Referencing the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area

Updated national report
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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AIKOS   Open Information, Guidance and Counselling System (*Atvira informavimo, konsultavimo, orientavimo sistema*)

ECTS   European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

ECVET   European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training

EHEA   European Higher Education Area

EQAVET   European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET

EQF   European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning

EMIS   Education Management Information System

ESG   Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

ILAs   Individual Learning Accounts

ISCED   International Standard Classification of Education

LTQF   Lithuanian Qualifications Framework

MESS   Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (*Švietimo, mokslo ir sporto ministerija*)

NCP   EQF National Coordination Point

NEA   National Education Agency (*Nacionalinė švietimo agentūra*)

QF-EHEA   Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area

QVETDC   Qualifications and VET Development Centre *(Kvalifikacijų ir profesinio mokymo plėtros centras)*

RCL   Research Council of Lithuania

RSTPQ   Register of Study, Training Programmes and Qualifications (*Studijų, mokymo programų ir kvalifikacijų registras*)

SKVC   Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education *(Studijų kokybės vertinimo centras)*

SPC   Sectoral Professional Committee

VET   Vocational Education and Training

Glossary

Competence
The ability to perform a certain activity on the basis of the entirety of acquired knowledge, abilities, skills and attitudes (*Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania*).

Descriptor
The term is used to refer to sets tools, such as frameworks or regulatory documents, which outline the expectations in terms of learning outcomes associated with qualifications awarded within a specific level (level descriptor), study cycle (study cycle descriptor) or field of study (study field descriptors).

Educational attainment (*išsilavinimas*)
In the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania, the educational attainment is defined as maturity, competence and qualification of a person at a certain level recognised in accordance with the procedure established by the legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania. Primary educational attainment level is acquired by completing primary education programmes. Lower secondary educational attainment level is acquired by completing the lower secondary education programmes and after assessment of learning achievements, unless the person is exempted from it in cases established by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport. Upper secondary educational attainment level is acquired by completing upper secondary education programmes and passing Matura examinations, unless the person is exempted from it in cases established by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport (*Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania*).

European qualifications framework (EQF)
A common European reference framework relating national qualifications systems and acting as a translation mechanism to make qualifications from different countries and systems more transparent and understandable (*Recommendation on the Establishment of EQF*)

Knowledge
The outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study. In the context of the EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual (*Recommendation on EQF*).

Learning outcomes
Statements regarding what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and responsibility and autonomy (*Recommendation on EQF*).

Level descriptor
Statement regarding the expectations for qualifications, placed on the same level of a qualifications framework, and their learning outcomes.

Lithuanian qualifications framework (LTQF)	A system of qualifications, based on competences, required for a person's activity, defined in the Republic of Lithuania (*Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania*).
Lithuanian qualifications system	The totality of the processes of designing and maintaining qualifications, assessing and recognising competences acquired by individuals and awarding qualifications (*Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania*).
LTQF description	The LTQF regulatory document (The Description of the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework) adopted the Government of the Republic of Lithuania seting out the system of the levels of qualifications established in the Republic of Lithuania on the basis of competences required for person's activities.
Qualification	In the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania, the qualification is defined as the entirety of a person's competences or professional experience and competences necessary for a certain activity, recognised in accordance with the procedure laid down by legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania. In Lithuania, the term "qualification" is primarily associated with qualifications acquired in vocational education and training and higher education sectors. General education programmes lead to primary, lower or upper secondary attainment levels and, so far, there is a lack of acknowledgment that general education also leads to a qualification. In general education programmes, it is learning outcomes which are referenced to a corresponding LTQF level.
	With this report, aiming to present all the landscape of qualifications and learning opportunities in general education, VET and higher education referenced to LTQF, the qualification term is used broadly and corresponds to the qualification definition provided for in the Recommendation on EQF (2017/C 189/03) – "A formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards".
Qualification descriptor	A description of a qualification provided in a sectoral qualification standard in terms of a name of qualification and qualification level, core qualification units and specialisation units (if applicable), competences within qualification units, competences' boundaries, requirements for acquiring the qualification, competence assessment requirements, compliance of the qualification with the European Union and international standards (if applicable).
Sectoral qualification standard	A descriptor of qualifications required for an economic sector or a sub-sector at all qualifications' levels, competences that constitute qualifications and the requirements for awarding qualifications *(Law on VET of the Republic of Lithuania).*
Skills	The ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the EQF, skills are described as cognitive

(involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments) (*Recommendation on EQF*).

Study Cycle Descriptor   A regulatory document adopted by the Minister of Education, Science and Sports outlining the outcomes associated with qualifications awarded within specific cycles of the QF-EHEA in the Republic of Lithuania.

Study field descriptor   A regulatory document adopted by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport setting out the general provisions, the scope, the outcomes, main provisions regarding teaching, learning, and assessment and other requirements for study programmes within a specific study field in the Republic of Lithuania.

1. Introduction

On 23rd April 2008, the European Parliament and the Council endorsed the Recommendation on the Establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning 2008/C 111/01/EC. The European Qualifications Framework (hereinafter referred to as "the EQF") is a reference framework that helps to determine the equivalence of national qualifications systems or qualifications of different countries. It is divided into eight levels of qualifications, which are described in terms of learning outcomes - statements about what the learner knows, understands and is able to do at the end of the learning process. The EQF covers all types and levels of qualifications, including qualifications provided by higher education, vocational education and training (VET) and general education institutions and qualifications provided by private sector organisations or international organisations.

One of the key goals of the Recommendation is to establish mechanisms using the EQF as a common reference tool, which would facilitate issuance and international recognition of qualification at all levels, including general education, VET and higher education, thus promoting territorial and professional mobility of individuals. One of the first steps on this road is reliably relating qualifications awarded within the national qualifications systems of all EU member states to the EQF levels. To achieve that, the member states were recommended:

- *to relate their national qualifications systems to the EQF by 2010, in particular by referencing, in a transparent manner, their qualification levels to the levels set out in Annex II and, where appropriate, by developing national qualifications frameworks in accordance with national legislation and practice;*

- *to adopt measures, as appropriate, so that, by 2012, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and Europass documents issued by competent authorities contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications systems, to the appropriate EQF level.*

If a member state decides to consider the abovementioned recommendations, it should prepare a referencing report, in which it would be demonstrated that the member state has established provisions for referencing qualifications awarded in the country to the level of the EQF that the qualification relates to.

The European Commission also proposed that each member state designates a National Coordination Point (NCP) in order to support and, in conjunction with other relevant national authorities, guide the relationship between national qualifications systems and the European Qualifications Framework with a view to promote the quality and transparency of that relationship. The European Commission primarily addresses the NCP regarding all issues in connection with the referencing process. In Lithuania, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport authorised the Qualifications and VET Development Centre to perform the NCP functions.

Recommendation 2008/C 111/01/EC on the establishment of the EQF was repealed on the 22nd May 2017 following the approval of the new Recommendation on the EQF for Lifelong Learning (2017/C

189/03). This recommendation has repeated the invitation to use the EQF to reference national qualifications frameworks or systems and to compare all types and levels of qualifications in the EU by referencing their qualification levels to levels of the EQF, set out in Annex II, and by using the criteria set out in Annex III of the Recommendation. It has also been recommended that reviews and updates, as appropriate, of referencing the national qualifications frameworks or systems levels would be performed.

The Description of the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework (hereinafter referred to as "the LTQF") was officially approved on 4th May 2010 by the Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania No. 535. It establishes an eight-level qualifications system and provides descriptors of qualification levels (hereinafter referred to as "level descriptors"). Each qualification level includes qualifications for activities of similar complexity, autonomy and variability. The LTQF has been developed with the aim of classifying the qualifications in the Republic of Lithuania, aligning the qualifications with the needs of the economy, ensuring clarity of qualifications design, acquisition, assessment and recognition processes, ensuring the transparency of information about the qualifications content and level, thereof acquisition and development, facilitating national and international labour mobility and promoting lifelong learning through diverse ways of acquiring qualifications and improved permeability between qualification levels.

The LTQF has been integrated into the qualification system management processes, i.e. qualifications design, acquisition, assessment and recognition. It helped to introduce a more systemic approach to the national qualifications system by becoming a reference for qualifications content and a tool for structuring qualifications. After the approval of the LTQF Description, its implementation started by preparing the sectoral qualification standards, designing study and training programmes and managing the Register of Study, Training Programmes and Qualifications (RSTPQ). In the documents certifying the completion of VET programmes and the acquisition of qualifications, the LTQF and EQF levels have been indicated since 2012, in the study certificates and higher education Diploma Supplements have been indicated since 2016, and in the certificates of primary, lower secondary education and the Matura certificate have been indicated since 2023.

The first report of Referencing the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (hereinafter referred to as "the referencing report") was prepared and officially published in 2012.[1] Based on responses to 10 referencing criteria, it was concluded that a clear and demonstrable link exists between the qualifications levels in the LTQF and EQF. It was also established that LTQF levels 6, 7 and 8 relate to the first, second and third cycles of Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA), correspondingly. The referencing process has also shown that:

- the majority of programmes provided in the formal education system were either already based on learning outcomes or, in cases where these were not yet implemented, the new arrangements were underway;

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[1] The referencing report is available at https://europa.eu/europass/en/document-library/eqf-referencing-report-lithuania

- political preconditions for the assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning have been created, but little progress have been made in the implementation thereof;

- even before the LTQF was approved, a system of classifying education and training programmes into levels had already existed in Lithuania, and clear and transparent procedures for the identification of the level of awarded qualifications had been set;

- quality assurance in all sectors of the education system complied with the majority of Common Principles for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training in the context of the European Qualifications Framework (Annex III of the Recommendation 2008/C 111/01/EC).

The report reflected the situation of the Lithuanian qualifications system until October 2011, and after assessing the pending changes in the qualifications system, it was planned to update the report in 2013. However, since the start and implementation of important qualifications system formation works (such as the preparation of sectoral qualification standards and study field descriptors, update of study and training programmes, legitimation of schemes of awarding 5th level qualifications, implementation of mechanisms for ensuring the quality of VET) was delayed, the update of the referencing report was postponed and initiated in 2023.

The updated referencing report presents the experience of the implementation of the LTQF and related changes in the education system between 2012 and 2023. It was prepared by a group of experts representing different education sectors and the labour market. The findings of the report, together with progress, challenges and future plans in the implementation of the LTQF were discussed in three dedicated workshops with stakeholders from VET, higher education and social partners. In addition, consultations were held with representatives of MESS and "information-rich" stakeholder to verify the accuracy of the information provided. As recommended in both EQF recommendations, the referencing process involved three international experts, who provided feedback on the report, and their comments were duly addressed. Finally, this version of the report incorporates the feedback and comments of the European Commission, Cedefop, Council of Europe and EQF Advisory Group members which were received during the presentation of the report to the EQF Advisory Group on 6th of March, 2024.

The report covers all education sectors – general education, VET and higher education. It also discusses the operation of mechanisms for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Special attention is paid to implementing the learning outcomes approach and developing quality assurance instruments for the design and award of qualifications. It provides revised answers to the criteria and procedures for referencing national qualifications frameworks to the EQF and for verifying the compatibility of national qualifications frameworks with the QF-EHEA, identifies the challenges related to the implementation of the LTQF and the LTQF development plans for the coming years.

The report is composed of the following chapters:

- the first chapter presents the context and goals of the updated referencing report;

- the second chapter reveals the preconditions and development process of the LTQF until 2012, subsequent legal changes, the structure of the LTQF and the qualifications assigned to it, its scope, institutions and stakeholders involved in the implementation of the LTQF;

- the third chapter presents the qualifications provided in Lithuania and the principles and procedures of their formation;

- the fourth chapter reviews the changes in general education, VET and higher education after 2012 in the context of the LTQF implementation;

- the fifth chapter demonstrates how the LTQF and its referencing to the EQF fulfils ten referencing criteria and procedures as formulated in the EQF Recommendation;

- the sixth chapter demonstrates how Lithuanian higher education complies with the criteria and procedures for verifying the compatibility of qualifications frameworks with the QF-EHEA as established by a Bologna Process working group;

- the seventh chapter introduces the expected initiatives for further development of the LTQF and for responding to challenges identified during the update of the referencing report.

2. Lithuanian Qualifications Framework (LTQF)

2.1. LTQF Design Preconditions and Process Until 2012

On 4th July 2003, the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania approved the provisions of the National Education Strategy for 2003-2012, where one of the indicated measures for achieving the targets was the "*development of the flexible and open structure of education, uniting the general education, VET, studies, as well as formal, non-formal and informal education into the single area of education.*" Referring to this provision and taking into account the European Union initiatives supporting transparency and quality of qualifications, it was decided to revise and improve the national qualifications system as far back as when the priorities for use of the ESF support between 2004-2006 for Lithuania were planned. This resulted in the preparation and financing of the project "Creation of the Lithuanian Qualifications System," which was carried out between 2005-2008. The project was aimed at the creation of a qualifications system that would satisfy the needs of the economy and ensure favourable conditions for lifelong learning.

The concept (2007) and the model (2008) of the national qualifications system were prepared, where the central element is the national qualifications framework, covering all education sectors. Thus, the national qualifications framework in Lithuania was being developed alongside the EQF.

The design of the national qualifications framework was based on the system of dividing learning outcomes into levels, which already existed in the Lithuanian education system: three education levels in the general education sector, four VET attainment levels in the VET sector and three study cycles in higher education. After discussions over the prepared draft of the national qualifications framework with all stakeholders and its adjustment according to comments received, the Government of the Republic of Lithuania approved the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework (referred to in the report as "the LTQF") by its Resolution No. 535 on 4th May 2010 (referred to in the report as "the LTQF Description" ", the most recent edition of which is provided in Annex 1). The LTQF Description established a system of eight qualification levels, set the criteria defining the qualification levels (complexity of activity, independence of activity, variability of activity) and defined the paths of obtaining qualifications at all levels and the areas of the LTQF application. Descriptors of the qualification levels were provided in the annex of the resolution.

After the start of the referencing the LTQF to the EQF, a detailed comparison of the LTQF and EQF level descriptors was performed, and it was determined that a different understanding of "the qualification" back then (in Lithuania, a qualification denoted the level of a person's readiness for a "*certain professional activity*", whereas in the EQF – one's readiness "*to work or to learn*") reduced possibilities of using the LTQF for referencing qualifications awarded in Lithuania and other countries. It was also identified that, in spite of the same number of levels, the conformity between the LTQF and the EQF levels was not strong – the LTQF level 1 descriptor best corresponded to the EQF level 2 descriptor,

whereas the LTQF level 2 descriptor to the EQF level 1 descriptor. It was also noted that the *Matura* certificate (school leaving certificate), confirming successful completion of the upper secondary general education programme and giving the right to continue studies in the higher education system, had no place in the LTQF at all. Furthermore, emphasis on professional activity, hindering the inclusion of learning outcomes achieved in the general education sector into the LTQF, considerably reduced possibilities for the LTQF to become an efficient instrument for promoting lifelong learning, which is one of the main aims in the case of the EQF. Therefore, it was recommended that the definition of qualification be changed by drawing it closer to the notion used in the EQF and adjusting the LTQF accordingly.

In the new edition of the Law on Education, adopted by the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania on 17th March 2011, the qualification is defined as follows: "***qualification** is the entirety of a person's competences or professional experience and competences necessary for a **certain activity**, recognised in accordance with the procedure laid down by legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania*" (Law on Education, Article 2(8)). On the one hand, this definition no longer obliges to focus on readiness for a specific professional activity when determining the place of qualification in the qualifications framework. On the other hand, when relating qualifications to one's competences possessed, this underlined much more clearly the importance of learning outcomes, especially having in mind the definition of competence given in the Law on Education: "***competence** is the ability to perform a certain activity on the basis of the entirety of acquired **knowledge, abilities, skills and attitudes (vertybinės nuostatos)**"* (Law on Education, Article 2(7)). Moreover, the term "higher education qualification" *(aukštojo mokslo kvalfikacija)* was introduced in the Law on Education (Article 13(4)): "*Upon completion of a higher education study programme, a higher education qualification corresponding to the level established in the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework is obtained*". It should also be noted that this edition of the law legitimised the definition of the LTQF (Lithuanian Qualifications Framework - *a system of qualifications, based on competences, required for a person's activity, defined in the Republic of Lithuania*).

On 24th August 2011, the second step was taken; the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, through Resolution No. 986, approved the LTQF Description amendments regarding the acquisition of level 1-4 qualifications according to VET and (or) general education programmes, by informal learning or from professional experience and has stipulated a new edition of descriptors of LTQF levels.

In 2011, the draft report on referencing LTQF to the EQF and to the QF-EHEA was presented to the Lithuanian public at consultation events and at a national conference, as well as to the EQF Advisory Group at the European Commission. In 2012, the draft referencing report was amended according to the comments and suggestions of the EQF Advisory Group and was officially published.

2.2. Changes in Regulation of LTQF After 2012

On 24th July 2019, the Government of the Republic of Lithuania approved the new edition of the LTQF Description with the Resolution No. 764. Its initiation was primarily due to changes in the classification of higher education study programmes. In the new edition of the Resolution, it is established that 5th level qualifications can be obtained after completing short cycle study programmes. Moreover, it is stipulated that qualifications at the 6th level are obtained after completing the first cycle and/or professional study programmes, 7th level qualifications are obtained after completing the second cycle and/or integrated studies or professional study programmes and 8th level qualifications are obtained after completing third cycle studies.

In the 2019 edition of the LTQF Description, the information about related legal acts was updated, and certain wordings were clarified, for example, that the qualification is acquired after completing a training or study programme (and not while learning or studying). In the document, the division of qualifications into qualifications for work and qualifications for learning was also abandoned. No significant changes have been introduced in the qualification level descriptors, except that the descriptor of the 3rd level specified that the activity could be "carried out autonomously *or* under the guidance of an employee with a higher-level qualification and subject to external performance quality control", while the descriptor of the 7th level emphasises that, to perform the activity, "the application of the *latest* research results" is needed.

It should also be noted that in 2017, the Law on Education, which is the most important legal act regulating the education system, was supplemented with Article 39[1] "The purpose and the structure of the qualifications system, design and management of qualifications, assessment of competences and award of qualifications" (box 1). Essentially, this means that the principles of the qualifications system operation are no longer regulated by the Law on VET and are subject to the Law on Education. However, it can be noted that these provisions are most applicable to qualifications acquired in the VET system and are not fully aligned with the mission and specifics of other sectors of education. Higher education qualifications (qualification degree, Doctor of Sciences degree, Doctor of Arts degree and qualifications awarded by a higher education institution that has the approval of a competent authority to award this qualification) are regulated in the Law on Higher Education and Research. Moreover, such provisions for qualifications system management do not cover primary, lower and upper secondary general education.

Box 1. Article 39[1] "The purpose and the structure of the qualifications system, design and management of qualifications, assessment of competences and award of qualifications"

> 1. The purpose of the qualifications system is to ensure the relevance of higher education and VET qualifications to the needs of the national economy, their transparency, comparability, the continuity of learning and the occupational and territorial mobility of individuals. The qualifications system also includes the development and implementation of processes related to quality assurance and the assessment and award of qualifications.

2. The qualifications system is based on cooperation between the social partners, the State, higher education institutions and VET institutions.

3. The qualifications system includes the design and management of qualifications, the assessment and recognition of competences acquired and the award of qualifications.

4. The qualifications system is managed by an authority authorised by the Minister for Education, Science and Sport (the Qualifications Management Authority – *Kvalifikacijų tvarkymo įstaiga*).[2]

5. Qualifications are competence-based. The competences required for a qualification are laid out in a sectoral qualification standard.

6. Qualifications are managed by the Qualifications Management Authority in accordance with the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework established by the Government and the Lithuanian Classification of Occupations.

