Conformity of Quality Assurance in Lithuanian Education System with the Common Principles Indicated in EC Recommendations' Annex 3

Research Report

Prof. Kestutis Pukelis

Vilnius, 2011

Guidelines for Quality Assurance Analysis in the Lithuanian Education System

Common Principles for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training in the context of the European Qualifications Framework

1. *Quality assurance policy and procedures should underpin all levels of the National (European) Qualifications Framework.*

2. *Quality assurance should be an integral part of the internal management of education and training institutions.*

3. *Quality assurance should include regular evaluation of institutions, their programmes or their quality assurance systems by external monitoring bodies or agencies.*

4. *External monitoring bodies or agencies carrying out quality assurance should be subject of regular review.*

5. *Quality assurance should include context, input, process and output dimensions, while giving emphasis to outputs and learning outcomes.*

6. *Quality assurance system should include the following elements:*
   - *Clear and measurable objectives and standards;*
   - *Guidelines for implementation, including stakeholder involvement;*
   - *Appropriate resources;*
   - *Consistent evaluation methods, associating self-assessment and external review;*
   - *Feedback mechanisms and procedures for improvement;*
   - *Widely accessible evaluation results.*

7. *Quality assurance initiatives at international, national and regional level should be coordinated in order to ensure overview, coherence, synergy and system-wide analysis.*

8. *Quality assurance should be a cooperative process across education and training levels and systems, involving all relevant stakeholders, within Members States and across the Community.*

9. *Quality assurance orientations at Community level may provide reference points for evaluation and peer learning.*

Main principles for report preparation

The *aim* of this report was to carry out the analysis on the conformity of the quality assurance in the Lithuanian education system to the principles indicated in the Recommendations' annex 3. The main objectives of the research were to analyse the conformity of quality assurance systems in particular sectors of Lithuanian education system with the common principles indicated the Recommendations' annex 3.

Based on the experience of other countries (Ireland, UK, Malta and Scotland) the Guidelines for the conformity analysis of the quality assurance in Lithuanian education system were prepared. When performing the analysis on the conformity of the quality assurance in Lithuanian education system with the principles indicated in the Recommendations' annex 3 it emerged that the analysis guidelines based on the experience of foreign countries can not always be used as valid analysis criteria because of the historical and cultural differences in the development of quality assurance systems in Lithuania and other mentioned countries. Therefore the methodology of the evidence – based survey of laws and sub-statutory acts has been chosen to carry out the conformity analysis. When analysing the documents regulating quality assurance in Lithuanian education system evident arguments (quotation, comments on separate text parts, references to the documents, where the evidence of presented arguments can be enlarged) that quality assurance in Lithuanian education system conforms to the principles indicated in the Recommendations' annex 3 are presented.

The following research methods have been applied: a) generalization of the experience of countries which have already performed the mentioned analysis; b) comparative analysis of Lithuanian laws and sub-statutory acts based on the principles indicated in the Recommendations' annex 3 aiming to assess the state of conformity of Lithuanian quality assurance system to these principles; c) interview with the directors of the main quality assurance agencies in Lithuanian education system with the aim to specify which documents regulating quality assurance are the most up-to-date and are applied to realize the principles indicated in the Recommendations' annex 3.

In the end of analysis generalization of the conformity of quality assurance in Lithuanian education system to particular principles indicated in the Recommendations' annex 3 is presented. However the reader can decide himself/herself whether the arguments taken from laws and other sub-statutory acts are sufficient assumptions to make the following conclusions and generalizations. In the end of each page the list of used literature is presented, because it is easier for the reader to find it. Overall 83 different documents (laws, sub-statutory acts, government regulations, orders of ministers and directors of quality assurance agencies, regulations of main quality assurance agencies) were analysed.

The report consists of the following parts: the list of Common Principles for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training in the context of the European Qualifications Framework; main principles for report preparation, introduction, analysis of Lithuanian quality assurance systems' conformity to common principles indicated in the Recommendations' annex 3 in separate education sectors (higher education, vocational education and training, general education). When analysing the conformity of quality assurance systems in

particular Lithuanian education sector to indicated principles, the quality assurance at programme and institutional level were defined.

Introduction

Lithuanian education system consists of three sectors: general education, vocational education and training and higher education. Higher education sector is binary and includes college (college higher education) and university (university higher education) studies. According to the Lithuanian qualifications framework (LKS) general education sector encompasses qualification of level I, vocational education and training provides qualifications of level II, III, IV and V, qualifications of levels VI, VII and VIII can be awarded in higher education sector.

The Law[1] on Education passed by the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania on 25 June, 1991, (No. I-1489)[2] is the main law regulating quality assurance in the whole education system. The Law on Education determines: objectives and principles of education system of the Republic of Lithuania, basics for the structure, activities and relations of education system, and state obligations in the field of education. One of the most important state obligations is the quality assurance of services provided in the field of education. This obligation is based on the principle of effectiveness, which states that "the educational system pursues high-quality results by rationally and economically using available resources; by continuously evaluating, analysing and planning its activity; and by relying on effective management, i.e. proper and timely decisions" (paragraph 3 of article 5). The 37th article of the Law on Education third chapter "Accessibility and Quality of Education" is devoted for the quality of education. This article states that "The quality of education is the responsibility of the education provider. The State ensures the quality of formal and to a certain extent, that of non-formal education" (paragraph 1). In the paragraph 3 of the same article is indicated that "The State, the founder of the school and the education provider, each within the scope of their competency, develop educational programs and vouch for their quality".

In separate sectors of formal education the State delegated rights and responsibilities of quality assurance for the following bodies and agencies: a) National school evaluation agency[3] (hereinafter – NMVA) and Commission of Secondary Education Programmes Accreditation [4] (VUPAK) in general education sector; b) Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training

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[1] http://www.smm.lt
[2] *New redaction of the Law on Education was issued in 28 June, 2003, No. IX-1630. Separate amendments of the Law on Education were made in 2004, 2007, and 2009.*
[3] *NMVA was established on 30 December, 2005, by the order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania "On the Establishment of National School Assessment Agency and Approval of its Provisions" No. ISAK - 268.*
[4] *Programmes of secondary education are accredited by the Commission of Secondary Education Programmes Accreditation which is approved by the Minister of Education and Science (see more in the chapter 3.1. of this document).*

Development Centre[5] (hereinafter – KPMPC) in vocational education and training sector; c) Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education[6] (hereinafter – SKVC) in higher education sector. The underlying activity of all mentioned institutions is the quality assurance (assessment and improvement of teaching or study quality) of education services including quality assurance of the activities of all educational institutions providing qualifications in accordance with the levels of Lithuanian qualifications' framework.

The Law on Education regulates quality assurance in general education sector, the Law on Vocational Education and Training[7] regulates quality assurance in the sector of vocational education and training, as well as the Law on Higher Education and Research[8] regulates the quality assurance in higher education sector. The conception[9] of formal education quality assurance system defines the quality assurance principles for all sectors (general education, vocational education and training and higher education) of education system.

The purpose of the conception of formal education quality assurance system – to provide conceptual basis for politics and society agreements on the conception of education quality, and formal education quality assurance ways and means, as well as to create preconditions for common arrangements on education quality assurance policy. In the conception the following issues are discussed: components of formal education quality, education quality assurance, development of formal education quality conception, assessment and improvement of education quality, as well as principles, methods and tools on which mentioned processes are based.

Institutions (NMVA and SKVC) responsible for the quality assurance processes in the sectors of general and higher education have legally approved external quality assurance systems, which are oriented towards the development and improvement of the internal quality assurance systems in the institutions awarding qualifications. In the sector of vocational education and training (KPMPC) the juridical preconditions for the establishment of the internal and external quality assurance systems in the institutions awarding qualifications are created.

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[5] *KPMPC was established on the basis of Methodological Centre for Vocational Education and Training which was established by the order "On the Establishment of Methodical Centre for Vocational Education and Training" No. 214 approved by the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania in 29 February, 1996. Based on the order "On the Adjustment of the Order "On the Approval of the Provisions of Methodical Centre for Vocational Education and Training" No. ISAK-1595 on 27 July , 2007" No. ISAK-284 on 31 December, 2009, approved by the Minister of Education and Science the title of the Methodical Centre for Vocational Education and Training was changed into the title Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre.*

[6] *SKVC was established by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania in 1995. Based on the order No. ISAK-1476 issued by the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania on 10 July, 2009, the adjustments of SKVC regulations were approved in accordance with the new Law on Education and Research (2009).*

[7] *http://www.smm.lt*

[8] *http://www.smm.lt*

[9] *The conception of formal education quality assurance system was approved by the order No. ISAK-3219 of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania on 24 November, 2008. See more at: http://www.smm.lt*

1. HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education includes VI, VII and VIII levels of Lithuanian qualifications' framework (VI, VII and VIII levels of European qualifications framework accordingly) and is organized in accordance with the Law on Higher Education and Research (2009)[10].

The article 40 "Quality assurance in higher education and research" of the Law on Higher Education and Research indicates that institutions of higher education "shall be responsible for the quality of research (artistic) activities, studies and other activities. They must publicly announce the quality indices of their activities and foster the culture of the quality of activities regarding higher education and research together with assessment institutions" (p. 31). The quality of studies is assured through "the internal systems of ensuring of the quality of higher education and research institutions, external assessment and accreditation of study programmes, external evaluation of research activities and external assessment and/or accreditation of higher education and research institutions" (p. 31). According to the law external assessment has the following aims: to evaluate the quality of higher education institutions' activity, to provide recommendations on improving its quality, to develop the culture of quality assurance in higher education and research. The purpose of an accreditation is in accordance with the conclusions of external assessment to evaluate whether a study programme and/or newly established institution of higher education conforms with/to the requirements of legal acts. It is indicated that the activity of institutions of higher education has always to be improved in accordance with the conclusions of self-analysis and external assessment.

In the Law on Higher Education and Research article 43 "External evaluation of activities of higher education and research institutions" it is indicated that the Ministry of Education and Science involving experts from foreign countries initiates, every six year, external assessment of the activity of higher education institutions in order to improve their quality and accountability. External assessment should include all activities areas indicated in their statutes and regulations. These activities have to be based on the following criteria: conformity of an institutions' activity to the mission indicated in their statutes and regulations as well as to the international level of education and research; conformity of the assessment of learning outcomes to the indicated requirements[11]; meeting the requirements for academic ethics and procedures and effectiveness of the use of state funds. The description of external assessment procedures of higher education institutions is approved by the Government.

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[10] *The Law on Higher Education and Research was approved by the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania on 30 April, 2009, No. XI-242, http://www.smm.lt/ti/docs/istatymai/MSI.pdf*

[11] *The Government of the Republic of Lithuania by the order No. 535 on 4 May, 2010, approved the "Lithuanian Qualification Framework" (see more at: http://www3.lrs.lt) in accordance to which learning outcomes of study programmes in higher education, vocational education and training and general education should conform learning outcomes described in the framework descriptions of particular qualifications' levels.*

In the article 44 "Accreditation of a higher education institution" of the Law on Higher Education and Research it is indicated that institution of higher education is accredited in accordance with the results of external assessment. The description of accreditation procedures of higher education institutions is approved by the Government.

