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REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH



Erasmus+ Project
“Road Map for Implementation of Institutional Assessment”
(Number 899137 - RoadMap)

Report on Analysis of Higher Education Institutions and Stakeholders Needs

On February 28 and March 1, 2022, the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) and Academic Information Centre (AIC) organized interactive webinars for representatives of colleges, universities and social partners (Student Union of Latvia, Council of Rectors of Latvia, Council of Higher Education, Employers' Confederation of Latvia) on the introduction and implementation of cyclical institutional accreditation of higher education institutions based on the experience of foreign experts. About fifty participants took part in both webinars. In turn, on March 17 and 18, the MES and AIC organized remote workshops for representatives of colleges, universities and partners, continuing to work on the development of the most appropriate conceptual model for the cyclical institutional accreditation of higher education institutions in Latvia. There were about 40 participants in the workshop for colleges and social partners on March 17, and about 50 participants in the workshop for universities and social partners on March 18.

On February 28, Anca Prisacariu, a senior quality assurance expert with extensive experience in quality assessment of European higher education institutions from Romania, and **Anne Rooste**, a leading academic expert at Tallinn University of Applied Sciences (Tallinna Tehnikakõrgkool), shared their experience at the seminar for colleges and social partners. In the first part of the presentation “Critical orientations to institutional accreditation - an international perspective”, **Anca Prisacariu** presented four different models and approaches to institutional accreditation: 1) *Review quality against fixed external standards*, 2) *Assuring The Effectiveness of the Institutional Quality System*, 3) *Assessment of the quality of performance and achievement of ILOs*, and 4) *Evaluation against the institution’s*

own mission, vision and values. In the second part of the presentation the focus was to the international practices about criteria and indicators of an institutional accreditation, introducing participants with the approach implemented in Slovakia, Malta, Estonia, Lithuania, Georgia, Kosovo and Turkey, and the key principles, which should be taken into account in the development of the model of institutional accreditation. Anca Prisacariu also paid special attention to the main features of internal quality management systems both at level of governance and higher education institutions.

Anne Rooste presented the experience of Tallinn University of Applied Sciences in the process of institutional accreditation, which was recently successfully accredited for seven years.

On March 1, the webinar was attended by **Diane Freiburger**, Managing director of the Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation (FIBAA) and **Viktorija Tischanski**, Division Manager for International Accreditation/Bereichsleiterin International, FIBAA, **Mario Prast**, Head of Quality, Paracelsus Medical University (Austria), German Quality Assessment Agency and the Head of the Quality Management Working Group of the Austrian Conference of Private Universities (OePUK) and **Hanna Haavapuu**, Chief Academic Development Officer of Development and Quality Division at Tallinn Technical University.

Representatives of FIBAA provided extensive insight into the operation of FIBAA, outlining the link between HE, the Quality Agency and FIBAA, and the systemic framework for institutional accreditation of higher education institutions. For instance, webinar participants were introduced with quality criteria of the system of accreditation, principles of peer review, types of the on-site visits, preparing of the accreditation report, and assesment guide. Special attention was paid to the assesment guide, introducing with 7 issues of evolution of the universities: 1. Mission statement, profile, strategic objectives; 2) Management structure and quality management; 3) Studies and teaching; 4) Research; 5) Services (administration, counselling, academic support); 6) Resources, and 7) Information policy.

Mario Prast introduced webinar participants on accreditation from the perspective of a private university in Austria - The Paracelsus Medical University (PMU). Firstly Mario Prast introduced with the PMU and internal quality management system of PMU, followed by a detailed description of the existing accreditation process for higher education institutions in Austria, especially paying attention that the institutional accreditation approach differs for private universities and public universities. As indicated, private universities go through an accreditation process, while public universities have an audit. There is also accreditation regulation for private universities, which govern the procedure and the criteria for the initial accreditation of a private university and its degree programmes, the procedure and criteria for the extension of the institutional accreditation, and the procedure and criteria for the programme accreditation, as well as the procedure and the criteria for changes to institutional and programme accreditation. Private universities (also colleges) have 13 criteria for the institutional initial accreditation and 12 Criteria for re-accreditation. Separate 7 criteria are provided for the accreditation of bachelor and master programmes and 6 criteria for doctoral programmes (two additional criteria are included in the research evaluation). Mario Prast also showed the schematic visualization on impact of criteria from accreditation decree to the PMU internal quality management system. It was also important to learn about the Impact of accreditation in daily work at the PMU, for instance, high workload during preparation of documents for the accreditation, knowledge of accreditation decree, etc., and highlighting benefits, for instance, protection of the sector of private universities, reviewers input, as well as shortfalls, for instance, not only a high workload but also high cost of accreditation, over-regulation in some criteria reduces room for manoeuvre, criteria are often oriented on public universities. At the same time, other shortcomings related to the accreditation process were highlighted, for example, indicating selection of reviewers is a critical factor, frequent changes in Accreditation Decree, differences in procedures between different types of higher education, as well as long duration of accreditation process.