7. The Qualifications Management Authority forms sectoral professional committees consisting of representatives of the State, municipal authorities, institutions and social partners to coordinate strategic issues of the qualifications system.

8. The requirements for institutions engaged in the evaluation and recognition of competences and the procedure for their accreditation are determined by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport in agreement with the Minister of Economy and Innovation.

9. The evaluation and recognition of competences acquired by a person are organised by the Qualifications Management Authority, in accordance with the procedure for evaluating the competences acquired by an individual, established by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport and coordinated with the Minister of Economy and Innovation and the Minister of Social Security and Labour.

10. A qualification is awarded to a person who has acquired all competences required for the qualification, as set out in the relevant sectoral qualification standard.

11. The qualification (or part of it) is awarded to a person by a VET provider or higher education institution following the results of the assessment of competences.

12. Supervision of the assessment and award of qualifications is organised by the Qualifications Management Authority in accordance with the procedure laid down by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport.

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[2] The functions of the Qualifications Management Authority are performed by the Qualifications and VET Development Centre (QVETDC) pursuant to the Order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania No ISAK-2047 of 15 October 2009, the Order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania No V-127 of 9 February 2018, and the Order of the Minister of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania No V-1219 of 18 September 2023 "On the Granting of Powers to the Qualifications and VET Development Centre".

2.3. Structure of the LTQF and Descriptors of Qualification Levels

Like the EQF, the LTQF has eight qualification levels, but their descriptors are based on different criteria. In the case of the EQF, *knowledge, skills, and responsibility and autonomy*[3] were used as criteria for describing levels of learning outcomes. Meanwhile, for the LTQF, the following criteria characterising activity were chosen to describe qualification levels:

- *complexity of activities* – a criterion used to describe the character of activities, the variety and complexity of tasks and the level of knowledge necessary for the performance of activities;

- *autonomy of activities (autonomy of actor)* – a criterion used to describe changes in activity organisation and nature of subordination, as well as the degree of responsibility;

- *variability of activities* – a criterion used to describe activities in terms of the changing technological and organisational environment.

The LTQF evel descriptors are presented in Table 1. The first paragraph of each level descriptor characterises the complexity of the activity for which a person who acquired a qualification of the relevant level is ready. The second paragraph reflects the autonomy of such an activity, and the third paragraph reflects its variability.

Table 1. LTQF level descriptors

Qualification level	Qualification level descriptor
1	The qualification is intended for activities consisting of one or several simple specialised actions or operations. The activities require the ability to apply basic knowledge characteristic of the activities performed. The environment of the activities is clear, the activities are performed in line with detailed instructions, some cases require intense supervision and guidance. The situations, actions and operations constituting the activities are regular and constantly repetitive.
2	The qualification covers the activities consisting of actions and operations intended to solve simple problems. The activities performed require the application of the main factual knowledge characteristic of the activities. The activities performed require supervision and guidance. The activities and operations constituting the activities are regular.
3	The qualification is intended for activities consisting of actions and operations in narrow areas of activities. The activities may include several or more specialised activity tasks that require the application of well-known and tested solutions. Performance of the activities involves the ability to apply the knowledge characteristic of the activities performed pertaining to the facts, principles and processes of the activity area.

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[3] The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23rd April 2008 on the Development of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning described learning outcomes in terms of the criteria of knowledge, skills and competences. In 2018, in the updated Recommendation, the criterion "competence" has been reformulated as "responsibility and autonomy", without changing the level descriptors.

	The activities are carried out autonomously or under the guidance of an employee with a higher-level qualification and subject to external performance quality control. The activity environment may require the ability to adapt to simple context changes.
4	The qualification is intended for activities consisting of actions and operations in relatively broad areas of activity. The activities are performed by carrying out several or more specialised activity tasks, solutions to which are not always tested or known. Performance of the activities involves the ability to apply factual and theoretical knowledge characteristic of a broad context related to the activity areas. The activities are performed autonomously, assuming the responsibility for the quality of the procedures and outcomes of performance. With the acquisition of professional experience of set duration, the qualification allows the transfer of practical skills to the staff with lower-level qualifications as well as supervision of their activities. The activity environment requires the ability to adapt to the developments predetermined by the context change, which is normally foreseeable.
5	The qualification is intended for activities distinguished by integrated coordination of activity tasks in different activity areas. The activities include the evaluation of the competences of lower-qualification employees and training thereof. The activities require coordination of comprehensive knowledge of the activity area with general knowledge in dealing with various specialised activity tasks in several different activity areas. The employee performs the activities independently and is supervised only as regards the evaluation of results. The activity tasks are set by an employee with a higher-level qualification, who frequently grants the employee performing the activities the discretion as to the choice of methods and measures to complete the tasks. The employee supervises the activities of lower-qualification staff, plans and assigns activity tasks, oversees the performance of the activities, provides consulting and verifies the performance quality. The technological and organisational requirements of the activities as well as their environment are constantly changing, the changes are often unforeseeable and may be related to new areas of activity.
6	The qualification is intended for complex activities distinguished by a variety of tasks and their content. Different means and methods are employed when dealing with problems in various areas of professional activities. Therefore, the performance of activities requires the application of broad theoretical knowledge based on the results of new fundamental and applied research or necessary for the introduction of various innovations. Activities are performed independently, selecting the methods for task completion and organising the work of the respective staff for the completion of the set tasks. Thus, the qualifications in this level include the ability to plan activities with respect to the set tasks, to analyse and record the activity results and to submit reports to activity coordinators, to modify activities based on the activity result analysis and specialist recommendations, and to carry out different project activities. The activity environment requires the ability to adapt to constant and normally unpredictable changes predetermined by the progress of knowledge and technologies in a specific professional sphere. The qualification allows the enhancement and extension of professional knowledge and, following the self-assessment of the activities, enables independent learning (development of cognitive competences) as required by the changing professional activities.
7	The qualification is intended for complex activities consisting of various interconnected tasks that may cover several related professional activities. Therefore, the performance of activities requires expert evaluation and application of the latest knowledge of the professional activities and similar or related areas, discovery of new facts in conducting applied research into the professional activities, and creative application of theoretical knowledge and the latest research results. The activities are performed by means of independent setting of the tasks in the respective activity area and taking independent decisions aimed at activity enhancement and improvement. A peculiar characteristic of the activities is the supervision of other employees' activities. Thus, the qualifications of this level cover the abilities to independently carry out applied research, provide consulting in the activity area, coordinate projects aimed at the improvement of the qualifications of others as well as introduction of innovations, and to analyse and present the activity results.

	Due to the advancement of the knowledge, technology and labour organisation in various activity areas, the activities of this level and their environment undergo intense changes, the developments are difficult to predict, and the activities consist of constantly changing combinations of tasks. Thus, the activity changes require the ability to adopt innovative solutions based on research results as well as the evaluation of alternative solutions and possible social and ethical consequences of the activities.
8	The qualification is intended for activities of exceptional complexity, distinguished by the development of new knowledge, ideas, technologies, as well as work practices, methods and processes. Consequently, the activity demands the discovery of new knowledge in the activity areas on the basis of fundamental and applied research findings, integrating knowledge in different activity areas. The activities are characterised by strategic activity objectives that may cover several different activity areas or research subjects.
	The activities are strategically planned by assuming the responsibility for the results and quality of other employees' activities and independent strategically important decision-making. The training and consulting of the specialists in the respective activity area is another characteristic. Thus, it is necessary to have the ability to adopt strategic decisions of public significance, to independently plan and conduct fundamental and/or applied research, to transfer the latest knowledge (to share know-how) to specialists in the respective area and to coordinate scientific and applied research projects.
	Intense and unpredictable changes in the activities and their environment require readiness for constant developments, openness to innovation, a positive attitude towards the development of the organisation and society, the ability to address issues originally in the light of their context, and the ability to initiate and make changes in various areas of activity and public life.

The LTQF level descriptors' criteria have been chosen in the context of Lithuania with the goal of making the qualifications content at different levels more easily comprehended by the main users of the qualifications system, i.e. persons seeking to obtain qualifications and employers. Authors of the LTQF project have also proposed an alternative version of the qualification level descriptors - referred to as the *comprehensive descriptors* - in which criteria are spread into a matrix, expressed through cognitive, functional and general competences (see Annex 2). Such LTQF qualification descriptors do not have legal power, they are used as methodological guidance when preparing qualification descriptors, training and study programmes. They are presented in methodological papers and on the website of the Qualifications and VET Development Centre (QVETDC) (the functions of QVETDC are presented in Section 2.8).

2.4. LTQF Application

The main areas of the LTQF application are:

- preparation and approval of sectoral qualification standards, the study cycle descriptor and study field descriptors (see Section 3.2 for more information);

- ensuring coherence between the content and the level of qualifications (see Section 3.2);

- identification of the level of qualifications and units of qualifications (see Section 5.4);

- the development and implementation of VET and study programmes (see Sections 4.2 and 4.3);

- the evaluation and recognition of competences acquired through formal, non-formal or informal learning and the award and recognition of qualifications (see Section 4.5);

- the evaluation and recognition of qualifications acquired according to educational programmes of foreign countries and international organisations;

- the issuing of documents evidencing the acquisition of qualifications to individuals, indicating the level of qualification awarded (see Section 2.6);

- maintenance of the Register of Study, Training Programmes and Qualifications (RSTPQ) (see Section 2.7);

- vocational guidance and counselling, providing information about pathways leading to qualifications, continuing professional and academic development, the level and content of qualifications and information on permeability between different qualifications and levels of qualifications.

The LTQF is primarily a tool to classify the qualifications awarded in Lithuania by assigning them to the appropriate level according to their learning/study outcomes. The qualifications framework is seen as a prerequisite for the development of a unified national qualifications system in Lithuania which would be in line with the European Union's priorities for the quality and comparability of qualifications and would ensure the relevance of qualifications to the country's economic needs, their transparency and comparability, the continuity of learning and the professional and territorial mobility of individuals (Law on Education, Article 39[1]).

The LTQF level descriptors are used for the shaping of qualification content, for decisions on their level, for the formulation of learning outcomes in VET programmes, in study fields descriptors and in study programmes (see Sections 3.2.2, 3.2.3, 4.2.2 and 4.3.1). The LTQF level descriptors were also taken into account when formulating competences and learning outcomes of general education curriculum (see Sections 3.2.1 and 4.1.1).

2.5. Qualifications at Different LTQF Levels

In the LTQF Description approved by the Government, the following paths for the acquisition of qualifications are indicated:

- Qualifications at levels 1-4 are acquired upon completing VET and/or general education programmes;

- Qualifications at level 5 are acquired upon completing training programmes for persons having a VET qualification and professional experience of a fixed duration or short cycle study programmes;

- Qualifications at level 6 are acquired upon completing first cycle or professional study programmes;

- Qualifications at level 7 are acquired upon completing second cycle, integrated or professional study programmes;

- Level 8 qualifications are awarded upon completion of third cycle studies.

It is also specified that qualifications at *any level* may be acquired through work experience and informal learning. This provides a legal basis for introducing mechanisms for the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning across the whole range of qualifications.

Although the Lithuanian legal framework sets a fairly broad definition of the qualification, it is primarily associated with preparation for professional activity. The Law on Education defines the qualification as "the entirety of a person's competences or professional experience and competences necessary for a certain activity, recognised in accordance with the procedure laid down by legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania" (Law on Education, Article 2(8)).

The Law on Higher Education and Research also defines a higher education qualification and attributes to this term such qualifications as qualification degrees (Professional Bachelor, Bachelor, Master), Doctor of Sciences degrees, Doctor of Arts degrees) and qualifications awarded by a higher education institution that has the approval of a competent authority to award this qualification (Law on Higher Education and Research, Article 4 (5)).

It is not generally accepted to consider primary, lower secondary or upper secondary educational attainment levels (*išsilavinimas*) as a "qualification", but the learning outcomes of competences development upon finalisation of general education programmes are referenced to the relevant levels of the LTQF.

This report considers the entire range of qualifications across all education sectors and interprets a qualification in accordance with the definition given in the EQF Recommendation: "*qualification means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent authority determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards*". The report covers general education, VET and higher education systems, the educational programmes and qualifications provided within them (i.e. educational attainment level reached within general education, qualifications described in the sectoral qualification standards and acquired by completing VET programmes and higher education qualifications).

The hierarchy of qualification types (documents) is shown in Table 2. Compared to 2012, new qualification types have been included at a level 5 (a Diploma, awarded after finalising short cycle studies, and a VET diploma, awarded after finalising VET programmes) and at a level 6 (a Study certificate after finalising pedagogical studies) (see also Annex 3). LTQF level 5 covers qualifications acquired either in VET (acquisition certified by a VET diploma) or in higher education (acquisition certified by a Diploma). The qualifications are designed for different target groups, with VET qualifications primary covering Meister (Master of crafts - *Meistras)* type qualifications and designed for learners who possess a VET qualification and / or have practical experience and higher education qualifications having more profound requirements for scientific knowledge and intended to act as a pathway to a level 6 qualifications (bachelor or professional bachelor).

Table 2. Qualification documents and qualifications according to the LTQF levels

LTQF level	Qualification documents (qualifications)	EQF level
8	Doctor of Sciences Degree Doctor of Arts Degree	8
7	Master Degree	7
6	Bachelor Degree Professional Bachelor Degree Study Certificate (awarded after completion of a teacher training programme)	6
5	Diploma (awarded after completion of a short cycle programme) VET Diploma	5
4	VET Diploma Matura Certificate (**)	4
3	VET Diploma Lower Secondary Education Certificate (**)	3
2	VET Diploma	2
1	VET Diploma (*) Primary Education Certificate (**)	1

* Level 1 qualifications are not currently awarded

** The Descriptor of Primary, Lower and Upper Secondary Education Programmes, approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania on 20th April 2023 by the Order No. V-570, stipulates that the results of competence development upon completion of general education programmes are related to the relevant LTQF levels. The learning outcomes of the primary education programme are related to the LTQF level 1, the learning outcomes of the lower-secondary education programme are related to the LTQF level 3, and the learning outcomes of upper-secondary education programme are related to the LTQF level 4.

2.6. Indicating the Level of Qualification in the Documents Certifying the Acquired Qualification

Seeking to ensure transparency, comparability and recognition of qualifications, the level of the qualification is indicated on the qualification documents. The LTQF and EQF levels have been indicated in VET diplomas since 2012 and in study certificates and higher education Diploma Supplements since 2016. On 2nd June 2023 the Description of the Procedure for Issuing General Education Certificates and Matura Certificates was supplemented with the provision that in general education, the primary education certificates, lower education certificates and Matura certificates indicate the levels of the LTQF.[4]

VET documents

The acquisition of a qualification in VET is certified by a VET diploma issued by a VET provider. Order No. V-209 of the Minister of Education and Science, dated 6th February 2012, approved the Description of the Content, Form and Procedure of Issuance of the Qualification Certificate, VET Certificate, VET Achievements Certificate, the Certificate and the Competence Assessment Certificate, which determined the content and requisites of the document certifying the qualification acquisition (in 2012–2015, this document was called the "qualification certificate"). These included the name and code of the awarded qualification registered in the RSTPQ; the name and code of a sectoral qualification standard or a VET standard; the name and state code of a corresponding formal VET programme which described the awarded qualification in their absence, and a qualification level according to the LTQF and EQF.

This order was replaced by the order No. V-231 of the Minister of Education and Science, dated 23rd March 2015. Since 2015, instead of the qualification certificate, the qualification is confirmed by a VET diploma. In addition to the information mentioned above, since 2015, the VET diploma indicates a list of the competences acquired; the names of the modules (subjects) of the formal VET programme, their duration or workload in credits and their evaluation results. Also, it has been established that upon completion of the programme modules, a certificate is issued, which indicates the competences acquired and the LTQF and EQF levels.

The changes to the description of the procedure adopted on 6th March 2023 did not change the content of the VET diploma but legalised the issuance of digital documents certifying qualifications and learning outcomes. It has also been established that the certificate (*pažymėjimas)* is issued to persons who have received a positive evaluation of the competences acquired through non-formal learning and to persons who have completed a non-formal VET programme.

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[4] Learning outcomes of lower and upper secondary education curriculum have been referenced to the LTQF levels 3 and 4 respectively from 2016 and of primary education to LTQF level 1 from 2023. Following amendment of Description of the Procedure for Issuing General Education Certificates and Matura Certificates (https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.B9CFE15EB6DA/asr) from 2023 LTQF levels are indicated on general education certificates and Matura diploma.

The award of a Lithuanian higher education qualification can be certified by two types of credentials:

- A diploma is issued after completion of cycle studies.[5] A bilingual Diploma Supplement is awarded in Lithuanian and English together with Professional Bachelor, Bachelor and Master diplomas. From 2024, the legislation recommends the issuance of a Diploma Supplement also for short cycle programmes;

- A certificate is issued after completion of professional studies. Depending on the completed studies, certificates can be of several types: study certificates, residency (*rezidentūros*) certificates or internship (*internatūros*) certificates.

Higher education institutions issue diplomas, diploma supplements and certificates, but in doing so, they follow the requirements and the procedure regulated by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport, which also lays out the type of information to be provided in the credentials.[6] According to these regulations, the LTQF and EQF level of qualification is indicated in the Diploma Supplement or the study certificate. The necessary changes to indicate qualification levels in these documents were approved in 2016. The Diploma Supplement, issued together with Professional Bachelor, Bachelor and Master diplomas, follows the Europass Diploma Supplement template. It indicates information about the completed study programme and study modules, the name of the awarded qualification degree and qualification (if relevant), the qualification level according to the LTQF and EQF and the study programme level according to the Lithuanian Standardized Education Classification, etc.

The diploma contains information about the holder of the diploma, the awarding institution, the diploma title, serial numbers, registration numbers, date of issue (in case of doctoral diplomas, the date of defence of doctoral thesis), etc.

Since a Diploma Supplement is not awarded after completion of doctoral studies, the LTQF and EQF level is not indicated for graduates of the third cycle studies. However, these qualifications are considered to be referenced to LTQF level 8 and EQF level 8.

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[5] Persons who have completed short cycle studies and acquired a LTQF level 5 qualification from 2024 (i.e. the first graduates of short cycle studies) are also issued a diploma (previously, a study certificate was foreseen).
[6] Description of the Procedure for the Preparation, Production, Accounting, Registration and Issuance of Mandatory Forms for Diplomas, Diploma Supplements, and Study Certificate Forms: *https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/2863764039aa11e79f4996496b137f39/CpcxIgcUwG?jfwid=-cqr93kobe*.

2.7. Register of Study, Training Programmes and Qualifications

Formal education programmes, qualifications and sectoral qualification standards are registered in the Register of Study, Training Programmes and Qualifications (RSTPQ, *Studijų, mokymo programų ir kvalifikacijų registras*).[7] The controller of the register is the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania, and the manager (i.e. managing body) of the RSTPQ is the National Education Agency (NEA, see Section 2.8 for further information about NEA activities). The RSTPQ was established in 2010 after reorganising the Register of Study and Training Programmes into the RSTPQ. The purpose, objects, the rights and duties of controlling and managing authorities of the RSTPQ, data processing, interconnection with related registers and data security are governed by the Regulations of the RSTPQ, approved by Resolution No. 895 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, dated 26th August 2015. The provision, change, updating and de-registration of data on qualifications is governed by the Description of the Procedure for Registration of Objects of the RSTPQ.

RSTPQ objects are the following:

- Qualifications;
- Study, formal and non-formal VET, primary, lower and upper secondary education programmes, upon completion of which the relevant educational level is attained and/or the qualification is awarded or competence is acquired which is required to perform a job or function regulated by laws;
- Sectoral qualification standards.

When registering these objects, a state code is assigned for identification purposes.