The article 27 "Conditions of establishment of a higher education institution" of the Law on Higher Education and Research indicates (paragraph 2) that "a higher education institution may be established if there is a material base and other conditions indicated in this Law which are necessary to ensure the quality of planned study programmes, research and/or artistic activities, and to meet the requirements of presented higher education qualifications" (p. 22).

In the article 17 "Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education" of the Law on Higher Education and Research it is indicated that SKVC is a state budgetary establishment. The following are the main objectives of SKVC: "1) to encourage the quality of activities of higher education institutions through an external assessment and accreditation of institutions and study programmes; 2) to create favourable conditions of the free movement of persons when organising and carrying out the assessment and/or recognition of higher education-related qualifications awarded in foreign institutions in Lithuania and fulfilling other function set by the Government" (p. 12). Achieving these objectives SKVC performs the following functions[12]: assesses study programmes with the offer of higher education institutions, accredits study programmes of higher education institutions with the authority from Ministry of Education and Science, performs external assessment of the activities of higher education institutions of the Republic of Lithuania, performs external assessment of foreign institutions of higher education in accordance with the procedures indicated in the legal acts and accredits institutions of higher education of the Republic of Lithuania, develops the culture of quality, prepares and improves methodologies for self-analysis, external assessment and other methodologies of advisory nature, organizes and/or holds trainings and consultations for the assessors of higher education quality, announces the conclusions and summaries of the assessment of the higher education institutions' activities and study programmes, collects, analyses and disseminates good experience on the assessment experience and other functions in quality assurance in foreign higher education institutions.

SKVC activities are organized by SKVC Council and director. SKVC Council is collegial body comprised of 11 members, who are deputed for the period of 6 years by different state institutions and public organizations[13]. SKVC Council through the public tender elects SKVC

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[12] *See for more in SKVC regulations available at:* http://www.skvc.lt/content.asp?id=74
[13] *SKVC Council members are assigned by: the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania under the recommendations of the Committee on Education, Science and Culture, the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, the Minister of Education and Science, the Research Council of Lithuania together with the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, the Senates of universities, the academic councils of colleges, unions of student representations of higher education institutions of the*

director for the 5 years period, as well as appoints and dismisses him/her under the necessity. The same person as SKVC director can't be elected more than two consecutive terms. SKVC director is responsible for the organization of staff professional development. SKVC is a member of number international quality assurance organizations[14]. In 2011 it is planned to appeal to ENQA (*European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education*) with the request to perform the independent assessment of SKVC activities.

1.1. Study programme quality assurance

The article 42 "External evaluation and accreditation of study programmes" of the Law on Higher Education and Research (2009) points out that only accredited study programmes are implemented in the institutions of higher education. The external assessment of study programmes of higher education institutions (colleges and universities) is carried out by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) or other agency of higher education quality assessment which is included in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education. Study programmes are accredited by the institution authorized by the Ministry of Education and Science[15]. In accordance with the law study programmes must be accredited at least once every 6 years. Non-accredited study programme or programme which accreditation time has expired is removed from the register of study and learning programmes.

In compliance with the Law on Higher Education and Research the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania enacted the order "On the approval of description of the procedures of study programmes external assessment and accreditation" No. ISAK – 1652 on 24 July, 2009, aiming to bring into line study programmes' external assessment and accreditation with the new Law on Higher Education and Research[16].

In the description of study programmes' external assessment and accreditation procedures it is indicated that one of the aims of external study programmes' assessment is to define the following: whether the quality of study programme conforms the latest national and international experience, whether the quality of study programmes' implementation conforms to regulations of the European higher education area. The purpose of study programmes' accreditation is to evaluate whether study programmes conform to the requirements of legal acts. The paragraph 7 in the

description of external study programmes' assessment and accreditation procedures commits SKVC to "prepare, approve and publicly announce the methodology of preparation of study programmes self-analysis/evaluation, to prepare the description of criteria/criterions of assessment, of assessment experts' selection and of assessment procedures. According to the agreement with the institution of higher education the Agency[17] performs external assessment basing on the criteria/criterions and procedures of external assessment appointed/determined and publicly announced by the Agency".

In the description of study programmes' external assessment and accreditation procedures it is indicated that only accredited study programmes are implemented. Study programmes have to be accredited at least once every 6 year or more often (up to the accreditation deadline) when the shorter[18] term of accreditation is applied. In accordance with the Description accreditation institution (SKVC) decrees the following decisions: "26.1. to accredit study programme for 6 year; 26.2. to accredit study programme for 3 year; 26.3. do not accredit study programme". In the latter case study programme is deregistered from the Register of Study and Learning programmes. In the Description it is indicated that accreditation institution makes a decision under the conclusions of external assessment. When the evaluation of study programme is at least 18 points[19] and none of the assessment areas is evaluated as "not satisfactory" or "satisfactory"[20] and study programme conforms to the requirements[21] for study programmes approved by the Ministry of Education and Science, study programme is accredited for 6 years period. When the evaluation of study programme is at least 12 points and none of assessment areas is evaluated as "not satisfactory" and study programme conforms to the requirements for study programmes approved by the Ministry of Education and Science, study programme is accredited for 3 years period. When the evaluation of study programme is less than 12 points or at least one of the assessment areas was evaluated as "not

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[17] *SKVC or any other agency of higher education assessment included in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education.*

[18] *In accordance with the Description implemented study programmes have to be accredited every 6 or 3 years. Study programmes which are intended to be implemented have to be accredited every 3 years.*

[19] *More information is available in the annex 1 "Evaluation of Study Programmes" in the order "On the Approval of the Description of External Study Programmes Assessment and Accreditation Procedures" No. ISAK-1652 approved by the Minister of Education and Science on 24 July, 2009 (http://www.smm.lt).*

[20] *More information is available in annex 2 "Evaluation scale" in the order "On the Approval of the Description of External Study Programmes Assessment and Accreditation Procedures" No. ISAK-1652 approved by the Minister of Education and Science on 24 July, 2009 (http://www.smm.lt).*

[21] *The Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania issued the following orders: "Description of the Common Requirements for the First Cycle Study Programmes and Integral Study Programmes Awarding Degree" No. V-501, 9 April, 2010; "Description of the Common Requirements for the Master Degree Study Programmes" No. V-826, 3 June, 2010, (http://www.smm.lt). More information about the mentioned orders is available in the following parts of this document: chapter 1.1., annex 1 "Main parameters of the description of the common requirements for the first cycle study programmes and integral study programmes awarding degree" (under the order "Description of the Common Requirements for the First Cycle Study Programmes and Integral Study Programmes Awarding Degree" No. V-50 approved by the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania on 9 April, 2010), annex 2 "Main parameters of the description of the common requirements for the master degree study programmes" (under the order "Description of the Common Requirements for the Master Degree Study Programmes" No. V-826 approved by the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania on 3 June, 2010).*

satisfactory" or study programme did not conform to the requirements for study programmes approved by the Ministry of Education and Science, study programme is not accredited.

The order "Description of the common requirements for the first cycle study programmes and integral study programmes awarding degree" No. V-501, 9 April, 2010 and order "Description of the common requirements for the master degree study programmes" No. V-826, 3 June, 2010, both approved by Minister's of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania (http://www.smm.lt) are very important documents for the development of culture of study programmes quality assurance in college and university studies. Study programmes have to be described following the requirements indicated in mentioned documents, excepting the cases when there are descriptions of study field or a set of study fields approved by the Minister of Education and Science or there are any other national or international legally approved document for study programmes' preparation and description.

Mentioned documents define general and specific requirements for study programmes. They are very important for the development of culture of study programmes' quality assurance, because the following those requirements is an important factor to make a decision on the study programme. Institution of higher education planning to implement or already implementing study programme of first or second cycle (study form – continuous or extended[22] – is not important) has to follow the common and specific requirements for the structure and implementation of study programme: study programmes have to conform with the requirements for their purpose (professional bachelor/bachelor degree of one study field, double professional bachelor/bachelor degree or professional bachelor/bachelor degrees of two different study fields) defined in the orders, aims of all study programmes have to be linked with learning outcomes – knowledge, understanding, skills and competences (paragraph 7, order No. V-501; paragraph 6, order No. V-826), to conform with defined volume and structure of credits[23] (compulsory and elective subjects/modules of study field, practice, common academic study subjects/modules, and graduate paper), programme teachers have to have appropriate qualification and experience.

In the description of common requirements for study programmes of second cycle (master degree studies) following requirements are additionally detailed: requirements for learning outcomes (paragraphs 16.1, 16.2, 16.3, and 16.4 in the order No. V-826), which correlate with

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[22] *The regular volume of studies of a continual form shall be 60 credits, but not less than 45 credits. The volume of studies of an extended form for one year must not exceed 45 credits and the total duration of studies of this form must not last one and a half times longer than studies of a continual form to which a norm of 60 credits is applied (paragraph 3, article 47, the Law on Education and Research, 2009).*

[23] *The volume of credits is expressed in ECTS credits. Study credit means a unit of the volume of studies, by which study results and student's working time are measured. 1600 hours of one academic year shall equal to 60 credits (by 1 September, 2011, national credit system is used where 1 credit is equal to 40 hours of students' working time).*

Dublin descriptors for the second cycle studies, requirements for the graduate work and its defence assessment commission, which should involve stakeholders, and so on.

1.1.1. Quality assurance of study programmes intended to be implemented

External study programme assessment is important factor for external study programme accreditation. External assessment of study programmes intended to be implemented and external assessment of study programmes already being implemented are distinguished. Study programmes intended to be implemented are accredited in accordance with assessment methodology "On the approval of methodological guidelines for the description of study programmes intended to be implemented and the evaluation for its conformity with common and specific requirements for study programmes approved by the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Lithuania"[24]. Methodology was prepared on the basis of order "On the approval of description of the external study programmes assessment and accreditation procedures" No. ISAK-1652, 24, July, 2009, approved by the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania and it was approved by the SKVC director's order No. 1-01-18 on 3 March, 2010. Methodological guidelines consolidated requirement for the preparation of the description of study programmes intended to be implemented, as well as the conformity of the prepared description of study programmes intended to be implemented with the common and specific requirements for study programmes approved by the Minister of Education and Science. The purpose of evaluation of study programmes intended to be implemented conformity with the common and specific requirements is to create conditions for making decision on study programme accreditation and registration.

In the methodological guidelines common requirements for the following area of study programme intended to be implemented are indicated: description and its preparation process, evaluation process of the conformity with common and specific requirements. In the description of study programme intended to be implemented the following information has to be described: title of study programme, study area, study field, study branch (in case it is), study kind (college or university), study cycle (first or second), study type (in case of integrated study programme), study form (continuous and extended), volume in credits, the degree and qualification intended to be awarded, level of education required for the entrance of study programme. There are some additional requirements for joint study programmes.

In the methodological guidelines main parts of study programme and requirements for its description are distinguished with the aim to assure quality of study programmes intended to be implemented. The main parts of study programme intended to be implemented are: 1) programme

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[24] *More information is available at: http://www.skvc.lt*

aims and learning outcomes; 2) reasoning of programme demand; 3) programme structure; 4) staff; 5) facilities and learning resources; 6) intended study process; 7) rules for internal study quality assurance.

