higher education.
- 2.15 organizational issues of online visits in accordance with Annex 3 to this Methodology.

3. The Committee

The Committee shall operate in compliance with the Rules of the Study Quality Committee and perform the following tasks:

- 3.1 review the application for licensing of the study programme submitted by the higher education institution/college, the description of the study programme, and other binding information;
- 3.2 discuss, analyse and evaluate the joint opinion of the experts;
- 3.3 based on the application and documents attached thereto, the joint opinion of the experts, as well as other information available to the Committee, take, within four months since the application of the higher education institution/college for licensing of the relevant study programme has been received, the decision on licensing of the study programme if the study programme meets all the requirements set out in Paragraph 5 of Section 55² of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education, or the decision on the refusal to license the

- study programme if the study programme does not meet any of the requirements set out in Paragraph 5 of Section 55² of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education;
- 3.4 take the decision on making changes in the licence of the study programme if the information referred to in Paragraph 12 and 14 of Cabinet Regulation No. 795 (except for Subparagraph 12.10 of Cabinet Regulation No. 795) has been changed;
 - 3.5 may take the decision on annulment of the licence of the study programme in cases specified in Paragraph 8 of Section 55² of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education, including cases where the study programme, upon accreditation of the study field, has been rated as “unsatisfactory”, and such a decision shall specify the term from which the licence has been annulled;
 - 3.6 has the right to request from higher education institutions/colleges and relevant state authorities information necessary for licensing;
 - 3.7 provide recommendations for the improvement of the study programme, if necessary;
 - 3.8 obtain advice from experts, if necessary;
 - 3.9 the chairperson of the Committee may suggest to invite the representatives of the ministries of the related industry or experts delegated by the ministries to the respective meeting if the Committee reviews an application for licensing of a study programme in the relevant industry within the competence of the respective ministry, as well as may invite industries’ experts who have advisory rights;
 - 3.10 has the right to visit the higher education institution/college, including branches thereof, to inspect the actual circumstances in the higher education institution/college within the licensing process of the study programme.

4. Experts and observers

- 4.1. The rights and obligations of the experts are defined for related procedure steps included in Chapter 4 and 5 of Part II of the Methodology and tasks to be performed, subject to binding regulatory enactments.
- 4.2. The experts shall mutually agree on the allocation of responsibilities and appoint the head of the experts’ group responsible for the work of the experts’ group in general.
- 4.3. The observers shall act in accordance with the procedure designed by the Agency ⁴.
- 4.4. In their work, the experts and observers shall also be abide by the following principles:
 - 4.4.1. unbiased and fact-based findings – the expert shall act in an honest and unbiased manner in their efforts to reach the aim of the assessment. When expressing their opinion, formulating conclusions or taking decisions, the expert shall rely on facts, observations and their personal competence;
 - 4.4.2. neutrality – when assessing a study programme, the expert shall act independently. The expert shall not represent the interests of the higher education institution/college, study field or other party;
 - 4.4.3. respect towards the parties involved in the assessment process – within the assessment process, the expert shall act in good faith as a professional. The expert shall not exceed his/her powers as specified in his/her tasks. The expert shall treat the parties involved in the assessment process as persons capable of taking

responsibility for their actions, therefore he/she shall rely on facts and observations when referring to the strengths and weaknesses of the study programme;

- 4.4.4. confidentiality – all information related to the assessment (opinion of the interviewees, description of the study programme, and additional information provided by the higher education institution/college) shall be used exclusively for the assessment process;
- 4.4.5. collaboration – each expert shall be open to collaboration with other experts. The experts shall develop mutual understanding with the representatives of the higher education institution/college and make efforts to assist the higher education institution/college to enhance the quality system and quality culture.

5. Appeals Committee

5.1 The Appeals Committee shall review applications submitted with the aim to contest the decisions taken by the Committee and take decisions in compliance with the procedure set out in the Administrative Procedure Law.

5.2 The Appeals Committee shall act in accordance with its Appeals Procedure.

Annex 2 – Explanation of ratings for criteria and requirements

1. The requirements included in the joint opinion of the experts are defined in accordance with Paragraph 5 of Section 55² of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education.
2. To provide a comprehensive assessment in the joint opinion of the experts, a number of criteria to be analysed and rated by the experts' group are defined.
3. Criteria ratings and its explanation is included in the table below:

Rating	Rating explanation
Excellent	No deficiencies are found with regard to meeting the criteria set
Good	No significant deficiencies are found with regard to meeting the criteria set
Average	There are deficiencies found with regard to meeting the criteria set that may be eliminated by the meeting of the Study Quality Committee which will revise the application for licensing of the study programme
Unsatisfactory	There are significant deficiencies found, as well as deficiencies that may not be eliminated by the meeting of the Study Quality Committee which will revise the application for licensing of the study programme

4. Based on the provided rating of the criteria, the experts shall rate the requirements which are explained in the table below:

Rating	Rating explanation
Compliant	The relevant criteria of the requirement are rated as “ excellent ” or “ good ”
Partially compliant	The relevant criteria of the requirement are rated as “ average ”
Non-compliant	At least one relevant criterion of the requirement is rated as “ unsatisfactory ”

5. If all the requirements are rated as “compliant”, the experts may recommend to license the study programme.
6. If at least one requirement is rated as “non-compliant”, the experts may recommend not to license the study programme.
7. If any of the requirements is rated as “partially compliant”, the higher education institution/college, by the decision on licensing of the study programme or the refusal to license the study programme is taken, must meet the conditions/requirements given by the experts.

