



Quality Agency for
Higher Education

SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT FOR THE FOCUSED REVIEW

September 2024

CONTENTS

1. ABBREVIATIONS	3
2. INTRODUCTION	4
3. DEVELOPMENT OF THE SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT/ CONTEXT OF THE REVIEW	4
4. HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE AGENCY	6
5. NEW DEVELOPMENTS SINCE THE FULL REVIEW	8
6. ACTIVITIES OF THE AGENCY	9
7. ESG PART 2	11
7.1. ESG 2.1 (CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE)	11
7.2. ESG 2.4 (PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS)	24
7.3. ESG 2.6 (REPORTING)	25
8. ESG PART 3	27
8.1. ESG 3.6 (INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT)	27
9. KEY CHALLENGES AND SWOT ANALYSIS	31
10. ANNEXES	34

1. ABBREVIATIONS

AIC – Academic Information Centre

AIKA – Quality Agency for Higher Education (abbreviation in Latvian)

ECTS – European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

ENQA – European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

EQAR – European Quality Assurance Register

EQAR RC – Register Committee of the European Quality Assurance Register

EQF – European Qualifications Framework

ESG – Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

HEI – Higher Education Institution

LQF – Latvian Qualifications Framework

SAR – Self-Assessment Report

SWOT – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

ToR – Terms of Reference

2. INTRODUCTION

This is the self-assessment report (SAR) produced for the purpose of AIC's focused review for the renewal of registration on the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).

The quality assurance function is performed by a separate structural unit of the Academic Information Centre – the Quality Agency for Higher Education (Agency; AIKA – the acronym in Latvian) but, as the legal entity applying for EQAR membership is the Academic Information Centre (AIC), both the abbreviations AIC and Agency are used further in the text and refer to the quality assurance function only, if not stated otherwise.

SAR has been prepared for the focused review of AIC against the ESG standards 2.1, 2.4, 2.6 and 3.6.

Since the full review in 2023, there have not been any changes affecting compliance with other standards. The new developments that have taken place since 2023 and are planned to take place in the future are described in section 5. "New developments since the full review".

3. DEVELOPMENT OF THE SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT/ CONTEXT OF THE REVIEW

The scope of this review was defined based on the EQAR Register Committee (EQAR RC) decision from 12.12.2023. that concluded on AIC's partial compliance with the ESG standards 2.1, 2.4, 2.6 and 3.6 and was unable to conclude that AIC complies substantially with the ESG as a whole. Consequently, the EQAR RC required a focused review of the standards above for the EQAR RC to conclude on AIC's overall compliance with the ESG.

According to the Terms of Reference (ToR), the scope of this review is compliance with these ESG standards of all AIC's activities that are within the scope of the ESG. In addition, as stated in the ToR, the review should also confirm whether the other findings (regarding those standards not covered in depth now) of the full review report of 28 June 2023 remain valid.

The particular issues of concern by the EQAR RC under each of these standards are (as per the EQAR RC decision):

- ESG 2.1 (Consideration of internal quality assurance) – the EQAR RC concluded that even when considering that different procedures could be considered as a package, there are

missing elements with regards to standards 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and 1.8 in the QA model of the agency.

- ESG 2.4 (Peer review experts) – The EQAR RC however noted that students are at the time not included in this procedure [inclusion of licenced study programme on the accreditation of study field], as the new system is not implemented yet. The Register Committee underlined the expectation of the standard, that students should be involved in all QA processes.
- ESG 2.6 (Reporting) – Both from the panel’s report and the AIC website, it was clear that only the duration of accreditation terms is published, while the full decisions are not published together with the reports.
- ESG 3.6 (Internal quality assurance and professional conduct) – The EQAR RC however noted AIC’s internal quality assurance system faces a number of issues and limitations: no major changes/ improvements can take place without government regulation or legal change; the informal nature of the feedback limits the ability of the agency to measure objectively “the outputs of the system”; no sufficient evidence that experts are getting acquainted with additional requirements or obligations set by Study Quality Commission after the accreditation procedure. The Register Committee therefore finds that AIC has yet to consolidate its internal quality assurance system, including internal and external feedback mechanisms for continuous improvement.

For all above-mentioned standards, the respective section in the SAR includes the reasoning and recommendations by the ENQA review panel, the justification and recommendations by the EQAR RC and the subsequent actions taken by AIC.

The SAR was prepared by the management team of the Agency, consisting of the Head of the Agency Jolanta Silka, the Head of Quality Assessment Unit Ilva Grigorjeva and the Head of Development and International Cooperation Unit Asnate Upmace.

Findings of the EQAR RC and the subsequent actions to be taken were discussed during the internal weekly update meetings of the Agency staff, therefore ensuring that all staff members have contributed to the self-assessment process that led to the SAR.

Draft SAR was discussed during internal staff meetings and at the meeting of the Higher Education Quality Assurance Council in August 2024. The final version of the SAR was approved by the Chairperson of the AIC Board.

In addition to evidence for the partially compliant standards, the SAR includes a description of key challenges and an up-to-date SWOT analysis. The development of the SAR collided with the final stages of Agency’s strategy development for the period 2024 – 2028, therefore these descriptions are to a large extent based on the strategy and also the strategy reflects on the findings learned during the Agency’s last external review and the related decisions.

4. HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE AGENCY

In this section, a brief overview of the higher education system, recent changes in the higher education landscape and up-to-date statistics from 2024 have been presented. The higher education system in Latvia has been explained in detail in the SAR produced for the AIC's full review on p. 7 – 11 (data as of November 2022)¹.

The higher education system of Latvia consists of short-cycle professional education (LQF5/EQF5), academic bachelor's studies or professional bachelor's studies (first cycle; LQF6/EQF6), academic master's studies or professional master's studies or professional higher education, e.g. medical study programmes (second cycle; LQF7/EQF7) and doctoral studies or professional higher education (residency in medicine) (LQF8/EQF8) and is fully aligned with the Latvian Qualifications Framework (LQF) and subsequently with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). LQF is fully referenced to the EQF and presented in the EC EQF AG in 2011 and 2019. The development and further implementation of each study programme has to take place according to the LQF, including the allocation to a certain LQF level formulation of learning outcomes. This is required by the national legal framework and also assessed during the programme-level external quality assessments.

All higher education on levels LQF5 to LQF8 implemented by any higher education institution registered in Latvia is subject to external quality assurance procedures by AIC.

Higher education is offered by private and state higher education institutions that include also colleges – institutions eligible to offer only LQF5/EQF5 higher education. As of 1 September 2024, higher education is offered by 48 higher education institutions, including two branches of foreign higher education institutions. The overall student population in 2023 was 74 017 with 57 865 students studying in state and 16 152 students in private higher education institutions. The total number of mobile (international) students in 2023 was 10 425 (14% of the total) (all data as of 13.02.2024).

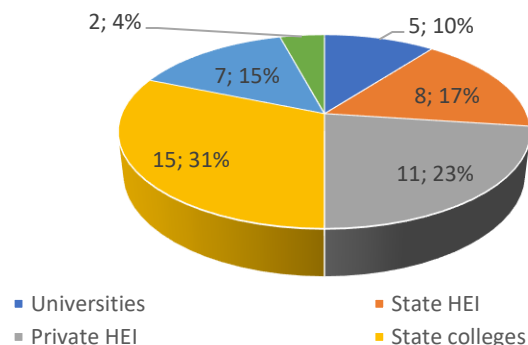


Image 1 Higher Education Institutions in Latvia (as of 1st September 2024)

¹ Self-assessment Report for the ENQA Agency Review, November 2022 https://www.aika.lv/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/AIC_SER_November_2022_ENQA-comments_FINAL_Dec.pdf

Since 2022 major activities of consolidation have taken place. In 2022 Latvian Maritime Academy was reorganised as part of the Riga Technical University. In 2024, the consolidation of Liepāja University into Riga Technical University and Latvian Academy of Sport Education into Riga Stradiņš University took place. Several colleges were also reorganised – either as vocational education providers or integral parts of other higher education institutions.

