

The project "Road Map for Implementation of Institutional Assessment" of the European Union ERASMUS + K3 programme "Support for policy reforms" has ended

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This year on 12 May, the final conference of the European Union ERASMUS + K3 programme "Support for policy reforms" project "Road Map for Implementation of Institutional Assessment" was organized by the project's lead partner – the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia (hereinafter – the Ministry) in cooperation with the Academic Information Center (AIC). The project partners from Estonia, a representative of the Center for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (Lithuania) and about 75 listeners participated in it remotely (via ZOOM platform), while the project partners from Latvia and the participants of the panel discussion finally had the opportunity to meet in person (at Riga Technical University's Scientific Library). Participants were provided with simultaneous interpretation into Latvian and English throughout the conference.

The conference aimed to acquaint the conference participants with the concept of institutional accreditation for Latvia prepared during the project to analyze and improve it jointly. Thus, approaching the project goal – to improve the quality assurance system in Latvia and introduce a cyclical accreditation of higher education institutions as the primary quality assurance procedure, reducing the current overlap between the various existing quality assurance procedures, administrative burdens and evaluation procedures.

The conference was opened by Dace Jansone, Deputy Director in the field of higher education of the Department of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, with a presentation on the project and the improvement of the quality of Latvian higher education and international competitiveness in general. Currently, for all involved, the priority of the quality assurance system is the successful conclusion of the previous cycle of quality assessment of study fields by the end of 2024, at the same time planning the transition to the introduction of cyclical institutional accreditation starting from 2025. To prepare for it in time and ensure a smooth transition to a new accreditation model for Latvia, in 2020, the Ministry, in cooperation with the AIC, the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research and the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA), launched the European Union ERASMUS + K3 programme's "Support for policy reforms" project "Road Map for Implementation

of Institutional Assessment", which ends this year on 31 May. During the project, the experience of six European countries was explored in-depth – Estonia, the Netherlands, Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Sweden, incl. also assessing the downsides and challenges these countries faced in implementing and enforcing institutional accreditation. This year, with the participation of foreign experts, four interactive seminars were held, in which representatives of universities and colleges expressed their vision of the challenges and solutions in the transition to cyclical institutional accreditation. They concluded that it is crucial to maintain each higher education institution's internal quality education culture by meeting specific minimum standards and by striving for the provision of continuous development, high-quality, internationally competitive higher education.

In a presentation that followed, Rasa Penkauskienė, Director of the Institutional Evaluation Department of the Center for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (Lithuania), introduced the quality assessment system in Lithuania, outlining the implementation of institutional accreditation in our region and its contribution to Lithuanian higher education.

The Estonian partners then presented their experience setting up and implementing an institutional accreditation system. Estonia has overtaken us in this respect by introducing institutional accreditation more than 10 years ago. Kristi Raudmäe, the Lead Expert of the Department of Higher Education, spoke at the conference from the Estonian Ministry of Higher Education and Research. Heli Mattisen, Director of Evaluation, Liia Lauri, Director of Evaluation, and Tiia Bach, Evaluation Coordinator, addressed the participants from EKKA.

In the second part of the conference, Jolanta Silka, Director of the AIC Higher Education Quality Agency (AIKA), analyzed Latvia's existing quality assessment system, emphasizing its strengths and weaknesses, and presented a draft institutional accreditation concept to Latvia. This concept is included in a draft conceptual report, which will be published on the Ministry's website shortly. The key to the proposed concept: institutional accreditation must meet a specific goal, in the case of Latvia – to support and promote the continuous improvement of the internal quality assurance system of higher education institutions and colleges; areas to be assessed – 1) management and support systems, 2) resources, 3) cooperation and internationalization, 4) provision of the study process, scientific research and/or artistic creation; the period of institutional accreditation in the case of a positive assessment – three or seven years; accreditation results are publicly available; the evaluation of separate study programs has been preserved; the results of the international evaluation of scientific institutions, the goals set in the strategy of the institution, etc.

In the panel discussion, the participants analyzed both the presented model and tried to find answers from various points of view to the questions of how to ensure the credibility of institutional accreditation, how to ensure that higher education institutions provide accurate information during the evaluation, and whether the transition system in Latvia is mature enough. Accreditation: what would be the role of those involved and, finally, how to ensure a successful transition from accreditation to institutional accreditation. Representatives of the Latvian Employers' Confederation, the Latvian Students' Association, the Latvian College Association, the Latvian University Association and the Rectors' Council participated in the panel discussion.

After the panel discussion, the conference participants had the opportunity to ask questions to both the panel discussion participants and the project implementers – the Ministry and AIKA.

In concluding the conference, J. Silka and D. Jansone emphasized that time is of the essence to complete existing processes as successfully as possible and to start new ones. Given that some of the most significant reforms in the field of higher education have taken place in recent years, such as the change in the governance model of higher education, the typology of higher education institutions, the change of the academic career frameworks, The Ministry called on higher education institutions to keep up with the ongoing changes and responsibly prepare their development strategies, thus also contributing to the readiness for the implementation of institutional accreditation processes. The conference concluded with an invitation to all parties involved to actively cooperate and participate in developing and implementing the new model. Even though the project is coming to an end, active cooperation will continue. The Ministry will propose for public consultation a draft information report on the transition to cyclical institutional accreditation as early as autumn this year.

You can watch the conference video in English language on the ministry's YouTube account: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n9svN4GYDi8>



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<https://www.izm.gov.lv/en/article/project-road-map-implementation-institutional-assessment-european-union-erasmus-k3-programme-support-policy-reforms-has-ended>