ANNEX 3 - Organisation of online visits for study programmes assessment

1. The purpose of an online visit is to ensure a full-fledged process of assessment of the study programme also in cases when it is not possible to organize an on-site visit. An online visit shall be organized only in cases of force majeure or due to other reasonably objective exceptional circumstances arising independently of the acts or omissions of the Agency or the higher education institution / college (for example, at the national level Covid-19 restrictions, including travel restrictions and quarantine, regulations, which in any way creates conditions when the possibility to organize an on-site visit, etc. does not exist).
2. Assessment visits can be organized online in two ways:
 - 2.1. **Partially online assessment visit** — in cases of force majeure or other objectively justified exceptional circumstances justifying the inability of one of the experts to attend the assessment visit, the expert shall participate in the assessment visit at a distance.
 - 2.2. **Fully online assessment visit** — in cases of force majeure or other objectively justified exceptional circumstances which make it impossible for any of the experts to attend the assessment visit, all experts shall participate in the assessment visit at a distance and only the assessment coordinator shall participate in the assessment visit on-site. In cases where the objectively justified exceptional circumstances make impossible assessment coordinator to participate assessment visit on-site, the assessment coordinator shall participate in the assessment visit at a distance.
 - 2.3. The higher education institution / college cannot choose between on-site visit and online visit, it is determined by the Agency on the basis of the external regulatory enactments of the Republic of Latvia and objectively justified circumstances. The higher education institution / college must be able to provide on-site visits, unless otherwise provided by the legislation of the Republic of Latvia or other external regulations (Covid-19 distance restrictions, or insufficient area of premises cannot be the reason for the organization of the online visit).
 - 2.4. The assessment coordinator shall organize the online visits according to the same rules and principles as the on-site visits and, in addition, before the online visit, verify that the experts and the higher education institution / college, in accordance with Section 4.5 of Chapter II of this Methodology, have provided technical support and solutions for the online visit.
 - 2.5. The coordinator and the higher education institution / college mutually agree, which online platform will be used and the higher education institution / college, for its part, must provide the requirements for the technical support base referred to in Annex 3, Section 4.8.
 - 2.6. Before the online visit the assessment coordinator must inform the higher education institution / college about it. If necessary, the coordinator can stipulate it in the Schedule of the expert group.

- 2.7. The higher education institution / college is obliged to provide all technical equipment and resources for full and high-quality provision of the online visit, so that during the online visit the experts could obtain the necessary information for the joint opinion. During the online visit, the higher education institution / college bears full responsibility for the content and truthfulness of the information provided in any format (visual, oral, written, online platform, etc.), as well as for the provision and use of high-quality and process-appropriate material and technical base.
- 2.8. Provision of the quality material and technical base during the online visit means that the higher education institution / college must ensure the following minimum technical requirements:
 - 2.8.1. A computer or other device able to operate an online platform
 - 2.8.2. Screen / projector
 - 2.8.3. Sound equipment according to the area of the room to ensure the audibility
 - 2.8.4. Stable internet connection, according to the requirements of the online platform
 - 2.8.5. Microphone(s)
- 2.9. In the online visit no other third parties may participate during the scheduled meetings for the purpose of obtaining an objective opinion and ensuring anonymity. The higher education institution / college is prohibited from making audio and / or video recordings of these conversations, including recordings on the online platform.
- 2.10. In case of emergencies when it is not possible for the higher education institution / college, for reasons beyond its control, to provide technical support and solutions for the online visit (internet interruption / absence, power outage / absence, etc.) a partially online visit shall be deemed to have taken place if at least 50% of the expert group have participated in the on-site assessment visit. A fully online visit, on the grounds that it is organized solely on the basis of technical means, shall be deemed not to have taken place in such cases.
- 2.11. During the online visit, the expert must be able to provide himself with technical equipment that is compatible with the online platform chosen for the visit and meets the minimum requirements for its operation.
- 2.12. In order to ensure the identification, all participants of the online visit must register on the online platform with their name and surname during the visit, as well as must have a microphone and a camera to provide a real-time image of the participant.
1. 2.13. All participants in the online visit shall notify the coordinator of any significant changes that may affect the Schedule and progress of the online visit in any way. In the event that the above circumstances occur on the part of the Agency, the coordinator shall inform the other participants of the visit.