

Elaborated according to Paragraph 13 of
Cabinet Regulation No. 793 of 11 December 2018
“Regulations Regarding Opening and
Accreditation of Study Fields”

Methodology for the Assessment and Accreditation of Study Fields¹

APPROVED

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¹ 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.

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I. General Provisions

1. The methodology for the assessment and accreditation of study field (hereinafter – Methodology) provides information for the assessment and organisation of the accreditation of study fields in cases where a higher education institution/college selects the Accreditation Department of the Academic Information Centre (hereinafter – Centre), hereinafter referred to as the Quality Agency for Higher Education (hereinafter – Agency) for the assessment of its study field(s).
2. The procedures described in the Methodology ensure the compliance of the procedures for quality assessment of studies with the national regulatory framework and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (hereinafter – ESG).
3. The assessment and accreditation of study fields shall be organised in accordance with the Law on Institutions of Higher Education and Cabinet Regulation No. 793 of 11 December 2018 “Regulations Regarding Opening and Accreditation of Study Fields” (hereinafter – Cabinet Regulation No. 793).
4. The assessment of a study field and the accreditation of a study field are two separate procedures. The procedure of the assessment of the study field shall last six months, whereas the procedure of the accreditation of the study field – four months.
5. The parties of the assessment process of the study field shall be as follows:
 - 5.1. higher education institution/college²;
 - 5.2. Agency;
 - 5.3. experts group for the assessment of a study field (hereinafter – experts group);
 - 5.4. Student Union of Latvia (hereinafter – LSA);
 - 5.5. Employers’ Confederation of Latvia (hereinafter – LDDK); and
 - 5.6. Latvian Trade Union of Education and Science Employees (hereinafter – LIZDA).
6. The parties of the accreditation process of the study field shall be as follows:
 - 6.1. higher education institution/college;
 - 6.2. Agency;
 - 6.3. Study Quality Committee (hereinafter – Committee); and
 - 6.4. Appeals Committee.
7. The parties of the assessment and accreditation process of the study field in their operation shall follow the following principles:

² The term “higher education institution/ college” used herein is applicable to all higher education and science institutions mentioned in the Law on Institutions of Higher Education which implement academic and professional study programmes, as well as deal with science, research activities, and artistic creation (universities, higher education institutions, academies, institutes, and colleges).

- 7.1. unbiased and fact-based findings;
 - 7.2. confidentiality;
 - 7.3. respect towards the parties involved in the assessment process;
 - 7.4. neutrality; and
 - 7.5. collaboration.
8. The rights and obligations of the parties of the assessment and accreditation process of the study field are specified in Annex 1 and Annex 2 to this Methodology, respectively.

II. Assessment of the Study Field

1. Application for the Assessment of a Study Field

- 1.1 In order to ensure a successful assessment and accreditation process of the study field, a higher education institution/college shall, at least twelve months prior to the deadline of the accreditation term of the study field, inform the Agency in written of its wish to perform the assessment of the study field.
- 1.2 The higher education institution/college and the Agency shall, upon a mutual agreement, enter into an agreement on the assessment of the study field (hereinafter – agreement), which contains information on the rights, obligations, and liability of the parties, and the financial settlement procedure.
- 1.3 The higher education institution/college shall, within the deadline specified in the agreement, submit to the Agency the application for the assessment of a study field electronically, which shall be accompanied by the Self-Assessment Report of the study field and other documents specified by the Agency.
- 1.4 The application for the assessment of a study field and the documents specified by the Agency shall be signed by the rector of a higher education institution or the director of a college with a secure electronic signature, in compliance with the provisions of the Electronic Documents Law.
- 1.5 The application for the assessment of a study field shall be accompanied by the Self-Assessment Report of the study field, which shall be prepared in accordance with the guidelines for the preparation of a Self-Assessment Report of a study field (hereinafter – guidelines),³ as developed by the Agency, and form an integral part of the application for the assessment of a study field.
- 1.6 The higher education institution/college shall prepare the Self-Assessment Report in accordance with internally developed procedures, and it shall be responsible for a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the study field and the relevant study programmes,

³ *Guidelines for the Preparation of a Self-Assessment Report of a Study Field [4 March 2019]. Available under http://aika.flowin.lv/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Studiju-virziena-pasnovertejuma-zinojuma-izstrades-vadlinijas_2019.pdf*

and the preparation of the Self-Assessment Report by the specified deadline. The content and structure of the Self-Assessment Report of the study field shall comply with the requirements specified in the guidelines.

- 1.7 The documents shall be submitted in the official language accompanied by a translation into English (translations of documents provided by other organisations may contain a reference “Provisional translation”). In the event of disputes, the documents submitted in the official language shall prevail.
- 1.8 The Self-Assessment Report shall be presented separately from the annexes thereto. The descriptions of the study courses of each study programme in the relevant study field shall be attached in one file. The biographies of the teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study programmes in the relevant study field (*in the Curriculum Vitae Europass format*) shall be attached in one file. In order to ensure the accreditation and licensing process, the Self-Assessment Report without the annexes thereto shall be published on the e-platform of the Agency (hereinafter – e-platform).