The amendments to the Law on Higher Education Institutions in 2021 also set the strategic specialisation of higher education institutions and clearly define the types of HEI based on certain quantitative criteria – university of science, university of arts and culture, university of applied sciences and higher education institution of applied sciences. The introduction of these types indicates a gradual preparation for cyclical institutional accreditation. The amendments also foresee a unified state standard for all levels of higher education that would replace the existing separate standards for academic and professional higher education. This standard is currently under development and the Agency has an integral role in this process. The existing standard for professional higher education is already a result of the merger and revision of the former separate standards for different levels of professional higher education.

Following the 2022 amendments to the Law on Higher Education Institutions, after 31 December 2024, the workload in all study programmes in Latvia will be expressed in ECTS only where one ECTS will be equivalent to 25 – 30 study hours.

The higher education in Latvia is regulated by the following laws:

- [Education law](#) (1998) – the main law that includes definitions for all types and levels of education and determine general principles and sets general principles for institutions.
- [Vocational Education Law](#) (1999) – the purpose of the law is to ensure the implementation of the state professional education policy, as well as the operation, management and development of the professional education system.
- [Law on Higher Education Institutions](#) (1995) – applies to all HEIs in Latvia, regulates the legal basis of the HEIs, determines and protects the autonomy of HEIs.
- [Law on Scientific Activity](#) (2005) – determines the unity of science and higher education, the rights of scientists, responsibility, independence and academic freedom, professional and social guarantees, the competence and obligations of state institutions in ensuring scientific activity.

Secondly, higher education in Latvia is regulated by several Cabinet regulations:

- [Regulation on the classification of education in Latvia](#) (2017; in Latvian only) – determines the classification of education in Latvia, including descriptions of knowledge, skills and competences corresponding to the levels of the LQF, which is also used to formulate degrees for academic study programmes.
- [Regulation on groups of science branches, scientific branches and sub-branches](#) (2022; in Latvian only) – classifies science branches and is also used to formulate doctorate degrees.

- [Regulation on the national standard of academic education](#) (2014; in Latvian only) – determines the general principles for academic bachelor and master study programmes, as well as main principles for learning and grading in academic study programmes.
- [Regulation on the national standard of professional education](#) (2023; in Latvian only) – determines the general principles for professional higher education study programmes (short-cycle, bachelor and master), as well as main principles for learning and grading in professional study programmes.
- [Procedure and criteria for awarding of doctorate degree](#) (2005; in Latvian only) – determines the general principles for doctoral theses, promotion council, evaluation of the doctoral thesis, defence of the doctoral thesis and awarding of the doctoral degree.

5. NEW DEVELOPMENTS SINCE THE FULL REVIEW

In 2023 the previous strategic period was concluded and the process of assessing the implementation of the 2017 – 2023 strategy² and drafting the new strategy started.

The new 2024 – 2028 strategy was approved by Higher Education Quality Assurance Council and defines five strategic directions:

- PUBLIC AWARENESS – promote the visibility of the Agency in Latvia by informing the public about its achievements and current events related to quality assurance;
- ENSURING QUALITY – promote continuous improvement of the quality of higher education and development by implementing quality assurance procedures and organizing informative events for representatives in the field of higher education;
- POLICY MAKING – to be more actively involved in the national higher education/quality assurance policy-making processes, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science and other involved parties;
- PERFORMANCE OF THE AGENCY – to ensure the performance of the Agency on a level appropriate to the implementation of its mission, by increasing the efficiency of internal processes;
- INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION – to develop international cooperation that would promote the quality of Latvian higher education, the recognition of the Agency and the exchange of experience in the European higher education area.

The strategy is published on the Agency’s website³.

² Report on the implementation of the 2017-2023 strategic objectives is available at: <https://www.aika.lv/en/aika-about/strategy/> (currently in Latvian only)

³ Quality Agency’s for Higher Education directions for strategic development 2024. – 2028 are available at: <https://www.aika.lv/en/aika-about/strategy/> (currently in Latvian only)

In parallel with the development of the new strategy, the Agency reflected on the results of the external review coordinated by ENQA in 2022 – 2023, in particular, on the recommendations to better demonstrate and intensify the Agency’s involvement in policy discussions, improve the available public information on Agency’s work and assessment procedures and simplify/revise the overall framework for external quality assurance, first on operational and then conceptual level. Part of the review panel’s findings collided with the activities that the Agency had already started and some other findings served as a catalyst for certain changes that were not implemented at the moment of the review.

The Agency is currently in the process of developing a model for external quality assurance that would include cyclical institutional assessment and accreditation and certain elements of study programme licensing/change assessment procedure but eliminate other types of assessments. This model will be gradually implemented starting from 2025 and no methodological documents have been developed at this point.

The new model for external quality assurance foresees the elimination of the “Inclusion of a licensed study programme on the accreditation form of study field” (starting from January 2025, as reported to EQAR earlier) and “Assessment/accreditation of study fields” as well as significant revision or partial elimination of “Licensing of study programme” and “Assessment of feasibility on changes in study fields (i.e. study programmes)”.

As the decision by the EQAR RC required immediate action, the decision to remove “Inclusion of a licensed study programme on the accreditation form of study field” from September 2024 was taken. This is further referenced in chapters 7.1 and 7.2.

6. ACTIVITIES OF THE AGENCY

At the time of the full review against the ESG in 2022, the agency’s portfolio included 6 assessment procedures:

- accreditation of HEI,
- accreditation and assessment of study field,
- licensing of study programme,
- assessment of feasibility on changes in study fields (i.e. study programmes),
- inclusion of a licensed study programme on the accreditation form of study field,
- accreditation of study programmes abroad.

Following the external review and EQAR RC decision from 12.12.2023, the “assessment of feasibility on changes in study fields (i.e. study programmes)” was recognised to be outside the scope of the ESG. It was also not considered in EQAR RC’s assessment of AIC’s compliance with the ESG.

As indicated in the previous section, the “Inclusion of a licensed study programme on the accreditation form of study field” was removed from the agency’s portfolio of activities. The

related amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 793 “Regulations Regarding Opening and Accreditation of Study Fields” (subpoints 1.1., 1.2 and 1.5) are in force as of 1st September 2024⁴.

Currently, the agency’s portfolio consists of the four activities that are within the scope of the ESG:

- accreditation of HEI,
- accreditation and assessment of study field,
- licensing of study programme,
- accreditation of study programmes abroad.

While the “Accreditation of HEI” is still active, there is only one assessment of this type foreseen within the current legal arrangements and guidelines as an extraordinary institutional accreditation of one institution has been initiated this year. However, up to date all HEIs in Latvia are accredited for an indefinite term.

In the meantime, the Agency is preparing for the transition to cyclical institutional assessment and accreditation that will be gradually prepared for implementation starting from 2025. At the time of this review, no methodologies or guidelines have been developed. They will be submitted to EQAR later as a part of the substantive change report.