LTQF level 1-4 qualifications, acquired according to VET programmes, and level 5 qualifications, acquired according to VET or short cycle programmes, are described in sectoral qualification standards. QVETDC assigns a state code[8] to these qualifications and submits the qualification data to the NEA for registration.

The titles of the qualifications of LTQF level 6–7 – titles of degrees – are associated with the classification of studies by study field. Their titles are determined by the Order No. V-1075 of the Minister of Education, Science and Sport, dated 1st December 2016, on Approval of the List of Study Fields and Groups of Study Fields according to which Studies are Conducted in Higher Education Institutions, the

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[7] RSTPQ information about qualifications is accessible at:
https://www.aikos.smm.lt/Registrai/Kvalifikacijos/SitePages/Pagrindinis.aspx?ss=d43c51ae-98f8-4e57-a6b5-04f746a49300; in English at:
https://www.aikos.smm.lt/en/StudyProgramm/Qualifications/SitePages/Home.aspx?ss=f5d1d54d-e405-46fb-9a8f-b90ef15b2d37.

[8] The structure of the qualification code: the first symbol is the section code according to National Classification of Economic Activities (EVRK 2 red.); the second symbol is the sequence number of the standard in the section to which the qualification belongs; the third and fourth symbols are the division code according to EVRK 2 red.; the fifth symbol is the LTQF level; the sixth and seventh symbols are the sequence number of the qualification.

Procedure for Changing it, the Framework of Degrees and the Principles of Establishing the Titles of Study Programmes.[9] Degrees by study field are included in the RSTPQ as the object "qualification".

Information about the professional qualifications of LTQF level 6–8, described in the sectoral qualification standards, may also be found in the RSTPQ. After the descriptors for these qualifications are approved, the QVETDC assigns a state code and submits the qualification data to the NEA for registration. However, only some of these qualifications are awarded (for example, qualifications in the healthcare sector).

RSTPQ data in Lithuanian and in English is publicly accessible in the Open Information, Guidance and Counselling System (AIKOS) *www.aikos.smm.lt*.[10] It should be noted that, in the AIKOS, information about qualifications and their LTQF and EQF levels is closely linked with RSTPQ information about programmes, leading to these qualifications, and information about bodies, awarding these qualifications (educational institutions). This allows for more user-friendly browsing in the AIKOS portal.

Data on VET programmes and their modules for registration in the RSTPQ are provided by the QVETDC. National-level VET programmes and their modules are assigned codes.[11] Together with the programme data, a list of competences that constitute the qualification, as defined by sectoral qualification standard, is provided.

When it comes to higher education qualifications, only accredited study programmes or the programmes in the study field and cycle, for which the higher education has a 7-year period of accreditation, can be registered. Higher education institutions provide data on the programmes they intend to offer to the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC). Once a positive decision regarding the accreditation of the study programme is made or the 7 year accreditation status of the study field and cycle is verified, SKVC submits data about the programme (including accreditation data, when applicable) to the NEA.[12] The description of a study programme also includes intended learning outcomes, associated with an individual qualification, to be acquired after graduating from the programme.

Information about qualifications and programmes collected by the RSTPQ is presented in Annex 3.

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[9] The List of Study Fields and Groups of Study Fields according to which Studies are Conducted in Higher Education Institutions, the Procedure for Changing it, the Framework of Degrees and the Principles of Establishing the Titles of Study Programmes: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/ae5d5730b7c211e693eea1ef35f20da9/asr.
[10] https://www.aikos.smm.lt/Registrai/Kvalifikacijos/SitePages/Pagrindinis.aspx?ss=a0d9a76f-e24b-4adf-88d0-952c54421b53.
[11] The structure of the VET programme code: the first symbol (P or T) indicates if the programme is intended for initial or continuing VET; the second symbol is the LTQF level; the third symbol is the level of education; the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh symbols are the educational sub-area code from the Lithuanian Classification of Education; and the eighth and ninth symbols are the programme's sequence number.
[12] The structure of the study programme code: the first, second and third symbols are the type of programme; the fourth symbol is the type of qualification degree; the fifth and sixth symbols are the study field(s) code; and the seventh, eighth and ninth symbols are the programme's sequence number.

2.8. Institutions and Social Partners Participating in the Implementation of the LTQF

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND SPORT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA (MESS)

MESS is an executive authority that forms state policy in the area of education (including the qualifications system), organising, coordinating and controlling its implementation. The Lithuanian education system is partially decentralised: decision-making takes place at several levels. At the national level, education is organised through laws and other normative legal acts regulating the principles and criteria of education organisation.

One of the key functions of the MESS is the responsibility for the quality of education. The MESS has subordinate institutions that directly participate in the implementation of LTQF, namely the Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre, the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education and the National Education Agency (Graph 1).

The MESS is represented in all sectoral professional committees operating under the Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre (described below).

Graph 1. National institutions involved in implementation of the LTQF
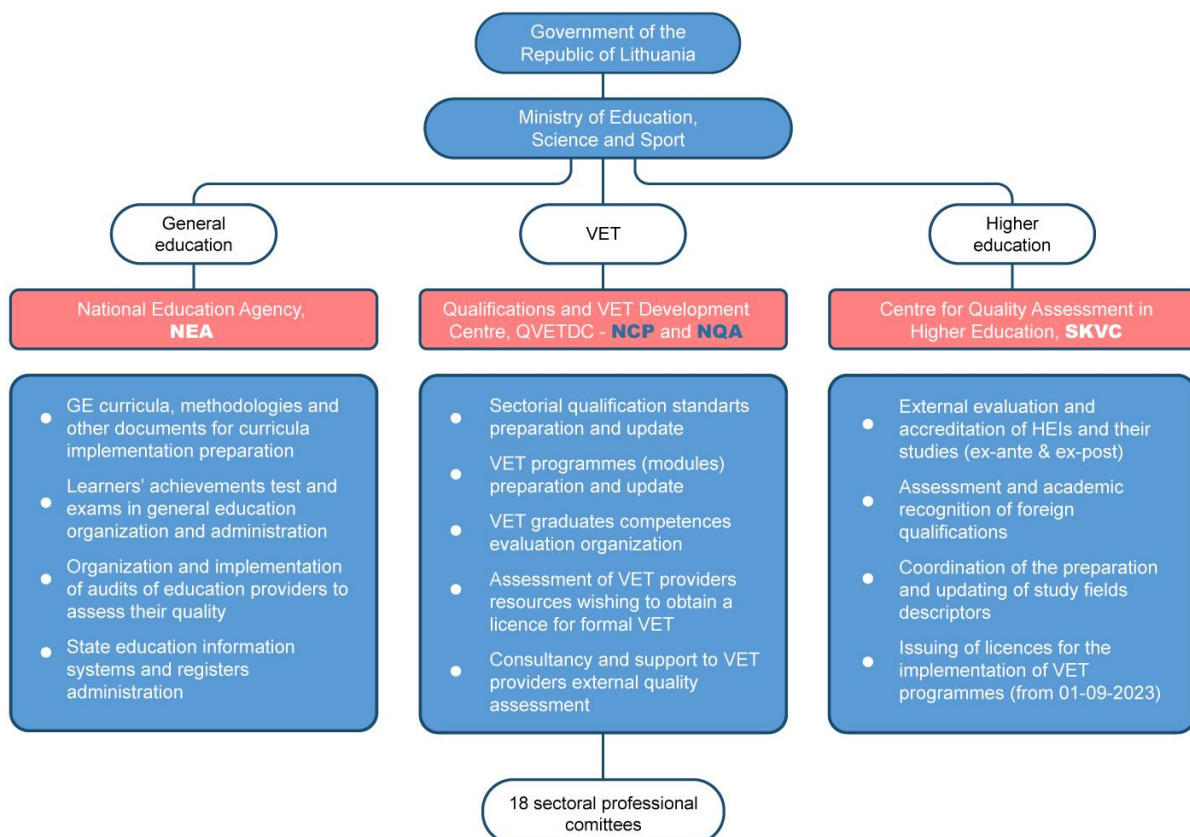
QUALIFICATIONS AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING DEVELOPMENT CENTRE (QVETDC)

The QVETDC, under the MESS, is an educational support institution that provides informational, expert, consulting and qualification improvement support, and implements state policy in the area of VET and lifelong learning systems. The purpose of QVETDC's activities is to develop VET and lifelong learning systems so that they respond to the needs of the economy and national and international initiatives. Its operational tasks include managing the Lithuanian qualifications system, improving the quality of VET, developing the adult education system and implementing VET and adult training participants' continuing professional development. By the order of the Minister of Education and Science, the QVETDC was assigned to perform the functions of the Qualifications Management Authority provided for in Article 39[1] of the Law on Education and in the Law on VET.

The QVETDC performs the following functions related to the development and implementation of the LTQF: (1) organises the preparation and updating of sectoral qualification standards, coordinates and/or carries out the preparation and/or updating and evaluation of VET programmes or their modules and submits their data for registration in the RSTPQ; (2) organises and carries out an assessment of legal or natural persons wishing to obtain a licence to carry out formal VET and VET-related activities in regards to the requirements set out in legal acts and issues an expert report; (3) provides consultancy and support in carrying out VET providers external quality assessment; (4) in the area of competences evaluation, coordinates preparation of the assignments and organisation of competences' evaluation, organises the evaluation of institutions according to their readiness to evaluate a person's competences and submits them for accreditation to the MESS; (5) organises the activities of sectoral professional committees; (6) performs the functions of the EQF NCP in Lithuania.

NATIONAL EDUCATION AGENCY (NEA)

The NEA, under the MESS, is an educational support institution that implements education policy in the pre-primary, pre-school and general education sectors.

The NEA started its activities on 1st September 2019 after reorganising six institutions subordinate to the MESS: the National Examination Centre, the National School Evaluation Agency, the Centre for Special Pedagogy and Psychology, the Education Supply Centre, the Education Information Technology Centre and the Education Development Centre.

Since 1st July 2023, the following operational goals of the agency have been defined: to create equal conditions for access to pre-primary, pre-school and general education and to good quality education; to implement a curriculum adhering to the principle of inclusion; to ensure effective management of education providers; to organize the continuing professional development of pedagogical staff (except for those of higher education institutions); to oversee the formation of a reserve of managers of educational institutions (except for higher education institutions) and to implement measures to ensure the timely turnover of pedagogical staff (except for those of higher education institutions); to carry out

assessment of student achievements; to analyse the results of student achievements; to select and implement appropriate measures to improve students achievements; to carry out state supervision of the activities of education providers (except for higher education institutions); to cooperate with institutions implementing the owner's rights and obligations in providing assistance to education providers; to ensure the legality, availability and quality of data processed in state education registers and information systems; to carry out monitoring of state education; to submit proposals to MESS regarding the formation of education policy. From 1st September 2023, the NEA organises and implements supervision of how licenced VET providers comply with the requirements of licensing.

The NEA performs the following functions directly related to the development of LTQF: administers and develops state education information systems and registers (i.e. RSTPQ, Education Management Information System - EMIS); ensures the availability and quality of the data accumulated in the systems and registers; conducts research and provides recommendations for improving the quality of education and the efficiency of the education system; coordinates and administers the implementation and evaluation of Matura exams, lower-secondary education exams, national and other student achievements tests; organises and conducts external evaluation of the activities of schools implementing general education and formal VET programmes.

CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION (SKVC)

The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) is an independent public agency established in 1995 by the Ministry of Education and Science. SKVC promotes quality in the activities of higher education institutions through external quality assessment and accreditation as well as creates favourable conditions for the free movement of persons through assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications and provision of information. It acts as the quality assurance body within higher education and the national academic recognition and information centre (the ENIC / NARIC office).

The main objectives of SKVC are:

- external evaluation and accreditation of higher education institutions and their programmes, advice to higher education institutions within its mandate, publishing evaluation results, follow up activities after external evaluation and analysis of quality indicators;

- assessment and academic recognition of foreign qualifications, provision of information, seeking cohesion of the Lithuanian system of higher education with the provisions of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), ensuring fulfilment of Lithuania's international obligations within the field of SKVC mandate.

SKVC also coordinates the preparation and updating of study fields descriptors and submits them to the Minister of Education, Science and Sport for approval.

From 1st September 2023, SKVC has been mandated to carry out the licensing of formal VET, which encompasses issuing, supplementing and suspending the validity of licences for the implementation of VET programmes.

SECTORAL PROFESSIONAL COMMITTEES (SPCs)

SPCs are advisory bodies, operating at QVETDC, established on the basis of cooperation to coordinate the strategic issues of the formation of the qualifications system and VET in a specific economic sector. Within the limits of their economic sector, they consider and submit proposals to the MESS regarding LTQF level 1–8 qualifications (names of qualifications, levels, evaluation of qualifications, their awarding, etc.). The composition of SPCs is set by the order of QVETDC director.

In 2010, the functions of SPC committees were approved by the order of two ministers (the Minister of Education and Science and the Minister of Economy) for the first time. Their main task was to approve sectoral qualification standards. They also expressed their agreement for the preparation of formal VET programmes intended for the acquisition of qualifications and evaluated the compliance of programmes with the requirements established in the standards.

Over the course of developing the Lithuanian qualifications system and reorganising the VET system to expand the functions and areas of activity of the SPCs, in 2018, the Description of the Tasks, Functions, Formation and Financing Procedure of the Sectoral Professional Committees was approved.[13] This legal act replaced the previous document regulating SPCs' activities, valid since 2010.

From 2018 SPCs responsibilities and functions were expanded. The main SPC activities and issues considered during SPC meetings are (1) the approval of sectoral qualification standards (their amendments), the initiation of updating the sectoral qualification standards and the consideration of proposals for updating them, (2) discussion of apprenticeship implementation possibilities in economy sectors and (3) consideration of the list of possible qualifications and study fields in which short cycle studies can be carried out.

The QVETDC, in implementing the assigned functions, also involves the members of SPCs to participate in and chair the expert commissions, formed to evaluate the applications and capacities of institutions seeking to acquire the right to assess (recognise) the competences of persons seeking qualifications. SPCs members also act as evaluators of prepared VET programmes or their modules and carry out external VET evaluation.

There are currently 18 committees. SPCs include representatives of the relevant ministries by economic sector, social partners, representatives of VET and higher education institutions. When forming sectoral professional committees, members representing employers usually constitute at least half of SPCs members. According to data from December 2023, the total number of SPCs members is 327 persons.

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[13] Description of the Tasks, Functions, Formation and Financing Procedure of the Sectoral Professional Committees: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/420ac9b07e8a11e8ae2bfd1913d66d57.

THE ROLE OF OTHER MINISTRIES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LTQF

Other ministries participate in the SPC activities of their sector according to their competence. Representatives of the Ministry of Economy and Innovation participate in all SPCs. Descriptors of regulated professional qualifications are submitted to the relevant competent authorities (ministries of the relevant sector or an institution subordinate to it), which evaluate the descriptors of these qualifications and issue a conclusion. Several ministries (e. g., Finance, Social Security and Labour, Health, Internal Affairs and Agriculture) are actively involved in the development and implementation of initial VET (e. g., internal affairs system employees' training) and continuing professional development programmes for employees in their sector.

EDUCATION PROVIDERS

In Lithuania, qualifications are awarded by education providers: educational institutions (schools) whose main activity can be either formal or non-formal education or other education providers (institutions, companies, organisations and other legal entities or other organisations or their divisions, for which education is not the main activity), having the right to carry out education.

General education schools network consists of state, municipal and private primary education schools, pre-gymnasiums (*progimnazija*), basic schools (*pagrindinė mokykla*) and gymnasiums.

VET providers (*profesinio mokymo teikėjas)* are state or municipal VET institutions (*profesinio mokymo įstaiga,* with a self-governing institution status), whose main activity is VET, and other VET providers *(kiti profesinio mokymo teikėjai)*, both, public and private, whose main activity is other than VET, having a right to implement VET programmes. They may receive a licence for and offer initial and continuing VET programmes.

Education providers in higher education are higher education institutions, which are two types: universities (*universitetas*) and colleges (*kolegija*). Higher education providers are automous in all of their activities. This autonomy of higher education institutions is entrenched and safeguarded by the provisions in the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania. The main provisions regarding autonomy and responsibilities of higher education providers are outlined in more detail in the Law on Higher Education and Research. The higher education sector includes both private and public education providers. All of them offer study programmes and engage in research. Colleges offer short cycle programmes and first cycle college programmes. Universities offer first, second and third cycle university programmes. Higher education institutions have autonomy, which encompasses academic, administrative, economic and financial management activities, based on the principle of self-government and academic freedom.

3. Qualifications in Lithuania, Their Acquisition and Design

3.1. Education System in Lithuania and Qualifications Obtained in Different Education Sectors

The Lithuanian education system includes:

- formal education (primary, lower and upper secondary education, formal VET and higher education studies);
- non-formal education (pre-school, pre-primary and other non-formal education for children (as well as education supplementing formal education) and adult education);
- informal learning;
- educational assistance (vocational guidance, educational informational, psychological, social pedagogical, special pedagogical and special assistance, health care at school, consulting, teachers continuing professional development and other assistance).

The structure of the education system and statistical data about students in different sectors of the education system are presented in Annexes 4 and 5. Below the description of programmes and qualifications in general education, VET and higher education is provided.[14]

Pre-school education

The purpose of pre-school education is to help a child satisfy his / her natural, cultural, ethnic, social and cognitive abilities and to help a child prepare for education according to the pre-primary education programme.

Pre-school education is not compulsory, except when a child is growing up in a family at social risk and is not educated according to pre-school education programme or is listed in a pre-school education institution's attendee list but is not in attendance (with no reason being given). Parents (guardians) can educate the child themselves in the family or, if they wish, the child is educated according to the pre-school education programme until he/she enrols to pre-primary education. The Law on Education stipulates that from September 2025, education according to the pre-school education programme will become universal from the age of 2 (i.e. if there is a request for the child to participate in a pre-school education programme by the parents (guardians), such an opportunity will be provided by the municipality).

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[14] Based on the Law on Education and https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/lt/national-education-systems/lithuania/svietimo-sistema-ir-jos-struktura.

The pre-school education programme is designed by pre-school education provider according to the guidelines for pre-school education programmes approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport.

Pre-primary education

The purpose of pre-primary education is to help a child prepare for learning according to the primary education programme. A child starts pre-primary education during the calendar year when he/she turns five years old by the 30th of April. After assessing the child's education and learning needs, pre-primary education may be started in the calendar year when the child turns five years old by 1st September. However, a child needs to start learning according to the pre-primary education programme not later than when he/she turns six in a given calendar year. Pre-primary education became compulsory on the 1st September 2016.

The pre-primary education programme is carried out according to the general programme of pre-school education approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport. The duration of the programme is one year. If a child starts pre-primary education in the calendar year when he/she turns five years old, after assessing a child's education and learning needs, pre-primary education may last for up to two years.

Primary education

Primary education aims to introduce a child to moral and social maturity, the foundations of culture and ethics and basic literacy. Primary education serves to help a child prepare for learning according to the lower-secondary education programme.

A child typically begins education according to the primary education programme when he/she turns seven years old in that calendar year. If a child begins education earlier in the pre-primary curriculum, he/she also starts the primary education earlier.

Primary education is carried out according to primary education general programmes, which are approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport. The duration of the primary education programmes is four years (cover grades 1-4). After primary education, pupils continue their education in lower education programmes.

After the primary education programme is completed, a primary educational attainment level (*pradinis išsilavinimas*) is acquired. A document certifying learning outcomes is a certificate of primary education. Learning outcomes of primary education programmes are related to the LTQF level 1.

Lower secondary general education

Lower secondary education aims to provide a person with the foundations of moral, sociocultural and civic maturity, general literacy and the basics of technological literacy, to develop national awareness and aspirations and to learn to make judgements, choose and continue learning.