2. Review of the Submitted Documents

- 2.1. The Agency shall review the application for the assessment of a study field and the documents attached thereto and, if necessary, request additional information electronically, which the higher education institution/college shall submit to the Agency within the deadline specified by the Agency, however, no later than within 30 calendar days since the request for additional information has been received. The additional information shall be submitted electronically and signed by the rector of a higher education institution or the director of a college with a secure electronic signature, in compliance with the provisions of the Electronic Documents Law.
- 2.2. Whilst requesting additional information, the Agency shall inform the higher education institution/college of the employee of the Agency who is to coordinate the assessment (hereinafter – assessment coordinator) procedure.
- 2.3. The Agency shall invoice the higher education institution/college in accordance with the Pricelist⁴ developed by the Centre and the provisions of the agreement.
- 2.4. The application for the assessment of a study field shall be left without consideration in the following cases:
 - 2.4.1. The higher education institution/college has not made the payment for the assessment of the study field in accordance with the service payment procedure specified in the agreement.
 - 2.4.2. The higher education institution/college has not submitted all requested information, as specified in the guidelines and Agency's request for additional information.

⁴ *Pricelist of Paid Services of the Foundation “Academic Information Centre”. Available under: http://aika.flowin.lv/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Nodibinajuma_Akademiskas-informācijas-centrs_maksas-pakalpojumu-cenradis_2019.pdf*

- 2.4.3. The documents have not been prepared in accordance with the requirements for the preparation of documents, as specified in the relevant laws and regulations.
- 2.4.4. The higher education institution/college has not complied with the provisions of the agreement.
- 2.5. The Agency shall commence to organise the assessment once the payment for the assessment has been made in accordance with the settlement procedure specified in the agreement, all the information requested by the Agency has been submitted, and the submitted documents have been drawn up in accordance with the requirements for drawing up documents, as specified in the relevant laws and regulations.

3. Request for Opinions from Other Organisations

- 3.1. The Agency shall request and obtain from the registers⁵ of the Ministry of Education and Science and the state the data on the higher education institution/college required for the assessment and accreditation of the study field.
- 3.2. The Agency shall request the State Education Quality Service (hereinafter – IKVD) to provide, within 10 working days, information on violations detected during the previous accreditation term of the study field whilst implementing the study programme(s) in the relevant study field at the higher education institution/college, measures undertaken by the higher education institution/college for eliminating these violations, and decisions taken by the IKVD on complaints received with regards to the implementation of the study programme(s) in the relevant study field and measures undertaken by the higher education institution/college for setting these complaints.
- 3.3. In cases where the study programmes in the relevant study field are related to the field of military defense, the Agency shall request the Ministry of Defense to provide the assessment of the study programmes in the relevant study field within 10 working days.
- 3.4. In cases where the study programmes in the relevant study field educate specialists in regulated professions, the Agency shall request the certification body to provide, within 10 working days, the report on assessment of the compliance of the relevant study programmes with the laws and regulations regarding the regulated professions.
- 3.5. In cases where the study programme(s) in the relevant study field is/are related to a regulated profession, the Agency shall request the coordinator for the recognition of professional qualification to provide, within a month, the opinion on the relevant study programme.

⁵ For instance, the State Education Information System or National Information System of Research Activity.

- 3.6. In case of a doctoral study programme(s) in the relevant study field, the Agency shall request the Latvian Council of Science to provide a report on the doctoral study programmes in accordance with Section 16, Paragraph 7 of the Law on Scientific Activity.
- 3.7. If necessary, the Agency may request other sectoral organisations to provide a report on the study field to be assessed and the relevant study programmes.

4. Selection and Approval of the Members of the Experts Group

- 4.1. The Agency shall approve the experts to be included in the experts group, head, and secretary thereof.
- 4.2. At least five experts shall be included in the experts group, one of which shall be a representative delegated by the LSA, one – a representative delegated by the LDDK, and at least one foreign expert. While establishing the experts group, the experts shall comply with the requirements as follows:
 - 4.2.1. The experts shall have experience in quality assurance of the study process or external quality assessment.
 - 4.2.2. The experts shall have qualification in the field relevant to the study field to be assessed.
 - 4.2.3. While selecting candidates for the position of the head and the secretary of the experts group for the assessment of a study field, the following requirements shall be additionally met: experience in external quality assessment of higher education (it is preferable that the head of the experts group has experience at international level); and
 - 4.2.4. Previous participation in conferences, seminars, and training on quality assurance of higher education.
- 4.3. The criteria and principles for the selection of experts are defined in the rules “Criteria and Principles for the Selection of Experts”⁶, as approved by the Centre, that are publicly available on the website of the Agency.
- 4.4. The Agency shall request the LSA and LIZDA to delegate, within 10 days, observers for their participation in the work of the experts group without voting rights. The purpose of observers’ participation is to make observations on the assessment progress within the assessment procedure and give recommendations for the improvement of the procedure. The observers shall be subject to the “Procedure for Observers Participation in Assessment Procedures”⁷, as approved by the Centre.

⁶ *Criteria and Principles for the Selection of Experts. Available under: https://www.aika.lv/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Ekspertu_atlases_kriteriji_un_principi_2019.pdf.*

⁷ *Procedure for Observers Participation in Assessment Procedures [31 January 2019]. Available under: http://aika.flowin.lv/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Noverotaju-dalibas-kartiba-novertesanas-proceduras_2019.pdf.*

- 4.5. The Agency shall inform the higher education institution/college about the composition of the experts group and the observers within three working days after the experts group has been approved.
- 4.6. The higher education institution/college may, within three working days, reject one or several members of the experts group by submitting to the Agency a justification electronically, specifying the reasons for each rejected member of the experts group.
- 4.7. The Agency shall review the rejection expressed by the higher education institution/college within 10 working days. In the event that it is recognised as justified, the Agency shall approve other assessment experts to replace the rejected ones and inform the higher education institution/college thereof.
- 4.8. The Centre shall conclude the agreement for performing the assessment with each experts. The agreement shall be accompanied by a confirmation of non-existence of conflict-of-interest⁸ and confirmation on the compliance with confidentiality liabilities with regard to information obtained during the assessment process (hereinafter – confidentiality statement).
- 4.9. The observers shall sign the confirmation of non-existence of conflict-of-interest and confirmation on the compliance with the confidentiality liabilities.

