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CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION
QUALITY MANUAL

Produced with the support of the EU Structural Funds and the State Budget of the Republic of Lithuania as part of the Project "Introduction of a quality management system in the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (VIKOS)"

Application area:

Evaluation of quality in higher education, evaluation of foreign qualifications, information and consultations

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ABOUT THE CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereinafter referred to as 'the SKVC') was established in 1995 as a body supported from the state budget of the Republic of Lithuania for the purpose of implementing quality monitoring policies and contributing to the improvement of conditions for the free movement of persons in accordance with the SKVC regulations and other legal acts and procedures. The founder of the SKVC is the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania (hereinafter LR; 'ŠMM')

The SKVC is one of the public bodies acting at the legislative level, whose task it is to implement the public policy of higher education and research as formulated by the Seimas and to plan activities according to the strategic objectives of long-term development. The policy of higher education and research is also implemented, within their remit, by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, the ŠMM, the Research Council of Lithuania and the State Fund of Studies.

The aim of the SKVC activities is to contribute to the harmonisation of the Lithuania higher education with the principles of the European Higher Education Area.

The key objectives of the SKVC as defined in its regulations are the following:

1. to promote the quality of higher education institutions through external reviews and accreditation of institutions and study programmes;
2. to create favourable conditions for the free movement of persons by organising and performing the evaluation and/or recognition of foreign qualifications related to higher education in the Republic of Lithuania.

In accordance with law, the SKVC performs the following **functions** to achieve its objectives:

1. at their request, evaluates the study programmes of higher education institutions;
2. as authorised by the ŠMM, accredits the study programmes of HEIs of the Republic of Lithuania;
3. as authorised by the ŠMM, performs external reviews of HEIs of the Republic of Lithuania;
4. according to the procedure established by law, conducts external reviews of foreign higher education institutions;
5. according to the procedure established by law, accredits HEIs of the Republic of Lithuania;
6. evaluates applications of Lithuanian HEIs and branches of foreign HEIs for a licence to provide higher education and related activities;
7. evaluates the study programmes of branches of foreign HEIs in Lithuania;
8. fosters quality culture, produces and improves methodologies for self-analysis and expert reviews of HEIs and other advisory methodologies;
9. organises and/or conducts training and consultations of quality evaluators in higher education;
10. publishes reports on HEIs reviews and study programme evaluations and their summaries;
11. accumulates, analyses and disseminates good practices of foreign HEIs in quality assurance and evaluation;
12. performs evaluation and/or recognition of foreign qualifications related to higher education;
13. advises HEIs of the Republic of Lithuanian in regard to the evaluation and recognition of foreign qualifications and recognition of partial studies;
14. advises employers in regard to foreign qualifications;
15. in cases defined by law, provides qualification examinations for persons who seek evaluation and/or recognition of their foreign qualifications in the Republic of Lithuania;
16. provides information to foreign subjects on:

16.1. the education system of the Republic of Lithuania, qualifications awarded, legitimate education institutions and study programmes;

16.2. the Lithuanian system for the evaluation and recognition of qualifications and its regulations;

16.3. requirements for the recognition of foreign professional qualifications, the relevant legal acts and the institutions which grant such recognition in the Republic of Lithuania;

17. provides information to the subjects of the Republic of Lithuania on:

17.1. the education systems of foreign countries, qualifications awarded, legitimate education institutions and study programmes;

17.2. foreign systems of qualification evaluation and recognition;

17.3. accumulates, analyses and disseminates good practices in the evaluation and recognition of foreign qualifications.

In the course of its activities the SKVC also performs other functions prescribed by the legislation of the Republic of Lithuania, Government regulations, orders of the Minister for Education and Science and other legal acts.

The activities of the SKVC are managed by the 11-member Council of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education and the Director elected and appointed by the Council. The organisational structure of the SKVC is presented in Annex 1 to the Quality Manual.

The SKVC is financed from the state budget and other sources such as the European Commission, and EU Structural Funds. All its services to physical and legal persons are free of charge.

As a partner and coordinator the SKVC participates in various projects which are financed by the European Commission, the European Social Fund, governments of foreign countries, other funds and the state budget of Lithuania.

Since its foundation, the SKVC has been an active member of various organisations related to the evaluation of quality in higher education and foreign qualifications.

REFERENCES

Presented below are the main legal acts which regulate the SKVC activities (such as reviews of higher education institutions, evaluation and accreditation of study programmes, and evaluation of foreign qualifications), standards and recommendations for quality assurance in the activities of the SKVC:

- Law on Education (*Official Gazette*, 1991, No 23-593 as last amended).
- Law on Research and Higher Education (*Official Gazette,* 2009, No 54-2140).
- Government resolutions:
  - Procedure for external reviews and accreditation of higher education institutions (*Official Gazette*, 2010, No 113-5760);
  - Procedure for the issue of licences to provide higher education and related activities (*Official Gazette*, 2009, No 134-5842);
  - Regulations on the evaluation and academic recognition of foreign qualifications which entitle to higher education studies (*Official Gazette*, 2005 No 12-369).
- Orders of the Minister for Education and Science:
  - Approving the Procedure for evaluation of applications for a licence to provide higher education and related activities (*Official Gazette*., 2010, Nr. 9-424);
  - Regarding external reviews of higher education institutions (*Official Gazette*, 2010, N 155-7890 as last amended);
  - Regarding the grant of powers (*Official Gazette*., 2010, Nr. 155-7891);
  - Approving the Procedure for the external evaluation and accreditation of study programmes (*Official Gazette*, 2009, Nr. 96-4083);
  - Regarding the participation of persons with foreign education background in competitions for state-financed places in HEIs (*Official Gazette*, 2009, Nr. 63-2516).
- Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European higher education area (hereinafter referred to as 'the ESG').
- Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon recognition convention).
- Recommendation on criteria and procedures for the assessment of foreign qualifications.
- Joint ENIC/NARIC Charter of Activities and Services.

- LST EN ISO 9004:2010 „Managing for the sustained success of an organisation – A quality management approach".
- LST EN ISO 9001:2008 „Quality management systems – Requirements".
- LST EN ISO 9000:2005 „ Quality management systems – Fundamentals and vocabulary".
- Description of the quality management system of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education.
- Other legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania and their amendments regulation the activities of the SKVC.

TERMS, DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

Acronyms	Explanations
SKVC (a body)	Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education
CEEN	Central and East European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
ENIC	European Network of National Information Centres
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EU	European Union
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area)
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education)
ISO 9001	LST EN ISO 9001:2008 „Quality management systems. Requirements“
ISO 9004	LST EN ISO 9004:2010 „Managing for the sustained success of an organisation – A quality management approach“
Quality model	Description of the management system model of the SKVC
LRC	Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon recognition convention)
RoL	Republic of Lithuania
NARIC	Network of National Academic Recognition Information Centres
P	Procedure
ŠMM	Ministry of Education and Science
QMR	Management Representative for Quality

Audit means a systematic, independent and documented process of collecting data and evaluating them objectively in order to establish the extent of their compliance with the audit criteria.

Higher education institution means a body whose task it is to organise and provide higher education programmes leading to higher education qualifications and to conduct related activities. **Document management** means a management area covering effective and systematic control of

document production, receipt, saving, maintenance, use and disposal, including actions relating to documentary recording of evidence and information on activities and transactions.

Efficiency refers to the outcome/cost ratio.

Feedback covers opinions and comments on the product (service) or appeals handling and the expression of interest in the product (service) or the appeals handling process.

Client means an organisation or an individual in receipt of the product. The clients of the SKVC include the Ministry of Education and Science, higher education institutions, graduates and school leavers or any other physical persons or legal entities that seek services from the SKVC.

Quality means the extent of compliance of the overall characteristics with the requirements.

Improvement of quality means the part of management whose task it is to increase competences to ensure quality requirements. The constant improvement of quality in SKVC activities can be ensured by an effective and efficient implementation of improvement processes.

Quality planning refers to the part of quality management whose task it is to define the objectives of quality and the activities and resources required to achieve the established quality objectives.

Quality policy covers the intentions and activities of the SKVC relating to quality as they are officially formulated by the management.

Quality indicators mean the entirety of characteristics that determine the compliance of the activity results with the established quality objectives.