Description of study programme aims and learning outcomes are especially important for linking qualifications awarded by study programmes with the Lithuanian qualification framework. Description of study aims are based on the requirements for specialists' activity (on the main work functions). Learning outcomes, as well as generic and specific skills are defined referring to knowledge and understanding, and their application area and conditions. Interface between learning outcomes and learning subjects for their realization has to be presented in separate table[25] (particular learning outcome can be realized through one or several learning subjects). This table should follow other table "Interface of study programme learning outcomes with the intended study subject learning outcomes and assessment methods of learning achievements[26]".

Particular requirements are also defined for the description of the other parts of study programme. For instance, structure and staff of study programme have to follow general and specific requirements for study programmes and additional requirements provided in methodological guidelines; study process has to follow the requirements for study programme entrance and acceptance criteria (competitive grades, studied subjects and etc.). When the study programme of second cycle is delivered, the following information has to be provided: what study fields have to be completed to enter particular study programme, what are the enrolment criteria, what are the cases, when additional studies are necessary and etc. When the process of internal quality assurance of study programme intended to be implemented is described, tools for internal quality assurance are presented and described.

Together with the description of study programme intended to implement it is mandatory to submit descriptions of study subject which should contain the following information: subject title, subject volume expressed in credits and hours, subject aims and learning outcomes (knowledge, understanding, skills) as well as the assessment of their achievement, studying methods, methods of learning achievements' assessment, subject content (learning themes and volume of contact and individual work hours), list of main and additional literature references, and other important information. When subject involves graduate papers and practices, in separate descriptions it is

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[25] *More information is available in the table 1 of annex 1 of the order "On the Approval of Methodological Guidelines for the Description of Study Programmes Intended to be Implemented and the Evaluation for its Conformity to Common and Specific Requirements for Study Programmes Approved by the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Lithuania" No. 1-01-18, 3 March, 2010, approved by SKVC director (http://www.skvc.lt).*
[26] *More information is available in the table 2 of annex 2 of the order "On the Approval of Methodological Guidelines for the Description of Study Programmes Intended to be Implemented and the Evaluation for its Conformity with/to Common and Specific Requirements for Study Programmes Approved by the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Lithuania" No. 1-01-18, 3 March, 2010, approved by SKVC director (http://www.skvc.lt).*

mandatory to define rules and requirements for practice organization, graduate papers and final examinations, provide their assessment criteria and methods.

Information on the conformity of study programme intended to implement to the common and specific requirements, and methodological guidelines (title of study programme intended to implement, state of conformity assessment, decision on accreditation and registration) is announced in SKVC website. SKVC involves experts[27] to perform external assessment of study programme intended to implement.

1.1.2. **Study programme quality assurance**

In accordance with the order "On the approval of description the external study programme assessment and accreditation" No. ISAK-1652, 24 July, 2009, SKVC director enacted the order "On the approval of description and methodical guidelines for study programme assessment procedures" No. 1-94, 30 October, 2009, which regulates procedures of external study programme assessment performed by SKVC, preparation of study programme self-analysis and criteria for external assessment.

The main participants of *study programme* external assessment are: institution of higher education, which of study programme is assessed; SKVC, experts' group and commission of study assessment, which discusses conclusion delivered from expert group and gives recommendations on the decision on the study programme evaluation and accreditation.

Study programmes external assessment comprises from the following main stages: 1) external assessment planning which main result is assessment plan; 2) self-analysis performed by a higher education institution (main result – self-analysis report); 3) preparation for the assessment – (expert group organizing, primary assessment conclusions, visit agenda; 4) visit to a higher education institution (oral assessment survey); 5) preparation of the external assessment conclusions (project of assessment conclusions); 6) negotiation and announcement of external assessment conclusions (assessment conclusions); 7) follow-up of higher education institution (programme improvement).

In the process of study programme external assessment experts or their groups can be involved from Lithuania and from different foreign countries. Experts' selection is based on the following documents: the Description of expert selection[28] approved by SKVC director by the order "On the

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[27] *More information on experts' selection, training and requirements for their activity are provided in the following orders approved by SKVC director: "On the SKVC director order "On the Approval of Description of Expert Selection" No. 1-55, 19 March, 2007" No. 1-65, 31 July, 2009; "On the Approval of Description the External Study Programme Assessment and Accreditation Procedures" No. 1-94, 30 October, 2009 (http://www.smm.lt).*
[28] *Requirements for study programmes assessment are defined separately. Two experts assess study programme intended to implement, ongoing study programme is assessed by three or more experts when two study programmes are*

SKVC director order "On the approval of description of expert selection" No. 1-55, 19 March, 2007" No. 1-65, 31 July, 2009 (http://www.skvc.lt); section one "Expert group composition and its activity organization" and section two "Principles of experts' work ethics" provided in the chapter IV "External assessment methodology" of the order "On the approval of description the external study programme assessment and accreditation" No. 1-94, 30 October, 2009. Experts' group composition is based on these principles: impartiality, transparency, objectivity, and competence. Activity of experts' group is organized by group leader. Experts perform an external assessment in accordance with formulated principles of experts' work ethics (objectivity, impartiality, respect for assessment participants, confidentiality and cooperation). Requirements for the selection of experts' group were described separately for the following assessment areas: study programmes, quality of higher education institution activity, higher education institutions' applications for the authorization to carry out studies as well as the activity related with studies, preparation of qualification exam programme, secondary and higher education qualifications awarded in higher education institutions in foreign countries or conformity of completed subjects to the grades received[29].

The duration of experts visit into higher education institution is 1-3 days. During the visit experts meet the administrative staff of higher education institution and its departments, organizers of study programme self-analysis, teachers of study programme, students, graduates, employers and other stakeholders who are important for the study programme quality. During the visit experts get acquainted with facilities and learning resources, students' term and graduate paper, and other documentation.

During the analysis of self-analysis and other documents, assessment of facilities and learning resources for study programme implementation, and meetings with teachers and stakeholders experts assess 6 main study programme areas (programme aims and learning outcomes, programme design, staff, facilities and learning resources, study process and assessment, programme management), subdivided into sub-areas. Each of sub-areas is given assessment criteria as attributes based on which quality of study programme is assessed. Assessment criteria are detailed into indicators – qualitative or quantitative data about study programme[30]. In the process of study programmes external assessment connections between learning outcomes and both Lithuanian qualification framework and European Qualifications framework is very important. In the Methodological guidelines for the study programmes external assessment for the assessment of

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assessed. In the assessment of ongoing study programmes one representative from employers or trade union, as well as students' representative are involved.

[29] *More information is available in SKVC director's order "On the SKVC Director Order "On the Approval of Description of Expert Selection" No. 1-55, 19 March, 2007" No. 1-65, 31 July, 2009 (http://www.smm.lt).*

[30] *More information is available in the order of SKCV director "On the Approval of Description the External Study Programme Assessment and Accreditation" No. 1-94, 30 October, 2009, chapter II, section IV, table 1 "Assessment Areas, Sub-areas, Criteria and Indicators" (http://www.smm.lt).*

complexity level of learning outcomes, it is recommended to evaluate "whether the complexity of learning outcomes is appropriate in accordance to the study type, field and cycle" (paragraph 95.2), to evaluate whether the learning outcomes are not to much or to less complex. It is assessed, whether the students can achieve learning outcomes during defined period of studies. It is commented, whether "the complexity level of learning outcomes conforms to qualification requirements described in the European and national qualification frameworks" (paragraph 95.2). The same attitude is expressed in the paragraph 173.2 of the Methodological guidelines which states that it is compulsory to evaluate "whether the complexity of learning outcomes conforms to the requirements for the awarded qualification and qualification degree described in the European and national qualification framework"[31].

For the quality assurance of awarded qualifications and their conformity to the Lithuanian qualification framework and European qualification framework the following areas of external assessment are important: study programme and subject learning outcomes and their compatibility, staff competence and evaluation of their professional development possibilities, assessment of learning achievements (validity and publicity of assessment criteria, feedback effectiveness, effectiveness of graduate papers assessment, effectiveness of the assessment system of non-formally and informally acquired learning achievements, connections between assessment criteria of learning achievements and learning outcomes, structure of learning achievements assessment grade, publicity of assessment criteria, influence of feedback on students learning results, demand for assessment for non-formally and informally acquired learning achievements, procedures and results of the assessment of non-formally and informally acquired learning achievements and etc.). In the methodology of study programme external assessment great attention is devoted for the graduates' employability and connections of their work with study programme aims and objectives, internal study programme quality assurance, involvement of students, teachers and other groups of stakeholders into the process of internal quality assurance. Section III of chapter IV in the methodology of study programme external assessment is devoted for the narrow evaluation of assessment areas and sub-areas based on the defined criteria, which are followed by the indicators[32] and scale of programme criteria assessment (1 – based on particular criterion programme is assessed not satisfactory, there essential limitations which must be eliminated; 2 – based on particular criterion programme is assessed weakly, there many limitations which are not essential; 3 – based on particular criterion programme is assessed satisfactory, programme follows minimal

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[31] *The project of Lithuanian qualification framework publicly announced for the first time (draft of the Lithuanian qualification framework) was published in 2007.*
[32] *More information is available in chapter IV, section II „Assessment based on the areas, sub-areas, and criteria" in the order "On the approval of description the external study programme assessment and accreditation" No. 1-94, 30 October, 2009 (http://www.skvc.lt).*

requirements defined in legal acts or has one or two not essential limitations; 4 – based on particular criterion programme is assessed as good, programme follows more than it is indicated in the requirements defined in legal acts; 5 – based on particular criterion programme is assessed very well, the quality of programme is of especially high level)[33].

In the order of SKVC director common requirements for the preparation of self-analysis report of higher education institution are defined in accordance with the study programme external assessment areas, sub-areas, criteria and indicators. Self-analysis report should be provided separately for each study programme. If a study programme is of continuous and extended form, self-analysis report is provided separately for each form not repeating information which they have in common.

1.2. Internal quality assurance in higher education institution activities

An article 41 "Internal quality assurance in activities of higher education and research institutions" of the Law on Higher Education and Research (2009) states, that "Every higher education institution must have an internal quality assurance system for studies based on the European Higher Education Area guidelines for quality assurance of studies and the strategy of quality improvement approved by the higher education institution itself; schedule methods and measures which help to ensure the quality of higher education provided by the institution" (p. 31). A higher education institution must constantly announce in its website and in other ways the accurate quantitative and qualitative information about study programmes, awarded higher education qualifications, research (artistic) activities, evaluation results, opinions of students, graduates and other interested parties about study quality, assessments of activities of the higher education institution performed by the accredited institutions, career indexes of graduates; it may also announce other data necessary to inform the public about studies. Higher education and research institutions shall constantly carry out self-assessment of research and study (artistic) activities.

Institutional assessment of higher education institutions is performed according to the order by the Minister of Education and Science "Description of college activity quality assessment procedures" No. ISAK-569, 3 March, 2008, and to the following orders by SKVC director: „Methodological recommendations for the external assessment of education and research activities" No. 3-119, 28 August, 2008, devoted for the institutional quality assessment of higher education and research institutions; "On the methodological recommendations for preparation self-analysis of

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[33] *More information is available in annex 8 in the order of SKVC director "On the approval of description the external study programme assessment and accreditation" No. 1-94, 30 October, 2009 (http://www.skvc.lt).*

higher education and research institutions" No. 1-154, 18 November, 2008; "Methodology of external assessment of college activity quality" No. 1-66, 8 May, 2008; and "Methodological recommendations for the self-analysis of college activity" No. 1-28, 17 March, 2008, devoted for the institutional assessment of college activities[34].