The “accreditation of study programmes abroad” has been temporarily discontinued due to the heavy workload at the Agency in years 2022 – 2024 as these were forecasted as the years with the largest number of national assessment procedures. In addition, most applications for this assessment are received from higher education institutions located in Ukraine and organisation of site visits in Ukraine has been suspended for the time being.

An overview of all currently active assessments is available in Table 1.

Table 1 Assessments performed by the Agency

Type of assessment	Organization	Experts	Decision-making body	Comments
Licensing of study programmes	Agency	3 experts (academician, student, labour market)	Study Quality Commission	Mandatory procedure based on ESG
Accreditation and assessment of study field	Agency/ another EQAR registered agency/ agency + another EQAR	At least 5 experts (academician, student, labour market, in all cases at least 2 foreign experts)	Study Quality Commission	Mandatory procedure based on ESG

⁴ Cabinet Regulations No.793 “Regulations Regarding Opening and Accreditation of Study Fields”, paragraph 2.5. is removed, <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/303956-studiju-virzientu-atversanas-un-akreditacijas-noteikumi> (in Latvian, as the latest amendments have not been translated yet).

	registered agency			
Accreditation of HEI	Agency	7 experts (academician, student, labour market, in all cases at least 2 foreign experts)	Council of Higher Education Due to the legislative changes from 2025 Study Quality Commission	Mandatory procedure only for newly established HEI, based on ESG. At the moment, all HEIs in Latvia are accredited for indefinite period, therefore this procedure is not applicable
Accreditation of study programmes abroad	Agency	At least 4 experts (academician, student, labour market)	Accreditation Commission for foreign study programmes	Procedure for foreign HEIs operating abroad, based on ESG

7. ESG PART 2

7.1. ESG 2.1 (CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE)

<p>Findings by the review panel</p> <p>The panel is confident that the agency’s main procedures Institutional accreditation, Licencing of new study programmes and Assessment and accreditation of study fields consider the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes in higher education institutions as described in Part 1 of the ESG sufficiently.</p> <p>The procedure for Inclusion of a licensed study programme on the accreditation form of a study field does not cover all standards. However, as this process is implemented within two years after the licensing process, the panel considers it sufficient to check only the ESG which are mostly affected by the implementation of the programme, taking into account the above-mentioned recommendations.</p>
<p>Recommendations by the review panel</p> <p>1. The panel urges the agency to define an assessment framework in order to ensure that the Assessment of feasibility on changes in study fields considers all relevant standards of ESG Part 1 in order to guarantee that the study field stays ESG-compliant upon implementation of the proposed changes.</p>

2. The panel recommends to mention the requirement of a public quality assurance policy (ESG 1.1) explicitly in the Inclusion of a licensed study programme on the accreditation form of a study field and the Accreditation of foreign study programmes frameworks, the national qualification framework (ESG 1.2) in each assessment framework, focus more on assessment policies in all assessment frameworks, including a focus on student-centred assessment (ESG 1.3), and to add reference to public information (ESG 1.8) in the Inclusion of a licensed study programme on the accreditation form of a study field framework.

Decision by the EQAR Register Committee

10. The Register Committee follows the panel’s analysis regarding the requirement of a public quality assurance policy (ESG 1.1), explicitly in the Inclusion of a licensed study programme on the accreditation form of a study field and the Accreditation of foreign study programmes frameworks. The Register Committee noted that AIC has yet to fully take up the national qualification framework (ESG 1.2) in each assessment framework, focusing more on assessment policies in all assessment frameworks, including a focus on student-centred assessment (ESG 1.3), and adding reference to public information (ESG 1.8) in the Inclusion of a licensed study programme on the accreditation form of a study field framework.

11. After consideration of the additional representation by AIC regarding the points addressed in the panel review report and the Register Committee decisions, the Register Committee concluded that even when considering that different procedures could be considered as a package, there are missing elements with regards to standards 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and 1.8 in the QA model of the agency.

Progress/new developments since the review

Revision of the guidelines and methodologies is a regular process performed annually. The revision is based on external and internal feedback or caused by external circumstances (e.g. COVID pandemics or changes to national legislation). More information on the reasons and process for revising the guidelines and methodologies is available in the original SAR for AIC’s full review in 2023 (p.43, pp. 55 – 57).

Also, in order to maintain consistency of the reviews performed at the same period, the changes result in improved training/consultations for the higher education institutions.

Following the ENQA review and EQAR’s decision, in spring 2024 AIC carefully reconsidered the standards it uses, by analysing the panel’s report and EQAR’s decision and identifying particular standards to be improved. This process also collided with certain changes to the external legal framework that had to be incorporated into all AIC methodologies.

AIC believes that all the elements mentioned by the review panel were already part of the methodology at the time of the full review in 2022 but they have now been made more explicit in the amended versions (amendments approved on 2th September, 2024).

Recommendation No.1 by the review panel was not addressed as in its decision the EQAR Register Committee recognised that “Assessment of feasibility on changes in study fields” is outside the scope of the ESG.

Recommendation No.2 has been addressed for all assessment frameworks, as demonstrated below (in Table 2), except for the “Inclusion of a licensed study programme on the

accreditation form of a study field” which has been eliminated from the AIC portfolio. The only framework where no amendments were made is for the “Accreditation of HEI”. First of all, this is an institutional assessment and AIC believes that the requirements of ESG 1.2 and 1.3 are already covered sufficiently and in general, should be covered in more detail by assessments on the programme (study field) level. Secondly, as mentioned earlier in the SAR, there is only one institution that is currently undergoing extraordinary accreditation of HEI and no other institutions are expected to undergo this procedure before it ceases to exist.

Thus, Table 2 demonstrates changes made in the procedures based on EQAR RC decision covering only those standards:

- ESG 1.1. for the accreditation of foreign study programmes abroad frameworks
- ESG 1.2. for the accreditation and assessment of study field, licensing of study programme, and accreditation of study programmes abroad.
- ESG 1.3. for the accreditation and assessment of study field, licensing of study programme, and accreditation of study programmes abroad.
- ESG 1.8. not included in the Table 2 as inclusion is excluded from the Agency portfolio.

All additions/revisions have been highlighted in bold.

Table 2 Overview on the amendments to the assessment guidelines

Standard	Assessment procedure	Guidelines BEFORE amendments	Guidelines AFTER amendments
ESG 1.1.	Accreditation of study programmes abroad	<p>Methodological description:</p> <p>1. Strategy, aims and programme management</p> <p><i>System for internal monitoring, development and review of study programme, including the system for receiving and using the feedback of stakeholders, the use of key-performance indicators (KPI). In the Form 2 examples of KPI's are presented, but please present your own KPI or choose the most appropriate ones that reflects the progress and activities of your higher education institution.</i></p> <p>Guidelines for HEI:</p> <p>1. Strategy, aims and programme management. 1.7. <i>System for internal monitoring, development and review of study programme, including the system for receiving and using the feedback of stakeholders, the use of key-performance indicators (KPI).</i></p> <p>Guidelines for experts:</p>	<p>Methodological description:</p> <p>1. Strategy, aims and programme management</p> <p><i>System for internal monitoring, development and review of study programme, including the system for receiving and using the feedback of stakeholders, the use of key-performance indicators (KPI). In the Form 2 examples of KPI's are presented, but please present your own KPI or choose the most appropriate ones that reflects the progress and activities of your higher education institution. Please also provide a link to institutional quality policy and other publicly available elements of the institutional internal quality assurance system.</i></p> <p>Guidelines for HEI:</p> <p>1. Strategy, aims and programme management. 1.7. <i>System for internal monitoring, development and review of study programme, including the system for receiving and using the feedback of stakeholders, the use of key-performance indicators (KPI). An institutional quality policy is developed in collaboration with stakeholders and is publicly available.</i></p> <p>Guidelines for experts:</p>