Quality objective means a quality-related ambition or intention.

Quality management system is a management system designed to direct and manage SKVC activities relating to quality.

Quality manual means a document which contains a description of the SKVC quality management system.

Quality management means the part of management designed to implement quality requirements. The SKVC quality management covers the effective and efficient implementation of the key processes.

Quality assurance refers to the part of quality management which is concerned with increasing confidence in the ability to meet quality requirements. The quality of the SKVC activities is ensured through the implementation of reporting.

A corrective action means an action taken to eliminate the cause of a non-conformity or any other unwanted situation.

Measurement means an action which enables to establish a quantitative value.

Monitoring means a systematic observation of the situation and its dynamics and evaluation and forecasting of changes. The Lithuanian equivalent of monitoring is "monitoringas" and its synonyms **stebėsena** and **vertinimas**.

Non-conformity means a failure to meet a requirement.

Preventive action means an action taken to eliminate the cause of a possible non-conformity or any other potential undesirable situation.

Procedure means an established way of conducting an activity or performing a process.

Procedure may also refer to a quality management document which defines the way of performing a specific process.

Process means an entirety of related and interacting activities designed to turn input into output.

Process manager means an SKVC employee appointed by the Director's order to be responsible for the results of the process based on process planning, implementation, control and improvement.

Product refers to the outcome of the process. The SKVC product includes services and the intellectual outcome. The Quality Manual also uses its contextual synonym 'service'.

Requirement means an explicit, universally implied or required need or expectation.

Effectiveness refers to the extent in which the planned measures have been implemented or the planned results achieved.

Interested party refers to an individual or a group of individuals interested in the results or success of the SKVC.

Supplier means an organisation or an individual that supplies the SKVC product**.**

Management representative for quality means a manager appointed by the top management to be responsible for the determination, implementation and monitoring of quality management processes, reporting to the management on the activities of the quality management system and the needs for its improvement and the proper understanding of client requirements for services across the organisation.

Review refers to an activity conducted to establish the adequacy, effectiveness and fitness for purpose of an activity or process with regard to established objectives.

1. QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Principles of implementing a quality management system

The SKVC quality management system has been implemented on the basis of the following principles:

- orientation to the client;
- attention to employees;
- leadership;
- involvement of the staff;
- process approach;
- systemic approach to management;
- continuous improvement;
- evidence-based decision making;
- maintenance of mutually useful relations with suppliers;
- "Plan-do-check-act" principle in quality improvement cycle.

Application of quality management principles and the scope of the system

In pursuit of sustainable success, the SKVC follows the principles of quality management. The SKVC has created, documented and implemented a quality management system, which is constantly maintained and improved. The quality management system ensures the implementation of the quality policy and objectives throughout the organisation.

The responsibility for the implementation and maintenance of the quality management system rests with the SKVC management and its authorised employees. The SKVC management is responsible for the organisation of the planning of the quality management system and the implementation of its amendments by maintaining its integrity (for greater detail see PA1 "Activity and budget planning"). The functioning of the system is checked by conducting regular internal audits. As all the employees of the organisation contribute to quality management, the requirements of the quality management system are obligatory to all the employees, particularly to those directly responsible for the quality of evaluation, information and consultation services provided.

The SKVC management has committed itself to ensure evaluation, information and consultation services of high quality in line with the requirements and expectations of the interested parties. This is defined in the SKVC quality policy (see Annex 4).

The quality system is described in the Quality Manual, Procedures and other relevant documents.

Quality management system model

The SKVC quality management system has been created, documented and implemented in accordance with the requirements of the SKVC quality management system model (hereinafter referred to as 'the quality model'). The aim of the SKVC quality model is to select the most important quality management requirements for grouping them in accordance with the specific aspects of activity.

The SKVC quality model has been created on the basis of LST EN ISO 9001:2008 "Quality management systems. Requirements" (hereinafter referred to as 'ISO 9001) and LST EN ISO 9004:2010 "Managing for the sustained success of an organisation – A quality management approach" (hereinafter referred to as 'ISO 9004'), Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention), Joint ENIC/NARIC Charter of Activities and Services, and the relevant legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania.

The correlation between the SKVC processes and the requirements of ISO 9001, ISO 9004 and the ESG (Part 3) is presented in Annex 2.

Responsibilities and powers

The internal structure of the SKVC is regulated by Article 17 of the Law on Research and Higher Education and the SKVC Statute. The responsibilities and powers are set forth in:

- the SKVC Statute, departmental regulations, the Quality Manual;
- organisational structure (see Annex 1 "SKVC organisational structure");
- procedures, instructions and other documents.

The responsibilities, rights and powers of the staff are defined in their job descriptions. All the employees are responsible, within their remit, for the achievement of the goals related to their activities and the performance of the tasks and functions assigned to them under the quality management system.

The SKVC management organ is the SKVC Council composed of 11 members representing different interested parties. The composition of the Council is promulgated by the Minister for Education and Science.

The Director, who is elected for a term of five years according to a public competitive procedure, is a single-person management organ of the SKVC. The Director is appointed to his/her post by the formal employer, i. e. the Minister for Education and Science.

The Minister also issues orders on the appointment of process managers, defining their responsibilities and powers. The SKVC is composed of five divisions. The staff includes civil servants and employees who do not belong specifically to any division (according to their activities and their legal regulation).

The SKVC has the following divisions:

1. Division for Studies Assessment;
2. Division for Institutional Assessment;
3. Division for Qualifications Assessment;
4. Legal Division;
5. Division for Finance.

The Division for Studies Assessment and the Division for Institutional Assessment perform the functions of an external quality evaluation agency, whereas the Division of Qualifications Assessment performs the functions of the Lithuanian ENIC/NARIC. The responsibilities of the Legal Division, the Division for Finance and the employees who do not belong specifically to any division (Deputy Director, Personnel Administrator, Project Coordinator and the Facility Manager) consist in assuring the smooth performance of supporting functions.

The divisions which perform the core functions are subordinate to the Deputy Director. The supporting divisions and employees and the Deputy Director report directly to the Director.

The SKVC has three advising institutions:

1. Evaluation Commission of Study Programmes;
2. Institutional Review Commission;
3. Study Programme Evaluation Appeals Commission.

Management representative

The Management Representative for Quality (hereinafter referred to as ‘the QMR’) is appointed by the Director’s order to be responsible for the organisation of the implementation, monitoring and improvement of the quality management system. The QMR is granted the relevant powers and responsibilities. In performing his/her functions, the QMR is directly subordinate to the SKVC Director.

The main *responsibilities* of the QMR are the following:

- monitoring and improving the quality management system;
- disseminating information on client demands for SKVC services;
- adjusting the quality management system to the changing aims, processes and requirements;
- organising training in quality management;
- reporting to the management on the performance of the quality management system and the needs for its improvement;
- maintaining and improving the Quality Manual;
- improving the effectiveness of the quality management system and its documentation;
- inspecting the quality management system by conducting internal audits;
- initiating analyses and checks on the effectiveness of corrective and preventive actions;
- coordinating the activities of the employees during the preparation and implementation of procedures.

The responsibility for the effective performance of the quality management system is shared by the entire staff of the SKVC.

Documentation of the Quality management system

The purpose of documentation is to ensure a clear and precise structure of processes, i. e. the core and supporting activities, which determine the quality of the servicers provided. Documents and records contribute to the efficiency of process planning, performance and management. The SKVC quality management system is documented in a four-tier documentation system (see Fig. 1)

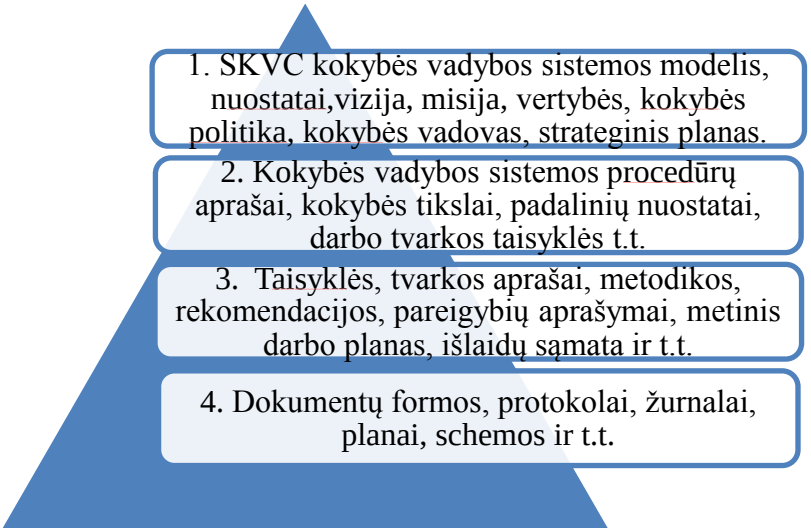

Fig. 1. Hierarchy of SKVC documents

The management of documents and records, its purpose, aims, indicators, interested parties, stages, inputs and outputs, requirements, individuals responsible for the activities and the participants of the process are described in the document PA8 “Management of Documents and Records”.