5. Obligations of the Members of the Experts Group Prior to and During the Visit

- 5.1. The head of the experts group shall:
 - 5.1.1. be responsible for the work of the experts group in general;
 - 5.1.2. prior to the visit by the experts group, organise the exchange of opinions⁹ among the members of the experts group after the review of the relevant documents;
 - 5.1.3. prior to the visit by the experts group, discuss the work schedule of the experts with the Agency;
 - 5.1.4. prior to the visit by the experts group, distribute the duties amongst the members of the experts group;
 - 5.1.5. chair the meetings of the experts group;
 - 5.1.6. chair the meetings with target groups or delegate another member of the experts group to chair the meeting during the visit; and

⁸ *A conflict-of-interest shall arise in the situations as follows:*

- 1) *The expert is employed by the institution of higher education, the study field of which is being assessed, and he/she has other contractual relationship with this institution of higher education or he/she has been employed by this institution of higher education during the 2 years preceding the on-site visit.*
- 2) *The expert forms part of a decision-making or advisory body of the institution of higher education, the study field of which is being assessed.*
- 3) *The expert studies at the institution of higher education, the study field of which is being assessed, or has graduated from it during the 2 years preceding the on-site visit.*
- 4) *A person, who is the father, mother, grandmother, grandfather, child, grandchild, adoptee, adopter, brother, sister, half-brother, half-sister or spouse of the expert, is involved in the implementation of the study field.*

⁹ *By video conferencing, telephone conferencing, e-mail, etc.*

- 5.1.7. submit to the Agency the joint opinion by the experts group.
- 5.2. The secretary of the experts group shall:
 - 5.2.1. be responsible for the preparation of the joint opinion by the experts group in collaboration with other members of the experts group;
 - 5.2.2. prior to the visit, collect opinions and observations of all members of the experts group after the review of the relevant documents; and
 - 5.2.3. collect opinions and observations of all members of the experts group during the visit.
- 5.3. The members, including the head and the secretary, of the experts group, shall:
 - 5.3.1. Review the documents that regulate the assessment of the study field and prior to the assessment visit participate in the training organised by the Agency;
 - 5.3.2. Review the Self-Assessment Report prepared by the higher education institution/college and other information related to the study field to be assessed;
 - 5.3.3. formulate an opinion on different aspects, including issues that need to be addressed during the assessment visit, and send it to the whole experts group and the assessment coordinator electronically, no later than one week prior to the of the visit;
 - 5.3.4. in case of an ordinary assessment of a study field, the experts group shall evaluate how the higher education institution/college has implemented the given recommendations and eliminated the deficiencies detected in:
 - 5.3.4.1. previous joint opinion by the experts group on the accreditation of the study field;
 - 5.3.4.2. the report by the experts on licensing (if a procedure of licensing a study programme in the relevant study field has taken place since the previous accreditation of the study field);
 - 5.3.4.3. the report by the experts on the assessment of changes to the accredited study field (if a procedure of the assessment of changes to the relevant study field has taken place since the previous accreditation of the study field);
 - 5.3.4.4. in case of the procedure of including a licensed study programme in the accreditation form of a study field (if applicable);
 - 5.3.5. prepare and submit to the assessment coordinator information to be additionally required from the higher education institution/college;
 - 5.3.6. perform other tasks related to the assessment process according to the distribution of duties amongst the members of the experts group;
 - 5.3.7. participate in the assessment visit;
 - 5.3.8. participate in the preparation of the joint opinion by the experts group; and
 - 5.3.9. take into account the comments of the coordinator regarding the preparation of the report.
- 5.4. The assessment coordinator shall:

- 5.4.1. organise the assessment process, including:
 - 5.4.1.1. communication with the experts group and the higher education institution/college;
 - 5.4.1.2. settling legal issues together with the experts group;
 - 5.4.1.3. arrangement of travelling and accommodation together with the experts group;
 - 5.4.1.4. training for the experts prior to the assessment visit; and
 - 5.4.1.5. organizational issues of online visits in accordance with Annex 4 to this Methodology.
 - 5.4.2. ensure the access to the Self-Assessment Report and the annexes thereto to the experts group no later than one month prior to the visit at the higher education institution/college. In cases where the composition of the experts group changes due to reasons not attributable to the Agency, the new members of the experts group shall be granted the access to the Self-Assessment Report immediately after they have been included in the experts group;
 - 5.4.3. prepare the agenda of the assessment visit and coordinate it with the experts group and the higher education institution/college;
 - 5.4.4. engage himself/herself in the planning of the work of the experts group;
 - 5.4.5. prior to the visit, upon request by the experts, request additional information from the higher education institution/college;
 - 5.4.6. after the visit, upon request by the experts, may request from the higher education institution/college information or documents specified during the visit;
 - 5.4.7. review the joint opinion by the experts group and, if necessary, request to make the necessary corrections therein; and
 - 5.4.8. provide support to the experts group in issues related to the assessment.
- 5.5. Prior to the assessment visit at the higher education institution/college, the Agency shall organise training for the experts group, in which the observers may participate as well. During the training, the Agency shall introduce the experts with:
- 5.5.1. the aims and objectives of the assessment;
 - 5.5.2. the work schedule of the experts group;
 - 5.5.3. Methodology and the guidelines for the preparation of a joint opinion by the experts group;
 - 5.5.4. laws and regulations regulating the external assessment of study fields;
 - 5.5.5. the higher education system of Latvia; and
 - 5.5.6. the context of the study field to be assessed and the respective higher education institution/college.