		<p>4. Strategy, aims and programme management.</p> <p><i>Under this section please assess the quality, effectiveness and sustainability of the following: System for internal monitoring, development and review of study programme, including the system for receiving and using the feedback of stakeholders, the use of key-performance indicators (KPI).</i></p>	<p>4. Strategy, aims and programme management.</p> <p><i>Under this section please assess the quality, effectiveness and sustainability of the following: System for internal monitoring, development and review of study programme, including the system for receiving and using the feedback of stakeholders, the use of key-performance indicators (KPI). An institutional quality policy is developed in collaboration with stakeholders and is publicly available.</i></p>
ESG 1.2	Licensing of study programme	<p>Guidelines for HEI:</p> <p>I. Compliance of the Study Programme with the Study Field</p> <p><i>1.1 The justification of the creation of the study programme and the compliance with the strategy and the study field of the higher education institution/ college. Specify the aims, objectives, and the intended learning outcomes of the study programme and assess their attainability and correlation.</i></p> <p>III. Study Content and the Mechanism for the Implementation of the Study Programme</p> <p>3.1. Description of the content of the study programme by analysing and assessing the study courses/ modules of the study programme, their relevance, correlation, and compliance with the sectoral trends and/or the</p>	<p>Guidelines for HEI:</p> <p>I. Compliance of the Study Programme with the Study Field</p> <p><i>1.1 The justification of the creation of the study programme and the compliance with the strategy and the study field of the higher education institution/ college. Specify the aims, objectives, and the intended learning outcomes of the study programme in compliance with the respective LQF level and assess their attainability and correlation.</i></p> <p>III. Study Content and the Mechanism for the Implementation of the Study Programme</p> <p>3.1. Description of the content of the study programme by analysing and assessing the study courses/ modules of the study programme, their relevance, correlation, and compliance with the sectoral trends and/or the</p>

		<p>trends in science, as well as the provisions of regulatory enactments.</p> <p>Guidelines for experts: I. Compliance of the Study Programme with the Study Field <i>1. The development of the study programme is well-founded, and it complies with the strategy of the higher education institution/ college. The aim, objectives, and the intended learning outcomes are attainable and correlated. External experts, the teaching staff, students, employers, etc. were involved in the development of the study programme.</i></p> <p>III. Study Content and the Mechanism for the Implementation of the Study Programme <i>1. The study content is relevant and in line with the latest sectoral trends and/or the trends in science, and it complies with the provisions of the relevant regulatory enactments. The contents of the study courses are harmonised and allows achieving the learning outcomes of study courses and the study programme.</i></p>	<p>trends in science, as well as compliance with the requirements of the respective LQF/EQF level, state standard, profession standard or professional qualification requirements</p> <p>Guidelines for experts: I. Compliance of the Study Programme with the Study Field <i>1. The development of the study programme is well-founded, and it complies with the strategy of the higher education institution/ college. The aim, objectives, and the intended learning outcomes are attainable, correlated and compliant with the respective LQF/EQF level. External experts, the teaching staff, students, employers, etc. were involved in the development of the study programme.</i></p> <p>III. Study Content and the Mechanism for the Implementation of the Study Programme <i>1. The study content is relevant and in line with the latest sectoral trends and/or the trends in science, and it complies with the requirements of the respective LQF/EQF level, state standard, profession standard and professional qualification requirements. The contents of the study courses are harmonised and allows achieving the learning outcomes of study courses and the study programme.</i></p>
--	--	---	--

	<p>Assessment and accreditation of a study field</p>	<p>Guidelines for HEI: III. DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME “...”</p> <p>3.1. Indicators describing the Study Programme 3.1.2. <i>Analysis and assessment of the study programme compliance with the study field. Analysis of the interrelation between the code of the study programme, the degree, professional qualification/professional qualification requirements or the degree and professional qualification to be acquired, the aims, objectives, learning outcomes, and the admission requirements. Description of the duration and scope of the implementation of the study programme (including different options of the study programme implementation) and evaluation of its usefulness.</i></p> <p>3.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof, 3.2.1. <i>Analysis of the content of the study programme. Assessment of the interrelation between the information included in the study courses/ modules, the intended learning outcomes, the set aims and other indicators with the aims of the study course/ module and the aims and intended outcomes of the study programme. Assessment of the relevance of the</i></p>	<p>Guidelines for HEI: III. DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME “...”</p> <p>3.1. Indicators describing the Study Programme 3.1.2 <i>Analysis and assessment of the study programme compliance with the study field. Analysis of the interrelation between the code of the study programme, the degree, professional qualification/professional qualification requirements or the degree and professional qualification to be acquired, the aims, objectives, learning outcomes, which are compliant with the respective LQF/EQF level, and the admission requirements. Description of the duration and scope of the implementation of the study programme (including different options of the study programme implementation) and evaluation of its usefulness.</i></p> <p>3.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof, 3.2.1. <i>Analysis of the content of the study programme. Assessment of the interrelation between the information included in the study courses/ modules, the intended learning outcomes, the set aims and other indicators with the aims of the study course/ module and the aims and intended outcomes of the study programme in compliance with the respective</i></p>
--	--	--	--

		<p><i>content of the study courses/ modules and compliance with the needs of the relevant industry, labour market and with the trends in science on how and whether the content of the study courses/ modules is updated in line with the development trends of the relevant industry, labour market, and science.</i></p> <p>Guidelines for experts: II. ASSESSMENT OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME “...” 2.1. Indicators describing the Study Programme 2.1.2. <i>The title, code, degree to be obtained, professional qualification or degree and professional qualification of the study programme, aims, objectives, learning outcomes and admission requirements are interrelated. The duration and scope of the study programme implementation (including different study programme implementation options), as well as the implementation language, are reasonable and justified.</i></p>	<p><i>LQF/EQF level, state standard, profession standard and professional qualification requirements.</i> <i>Assessment of the relevance of the content of the study courses/ modules and compliance with the needs of the relevant industry, labour market and with the trends in science on how and whether the content of the study courses/ modules is updated in line with the development trends of the relevant industry, labour market, and science.</i></p> <p>Guidelines for experts: II. ASSESSMENT OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME “...” 2.1. Indicators describing the Study Programme 2.1.2. <i>The title, code, degree to be obtained, professional qualification or degree and professional qualification of the study programme, aims, objectives, learning outcomes, which are compliant with the respective LQF/EQF level, and admission requirements are interrelated. The duration and scope of the study programme implementation (including different study programme implementation options), as well as the implementation language, are reasonable and justified.</i></p>
--	--	--	--