Methodical recommendations for the external assessment of higher education and research institutions define aims of external assessment of *university* activities, procedures, principles of experts' group organization and activity, areas and sub-areas of external assessment. External assessment is performed by the experts selected by SKVC. The base of external assessment is self-analysis performed by institution. The aim of external assessment is to develop internal quality assurance culture in the universities, to support universities in defining their strongest and weakest areas, to improve study quality, publicly announce the conclusions of the quality of university activity.

1.2.1. External assessment of university activity

External assessment of university activity consists of the preparation of self-analysis report, and external assessment. External assessment comprises from 4 main stages: 1) preparation for external assessment (assessment aims identification, expert group organization, information university about the composition of expert group, expert readiness for the assessment which includes signing declaration of interest and confidentiality, expert group trainings, organizing and announcement of agenda of visit to the university); 2) visit to the university (meetings with university staff, students, graduates, employers and other stakeholders, acquaintance with facilities and learning resources); 3) preparation and public announcement of assessment conclusions (preparation of assessment conclusions project, its introduction to the academic society, revision of factual information, public announcement of final assessment conclusions); 4) follow-up (preparation of plan for the university activity improvement, its implementation and second external assessment in order to evaluate how university followed the conclusions of external assessment).

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[34] When the report was prepared the Ministry of Education and Science approved the order "On the approval of description of the procedures of external assessment of higher education institutions and description of procedures of higher education institutions accreditation" No. 1317, 22 September, 2010, in accordance to which institutional external assessment and accreditation of higher education institutions should be performed. *More information is available at: http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=381569&p_query=&p_tr2=*

Expert groups are organized on the basis of the description of expert selection[35] and additional requirements which mostly depend on the field of education and research of university to be assessed, as well as on other criteria. Persons having experience in management of university, business, and industry institutions are invited to become assessment experts (ex-rectors, ex-vice-rectors, ex-directors and etc). Expert groups can be comprised from: a) local experts (persons, working in Lithuania); b) foreign experts (persons working abroad); c) mixed expert group, involving persons working in Lithuania and persons working abroad. Expert group has to consist of 3 persons as minimum, when one of them is appointed group leader. During the assessment process experts follow the principles of confidentiality, objectivity, assistance and accountability. The work of expert group is coordinated by the coordinator of university external assessment appointed by SKVC.

The following areas are the main areas of external university assessment: 1) internal university management; 2) external university management; 3) study process; 4) research activities; 5) resources; 6) student support; 7) internal quality assurance[36].

University internal assessment is performed in accordance with the order by SKVC director "On the Methodological recommendations for preparation self-analysis of higher education and research institutions activities" No. 1-154, 18 November, 2008, which is in compliance with the methodology for university external assessment. The following main areas of universities self-analysis are distinguished: self-government, external intercourse, studies, research and artistic activities, resources, student support, internal quality management system. Every assessment area is divided into sub-areas, criteria and indicators for self-analysis are presented[37]. Report of university activities self-analysis is important part of external assessment.

1.2.2. External assessment of college activities quality

External assessment of college activities quality consists of two parts: internal college assessment (self-analysis) and external assessment, which is performed by expert group. Preparation of self-analysis report of college activities quality is based on the "Methodological recommendations for self-analysis of college activities" as well as external assessment is performed

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[35] *The order by SKVC director "On the approval of the description of expert selection" No. 1-55, issued on 19 March, 2007 (http://www.skvc.lt).*

[36] *More information on assessment criteria and indicators is available in the chapter IV "Institutional assessment areas and sub-areas" of the order „Methodological recommendations for the external assessment of education and research activities" No. 3-119 issued by SKVC director on 28 August, 2008 (http://www.skvc.lt).*

[37] *More information is available in chapter 2 "Institutional assessment areas and sub-areas" in the order "On the Methodological recommendations for preparation self-analysis of higher education and research institutions activities" No. 1-154, issued by SKVC director on 18 November (http://www.skvc.lt).*

in accordance with "Methodology for external assessment of college activities quality". Methodology for external assessment of college activities quality describes the following assessment components: principles and procedures of expert group organization and activities, areas of activity assessment, system of assessment criteria and indicators, preparation of external assessment report (writing general conclusion and formulation of recommendations for the improvement quality of activities), process of the assessment of expert's work and methodological tools for the experts' work.

In principle the methodology for the external quality assessment of college activities corresponds with the methodology for external quality assessment of university activities except the number of assessment areas and requirements for expert selection and group organization, which are different. The external quality assessment of college activities is more focussed on the quality indicators of other level in comparison with universities assessment (for instance, in the college assessment of research activity applied research are more important, when in the assessment of university both applied research and fundamental research are important).

The aim of the selection of expert group for the quality assessment of college activities is to involve at least one representative from employers, one representative from colleges and universities. It is indicated that not less than half of the expert group members has to have an experience in the field of the assessment of higher education management and education management as well as to have experience in the examination assessment. The following groups of persons can not be included into the expert group: persons who worked or tried to employ in the institution to be assessed during the last 4 years; persons in tight relations with the direction of the institution to be assessed; persons who participate or participated in the self-government or academic activity of the institution to be assessed in the last 4 years; persons who graduated institution to be assessed not earlier than 5 years ago. The size of expert group depends on the college students' number[38]. Group leader is appointed from the members of group. The administrative of expert group is an employee of SKVC, who do not have a right to participate in the decision making process. The expert group is approved by the order of SKVC director. College has a right to express its opinion about the expert group composition.

The following are the main aims of the external assessment of college activities:

- To evaluate the quality of college activities, progress and implemented quality improvement mechanisms in accordance with the distinguished activities areas;
- To evaluate whether the college fulfilled the provisions prescribed for its establishment;

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[38] Expert group consists of 5 experts and 1 administrative when college has up to 5 000 students, and 7 experts and 1 administrative when college has more than 5 000 students.

- To evaluate whether the college performs the following activities:
    - carries out studies which provide to a person the college higher education and a higher education qualification and which satisfy the needs of the State, society and economy of Lithuania, and conform to the level of science and latest technologies;
    - develops applied research necessary for the region, to provide consultation to local government and economic entities;
    - creates conditions for continuous learning, supports economic entities in organization of persons professional development and re-qualification;
    - develops society receptive to education and culture, which is able to work under the conditions of rapid technology change.
- To provide college with the conclusions and recommendations on its activities improvement;
- To provide general conclusion with the offer to the Ministry of Education and Science on the expedience of further college activity.

College provides self-analysis report and other documents for the external assessment[39]. The following 9 areas of college activity are assessed: 1) college management; 2) planning of studies; 3) organization of studies; 4) assessment system of learning achievements; 5) applied research activity and consultation services; 6) international relations; 7) facilities and learning resources; 8) staff; 9) internal quality assurance system. Every assessment area is divided into sub-areas, as well as assessment criteria and indicators are defined[40]. When the assessment according to the indicators and criteria is finished experts provide the following evaluations: 4 – very good; 3 – good; 2 – weak; 1 – bad. Evaluation is positive when experts deliver points 4 and 3, negative evaluation is when points 2 and 1are delivered. Activity area is assessed positively if the evaluation is negative only according to the one criterion (point 2 or 1), and all the rest are evaluated positively (points 3 or 4). Activity area is evaluated negatively if the evaluation is negative in accordance with more then one assessment criteria. The activity of college is evaluated *positively* if only one area was evaluated negatively and all the rest areas were evaluated positively. General evaluation of college activity is *negative*, if more than one assessment area was evaluated negatively.

QA (quality assurance) culture of studies in Lithuanian higher education institutions is also developed through scientific researches of various study quality levels (teacher's teaching, study

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[39] *More information is available in section 4.1 "List of documents to be analysed and initial procedures" in the order "Methodology for external assessment of college activities quality" No. 1-66, 8 May, 2008, issued by SKVC director (http://www.skvc.lt).*
[40] *More information is available in chapter 9 "Assessment areas and criteria" in the order "Methodology for external assessment of college activities quality" No. 1-66, 8 May, 2008, issued by SKVC director (http://www.skvc.lt).*

subjects, their teaching, study programmes, activities of institutions and departments, internal QA systems). Research results are presented in international scientific journals and scientific journals published by local higher education institutions. Many of these journals are included in international scientific databases[41].

In conclusion, it can be stated that in the Lithuanian higher education system, study programme QA in colleges and universities involves two out of three qualification levels (vocational bachelor/bachelor and master) in accordance with the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework levels (VI, VII). QA of studies has clear and measurable aims and standards, is performed regularly, is characterised by precise requirements linked to credits and compliance of study programme outcomes with learning outcomes set in the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework. QA of studies also involves internal and external procedures for QA of study programme. During these procedures, context, input, process and outputs/outcomes are analysed (emphasising students' achievements on the base of learning outcomes), a wide network of internal and external stakeholders is included, provision of feedback to programme developers and implementers is anticipated, and further study programme improvement actions are implemented.

QA is an integral part of internal quality management at higher education institutions. It is based on clear and measurable aims, requirements and procedures, is performed regularly and is characterised by reasonable evaluation methods, including self-assessment and external assessment. During internal self-assessment and external assessment, context, input, process and outputs/outcomes are analysed. The following aspects are assessed: do higher education institutions have clear development guidelines? Do these guidelines involve stakeholders? Do higher education institutions have relevant staff and facilities for QA of studies? Do provision of feedback and procedures for quality improvement are anticipated? Do quality evaluation results are published and available, as well as do other relevant procedures match general principles set in the Annex 3 of Recommendations? Study Quality Assessment Centre – the agency responsible for external assessment of higher education institutions – plans to implement international external quality assessment of its activities in 2011.

2. <u>VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING</u>

In the Lithuanian education system, vocational education and training (VET) encompasses II, III, IV and V levels in the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework (respectively, II, III, IV and V levels in the European Qualifications Framework) and is organised in accordance with the Law on

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[41] *The main journals which publish higher education quality researches are "The Quality of Higher Education", "Vocational Education: Research and Reality", "Pedagogics", "Management of Organisations" and other.*

Vocational Education and Training of the Republic of Lithuania[42]. In the Law on the Amendment of the Law on Vocational Education and Training, issued on 3 April, 2007, the concept of the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework[43] (system of levels of qualifications, based on competences necessary to person activities and applied in the Republic of Lithuania) is introduced and defined for the first time (Article 2(3)). In Article 3 of the law, some of the most important aims of the VET system are defined as the help for an individual "to gain qualification and competences corresponding to the contemporary level of science, technology, economics and culture, helping this person to enter and compete in the constantly changing labour market, and ensuring development of national economy, competitive ability in international market and sustainable development" (1st aim) and "to ensure VET availability and quality" (3rd aim).