A student starts learning in the lower secondary education programme when he/she attains the primary education level. Typically, the students age is from 10 (11) years to 16 (17) years. Learning according to the lower secondary education programme is mandatory until the age of 16.

The lower secondary education programme lasts six years, and it consists of two parts. The 1st part of the programme covers four years period (grades 5–8). The 2nd part covers two years period (grades 9–10 (or gymnasium grades I–II)). Lower secondary education is carried out according to lower secondary education general programmes, which are approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport. The first part of the programme is implemented by pre-gymnasiums and basic schools. After a grade 8, pupils may continue their education in a second part of the lower secondary education programme in basic schools or gymnasiums. Alternatively, they may choose to continue their learning in a VET institution implementing a lower secondary education programme together with a VET programme leading to a qualification and a VET diploma. After finalisation of a second part of lower secondary education programme, pupils may continue their education in upper secondary education programme in gymnasiums or VET institutions. In the latter case they also enrol to a VET programme leading to a qualification and a VET diploma.

After completing the lower secondary education programme and assessing the lower secondary education learning outcomes, a lower secondary educational attainment level (*pagrindinis išsilavinimas*) is acquired. From 1st September 2024, the lower secondary educational attainment level will be obtained by completing the lower secondary education programme and reaching a threshold level (i.e. at least 4 out of 10 points) in the lower secondary education achievements test in the subjects set by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport. The document certifying learning outcomes is a certificate of lower secondary education. Learning outcomes of the lower secondary education programme are related to the LTQF level 3.

Upper secondary general education

Upper secondary education aims to help a person acquire general subject, social, cultural and technological literacy, moral, national and civic maturity and the basics of professional competences. Upper-secondary education is not compulsory, but its accessibility is guaranteed to all willing to participate in it.

A student enters the upper secondary education when he/she acquires lower secondary educational attainment level. Students usually study in the secondary education programmes from 16 (17) to 18 (19) years old.

Upper secondary education is carried out according to upper secondary education general programmes, which are approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport. The upper secondary education programme lasts two years, it covers gymnasium grades III–IV. The upper secondary education programme consists of compulsory subjects and subjects which must be chosen. As a free choice subject, a learner may choose VET programme modules which are later recognised if a student continues learning in VET. These modules are gaining popularity among general education schools' students.

The upper secondary education programme is implemented by gymnasiums and by VET institutions. In the latter case the programme is implemented together with a VET programme leading to a qualification and a VET diploma.

After finalisation of the upper secondary education programme, pupils may continue their education in VET and higher education programmes.

After completing the upper secondary education programme and passing two Matura exams, one of which is the Lithuanian language and literature matura exam, upper secondary educational attainment level is acquired. From 1st September 2024, upper secondary educational attainment level will be obtained by completing an upper secondary education programme and passing two state Matura exams, and from 1st September 2026, three state Matura exams, of which the Lithuanian language and literature state matura exam will be compulsory. The document certifying learning outcomes is a Matura certificate. Learning outcomes of upper secondary education programmes are related to the LTQF level 4.

VET

VET aims to enable people with different needs and abilities to acquire qualifications and competences aligned to the latest developments in science, technology, economics and culture, thus, ensuring the progress of the national economy, international competitiveness and sustainable development, as well as the key competences that enable them to establish themselves and compete in the changing labour market, participate in lifelong learning and develop and update their qualifications. Qualifications acquired when studying according to VET programmes are defined in the sectoral qualification standards (e.g. carpenter, beautician, paramedic, etc.).

VET is offered from lower to post-secondary education (ISCED levels 2 to 4) and provides opportunities to acquire qualifications up to LTQF level 5:

- Lower secondary education level VET programmes (up to 3 years) lead to qualifications at LTQF level 2. They are open to learners over 14 and training is mandatory until age 16. A student who, in parallel with a VET programme, is learning according to the lower secondary education programme, together with a qualification, can acquire a lower secondary educational attainment level and a certificate of lower secondary education.

- At upper secondary education level, programmes lead to VET qualifications at LTQF levels 3 or 4. A student who, in parallel with a VET programme, is learning according to the upper secondary education programme, together with a qualification can acquire an upper secondary educational attainment level and a Matura certificate giving access to post-secondary and higher education programmes.
- Post-secondary education level VET programmes lead to VET qualifications at LTQF level 4 or level 5.

VET can be initial and continuing. Initial VET is aimed at obtaining a first qualification and is provided to persons who are at least 14 years old. Continuing VET is provided to a person who already has a first qualification or has acquired a higher education qualification. This is intended to improve the first qualification, to acquire another qualification or to acquire competences corresponding to a sectoral qualification standard.

Opportunities to acquire LTQF level 5 qualifications for those already having LTQF level 4 qualification and practical work experience were opened recently (see Section 4.2.2 for more details).

Moreover, non-formal vocational training programmes are implemented to develop competences corresponding to the competences of formal LTQF level 1-4 VET qualifications, as defined in the sectoral qualification standard. Competences acquired within a non-formal VET programme may be recognised as a partial qualification, i.e. a set of competences comprising a qualification unit defined in a qualification descriptor. A qualification is awarded upon recognition of competences acquired in a non-formal way and after passing the theory examination (knowledge assessment test) and receiving a positive assessment of practical skills.

The length and scope of VET programmes in credits may vary depending on the qualification. The possible volume of initial VET programmes expressed in learning credits is 30, 45, 60, 90 and 110 credits (continuing VET programmes: 20, 35, 50, 70 and 90 learning credits). The usual volume of a one-year formal VET programme is 60 learning credits. The volume of the non-formal VET programme is no more than 30 learning credits and is chosen by the VET provider.

In the VET system, it is possible to acquire qualifications of LTQF level 1–5, which meet sectoral qualification standards. Qualifications of the corresponding level are granted and a VET diploma is issued to persons who have completed a VET programme and/or received an evaluation of competences in accordance with the established procedure. A certificate is issued to persons who have completed a module of the VET programme or after evaluating their competences acquired through non-formal education.

VET in apprenticeship VET organisation form

The apprenticeship VET organisation form is a way of organising VET when the training (or part of it) is carried out in the workplace: for example, in a company, institution, organisation, farm or with a freelance teacher. This training method is unique in that no more than 30% of the time allocated to the training programme is spent at a VET institution and no less than 70% of the time is dedicated to learning at a workplace.

When VET is carried out in apprenticeship form, an apprenticeship employment contract and a VET contract are concluded with an apprentice in accordance with the procedure established by the Labour Code. The regulation of the apprenticeship contract was set in 2016 after adopting the new edition of the Labour Code. An apprenticeship contract can only be concluded for students who have already obtained a lower secondary educational attainment level. If the apprentice also studies according to the upper secondary education programme, he/she must be given the opportunity to complete the upper secondary education programme at a time that is convenient for him/her.

VET in the form of an apprenticeship can be organised both according to formal and non-formal VET programmes. A training contract is not concluded when an apprenticeship is carried out following the non-formal training programme approved by an employer. In the case of the latter, the employer has a right to train an apprentice for up to, but no longer than, six months.

An apprenticeship employment contract, which is concluded with a VET contract for formal or non-formal training, is a fixed-term contract, its duration coincides with the duration of the VET contract and is usually longer than six months. Before training as an apprentice, a person signs a VET contract with the VET provider, the VET provider signs a cooperation agreement with the employer, and the employer employs the VET learner by signing an apprenticeship employment contract. For the time worked, the apprentice is paid the wage stipulated in the apprenticeship employment contract, which may not be lower than the minimum monthly wage or the minimum hourly wage approved by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania.

It should be noted that VET in the form of an apprenticeship has developed rather slowly. It has been boosted by amendments to the Labour Code and legal provisions regarding the organisation of apprenticeship approved by the Government in 2019.[15] In recent years, apprenticeship has become a more popular option. According to the EMIS, in 2022, 90% of state-owned VET institutions were providing apprenticeship training in addition to the school-based VET form, and by the end of 2023, the share of such VET institutions was 95%. According to preliminary data of EMIS, there were 3,4 thous. apprentices among 34,5 thous. VET learners at the end of 2023. The share of apprentices compared to the total number of students completing VET and obtaining a qualification rose to 18.85% in 2023.

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[15] Description of Organising VET in a Form of Apprenticeship: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/c36026f0f97111e99681cd81dcdca52c.

In the VET system in an apprenticeship form, learners can acquire qualifications of LTQF level 1–5, which meet sectoral qualification standards. Qualifications of the corresponding level are granted and a VET diploma is issued to persons who have completed a VET programme and/or received an evaluation of competences in accordance with the established procedure. Qualifications acquired in the form of an apprenticeship do not differ from those acquired in the school-based system.

Higher education

The mission of higher education and research, as provisioned in the Law on Higher Education and Research, is multi-layered:

- to contribute to assuring the prosperity of the country's society, culture and economy;
- to support and foster a fulfilling life for every citizen of the Republic of Lithuania;
- and to fulfil the inherent quest for knowledge.

Higher education institutions are autonomous in their activities. This is provisioned in the Constitution and is further elaborated in terms of the principles of autonomy and responsibilities in the Law on Higher Education and Research. The Law also lays out the main regulatory principles for higher education and research including quality assurance, establishment and dissolution of institutions, award and recognition of qualifications, management and oversight of institutions, rights and obligations of teachers, researchers and students, financing, etc.

The Law also outlines the structure of the higher education system in Lithuania, which consists of cycle studies and professional studies. Cycle studies are based on the cycle structure of EHEA and encompass programmes in the short cycle (to acquire a Diploma), the first cycle (to acquire a Professional Bachelor or a Bachelor degree), the second cycle (to acquire a Master degree) and third cycle (to acquire a Doctor of Sciences or Doctor of Arts degree). Professional studies fall outside of the cycle structure and are aimed at preparing for independent practical activities and professional development (upskilling and reskilling) within the system of higher education. They currently encompass teacher training programmes (for those who already have a higher education qualification) and specialist training within the fields of medicine, odontology and veterinary medicine.

The workload in higher education is measured in ECTS credits, which encompass both the volume of learning and learning outcomes associated with it. A full-time academic year is allocated 60 ECTS. The volume of learning in hours ranges from 25 to 30 hours per credit depending on the learning outcomes and on the institutional policy in allocating credits. A short cycle qualification includes 90 to 120 credits, a first cycle qualification can consist of 180, 210 or 240 credits, the range for a second cycle qualification is 60, 90 or 120 credits. The studies leading to the Doctor of Arts constitute 240 credits. While the duration for doctoral studies leading to the Doctor of Sciences is 4 years, credits are allocated only for course work, which usually amounts to 30 ECTS.

Qualifications awarded within higher education are referenced to the LTQF levels 5–8. Qualifications that can be awarded include a short cycle qualification, a degree (Bachelor, Professional Bachelor, Master, Doctor of Sciences or Doctor of Arts) as well as a qualification aimed at professional activity (for example, a qualification of a medical doctor), the award of which requires prior approval by a competent authority (for example, the Ministry of Health).

The following credentials are issued to graduates:

- Graduates from the short cycle programmes are awarded a Diploma and a Diploma Supplement (recommended to be issued).

- Graduates from the first cycle college programmes are awarded a Professional Bachelor Diploma and a Diploma Supplement (automatically issued).

- Graduates from the first cycle university programmes area awarded a Bachelor Diploma and a Diploma Supplement (automatically issued).

- Graduates from the second cycle programmes are awarded a Master Diploma and Diploma Supplement (automatically issued).

- Graduates from the third cycle studies area awarded a Doctor of Sciences or a Doctor of Arts Diploma.

- Graduates from the professional studies are awarded a Certificate.

Education of persons with special education needs

As stipulated in the Description of the Procedure for Organising Education for Special Education Needs Pupils[16], education of learners with special education needs (SEN) in general education and VET is organised in accordance with the pre-school education programme, general programmes of pre-primary, primary, lower and upper secondary education and VET programmes. These programmes are adapted, taking into account the identified learners needs, learners, parents (guardians) interests and in accordance with the conclusions and recommendations of the pedagogical psychological service or the educational assistance service. The school makes decision and agrees internally about the adaptation and formalisation of the education and training programme. From 2024, following amended Law on Education, all kindergardens and schools in Lithuania have to guarantee education for SEN learners if parents express the desire for their children to learn in mainstream education. The set goal for 2030 is that 90% of all learners with disabilities would be educated in mainstream education schools (the indicator for 2021 was 49,8%). Children with severe disabilities may be educated in special schools, the number of which is decreasing.

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[16] Description of the Procedure for Organising Education for Special Education Needs Pupils: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.F0E90ABE387D/asr

In VET institutions, VET programmes combining VET with social skills development programmes are available for SEN learners to acquire a VET qualification. Many SEN learners enrol in LTQF level 2 VET programmes (see also Section 4.2.3 about workload of VET for SEN learners).

Higher education institutions adapt study programmes for SEN students according to institutional procedures.

3.2. Design of Qualifications

Summarising the above information and following the definition of a qualification provided in the EQF Recommendation (*"a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards"*), the qualifications provided in the Lithuanian education system can be grouped into:

- General education system qualifications: their acquisition is evidenced by the primary education certificate, the lower secondary education certificate and the Matura certificate;
- VET system qualifications: titles of the qualifications, their content and the level are determined in the sectoral qualification standards;
- Higher education qualifications, including qualification degrees, Doctor of Sciences degree, Doctor of Arts degree and qualifications awarded by a higher education institution that has the approval of a competent authority to award this qualification.

Below, a description of how the qualifications are formed is provided.

3.2.1. General Education System Qualifications

In general education, the concept of an educational attainment level (*išsilavinimo lygis*) is used instead of the term "qualification." The requirements for the acquisition of primary, lower and upper secondary educational attainment levels are defined in the Law on Education and in the general programmes (general curriculum) for primary, lower and upper secondary education, approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport.

The subjects that make up the curriculum are divided into the following subject groups: moral education, language education, social education, mathematics, science and technology education, art education, physical education and health education. General education is implemented according to 47 general programmes (*bendrosios programos*) (see Section 4.1.1 for more details). The general programmes for each subject set out the areas of learning outcomes and intended learning outcomes (in the Lithuanian context, this is also called learning achievements). These programmes also describe the development of learning outcomes for every two years, i.e. they clearly define what a pupil will know and be able to do when he or she finishes the relevant grade/grades cluster. The assignments for national students' achievements tests and Matura exams are developed on the basis of the defined learning outcomes (achievements).

3.2.2. VET System Qualifications

Qualifications at LTQF level 1–5, provided in the VET system, are determined by the sectoral qualification standards. In the Law on VET, a sectoral qualification standard is defined as a descriptor of qualifications required for an economic sector or a sub-sector at all qualifications' levels, competences that constitute qualifications and the requirements for awarding qualifications.[17] Sectoral qualification standards contain the following core information about qualifications (Paragraph 9.3 of the Description of the Procedure for the Preparation, Updating and Approval of Sectoral Qualification Standards)[18]:

- Name of qualification and qualification level according to the LTQF;
- Brief description of the qualification (object of activities, typical working tools, working conditions and other additional information);
- Core qualification units, comprising the qualification, and specialisation units (if applicable);
- Competences within qualification units;
- Competences' boundaries (i.e. information detailing and explaining the content of the competence);
- Requirements for acquiring the qualification (requirements for education, qualification and professional experience, if applicable);
- Requirements for acquiring the qualification in accordance with the European Union legal acts, international agreements or legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania (if applicable);
- Competence assessment requirements;
- Compliance of the qualification with the European Union and international standards (if applicable).

The qualifications described in the sectoral qualification standards are designed on the basis of competences, i.e. for each qualification the competences required to acquire it are defined. Competences are grouped into qualification units, and competences' boundaries are described. This principle of qualification formation supports the implementation of the learning outcomes approach and facilitates the recognition of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning. One of the principles of the preparation of sectoral qualification standards is the principle of methodological validity, according to which, when preparing sectoral qualification standards and descriptors of qualifications within them, it is necessary to adhere to a unified theoretical concept of qualifications and the qualifications framework, ensuring compatibility with the EQF (QVETDC, 2019, p. 4). The LTQF level descriptors and the comprehensive descriptors of qualification levels are the key documents in formulating the competences, that constitute the qualifications, and their limits.

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[17] The coverage of sectoral qualification standards and the number of qualifications included in different sectors of the economy vary (information in Annex 7).
[18] Description of the Procedure for the Preparation, Updating and Approval of Sectoral Qualification Standards: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/98c4ab906fcf11e9a13eeecaacbc653f.

Sectoral qualification standards represent the basis for creating and implementing VET programmes and their modules. Competences statements are transferred to VET programmes and VET diplomas and information on the boundaries of competences is used to define learning outcomes in VET programmes. Based on sectoral qualification standards, tasks for assessing the acquired competences are prepared. It should be emphasized that although the sectoral qualification standards also describe the qualifications at qualification levels 5–8, in the case of higher education qualifications and study programmes, the sectoral qualification standards instead express expectations for the content of the study programmes.

The general requirements for sectoral qualification standards are determined by the Description of the Procedure for the Preparation, Updating and Approval of Sectoral Qualification Standards, approved by Resolution No. 428 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, dated 30th April 2019. Sectoral qualification standards are prepared, updated and approved in accordance with this legal procedure, the methodology for the preparation of sectoral qualification standards[19], the LTQF Description and the Lithuanian Classification of Occupations approved by the Minister of Economy and Innovation of the Republic of Lithuania.

The process of preparing and updating sectoral qualification standards is coordinated and organised by the Qualifications Management Authority – QVETDC. Sectoral qualification standards are prepared and updated in cooperation between representatives of employers and educational institutions, involving employee representatives in these processes. The content of the sectoral qualification standard is formed based on the qualifications research conducted in the relevant economic sector or its sub-sector. The final draft of the sectoral qualification standard is evaluated by the sectoral professional committee (SPC). Standards describing regulated professional qualifications are also submitted to the relevant competent authority for evaluaton.

Taking into account the changes in the labour market, the sectoral qualification standards are updated at least once every five years. When a new qualification is initiated or the need to adjust a qualification already described in the sectoral qualification standard becomes apparent, the sectoral qualification standard is updated by supplementing it with a new qualification descriptor or by amending the qualification descriptor already included in the sectoral qualification standard.

The preparing or updating of the sectoral qualification standard can be initiated by the relevant ministries of the Republic of Lithuania, Government institutions, competent authorities responsible for the recognition of regulated professional qualifications, research and study institutions, VET providers, social partners, SPCs or the QVETDC. Proposals for preparing or renewing a sectoral qualification standard are submitted to the QVETDC in writing. After the QVETDC evaluates the proposal and makes a positive decision regarding the initiation of the qualification, natural or legal persons initiating the qualification prepare a qualification descriptor, which the SPC then discusses.

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[19] The Methodology for the Preparation of Sectoral Qualification Standards: https://www.kpmpc.lt/kpmpc/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Profesinio-standarto-rengimo-metodika_final_2020.pdf.

3.2.3. Higher Education Qualifications

Each qualification awarded in higher education is unique and depends on the completed study programme as well as the student's individual study pathway. However, there are mechanisms in place aimed at the design and award of qualifications, which ensure that each awarded qualification meets the expectations associated with a certain level, cycle and study field.

For the purposes of this report, several stages in the design of higher education qualifications are distinguished. Each of the stages is associated with specific requirements, outlines the relevant principles provisioned in the regulatory framework and provides a grid for the development of learning outcomes. The stages reflect the different levels we can refer to or even categorise qualifications in Lithuanian higher education.

The following stages in the design of higher education qualifications can be distinguished:

1. Requirements asociated with a qualification type	2. Study field requirements	3. Requirements associated with the programme

All qualifications awarded in Lithuanian higher education follow these stages of design and the requirements associated with them.