Quality Manual

The Quality Manual is a document which describes the quality management system in place at the SKVC. The title page of the manual indicates the scope of the quality management system. The *Quality Manual* contains a general explanation of the way the requirements of the quality model are implemented at the SKVC by giving references to procedures and other documents containing detailed descriptions of processes, responsibilities and powers.

All the quality management processes are constantly monitored and analysed to identify actions that could lead to improvement. Process managers are responsible for the regular revision of the processes and the procedure descriptions in their remit (at least once a calendar year). The QMR is responsible for monitoring of such revisions.

The Quality Manual has been produced in accordance with the requirements of the SKVC quality model and the existing legal acts. The responsibility for monitoring and updating the Manual (at least once a calendar year) rests with the QMR.

2. INTERESTED PARTIES, THEIR NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS

The SKVC environment is in a constant flux, therefore the SKVC is obliged to conduct a continuous monitoring and assessment of the political, economic, social, technological and other factors in its environment. This kind of monitoring enables the SKVC to establish, assess and manage threats relating to its interested parties, their changing needs and expectations. Ability to meet the needs and expectations of its interested parties helps the institution to ensure sustained success.

SKVC interested parties:

- Founder – the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania;
- SKVC Council;
- SKVC employees;
- Higher education institutions;
- school leavers;
- students;
- graduates;
- employers;
- international organisations;
- other institutions and individuals;
- public at large.

Benefits of the quality management system to the interested parties

By implementing the quality management system the SKVC brings benefit to the following interested parties:

- *to the Founder* – increased effectiveness and efficiency of the SKVC activities, better performance;
- *to the managers* – the quality management system covers the SKVC structure, objectives and procedures, therefore it is an effective means of management;
- *to employees* – a clear management structure, precise requirements, methods and aims contribute to the morale and spur efforts to improve the quality of the services provided;

- *to clients* – the effective and efficient service management system, a good monitoring system of relationships with clients and the decreasing number of errors make it possible for the SKVC to increase the degree of satisfaction among its clients;
- *to public at large* – the proactive SKVC position in regard to the quality of higher education in an environment which changes faster than the legal framework.

Orientation to the interested parties

The requirements of the SKVC interested parties – research and higher education institutions, graduates, school leavers and other subjects – to the services provided by the SKVC are defined in the main legal acts regulating its activities.

The SKVC management guarantees that the needs of the interested parties are established and treated as requirements to the services provided by the SKVC. The staff is familiarised with these requirements and all their efforts are directed towards their implementation.

To meet the legitimate needs and expectations of its clients, the SKVC tries to understand their present and potential needs by defining its strengths and weaknesses, by analysing changes in its environment and by planning improvements.

A more detailed description of the orientation to the interested parties is presented in Procedure PA2 “Organisation of Self-assessment” and PA15 “Ensuring feedback”.

Establishment of requirements related to services and reviews

Requirements to the activities of the SKVC are regulated by legal acts (reviews and accreditation of higher education institutions, evaluation and accreditation of study programmes, evaluation of foreign qualifications and other related activities) (see Section “References”).

The SKVC website contains detailed information on and references to legal acts and regulations regulating the key functions of the SKVC.

The monitoring and analysis of legal requirements to services are conducted by the employees of the relevant SKVC divisions in accordance with their remit. Responsibility for the analysis of the requirements of the interested parties for services rests with the managers of the main processes.

Relations with interested parties

The SKVC offers consultations to the interested parties on issues within its remit and it also provides information required under law. Information is provided through the SKVC website, also

directly at the SKVC office, by telephone or e-mail, by letter or during various events. To improve its services to clients, the SKVC has produced and approved a *Procedure for servicing clients and handling their applications, complaints and communications*.

The SKVC activities relating to the provision of information to interested parties are reflected in the descriptions of the main processes and the descriptions of the management of information and public relations and assurance of feedback.

The applications, requests and other documents received from interested parties are handled in the proper way by registering and distributing them among the employees according to their remit and functions (see PA8 “Management of documents and records”).

3. SKVC PROCESSES

The SKVC processes are managed as a system by taking into account their sequence and interaction.

In the implementation of the procedural approach, the SKVC conducts an effective and efficient process planning and distribution of responsibilities and powers. Once a year the SKVC reviews the processes and their interaction and takes appropriate measure to improve them.

Process planning and management

To ensure a continuous provision of its services to clients and other interested parties, the SKVC defines and identifies its functions and plans its processes. As a public administration body, the SKVC plans and manages its processes in accordance with laws and other regulations and its own vision and mission. Furthermore, the planning and management of its processes also includes the allocation of resources, provision of services, monitoring, measurement and evaluation.

To ensure effective and efficient process planning and management, the SKVC *analyses the following information*:

- legal requirements;
- the needs and expectation of the SKVC interested parties;
- its objectives;
- changes in its environment;
- input (incoming information) and output (outgoing information);
- process interactions;
- resources and information;
- activities and methodology;
- obligatory and preferable documents and documentary records;
- measurement opportunities, monitoring and analysis;
- required corrective and preventive actions;
- opportunities for improvement and innovations.

Process responsibility and powers

Each process has been appointed a process manager, who has been granted responsibilities and powers to create, control and improve the process and its interaction with other processes. The

SKVC can give assurance that the responsibilities, powers and roles of the process managers are recognised throughout the organisation, while other employees dealing with individual processes possess the required competences to carry out their tasks and activities.

The low chart of the SKVC processes is presented in Annex 3.

I Management processes

The purpose of the management processes is to ensure decisions related to the SKVC strategy and objectives, to secure the required resources for their implementation and to ensure the continuous improvement of the SKVC processes.

The SKVC has identified the following management processes, which are documented, planned, managed, monitored, measured and improved.

No	Procedure code	Process name	Process manager	Responsible participants
1	PA1	Activity and budget planning	Director	Deputy director, division heads, other staff
2	PA2	Organisation of self-assessment	Deputy director	Director, division heads
3	PA3	Reporting on activities	Director	Deputy director, division heads, other staff

II Core processes

The purpose of the core processes is to produce public benefit and meet the needs and expectations of the SKVC interested parties. The core processes create the product – services and intellectual products, which are indispensable for the realisation of the SKVC vision and mission.

The SKVC has identified the following core processes, which are documented, planned, managed, monitored, measured and improved:

No	Procedure code	Process name	Process manager	Responsible participants
1	PA4	Expert review of higher education institutions	Head of the Institutional Review Division	Director, Institutional Review Division, Finance Division, Legal Division
2	PA5	Expert evaluation of study programmes	Head of the Study Programme Evaluation Division	Director, Division for Study Programme Evaluation, Finance Division, Legal Division
3	PA6	Follow-up	Acting deputy head of the division	Institutional Review Division, Division for Study Programme Evaluation
4	PA7	Evaluation of foreign qualifications related	Head of Qualifications	Deputy Director, Qualifications Evaluation

		to higher education	Evaluation Division	Division, Legal Division, Finance Division
5	PA18	Performance of the activities of the ENIC/NARIC networks authorised member	Head of the Qualifications Evaluation Division	Deputy Director, Qualifications Evaluation Division

III Supporting processes

The purpose of the supporting processes is to ensure availability of resources, information and elements of the working environment and infrastructure necessary for a smooth functioning of the core processes and the entire quality management system and for the ability to meet the needs of the interested parties and to fulfil the main requirements of the SKVC activities.