In Lithuania, VET is implemented in accordance with the programmes of formal and non-formal VET. The Law on Vocational Education and Training sets acknowledgment of non-formally and informally gained skills (Article 7). Part III of the law "System of Qualifications" describes the purpose and framework of the system of qualifications (Article 9), formation and management of qualifications (Article 10), evaluation of individual's competence and award of qualification (Article 11). Article 9(2) indicates that "the system of qualifications is based on the collaboration of stakeholders, state and education institutions" and encompasses formation and management of qualifications, assessment of individual's gained skills and award of qualifications (Paragraph 3). Article 10(1) determines that "qualification is based on competencies. Competencies necessary for the award of qualification are set by the vocational standard" and "qualifications are managed by the institution responsible for the management of qualifications". Management is done in accordance with the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework established by the government" (Paragraph 2)[44]. Article 11(1) of the Law on Vocational Education and Training indicates that "requirements for institutions that assess competences and procedures for accreditation of these institutions are set by the government". Evaluation of competences acquired by an individual is organised by the institution that assesses competences. Evaluation is performed in accordance with the procedure for the assessment of competences acquired by an individual, set by the minister of

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[42] *The Law on Vocational Education and Training of the Republic of Lithuania was issued in 1997. Amendments of the law were adopted in 1999, 2000, 2006, 2007, and 2009. The most recent amendment of the Law on Vocational Education and Training of the Republic of Lithuania was adopted by the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania on 25 May, 2010, No. XI-839.*

[43]*The Law of the Amendment and Supplement of Articles 2,6,10,11,12,13,14,18,19,21,22,23,24,27,28,31,33 of the Law on Vocational Education and Training of the Republic of Lithuania, the Supplement of the Law with Article 12¹s, the Withdrawal of Article 26, adopted on 25 May, 2010, No. XI-839, changed the concept of "National Qualifications Framework" into "Lithuanian Qualifications Framework".*

[44] *Quoted from The Law of the Amendment of the Law, No. XI-839, issued on 25 May, 2010. On 31 December, 2009, regulations of Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre were approved by the order No. ISAK-2845 of the minister of education and science. According to the Section 10.1 of these regulations, the function of qualifications management was appointed to this centre (http://www.kpmpc.lt).*

social security and labour and coordinated with the Minister of Education and Science. On the grounds of this legislative provision, the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania issued an order No. ISAK-991 "On the Approval of the Description of Rules for Final Qualification Examination of Basic Vocational Education and Training"[45] on 1st June, 2005. The order indicates that an independent three-member board should be formed for final qualification examination at each distinct school. A chairperson of the board is employers' representative (competent institutions also appoint a representative of trade unions and a representative of vocational teachers to the board). Qualification is awarded to a person who has acquired all competencies relevant to the qualification and set by the adequate vocational standard (Article 11, Paragraphs 2, 3).

Article 12(4) in the Part IV of the Law on Vocational Education and Training "Organisation and Quality of Vocational Education and Training" indicates that "the programme of formal VET is intended for awarding qualification that is included into the Register of Vocational Standards and Qualifications, established by the government". In the same article paragraph 6 states that "VET programme shall meet vocational standard that describes the qualification or the appropriate Vocational Training Standard". Paragraph 8 of the Article obliges to register formal VET programmes and vocational training standards in the Register of Study and Training Programmes. All this shall be done in accordance with the order set by the Minister of Education and Science. Paragraph 1 of the Article 18 "Quality Assurance of Vocational Training and Education" of the Law on Vocational Training and Education indicates that responsibility for VET quality assurance (QA) is taken by "the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, other ministries and government institutions, institutions under the Ministry of Education and Science, Institution of Qualification Management[46], municipality institutions, the owner of a non-state funded VET institution (meeting of participants), the head of VET institution. They initiate and validate public agreements on the concept of VET quality, foresee indicators, criteria, standards or other requirements of VET quality, observe and assess conformity of VET with agreements, plan and implement VET development"[47]. In order to assure VET quality, VET is monitored in accordance with monitoring indicators[48], approved by the Minister of Education and Science, and set order, quality of activities of VET institutions are self-assessed and assessed

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[45] More information available at:. http://www.smm.lt

[46] By the order No. ISAK-2845 of the minister of education and science, issued on 31 December, 2009, the functions of the Institution of Qualifications Management were ascribed to the Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre.

[47] According to the Law of Amendment of the Law on Vocational Education and Training No. XI-839 issued on 25 May, 2010.

[48] More information available at: http://www.smm.lt; Order of the minister of education and science No. ISAK-2692 "On the Approval of Indicators for State Education Monitoring", issued on 30 December, 2005 and prepared during the implementation of the Part 2 of the Article 53 of the Law on Education.

externally, learning achievements are assessed, as well as VET and award of qualifications are supervised (Article 18, Paragraph 2, 25 May, 2010, the Law of Amendment of the Law on Vocational Education and Training No. XI-839). The law indicates that responsibility for VET quality has to be taken by the VET provider. Self-assessment of VET institution and external assessment are regulated by the Law on Education[49]. The Law on Amendment of the Law on Vocational Education and Training (No. XI-839, Article 11, Part 2, Point 2) requires "providing learning conditions that are indicated in VET programmes, ensure conformity of VET programmes with vocational standards or VET standards and continual development of teaching content and teaching methods". Other ministries and stakeholders (depending on their competency) take part in preparing vocational standards and "performing external quality assessment of VET institutions" (Point 8 of Article 17 of the Law on Amendment of the Law on Vocational Education and Training).

On 9 July, 2008, the Government of the Republic of Lithuania adopted a resolution No. 707 "On the Approval of Formal Vocational Education and Training Licensing Regulations"[50] which provided a new edition of the resolution No. 822 "On the Approval of Education and Training Licensing Regulations", adopted by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania on 29 June, 2004.

Formal Vocational Education and Training Licensing Regulations regulate issue of licences to legal entities, to branches of EU or other EEA states-based enterprises in the Republic of Lithuania or to private persons to provide formal VET programmes. These regulations also regulate update and revision of licences, rejection to issue licences, suspension of licence validity, withdrawal of suspension of licence validity and withdrawal of validity, issue of licence duplicates, as well as licence holders' rights and obligations, terms of licensed activity and their supervision. The regulations indicate that licences are issued, updated, revised, as well as their validity is suspended, suspension of validity is withdrawn and validity of licences is withdrawn by the Ministry of Education and Science, in accordance with the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania, the Law on Vocational Education and Training of the Republic of Lithuania, these regulations and other legal acts.

Section 10.1 of the Part IV of the Formal Vocational Education and Training Licensing Regulations "Requirements for Legal and Natural Persons That Aim to Become VET Providers" indicates that VET provider shall have "vocational teachers or vocational teacher candidates who meet requirements set in teaching programmes and the Law on Education of the Republic of

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[49] *For more information visit http://www.smm.lt; the Law on Education, Point 2 of Article 37, adopted on 25 June, 1991, No. I-1489 (Edition of the Law on Education, No. 63-2853, 28 June, 2003).*
[50] *More information available at: http://www3.lrs.lt*

Lithuania. A natural person shall meet requirements applied to vocational teachers and set in teaching programmes and the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania."

Section IX of Licensing Regulations "Suspension of licence validity, withdrawal of suspension of licence validity, withdrawal of licence validity and duplicate issue" indicates that licence validity is suspended if teaching programme (programmes) requirements are not being fulfilled, vocational teachers do not meet requirements set in teaching programme (programmes) and the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania, places for theoretical and practical training do not meet the number of students and teaching programme, as well as health, safety, fire and hygiene requirements indicated in legal acts, facilities and methodical resources aimed at theoretical and practical training do not meet the number of students and teaching programme requirements (Points 30.1- 30.4).

Section XI (Points 43.3 and 43.4) of Licencing Regulations "Terms for Activities to be Licensed, Licence Holder's Rights and Obligations" indicate that a licence holder shall "ensure that teachers', who participate in the process, educational background, pedagogical qualification, pedagogical experience, practical experience in a relevant sphere would meet requirements set in legal acts and teaching programmes, as well as ensure that training classes, laboratories, workshops would be appropriately equipped and meet requirements for places of theoretical and practical training, health, safety, fire and hygiene requirements, set in legal acts and other documents".

Conditions for licensed activities are supervised by education supervision institutions, in accordance with the order set by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania or its authorised institution[51]. The main institution responsible for VET development and VET QA is the Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre (http://www.kpmpc.lt). The main aim of this centre is to ensure that the developments of Lithuanian qualifications system correspond to the needs of the economy, as well as national and international initiatives. In order to achieve the aim, the centre takes such objectives as: management of Lithuanian qualifications system, improvement of VET quality, strengthening the cooperation among VET actors etc. In order to implement these tasks, the centre performs such functions as development of occupational and VET standards; organisation and/or implementation of research in VET, including specialists demand forecasts; organisation and/or implementation of training sessions for occupational and VET standard developers, VET and specialists demand forecasts researchers; cooperation with Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education when managing higher education qualifications; organises assessment of formal VET programmes; organisation of assessment of

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[51] *On 31 December, 2009, regulations of Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre were approved by the order No. ISAK-2845 of the minister of education and science. According to these regulations, the function of qualifications management was appointed to this centre (http://www.kpmpc.lt).*

readiness to implement formal VET programmes and issuance of inspection acts; External assessment of VET institutions activity and/or implementation of formal VET programmes; organisation of assessment of institutions according to their readiness to assess individual's competence and offering these institutions to the Ministry of Education and Science to be accredited; development of quality culture (development and improvement of VET institutions self-analysis, external assessment and other advisory methodologies, organisation and/or implementation of training and counselling for VET quality assessors); development of VET credit systems; initiation and/or implementation applied VET researches; publication of generalisations of VET institution activity and VET programme assessments; compilation, analysis and dissemination of VET information; organisation of development of modular programmes and/or their renewal, as well as organisation of training and counselling sessions to programme developers; cooperation with national and international VET actors; performance of *Quality Assurance National Reference Point for VET* functions and *National Coordination Point* tasks; coordination of European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) information and ReferNet network in Lithuania; preparation or participation in preparation of draft law of the Republic of Lithuania, draft resolutions of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania and other draft legislation of the Republic of Lithuania and the European Union.

Activity of the Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre (KPMPC) is organised, managed and represented by the director of the centre. The director of the centre is appointed and removed by the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania. Centre coordination board is responsible for coordination of activities of the Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre. The board consists of eight members, two of whom represent social partners, two represent education providers, another two represent the Ministry of Education and Science, one represents either the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Lithuania or the Ministry of Social Security and Labour and the last member of the board is the director of the Centre (without voting). Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre has not yet implemented the procedure of international external quality assessment of its activity.

On 27 May, 2010, the director of the Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre issued edition of the order "On the Methodology of Inspection of Readiness to Implement Formal VET Programmes" No. VI-43[52]. It was prepared in accordance with the order No. ISAK-38 of the Minister of Education and Science "On the Approval of the Description of Procedures for the Inspection of Readiness to Implement Formal VET Programmes"[53], issued on 8

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[52] *For more information visit http://www.kpmpc.lt*
[53] *For more information visit http://www.smm.lt*

January, 2009. This minister's order sets the procedure for assessment of readiness of legal entities, branches of EU or other EEA states-based enterprises in the Republic of Lithuania or private persons to implement a specific VET programme, as well as sets procedures for the issue of the act of inspection. It identifies 3 main criteria[54] that are used to assess the readiness of an applicant to implement VET programmes.