Stages in the design of higher education qualifications and their output:

1. **Requirements associated with a qualification type:** refers to a higher education qualification on the most generic level, e.g. Professional Bachelor, Bachelor, Master, etc.

2. **Study field requirements:** refers to requirements for a qualification type awarded within a specific field, e. g. Bachelor in Computing.

3. **Study programme requirements:** refers to a qualification awarded within a specific field after completion of a programme in a specific higher education institution, e.g. Bachelor in Computing, awarded after completion of the Informatics Engineering study programme offered by Kaunas University of Technology.

The initial referencing to the LTQF takes place at the first, most generic stage in the design of a qualification; then, a certain grid of requirements ensures that the requirements of the level or the cycle are maintained through the further steps in the qualification design.

Stage 1. Requirements associated with a qualification type

The types of qualifications awarded in higher education are regulated by the Law on Higher Education and Research, which provisions the award of the following qualifications:

	Type of qualification		LTQF level	Cycle (QF-EHEA[20])
Cycle studies	Qualification awarded after completion of short cycle programmes		5	Short
	Degree *with a permission from a competent authority, a (professional) qualification may be awarded alongside the degree*	Professional Bachelor, Bachelor	6	First
		Master	7	Second
	Doctor of Science, Doctor of Arts		8	Third
Professional studies	Qualifications awarded after completion of professional studies[21]		6 – 7[22]	–

The Law on Higher Education and Research provisions that the referencing of higher education qualifications to the LTQF levels is determined by the Government. The Government, in turn, has approved the LTQF Description (see Annex 1), which outlines the framework for referencing. In the LTQF Description, the qualifications are referenced to the corresponding level based on the cycle of the completed programme. When it comes to professional studies, which fall outside of the cycle structure, the LTQF Description provisions the possibility to reference qualifications awarded after these types of studies to level 6 or 7 of the LTQF.

In this way, a clear connection with the relevant level of the qualifications framework is established already at this stage of qualification design. This stage also encompasses a set of general requirements, which are applicable to all qualifications awarded within a specific type and ensure that the qualification is at the right level. The requirements are laid out in:

- LTQF level descriptors;
- Study Cycle Descriptor based on QF-EHEA descriptors (further information about the Study Cycle Descriptor is provided in Section 4.3.1);

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[20] European Higher Education Area Qualifications Framework (QF-EHEA).
[21] Residency in medicine, dentistry, and veterinary medicine study fields, as well as other fields determined by the Government.
[22] It is possible to reference the qualifications awarded after finishing professional studies (residency and other areas determined by the Government) to level 6 or 7. Currently, only the teacher qualification is referenced to LTQF level 6, and this referencing is provided for in the Education and training study field descriptor.

- General Requirements for Conducting Studies (do not include Doctor of Sciences (Art) degrees), which determine the main principles of the organisation of cycle programmes[23];
- Regulations for doctoral studies in sciences and in arts (for Doctor of Sciences (Art) degrees).

Stage 2. Study field requirements

The Law on Higher Education and Research stipulates that a study programme is a totality of the implementation of studies within a specific study field(s) by higher education institutions. Thus, further stages of the qualification design[24] are associated with certain expectations and requirements associated with a study field.

The main documents that higher education institutions rely on when designing programmes for the relevant study field are the study field descriptors (*studijų krypties aprašai)*, which outline the main guiding principles and requirements for qualifications associated with a specific study field (further information about study field descriptors is provided in Section 4.3.1).

The nomenclature for the titles of degrees awarded in Lithuania is also dependent upon the classification of the programme in terms of the study fields.[25] In this way, a finite list of the titles of degrees awarded after completion of cycle programmes is determined in the legislation (exceptions are provisioned only for joint degrees). The titles of the degrees were included in the RSTPQ as the object "qualification".

In cases where, alongside a degree, a qualification aimed at a specific professional activity is also awarded (e.g. Master of Health Sciences and a qualification of Medical Doctor)[26], the programmes must also meet the requirements set out in the documents prepared by the competent authorities (e.g. Medical norms), and in the case of short cycle studies, the requirements of the sectoral qualification standards. Usually, these requirements are integrated into the relevant study field descriptors.

Stage 3. Study programme requirements

The previous stages in the qualification design are linked to the national requirements outlined for specific types of qualifications (see Table 3). The third stage is the final stage of the qualification design, which shapes the end qualification awarded to the graduates. Since the providers of qualifications in higher education are higher education institutions, this is the stage, which is linked to institutional requirements.

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[23] General Requirements for Conducting Studies https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/739065a0ce9911e69e09f35d37acd719/asr.
[24] With the exception of qualifications at level 8, which are linked to the completion of studies rather than a programme.
[25] Title of the group of study fields + title of the degree.
[26] This is applicable to programmes, which prepare for practicing within the regulated professions. The award of such qualification is subject to approval from the relevant competent authority (e.g. the Ministry of Health).

Awarding of qualifications, design, deliver, and review of the study programme, preparation and defence of a dissertation[27] are part of the autonomy of higher education institutions and are regulated according to the procedure established by them. However, these processes must comply with legislation (this would include the LTQF level descriptors, study fields descriptors and other relevant requirements). Proper application and compliance are ensured through internal and external quality assurance mechanisms. On the basis of the national requirements, a higher education institution designs the individual qualification by designing a study programme and outlining the expected learning outcomes to be achieved by its graduates.

The study programme is registered in the RSTPQ under "study programme" and is given a unique code. The description of the study programme in the register also includes the intended learning outcomes to be acquired after graduating from the programme.

The table below provides a summary of the stages in the design of higher education qualifications and the requirements associated with them.

Table 3. Stages in the design of higher education qualifications

1. Requirements associated with a type of qualification	2. Study field requirements	3. Study programme requirements
E.g. Bachelor	*E.g. Bachelor in Computing*	*E.g. Bachelor in Computing awarded after completion of a specific programme*
At the national level • LTQF level descriptors • Study Cycle Descriptor • General requirements for conducting studies • Regulations for doctorate studies in sciences and Regulations for doctorate studies in arts	At the national level • LTQF level descriptors • Study Cycle Descriptor • General requirements for conducting studies • Regulations for doctorate studies in sciences and Regulations for doctorate studies in arts	At the national level • LTQF level descriptors • Study Cycle Descriptor • General requirements for conducting studies • Regulations for doctorate studies in sciences and Regulations for doctorate studies in arts
	At the national level • Study field descriptors • Requirements for professional qualifications set by competent authorities • Sectoral qualification standards (for short cycle)	At the national level • Study field descriptors • Requirements for professional qualifications set by competent authorities • Sectoral qualification standards (for short cycle)
		At the institutional level • Intended learning outcomes • Programme description

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[27] The preparation and defence of a dissertation is associated with the acquisition of level 8 qualifications.

4. Changes in the Education System After 2012 in the Context of the Introduction of LTQF

4.1. Changes in General Education

4.1.1. Update and Implementation of Competence and Learning Outcomes Based General Education Programmes

From 1st September 2023 in odd classes and from 1st September 2024 in all classes, the educational process is carried out according to updated programmes. The process of updating the general programmes (*bendrosios programos)* started in 2018, when groups of scientists, educational experts and practitioners joined their efforts for this work. By the Order No. V-1317 of the Minister of Education, Science and Sport, dated 18th November 2019, the Guidelines for the Update of General Programmes were approved, the purpose of which was to indicate the directions for the update of the general programmes of pre-primary, primary, lower and upper secondary education.

General programmes were last updated in 2008–2011 (with Lithuanian language and literature being updated in 2016). The update of general programmes aimed to provide students with a solid and sustainable foundation of knowledge, developing competences based on the content of diverse subjects, meaningfully including relevant content, providing educational opportunities in various contexts, establishing connections between educational stages and educational subjects and ensuring the harmony of educational objectives, curriculum implementation and the assessment of student achievements. The most important changes in the updated general programmes are consistently organised competence-based education, the possibility for primary and lower secondary education teachers to independently choose a third of the content of their taught subject and the strengthening of interdisciplinary education.

When initiating updating of the curriculum, it was decided to adjust and supplement the programmes taking into consideration the changes in education, the country and the world, the latest scientific achievements, the recommendations of experts from international organisations and the results of international research and national achievement surveys. The country's schools regularly participate in comparative studies of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). From 2012 to 2023, Lithuania participated in PIRLS, TIMSS, ICILS, ICCS and PISA international student achievements surveys, as well as the TALIS teacher survey. In the 2018 PISA study, students' results improved compared to 2015 (although the difference was not statistically significant), but this remained below the average of students in OECD countries. The results of students who participated in the financial literacy survey have improved significantly over the years. Scores of achievements in mathematics and natural sciences among 8th grade students in the TIMSS test increased in the period from 1995 to 2019. Since 2003, the scores for mathematics and natural sciences achievements among 4th and 8th grade students

have been above the TIMSS scale mean. According to the IEA PIRLS 2021 study, the achievements in reading among 4th graders were the highest in twenty years; Lithuania entered the top 10 countries achieving the highest results. Nevertheless, differences in student achievements persist depending on the area in which the school is located. According to data from the 2006–2018 PISA test, the differences between the achievements of fifteen-year-olds in reading, mathematics and natural science literacy in city and rural schools have slightly increased. Accordingly, changes in the general programmes and their indicators were designed, taking into account the data of these international studies.

In updating the general programmes, the competence-based curriculum orientation was further followed. When reforming the curriculum, the concept of competence was clarified, the components that compose competence (knowledge, skills, attitudes) were specified, the list of competences was revised and newly approved and the methods on how to develop competences through the content of subjects were proposed. General education aims to develop (1) cognitive competence, (2) communication competence, (3) cultural competence, (4) creativity competence, (5) citizenship competence, (6) digital competence and (7) social, emotional and healthy lifestyle competence.[28] It is emphasised that all competences are important and are developed through the implementation of general programmes of all subjects. However, the intensity of development for each competence depends on the specific subject.

Along with the general programmes, the Descriptor of Competences Development (Annex 1 of the General Programmes of Pre-Primary, Primary, Lower and Upper Secondary Education)[29] was also approved, which specifies competences and thereof dimensions. Moreover, the components and the development of competences are described, taking into account the characteristics of cognitive and social development at a different learner's age. In the general programmes of all subjects, development of all seven competences is arranged according to the intensity of competence development.

The general programmes are documents regulating the content of education at the national level. 47 general programmes have been prepared according to a unified structure and consist of the following sections:

- General provisions;
- Purpose and objectives;
- Competences development;
- Learning outcomes areas and learning outcomes;
- Content of teaching/learning;
- Assessment of learning outcomes;
- Indicators of student achievement levels (threshold, satisfactory, basic, advanced) by learning outcome areas.

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[28] NEA website dedicated to development of competences in general education: https://emokykla.lt/bendrosios-programos/kompetencijos.
[29] General Programmes of Pre-Primary, Primary, Lower and Upper Secondary Education: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/7165e2104baa11ee9de9e7e0fd363afc.

The learning outcomes to be achieved in the general programmes are described (1) through competences development outcomes, which specify how competences will be developed in the subject, and (2) through the learning outcomes of the thematic areas defined for a specific programme. For each area and learning outcomes associated with it, indicators of achievement levels (threshold, satisfactory, basic and advanced, in pre-primary education – up to basic level, basic level and above basic level) are formulated. The characteristics of levels of learning outcomes achievement are described by specifying autonomy, complexity and context concepts and their scales.

The following results of the student's competences development after completing the lower secondary education programmes are expected[30]:

- The student recognises the hierarchical structure of subject concepts, perceives the logical structure of subject statements, creates a coherent worldview by connecting knowledge and ideas from different subjects, raises questions, seeks to assess assumptions, evaluates knowledge in new contexts, considers opportunities for creating and using added value, predicts the possible impact of accidents when solving problems and implementing ideas, assesses risks and divides complex tasks into several simpler ones and solves them, is not afraid to make mistakes.

- The student shares knowledge, experience, and ideas that can influence the context and circumstances of creation, uses creative possibilities, taking into account different perspectives, analyses alternative solutions, considers the context, presents arguments for choosing ideas and solutions and explains the value of their creative product or solution to themselves and others.

- The student improves his/her work, analyses the strengths and improvement areas of his/her learning, persistently and honourably pursues goals.

- The student analyses and compares the cultural objects, phenomena and works of Lithuania and other European countries with own social and historical contexts, interprets and evaluates trends in contemporary culture, justifies the role of culture, language and history for a person's worldview and identity, participates actively in multifaceted cultural activities and expression, develops aesthetic taste, uses intellectual products responsibly and correctly, critically evaluates stereotypes, integrates knowledge of other cultures into everyday life and strives for a dialogic relationship with representatives of other cultures.

- The student initiates and participates in civic activities in the life of Lithuanian society, contributes to class and school self-management, analyses data showing the civil power of Lithuanian society and the situation of citizens' rights and duties, makes ethical decisions and is intolerant of violations of civil morality, describes the possible forms of civil resistance, applies them if necessary, contributes to the protection of cultural heritage and nature.

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[30] NEA information about general education curriculum: https://www.emokykla.lt/bendrosios-programos/programu-ivadas/visos-bendrosios-programos.

- When communicating, the student uses complex means and forms of expression, including digital methods, adapts the messages to various communication situations and addressees, analyses various messages based on context, recognises implicit intentions, assesses the credibility of the message, recognises manifestations of propaganda in the media, explains what manipulation of information is and why it is harmful, performs an analysis of sources and evaluates their reliability, manages digital content in a structured environment.

- The student uses operational tools ethically, protects his/her personal data and privacy in the digital environment, manages his/her digital identity and takes care of his/her reputation in the digital space, chooses the most appropriate digital technology protection.

- The student reacts responsibly, avoids and helps others to avoid irresponsible behaviour, aids others when requested, implements physical activity goals, self-evaluates personal progress and eats healthily.

The following outcomes of the student's competence development after completing the upper-secondary education programmes are expected:[31]

- The student explains the benefits of subject knowledge, describes the content and ideas of the subject using different representations of ideas, facts and concepts, gives different examples when thinking about the same phenomenon, creates a coherent worldview, by asking questions, analyses practical problems and abstract ideas, envisages alternative ideas for problem-solving and evaluates their implementation prospects, taking into account the context, circumstances and possible risks presents arguments for the selected ideas and solutions based on validity, relevance and value criteria, chooses the necessary digital technologies, selects the necessary sources and uses these to solve complex real-world tasks and automate actions.

- The student sees opportunities in risky undertakings, purposefully chooses and applies means and methods of activity, takes into account ethical and intellectual property norms and develops an original, creative style, discusses the characteristics of own creative style and that of others, creates personally and socially meaningful works, ideas and products, when presenting and evaluating creative results, takes into account the criteria of originality, suggestiveness, completeness, ethics and value for oneself and others.

- The student justifies the importance of culture as an essential component that shapes a person's worldview and identity, evaluates cultural phenomena from various perspectives, comparing Lithuanian cultural objects, works and current cultural trends, forms a dialogic relationship with Lithuanian, European and world cultural phenomena and works, connecting them to wider contexts, implements his/her artistic and cultural interests, talents and inclinations through specific cultural activities.

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[31] NEA information about general education curriculum: https://www.emokykla.lt/bendrosios-programos/programu-ivadas/visos-bendrosios-programos.

- The student purposefully chooses communication strategies, verbal and non-verbal means and forms of expression, uses them creatively, analyses diverse messages and complex communicative intentions in all areas of life, interprets and critically evaluates the credibility of a message based on a variety of sources, is resistant to propaganda, engages in the communication discourse of the future profession.

- The student participates in civic activities and initiates them, uses his/her civil rights, takes personal responsibility for strengthening the state, is intolerant of violations of civic morality, applies forms of civil resistance if necessary, behaves in accordance with moral and civic values, contributes to solving social, civic and environmental problems.

- The student addresses issues related to health risks posed by digital technologies, applies various measures to avoid them, performs complex tasks related to the protection of digital technologies, considers risk and danger management and the application of protective measures and uses measures that ensure the reliability and privacy of information in the digital environment.

- The student analyses the influence of lifestyle and environment on individual and public health and is physically active, takes care of own health.

The content of the teaching/learning in the updated primary and lower secondary education programmes is presented by distinguishing mandatory subject content (about 70%) and optional content (about 30%), which is chosen by the teacher, taking into account the students' capacities and in coordination with other teachers. The exact proportion may vary depending on the level of education, subject logic, objectives and teaching traditions. In order to deepen the subject, the optional content of the upper secondary education programme is implemented through the student's optional subjects and modules. The updated general programmes aim to ensure that learning content is consistent. They emphasise integrative relationships that are revealed by examining interdisciplinary topics. Seeking to support teachers in applying the updated curriculum in lessons, recommendations for the implementation of the updated general programmes and methodical materials were prepared and training sessions for teachers and consultations with foreign experts were held.

It should also be mentioned that, by the Order No. V-1309 of the Minister of Education, Science and Sport, dated 21st December 2015, the Descriptor of Primary, Lower and Upper Secondary Education Programmes was approved[32], which determines the objectives and principles of general education, the purpose of primary, lower and upper secondary education programmes and directions for the improvement of general education. On 14th April 2016, this document was supplemented with the explanation that students' learning outcomes which define students' competences to live, study and act in a personal, cultural, civic, social and/or professional context are related to the corresponding levels of

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[32] Descriptor of Primary, Lower and Upper Secondary Education Programmes (2016): https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/37350520a7bc11e5be7fbe3f919a1ebe/asr.
Descriptor of Primary, Lower and Upper Secondary Education Programmes (2023): https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/legalAct.html?documentId=2dbd4b10df6311ed9978886e85107ab2.

the LTQF. The outcomes of the lower secondary education programme are related to the LTQF level 3 and the outcomes of the upper secondary education programme to the LTQF level 4 (Paragraph 10). This alignment was made on the basis of the analysis of the dimensions of the structure of students' competences, including attitudes, knowledge and understanding and skills (see Annex 6). On 20th April 2023 the Descriptor of Primary, Lower and Upper Secondary Education Programmes was updated by the Order No. V-570 of the Minister of Education, Science and Sport. In the document, it was additionally stated that the outcomes of the primary education programme are related to the LTQF level 1 (Paragraph 15).

4.1.2. Evaluation of Students Achievements

At the end of the lower secondary education programme, in grade 10 (gymnasium grade II), students take part in lower secondary education achievement tests. Achievement tests of the Lithuanian language, literature and mathematics are organised; students who learn in the language of instruction of national minorities (Belarusian, Polish or Russian) can take tests in their mother tongue.

Currently, to obtain a lower secondary educational attainment level, students must complete the lower secondary education programme and participate in the lower secondary education achievement test; however, there is no set requirement regarding the minimum score a student must achieve in the achievement tests. This situation changes from 1st September 2024, since the Law on Education establishes a requirement for learners to reach at least a threshold level of achievement. Those who do not achieve this level will be able to retake the test in the same academic year or repeat the course at the same school or a VET institution.

At the end of the upper secondary education programme, school and state Matura exams are organised in general education schools and VET institutions. In order to obtain a Matura certificate, the students must pass two Matura exams. One of them – Lithuanian language and literature – is mandatory. The type of this exam – state or school – can be chosen by the student. In addition to the Lithuanian language and literature Matura exam, which is mandatory, it is also possible to choose and take Matura exams in no more than six subjects or to prepare a project assignment, called Maturity thesis (*Brandos darbas*). The state Matura exams are organised following the centralised student achievement assessment system principle.

One of the most important recent changes in the Matura examination system was implemented in 2013. Since that year, school-level Matura exams for those educational subjects that have the equivalent of the state Matura exams, with the exception of the Lithuanian language and literature Matura exam, are no longer organised.