		<p>2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof</p> <p><i>2.2.1 Indicators Describing the Study Programme The content of the study programme is topical, the content of the study courses / modules is interconnected and complementary, corresponds to the objectives of the programme and ensures the achievement of learning outcomes, as well as meets the needs of the industry, labor market and scientific trends. Complies with national regulations (state education standard, professional (occupational) standard or professional qualification requirements (if applicable)).</i></p>	<p>2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof</p> <p><i>2.2.1 Indicators Describing the Study Programme The content of the study programme is topical, the content of the study courses / modules is interconnected and complementary, corresponds to the objectives of the programme and ensures the achievement of learning outcomes, as well as meets the needs of the industry, labor market and scientific trends. Complies with the respective LQF/EQF level, state education standard, profession (occupational) standard or professional qualification requirements (if applicable)).</i></p>
	Accreditation of study programmes abroad	<p>Guidelines for HEI</p> <p><i>2. Structure and content of the programme.</i> No specific reference to the national qualifications framework</p> <p>Guidelines for experts</p> <p><i>5. Structure and content of the programme</i> No specific reference to the national qualifications framework</p>	<p>Guidelines for HEI</p> <p>2. Structure and content of the programme. 2.3. Compliance of the programme with the national qualifications framework (where such framework is developed)</p> <p>Guidelines for experts</p> <p>5. Structure and content of the programme - Compliance of the programme with the national qualifications framework (if applicable)</p>
ESG 1.3	Licensing of study programme	<p>Guidelines for HEI</p> <p>III. Study Content and the Mechanism for the Implementation of the Study Programme</p>	<p>Guidelines for HEI</p> <p>III. Study Content and the Mechanism for the Implementation of the Study Programme</p>

		<p>3.2. Assessment of the mechanism for the implementation (including the mechanism for the evaluation) of the study programme by including an analysis as to what extent they ensure the achievement of the learning outcomes. Provide an explanation as to what extent the principles of student-centred learning are taken into consideration whilst implementing the study process by including information on the organisation of the study process.</p> <p>3.3. Description and analysis of the provision of traineeships for students by <u>specifying the support provided for the students</u>. Information on the aims of students' traineeship and its role in achieving the general aims of the study programme. Principles for selecting cooperation institutions and their contribution to achieving the general aims of the study programme.</p> <p>3.4. Assessment as to what extent the quality assurance system in place at the higher education institution/ college and its relevant principles are complied with whilst implementing the study programme by giving specific examples. <u>Specify to what extent the standards set forth in Part 1 of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) have been met</u>. In case of a joint study programme, provide the description and assessment of the joint quality assurance system.</p>	<p>3.2. Assessment of the mechanism for the implementation (including the mechanism for the evaluation) of the study programme by including an analysis as to what extent they ensure the achievement of the learning outcomes. Provide an explanation as to what extent the principles of student-centred teaching and learning, including the assessment, are taken into consideration whilst implementing the study process by including information on the organisation of the study process.</p> <p>3.3 no changes, as elements of student-centred approach have already been explicitly included</p> <p>3.4 no changes, as elements of student-centred approach have already been explicitly included</p>
--	--	---	--

		<p>Guidelines for experts:</p> <p>III. Study Content and the Mechanism for the Implementation of the Study Programme</p> <p><i>2. The mechanism for the implementation of the study programme allows achieving the learning outcomes, <u>including the principles of student-centred learning</u>. The requirements for the organisation of traineeships for the students (if applicable) and <u>the support provided for the students</u> have been determined and integrated in the content of the study programme.</i></p> <p><i>3. There is a quality assurance system in place at the higher education institution/ college, the principles of which are complied with also in the study programme to be licensed. The study programme meets the standards set forth in <u>Part 1 of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)</u></i></p>	<p>Guidelines for experts:</p> <p>III. Study Content and the Mechanism for the Implementation of the Study Programme</p> <p><i>2. The mechanism for the implementation of the study programme allows achieving the learning outcomes, including the principles of student-centred teaching, learning and assessment. The requirements for the organisation of traineeships for the students (if applicable) and <u>the support provided for the students</u> have been determined and integrated in the content of the study programme.</i></p> <p>3. no changes, as elements of student-centred approach have already been explicitly included</p>
	Assessment and accreditation of a study field	<p>Guidelines for HEI</p> <p>III. DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME</p> <p>"..." 3.2. The content of studies and implementation thereof,</p> <p><u>3.2.3. Assessment of the study programme including the study course/ module implementation methods by indicating what the methods are, and how they contribute to the achievement of the learning outcomes of the study courses and the aims of the study</u></p>	<p>Guidelines for HEI</p> <p>III. DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME</p> <p>"..." 3.2. The content of studies and implementation thereof,</p> <p><i>3.2.3. Assessment of the study programme including the study course/ module implementation methods by indicating what the methods are, and how they contribute to the achievement of the learning outcomes of the study courses and the aims of the study</i></p>

		<p><u>programme. In the case of a joint study programme, or in case the study programme is implemented in a foreign language or in the form of distance learning, describe in detail the methods used to deliver such a study programme. Provide an explanation of how the student-centred principles are taken into account in the implementation of the study process</u></p> <p><i>3.2.4. If the study programme envisages an internship, describe the <u>internship opportunities offered to students, provision and work organization, including whether the higher education institution/ college helps students to find an internship place.</u> If the study programme is implemented in a foreign language, provide information on how internship opportunities are provided in a foreign language, including for foreign students. To provide analysis and evaluation of the connection of the tasks set for students during the internship included in the study programme with the learning outcomes of the study programme (if applicable).</i></p> <p>Guidelines for experts: II. ASSESSMENT OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME “...” 2.2 The content of studies and implementation thereof 2.2.3. <i>The study implementation methods contribute to the achievement of the aims and</i></p>	<p><i>programme. In the case of a joint study programme, or in case the study programme is implemented in a foreign language or in the form of distance learning, describe in detail the methods used to deliver such a study programme. Provide an explanation of how the student-centred teaching, learning and assessment principles are taken into account in the implementation of the study process</i></p> <p>3.2.4. no changes, as elements of student-centred approach have already been explicitly included</p> <p>Guidelines for experts: II. ASSESSMENT OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME “...” 2.2 The content of studies and implementation thereof 2.2.3. <i>The study implementation methods contribute to the achievement of the aims and</i></p>
--	--	---	---

		<p><i>learning outcomes of the study courses and the study programme. Student-centred learning and teaching principles are considered.</i></p> <p><i>2.2.4. If an internship is foreseen during the study programme, <u>the opportunities and provision of internship offered to students</u>, as well as the organization of work are effective. The tasks of the internship are related to the learning outcomes achievable. The internship complies with the requirements of regulatory enactments.</i></p>	<p><i>learning outcomes of the study courses and the study programme. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment principles are considered.</i></p> <p>3.2.4. no changes, as elements of student-centred approach have already been explicitly included</p>
	Accreditation of study programmes abroad	<p>Guidelines for HEI:</p> <p><i>4. Techniques and methods of educational activity</i></p> <p><i>4.2. The process of developing and the principles of applying student assessment methods</i></p> <p><i>4.4. Implementation of student-centred approach in the learning and teaching process</i></p> <p>Guidelines for experts:</p> <p><i>6. Techniques and methods of educational activity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Process for development and principles for application of student evaluation methods</i> - <i>Implementation of student-centred approach in the learning and teaching process</i> 	<p>Guidelines for HEI:</p> <p><i>4. Techniques and methods of educational activity</i></p> <p><i>4.2. The process of developing and the principles of applying student assessment methods</i></p> <p><i>4.4. Implementation of student-centred approach in the learning and teaching process, including assessment</i></p> <p>Guidelines for experts:</p> <p><i>7. Techniques and methods of educational activity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Process for development and principles for application of student evaluation methods</i> - <i>Implementation of student-centred approach in the learning and teaching process, including assessment.</i>