The following main inspection objectives are provided in the inspection methodology (Order No. VI-43 of the director of the Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre): a) to evaluate appropriateness of human, facility and methodological resources, taking into consideration all documents provided by the applicant; b) to inspect appropriateness of human, facility and methodological resources during the site visit; c) to generalise assessment results and evaluate applicant's readiness to implement a programme.

Inspection is performed by the expert board, approved by the director of the Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre. The board consists of no less than 3 members, chosen in accordance with the order and requirements of the Centre (each member shall have at least 3 years experience in the field of the programme to be assessed; at least one member of the board shall represent education and at least one member shall represent business). When selecting experts, priority is given to people who have experience in programme assessment and/or assessment of readiness to implement them. One member of the board is appointed to be the chairperson of the board. This person is responsible for board's activity and preparation of inspection acts.

Another important document that assures VET quality is the order No. V-815 of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania, issued on 2 June, 2010, "On the Amendment of the Oder No. ISAK-2333 of the Minister of Education and Science, Issued on 3 December, 2007, "On the Approval of the Programme of Development of Practical VET Resources"[55]. The order indicates precise schedules for project funding and signing of administration agreements while developing various VET fields, including implementation of internal methods for VET QA (Point 20.2.11, starts 2010) and implementation of external VET quality assessment (Point 20.2.12, starts 2011). Culture of VET QA is initially planned to be

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[54] *For more information see the edition of the order No. VI-43 of the director of the Centre, issued on 27 May, 2010, Point 4.2 "Definition and Assessment of Criteria" (http://www.kpmpc.lt) that were prepared in accordance with the "List of indicators", Annex II of Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (Official Journal of the European Union, p. 155/6, Annex I, date – 8.07.2009).*

[55] *For more information see the order No. V-815 of the minister of education and science of the Republic of Lithuania, issued on 2 June, 2010, "On the Amendment of the Oder No. ISAK-2333 of the Minister of Education and Science, Issued on 3 December, 2007, "On the Approval of the Programme of Development of Practical VET Resources" (http://www.smm.lt).*

developed through stimulation of VET providers' initiatives to develop internal QA methods. Later on they are planned to be strengthened through implementation of external assessment methods. A very important initiative was recorded in the minister's order No. ISAK-2333, issued on 3 December, 2007. This initiative aims to reorganise VET programmes on the modular principle in order to make them closer to the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework and develop acknowledgment of learning credits in VET and acknowledgement of non-formally and informally acquired knowledge and abilities.

In Section III of the order No. V-815 of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania "Analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats", the following aspects are emphasised as strengths of the development of VET system: VET standard system (Point 18.1.1.), VET content based on competencies (Point 18.1.2.), prepared conception of VET QA[56] (Point 18.1.8), experience in preparation and assessment of VET programmes and tools, as well as in development of vocational teachers' and lecturers' technological abilities (Point 18.1.3.) etc. The fact that VET institutions have not implemented internal QA methods is shown as one of weaknesses of the development of VET system (Point 18.2.10). Opportunities related to the formation of the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework are presented as an important opportunity for the development of VET system (Point 18.3.3).

The draft order "Regulations for VET QA System" [57] has already been prepared by the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania. These regulations aim to form a unified understanding of VET QA and to encourage all interested parties to contribute to the development of QA system. Regulations for VET QA system are prepared in accordance with the Conception of Formal Education QA System[58] and other national and EU documents and proper experience. The draft distinguishes internal (leadership and management, contribution, teaching and learning processes, outcomes) and environmental (VET influence and consequences, VET context) VET components. It also provides VET QA model with 5 processes: plan, implementation, assessment, monitoring and unified methodology that includes all these processes. 8 basic elements of VET QA system are distinguished: 1) internal quality assessment; 2) national regulation[59]; 3) help to providers; 4) external quality assessment; 5) promotion of quality development; 6) VET monitoring[60]; 7) licensing and supervision[61]; 8) national coordination.

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[56] More information is available at: http://www.kpmpc.lt

[57] More information is available at: http://www.kpmpc.lt

[58] The Conception of Formal Education QA System was approved by the order No. ISAK-3219 of the minister of education and science of the Republic of Lithuania, issued on 24 November, 2008. For more information visit http://www.smm.lt

[59] Based on Lithuanian Qualifications Framework; for more information visit http://www3.lrs.lt

[60] Based on education monitoring indicators, Order of the minister of education and science No. ISAK-2692 "On the Approval of Indicators for State Education Monitoring", issued on 30 December; for more information visit http://www.smm.lt .

During internal VET self-assessment (Point 10 of the regulations), a VET provider chooses what VET programme implementation and sphere of activity will be self-assessed each year and what criteria and indicators will be used for this self-assessment. When performing self-assessment, VET institutions can use a specially prepared "Manual for VET Internal QA" (2000) and "Dictionary of VET QA terminology" (2006). When preparing for external assessment at national level, self-assessment is performed in accordance with criteria set at national level.

National regulation (Point 11 in draft regulations) approves the most important parameters for contribution, teaching and learning process, prepares VET quality assessment criteria for each cycle (the forecasted length of which is 5 years) of external quality assessment, performed at system level. Priority tasks of VET system development are determined for each cycle of external assessment. Besides, efficiency of internal QA system used by VET providers is measured.

According to national criteria, external quality assessment (Point 13 in draft regulations) can be of two types: a) VET programme preparation, development of their implementation and improvement of learning outcomes; b) improvement of VET institution management and implementation of QA systems.

VET monitoring (Point 15 in draft regulations) is planned to be implemented in accordance with national VET monitoring indicators, set by the Minister of Education and Science. Statistical data and research[62] data will be used for assessment of achievement of indicators. Monitoring is also performed at the level of VET provider. VET provider individually chooses relevant monitoring indicators after self-assessment of needs and taking into consideration national monitoring indicators. Monitoring indicators are evaluated each year and are used for the development of VET processes and QA methods. According to the order No. V-815 of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania, issued on 2 June, 2010, these VET QA regulations shall be approved by the end of 2010.

When trying to make generalisations on the state of VET QA in Lithuania, it can be stated that it includes all VET qualifications in accordance with levels of Lithuanian Qualifications Framework. VET is implemented in accordance with clear and measurable aims and standards that are based on the requirements of the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework and function in accordance with the order for external quality assessment of future VET programmes. A lot of stakeholders take part in its realisation. Establishment of VET institutions is related to requirements of VET QA. Cooperation with other QA agencies and similar international institutions is organised.

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[61] *Based on the resolution No. 707 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, issued on 9 July, 2008; for more information visit http://www3.lrs.lt*
[62] *The Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre organises and/or implements explicit VET system and its quality reasearches. For more information visit http://www.kpmpc.lt*

Legal assumptions for validation of procedures for VET institution quality and VET programme internal and external quality are prepared in accordance with self-assessment and evaluation of VET context, input, process and outputs/outcomes. Emphasis is put on conformity of learners' learning achievements with specific learning outcomes indicated in Lithuanian Qualifications Framework. Many stakeholders are included and valid VET programme quality and VET institution quality methods, as well as VET programme and institution quality improvement procedures, public evaluation results are described. Other relevant procedures that comply with general principles indicated in Annex 3 of the recommendations are mentioned.

Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre has not yet implemented the procedure of international external assessment of its activity quality.

3. <u>GENERAL EDUCATION</u>

The Law on Education regulates pre-school, pre-primary, primary, basic and secondary, special education, non-formal children education, as well as other (e.g. teachers' education and training) action spheres related to these fields of general education. QA of education in these fields of general education is governed by the Law on Education and related resolutions of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania and orders of the minster of education and science of the Republic of Lithuania.

Part 2 of Article 37 "Education Quality" of the Law on Education indicates that "the government or its authorised institution determines: 1) general requirements for formal education programmes and teachers' qualification, general criteria for state and municipality-funded non-formal education programmes, and monitors conformity with these criteria; 2) criteria and order for licence issue, monitors licensing terms; 3) standards of formal education and qualifications[63], order for qualification evaluation, acquisition and validation of education and qualifications; 4) order of internal and external assessment of education providers' management and pedagogical activity[64]". Part 4 of the Article indicates that the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania "uses education quality research results"[65], and aims to ensure renewal of formal education programmes, introduction of new programmes, as well as interaction and coherence of

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[63] *The order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania No. ISAK-2433 "On the Approval of General Programmes of Primary and Basic Education", issued on 26 August, 2008; for more information visit* http://www.smm.lt
[64] *Order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania "On the Amendment of Approval of the Description of Order for External Audit of General Education School Quality" No. ISAK-608, issued on 30 March, 2009; Order No. ISAK-607 "On the Acceptance of Recommendations on Self-assessment of General Education School Quality", issued on 30 March, 2009. For more information visit:* http://www.smm.lt/ti/isakymai.ht
[65] *Education Development Centre, founded by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania, is responsible for education researches (including education quality researches) For more information visit:* http://www.upc.lt

programmes from different levels". The same Part indicates that the Minister of Education and Science approves general programmes of pre-primary and general education, determines criteria for pre-school and non-formal children education, approves general education plans for general education schools, approves primary, basic and secondary education standards, regulations for pedagogue education and training[66], approves *Matura* examination programmes and their organisation and implementation order.

Part 5 of Article 37 of the Law on Education indicates that "the founder of a school[67] accepts variants of elective part of formal education programme of the school and non-formal education programmes. A county governor[68], municipality board ensure that the supply of programmes in their founded schools would meet the needs of local community (region)". According to Point 6 of Part 6 of the same Article, a school ensures flexibility and variability of programme content, coherence of programme content and its delivery methods, compliance of standards of individualized programme and student needs and abilities, implemented programmes, as well as education and qualifications, identified by the state.

Part 2 of Article 38 "Assessment of Learning Achievements" of the Law on Education indicates that learning achievements are assessed by a teacher, education provider, the Ministry of Education and Science and its authorised institutions. Assessment of learning achievements of students who participate in formal education programmes and the use of assessment results are regulated by specific regulations (Part 3 of Article 38), approved by the Minister of Education and Science. Part 4 of the same Article indicates that institutions authorised by the Minister of Education and Science organise examinations[69] and commissions other means of assessment of learning achievements.

The purpose of the National Examination Centre (NEC), as an authorised institution of the Ministry of Education and Science to assess learning achievements, is to provide help to a student, teacher, and school, to organise and implement examinations and knowledge and abilities evaluation, to analyse, generalise and use examination results and learning achievements when

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[66] *Order of the minister of education and science of the Republic of Lithuania No. V-54 "On the Approval of Pedagogue Education and Training Regulations", issued on 8 January, 2010. This order determines requirements for education and training of teachers, vocational teachers and adult educators (andragogues). For more information visit http://www.smm.lt .*

[67] *Founders of general education schools can be the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania, municipality or participant meeting.*

[68] *In accordance with the governing reform of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, county governor's administrations were removed on 1 July 2010.*

[69] *The National Examination Centre (NEC) is responsible for the organisation and implementation of basic education achievements and Matura examinations and other similar functions. The Centre was established on 5 March, 1996 as the Examination Centre (order of the minister of education and science No. 234); In 2000, the Centre was renamed into the National Examination Centre (Order No. 335; 3 April, 2000). The NEC regulations were approved by the order of the minister of education and science No. ISAK-548 "On the Approval of National Examination Regulations", issued on 24 March, 2006. For more information visit http://www.nec.lt*

improving knowledge and abilities research ways and methods. The main aim of the NEC is to assess general education achievements of individuals. During the development and maintenance of qualification examination system at VET institutions, the NEC also collaborates with institutions from other education sectors, i.e. VET institutions, higher education institutions, chambers of commerce, industry and crafts and their association. The NEC also takes part in preparation of draft legal acts that meet its competence.