The SKVC has identified the following supporting processes, which are documented, planned, managed, monitored, measured and improved:

No	Procedure code	Process name	Process manager	Responsible participants
1	PA8	Management of documents and records	Chief specialist (administration)	The entire SKVC staff
2	PA9	Personnel management	Chief specialist (administration)	Director, Deputy Director, division heads
3	PA10	Management of safety and the infrastructure	Head of the Institutional Review Division	The entire SKVC staff
4	PA11	Management of supplies	Director	Director, division heads
5	PA12	Cooperation assurance	Deputy Director	Director, division heads
6	PA13	Provision of information and public relations management	Director	The entire SKVC staff
7	PA14	Project management	Chief specialist (project coordination)	Director, Director, division heads

IV Improvement processes

In order to ensure the compliance of the quality management system with the legal requirements and the requirements of the interested parties and to create conditions for the continuous improvement of the organisation's activities, the SKVC endeavours to ensure an effective management of the improvement processes. The definition and implementation of the improvement processes enables the SKVC to ensure compliance with the legal requirements and the requirements

of its interested parties. The implementation of the improvement processes creates prerequisites for a continuous improvement of the SKVC activities.

The SKVC has identified the following supporting processes, which are documented, planned, managed, monitored, measured and improved:

No	Procedure code	Process name	Process manager	Responsible participants
1	PA8	Feedback management	Chief specialist (administration	The entire staff
2	PA9	Internal audit of quality	Head of the Institutional Review Division	Director, Deputy Director, division heads
3	PA10	Management of corrective and preventive actions	Head of the Legal Division	The entire staff

4. MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES AND PROCESSES

Commitments of the management

To secure the sustained success of the organisation, the SKVC management follows an approach based on quality management combined with the efforts to meet the needs and expectations of the interested parties and to keep an observant eye on the environment of the organisation.

To implement the requirements of the quality management system, the SKVC *management undertakes to*:

- conduct a continuous observation and regular analysis of the SKVC environment and its changes;
- identify the SKVC interested parties, to assess their possible impact on the activities of the organisation and to make plans for meeting their needs and expectations;
- maintain constant communication with the SKVC interested parties;
- ensure a constructive coordination of the needs and expectation of the interested parties;
- develop mutually beneficial relations with the SKVC partners and suppliers;
- identify and manage short-term and long-term threats;
- project for the needs of the (financial, information, staff and competences) resources in the future;
- create and implement processes suitable to and necessary for the implementation of the SKVC vision, mission and strategy;
- create and monitor continuous improvement processes;
- perform regular evaluations of the implementation of the SKVC plans and of compliance with the established procedures;
- ensure continuous training opportunities for the SKVC staff and to maintain the viability of the organisation (e.g., by developing a general strategy and values, systemic thinking and team work).

The SKVC management has defined and documented its *policy regarding quality management*, including the objectives of the organisation in the area of quality, and as a guarantee for the implementation of the quality management policy has created a quality management system, which is used as a basis for:

- defining the policy and objectives of quality management and their monitoring;
- planning strategic activities and the budget;

- disseminating the policy and objectives of quality management across the organisation in order to increase awareness, motivation and involvement of the entire staff;
- focusing the SKVC activities on meeting the demands of the interested parties (there are necessary processes in place);
- allocating duties, responsibilities and powers and appointing the management representative for quality;
- supplying the organisation with the necessary resources;
- conducting regular self-assessments of the organisation and reviews of the quality management system and its continuous improvement;
- reporting on the activities of the organisation.

The development, review and approval of the SKVC strategy, quality policy, quality objectives, strategic plan, annual activity plan, quality indicators and the budget are described in Procedure PA1 "Planning Activities and the Budget".

The initiation of the SKVC self-assessment, accumulation of the necessary data, their analysis and evaluation, production of the self-assessment report, its approval and publication are described in Procedure PA2 "Organisation of Self-assessment".

Evaluation of the outcome of the SKVC activities, adjustment of the annual activity plan, quality objectives and indicators, evaluation of the implementation of the quality policy, objectives and indicators, review of the quality management system, production, approval and publication of the annual activity report are described in Procedure PA3 "Reporting on Activities".

Communication of the strategy and the quality policy

The SKVC ensures timely and continuous communication of information on its strategy and quality policy. To make it effective, the communication process is conducted both vertically and horizontally and is tailored to the different needs of the information receivers.

Internal communication

The SKVC management sees to it that divisions share information on the results of the quality management system. There are established procedures for internal and external communication which ensure dissemination of information on the quality management system throughout the organisation. For communication and information purposes the SKVC uses the following means:

- e-mail;

- meetings;
- internal computer network;
- provision of information at work stations;
- training, instructions, consultations.

The communication and information means are described in Procedures, including the description of input information.

Receipt and forwarding of information is described in Procedure PA13 "Provision of Information and Record Management" and also in every procedure and related documents. The mode of information exchange is mostly free unless prescribed by legal acts or clients' requirements.

4.1. Activity and budget planning

The SKVC vision and mission are determined by the key objectives of the Education Strategy of the Republic of Lithuania.

SKVC vision:

The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education as an influential generator, implementer and disseminator of ideas of quality and internationalism in higher education.

SKVC mission:

The SKVC is an organisation contributing to the improvement of quality in Lithuanian higher education and the free movement of persons across borders.

SKVC values:

- Partnership as cooperation and mutual respect between the evaluators and those being evaluated.
- Professionalism as a responsible approach to entrusted tasks, objectivity and transparency.
- Quality entails focusing on best results, continuous learning by analysing and adjusting our actions. We seek new knowledge and experience through continuous learning and we are ready to share our knowledge and experience with others.

Strategy

The development of the SKVC strategy is based on the analysis of legal requirements, demands of the interested parties, services provided by the organisation and its strengths, weaknesses,

opportunities and threats, the results of the reviews conducted by the management and the proposals for improvement. Although national legislation does not oblige the SKVC to have a strategic activity plan typically required of budget appropriation managers, the SKVC has produced a strategic plan for three years. Each year it also produces an operational plan and a budget estimate, the implementation of which undergoes regular checks; if necessary, the plan is adjusted according to needs.

The *long-term objectives* defined in the SKVC strategy are the following:

1. to promote quality in the activities of higher education institutions;
2. to create favourable conditions for the free movement of persons.

The SKVC management has defined its *quality policy* (see Annex 4) and it guarantees that:

- its quality policy is in line with the SKVC intentions;
- it contains an undertaking to comply with legal acts, to meet the legitimate demands of the interested parties and to constantly improve the effectiveness of the quality management system;
- its quality policy spells out the guidelines for the establishment and review of quality objectives;
- the staff are aware and understand its quality policy;
- the quality policy is reviewed and revised to keep it suitable and fit for the purpose.

The quality policy is guided by the SKVC strategic goals and commitments to quality. The quality policy and objectives are discussed at staff meetings and are accessible to all the employees. The implementation and suitability of the quality policy are regularly reviewed by the management.

Objectives and indicators of the quality management system

The objectives of the quality management system are established on the basis of the quality policy and by taking into consideration the SKVC vision, mission, strategy and long-term and medium-term objectives. The objectives of the quality management system cover all the processes of the organisation. The management appoints individual employees or their groups to be responsible for the attainment of the objectives and plans for the necessary resources. While establishing the objectives, the SKVC management takes into account the needs and expectations of the interested parties and the review results; it also projects for improvement opportunities. For monitoring and evaluation purposes it is necessary to establish quality indicators. The quality objectives and indicators are established and discuss during the review of the quality management system. A

detailed procedure for planning the quality management system is presented in Procedure PA1 "Planning of activities and the budget", while the review procedure is described in Procedure PA3 "Reporting on activities".

While implementing its strategic goals and quality policy, the SKVC has established quality management processes which make it possible to deal with the strategic goals and quality policy at the operational level and secure the necessary resources. The SKVC process of operational and budgetary planning is described in detail in Procedure PA1 "Operational and budgetary planning".

4.2. Organisation of self-assessment

According to the Law on Research and Higher Education, the SKVC must undergo an external review every five years. In order to have a systematic and full picture of the effectiveness of its operations, to establish its strengths, weaknesses and priorities and to implement improvements, the SKVC performs a self-assessment exercise. Internal evaluation is closely related to external evaluation in that the aspects to be evaluated are very similar. Self-assessment is an important element of the quality assurance system and a basis for external review, changes and improvement actions.