7.2. ESG 2.4 (PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS)

<p>Findings by the review panel</p> <p>Taking into account that all major review processes are compliant with the standard, while also taking into account that the expert-based review processes for the Inclusion of a licensed study programme on the accreditation form of a study field and the Assessment of feasibility on changes in a study fields do not include a student-member, and therefore only partially comply with this ESG standard.</p>
<p>Recommendations by the review panel</p> <p>5. The panel urges the agency to include student-members in all procedures involving external experts, in particular in the procedures for Inclusion of a licensed study programme in the accreditation form of study field and the Assessment of feasibility on changes in study field.</p>
<p>Decision by the EQAR Register Committee</p> <p>17. The Register Committee stressed in its Substantive Change Report Decision of 2021-10-22 that the group of experts in the inclusion of licenced study programme on the accreditation of study field procedure, does not include a student. While the Committee understands that this procedure was created as a temporary and short-term solution in order to close possible gaps in the accreditation periods of programmes (until the next reaccreditation of the corresponding study field), the Committee could not follow the agency’s decision of not involving students, as per the requirement of the standard 2.4.</p> <p>18. The Register Committee further noted from the review panel’s report that the agency has not resolved this issue and sustained its position that two experts should be sufficient in this procedure.</p> <p>19. Considering AIC’s statement to the report that, the Register Committee understood that AIC is applying the national framework. The Committee however underlined that it is AIC’s responsibility to ensure ESG compliance with all standards and that it has taken measures to ensure the involvement of students in all procedures.</p> <p>20. The Register Committee underlines the panel’s recommendation to include student-members in all procedures involving external experts, in particular in the procedures for Inclusion of a licensed study programme in the accreditation form of study field.</p> <p>21. In its additional representation, AIC explained that the inclusion of licenced study programme on the accreditation of study field procedure is not a stand-alone procedure, but a temporary measure while the new quality assurance system from 2025 will include students in all procedures. The Register Committee however noted that students are at the time not included in this procedure, as the new system is not implemented yet. The Register Committee underlined the expectation of the standard, that students should be involved in all QA processes.</p>
<p>Progress/new developments since the review</p>

Following the decision by the EQAR Register Committee, it was agreed to remove the “Inclusion of a licensed study programme in the accreditation form of study field” from the AIC portfolio earlier than planned initially. The respective amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 793 “Regulations Regarding Opening and Accreditation of Study Fields are in force as of 1st September 2024⁵.

The recommendations by the review panel and EQAR Register Committee are therefore not effective anymore.

7.3. ESG 2.6 (REPORTING)

Findings by the review panel

For Accreditation of higher education institution, Assessment and accreditation of a study field, Licensing of study programme and Accreditation of study programmes abroad, the agency publishes full reports of the expert panels, including summary reports which are helpful for the broader public.

The panel considers the fact that only the duration of accreditation terms is published while the full decisions, including the elements which have led to the decision, as well as potential additional ‘tasks’ are not published together with the reports for all procedures relating to Latvian higher education as a substantial deficiency relating to this standard. Experts reports are clear and accessible to the academic community and are published. For the Accreditation of foreign study programmes both the decision document is published, as well as the expert’s report. So, overall the panel considers the agency to partially comply with this ESG standard.

Recommendations by the review panel

8. The agency should urgently publish accreditation decisions as they are communicated to the institution, including potential tasks and elements taken which are taken into account next to the published experts’ reports.

Decision by the EQAR Register Committee

23. The panel’s analysis shows that AIC does publish full reports of the experts panels for its procedures ‘Accreditation of higher education institution’, ‘Assessment and accreditation of a study field’, ‘Licensing of study programme’ and ‘Accreditation of study programmes abroad’.

24. The Register Committee further noted however, that these published reports and the decision letter do not reflect the additional elements which have been provided and taken into consideration after the site visit nor the additional tasks given to the higher education institution.

25. The Register Committee could not find any new supporting evidence to AIC’s position in the additional representation. Both from the panel’s report and the AIC website, it was clear that only

⁵ Cabinet Regulations No.793 “Regulations Regarding Opening and Accreditation of Study Fields”, paragraph 2.5. is removed, <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/303956-studiju-virzienu-atversanas-un-akreditacijas-noteikumi> (in Latvian, as the latest amendments have not been translated yet)

the duration of accreditation terms is published, while the full decisions are not published together with the reports.

Progress/new developments since the review

As explained earlier to the 2023 review panel and EQAR within the decision process, the reason for AIC not publishing the legal text of the accreditation decisions was related to the fact that, uncommonly for many other countries, the decision on accreditation in Latvia is an administrative act according to the Administrative Procedure Law. It is defined by the Law that this act refers to an individual (entity or a person) and information to third parties is provided only in compliance with the Freedom of Information Law and Personal Data Processing Law.

In addition, the accreditation decisions may contain limited access information, for example, regarding the trade secret (budget of higher education institutions, distribution of funding), exams, attestation, projects and similar internal assessment processes.

Since 2015 AIC has diligently published all self-assessment reports prepared by higher education institutions that on the other hand is not a widely spread practice elsewhere. AIC has also published all reports produced by external experts and ensured public availability of all parameters that are used in the credential evaluation process (length, language, amount of credits, type of instruction, entrance requirements, degrees and qualifications awarded etc.)

However, as a result of a major legal discussion triggered by the EQAR RC decision, full texts of all decisions taken by the Study Quality Commission are available on E-platform. (The respective amendments to the Cabinet Regulation No. 793 are in force as of 13th August 2024, paragraph 31, and No. 795 are in force as of 27th July 2024, paragraph 28).

With the introduction of these amendments, all decisions will be published in the section “Documents” for each particular study programme/study field.

Considering amendments to the Cabinet Regulations, the amendments to the respective methodologies have been introduced as well (*paragraph 7.6. of the Methodology for Organising Licensing of Study Programmes; Part III section 3 paragraph 3.7. of the Methodology for the Assessment and Accreditation of Study Fields*).

Document	Document type	Language
Commission decision (24.08.2024)	Commission decision	latvian
Expert / Experts joint report	Expert / Experts joint report	english
Expert / Experts joint report (01.08.2024)	Expert / Experts joint report	english
Expert / Experts joint report (28.06.2023)	Expert / Experts joint report	latvian
Self-evaluation report	Self-evaluation report	english
Self-evaluation report	Self-evaluation report	latvian
Self-evaluation report (26.03.2024)	Self-evaluation report	latvian
Self-evaluation report (26.03.2024)	Self-evaluation report	english

Image 2 Public information on study programme (sample)

Besides, since 2023 information about all decisions taken by the Study Quality Commission is published on the Agency’s website (e.g. <https://www.aika.lv/studiju-kvalitates-komisijas-28-08-2024-sede-pienemtie-lemumi/>). This allows for easier navigation in the search of relevant decisions on the E-platform.

8. ESG PART 3

8.1. ESG 3.6 (INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT)

Findings by the review panel
<p>The internal quality assurance system of the agency is mainly based on stakeholder feedback. Summaries of the feedback gathered by the agency are reported in the annual report to the Ministry of Education and Science and in the annual report of the agency. This input is used to foster continuous improvement. As indicated in Table 4, uses the gathered feedback to improve its own practices. Comparing the results of surveys in 2017 and 2021 it is concluded that the work of the agency is valued by its stakeholders (average assessment is between 3,69 and 3,92 out of 4 points). The best evaluated aspect is effective organisation of communication process among all involved parties (3,92), and that the staff of the agency has managed to ensure clear information/answers (3,85). In case more fundamental changes are required, the agency involves staff and stakeholders by inviting them to working groups and strategic meetings. Often, fundamental changes can only be made by convincing the Ministry to change Cabinet Regulations or other legal frameworks. In order to further improve the internal quality assurance system of the agency, it may be useful to complement stakeholder feedback by measuring the outputs of the system, as well as the overall impact on the quality of higher education.</p>
Recommendations by the ENQA review panel
None
Decision by the EQAR Register Committee
<p>33. The Register Committee understood from the panel’s analysis that AIC has set up an internal management system to support the daily work of the agency and the collection of feedback from different sources to inform improvements.</p> <p>34. The Committee however noted AIC’s internal quality assurance system faces a number of issues and limitations: no major changes/ improvements can take place without government regulation or legal change; the informal nature of the feedback limits the ability of the agency to measure objectively “the outputs of the system”; no sufficient evidence that experts are getting</p>

acquainted with additional requirements or obligations set by Study Quality Commission after the accreditation procedure.