6. Assessment Visit

- 6.1. The aim of the visit is to obtain as much information as possible on the study field and the relevant study programmes in order to perform a comprehensive and unbiased assessment in accordance with the requirements specified in Paragraphs 15, 16, and 17 of Cabinet Regulation No. 793, the criteria specified in the guidelines for the preparation of the joint opinion by the experts group on the assessment of the study field (hereinafter – guidelines for the preparation of a report by the experts)¹⁰, and the Methodology. During the visit, the experts shall gain the justification for the information provided for in the Self-Assessment Report prepared by the higher education institution/college, as well as make additions to recent findings and observations gained during the assessment visit.
- 6.2. The assessment coordinator shall hand over the application of the higher education institution/college and the related information to the experts provided that the higher education institution/college has not rejected the experts within the deadline specified by the Agency and the experts have confirmed the non-existence of conflict-of-interest and compliance with the obligation of confidentiality.
- 6.3. The assessment coordinator shall prepare the draft agenda of the visit and send it to the higher education institution/college for making additions and coordination thereof. The experts shall provide comments on the draft agenda of the visit and coordinate it.
- 6.4. During the visit, the higher education institution/college shall, upon request by the Agency or the experts group, provide the access to the informative resources/infrastructure of the study field, including the library resources, the material and technical provision, the final theses (if any), the examination materials, and other resources. The higher education institution/college shall provide adequate premises and equipment required during the assessment visit.
- 6.5. During the assessment visit, the experts group shall meet with the management of the higher education institution/college and/or the respective department, the team that has prepared the Self-Assessment Report, the teaching staff¹¹, students, graduates, and the representatives of the employers and/or professional organisations.
- 6.6. During an assessment visit, a representative of the higher education institution/college may attend only one meeting with the experts group, except the final meeting and individual cases, where such an option has been previously agreed with the assessment coordinator.

¹⁰ *Guidelines for the Preparation of the Joint Report by the Experts Group on the Assessment of the Study Field [4 May 2019]. Available under: http://aika.flowin.lv/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Studiju-virziena-novertesanas-ekspertu-grupas-kopiga-atzinuma-izstrades-vadlinijas_2019.pdf.*

¹¹ *The term “teaching staff” used herein shall refer to the academic staff, visiting professors, visiting associate professors, visiting docents, visiting lecturers, and visiting assistants of the relevant higher education institution/college.*

- 6.7. The meetings with the teaching staff and the students shall take place in the absence of the representatives of the management of the higher education institution/college.
- 6.8. In all meetings, except the meeting with the students, lists of participants shall be drawn up.
- 6.9. As for the meetings with the graduates and the representatives of the employers and/or professional organisations, the persons studying and/or employed at the respective higher education institution/college shall not be allowed to attend these meetings.
- 6.10. Persons employed by the respective higher education institution/college shall not be allowed to attend the meetings with the students.
- 6.11. The meeting of the experts group with the representatives of the higher education institution/college shall include a question-and-answer session, as well as a discussion between the representatives of the higher education institution/college and the experts. The aim of the meeting is to gain information required to analyse the requirements and criteria specified in the guidelines for the preparation of the joint opinion by the experts and to prepare the joint opinion by the experts group.
- 6.12. During the visit by the experts group, the higher education institution/college may give a presentation provided that it does not contain information included in the Self-Assessment Report attached to the application. In cases where the presentation contains information, which has been already previously provided, the assessment coordinator may, upon agreement with the experts group, ask the higher education institution/college not to demonstrate such a presentation in order to ensure efficient use of the time intended for the meeting.
- 6.13. At the end of each working day, the experts group shall mutually discuss and summarise the information and findings gained. On the final day of the visit, the experts group shall mutually discuss the outcomes of the visit, formulate a joint opinion on the compliance of the study field subject to the assessment with the assessment criteria, requirements, and conclusions gained during the visit. The experts group shall inform the representatives of the higher education institution/college about the main conclusions.
- 6.14. English shall be the working language during the assessment visit, unless otherwise agreed upon with the Agency.
- 6.15. If necessary, the higher education institution/college may use the services of an interpreter, subject to coordination thereof with the Agency at least five working days prior to the visit. The interpreter shall not be involved in the implementation of the study field subject to the assessment. The expenses related to the interpreting services shall be borne by the higher education institution/college.

- 6.16. During the assessment visit, the breaks (coffee breaks, lunch, and dinner) shall be organised separately from the representatives of the higher education institution/college, unless otherwise proposed by the experts group.