The SKVC performs its self-assessment according to the ESG principles (Parts 2 and 3) of the external review agencies in order to find out to what extent the SKVC adheres to those principles. An exercise of self-assessment makes it possible to evaluate changes in the SKVC environment, its activities and procedures over a long-term (five-year) period.

Self-assessment involves evaluation of external quality assurance procedures and their use in higher education, also the evaluation of the statute, activities, resources, mission, independence, external quality assurance criteria, reporting and other areas important to the activities of the SKVC.

The self-assessment process is described in Procedure PA2 "Organisation of Self-assessment".

The SKVC can also initiate a comparative analysis of its activities and individual processes against the activities and processes of similar European quality assurance and qualification evaluation agencies.

4.3. Reporting on activities

In order to ensure a continuous effective and efficient functioning of the quality management system, the SKVC management organises *periodical reporting on the activities and reviews*. The aim of such exercises is to evaluate the annual operational results, the possibilities for the implementation of the strategic aims and the quality policy, and opportunities for improving or modifying the quality management system.

The implementation of the operational plans is constantly monitored by noting deviations from the intended results and the internal and external factors which determine such deviations. Annual evaluations involve comparison of the planned and actual results and expenditure and the analysis of the possible causes.

Management reviews constitute an integral part of reporting on the activities; their aim is to evaluate the suitability, effectiveness (the extent to which the objectives are achieved) and efficiency (the outcome/cost ratio) of the quality management system in a long-term perspective and the opportunities for its improvement. Management reviews establish follow-up actions and appoint persons responsible for their implementation.

The entire quality management system undergoes regular analyses and evaluations. It is analysed at least once a year or, if necessary, more often (if there are essential changes in the organisation or the legal framework, or if the operations do not comply with the proclaimed quality policy or objectives).

Participating in reporting on the activities and reviews are the management of the SKVC, departmental heads and other officials. The SKVC report on the activities, which includes the results of the reporting activities and the review, is submitted to the Council for approval, then, it is made available to the interested parties and published on the SKVC website.

Information for reviews

Information for management reviews (input data) consists of:

- the results of internal and/or external audits;
- feedback from the clients and other interested parties;
- process effectiveness (performance indicators);
- extent to which quality objectives have been attained:
- conformity (non-conformity) of the services to the requirements;
- effectiveness of corrective and preventive actions;
- expected changes that could impact the quality management system;

- implementation of the actions set out in the previous management reviews;
- necessity to change the quality policy and its objectives;
- improvement recommendations;
- other appropriate issues.

Review decisions

Possible review decisions (outcome/output) may relate to:

- improvement of the quality management system and its processes;
- improvement of services;
- establishment of the needs for resources.

The results of management review are always documented.

The process of reporting on activities, including the annual operational plan, evaluation of quality aims and indicators, their adjustment, evaluation of the implementation of the quality policy, its aims and indicators, review of the quality management system, and the production, approval and publication of the annual report, is described in Procedure PA3 “Reporting on Activities”.

5. CORE PROCESSES

The quality management system consists of SKVC activities and processes designed to manage quality. The aim of the SKVC core processes is to generate benefit and meet the legitimate needs and expectations of interested parties and legal requirements. These processes enable the SKVC to seek the implementation of its vision and mission.

The effectiveness of processes is measured against the evaluation indicators, which make it possible to monitor, measure and evaluate the process by applying the methods of control, self-assessment and internal audit.

5.1. Service provision planning

The SKVC core processes related to evaluation of higher education institutions, study programmes and qualifications and the provision of other services related to such processes are planned and improved so as to ensure the proper provision of SKVC services and their compliance with the relevant requirements. Service provision planning is also conducted in line with the requirements of other quality management processes.

While planning the provision of the core services, the SKVC establishes quality aims and indicators related to the services provided. The SKVC plans the necessary processes, regulatory documentation, resources, monitoring, evaluation actions and related records which contain evidence that the processes and the final results of the services meet the established requirements. The planning process of the provision of core services is described in Procedure PA1 “Planning activities and the budget”.

Services to SKVC clients and interested parties are provided according the relevant requirements, procedures, internal and external legal acts and regulations. The quality of the services is under a continuous surveillance through the inspection and analysis of the effects of each process.

5.2. Provision of services

Managing service provision

The provision of SKVC services proceeds under controlled conditions which guarantee the employees, clients and interested parties:

- information on the characteristics of the services;
- information on the internal and external legal acts and regulations and other documents regulating the services;
- information on the requirements of the SKVC quality model and documentation of the quality management system;
- availability of suitable hardware and software and means for certifying the authenticity of documents;
- control, monitoring and evaluation of services;
- provision of information on the results of the services to clients and other interested parties.

Identification and audit trail

The SKVC guarantees the identification and audit trail of its services. It is realised by registering and classifying incoming evaluation documents, making records on the SKVC website, portal or LAN.

Client property

The SKVC guarantees a safe handling of its clients' property used in the provision of services. Clients' property (personal data, documents submitted, etc.) is treated as confidential information and the employees are instructed on the way such information is to be handled. Clients are advised of any loss, damage or unsuitability of their property for use (for any reason) and such cases are recorded appropriately.

Legal requirements applicable to service provision

The Law on Research and Higher Education lays down that a higher education institution is responsible for the quality of its research (art activities), studies and other activities. Such quality is ensured through their internal quality assurance systems, external evaluation and accreditation of study programmes, external review of their research and external institutional reviews and/or accreditations.

The right of the SKVC to conduct external evaluations in higher education, accreditation of higher education institutions and their study programmes and the evaluation and/or recognition of foreign qualifications relating to higher education are regulated by Article 17(1) of the Law on Research and Higher Education. The evaluation of study programmes and institutional reviews are subject to

the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European higher education area while the evaluation of qualifications must follow the LPK and other international and national legal acts.

The right to evaluate applications for a licence to provide higher education and conduct other activities related to higher education and the right to conduct external evaluation of study programmes is governed by Articles 36 and 42 of the Law on Research and Higher Education. Under Order No V-2356 of 22 December 2010 of the Minister for Education and Science, the SKVC is authorised to organise external institutional reviews.

The independence of SKVC evaluation activities is guaranteed by legal acts which define the evaluation process, its participants (experts, evaluators, expert teams), and the right of the applicants to appeal against the SKVC decisions on evaluation judgements or against legal acts before appeal commissions, the Chief Administrative Disputes Commission or courts.

5.2.1. External institutional review process

The purpose of external institutional reviews is to ascertain the quality of the activities of higher education institutions, to present recommendations for their improvement and to foster the culture of quality in higher education. The purpose of accreditation is to determine, on the basis of the conclusions of external evaluation, that a new higher education institution meets the applicable legal requirements.

The external review conclusions and self-assessment results should be used by a higher education institution for the improvement of its activities. External reviews are conducted periodically subject to a ŠMM order.

Expert reviews in higher education conducted by the SKVC cover the following activities:

1. External reviews of Lithuanian higher education institutions;
2. Accreditation of Lithuanian higher education institutions;
3. Evaluation of applications of Lithuanian higher education institutions and branches of foreign HEIs in Lithuania for licences to provide higher education and conduct relevant activities.

The procedure of external review and accreditation of HEIs, time limits and other terms and conditions are subject to Lithuanian legislation and other legal acts approved by the Government, the Minister for Education and Science or the SKVC Director (see p. 2). Legal acts and other legal instruments governing evaluation procedures, criteria and other evaluation requirements are published on the SKVC website.

The aim of the SKVC expert evaluation in higher education is to evaluate HEI documents necessary for the issue of licences to provide higher education and to conduct activities related to higher education; to conduct expert institutional reviews and to accredit higher education institutions; to produce and improve documents governing study programme evaluation; to provide advice and organise training and to publish information relating to evaluation.