Webinar was closed by the presentation of **Hanna Haavapuu** on the experience of institutional accreditation of the Tallinn University of Technology (Estonia). This

experience was particularly significant because Tallinn University of Technology (TALTECH) has just completed its institutional accreditation process and received a final decision in January 2022 - to accredit Tallinn University of Technology for 7 years (until 2029). Webinar participants were introduced to **what the institutional accreditation of TALTECH looks like in numbers**, for example, it was a self-evaluation report in **136** pages, **48** interviews with more than **300** people, **13** experts from **9** European countries and **8** selected study programmes for evaluation, **what were the main preparatory steps and how much time was devoted to it, how the self-assessment report was prepared** (for example, 7 working groups performed a self-evaluation, prepared SWOT, SER, collected data, indicators, and suggested areas of improvement in the sector) **and reviewed**. As Hanna Haavapuu pointed out, in order to engage members of the university, communicate the goals of the university, share the findings of the self-evaluation report, prepare for the site visit of the committee, **the provision of internal communication is vital**. To ensure full internal communication at the university, an interactive tool SMART was developed with access to the most important processes of the university and the related regulations, strategic goals, metrics, KPIs etc., and projects related to the implementation plan of the Strategic Plan of the university visible in the form of descriptions or diagrams. At the end of the presentation **Hanna Haavapuu** also outlined the added value 1) stating that **TALTECH does not do anything because of the institutional accreditation – most of the areas of improvement in self-evaluation report are in the Strategic Plan**, 2) highlighting the **communication** - from boring presentations to virtual tours, communication by videos from colleague to colleague, delivering of messages by both management and top-level researchers, as well partners and students, and providing of more info in two languages, and **massive collaboration** between structural units and staff, 3) mapping of the practices and experiences of other universities.

After the presentations of the experts, the participants had the opportunity to ask questions and get them answered. The participants of the webinars were interested in the first steps of deciding which institutional accreditation model would be appropriate for their own country's scenarios, the verification of compliance with

regulatory enactments, the costs and duration of institutional accreditation, evaluation of scientific activities in this context, preparation time for institutional accreditation, added value of institutional accreditation, institutional accreditation for higher education institutions specializing in medicine and other similar issues.

On **March 17 and 18**, in the first part of both workshops Jolanta Silka (AIC) presented four models of cyclical institutional accreditation which are based on the lessons learned from webinars on February 28 and March 1, as well as drew attention to the goals of institutional accreditation and standards for evaluation in Estonia and Lithuania and the current goal of institutional accreditation of higher education institutions or colleges in Latvia. In her presentation, Jolanta Silka provided an insight into the existing quality assessment system in Latvia, as well as asking the rhetorical question “How to move forward?”.

In the second part of the workshops the participants were divided into groups and invited to express their opinion by answering the group moderator’s questions related to added value and challenges and risks of the introduction of an institutional accreditation system of higher education institutions in Latvia; assessment standards and areas for evaluation, especially, if college implements both vocational secondary education and 1st level professional higher education; significance or weight of assessment standards; selection of experts and site visits. The group discussions also raised issues such as *should the assessment of compliance with regulatory enactments be included in the assessment performed by experts or as a separate procedure? what should be the results of institutional accreditation of higher education institutions? should the evaluation of study fields and corresponding study programs be maintained within the framework of institutional accreditation and to what extent? what would higher education institutions need to successfully prepare for the transition to institutional accreditation?*

Analyzing the development of the quality assessment system and the strengths and weaknesses of the existing system, the following positive and negative aspects can be distinguished:

Positive aspects:

- new study programs on a national scale are developed in accordance with unified requirements;
- new study programs are evaluated by an external / independent group of experts, which also includes the opinion of employers and student representatives, providing evaluation and proposals for the improvement of the planned study program, proposals for the improvement of the study field and the corresponding study programs;
- centralized decision-making on licensing new study programs ensures equal access to study program characteristics (eg degrees to be awarded, study program codes, etc.);
- the decision is made on the basis of a comprehensive analysis of the study field and the corresponding programs, and in all cases equal principles are applied;
- compliance of study programs with external regulatory framework is ensured;
- at the national level, unified and detailed information on study programs is obtained, which is available in the register of study programs, including, providing reliable information on study programs;
- within the procedure of study fields assessment, the study fields of higher education institutions and colleges and the corresponding study programs are assessed according to a common standard, which, allows higher education institutions / colleges to review and update internal processes and internal regulatory framework;
- a comprehensive insight into the study fields implemented in Latvia and the corresponding study programs is obtained, including the areas that can be assessed as strengths and those that would need improvement;
- higher education institutions / colleges carefully evaluate the necessity and topicality of study programs, at the same time closing the study programs;