7. Preparation of the Joint opinion by the Experts Group

- 7.1. After the assessment visit, the experts group shall:
- 7.1.1. by the deadlines specified by the Agency, prepare the joint opinion by the experts group in compliance with the guidelines for the preparation of the joint opinion by the experts group, as developed by the Agency;
 - 7.1.2. whilst preparing the report, take into account the Methodology, the Self-Assessment Report of the study field, the information provided by the IKVD and the certification body (if applicable), as well as other information, if provided on the study field subject to the assessment, outcomes of the visit at the higher education institution/college, and additional information provided by the higher education institution/college;
 - 7.1.3. provide in the report evaluation on both the study field and the study programmes in the relevant study field;
 - 7.1.4. in the report, mutually agree upon the evaluation of the criteria and requirements subject to the assessment, while taking into account the guidelines for the preparation of the joint opinion by the experts and Part I of the ESG. See the explanation of the evaluation of the criteria and requirements in Annex 3 to the Methodology;
 - 7.1.5. mutually agree upon the evaluation of each study programme in the relevant study field, as provided for in Paragraph 17 of Cabinet Regulation No. 793;
 - 7.1.6. agree upon the wording of the report by the experts group acceptable for all experts (*consensus*). In the event that the opinion of the members of the experts group on any of the criteria differ, the dissenting opinion shall be indicated in the relevant chapter of the joint opinion, specifying the name and surname of the expert, the dissenting opinion, the assessment criterion, and the justification of the dissenting opinion;
 - 7.1.7. prepare the joint opinion in English in computer readable format and submit it electronically;
 - 7.1.8. describe both the positive and negative aspects in the joint opinion, analysing each assessment criterion, formulating conclusions, and identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the higher education institution/college regarding the implementation of the assessment criterion and the requirement;
 - 7.1.9. while preparing the assessment of compliance, provide in the joint opinion a justification of the evaluation, which may include a reference to the respective part of the report or the information provided by the higher education institution/college, which serves as evidence for the full compliance, partial compliance or non-compliance identified;

- 7.1.10. while assessing the criteria, observe consistency between the criteria of the study field and the study programmes (the assessment of a study programme must be relevant to the assessment of the study field and vice versa);
 - 7.1.11. provide in the joint opinion recommendations for the elimination of the deficiencies detected (on a short-term basis) and for the improvement of the study field and the relevant study programmes (on a long-term basis);
 - 7.1.12. make corrections in the prepared joint opinion, as instructed by the Agency; and
 - 7.1.13. perform other tasks related to the assessment of the study field.
- 7.2. The secretary of the experts group shall:
 - 7.2.1. prepare the joint opinion by the experts group, taking into account that the joint opinion represents the opinion of the whole experts group;
 - 7.2.2. ensure the compliance of the joint opinion with the guidelines for the preparation of the joint opinion by the experts; and
 - 7.2.3. if necessary, make corrections in accordance with the indications and comments provided by the Agency.
 - 7.3. The head of the experts group shall:
 - 7.3.1. submit the report electronically by the deadline specified by the Agency.
 - 7.4. The Agency shall review the joint opinion by the experts group and, if necessary, request the experts group to make the necessary corrections.
 - 7.5. The experts group shall make corrections in the joint opinion, in accordance with the comments provided by the Agency.
 - 7.6. The Agency shall send the joint opinion by the experts electronically to the higher education institution/college within two months since the visit by the experts group at the higher education institution/college has taken place.
 - 7.7. The higher education institution/college may, within 10 working days since the joint opinion by the experts group has been received, provide comments on the factual errors detected therein. The comments and their justification shall be provided to the Agency electronically in English, by attaching the respective translation into the official language.
 - 7.8. The Agency shall forward the comments by the higher education institution/college on the factual errors to the experts group.
 - 7.9. The experts group shall review the comments by the higher education institution/college and may, within 10 working days since they have been received, correct the joint opinion and submit it to the Agency.
 - 7.10. The corrected joint opinion by the experts group shall be sent to the higher education institution/college and published on the e-platform.

III. Accreditation of the Study Field

1. Application for the Accreditation of the Study Field

- 1.1 The higher education institution/college shall, at least four months prior to the deadline of the accreditation term of the study field, electronically submit to the Centre an application for the accreditation of a study field (hereinafter – application for accreditation).
- 1.2 The application for accreditation shall contain the following information:
 - 1.2.1. name of the higher education institution/college;
 - 1.2.2. name of the study field;
 - 1.2.3. names and codes of the study programmes in the relevant study field, in accordance with the Latvian Education Classification;
 - 1.2.4. duration and amount of the study programmes in the relevant study field;
 - 1.2.5. address of the place of implementation of the study programmes in the relevant study field (higher education institution, branch of the higher education institution or college, branch of the college), language in which study programmes are implemented, and the type and form of studies, including distance-learning;
 - 1.2.6. requirements for the admission to the study programmes in the relevant study field;
 - 1.2.7. degrees, professional qualifications or degrees and professional qualifications to be acquired in the study programmes in the relevant study field; and
 - 1.2.8. name, surname, and position of the person entitled by the higher education institution/college to deal with issues related to the accreditation of the study field.
- 1.3 The application shall be accompanied by documents submitted to the Agency for assessment purposes, and the joint opinion by the experts group. The application and documents shall be submitted in the official language, attaching also the documents and the joint opinion by the experts group – both in English.
- 1.4 While submitting the application on accreditation, the higher education institution/college may request the Agency to submit to the Committee all the documents related to the assessment procedure (the Self-Assessment Report, the joint opinion by the experts group, etc.).
- 1.5 The application and the documents attached thereto (if applicable) shall be submitted electronically, and the application shall be signed with a secure electronic signature, in compliance with the provisions of the Electronic Documents Law.
- 1.6 The Agency shall submit to the Committee the reports of the IKVD and other organisations obtained during the assessment procedure of the study field.
- 1.7 In cases where the higher education institution/college has introduced changes to the study programmes, in compliance with the joint opinion by the experts group and

recommendations for the study field and the relevant study programmes, the application for accreditation shall be accompanied by the description of the introduced changes.