Part 1 of Article 39 "Legitimating of Learning Achievements" of the Law on Education indicates that "The learning achievements of a person engaged in the process of formal education, non-formal education or self-education are legitimated by means of a document (certificate, *Matura* certificate, diploma) issued according to an established procedure; the form and the procedure of issue of the document is established by the Government or its authorised institution". Part 2 of the Article indicates that learning achievement documents are issued: 1) a certificate of basic education – upon completion of the basic curriculum; 2)   a *Matura* attestation – upon completion of the secondary curriculum and upon passing the *Matura* examinations[70]. Learners who have completed a part (module) of the primary, basic or secondary curricula, a special education curriculum or those who failed to pass the *Matura* examinations receive a certificate attesting to their learning achievements (Part 4 of Article 39).

Responsibility for QA at general education schools is taken by the National Agency of School Evaluation, founded by the Minister of Education and Science (30 December, 2005; Order No. ISAK-2683 "On the Establishment of the National Agency of School Evaluation (NMVA) and Its Regulation Approval"). Responsibility for accreditation of secondary education programmes goes to the board of accreditation of secondary education programmes (appointed by the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania for the 3-year term) and accreditation boards (appointed by county governors)[71].

The purpose of the National Agency of School Evaluation is to help the Ministry of Education and Science to assure education quality while developing self-assessment and external assessment of general education schools and helping heads and founders of schools to make decisions of higher quality when using appropriate data. The aim of the National Agency of School Evaluation is to assess quality of activities of schools that provide general education, to provide methodical support and recommendations to schools and founders of school in relation to improvement of quality of school activities. The main tasks are: a) to manage internal self-

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[70] *The procedures for issuance of learning achievements documents attesting to the completion of vocational training or a studies curricula and attesting to attaining a higher education level, a qualification, a qualification degree or a research degree are regulated by the Law on Vocational Training and the Law on Higher Education.*

[71] *In accordance with the governing reform of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, county governor's administrations were removed on 1 July 2010.*

assessment of quality of school activities and organise and coordinate external assessment of quality of school activities; b) provide data for education monitoring; c) select external assessors for assessment of quality of school activities and to provide them with training and attestation. The National Agency of School Evaluation also prepares and publishes criteria for school selection and their quality assessment. In accordance with the order set in legal acts, the director of the agency is appointed by means of a competition by the Ministry of Education and Science by the Republic of Lithuania[72]. The National Agency of School Evaluation is a member of many international organisations; however it has not yet been externally assessed by any agency of the European Network for Quality Assurance.

The order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania No. V-238, issued on 22 February, 2010 "On the Amendment of the order of the Minister of Education and Science No. ISAK-171 "On the Approval of Education Programme Accreditation Criteria and Description of the Order of Accreditation", issued on 5 February, 2004" is used when trying to assure quality of secondary education programmes provided in the sector of general education. The order No. ISAK-608, issued on 30 March, 2009 "On the Amendment of "The Approval of the Description of Order for External Audit of Quality of General Education Schools" and order No. ISAK-607, issued on 30 March, 2009, "On the Acceptance of Recommendations on Self-assessment of General Education School Quality" are used when ensuring quality of general education schools.

3.1. Accreditation of Secondary Education Programmes

A very important document in general education QA is the order by the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania No. ISAK-2433 "On the Approval of General Programmes of Primary and Basic Education", issued on 26 August, 2008. The purpose of general programmes is to define the content of primary and basic education when trying to achieve coherence, availability and quality of education in the entire Lithuanian education system. Education content is defined in general programmes when describing learning outcomes, providing recommended guidelines for the process of education, indicating the volume of subject content, as well as describing features of distinct levels of learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are described in General programmes with the emphasis on the basics of acquired general competences and essential subject competences[73].

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[72] *For more information visit http://www.nmva.lt*

[73] *General and essential competences (required for personal self-realisation, active public spirit, social occupation and employment and life-long learning) are defined in General programmes in accordance with Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences of lifelong learning (2006/962/EC):*

General programmes define education content at the state level. Point 6.2 of the order indicates that learning outcomes are described as the unit of three interrelated components (knowledge, skills and understanding) of continually developed competence. A student shall appropriately realise received knowledge, be able to apply this knowledge in new situations, demonstrate sophistication and behaviour that is based on certain values, i.e. competence. Next to descriptions of learning outcomes, General programmes provide a section on "Education Guidelines" that are aimed at stimulating conscious learning activity. Learning outcomes are described for the two-year concentre (1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, 9-10 classes). Learning outcomes for each two-year concentre are provided in a table with generalised descriptions of features of satisfactory (marginal), basic (typical) and higher learning outcomes. Sections "Education Guidelines" and "Content Volume" describe the minimum of learning content, indicating what is necessary to be learned in order to achieve satisfactory learning outcomes.

The order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania No. V-238, issued on 22 February, 2010 "On the Amendment of "The Approval of Education Programme Accreditation Criteria and Description of the Order of Accreditation" provides assessment and features of criteria for accreditation of secondary education programme. The document distinguishes 8 assessment criteria and related indicators[74]. The highest possible amount of points to be received when assessing education programme is 180; the lowest required amount of points for the programme to be accredited is 120. Data from the last 3 years are used for the assessment of education programmes.

Accreditation of secondary education programme is organised and implemented by: a) accreditation board for secondary education programme; b) accreditation coordination boards, and c) assessment group.

The accreditation board for secondary education programme consists of 11 members. They can be representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania, Departments (offices) for State Supervision at County Governors' Administrations, Education departments, Education subdivisions at municipality administrations, or Gymnasium Associations. Members of the board are approved by the Minister of Education and Science for the three-year period. Resolutions of the board for accreditation of secondary education programme are approved by the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania.

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1) communication in the mother tongue; 2) communication in foreign languages; 3) mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology; 4) digital competence; 5) learning to learn; 6) social and civic competences; 7) sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; 8) cultural awareness and expression. These competences are provided in Point 13 of the order No. ISAK-243.

[74] For more information see Annex 1 "Assessment and Features of Criteria for Accreditation of Secondary Education Programmes" of the order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania No. V-238 "On the Amendment of "The Approval of Education Programme Accreditation Criteria and Description of the Order of Accreditation", issued on 22 February, 2010; (http://www.smm.lt).

A one-year plan for accreditation of secondary education programmes at schools is drawn by the board for accreditation of secondary education programmes. The board also accredits secondary education programme for a specific school, considers appeals of head of schools, and makes decisions related to suspension or withdrawal of validity of secondary education programmes. Accreditation coordination boards are approved by county governors[75].

A group for assessment of conformity of implementation of secondary education programme at a specific school with accreditation criteria is formed. This group consists of 5-7 experts of accreditation (specialist from the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania, head and/or specialist of the Department for State Education Supervision, heads of gymnasiums, deputy heads for education of gymnasiums). If needed, a psychologist, a special pedagogue and a social pedagogue are added to the group. The group is managed by the specialist of the Department for State Education Supervision.

A school that wants its secondary education programme to be accredited shall in advance provide the assessment group with data on the success of achievements of students who study under the secondary education programme, pedagogue qualifications, and school inspection acts for the last three years, acts or reviews of external audit and other documents. Group members share their work and analyse provided documents and data that can be found in the databases of the Centre of Information Technologies in Education[76] and Education Supply Centre[77] prior to the start of accreditation and prepare for preliminary assessment. The head of the group and two group members inspect: a) how criteria of learning success and achievements are implemented at school and b) how the order for acceptance to school is followed. If the results show that the school gets no less that 15 out of 21 points in regard to criteria of learning success and achievements and that the school avoids selection to its maximum when enrolling learners to the secondary education programme, the head of the assessment group together with the head of the school prepare draft plan for the work of the group at the school and set the date for inspection. In case the school receives less than 15 points and/or applies selection procedures when enrolling learners to the secondary education programme, the head of the assessment group prepares a report and suggests the accreditation coordination group to postpone the date of accreditation.

If the report of preliminary assessment indicates that 15 or more points are received, the assessment group prepares the plan for assessment of the school's secondary education programme. In this plan, each group member is appointed certain tasks, as well as the order of activities, terms, and conversations with heads of school, pedagogues, learners, parents and other stakeholders are

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[75] *In accordance with the governing reform of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, county governor's administrations were removed on 1 July 2010.*
[76] *For more information visit http://www.ipc.lt*
[77] *For more information visit http://www.sac.smm.lt*

scheduled. Within five working days, the group evaluates if the implementation of the secondary education programme conforms to accreditation criteria. During the group's work at school, a representative of the institution that realises owner's rights and obligations acts as an observer. The prepared draft report is discussed with the school's administration.

Within seven working days, the group evaluates implementation of the secondary education programme. Evaluation is based on the features of accreditation criteria. Preliminary report is discussed with the school's administration. During the group's work at school, a representative of the founder acts as an observer.

Decision on the accreditation of the secondary education programme is made after the analysis of the last three-years data on: a) secondary education acquisition (according to Table 1 in Annex 3)[78]; b) learners' achievements and course repetition (according to Table 2 in Annex 3); c) 11-12th form education plan and teachers' qualification (according to Table 3 in Annex 3); d) qualification categories of 11-12th form teachers at the day of information collection (according to Table 4 in Annex 3); e) 11-12th form learners who terminate learning (according to Table 5 in Annex 3); f) school attendance (according to Table 6 in Annex 3); g) meeting the needs of 11-12th form learners in the final year in accordance with additional education programmes (according to Table 7 in Annex 3); h) results of Olympiads, competitions, contests, projects and scientific conferences (according to Table 8 in Annex 3); i) development of 11-12th form teachers' qualification (according to Table 9 in Annex 3); j) results of the national level *Matura* examination (according to Table 10 in Annex 3).

The assessment group can provide the following conclusions: 1) if a school gets no less than 2/3 of possible points, it can be claimed that the quality of the implementation of secondary education programme meets set accreditation criteria and it is recommended to accredit the programme; 2) if a school gets less than 2/3 of possible points, it can be claimed that the quality of the implementation of secondary education programme partially meets set accreditation criteria and it is recommended to postpone accreditation for 1 year; 3) if a school gets 1/3 or less of possible points, it can be claimed that the quality of the implementation of secondary education programme does not meet set accreditation criteria and it is recommended not to accredit the programme of secondary education implemented in the school; the institution that implements owner's rights and obligations is recommended to terminate learners' enrolment to the secondary education programme.