- considering that the working language is English, it has been observed that higher education institutions / colleges translate their internal regulatory enactments, as well as improve the English sections of the institutions' websites, which in general promotes greater accessibility of higher education institutions / colleges to the international environment;
- a cyclical external assessment of study programmes is observed.

Negative aspects:

- higher education institutions / colleges have to reckon with additional costs for each type of assessment, as according to the regulatory framework, the costs of the assessment procedure are covered by the higher education institution / college;
- the amount of information to be provided to an institution of higher education/college may be high, if a large number of study programs (for example, 10 or 20 programs) correspond to the field;
- In case no data has been accumulated or regular analysis of the activity has been performed in the period since the previous accreditation of the study fields, the work to be invested for the preparation of the self-assessment is extensive;
- considering the number of study fields and the number of planned accreditation procedures, the study quality commission and AIKA have a high workload;
- Significant administrative burden for higher education institutions / colleges, study quality commission and AIKA;
- The term of accreditation of study fields of two (2) years is not sufficient to eliminate shortcomings and prepare for the next accreditation;
- the evaluation criteria and aspects were overlapping and duplicated in the various assessments.

Additional remarks made by representatives of higher education institutions / colleges during the workshops:

- ✓ It is worth moving in the direction of progress and autonomy

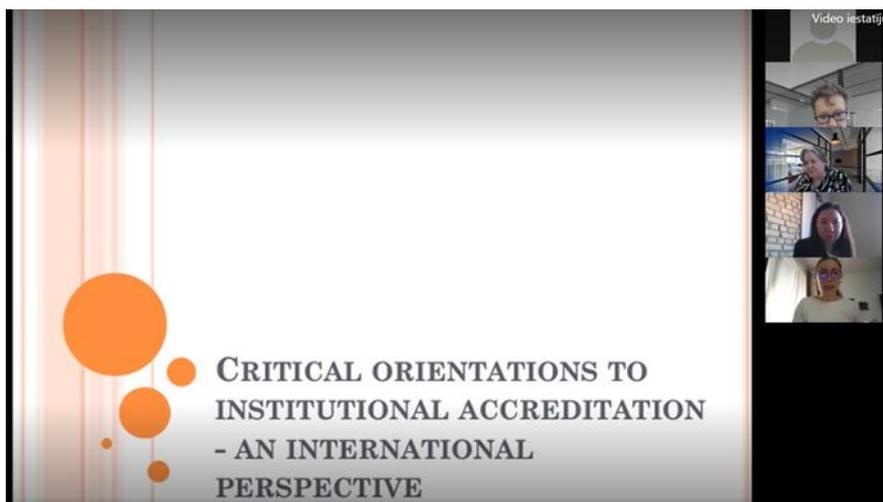
- ✓ A preparatory phase is required
- ✓ High administrative burden
- ✓ The 2-year accreditation period is too short, as the accreditation process takes at least 1 year
- ✓ Experts do not have to assess compliance with regulations
- ✓ Accreditation should be an added value for institutions - not an external setting but an internal need
- ✓ Higher education institution accreditation and its typology assessment within one procedure
- ✓ The culture of accreditation must change from a control to an improvement approach
- ✓ Move towards an understandable and stable process
- ✓ The number of evaluation procedures should be reduced
- ✓ One model for private and public universities should be applied, but typology and strategic specialization of institutions should be taken into account
- ✓ A monitoring system is needed so that higher education institutions and other involved parties can use a functioning monitoring system (data) - employers' opinion, graduates, remuneration. The monitoring system must serve the needs of the university, the data must be accessible to all and everyone must see the point.
- ✓ There should be activities to support HEI in its development processes, peer learning activities should be organized both in Latvia and internationally.

All in all, it can be concluded that the participants of both seminars agreed - cyclical accreditation of higher education institutions in Latvia is necessary and should be supported from the point of view of all involved parties. Institutional accreditation must be carried out in the public interest so that its members receive a high-quality and competitive education. The participants also pointed out that when introducing institutional accreditation as the main quality assessment system of

higher education institutions in Latvia, the current assessment of study programs and study fields should be abandoned. Those present emphasized that preparing for institutional accreditation takes considerable time and resources, and would therefore support such accreditation no more frequently than every 6 to 10 years. Participants drew the attention of the MES and the AIC to the need for specific guidelines, the need for a preparation phase, a transition period and training for employees. The experts who carry out the evaluation must be competent in the implementation of the processes of the specific type of educational institution, for example, the academic representatives of the college in the evaluation must be from the vocational education environment.