2. Review of the Application for Accreditation

- 2.1. The Agency shall review the application for accreditation and the documents attached thereto, and, if necessary, request the missing information electronically.
- 2.2. The higher education institution/college shall provide the missing information to Centre within 20 calendar days since it has been requested.
- 2.3. The application for accreditation shall be left without consideration in the following cases:
 - 2.3.1. The higher education institution/college has not submitted all the information requested in accordance with the provisions specified in Chapter 1 of Part III of this Methodology; and
 - 2.3.2. The documents have not been prepared in accordance with the requirements for the preparation of documents, as specified in the relevant laws and regulations.

3. Taking a Decision on the Accreditation of the Study Field

- 3.1. The decision on the accreditation of the study field or the refusal to accredit the study field (hereinafter – decision) shall be taken by the Committee within four months since the application for accreditation has been received from the higher education institution/college. The Committee shall have a quorum if at least four members of the Committee are present at the meeting. The decision-making procedure is specified in the rules of the Committee. In cases where a member of the Committee has direct or indirect interest in the decision or there are circumstances, which may give rise to a conflict-of-interest, this member of the Committee shall not participate in the decision-making process.
- 3.2. The Agency shall inform the higher education institution/college about the date, time, and place, the application for accreditation 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 a representative/ representatives of the experts group to attend the Committee meeting.
- 3.3. The Agency may invite the representatives of ministries or experts delegated by the respective ministries to attend the Committee meeting, if the Committee reviews an application for the accreditation of study fields, which comply with the sector falling within the competence of the relevant ministry, as well as sectoral experts with an advisory capacity in the meeting.
- 3.4. If there are study programmes in the relevant study field, that are related to regulated professions, the Agency shall invite to the Committee meeting the coordinator for the recognition of a professional qualification who shall attend the Committee meeting as an observer, as specified in Paragraph 28 of Cabinet Regulation No. 793.

- 3.5. The Committee shall review the documents submitted by the higher education institution/college, the joint opinion by the experts group, the comments of the higher education institution/college on the factual errors detected in the joint opinion by the experts group, if any, the opinion of the IKVD, the certification body, and the Ministry of Defence, if any, and other information available to the Committee, if any. If necessary, the Committee shall review the actual circumstances at the higher education institution/college and other information available to the Committee and decide on the accreditation and accreditation term of the relevant study field or the refusal to accredit the study field, providing individual evaluation of each study programme in the decision.
- 3.6. Once the decision has been taken, the Agency shall prepare a draft decision, which may be corrected by the members of the Committee, if necessary. The decision shall be signed by the Chairperson of the Committee, and, within 10 working days since it has been taken, the Agency shall send the decision to the higher education institution/college and a copy thereof – to the Ministry of Education and Science.
- 3.7. If the Committee has taken the decision to accredit the study field, the Agency shall, within 10 working days, issue to the higher education institution/college the accreditation form of the relevant study field, signed by the Chairperson of the Committee, together with the decision of the Committee, as specified in Annex 2 to Cabinet Regulation No. 793.

IV. Follow-Up Activities

1. After the decision on the accreditation of the study field has been taken, the higher education institution/college shall perform activities aimed at improving the study field, by eliminating deficiencies detected during the assessment and accreditation process of the study field and implementing recommendations for the improvement of the study field and elimination of deficiencies, as provided by the experts group and the Study Quality Committee.
2. In the event that the study field is accredited for two years, the higher education institution/college shall, within six months since the decision on the accreditation of the study field has been taken, electronically submit to the Agency a report on the implementation of the recommendations.
3. In the event that the study field is accredited for six years, the higher education institution/college shall, within two years since the decision on the accreditation of the study field has been taken, electronically submit a report on the implementation of the recommendations.
4. The Agency shall, within one month since the report has been received, review the activities for the improvement of the study field, performed by the higher education institution/college, as well as other information on the implementation of studies in the relevant study field. In

cases where significant deficiencies have been detected, the Agency shall accordingly inform the Committee thereof.

5. The principles and procedure of follow-up activities are defined in the rules on follow-up activities,¹² approved by the Centre.

V. Complaints and Appeals

1. If, during the assessment and/or accreditation process, the experts or the higher education institution/college detects any violations in the assessment and/or accreditation process and/or unethical conduct of the parties involved in the assessment and/or accreditation process, a complaint may be expressed to the assessment coordinator or submitted to the Agency in written.
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 accordance with the procedure specified in the Administrative Procedure Law.
3. The operating principles and procedure of the Appeals Committee are defined in the Appeals procedure of the Appeals Committee.