The process of expert evaluation in higher education includes provision of information or advice to representatives of HEIs regarding the issue of licences for the provision of higher education and conduct of activities related to higher education; external evaluation; accreditation; make up of expert teams; evaluation of the application or self-assessment report submitted; arrangement of a site visit; coordination and approval of the draft evaluation report; discussion of the evaluation report at the meeting of a Committee for HEI reviews; taking a decision on accreditation; publication of the evaluation report; examination of appeals and complaints; revision and improvement of the process (see PA4 "Expert review of higher education institutions").

This process is closely linked with the processes described in Procedures PA6 "Follow-up" and PA15 "Feedback management".

5.2.2. Expert evaluation of study programmes

Expert evaluation of study programmes conducted by the SKVC covers the following activities:

1. Initial evaluation of study programmes proposed by higher education institutions or re-evaluation of the current programmes;
2. Accreditation of HEI study programmes.

Study programme evaluation is usually initiated by the higher education institutions by submitting to the SKVC an application and other documents. The procedure, time limits and other terms and conditions of study programme evaluation are prescribed by the legislation of the Republic of Lithuania and other legal acts approved by the Government, the Minister for Education and Science or the SKVC Director (see p. 2).

Legal acts and other legal instruments governing evaluation procedures, criteria and other evaluation requirements are published on the SKVC website.

The aim of expert study programme evaluation is to determine that the study programmes proposed by higher education institutions meet legal requirements; to accredit study programmes; to produce and improve documents governing study programme evaluation; to provide advice and organise training and to publish information relating to evaluation.

Expert study programme evaluation includes initial study programme evaluation and re-evaluation of programme. The process includes provision of information or advice to the representatives of HEIs regarding the initial external evaluation of proposed study programmes, their accreditation and organisation of the evaluation; organisation of the re-evaluation of study programmes, examination of appeals and complaints; monitoring and improvement of the process (see PA5 "Expert study programme evaluation").

This process is linked to the processes described in Procedure PA6 "Follow-up" and PA15 "Feedback management".

5.2.3. Follow-up process

The follow-up is mostly related to the initiatives of the HEI to improve the quality of its activities and studies, to eliminate the drawbacks found during self-assessment and external review and to implement the recommendations of the experts presented in the evaluation report.

As defined in the Procedure for external reviews of higher education institutions (Government Resolution No 1317, 22.09.2010) and the Procedure for the evaluation and accreditation of study programmes (Order No ISAK-1652, 24.07.2009, of the SKVC Director), the follow-up activities include the publication of the decision on the HEI external review or study programme evaluation and determination of measures to eliminate the drawbacks found during the self-assessment and evaluation and to improve the study programme or HEI activities.

Representative of the HEI can request the SKVC to evaluate the proposed plan for the improvement of the quality of studies and to advise on issues related to the elimination of the drawbacks found during the external review. In conducting an evaluation of a study programme, account is taken of the progress made since the previous evaluation and the implementation of the recommendations of the experts. Subject to a specific ŠMM authorisation, the SKVC may monitor the elimination of the drawbacks after the external review of a HEI.

The SKVC compiles and publishes aggregate results of institutional reviews and study programme evaluations; in its methodologies it gives recommendations to HEIs regarding the improvement of their activities and disseminates good practices.

The aim of the follow-up process is to ensure provision of consultations to HEIs regarding the elimination of drawbacks found during the external, institutional or study programme evaluation and the improvement and monitoring of quality. This process is described in Procedure PA6 "Follow-up".

In order to implement the principles of the SKVC quality model, it is necessary for the SKVC, as a body authorised to organise external evaluation and to grant accreditation, to initiate the appropriate monitoring and evaluative actions designed to ensure compliance of the HEI with the established requirements and to evaluate the implementation of the recommendations.

5.2.4. Evaluation and/or recognition of foreign qualifications related to higher education

To contribute to the favourable conditions for the free movement of persons, the SKVC performs evaluation of foreign qualifications related to higher education or, if necessary, organises qualification examinations (in cases where a qualification is evaluated with a reservation).

The aim of the evaluation and/or recognition of foreign qualifications related to higher education is to ascertain that foreign higher education qualifications or qualifications which entitle the holder to continue higher education studies are equivalent to the relevant qualifications granted in Lithuania.

Holders of qualifications may apply to the SKVC for the evaluation and/or recognition of their qualifications in person or through a representative. The SKVC organises the evaluation process while the decision on the recognition of the qualification is taken by the ŠMM on the basis of the evaluation outcome.

The evaluation of secondary and higher education qualifications is governed by the Regulations of the evaluation and academic recognition of foreign higher education qualifications or qualifications which entitle the holder to higher education studies (approved by Government Resolution No 60, 21.01.2005 and other legal acts).

Applicants whose foreign qualifications related to higher education have been evaluated with a reservation, i.e. in cases where the positive evaluation depends on the positive outcome of a qualification examination, must submit a standard application to sit a qualification examination organised by the SKVC. The SKVC organises the receipt of such applications, the setting up of the examination syllabus and the examination board, the production of the procedure for this kind of examinations, and arranges for the actual sitting/re-sitting of the examination, the assessment of its results and the provision of information to the applicant.

The SKVC participates in the examination of complaints against the evaluation of qualifications, the examination procedure or the decision on the examination results.

The evaluation process of foreign qualifications is described in Procedure PA7 “Evaluation and/or recognition of foreign qualifications related to higher education”. The process manager is responsible for the initiation of the analysis, evaluation and improvement of this process”.

5.2.5. Activities of the SKVC as an authorised member of the ENIC/NARIC networks

While implementing one of its aims to contribute to the favourable conditions for the free movement of persons, and performing the functions of the Lithuanian ENIC/NARIC member, the SKVC also engages in:

- Dissemination of good practices in qualification evaluation and recognition;
- Consultations of the Lithuanian HEIs on the evaluation and recognition of qualifications or partial studies;
- Provision of information and advice to employers;
- Provision of information to foreigners on the Lithuanian education system, qualifications, education institutions, study programme, evaluation and recognition of qualifications and the relevant governing legal acts;
- Provision of information on the requirements for the recognition of professional qualifications, the relevant legal acts and competent institutions;
- Provision of information to Lithuanian citizens on the education systems of other states, their qualifications and education institutions, study programmes and the evaluation and recognition of qualifications.

The activities of the SKVC as an authorised member of the ENIC/NARIC networks include activity planning; provision of information to interested parties directly or through communications means or in the form of a paper publication; information on the accumulation and analysis of good practices; organisation of cooperation between the ENIC/NARIC centres in the Baltic states; monitoring, evaluation and evaluation of the Lithuania ENIC/NARIC activities. The description of this process is presented in Procedure PA18 “Activities of an authorised member of the ENIC/NARIC networks”.

6. SUPPORTING PROCESSES

To ensure availability of resources, information, elements of a suitable working environment and infrastructure and the effective management of project, cooperation and information activities necessary for the smooth functioning of the core processes of the quality management system and compliance with the requirements posed to SKVC activities as well as meeting the demands of interested parties, the SKVC ensures an effective management of the supporting processes of the organisation.

6.1. Documentary and record management

Documentary management

The Procedure „Documentary and record management" sets the procedure for the effective management (execution, handling, control, safekeeping) of incoming and outgoing documents, quality management and other documents intended for internal or external use. The procedure covers documents in paper and electronic form and documentary records. The Procedure PA8 "Documentary and record management" defines responsibilities for documents and records and their maintenance.

Record management

The structure of data, record forms and requirements for data storage and, if necessary, their recovery are set in Procedure PA8 "Documentary and record management and other procedures, rules and regulations.

The proper management and storage of records makes it possible to trace problems in making analyses. Records can be traced by their code, i. e. their serial number, file number, title, date or the surname of the recorder.

To facilitate record management and tracing, the SKVC produces and approves annual documentation plans and the list of registers, which also includes quality management documents.

Production of legal acts and other legal documents

As a public administration subject, the SKVC participates in the legislative process by contributing to the production of legal acts related to its key functions. The legislative process follows a strict procedure. This area of SKVC activities consists of the following stages: the initiation of the

production of a legal act, appointment of persons responsible for the production of the legal act, production of the draft, reviewing, coordination and evaluation of the draft, approval, registration and publication of the legal act on the SKVC website and the *Official Gazette*, sending the legal act for implementation (see PA8 "Documentary and record management").

