

Approval of the Application by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) for Renewal of Inclusion on the Register

Register Committee
24/25 October 2022

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Application of:	2021-08-03
Agency registered since:	2012-06-01
External review report of:	2022-06-10
Type of review:	Targeted
Review coordinated by:	European Association for Quality Assurance of Higher Education (ENQA)
Review panel members:	Alexandra-Simona Zamfir, Asnate Kažoka, Oliver Vettori
Decision of:	2022-10-25
Registration until:	2027-06-30
Absented themselves from decision-making:	Eltjo Bazen
Attachments:	1. External Review Report, 2022-06-10 (separate file)

1. The application of 2021-08-03 adhered to the requirements of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.
2. The Register Committee confirmed eligibility of the application on 2021-09-29, having considered clarification received from SKVC on 2021-08-26.
3. The Register Committee considered the targeted external review report of 2022-06-10 on the compliance of SKVC with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015 version).

Analysis:

4. In considering SKVC's compliance with the ESG, the Register Committee took into account:
 - Ex-ante study programme external evaluation and accreditation in Lithuania (including joint programmes)
 - Ex-post study programme evaluation abroad
 - Ex-ante institutional review in Lithuania
 - Ex-post institutional review abroad

- Ex-post institutional review in Lithuania (*)
- Ex-post evaluation and accreditation of study fields in Lithuania (*)
- Ex-ante evaluation and accreditation of residency studies in Lithuania (*)
- Ex-post evaluation and accreditation of the residency studies in Lithuania (*)
- Ex-post institutional review of higher education in exile (*)

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5. SKVC's activities in recognition of foreign qualifications related to higher education, annual monitoring of study fields and other EU-financed projects are not within the scope of the ESG and, thus, not pertinent to SKVC's registration.

6. The Register Committee found that the report provides sufficient evidence and analysis on SKVC's level of compliance with the ESG; the activities marked with (*) above were introduced or changed since SKVC's last review and were thus subject of the targeted review.

7. With regard to the specific European Standards, the Register Committee considered the following:

ESG 2.5 – Criteria for outcomes

8. The panel considered that SKVC's criteria are lacking clarity, especially with regard to the exact understanding of the 5-level scale used by SKVC. The panel recommended developing guidelines for interpretation of each level to enhance consistency of their use.

9. The Committee understood that the current situation as described and analysed by the panel might lead to a lack of consistency.

10. The Register Committee therefore concurred with the panel's conclusion that SKVC only partially complies with the standard.

ESG 2.7 – Complaints and appeals

11. The lack of a specific process for complaints led to a conclusion of partial compliance when SKVC's registration was last renewed.

12. The panel reported that SKVC had newly introduced a complaints process, which clearly addresses this earlier issue.

13. The Register Committee shared the panel's reservations that the inability for higher education institutions in exile to use SKVC's internal appeals process is a shortcoming.

14. Given that this only concerns one single institution at the moment and no accreditation has taken place so far, the Committee, however, did not consider this shortcoming material enough to influence the conclusion per

this standard and concurred with the panel's conclusion that SKVC complies with the standard.

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ESG 3.3 – Independence

15. The review panel noted some concerns about the process of ex-post accreditation of higher education institutions in exile, especially given the direct involvement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the evaluation, i.e. certain standards being assessed by the Ministry instead of the panel of experts.

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16. The Register Committee considered that the rationale might lie in the obvious political and diplomatic dimensions involved and that this might justify distributed responsibilities in principle. The Committee, however, considered that it must be transparent to the public what is an assessment made by SKVC and its independent expert panels, and what part of the assessment is made by the Ministry, potentially taking into account political considerations. The Committee recommends that SKVC and the Ministry explore how to disentangle political/diplomatic considerations and quality assessments fully, e.g. by having the Ministry make a separate assessment and decision either preceding SKVC's quality assessment, or following a decision by SKVC.

17. Given the rare occurrence of these procedures and the brief analysis by the panel on the matter, the Register Committee was unable to draw a definitive conclusion; the independence and transparency in these procedures should thus receive close attention in SKVC's next review.

18. The Register Committee concurred with the panel that SKVC complies with the standard otherwise.

ESG 3.5 – Resources

19. Concerns regarding the long-term sustainability/stability of SKVC's funding led to a conclusion of partial compliance in the last renewal of the agency's registration.

20. The panel discussed SKVC funding, relying on sources from several channels. In particular, SKVC's activities still partly depended on EU structural funds, which are temporary by nature. The panel further noted that the funding from Lithuania's state budget seemed to be insufficient to support the agency's activities sustainably.

21. The Register Committee therefore concurred with the panel's conclusion that SKVC partially complies with the standard.

22. For the remaining standards, the Register Committee was able to concur with the review panel's analysis and conclusion without further comments.

Conclusion:

23. Based on the external review report and the considerations above, the Register Committee concluded that SKVC demonstrated compliance with the ESG (Parts 2 and 3) as follows:

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Standard	Previous decision (2017-11-16)	Review panel conclusion	Register Committee conclusion
2.1	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
2.2	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
2.3	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
2.4	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
2.5	Compliance	Partial compliance	Partial compliance
2.6	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
2.7	Partial compliance	Compliance	Compliance
3.1	Compliance	<i>(inherited)</i>	Compliance
3.2	Compliance	<i>(inherited)</i>	Compliance
3.3	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
3.4	Compliance	<i>(inherited)</i>	Compliance
3.5	Partial compliance	Partial compliance	Partial compliance
3.6	Compliance	<i>(inherited)</i>	Compliance
3.7	Compliance	<i>(not expected)</i>	Compliance (by virtue of applying)

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24. The Register Committee considered that SKVC only achieved partial compliance with two standards. In its holistic judgement, the Register Committee concluded that SKVC has nevertheless made progress with regard to resources (ESG 3.5) and improved one standard to compliance (ESG 2.7). The Committee hence considered that SKVC continues to comply substantially with the ESG as a whole.

25. The Register Committee therefore renewed SKVC’s inclusion on the Register. SKVC’s renewed inclusion shall be valid until 2027-06-30¹.

26. The Register Committee further underlined that SKVC is expected to address the issues mentioned appropriately and to resolve them at the earliest opportunity.

¹ Inclusion is valid for five years from the date of the external review report, see §4.1 of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.