¹² https://www.aika.lv/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Noteikumi-par-pecnovertejuma-aktivitatem_2019.pdf (in Latvian)

ANNEX 1 – Rights and Obligations of the Parties of the Assessment Process of the Study Field

1. During the assessment process of the study field, the higher education institution/college shall:

- 1.1. no later than twelve months prior to the deadline of the accreditation term of the study field, inform the Agency in written of its wish to perform the assessment of the study field and enter into the agreement on the assessment of a study field with the Agency;
- 1.2. no later than ten months prior to the deadline of the accreditation term of the study field, submit to the Agency the application for the assessment of a study field, in accordance with the provisions of Cabinet Regulation No. 793, attaching to the application the Self-Assessment Report of the study field in compliance with the guidelines for the preparation of the Self-Assessment Report of the study field, developed by the Agency, in accordance with the requirements for the assessment of the study field specified in the Law on Institutions of Higher Education, other laws and regulations of the Republic of Latvia, and the Methodology;
- 1.3. upon request by the Agency, submit additional information no later than within 30 calendar days;
- 1.4. within three working days, may reject one or several members of the experts group by submitting a written justification to the Agency, specifying the reasons for each rejected member of the experts group;
- 1.5. take part in the coordination and organisation of the visit by the experts group;
- 1.6. upon request by the Agency or the experts group, provide access to the informative resources/infrastructure of the study field, including the library resources, the material and technical provision, the final theses (if any), the examination materials, and other resources;
- 1.7. ensure that the information submitted provides a comprehensive and in-depth description of the study field and the relevant study programme/study programmes submitted for the assessment;
- 1.8. provide adequate conditions, premises and equipment required during the assessment visit;
- 1.9. during the visit by the experts group, be ready to present evidence of the information provided in the Self-Assessment Report;
- 1.10. may provide comments on the factual errors detected in the joint opinion by the experts group; and
- 1.11. perform follow-up activities within the deadlines specified by the Agency.

2. During the assessment procedure of the study field, the Agency shall:

- 2.1. prepare and conclude the agreement on the assessment of the study field with the higher education institution/college;

- 2.2. prepare and conclude the agreement on the assessment of the study field with the assessment experts;
- 2.3. develop and, while performing its activities, comply with the Methodology and procedures complying with the ESG;
- 2.4. develop guidelines for the preparation of the Self-Assessment Report and the guidelines for the preparation of the joint opinion by the experts group for the assessment of the study field, and publish them on the website of the Agency;
- 2.5. develop the pricelist of paid services for the assessment procedures of the study field and publish it on the website of the Agency;
- 2.6. for the purpose of the assessment of the study field, establish and approve the experts group consisting of at least five experts;
- 2.7. request from the state registers and other organisations information and reports on the study field to be assessed and the relevant study programmes;
- 2.8. organise the work of the experts group, including visits by the experts group at higher education institutions/colleges and branches thereof, and participate in them;
- 2.9. ensure acquisition of the required information and review of the submitted documents, as specified in the guidelines for the preparation of the Self-Assessment Report;
- 2.10. organise training for the experts group both prior to the assessment visit and during the academic year, subject to previous notification thereof;
- 2.11. ensure documentation and archiving of the assessment process; and
- 2.12. provide information and consultations in issues related to the quality assurance of study fields.

3. The Experts shall:

- 3.1. conclude an agreement with the Centre and perform their duties within the deadlines specified in the agreement;
- 3.2. review the documents regulating the assessment of the study field, the Self-Assessment Report of the higher education institution/college, and other information related to the study field subject to the assessment;
- 3.3. prior to the assessment visit, participate in the training organised by the Agency;
- 3.4. prepare the joint opinion by the experts group, in accordance with the guidelines for the preparation of the joint opinion by the experts group, developed by the Agency;
- 3.5. prepare and submit to the assessment coordinator information to be additionally requested from the higher education institution/college;
- 3.6. participate in the assessment visit;
- 3.7. during the preparation of the joint opinion by the experts group, take into account the comments provided by the assessment coordinator;
- 3.8. perform other tasks related to the assessment process, taking into account the distribution of duties amongst the members of the experts group;
- 3.9. the experts, including the head and the secretary of the experts group, shall comply with the provisions defined in Chapters 4 and 5 of Part II of the Methodology.

- 3.10. In addition, while performing their activities, the experts shall follow these principles:
- 3.10.1. Unbiased and fact-based findings – the expert shall be honest and objective in his/her efforts to achieve the aim of the assessment. While expressing his/her opinion, formulating conclusions or taking decisions, the expert shall rely on facts, observations and personal competence.
 - 3.10.2. Neutrality – during the assessment of the study field, the expert shall act independently. The expert may not represent the interests of a higher education institution, college, study field, or any other party.
 - 3.10.3. Respect towards the parties involved in the assessment process – during the assessment, 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 field.
 - 3.10.4. Confidentiality – all information related to the assessment (opinions of interviewees, the Self-Assessment Report, and additional information provided by the higher education institution/college) shall be used exclusively for the assessment process.
 - 3.10.5. Collaboration – each expert as a member of the experts group shall be open to the collaboration with the experts group. The cooperation among the experts shall be coordinated by the head of the experts group. The members of the experts group shall develop mutual understanding with the representatives of the higher education institution/college and make efforts to assist the higher education institution/college in enhancing the quality culture.

4. The Student Union of Latvia shall:

- 4.1. delegate experts of students to participate in visits by the experts group at higher education institutions/colleges and branches thereof as experts;
- 4.2. delegate representatives of the students to participate in visits by the experts group at higher education institutions/colleges and branches thereof as observers (without voting rights). The observers shall comply with the Procedure for Observers Participation in Assessment Procedures, developed by the Centre.

5. The Employers' Confederation of Latvia shall:

- 5.1. delegate experts of employers to participate in visits by the experts group at higher education institutions/colleges and branches thereof as experts.