Another important novelty, which is still valid today, was the transition from a normative to a criterion-based examination evaluation scale. This means that the preliminary limits for threshold, satisfactory, basic and advanced levels of achievements are determined in advance according to the characteristics defined in the examination programmes. The trends of Matura examination results in recent years reveal consistently improving or stable learning outcomes in Lithuanian language and

literature, foreign language (English), biology, physics and history. However, the greatest challenge remains mathematics skills and knowledge; in particular, the results of these exams worsened during the year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2016, the mathematics exam must be passed at a level of no less than a satisfactory level (i.e. to receive from 16 to 100 points) if the student is enrolling in higher education study programmes (with the exception of arts) implemented in Lithuania.

Starting in the 2017-2018 academic year, students can prepare a Maturity thesis – a long-term project work in their chosen field of education. The Maturity thesis is equated to a school Matura exam; the result is recorded in the certificate and is counted when applying to enrol higher education institutions. As reported by OECD (2023), a number of students undertaking project assignment is small – around 100 on average each year.

Since 2018, students of grades 4, 8 and 10 (gymnasium grade II) use the electronic format of the task. More than 90% of 4th and 8th grade students take part in the national student achievements tests (NMPP) every year, and 100% of grade 10 students (gymnasium grade II) complete the tasks of the lower-secondary education achievement tests (PUPP). When the assignments consist only of closed-ended questions, students can immediately see their results and also receive a written feedback. Another important advantage of electronic testing is that teachers do not need to grade students' work; after a few weeks, they receive detailed reports on how well their students demonstrated knowledge, as well as insights into their application and problem-solving skills. In parallel, the same electronic testing system is used for students of Lithuanian schools operating abroad and for VET institutions' students completing the theoretical part of their qualification examinations. Since 2022, electronic NMPP tasks have also been adapted for students with special educational needs.

School communities, municipal administrations and students' parents regularly receive information about students' achievements in NMPP. Reports with summarised indicators, cross-tabulations of results according to curriculum areas and skill groups allow municipalities and schools to identify a student's operational strengths, plan their activities, purposefully differentiate teaching styles and organise support for students while also predicting student achievements.

From the 2023–2024 academic year, the upper secondary education achievement evaluation system is changed. In order for students to reveal their acquired knowledge and skills more consistently and to reduce the burden of stress due to this being the only opportunity to demonstrate knowledge and skills in an examination determining their future academic and professional plans, the two-year learning system is being divided into smaller parts. State Matura will consist of two parts: uniform intermediate exams and Matura exams. During intermediate exams up to 40% of the total evaluation points can be accumulated, and the remaining 60% of the points will be collected in the Matura exams in gymnasium grade IV.

4.1.3. Restructuring of the General Education Schools Network and the Millennium School Program

The network of general education schools in the country has been changing over the past year. As part of the schools' network reorganisation plan, schools have been restructured, merged, or closed down to ensure high-quality education for all students, regardless of their place of residence, while also considering regional demographic trends. In the period between 2012–2023, the number of general education institutions decreased from 1261 to 929. The number of educational institutions implementing lower secondary education programmes decreased by 24.9% and upper-secondary secondary education programmes by 17.2%. The decrease in a number of general education schools is related to raised requirements for a number of students in general education schools (at least 200 students in one school). Thus, smaller schools have become the branches of larger schools with a closure occurring only in exceptional circumstances.

The national Millennium Schools Program is being implemented to reduce student achievement gaps and create integral, optimal and high-quality educational conditions in each municipality. Municipalities participating in this program in 2022–2026 prepare and implement a progress plan in four areas – leadership in action, inclusive education, STEAM education and cultural education. The aim is to ensure that the infrastructure and intellectual resources in the schools selected for the program are available to students and teachers of neighbouring schools. Funding is allocated to strengthening competences and infrastructure.

4.1.4. Quality Assurance

The "Concept of a Good School" was approved by the Order No. V-1308 of the Minister of Education, Science and Sport on 21st December 2015. It was prepared to create prerequisites for raising the quality of activities in national schools implementing general education programmes, to show the direction and guidelines of the school's activities and to enable its operation. The purpose of the concept is to be a universal reference point for the development of a modern school, indicating which features of a school are considered valuable and desirable in the country, to encourage the creativity of school communities and to promote long-term improvement initiatives in various types of schools.

The national review of the education system situation is prepared and published annually with an aim of reviewing the state of education in Lithuania and its recent changes, while considering the strategic goals and objectives set and highlighting the essential trends, difficulties and successes.[33] The review is based on the state education monitoring indicators, supplemented by additional national and international statistical data and research results. A separate part of the review is devoted to information about the educational situation in each municipality. Each year, during the preparation of the education system review, a selected aspect of education is analysed in more depth, for example, distance education(s), inclusive education or educational equity.

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[33] National reviews of the education system: https://www.nsa.smm.lt/svietimo-stebesena/svietimo-bukles-apzvalgos/.

The Law on Education (Article 37(4)) stipulates that, in order to improve the quality of education, educational monitoring, research, self-evaluation and external evaluation of school activities, attestation of teachers and educational support specialists and assessment of learning achievements must be carried out. Additionally, the heads of educational institutions must present an annual activity report to the school community and the council for consideration.

The external evaluation of the quality of the activities of general education schools has been organised since 2007, and its purpose is to encourage schools' development to achieve a higher quality of education and improve learners' achievements. The responsibility for its organisation lies with the NEA; from 2007 to 2023, 1125 external evaluations of the quality of school activities were carried out. The concept, organisation and implementation of external evaluation, as well as the submission of appeals and their examinations, are determined by the Description of the Procedure for the Organisation and Implementation of the External Evaluation of the Activities of Schools Implementing General Education Programmes, approved by the Order No. V-962 of the Minister of Education, Science and Sport on 3rd December 2018.[34]

External evaluation of the quality of school activities is a formative assessment of the processes taking place in the school, which provides information for adjusting the school's activities and improving its results. External evaluation is based on the self-evaluation of the school. When organising the external evaluation of the institution, three different approaches can be chosen:

- Overall assessment, where all school activities are assessed. The overall assessment is carried out using a system of 25 indicators covering four areas of school performance – outcomes, education and student experience, education environments and leadership and management.

- Thematic evaluation, where the school's activities are evaluated by delving into a particular topic (problem or question), which the Minister of Education, Science and Sport determines. The indicators of the thematic assessment can be restructured, taking into account the identified problematic issue. Three key areas of school performance are analysed: results, education and student experience and leadership and management.

- Risk assessment, where identification and analysis of school activity risk factors and prediction of opportunities for activity improvement are carried out. During the risk assessment, the indicators of three areas of school activity (results, student support and educational processes) are analysed. One year after the risk assessment, data on the change in the quality of the school's activities and the results of performance evaluation are analysed. After two years, a re-evaluation is organised. A positive change in the school's performance is established if more than half of the indicators are evaluated at a higher level than they had been initially.

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[34] Procedure for the Organisation and Implementation of the External Evaluation of the Activities of Schools Implementing General Education Programmes: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/2a887310f70611e89fcaa4a4a9822176.

Five evaluation levels (from very poor to very good) are used to evaluate the school's performance. The school introduces the students and their parents to the findings of the external evaluation. After the evaluation, the school and its founder take charge of performance improvement, involving consultants in these processes.

The quality of education is ensured and progress is promoted not only by carrying out external evaluation of the quality of schools' activities, but also by encouraging schools and municipalities (the owners of most schools) to prepare and publish progress reports. These reports are available on EMIS at *https://svis.emokykla.lt/pazangos-ataskaitos/* and institutional websites. Municipal progress reports record and assess changes in the municipal education system, evaluate the actions of the municipal administration and educational institutions that have led to the current situation, its' changes and effectiveness and identify needs for improvement and plans for change. School progress reports analyse school progress, students' achievements and other selected indicators and identify the need for improvement in school activities.

When planning activities, schools must rely on self-evaluation data. After 2012 attestation of the heads of schools has been replaced by the assessment of their performance. Currently, the heads of the schools are evaluated annually, and their performance tasks for one year are formulated. Every year, the school must publish a performance report consisting of a one-year school performance quality report and a head's performance report.

Students' achievements data, information about teaching staff, their qualifications and work experience are stored in different registers. The EMIS has created an open Infocard subsystem, which displays dynamic data about the school infrastructure, educational activities, profiles of schools' heads and teachers and student achievements.

4.2. Changes in VET

4.2.1. Development and Approval of Sectoral Qualification Standards

Sectoral qualification standards are the basis for VET programmes and competences assessment tasks (for further information, see Section 3.2.2). Until 2007, the VET curriculum was defined by VET standards, which determined the competences and their boundaries for a specific qualification, whereas Law on VET in 2007 legitimated sectoral qualification standards as the descriptors of qualifications required for the economic sector or its sub-sector at all qualification levels.

Since 2012, methodological and legal preparation for enacting sectoral qualification standards has been underway. The first ten sectoral qualification standards were prepared in 2015. 14 more standards were prepared in 2017–2019, but their approval started only in 2019 after changing the Description of the Procedure for the Preparation, Updating and Approval of Sectoral Qualification Standards. The previous procedure determined the standards approval by the two ministers – the

Minister of Education and Science and the Minister of Economy, and this model was difficult to implement in practice.

In accordance with the procedure established by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania in 2019, after the relevant SPC endorses the final draft of the sectoral qualification standard, this has to be approved by the order of director of the Qualifications Management Authority (QVETDC) no later than within five working days. Currently, 24 sectoral qualification standards have been approved and registered in the register of legal acts (i.e. they have a status of the legal act); all sectoral qualification standards (in the Lithuanian language) are publicly available at QVETDC website.[35]

4.2.2. Transition to Modular VET and Implementation of the Learning Outcomes Approach

The main feature of the VET curriculum reform after 2012 was its renewal based on sectoral qualification standards and the transformation of formal VET programmes from subject-based to modular ones.

In the VET system, even before 2012, there were attempts to group individual qualifications' learning outcomes into units and divide the curriculum into independent modules, leading to the acquisition of specific competences. The Description of the Procedure for Preparation and Legalisation of Formal VET programmes, approved by the Minister of Education and Science (2010), determined that newly prepared programmes must be modular, and that implemented programmes must be consistently updated, transforming them into modular ones.

In 2012, the Concept of the Modular VET System and the Methodology for Creating Modular VET programmes[36] were prepared (the latter updated in 2019). The implementation of modular VET programmes started in 2015, and the new version of the Description of the Procedure for Preparation and Legalisation of Formal VET programmes established that formal VET programmes registered in the RSTPQ before 2015 could be implemented no later than 31st December 2020.

Modular VET allows for qualifications to be acquired in parts, increases the flexibility of the VET system in implementing the principles of lifelong learning and gives learners more autonomy and freedom. The modular system also supports the geographical mobility, as the identified learning outcomes make it easier to agree on mobility goals, define acquired competences and assess a learner's achievements. VET programme modules share the characteristics and functions of micro-credentials. After finalising each module, a certificate is acquired (from 2023 – a digital certificate) with an indicated LTQF level of the module. Learners may enrol in stand-alone modules for continuing professional development purpose (also with a financial support from Employment Agency); general education schools' learners may choose a module and be exempted from learning in the technology subject of the general education curriculum.

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[35] List of sectoral qualification standards on QVETDC website: https://www.kpmpc.lt/kpmpc/kvalifikaciju-formavimas/standartai-2/profesiniai-standartai/.

[36] The project "Formation of Qualifications and Development of a Modular Vocational Training System": https://www.kpmpc.lt/kpmpc/projektai/igyvendinti-projektai/kvalifikaciju-formavimas-ir-modulinio-profesinio-mokymo-sistemos-kurimas/.

Formal VET programmes consist of the following structural parts (Paragraph 16 of the Description of the Procedure for Preparation and Legalisation of Formal VET programmes):

- Description of the programme, which indicates the name of the formal VET programme, state code, qualification title, qualification code, qualification level, volume of the programme in learning credits, the minimum level of education required to obtain the qualification, requirements for the applicant (if applicable), specifics of future job roles and any other information important for the implementation of the programme or for the applicant;

- Parameters of the VET programme with a list of core and optional modules, for each module indicating the state code, title, level, volume in learning credits, competences developed in the programme and learning outcomes demonstrating their achievement. The core modules are based on LTQF-levelled qualification units, defined in a sectoral qualification standard. Optional modules undergo levelling procedure;

- Recommended sequence of modules by specifying the requirements to learn in the module (if applicable);

- Recommendations for the development of the key competences required for professional activity, defined in the Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning of the European Parliament and the Council of 22nd May 2018 (OJ 2018 C 189, p. 13);

- Module descriptors, which indicate the name and state code of the module, the qualification level which the competences acquired in the module correspond to, the module volume in learning credits, competences and learning outcomes demonstrating competences achievement, recommended content for achieving learning outcomes, criteria for evaluating learning outcomes achieved, requirements for teaching methods and material resources, requirements for the venue of theoretical and practical training and qualification and competence requirements for vocational teachers.

The development of key competences is integrated into the VET curriculum, with learning outcomes for their development specified in VET programmes, and the approach to their integration left to the discretion of VET institutions. Legal acts recommend that at least 10% of learning time would be dedicated to their development.

It should be noted that when the same qualification described in the sectoral qualification standard is awarded according to the initial and continuing VET programmes, the modules for the acquisition of the competences constituting the qualification and the final module are the same. Additionally, initial VET requires the completion of an introductory module, general modules and optional modules. In continuing VET programmes, general modules for the development of safe behaviour in extreme situations and occupational safety and health competences are integrated into the module content.

All formal VET programmes are learning outcomes based, and each module specifies the criteria for evaluating them. Learning outcomes are formulated for each competence separately, taking into account the boundaries of competences specified in the qualification descriptor. In this way, the learning outcomes of VET programmes and their modules have clear links to the qualifications, their units and competences described in the relevant sectoral qualification standards. In the transition to the modular programmes, a great deal of attention was paid to training programme designers and vocational teachers, and consultations about the learning outcomes approach and its application. In the methodology for developing modular VET programmes, a separate section is devoted to recommendations for the formulation of learning outcomes.

Based on the data of 22nd December 2023, 629 modular VET programmes were registered in the RSTPQ. Table 4 presents the distribution of initial and continuing VET programmes by the LTQF level. The RSTPQ also includes a small number of non-modular formal VET programmes (N=13), mainly designed to provide specific competence for statutory functions.

Of particular note is the breakthrough in designing and implementing programmes leading to LTQF level 5 qualifications. While the need for qualifications at this level was identified during the preparation of the first referencing report, the legal framework has lacked clarity on the pathways for the acquisition of these qualifications, whether they should be acquired through VET, short cycle or corresponding studies or both ways. The first attempt to provide VET qualifications at this level was recorded back in 2016. Currently, ten LTQF level 5 qualifications may be acquired according to continuing VET programmes.

Table 4. Distribution of modular VET programmes by qualification levels (data of 22-12-2023)

VET level	LTQF level	VET programmes, total number
Initial VET	2	55
	3	89
	4	232
Total		**376**
Continuing VET	2	26
	3	91
	4	136
	5	10
Total		**253**
Total number		**629**

Source: *Registrai - Studijų ir mokymo programos (smm.lt)*

4.2.3. Introduction of Learning Credits

Another important change that was introduced since 2012 is the estimation of the volume of VET in learning credits. Learning credits are units of learning/training volume that measure the learning/training outcomes of a programme or its module and the learner's working time dedicated to achieving the learning outcomes. The implementation of the learning credit system was guided by the European Parliament and the Council recommendation of 18th June 2009 on establishing a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) (2009/C 155/02).

The amount of learning credits is determined by: (1) the complexity of the activities that will be performed by the person who has acquired the competences (the more complex the activities, the more time is needed to acquire the competences); (2) the level of independence in performing activities (the more independence the professional activities require, the more time should be devoted to the training and learning process); (3) variability of activities (the more time an individual has to react to changes in activities in the real workplace and to apply skills in a broader context, the more time should be devoted to acquiring such competences); (4) the level of complexity, type and quantity of learning materials and tasks that the learner must perform to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

One learning credit is equivalent to 27 academic hours, but the time allocated to contact work (i.e. guided learning hours) and independent learning varies according to the type of VET programme. In the implementation of the formal initial VET programme, 22 academic hours of one learning credit are allocated to contact work, consultations and assessment of the student's learning achievements, and five academic hours are allocated to independent learning. When implementing the formal initial VET programme for persons with special educational needs, 27 academic hours of a learning credit are allocated to contact work, consultations and evaluation of the student's learning achievements. When implementing the formal continuing VET programme, 18 academic hours of a learning credit are allocated to contact work, consultations and evaluation of the student's learning achievements, and nine academic hours are allocated to the student's independent learning. The usual volume of a one-year formal VET programme is 60 learning credits. The volume of formal VET programmes cannot be less than 30 (20 credits in the case of continuing VET) and cannot exceed 110 learning credits (90 credits in the case of continuing VET).

Estimation of modular VET programmes in learning credits allows learners to adapt learning more flexibly to personal needs, combine work and learning and choose flexible learning forms and methods.

4.2.4. Reform of the Competence Evaluation System

A qualification is granted to a person after evaluating all the competences required for the qualification, determined in the VET programme prepared on the basis of the sectoral qualification standard. The evaluation of acquired competences of persons who have completed VET programmes is separated from the training process.

In 2012, the assessment of competences for qualifications at LTQF levels 1–5, acquired through formal VET programmes, non-formal or informal learning or learning in the workplace, was delegated to accredited competence assessment institutions, i.e. social partners. In 2020, by the order of the Minister of Education, Science and Sport, after changing the Description of the Procedure for Evaluating the Competences Acquired by a Person, the transition to a different organisational model of competences evaluation began. The evaluation of competences until 2022 was insufficiently coordinated, information about the competence evaluation process was insufficiently public and the possibility of obtaining reliable evaluation data was only partially possible due to the different content of the competences' evaluation. For these reasons, it was decided to update the content and the organisational processes of competences evaluation.

Some of the major changes implemented and their advantages include:

- Optimised competence evaluation processes, clearly regulating the functions of institutions participating and appointing one coordinator – the QVETDC;

- The organisation and implementation of the competences evaluation involves the nominated VET providers (to be called Competence assessment centres). Selection of the nominated VET providers is organised by QVETDC. One VET provider is nominated for one sector. The applicants must prove that they have qualified staff to prepare and update competence evaluation tasks (assignments) and to advise the assessors of the practical examination. They also must have the necessary technical equipment and tools or access to a real workplace where the evaluation of practical skills can be carried out;

- The representatives of employers, as before, are involved in the competences evaluation through accredited competence assessment institutions (by validating tasks and delegating assessors);

- The unified theoretical knowledge testing system has been introduced; knowledge assessment is carried out only electronically through the NEA system;

- The bank of theoretical and practical tasks has been created and constantly filled and updated; tasks are prepared in accordance with set methodological principles and are validated. Theoretical tasks are prepared in such a way that all the competences that constitute the qualification are evaluated; practical tasks are planned to evaluate at least two competences;

- Consistent, clear and public competences evaluation planning is ensured: the competence evaluation schedule for the coming year is published in advance, which helps to properly plan processes, especially for externs seeking competence evaluation;

- Information is provided continuously about competences evaluation, educational institutions providing information and opportunities to pilot tests in a real electronic testing environment (*https://www.kpmpc.lt/kpmpc/profesinis-mokymas-3/asmens-igytu-kompetenciju-vertinimas/*);

- Equal opportunities have been created for those participating in the evaluation – everyone is evaluated against validated tasks, which are stored in the task bank;

- Monitoring of the quality of competence evaluation organisation and evaluation results is performed. Based on the received data, an analysis of the tasks' content was initiated in 2023 to supplement or amend the task bank. Feedback was provided to the experts preparing the tasks, task validators and VET institutions;

- Appeals procedures have been implemented.