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[78] *According to the order of the Minster of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania No. V-238 "On the Amendment of "The Approval of Education Programme Accreditation Criteria and Description of the Order of Accreditation", issued on 22 February, 2010; for more information visit (http://www.smm.lt.*

The report of the assessment group is forwarded to the accreditation board[79] that reviews validity of collected data and report. If the accreditation board finds no breaches, documents are forwarded to the accreditation board for secondary education programme. This board reviews the report provided by the assessment group and prepares draft project for the accreditation of the programme to be provided to the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania. Procedures for accreditation of secondary education programmes also plan procedures for appeal provision and analysis and indicate resources[80] for assessment of secondary education programme, as well as provide evaluation methods for each (out of 8) criterion (Annex 2). A special programme is designed for training of assessment experts. This programme includes selection of experts, interpretation of assessment objectives and other themes. Training session for selected experts lasts 5 days (46 academic hours). 33 hours are devoted to the training programme, 9 hours – to practical group works and another 4 hours are for tests.

3.2.   Assessment of general education schools

The system of quality assessment of general education school consists of school's self-assessment, which is the most important QA factor, and external assessment. External assessment is organised and implemented in all Lithuanian schools no more than once in the 7-year period. Each school can voluntarily apply for external assessment more often than just once in the 7-year period. External assessment is formative assessment of school processes. This assessment is performed in accordance with indicators[81] for the activity of general education school and provides information relevant for the corrections of certain school activities and for the improvement of its results.

External assessment of general education schools is organised by the National Agency of School Evaluation and institution that implements owner's rights and obligations. External assessment is organised in accordance with the order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania No. ISAK-608 "On the Approval of the Description of Procedures for External Assessment of Quality of General Education Schools", issued on 30 March, 2009. This

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[79] *In accordance with the governing reform of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, county governor's administrations were removed on 1 July 2010.*

[80] *For example, the following data collection resources are provided for the criterion "11-12th form learners' success and achievements": a) annual reports of school achievements and attendance (last 3 years); b) 11-12th form diaries ; c) analysis of data provided in Table 6 (provided by the annex to preliminary assessment) "School attendance"; d) analysis of data provided in documents (annual reports of school achievements and attendance, schedules of school activities) and Table 2 (provided by the annex to preliminary assessment) "Learners' achievements and Course Repetition".*

[81] *For more information see Annex 2 "Indicators of General Education School Activities" of the order of the minister of education and science of the Republic of Lithuania No. ISAK-608 "On the Approval of the Description of Procedures for External Assessment of General Education School Quality", issued on 30 March, 2009. These indicators include assessment spheres, assessment criteria (themes) and explanations of indicators. For more information visit http://smm.lt*

order defines the concept of external assessment of quality of school activities, as well as describes organisation and implementation of external assessment. The following actors participate in external assessment of school activities: assessors, school's community, institutions that implement owner's rights and obligations (ministry, municipality, participant meetings) or authorised representatives.

The aim of external assessment is to motivate schools' improvement and development in order to achieve higher education quality and better learning achievements. Important objectives of external assessment are to develop quality culture, provide information about quality of school's activities, as well as spread positive experience of participant meetings (owners), structured departments authorised by municipality administrations and institutions that implement rights and obligations of teachers, schools and school owner.

There are five stages of external assessment: 1) preparation; 2) first visits of the head assessor to a school; 3) assessment at school; 4) generalisation of assessment, preparation of report and its coordination with a school; 5) report of a school and other external assessment participant, team of external assessment, and the Agency.

The National Agency of School Evaluation selects external assessors, organises training and attestation[82], and prepares documents necessary for this activity. The director of the Agency has to approve teams of external assessment and its schedule no later than 11 weeks before the start of assessment at school. The one-year list of assessed schools is prepared by the National Agency of School Evaluation in accordance with applications of distinct schools and institution that implements owner's rights and obligations, as well as in accordance with criteria for school selection, set by the Minister of Education and Science. This list is approved by the by the Minister of Education and Science.

The size of the assessment group and its members work duration is determined in accordance with the number of teachers who work at a school[83]. The size of the group may vary from 3 to 13 assessors. During preparation and implementation of external assessment, the head of the group and the group itself closely collaborates with the head of the school, teachers and institution that implements owner's rights and obligations. When 10 weeks remain until the start of assessment, the head of the assessment group together with representatives of school's community and institution that implements owner's rights and obligations discuss how the school assess itself

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[82] *For more information see Annex 4 "Rules for Behaviour of External Assessors of General Education School Activities" of the order of the minister of education and science of the Republic of Lithuania No. ISAK-608 "On the Approval of the Description of Procedures for External Assessment of General Education School Quality", issued on 30 March, 2009 (http://www.smm.lt).*

[83] *For more information see Annex 5 "Plan of External Assessment of General Education School Quality" of the order of the minister of education and science of the Republic of Lithuania No. ISAK-608 "On the Approval of the Description of Procedures for External Assessment of General Education School Quality", issued on 30 March, 2009 (http://www.smm.lt).*

and how it is assessed, as well as discuss the procedure of external assessment. A flexible (can be corrected according to the situation) schedule[84] for monitoring lessons, projects, class meetings, non-formal education and other activity and collection of information (the schedule for lessons to be monitored is not announced to the community of the school) is made. On the last day of assessment at school, teachers' community is provided with initial conclusions (no less than 10 strengths and no more than 5 aspects to be improved) made by the assessment team. The assessment team also provides school owners with a short report of external assessment that can be published on the information system of education management.

The assessment group assess school activities in accordance with criteria for assessment of general education school. These criteria involve five spheres: 1) school's culture (criteria − ethos, improvement aims, order, school's relations); 2) education and learning (criteria − general organisation of education, organisation of a lesson, teaching quality, learning quality, differentiation of learning and teaching, assessment through education); 3) achievements (criteria − improvement, learning achievements); 4) support to learner (criteria − taking care of learners, pedagogical, psychological and social support, satisfaction of special learning needs, career planning support, parents' pedagogical education); 5) strategical school management (criteria − school strategy, school's self-assessment, management style, staff management, management of material resources).

Activity is assessed by the members of the assessment group in the 5-level scale[85]. During the assessment at school, all spheres of school activities are monitored: lessons, projects, class meetings, non-formal education etc. (at least 2 lessons of each teacher or other activity is monitored; however, no more than 50 per cent of lessons/activities are monitored each day). No less than 75 per cent of work at school is devoted to monitoring education process and to meetings with teachers' community and other staff members, parents (foster-parents) and learners, representatives of self-government institutions, as well as other stakeholders. Remaining time is devoted to the analysis of collected information and generalisations.

The head of the school shall establish favourable conditions for work of the assessment team at school, organise presentation of assessment-related information to school owners, learners and parents, as well as makes a plan for further improvement of school activities.

If the assessment group gives evaluation of level 1 or level N to at least one criterion (theme), the National Agency of School Evaluation monitors and analyses provision of support to the school, collaborates with structured departments authorised by directors of municipality

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[84] *Agreeably to the set form; for more information visit http://www.smm.lt , Annex 1 of the order of the minister of education and science of the Republic of Lithuania No. ISAK-608, issued on 30 March, 2009.*

[85] *According to the set quality assessment scale: level N – very poor, level 1 – poor, level 2 –fair, level 3 – good, level 4– very good. for more information visit http://www.smm.lt , Annex 3 of the order of the minister of education and science of the Republic of Lithuania No. ISAK-608, issued on 30 March, 2009.*

administrations, participant meetings (owners), as well as organises second external assessment at school during the one-year period after this assessment. For this aim, a team (2-4 members) of external assessors is formed (one member shall be from the team of external assessors who have already been to school). This team works at school for 1-3 days and monitors intended works of improvement. If the school has not improved relevant criterion (theme) even after the second external assessment, the National Agency of School Evaluation can recommend the institution that implements owner's rights and obligations to initiate attestation of the head of the school, deputy heads for education, and leaders of departments that organise education.

The head of the school can lodge appeals to the director of the National Agency of School Evaluation concerning conclusions of the assessment group. Appeals are investigated in accordance with the set order.

When preparing for external assessment, a school performs self-assessment. Self-assessment is performed in accordance with the order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania No. ISAK-607, issued on 30 March, 2009, "On the Acceptance of Recommendations on Self-assessment of General Education School Quality", taking into consideration indicators of general education school that are provided in the description of procedures for external quality assessment. This description includes the most important information on the most valuable aspects of school activities.

The main objectives of self-assessment are: 1) to forecast school improvement perspective; 2) to strengthen the sense of identity and responsibility in the school community; 3) to provide community members with reliable and explicit information on the quality of all spheres of school activities; 4) to improve staff's competence and encourage self-reflection; 5) to spread best-practice examples when collaborating with other education organisations.

Self-assessment has the following stages: 1) preparation for self-assessment; 2) wide self-assessment; 3) in-depth analysis of the chosen problem and self-assessment; 4) giving account on implemented assessment procedures and presentation of results; 5) the use of results for further improvement plans.

Recommendations on Self-assessment of General Education School Quality emphasise that successful work and further improvement plans depend on school's self-assessment, realisation of its problems and success, and forecast of trends for quality improvement rather than external supervision and inspection.

In conclusion, it can be stated that internal self-assessment and external assessment of education programmes and quality of school activities is regularly performed in the sector of general education of the Lithuanian education system. Assessment is based on clear and measurable standards and objectives. It is characterised by precise requirements related to conformity of

education programme results with the first level of the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework, internal self-assessment and external assessment. During internal self-assessment and external assessment, context, input, process and outputs/outcomes are analysed (emphasising learners' achievements on the base of learning outcomes), a wide network of internal and external stakeholders is included, provision of feedback to education programme implementers is anticipated, improvement of quality of education programme implementation is performed, and evaluation report is published. The following aspects are assessed: does a school have clear development guidelines? Do these guidelines involve social stakeholders? Does a general education school have relevant staff and facilities for education quality assurance, as well as other relevant procedures match general principles set in the Annex 3 of Recommendations.

REPORT OF CONFORMITY OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE LITHUANIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM WITH COMMON PRINCIPLES INDICATED IN RECOMMENDATIONS' ANNEX 3.

1. QA policies and procedures underpin all *levels* of Lithuanian Qualifications Framework.

2. QA is an integral part of internal management of LT education and training institutions (*except for VET institutions that do not have internal QA system applied to all VET institutions*).

3. QA includes regular evaluation of educational institutions and their programmes (*VET only partially*), performed by external monitoring agencies.

4. External monitoring agencies carrying out QA in LT educational sectors *have not been assessed externally yet*.

5. QA procedure includes CIPP (context, input, process and product/outputs) dimensions that emphasise *product/outputs* and *learning outcomes*.

6. QA system of general education and HE sectors (VET – partially) includes:

- Clear and measurable *objectives and standards*;
- Guidelines for implementation, including *stakeholder* involvement;
- Appropriate resources;
- Consistent evaluation methods that involve *self-assessment and external* assessment;
- *Feedback* mechanisms and procedures for improvement;
- Widely accessible evaluation results.

7. QA initiatives are *coordinated* at international, national and regional levels, ensuring overview, coherence, synergy and system-wide analysis.

8. QA still is not *sufficiently coordinated* process across Lithuanian education and training levels and systems, stakeholders are *not sufficiently* involved into these processes.

9. QA orientations at Community level provide reference points for evaluation and peer learning.