6. The Latvian Trade Union of Education and Science Employees shall:

- 6.1. delegate representatives of LIZDA to participate in visits by the experts group at higher education institutions/colleges and branches thereof as observers (without voting rights). The observers shall comply with the Procedure for Observers Participation in Assessment Procedures, developed by the Centre.

ANNEX 2 – Rights and Obligations of the Parties of the Accreditation Process of the Study Field

1. The higher education institution/college shall:

- 1.1. no later than four months prior to the deadline of the accreditation term of the study field, submit to the Centre the application for the accreditation of a study field and the related documents;
- 1.2. no later than within 20 calendar days, submit to the Agency additional information, if requested; and
- 1.3. may participate in the Committee meeting.

2. The Agency shall:

- 2.1. review the application for the accreditation of a study field submitted by the higher education institution/college and the documents attached thereto and, if necessary, request additional information;
- 2.2. organise Committee meetings;
- 2.3. if necessary, request and obtain data from state registers;
- 2.4. publish information on the accreditation of the study field on the website of the Agency;
- 2.5. ensure documentation and archiving of the accreditation process; and
- 2.6. provide information and consultations in issues related to the quality assurance of study fields; and
- 2.7. publish on its website the list and schedule of study fields to be assessed in the relevant year.

3. The Committee shall:

- 3.1. perform its activities in accordance with the rules of the Study Quality Committee and perform the following tasks:
 - 3.1.1. review the application for the accreditation of a study field submitted by the higher education institution/college and other relevant information;
 - 3.1.2. discuss, analyse, and evaluate the joint opinion by the experts group;
 - 3.1.3. take a decision on the accreditation of the study field or refusal to accredit the study field;
 - 3.1.4. contact the assessment experts, if necessary;
 - 3.1.5. request from higher education institutions/colleges and state institutions additional information required to perform its activities;
 - 3.1.6. review the actual circumstances at the higher education institution/college, including its branches, if necessary; and
 - 3.1.7. provide recommendations for the improvement of study fields and/or study programmes.

4. The Appeals Committee shall:

- 4.1 review applications submitted with the aim to contest the decisions taken by the Committee and take decisions in compliance with the procedure specified in the Administrative Procedure Law; and act in accordance with its Appeals procedure.

ANNEX 3 – Explanation of the Evaluation of the Criteria and Requirements

1. The joint opinion by the experts group is divided into three parts, where Part I deals with the evaluation of the criteria describing the study field and the applicable requirements, Part II – with the evaluation of the criteria describing the study programmes and the applicable requirements, and Part III includes the summary of the evaluation of the requirements.
2. The experts group shall evaluate each applicable requirement as “fully compliant”, “partially compliant” or “non-compliant”, taking into account the evaluation of the criteria relevant to the requirement.
3. The evaluations of the requirements and their explanations are given in the table below:

Evaluation	Explanation of evaluation
Fully compliant	The study field or the study programme fully complies with the prescribed requirements.
Partially compliant	Whilst assessing the compliance of the study field and the study programme with the prescribed requirements, shortcomings and deficiencies have been detected, but they can be eliminated by the day on which the Committee in its meeting is supposed to review the application for the accreditation of the study field, or within the accreditation term of the study field.
Non-compliant	Whilst assessing the compliance of the study field and the study programmes with the prescribed requirements, significant deficiencies have been detected, and the shortcomings and deficiencies detected in the implementation of the study programme cannot be eliminated within the two-year accreditation term of the study field.

4. Whilst preparing the joint opinion by the experts group on the study programmes in the relevant study field, the experts group shall agree upon the evaluation of the study programmes by specifying whether the study programme shall be evaluated as “excellent”, “good”, “average” or “poor”.
5. The evaluations of the study programmes are given in the table below:

Evaluation	Explanation of evaluation
Excellent	The study programme complies with the prescribed requirements.
Good	Whilst assessing the compliance of the study programme with the prescribed requirements, minor deficiencies have been detected.
Average	Whilst assessing the compliance of the study programme with the prescribed requirements, shortcomings and deficiencies have been identified, but they can be eliminated within the accreditation term of the study field.

Poor	Whilst assessing the compliance of the study programme with the prescribed requirements, significant deficiencies have been detected, and the shortcomings and deficiencies identified in the implementation of the study programme cannot be eliminated within the two-year accreditation term of the study field.
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ANNEX 4 – Organisation of online visits for study fields assessment

- 4.1. The purpose of an online visit is to ensure a full-fledged process of assessment of the study field 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).
- 4.2. Assessment visits can be organized online in two ways. Both of them can be used in the same procedure:
 - 4.2.1. 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 experts shall participate in the assessment visit at a distance, except for the head of the team or, in exceptional cases, the expert who is chairing the meetings.
 - 4.2.2. 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.
- 4.3. 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).
- 4.4. 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 Article 6.4 of Section II of this Methodology, have provided technical support and solutions for the online visit.
- 4.5. 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 4, Section 4.8.

- 4.6. 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.
- 4.7. 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.
- 4.8. 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:
 - 4.8.1. A computer or other device able to operate an online platform
 - 4.8.2. Screen / projector
 - 4.8.3. Sound equipment according to the area of the room to ensure the audibility
 - 4.8.4. Stable internet connection, according to the requirements of the online platform
 - 4.8.5. Microphone(s)
- 4.9. 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.
- 4.10. 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.
- 4.11. 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.
- 4.12. 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.

4.13. 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.