This reform has raised the bar for the reliability of VET quality and learning outcomes evaluation. A uniform competence evaluation model for all Lithuanian VET institutions and private VET providers was introduced, task banks were created for the evaluation of theoretical knowledge and practical skills, and responsibilities were clearly distributed to the participants. The competence of assessors and experts preparing tasks has been developed, and monitoring of competence evaluation has been ensured.

4.2.5. Quality Assurance

According to the Law on VET, the VET provider at the institutional level must ensure the quality of training and related activities, and the responsible institutions must carry out quality monitoring at the national level. The VET provider can accept learners, start awarding qualifications and implement formal VET programmes only after obtaining a licence for the programme or its module. In order to obtain a licence, the provider must prove: (1) compliance of vocational teachers or candidates to vocational teachers with the qualification and competence requirements established in the VET programme and the Law on Education; (2) the correspondence of theoretical and practical training venues and methodological resources for training to the expected number of students to be trained and the requirements established in the VET programme; (3) the availability of training facilities, equipped with the necessary material resources, and their suitability to ensure the quality of VET delivery.

Since 2012, the VET quality assurance system has been systematically developed at the provider and national levels. This systemic change was achieved with the support of national projects partially financed by the European Social Fund (ESF).

In the period from 2011 to 2015, internal quality assurance systems were implemented in 79 VET institutions. During the implementation of the project "External Evaluation of the Quality of Vocational Training", No. VP1-2.2-ŠMM-04-V-03-002, 2011–2015, a model of external evaluation of the VET quality was developed and an external evaluation of the initial VET programmes in seven education fields was carried out in all VET institutions that implemented these programmes (92 programmes out of 271 were evaluated). Recommendations were prepared to improve the quality of VET programmes and the quality assurance system itself.

In 2018–2023, during the project "Strengthening the Quality Assurance Systems and Processes of VET," No. 09.4.1-ESFA-V-713-03-0001, the system for monitoring of VET institutions activities and

VET programmes' implementation has been created and introduced based on 5 monitoring indicators with set numeric values.[37] The project also: (1) updated and created methodologies and evaluation instruments for the preparation of external evaluation and self-analysis reports of the activities of VET institutions implementing formal VET programmes; (2) trained VET institutions staff preparing self-analysis documents, and external evaluators; (3) conducted external evaluation of 28 VET institutions and summarised evaluation data, providing recommendations for improving the VET quality assurance system. The results of this project have been transferred to the provisions of the Description of the Procedure for the External Evaluation of the Activities of VET institutions and other VET Providers Implementing Formal VET (described below).

In 2017, a new edition of the Law on VET consolidated the VET quality assurance approach. As provided for in Article 22 of the Law:

- VET quality assurance is secured by implementing internal quality assurance systems chosen by VET providers and external evaluation in line with the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (EQAVET), by monitoring VET in accordance with the education monitoring indicators and the monitoring procedure approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport, by evaluating students' achieved learning outcomes and supervising the award of qualifications;

- The VET provider must have an internal quality assurance system and must foresee operational methods and measures to ensure that the quality of training provided remains in line with the requirements of sectoral qualification standards and other requirements approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport. Each VET institution must inform its community at least once a year and publicly publish the annual activity report of the head of the VET institution on its website;

- The external evaluation of VET is the determination of the quality of the VET institution's activities, based on self-analysis and VET monitoring data, with the involvement of external experts. The external evaluation of VET providers is organised by institution authorised by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport at least once every five years. The external evaluation of other VET providers, implementing formal VET, is also carried out by authorised institution with the participation of sectoral professional committees in accordance with the procedure established by legal acts.

The Minister of Education, Science and Sport approved the Description of the Procedure for the External Evaluation of the Activities of VET Institutions and other VET Providers Implementing Formal VET[38] by the Order No. V-442 in 2020 (amended by the Order No. V-316 on 25th February 2022), which established the concept of external evaluation of VET providers' activities and the organisation and implementation of the external evaluation. By this order, the NEA has been authorised to organise and

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[37] Project "Strengthening the Quality Assurance Systems and Processes of VET":
https://www.kpmpc.lt/kpmpc/projektai/vykdomi-projektai/profesinio-mokymo-kokybes-isorinis-vertinimas/.
[38] Procedure for the External Evaluation of the Activities of VET Institutions and other VET Providers Implementing Formal VET: https://e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/7f6484806ea311eabee4a336e7e6fdab/asr.

conduct external evaluations of VET providers' activities. The external evaluation is based on the data of external evaluation indicators, self-evaluation performed by the VET provider and VET monitoring.

Indicators for external evaluation of VET providers' activities are as follows:

- The share of filled state-funded VET places (applies to those performing admission to state-funded VET places);

- The share of students in apprenticeship;

- The share of persons who have not completed the formal VET programme;

- The share of evaluated students whose assessment of acquired competences is "good" (8 points), "very good" (9 points), or "excellent" (10 points);

- The share of graduates employed in the sixth month after completing a formal VET programme.

These indicators are published in the electronic tool of the annual monitoring of VET external evaluation indicators at EMIS (*https://www.svis.smm.lt/pm-isorinio-vertinimo-rodikliai/*). Using this publicly available information, VET policymakers and VET providers can monitor changes on an annual basis.

The Description of the Procedure for the External Evaluation of the Activities of VET Institutions and other VET Providers Implementing Formal VET stipulates that if the numerical values of all external evaluation indicators reach the set threshold numerical values, it is considered that the quality of the VET provider's activities meets the established requirements. In this case, an external evaluation of the activities of a VET institution, by organising the visit of an external evaluation expert group, should be carried out once every five years.

If the numerical values of the three external evaluation indicators reach the established threshold, it is considered that the quality of the VET provider's activities partially meets the established requirements. In this case, the authorised institution addresses the VET provider to foresee 2-year organisational, managerial, methodological and consulting assistance measures to improve the VET quality and to inform the authorised institution about the planned measures within two months. If the VET provider does not reach the set threshold numerical values of the external evaluation indicators within two years, the authorised institution organises a visit of the external evaluation expert group to the provider.

If the numerical values of the three external evaluation indicators do not reach the set threshold numerical values, the authorised institution must organise a visit of the external evaluation expert group to the VET provider no later than 12 months after the publication of these indicators in the EMIS.

The external evaluation of the activities of VET providers is carried out in three areas: leadership and management, training and learning and training and learning outcomes (Table 5).

Table 5. Criteria and indicators for the external evaluation of the activities of VET institutions and other VET providers conducting formal VET

Criteria	Indicators
1. AREA OF EVALUATION – LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	
1.1. Adoption, implementation and impact of strategic decisions on the quality of activities of a VET institution or other VET provider conducting formal VET (hereinafter referred to as the Provider)	1.1.1 Making and implementing strategic decisions
	1.1.2. Application of quality management system and influence on processes
1.2. Management effectiveness and leadership expression	1.2.1. Leadership of managers and other community members
	1.2.2. Personnel policy
	1.2.3. Provider's participation in social activities of the region and/or country
	1.2.4. Use of financial resources (including long-term investments)
2. AREA OF EVALUATION – TRAINING AND LEARNING	
2.1. Effectiveness of planning and execution of the teaching and learning process	2.1.1. Planning and conducting teaching and learning
	2.1.2. Student support
	2.1.3. Provider's initiatives to develop and improve the teaching and learning process
2.2. An enabling physical and emotional environment for teaching and learning	2.2.1. Sufficiency of material resources (equipment, tools, raw materials, educational materials) and compliance with the needs of the labour market
	2.2.2. Development of inclusive teaching and learning, adaptation of the material base and functionality of the teaching and learning environment
2.3. Stakeholder satisfaction with the teaching and learning process	2.3.1. Student satisfaction with the teaching and learning process
	2.3.2. Employers' satisfaction with the organisation and implementation of practical training

3. AREA OF EVALUATION – TRAINING AND LEARNING OUTCOMES	
3.1. Qualification acquisition	3.1.1. Persons admitted to the formal VET programme (module) and having acquired qualifications (competences)
	3.1.2. The results of the evaluation of a person's acquired competences
3.2. Competitiveness of graduates in the labour market	3.2.1. The situation of qualified persons in the labour market: employees, self-employed, employed and registered unemployed
	3.2.2. Employers' satisfaction with the qualifications of employed graduates
	3.2.3. Graduates' satisfaction with the acquired qualification

Until 2023, an external evaluation of the activities of 28 VET providers was carried out. The external evaluation, based on the external evaluation indicators, is expected to continue.

4.2.6. Recognition of Prior Learning

In the VET system, all VET institutions that provide formal VET programmes, upon request by a person, after evaluating his/her achievements, can recognise his/her competences and further inform and guide him/her towards the recognition of the full qualification. Since 2008, the Description of the Procedure for Recognising Prior Learning[39] regulates the recognition of prior learning of a person who is improving a current qualification or seeking to acquire another one. This covers assessing a person's previously acquired theoretical knowledge and practical skills against the requirements for assessing learning outcomes, as established in the corresponding formal VET programme.

This procedure primarily regulated the recognition of the prior learning as a part of the learning outcomes of the programme for persons who have enrolled in a formal VET programme. The Description of the Procedure for Recognising Prior Learning was changed by the Order No. V-643 of the Minister of Education and Science on 9th July 2018 to more clearly determine the recognition of prior learning for persons who do not study according to the formal VET programme. The changed procedure stipulates that a person who wants to improve his/her existing qualification or wishes that the competences acquired through non-formal education, work experience or informal learning are recognised as part of the qualification must address the chosen VET provider, who holds a licence for the relevant formal VET programme and implements it.

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[39] The Description of the Procedure for Recognising Prior Learning: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.9BD2ED8BD03A/asr.

If a person's competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning are positively assessed, the VET provider recognises the competences acquired and issues a conclusion confirming the recognition of competences (from September 2023 – a Conclusion on the Recognition of a Module's Competences Acquired Through Work Experience and Informal Learning). The conclusion lists the evaluated competences and the competences of the formal VET programme or the module they correspond to.

After the VET curriculum reform and the transition from subject-based to modular VET programmes, the recognition of individuals' competences became more transparent since each competence constituting a qualification as established in a sectoral qualification standard is detailed in the VET programme and estimated in learning credits.

The assessment and recognition of individual competences, at the person's request, is carried out in a VET institution in accordance with its institutional procedures, usually by a commission of vocational teachers (sometimes, this may include vocational teachers and social partners), to which the person seeking a competences recognition demonstrates a portfolio of his/her documented knowledge and skills.

Persons who wish to participate in the assessment of competences acquired through work experience, non-formal and informal learning and to obtain a VET diploma certifying a qualification must address the nominated VET provider (more information in Section 4.2.4) and submit a request, a copy of the personal identity document, documents certifying learning outcomes and confirming professional experience related to the competences to be recognised together with documents confirming recognition of competences. In line with existing procedures of VET graduates' competence evaluation (Section 4.2.4.), the qualification and the VET diploma certifying it are granted to a person after passing the theory examination (knowledge assessment test) and receiving a positive assessment of practical skills.

4.3. Changes in Higher Education

4.3.1. Implementation of the Learning Outcomes Approach in Higher Education

The main legal acts regulating the qualifications delivered in the Lithuanian higher education provision that programmes and qualifications are based on learning outcomes. One of the most important documents regulating the Lithuanian higher education system, which sets out the requirements for study programmes, is the Descriptor of the General Requirements for Conducting Studies approved in 2016.[40] It states that all study programmes must meet the requirements of the LTQF, and the acquisition of a qualification is associated not only with the completion of a programme but also with the achievement of learning outcomes.

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[40] General Requirements for Conducting Studies: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/739065a0ce9911e69e09f35d37acd719/asr.

The implementation of the learning outcomes approach and the national qualifications framework with the aim to ensure proper linking of qualifications with the levels of the LTQF in higher education has led to the development of two key tools:

- Study Cycle Descriptor;
- Study field descriptors.

These tools ensure common standards for qualifications, learning outcome-based qualifications and compliance of programmes and qualifications awarded upon graduation with the relevant level or cycle. The development of the tools started in 2009 (when the preparation of the first study field descriptors was initiated). They are being systematically developed further and are currently closely integrated with study implementation processes (including programme design, quality assurance, etc.).

Study Cycle Descriptor

The descriptor of study cycles[41] outlines the generic learning outcomes associated with a certain cycle (short, first, second, etc.) and/or type of a qualification awarded within the cycle (e.g. Bachelor, Professional Bachelor). Thus, the generic learning outcomes outlined in the descriptor are common to all qualifications awarded within a specific cycle, regardless of the field of study or individual programme.

This descriptor establishes basic expectations in terms of learning outcomes for all those who have acquired a qualification of a specific cycle and ensures that they correspond to the assigned level of the qualifications framework. At the same time, the learning outcomes highlight the qualitative differences between different qualifications provided within the same cycle (e.g. Bachelor and Professional Bachelor awarded in the first cycle) and different cycles (e.g. short and first cycles).

Learning outcomes in the cycle descriptors are described according to the following categories: knowledge and application; research skills; special abilities; social abilities; and personal abilities. The learning outcomes indicated in these categories are used in the development of study field descriptors, in the classification of degrees offered in Lithuania and in recognition of foreign qualifications.

The Study Cycle Descriptor was prepared in accordance with the LTQF Description, EQF and Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). The latest version of the Study Cycle Descriptor was approved by the Order No. V-1012 of the Minister of Education and Science, dated 16th November 2016, "On Approval of the Descriptor of Study Cycles". Previously, Order No. V-2212 of the Minister of Education and Science, dated 21st November 2011, "On Approval of the Descriptor of Study Cycles" was in force. The Descriptor in 2020 was supplemented with Annex 2, "Descriptor of learning outcomes of the short cycle studies."

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[41] Study Cycle Descriptor: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/775fbb90ac0711e6b844f0f29024f5ac/asr. English translation: https://www.skvc.lt/uploads/lawacts/docs/346_53c2f01ae1d71e0119694c2d9abf7a64.pdf

Study field descriptors

The Study Cycle Descriptor outlines general expectations in terms of the level of qualifications, while the study field descriptors specify expectations related to a particular field. They do not determine the learning outcomes of individual programmes, but provide the key sets of knowledge, skills, and requirements for qualifications awarded within a specific field of study.

The development of descriptors, which set outcome-based standards for specific fields of study, has started even before the implementation of the LTQF with regulation regarding engineering and some other programmes dating back to 2005. However, in 2009 this process has become more systematic with the launch of SKAR projects aimed at the development of study field descriptors for all fields of study. The project ran through three separate instalments in 2009, 2012 and 2018 up to the end of 2022 with SKVC as the coordinator. Currently, the task of developing, reviewing and updating the study field descriptors has moved from a project-based activity to one of the continuous and officially mandated tasks of SKVC.

Higher education institutions rely on study field descriptors when designing new or reviewing the existing programmes in a certain field of study. They are also used in external quality assurance processes. The Law on Higher Education and Research includes the requirement that the learning outcomes of study programmes should be aligned with the learning outcomes provided for in the study field descriptors.

Currently, descriptors of 53 study fields have been prepared. Their drafting is coordinated by SKVC and approved by the order of the Minister of Education, Science and Sport. The descriptors are prepared by expert groups composed of higher education institutions, social partners and competent authorities (in the case of regulated professions). If necessary, the descriptors are reviewed and updated (for example, this is being done when short cycle qualifications emerge in certain fields). The relevant sectoral qualification standards are also considered when preparing the descriptors. Prepared or updated descriptors are presented and discussed with the wider academic community, social partners and student representatives. Thus, they reflect the consensus of the community on certain common expectations associated with the qualifications of the relevant field.

In this way, the grid for learning outcomes developed in Lithuania is closely linked to the levels of the LTQF. At the top of the grid are the qualifications framework level descriptors, on the basis of which the study cycles descriptor and the study fields descriptors are prepared, which are used to formulate the learning outcomes of individual study programmes. This structural framework ensures the effective implementation of the learning outcomes approach, the transparency of the qualifications awarded and their alignment with the designated level. It also makes the system more comprehensible for employers, graduates, and other stakeholders.

4.3.2. The Structure of Higher Education Qualifications and its Changes

The Law on Higher Education and Research stipulates that the study system in Lithuania consists of cycle studies and professional studies. Cycle studies reflect the cycle structure of the QF-EHEA and include the short cycle, the first cycle (to acquire a Professional Bachelor or a Bachelor degree), the second cycle (to acquire a Master degree) and the third cycle (to acquire a Doctor of Science or a Doctor of Arts degree). Professional studies are aimed at preparing for independent practical activities and professional development (upskilling). The LTQF Description provisions the referencing of the qualifications awarded after completion of both types of studies with a specific level(s) of the qualifications framework. In this way, the QF-EHEA and its cycle system is integrated into the LTQF.

Cycle studies

It should be noted that the implementation of the three cycle structure (except for the short cycle) in the Lithuanian higher education has started in 2000. The foundations for this were laid down even earlier by the Law on Higher Education and Research, which came into force in 1991. The award of the Professional Bachelor degree has started in 2007. Thus, Lithuania has a well-established cycle structure, which, since 2010, is linked to the corresponding level within the LTQF. The main changes that occurred after 2012 in the qualification structure are associated with the introduction of the short cycle qualification.

The LTQF has always provisioned a level 5 qualification referenced to EQF level 5. However, there were no actual higher education awards placed at this level. In 2018, the amendments to the Law on Higher Education and Research provisioned the award of a short cycle qualification referenced to LTQF level 5.

The main features of the short cycle programmes are as follows:

- Referenced to the LTQF level 5;

- Workload: 90 to 120 ECTS;

- Admission requires *brandos atestatas* (Matura certificate) and a LTQF/ EQF level 4 VET qualification[42];

- Offered in specific fields of study (the list of fields and awarded qualifications within LTQF level 5 is approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport after consultation with sectoral professional committees)[43];

- The programmes are aligned not only with the study field descriptors but also with relevant sectoral qualification standards;

- Successful graduates are awarded a professional qualification attested by a diploma.

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[42] This requirement is set by the Law on Higher Education and Research from 2024. Previously there was no obligatory requirement for a VET qualification unless stated differently in the sectoral qualification standard.
[43] The list of qualifications awarded and study fields where short cycle studies may be implemented: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/e3468080a78911ed8df094f359a60216.

The qualification aims to enhance access to higher education for holders of VET qualifications and to expedite the preparation of specialists needed in the labour market. It has been incorporated into the higher education structures by updating the General Requirements for Conducting Studies, adding a descriptor for the short cycle into the Study Cycle Descriptor, provisioning and implementing quality assurance mechanisms, and revising study fields descriptors. Although the short cycle qualifications have been recently introduced, they have already been integrated into the Lithuanian qualification structure.

Another recent development is the introduction of shorter, labour market-oriented Master degrees. Since 2017, the General Requirements for Conducting Studies have provisioned for the awarding of a Master of Law (LL.M.). Another provision allowing for award of a Master of Business Administration (MBA) was added shortly thereafter. The requirements for these qualifications differ slightly from other Master qualifications: the preparation of a final thesis (project) is optional and the workload is reduced (at least 60 credits). Despite these differences in requirements, the programmes and qualifications must align with a level 7 descriptor and the learning outcomes of the second cycle; therefore, they are not treated differently from other Master degrees.

Additionally, the permeability between higher education qualifications has been improved. Until July 2015, a Professional Bachelor granted access to Master programmes only after meeting additional requirements. However, following an amendment of the Law on Higher Education and Research, the admission of Professional Bachelor degrees holders to Master programmes is now at the discretion of higher education institutions. Short cycle qualifications provide access to the first cycle programmes with the possibility of credit transfer, Bachelor degrees give access to the second cycle programmes, and the second cycle qualifications grant access to the third cycle. This ensures progression between different levels of qualifications within the framework.