35. The Register Committee therefore finds that AIC has yet to consolidate its internal quality assurance system, including internal and external feedback mechanisms for continuous improvement.

Progress/ new developments since the review

Internal quality assurance processes are at the core of AIC activities. In the Agency's Quality Policy, quality is defined as the level to which the Agency can fulfil the requirements of society and the needs of the stakeholders.

As already explained in the AIC's SAR for the full review in 2022 (pp. 39 – 42), the Agency has developed a Quality management manual. The Quality management manual was developed in collaboration with stakeholders and aims to ensure that all the staff of the Agency and involved stakeholders have common understanding, and the society is informed about quality standards of the Agency. Information on quality policy is available on the Agency's website.

The Quality Management System follows the four steps of the PDCA cycle: Plan – Do – Check – Act. The necessity for the improvement of the quality management system is assessed and planned within the annual strategic planning and control process. When measuring success and identifying areas for improvement, the Agency primarily relies on staff and stakeholder feedback collected through surveys/appraisal processes and annual analytic reports that measure the outputs of the system and include both quantitative and qualitative data.

As explained in the SAR, written feedback is collected from higher education institutions and review experts after each assessment procedure and this is done regularly since Agency's establishment (not of an informal nature as mentioned in the EQAR RC decision). This feedback results in internal and external analyses. The internal analysis is performed every year. The external analyses cover a longer period and are therefore prepared for several years simultaneously, to offer a comparison.

The latest external analysis has been performed in 2024 on the feedback from 2022 and 2023 and is available on the Agency's website in the section "Informative reports" (<https://www.aika.lv/normativie-akti/informativie-zinojumi/>; Latvian version as published in Latvian only).

There is a feedback template that is always sent to all experts involved in the review process:

Dear experts,

In order to ensure continuous improvement of assessment procedures organized by the Quality Agency for Higher Education, AIC would highly appreciate your feedback on the **College of Economics** study field "Economics" assessment process by filling in **online** questionnaire:

The questionnaire is available here - <https://forms.gle/iTikbvzIqYoSPi87>

Please fill in the online questionnaire **until XX February 2024**. Filling in the questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes. The results of the survey will be used only in aggregate form. Enclosed you will find the questionnaire in PDF format in order to see the full questionnaire. If you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to ask.

Your opinion is very important and helps us to improve quality assessment in higher education.

Thank you!

Image 3 E-mail template for the experts

A similar e-mail is sent to all higher education institutions:

Cienījamie augstskolu un koledžu pārstāvji,

Augstākās izglītības kvalitātes aģentūras vārdā lūdzam Jūs atbildēt uz aptaujas jautājumiem par **Ekonomikas koledžas** studiju virziena "Ekonomika" novērtēšanas procedūru.

Aizpildāmā aptaujas anketa pieejama šeit - <https://forms.gle/ymJ5YyABGDBWUymF7>

Aicinām aptauju aizpildīt līdz **2024. gada XX. februārim**. Aptaujas aizpildīšana aizņems aptuveni 20 minūtes. Jūsu vērtējumi tiks izmantoti tikai apkopotā veidā. Pielikumā pievienojam aptauju PDF formātā. Jautājumu gadījumā aicinām sazināties ar mums.

Jau iepriekš pateicamies par atsaucību!

Image 4 E-mail template for the higher education institutions

Feedback is gathered in electronic form, allowing for easy and efficient analysis of the results.

	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
1	A5. Number of study program	A6. Previous experience	A7. Your role in this assessment	A8. You were invited to participate	1. Please evaluate each	1. Please evaluate each	1. Please evaluate each	1. Please evaluate each
2	1-2	No experience	Team member	Expert delegated by the institution	4	4	4	3
3	1-2	Less than 3 years	Team member	Expert delegated by the institution	3	4	3	4
4	1-2	More than 3 years	Head of the experts group	Expert invited by the Quality Assurance Council	4	4	4	4
5	3-5	More than 10 years	Head of the experts group	Expert invited by the Quality Assurance Council	4	4	4	4
6	1-2	3 to 5 years	Head of the experts group	Expert invited by the Quality Assurance Council	4	4	4	4
7	1-2	3 to 5 years	Head of the experts group	Expert invited by the Quality Assurance Council	4	4	4	4
8	6-11	No experience	Team member	Expert delegated by the institution	3	4	4	4
9	6-11	6 to 10 years	Secretary of the experts	Expert invited by the Quality Assurance Council	4	4	4	4
10	18 and more	3 to 5 years	Team member	Expert invited by the Quality Assurance Council	4	3	4	4
11	3-5	No experience	Head of the experts group	Expert invited by the Quality Assurance Council	4	4	4	4
12	3-5	3 to 5 years	Secretary of the experts	Expert invited by the Quality Assurance Council	4	4	4	4
13	18 and more	3 to 5 years	Secretary of the experts	Expert invited by the Quality Assurance Council	4	4	4	4
14	18 and more	No experience	Team member	Expert delegated by the institution	4	3	4	3

Image 5 Consolidated feedback from the experts involved in study field assessment

Feedback from the Study Quality Commission, Higher Education Quality Assurance Council and individual stakeholder organisations is also collected regularly but due to the specificity of these bodies, focus groups are the preferred tool for collecting feedback.

Following the recommendation by the EQAR RC, all assessment methodologies now include a requirement to provide feedback to experts on the accreditation result once the decision by the Study Quality Commission has been taken (such practise existed even before):

Assessment coordinator shall inform experts on the decision made by the Commission. (paragraph 7.10. of the Methodology for Organising Licensing of Study Programmes; Part III section 3 paragraph 3.8. of the Methodology for the Assessment and Accreditation of Study Fields)

38. AIKA shall inform the foreign higher education institution about the decision within ten working days after making the decision. In addition, AIKA shall inform assessment experts about the decision made by the Accreditation Commission. (paragraph 38, Rules of Procedure of the Accreditation Commission for Foreign Study Programmes)

As in many EHEA countries, the major changes in the higher education system are introduced through legislative acts. However, the Agency is always involved in the development of the external regulations related not only to quality assurance but also to the higher education and research policy in general (for example, ECTS introduction, LQF and cycles definition, doctoral concept, education monitoring, higher education state standards, etc). The Agency is a major partner in the national consultation on the higher education state standards which takes place through focus groups and a working group, it also was involved in the work on amendments to the previous cycles definition.

Also, the national legal framework recognizes that all internal regulations developed by the Agency are binding to all stakeholders.

Internal regulations like Methodologies, steps of the procedures, guidelines, by-laws etc. are developed by the Agency (in discussions with all stakeholders), as well as amendments are approved also by the Agency without government implications.

As it was described in the SAR for AIC's full review in 2022, the processes for internal quality assurance are prescribed and implemented regularly. The Agency operates in a transparent, responsible and objective manner, involving stakeholders, which can be confirmed by the feedback received from all stakeholders and progress made since the previous assessment, including the current improvements described in this representation.