The opinions of the workshops` participants were divided on the connection / separation of the evaluation of the scientific activity of institutions from institutional accreditation, the level of international standards such as ISO and their connection with the institutional accreditation process, licensing of study programs, part-time accreditation from 2 to 4 years. Participants made constructive suggestions, for example, to link institutional accreditation to the duration of the strategies of higher education institutions and to take into account the goals set by the founder of the university when developing accreditation criteria. **Participants also acknowledged the need to move towards changing the accreditation culture from control to development approach.**

The ideas, suggestions and suggestions shared by the participants of the workshops will be evaluated and used for further work in the development of the concept of institutional accreditation of higher education institutions in Latvia.



In picture: Anca Prisacariu presentation "Critical orientations to institutional accreditation - an international perspective". Webinar on February 28, 2022

Accreditation Process

Institutional Program	1-1,5 Years 3-9 Month	1-2 Month 1-2 Month	2 Weeks 2 Weeks	1-2 Month 1-2 Month	2 Month 2 Month	max. 9 Month 3 Days 1 Day	1-2 Month 1-1,5 Month	2 Weeks 2 Weeks	1 Day 1 Day	~ 3 Weeks ~ 3 Weeks
AQ Austria		Formal Check		Selection of reviewers		On-Site Visit			Decision by Board	Approval by Ministry
Reviewers				Preparation and written questions			Writing of Expert Report			
University	Preparation of Documents and Submission		Revision	Statement	Written answers & additional documents			Writing of Statement		

Legal time frame can be exceeded by AQ Austria (PMU last re-accreditation: 18 month)

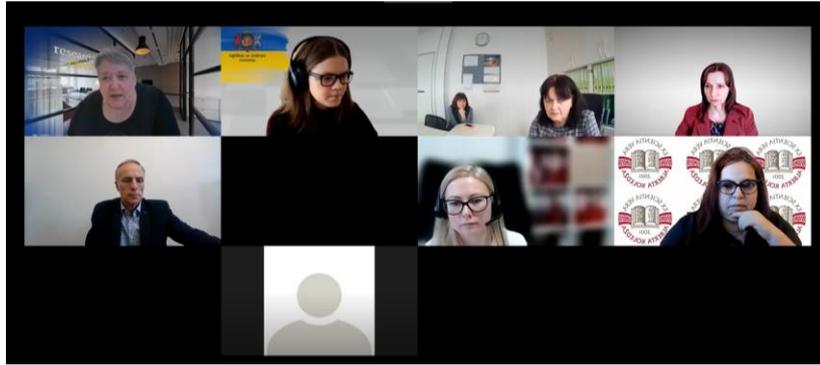
In picture: Mario Prast presents accreditation process in Austria. Webinar on March 1, 2022



In picture: Hanna Haavapuu presents institutional accreditation process of the Tallinn University of Technology (Estonia). Webinar on March 1, 2022



In Picture: *Group discussion managed by Jolanta Silka (AIC). Workshop for colleges and social partners on March 17, 2022.*



In Picture: *Group discussion managed by Dace Jansone (MES). Workshop for colleges and social partners on March 18, 2022.*



In Picture: *Group discussion managed by Dace Jansone (MES). Workshop for universities and social partners on March 18, 2022.*

Publications:

Information in English:

<https://www.izm.gov.lv/en/article/ministry-education-and-science-and-academic-information-centre-organize-webinars-higher-education-institutions-and-partners-foreign-experience-introduction-and-implementation-cyclical-institutional-accreditation>

<https://www.izm.gov.lv/en/article/work-development-cyclical-institutional-accreditation-framework-latvia-continues>

Information in Latvian:

<https://www.aika.lv/aika-sadarbiba-ar-izm-organize-seminarus-par-starptautisko-pieredzi-cikliskas-augstskolas-institucionalas-akreditacijas-istenosana/>

<https://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/izm-organize-seminarus-par-starptautisko-pieredzi-cikliskas-augstskolu-institucionalas-akreditacijas-istenosana>

<https://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/seminaros-augstskolas-un-koledzas-informe-par-arvalstu-pieredzi-cikliskas-institucionalas-akreditacijas-ieviesana-un-istenosana>

<https://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/interaktivos-seminaros-veido-cikliskas-institucionalas-akreditacijas-ietvaru-augstskolam-un-koledzam-latvija>

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