6.2. Management of resource provision

The SKVC management allocates and manages resources necessary for the proper functioning of the quality management system. On the basis of various analyses and their results, the management plans the provision of (intellectual, tangible and financial) resources necessary for the implementation and maintenance of the quality management system, its increased effectiveness and client satisfaction.

The procedures for providing intellectual, tangible and financial resources, determining the need for resources, planning, initiating and organising procurement, adhering to the public procurement procedures, checking on suppliers and evaluating their offers, contracting and controlling the implementation of contracts, examining disputes, paying damages, accepting goods/services/ works and auditing are described in Procedure PA1 "Management of resource provision".

Management of intellectual resources require first of all planning for the need of intellectual resources (civil servants and employees) and also planning for the need to improve the competences of the staff. Those procedures are described in Procedure PA9 "Personnel management".

The SKVC is funded from the state budget of the Republic of Lithuania and also from other non-budgetary sources. The planning of financing and the budget is based on economic calculations and activity planning, therefore it is an integral part of activity planning described in Procedure PA1 "Activity and budget planning". The SKVC draws up a budget for the next year; after it is approved by the ŠMM, the SKVC draws up a budget estimate where annual expenditure is set forth by quarter. Expenditure incurred by the SKVC may not exceed the approved budget estimate. Resources from EU Structural Funds or the European Commission support are planned and dealt with in project budgets.

SKVC financial reporting, which ensures monitoring and control of the effectiveness of the use of financial resources, is included in the activity planning process and is described in Procedure PA3,

Tangible resources are also needed to ensure the core functions and activities of the SKVC. The process of providing tangible resources includes planning for the needs of services, products or

work; determining the requirements for the procured services, products, work and suppliers; following public procurement procedures; checking on the compliance of procured services, products and work with the established requirements; verifying the implementation of contractual obligations and reporting on public procurement.

The selection and evaluation of product suppliers and service providers is described in Procedure PA11 "Management of resource provision"; the selection and evaluation of evaluation experts, who participate in the provision of core services, are described in the core procedures (see PA4, PA5, PA7).

6.3. Cooperation assurance

Development of cooperation and international relations contribute to the implementation of the main SKVC objectives, i. e. external evaluation of quality in higher education and promotion of individual mobility. Cooperation is based on mutually beneficial relations and exchanges of information and competences. International relations make it possible to implement the ESG and contribute to the harmonisation of the Lithuanian higher education system with the provisions of the European Higher Education Area.

Participation in thematic networks increases the visibility of the SKVC at the international scale, makes it easier to attract foreign experts, contributes to the improvement of personnel competences and the dissemination of good practices. The SKVC is a member of the international external quality evaluation networks (ENQA, CEEN, INQAAHE) and the networks of individual mobility (ENIC and NARIC).

Cooperation involves maintaining and developing partnership relations, participation in the events organised by international and national organisations, initiation and organisation of international and local events in Lithuania.

With a view to implementing the requirements of the Law on Public Administration, the SKVC may cooperate with other public administration bodies in providing or requesting professional help.

Determination/review and approval of the objectives of interinstitutional and international cooperation, initiation, evaluation, implementation of cooperation, reporting, monitoring and evaluation of cooperation are described in Procedure PA12 "Cooperation assurance".

While selecting its partners, suppliers and external experts who provide core services, the SKVC evaluates their competences and ability to generate benefit and to meet its requirements and the requirements of the interested parties.

6.4. Personnel management

The staff is the most important resource of the SKVC, which generates benefit to the interested parties. The SKVC management involves the entire staff in the efforts to attain strategic aims by transferring those aims into their annual objectives and tasks, and appraises the progress of each employee.

The majority of the staff consists of civil servants; their number is determined by the Government. Some employees are employed under employment contracts for work in projects.

While employing new employees, the SKVC verifies the compliance of their qualifications with its requirements. New employees are made aware of the organisation's working procedures, the quality management system, the requirements of safety and health at work, other documents and activities.

To ensure maximum effectiveness of performance and improvement of the quality of the services provided, the SKVC has produced Procedure PA9 "Personnel management", which describes the procedures for determining the need for new employees, administration, development and improvement of competences, career planning and control and feedback analysis.

Competence, awareness and training

Procedure PA9 is the guiding document for planning and organising work placements of SKVC employees, training, professional development, appraising their competences and estimating expenditure for personnel training.

The employees' competences are assessed before a decision to employ them is taken. Regularly, at least once a year, the SKVC performs an appraisal of its staff to encourage them to improve their competences. The appraisal of civil servants is organised in accordance with the Law on Civil Service and other legal acts. The SKVC organises internal or external training for its staff and applies incentives and, if necessary, disciplinary measures.

Records related to personnel administration are stored in the employees' personal files and the information system of the civil service register (VATARAS).

Involvement and motivation of the staff

To involve the entire staff in the improvement activities of the quality management system, the SKVC encourages its employees to make proposals and contribute to the continuous improvement of the activities of the organisation.

The employees understand the importance of their activities and responsibilities in creating value for the interested parties. They constantly share their knowledge and competences among themselves: by participating in the coaching of the new members of the staff, at regular staff meetings, by using the internal computer network, and by using other electronic and paper sources of information.

The involvement and motivation of the staff is also developed by encouraging them to acquire new skills, plan their careers and participate in project activities.

6.5. Infrastructure, safety and security management

The management of the SKVC infrastructure covers:

- maintenance of facilities and management of related services (utilities, insurance, cleaning, security);
- use of the organisation's cars and their maintenance;
- management and maintenance of the communications means and services;
- control of the organisation's property, disposal of the unnecessary or unusable property;
- use and management of information technologies and data security.

The aim of the infrastructure, safety and security management process is to establish the procedure for the management of and responsibilities for infrastructure elements so as to meet the requirements for the quality of the core services and the safety of the working environment as well as other legal requirements.

Infrastructure

Some part of its infrastructure the SKVC possesses by the right of ownership or the fiduciary right, or on the basis of rental agreements. Management of the infrastructure, safety and security involves organising the necessary purchases and the routine maintenance.

The procedures for the maintenance, cleaning and insurance of infrastructure elements (facilities, vehicles, means of communication), repairs, property administration, data protection, use and

management of information technologies are described in Procedure PA10 "Management of infrastructure, safety and security".

Knowledge, information and technologies

The SKVC knowledge base consists of the expertise of the SKVC staff; it is managed by determining the need for new knowledge (professional knowledge, competences and experience), by arranging opportunities for the acquisition of such knowledge, by sharing knowledge within and outside the organisation.

Data and information are used in the decision-taking process therefore the aim of the SKVC is to create a reliable system for the storage and communication of information on the basis of the state-of-the-art hardware and software technologies by ensuring the integrity, security and accessibility of the information.

The SKVC makes efforts to evaluate the existing or potential threats to the security of information technologies and data and to plan for ad implement measures to eliminate or reduce such threats.

Working environment

With a view to attaining the quality management objectives, the SKVC ensures an appropriate safe and secure working environment and promotes the motivation and satisfaction of the staff. In creating a working environment, account is taken of the following aspects:

- creative working methods;
- involvement of employees;
- rules and recommendation for safe work;
- working means and instruments used by the staff.

The SKVC working environment meets the requirements of safety and health at work, fire and other legal requirements. Professional risk evaluation is carried out regularly at work places, employees undergo regular health checkups.

6.6. Provision of information and public relations management

The SKVC organises provision of information and servicing of its clients by considering their applications and complaints and by providing to them information and advice within the limits of its competence.

The aim of the process of information provision and public relations management is to ensure the right of individuals to obtain information under law, to organise the dissemination of SKVC information and information monitoring and analysis in the public domain. The process does not include provision of information related to the functions of the ENIC/NARIC member.

Collection of feedback from interested parties and the determination and measurement of their satisfaction level are defined in Procedure PA15 “Feedback management”.

Organisation of the preparation and dissemination of public information, communication with the media, monitoring and analysis of public information, classification and storage of public information and internal communication are defined in Procedure PA13 “Provision of information and public relations management”.

6.7. Project management

Project activities bring additional financial resources to the SKVC and ensure growth in its competences and professionalism. The upgrading of its tangible resources, improvement of activities and introduction of innovations can only be implemented by initiating projects and seeking financing from the EU Structural Funds, the European Commission and other resources.