9. KEY CHALLENGES AND SWOT ANALYSIS

The period between the full review in 2022 and 2024 has been challenging due to several reasons.

First of all, while finishing the first full cycle of study field assessments against the current methodology, the Agency has already been in a transition period between programme-level (study field) assessments and cyclical institutional accreditation. Although no immediate changes are expected and the design of the new system will still take a considerable amount of time, a new system that will have a reduced number of assessment procedures and hopefully reduce the level of bureaucracy and workload for everyone is highly anticipated. This is an opportunity and challenge at the same time and the best result can be achieved if there is trust from the stakeholders.

Secondly, the additional activities following the Agency's external review in 2022 have taken up much time and energy in this already very intensive period. On one side, the Agency appreciates a high level of trust from all national stakeholders since its establishment. The national partners have also been highly supportive during the preparation for the focused review. On the other hand, any speculations regarding compliance with international standards and its implications would create a mixed reaction on the international level, often without a possibility to provide any clarification. This is even though the current situation does not create any barriers to international recognition of the diplomas issued by Latvian higher education institutions.

Also, as outlined in chapter 5 of this report, there are several extensive national legislative changes related to higher education provision and its framework – both recent and also expected in the future. The role of the Agency is crucial to ensure that these changes are logical, aligned with each other and do not have unintended consequences for higher education institutions and external quality assurance.

All these challenges place the Agency's strategy for the period 2024 – 2028 in a prominent position for ensuring adaptability, sustainability and trust.

The external review in 2022 was undoubtedly a valuable learning experience for the Agency, even though many concerns noted by the review panel were already identified during the Agency's internal analysis and some others were the result of complexity and several layers of the Latvian external quality assurance system. Quality as a shared responsibility is a common principle among all stakeholders involved in the system, and this is proven by the immediate changes in the system that were taken and also supported by the government.

However, development takes time, especially in the higher education sector and not everything can be achieved at once. It is important to acknowledge that quality assurance agencies are developing organisations, often facing different constraints and pressures that cannot be easily eliminated, but the ultimate goal of the Agency has always been to keep the standards for quality high.

The SWOT analysis presented below forms an integral part for the Agency's strategy for 2024 – 2028. While it is based on the SWOT from 2022 that was also included in the SAR for the Agency's full review, it also reinforces the elements that were identified to be crucial during the strategy development.

Strengths:

- Transparency of Agency's work that ensures trust and respect by the higher education institutions, assessment experts and other stakeholders.
- Cooperation with sectoral organisations working in the higher education field.
- Compliance with the ESG confirmed by international organisations.
- Active participation in projects, events and other quality assurance-related activities on the international level.
- Fully developed procedures and practical experience in conducting evaluation procedures abroad.
- Seminars and training offered by the Agency ensure the exchange of information, opinions and experience thus enhancing the professionalism of the stakeholders involved in higher education quality assurance processes.
- Public database that includes information about accredited higher education institutions, study fields and programmes, general information and expert reports.
- Functioning internal quality assurance system that includes detailed descriptions of processes (also methodologies and guidelines) and actions to be taken, including manuals, templates.
- Professional and competent staff.
- Well-developed ICT solution (e-platform) that supports the implementation of assessment procedures including the information exchange between higher education institutions, assessment experts, Study Quality Commission and Agency and serves as the database of assessment experts.
- Ability to adapt quickly to changing external environment.

Weaknesses:

- The Agency's e-platform currently does not support the implementation of all assessment procedures that could optimise the related and support processes.
- Insufficient human resources to engage in more active communication with the society.
- Lack of a unified platform/solution to manage Agency's internal processes.
- Impact of inflation and the increase in the average wage level on the costs of assessment procedures and sustainability of the Agency.

Opportunities:

- More intensive engagement in improving the external legal framework and introduction of cyclical institutional accreditation in Latvia.
- Targeted market analysis to actively offer assessment procedures abroad.
- More active staff engagement and regular participation in projects organised by international organisations to enhance the skills necessary for performing their duties and improve the quality of work.
- Professional development of the staff through ensuring that, in addition to coordinating assessment procedures, each staff member engages in diverse developmental activities.
- More intensive work to ensure the exchange of best practice in Latvia and abroad with higher education institutions and other stakeholders.
- Organising training for medium level managers at higher education institutions in order to ensure a broader understanding of external quality assurance processes and responsibilities of those involved.
- Improving the Agency's e-platform by expanding its functions and potentially integrating internal process management.

Threats:

- High number of assessment procedures can create burnout and turnover of Agency's staff.
- The frequency and inconsistency of amendments to external regulatory acts may negatively affect the assessment procedures and the work of the Agency as a whole.
- Additional assignments by the state are not always fully state-financed therefore there is a risk of lack of resources for the Agency's developmental activities.
- Inability of the external parties involved in the Agency's work to provide the necessary information exchange in a timely manner.
- Lack of qualified assessment experts in certain/specific education fields.
- Unforeseen obstacles and rapidly changing environments around the world, such as pandemics, wars.

10. ANNEXES

Laws

- [Education law](#) (1998)
- [Vocational Education Law](#) (1999)
- [Law on Higher Education Institutions](#) (1995)
- [Law on Scientific Activity](#) (2005)

Cabinet Regulations directly related to functions of the Agency

- [Regulations Regarding Opening and Accreditation of Study Fields](#) (English version referenced; the Latvian version with amendments from 13.08.2024 available here <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/303956-studiju-virzienu-atversanas-un-akreditacijas-noteikumi> with the relevant Cabinet Regulations on amendments available here <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/354261-grozijumi-ministru-kabineta-2018-gada-11-decembra-noteikumos-nr-793-studiju-virzienu-atversanas-un-akreditacijas-noteikumi->)
- [Regulations Regarding Licensing of Study Programmes](#) (English version referenced; the Latvian version with amendments from 23.07.2024 available here <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/303957-studiju-programmu-licencesanas-noteikumi> with the relevant Cabinet Regulations on amendments available here <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/353865>)
- [Regulations Regarding Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and Colleges](#)

Other Cabinet Regulations related to major aspects of higher education provision

- [Regulation on the classification of education in Latvia](#) (2017; in Latvian only)
- [Regulation on groups of science branches, scientific branches and sub-branches](#) (2022; in Latvian only)
- [Regulation on the national standard of academic education](#) (2014; in Latvian only)
- [Regulation on the national standard of professional education](#) (2023; in Latvian only)
- [Procedure and criteria for awarding of doctorate degree](#) (2005; in Latvian only)

Assessment guidelines and methodologies by the Agency (only the versions revised in 2024 have been referenced; available on the Agency website <https://www.aika.lv/en/laws-and-regulations-publications/internal-rules-and-regulations/>)

- ***The Guidelines for the Preparation of the Description of a Study Programme***
- ***The Guidelines for the Preparation of the Joint Report by the Experts on the Assessment of a Study Programme***
- ***The Guidelines for the Preparation of the Self-Assessment Report of a Study Field***

- ***The Guidelines for the Preparation of the Joint Opinion by the Expert Group on the Assessment of a Study Field***
- ***Methodology for Organising Licensing of Study Programmes***
- ***Methodology for the Assessment and Accreditation of Study Fields***
- ***Guidelines for Accreditation of Foreign Study Programmes*** (<https://www.aika.lv/en/higher-education-institutions/accreditation-of-foreign-study-programmes/preparation-of-self-evaluation-report/>)
- ***Rules of Procedure of the Accreditation Commission for Foreign Study Programmes*** (<https://www.aika.lv/en/aika-about/accreditation-commission-for-foreign-study-programmes/>)