The SKVC management evaluates the compatibility of project ideas with its strategic objectives, the potential benefit the project to the organisation and the interested parties, and the possible threats of the project activities. Through the implementation of projects and the participation in them it is possible to create intellectual products which can be use not only by the SKVC staff, but also by other interested parties.

Project initiation, consideration of project ideas, setting up of the project group, project planning, description of projects, review and adjustment of descriptions, preparation of project application and documentation, submission for evaluation, adjustment of the application, negotiation of the contract terms and conditions, management of the implementation of projects and the coordination of such management are defined in Procedure PA14 “Project management”.

7. IMPROVEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

Measurement, analysis and improvement

To ensure the compliance of the quality management system with the legal requirements and the demands of the interested parties, the SKVC makes efforts to create favourable conditions for the improvement of its activities and the efficient management of the improvement processes.

The SKVC management assesses the progress of the organisation in attaining its mission and vision and in the implementation of its quality policy, strategy and objectives in all its processes and functions.

The SKVC plans and implements the activities of quality management system monitoring, evaluation, self-assessment and improvement. The results of such activities are evidence of the compliance of services to the requirements and serve to ensure such compliance, effectiveness and continuous improvement.

For the purpose of quality evaluation and improvement, the SKVC uses to following *means*:

- reviews conducted by the SKVC management;
- evaluation of the satisfaction of interested parties;
- internal audit of quality;
- process monitoring;
- data analysis;
- corrective actions;
- preventive actions.

All these means are used in the improvement processes (feedback assurance, internal audit quality, management of corrective and preventive actions) and in the management processes (activity reporting, self-evaluation organisation).

Information on monitoring, evaluation, self-evaluation and improvement is disseminated among the staff and interested parties.

Monitoring and evaluation of processes

For the purpose of process evaluation the SKVC applies appropriate monitoring and evaluation methods. Monitoring ensures supervision of processes, while the effectiveness and efficiency of the processes are measured against the established process evaluation indicators. The monitoring and evaluation of each process is organised by the relevant process manager against the evaluation

indicators pre-set and coordinated during the planning process with the SKVC management. Such indicators are established each year (see PA1 "Activity and budget planning") and the analysis of their attainment is carried out during the activity analysis (PA3 "Activity reporting").

Service monitoring and evaluation

The monitoring and evaluation of core services (institutional reviews, qualification evaluation, provision of information and advice) are defined in Procedures governing the core processes.

The SKVC management seeks to ensure the monitoring of the organisation's environment and possibilities of collecting and evaluating information which is necessary to:

- establish and understand the current and future needs and expectations of interested parties;
- evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the organisation;
- establish the need for alternative or new services or functions;
- evaluate the current and emerging trends and technologies on the market;
- foresee changes in legislation and other legal requirements;
- understand the labour market and its impact on the employees' loyalty to the SKVC;
- understand social, economic, environmental and cultural phenomena related to the organisation's activities;
- assess the current opportunities of the organisation and its processes.

Data analysis

The SKVC collects and analyses data and information from various sources, which are related to the effectiveness of the quality management system and the attainment of quality policy objectives and plans. Data on the interested parties' satisfaction (feedback) are accumulated and analysed by the managers of the core processes related to the evaluation of higher education and qualifications. If necessary, process managers plan for corrective actions.

Data and information necessary for analysis are also obtained from monitoring the organisation's activities and its environment. The SKVC management effects evaluation of the general activities of the organisation by carrying out reviews and also during general meetings. Data on the analyses are presented in reports and meeting minutes.

Continuous improvement

Continuous improvement starts with the employees' awareness of the quality policy and objectives and the involvement of the entire staff in the efforts to ensure the required quality of their services.
The continuous improvement of the effectiveness of the quality management system is implemented through the quality policy and objectives, outcomes of the internal audits of quality, data analyses, corrective and preventive actions and reviews.

Improvement, innovations and learning

Improvement activities include both minute improvements at the working place and the improvements at the level of the entire organisation. To ensure continuous improvement, the SKVC follows the principle "Plan-do-check-act". It is the aim of the management to make continuous improvement an integral part of the organisation's culture, including:

- opportunities for employees to participate in the improvement activities by granting them appropriate powers;
- allocation of the necessary resources;
- recognition and improvement of the remuneration system;
- continuous increase in the effectiveness and efficiency of the processes.

Innovations and improvements are necessary to attain a sustainable success. The SKVC management treats training as an effective basis for improvements and innovations, which leads to the empowerment of the staff to take decisions based on data analysis and expertise.

7.1. Feedback assurance

Feedback helps to evaluate, on the basis of the evaluation results, the awareness of the SKVC staff and the interested parties of the extent to which the SKVC meets their legitimate requirements for quality management improvement.
The satisfaction of the interested parties is measured and monitored by analysing the information coming from them on the quality of evaluation, information and consultation services they receive and the extent to which their needs and expectations are met.
Information on the satisfaction of the clients comes from:

- the comments, requests, complaints, appreciation and proposals of the interested parties (employees, applicants, experts, committee members, etc.);
- direct communication with the interested parties;

- outsourced research;
- questionnaire surveys.

The information analysed is discussed and, if necessary, the SKVC management initiates actions designed to increase the satisfaction of the interested parties.

Management of feedback from interested parties, including initiation, planning and organising the collection of feedback, its analysis and evaluation, presentation of the analysis results and their introduction in the reviews of the quality management system and the publication of the results are described in Procedure PA15 “Feedback management”.

7.2. Internal audit of quality

The SKVC performs the internal audit of quality as an effective process of establishing problems, threats and non-conformities and a process of monitoring progress. Regular internal audits are designed to ascertain that the quality management system:

- meets the requirements of the SKVC quality model;
- functions effectively and efficiently and is properly supervised.

The frequency of internal audits is planned (at least once a year) and depends on the situation and importance of a certain activity area. The internal audit plan is drawn up by taking into consideration the importance of the processes to be audited and the results of the previous audits. Efforts are also made to ascertain the effectiveness of the corrective actions.

Internal audits are conducted by specially trained persons who have no relations with the activities audited. Internal auditor groups are set up pursuant to the SKVC Director’s orders.

The results of audits are presented in the form of reports which contain information on the compliance or non-compliance of the quality management system. The findings of the audit are used as a basis for problem solution and elimination of drawbacks in the quality management system. Internal audit results are analysed during management reviews (see PA3 “Activity reporting”).

Planning, preparation, implementation and documentation of internal audits of quality are defined in Procedure PA16 “Internal audits of quality”.

7.3. Management of corrective and preventive actions

Management of a non-compliant service

Non-compliant services are services which do not meet the demands of the client (interested parties) or the requirements of the legal acts or regulations. Having identified non-compliance (also a problem, comment or recommendation for improvement), SKVC employees are to complete a non-compliance form (Form P16/F2), establish its cause and, together with the relevant process manager, define the corrective or preventive actions. After the implementation of such actions, the management representative for quality evaluates the effectiveness of the actions in the elimination of the cause of the non-compliance or the non-compliance itself.

Identification and management of non-compliant services are defined in Procedure PA17 "Management of corrective and preventive actions".

Corrective and preventive actions

To eliminate the causes for non-compliance and to prevent their recurrence in the future, the SKVC employees perform corrective actions. Corrective actions are implemented in accordance with the importance of the problem. The aim of the preventive actions is to eliminate the potential causes of non-compliance. Corrective and preventive actions ensure that the SKVC quality management system will be able to meet the requirements of the interested parties, the quality model and other requirements.

Corrective and preventive actions and the verification of their effectiveness are documented in the Non-compliance report (Form P16/F2) or in the Internal audit report (Form P13/F3) (see PA17 "Management of corrective and preventive actions" and PA13 "Internal audit of quality").

The causes, recurrence and improvement trends are analysed during the review of the SKVC quality management system conducted after the implementation of corrective and preventive actions.

8. ANNEXES

Annex 1. SKVC organisational structure.

Annex 2. Correlation of the SKVC processes and the requirements.

Annex 3. Flow chart.

Annex 4. SKVC quality policy.

9. REVISIONS OF THE QUALITY MANUAL

Revision date	**Revision performed** (title, first name, surname, signature)	**Revision conclusions**