Professional studies

In 2017, following amendments to the Law on Higher Education and Research, professional studies were introduced as one of the elements of Lithuania's education system. This was not an entirely new development as these studies essentially correspond to non-degree programmes that have been part of the Lithuanian system since 2009 (both are designed to provide professional qualifications to individuals who have already attained higher education).

The main characteristics of professional study programmes are as follows:

- They are designed to equip individuals with qualifications and prepare them for independent practical work;
- Currently, two types of programme offerings are classified as professional studies: (1) residency studies aimed at specialist training in medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine, and (2) teacher training programmes leading to the award of a professional teaching qualification ;

- The workload of these programmes (excluding residency studies) is 60 ECTS credits; the workload (duration) of residency studies is determined by the Government or its delegated institutions;

- The requirements for implementing these programs are set by the Government or a competent authority;

- A certificate is awarded to those who successfully complete professional studies;

- Admission to these programmes requires either a first cycle qualification (for teacher training programmes) or a second cycle qualification (for residency studies).

The provisions of the LTQF Description indicate that a qualification obtained after completing a professional study program can be referenced to LTQF level 6 or 7, allowing for the potential alignment of professional studies with either of these levels.

Teacher training qualifications awarded after completion of professional studies are clearly referenced to level 6 in the study field descriptor for educational sciences. However, there remains a lack of clarity and consensus within the system regarding referencing of residency studies. While these qualifications are formal, quality assured and recognised (including for access to regulated professions), an agreement on their specific LTQF level designation is still pending.

4.3.3. Quality Assurance

The Lithuanian system for quality assurance in higher education is based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The requirement to comply with the ESG is provisioned in the Law on Higher Education and Research. Therefore, higher education institutions follow the ESG when implementing their internal quality assurance mechanisms. The compliance of Lithuania's external quality assurance system with the ESG was also confirmed in 2012 when the Lithuanian quality assurance agency, the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC), after an evaluation, became a member of the European Network of Higher Education Quality Agencies (ENQA) and was listed in the Register of European Higher Education Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAR). The ENQA membership and the EQAR listing were re-confirmed in December of 2017 and in 2022.

The external quality assurance system encompasses both, cycle studies and professional studies. External quality assurance procedures are currently applied to institutions, to ex ante study programmes and to study fields. SKVC organises evaluation and makes accreditation decisions (except for third cycle studies, which are evaluated by the Research Council of Lithuania). It should be noted that, according to current regulations regarding evaluation of studies, Lithuanian higher education institutions can turn to any EQAR registered agency for evaluation of ex ante study programmes or study fields, but SKVC makes the accreditation decision. This possibility is not provisioned for institutional reviews, which are a prerogative of SKVC.

Since 2020, the accreditation of ex-post study programmes has been changed to the accreditation of study fields (cluster of programmes) in a specific cycle. Both institutional and study field accreditation are cyclical and are carried out at least once every seven years.

The evaluation of study fields (clusters of programmes) include criteria associated with the alignment of study programme learning outcomes with the relevant level of a qualifications. A study field is evaluated according to the following seven evaluation areas:

- Aims, learning outcomes and curriculum;
- Links between scientific (artistic) research and higher education (not applicable to short cycle studies);
- Student admission and support;
- Learning, student assessment and employment of graduates;
- Teaching staff;
- Resources;
- Study quality management and publicity.

The evaluation area dedicated to the objectives, outcomes and curriculum contains indicators to assess the compliance of the study field and cycle study programmes with the regulatory framework. During the assessment of this indicator, information is collected regarding the compliance of the study programme objectives, expected learning outcomes, programme structure, subjects and/or module content with the type of study, the cycle and academic and/or professional requirements. Thus, compliance with the requirements associated with the relevant level is verified during the quality assurance procedures carried out by SKVC.

The external quality assurance procedures and decision making consist of several steps:

- a self-assessment report submitted by the higher education institution, which serves as the basis for the procedure;
- an external assessment by a review panel of experts (includes students and stakeholders), which involves a visit to the higher education institution;
- a report prepared by the review panel, which outlines the compliance with the requirements and recommendations for further improvement;
- an accreditation decision taken by SKVC based on the outcomes and findings of the review panel after an approval of an external committee tasked with reviewing consistency and quality of expert panel reports;
- follow up activities, which are aimed at implementation of recommendations provided by the expert panel.

Third-cycle is implemented as doctoral studies, the quality and effectiveness of which are assessed by the Research Council of Lithuania (RCL). The descriptions of the science and art doctorate

evaluation procedure do not provision assessing the compliance of the studies with the requirements of the relevant LTQF level, but has a clearly expressed orientation towards outcomes, which allows ensuring the achievement of the learning outcomes at the corresponding level.

4.3.4. Recognition of Prior Learning

Recognition of prior learning in higher education encompasses the recognition of qualifications, periods of study and the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. The implementation of the learning outcomes approach in higher education has opened up new possibilities for recognition, which are reflected in the procedures governing them.

Recognition of foreign qualifications is carried out by SKVC and designed by higher education institutions based on the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention with focus in recognition placed on learning outcomes to ensure fairness and flexibility. Recognition of foreign qualifications is governed by a Governmental Resolution newly approved in 2012, which has transferred the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention into Lithuanian national legislation.

Recognition of periods of study and non-formal and informal learning is carried out by higher education institutions, but they are guided by the procedures approved by the MESS, which define the general principles and requirements.

The Description of the Procedure for Recognising the Outcomes of Partial Studies in Higher Education Institutions[44] establishes that the recognition of partial studies is carried out for those who wish to continue their studies in the higher education institution and ensures that the results are recognised if the achieved learning outcomes correspond to the learning outcomes of the programme or a part of it. Up to 75% of the workload of the study programme in the same cycle may be recognised (i.e. the maximum credit limit given for recognised prior learning is 75% of the total study programme volume).

The first recommendations enabling higher education institutions to start recognising competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning were approved by the Order of the Minister of Education and Science in 2010. Currently, the legal act approved in 2017 is in force, which establishes the main principles of recognition (accessibility, flexibility, transparency and objectivity, comparability and voluntariness) and stages (information, consultation, evaluation and decision-making). The person's recognised competences are confirmed by a document indicating the number of recognised study credits that can be counted as part of the intended study programme. As in the case of recognising partial studies, the competences acquired by a person are evaluated according to the expected learning outcomes described in the relevant study programme.

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[44] Description of the Procedure for Recognising the Outcomes of Partial Studies in Higher Education Institutions: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/e545c490d7a211eaabd5b5599dd4eebe.

4.4. Non-Formal Qualifications and Individual Learning Accounts

Since 2019, the Ministry of the Economy and Innovation has been implementing the MASTER-PRO initiative, the aim of which is to create the preconditions for the development, recognition and validation of qualifications acquired through work activities (in the Lithuanian context, these are called "high-level mastership qualifications" – "*aukšto meistriškumo kvalifikacijos*"). The activities were implemented within the project, "MASTER-PRO: Development of a model for a subsystem of high-level mastership qualifications acquired at work" (*MASTER-PRO Darbinėje veikloje įgyjamų aukšto meistriškumo kvalifikacijų posistemės modelio sukūrimas*, Project No 09.4.3-ESFA-V-834-03-0001). During the project, the model of a subsystem for high-level mastership qualifications (i.e. private, non-formal qualifications validated / awarded by labour market actors) was proposed and methodological guidance tools for designing, recognising and validating qualifications were prepared. The Ministry of the Economy and Innovation intends to further develop and pilot this initiative in practice.

In May 2023, the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania adopted amendments to the Law on Non-Formal Adult Education and Continuing Education, which set preconditions for developing and implementing the individual learning accounts (ILAs) single-window information system. The ILAs system is being developed through a targeted ESF-funded project "Learn for Life". The project is led by the European Social Fund Agency and the Association of Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions for Centralised Admissions (LAMA BPO), with the NEA and the QVETDC as partners.

In order to implement the ILAs system, a number of legal and guidance documents have been prepared and updated in 2023, namely:

- The Law on Non-Formal Adult Education and Continuing Education[45];

- Order No. V-599 of the Minister of Education, Science and Sport, dated 27th April 2023, regarding the Approval of the Descriptor of the Model of ILAs[46];

- Resolution No. 819 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, dated 25th October 2023, regarding the Approval of the List of Non-formal Adult Education and Continuing Education Funding Instruments to be Included in the ILAs System, the List of Priority Areas of Publicly Funded Programmes to be Delivered through the ILAs and the List of Priority Groups of Persons Participating in the ILAs system[47];

- Order No. V-1218 of the Minister of Education, Science and Sport, dated 18th September 2023, regarding the approval of the Description of the Procedure for Quality Assurance of Non-formal Adult Education and Continuing Training Programmes, published on ILAs system[48];

- Order No. V-1515 of the Minister of Education, Science and Sport, dated 29th November 2023, regarding the approval of the Description of the Procedures for the Administration of ILAs system

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[45] Law on Non-Formal Adult Education and Continuing Education: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.CE3B174CA7E6/asr.
[46] https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/c93707e0e4d411ed9978886e85107ab2.
[47] https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/29a3971055e611ee81b8b446907f594f/asr.
[48] https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/29a3971055e611ee81b8b446907f594f/asr.

and for the Funding of Persons Seeking Improve and/ or Acquire Competences through this System, as well as for the Organisation of a Call for Tenders for Funding the Participation in Non-formal Adult Education and Continuing Training Programmes[49].

ILAs will operate through a digital ILAs platform (*www.kursuok.lt*). In the platform, individuals can, through their learning accounts, find training opportunities offered by various training providers, and receive counselling services. The ILAs system publishes non-formal adult education and continuing education programmes that meet the quality assurance requirements set out in legislation. When established and verified (e.g., the programme is a part of a VET or a study programme), programme information indicates a corresponding LTQF level.

ILAs system encourages people of working age to acquire qualifications and competences which are considered to be of high added value. The ILAs website *www.kursuok.lt* has been launched in December 2023. Once registered through the e-Government gateway, each person has a learner account where he or she can receive all the information related to the training, such as training timetables, cost of training, available financial support, a detailed description of the training programme, competences to be acquired, details of the certificate, etc. The ILAs system is linked to the national registers of population, education and similar, so that learners' authentication, education, qualifications and employment data are automatically retrieved. This ensures a fast and convenient learner service, information on the popularity of the training programmes, distribution of learners by regions and by educational fields or levels. In the long term perspective, it is planned that the ILAs system will become a portfolio-type tool for micro-credentials accumulation.

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[49] https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/e95ea5808e8611eea5a28c81c82193a8.

5. Referencing the LTQF to the EQF

The main goal of the referencing process is to relate national qualifications systems with the EQF in such a way that the EQF could be used as a communication tool for comparing and recognising qualifications provided in different countries. In order for the referencing process to proceed smoothly and for the referencing reports prepared by different countries to be comparable, in the EQF Recommendation ten referencing criteria and procedures have been outlined:

1. The responsibilities and/or legal competence of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process are clearly determined and published by the competent authorities.

2. There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications frameworks or systems and the level descriptors of the EQF.

3. The national qualifications frameworks or systems and their qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and related to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where appropriate, to credit systems.

4. The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualification system are transparent.

5. The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications frameworks or systems and are consistent with the principles on quality assurance as specified in Annex IV to this recommendation.

6. The referencing process shall include the stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies that the referencing report is consistent with the relevant national quality assurance arrangements, provisions and practice.

7. The referencing process shall involve international experts and the referencing reports shall contain the written statement of at least two international experts from two different countries on the referencing process.

8. The competent authority or authorities shall certify the referencing of the national qualifications frameworks or systems with the EQF. One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing, and the evidence supporting it, shall be published by the competent authorities, including the EQF National Coordination Points, and shall address separately each of the criteria. The same report can be used for self-certification to the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area, in accordance with the self-certification criteria of the latter.

9. Within 6 months from having referenced or updated the referencing report, Member States and other participating countries shall publish the referencing report and provide relevant information for comparison purposes on the relevant European portal.

10. Further to the referencing process, all newly issued documents related to qualifications that are part of the national qualifications frameworks or systems (e.g. certificates, diplomas, certificate supplements, diploma supplements) and/or qualification registers issued by the competent authorities should contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications frameworks or systems, to the appropriate EQF level.

Further in the chapter, information on how LTQF and its implementation comply with these criteria is provided.

5.1. Criterion 1

The responsibilities and/or legal competence of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process are clearly determined and published by the competent authorities.

The main institution that shapes the state policy in the field of education (qualifications system and recognition of competences, formal and non-formal education and educational assistance) and organises, coordinates and controls its implementation is the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (MESS).

The MESS has assigned the functions of the EQF NCP, as foreseen in the EQF Recommendation, to the Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre (QVETDC). The purpose of the QVETDC's activities is to develop VET and lifelong learning systems so that they respond to the needs of the economy and national and international initiatives. Its operational tasks include managing the Lithuanian qualifications system, improving the quality of VET, developing the adult education system and implementing VET and adult training participants' continuing professional development. The QVETDC also performs the functions of the Qualifications Management Authority defined in the Law on VET:

- It organises the preparation of sectoral qualification standards;
- It organises qualifications' evaluation and qualifications system formation;
- Together with sectoral professional committees and other institutions authorised by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, it organises external evaluation of VET institutions, conducts external evaluation of other VET providers and submits them to the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (from September 2023 to the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education) for accreditation;
- It determines the composition of sectoral professional committees and approves their work regulations.

The QVETDC is the main organizer of the LTQF and EQF referencing process. The responsibilities and functions of the QVETDC are governed by the regulations of the QVETDC, approved by the Order of the Minister of Education, Science and Sport.[50]

National institutions responsible for ensuring the quality of general education and higher education include the National Education Agency (NEA) and the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC). These have also been involved in the referencing process. The NEA is a state institution that participates in the implementation of the state policy of pre-primary, pre-school and general education. As an educational support institution, the NEA contributes to ensuring the quality of education by shaping educational content, coordinating its implementation and organising assessment of

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[50] Current version of QVETDC regulations: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/f55cb4608c2711ed8df094f359a60216.

students' achievements. The responsibilities and functions of the NEA are defined in the regulations of the NEA, approved by the Order of the Minister of Education, Science and Sport.[51]

The SKVC is a national institution that promotes quality assurance in higher education and evaluates and recognises foreign qualifications related to higher education. The activities of SKVC are regulated by the Law on Higher Education and Research (Article 22), and SKVC's regulations are approved by the Order of the Minister of Education, Science and Sport.[52] Paragraph 15 of the regulations establishes that the SKVC, in cooperation with the QVETDC, participates in the implementation of the LTQF according to its competence, as defined in the regulations. Since 2012, the SKVC has been a full member of the European Network of Higher Education Quality Agencies (ENQA) and has also been listed in the Register of European Higher Education Quality Agencies (EQAR).

More information about the activities of these institutions is provided in Section 2.8.

5.2. Criterion 2

There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications frameworks or systems and the level descriptors of the EQF.

5.2.1. Methodology for Comparison

Although no significant changes were introduced in the LTQF level descriptors after 2012, during the updating of the referencing report, it was decided to review the evidence of the links between the two frameworks.

Comparison of LTQF and EQF in 2011

When preparing the first referencing report and responding to the comments of the EQF Advisory Group of 13th December 2011 recommending for better transparency regarding the basis on which national levels are attributed to EQF levels, a detailed comparison of LTQF and EQF level descriptors was carried out. This demonstrated that, despite the different approaches used in defining LTQF and EQF levels, it could be sufficiently and reliably established to which of the EQF levels the qualifications with the assigned LTQF level can be referenced.

The methodology used for referencing LTQF to EQF included the following components:

1. General comparison of the frameworks, taking into consideration their mission, goals and the context of their application differences;

2. The assumption that, in the comparison of two frameworks, learning outcomes, defined in the EQF level descriptors in terms of knowledge, skills and competence, are the basis.

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[51] Current version of NEA regulations: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/52afe950df6311ed9978886e85107ab2.
[52] Current version of SKVC regulations: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/09280450abfa11e6b844f0f29024f5ac/asr.

Correspondence was established by conducting a comprehensive analysis of the LTQF and extracting knowledge, skills and competence statements from a corresponding LTQF level descriptor, then comparing these against the EQF level descriptors. When extracting knowledge, the aim was to describe the level of knowledge, its purpose and its range. When extracting skills, including both cognitive and practical skills, their level and range were described. When extracting competence, responsibility and autonomy, together with the requirements for learning to learn, were described. The latter was reflected within the LTQF by the variability of activity and its context;

3. Comparative analysis was intended to show which of the EQF levels each LTQF level should be attributed to. A match was identified by comparing the corresponding LTQF level descriptor with three contiguous EQF level descriptors. Analysis was performed in three stages:

    i. Assessing the extent to which requirements in each of the levels in comparison corresponded with regard to knowledge, skills and competence on an individual basis;
    ii. Establishing the degree of correspondence between the LTQF and the EQF levels by evaluating level descriptors as an integral unity of learning outcomes;
    iii. Identifying which EQF level the qualification at LTQF level concerned should be attributed to by applying the *best-fit* principle.

After performing a thorough comparison of LTQF and EQF level descriptors, it was underlined that, despite different principles being applied for the description of learning outcomes (in one case, they were described on the level of knowledge, skills and competence acquired, while in another case, descriptors were linked with the complexity, autonomy and variability in the activity for which the individual acquiring the qualification is ready), what hindered the detailed comparison of LTQF and EQF, it was possible to reliably establish a direct link between each of LTQF and EQF levels:

Graph 2. Links between LTQF and EQF

LTQF	EQF
8 →	8
7 →	7
6 →	6
5 →	5
4 →	4
3 →	3
2 →	2
1 →	1
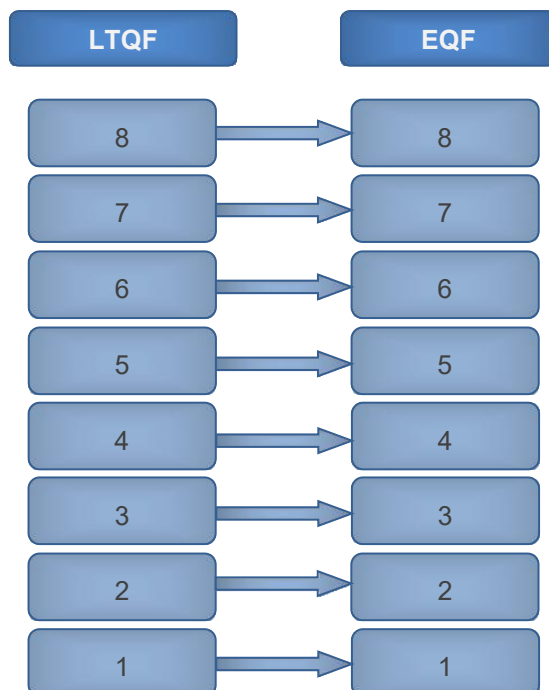
Revision of the LTQF and EQF comparison in 2023

The comparison of the LTQF and EQF level descriptors is based on the comparison presented above, which was carried out in 2011. When updating the referencing report:

- The general comparison of frameworks has been revised, taking into account changes in the EQF (the "competence" dimension has been changed to "responsibility and autonomy") (see Section 5.2.2);

- Comparative analysis of the LTQF and EQF level descriptors has been revised and updated (see Section 5.2.3):

    o In the LTQF level descriptors, the statements that characterise the dimensions of knowledge, skills, responsibility and autonomy have been distinguished;
    o A comprehensive analysis of the statements characterising the dimensions of knowledge, skills, responsibility and autonomy was carried out;
    o Description of the comparison of the qualification level descriptors was revised and updated.

Since the LTQF levels descriptors after 2012 have not fundamentally changed, the comparison of LTQF and EQF, established in the referencing report in 2012 (Graph 2), has remained valid until now.

5.2.2. LTQF and EQF: General Comparison of Frameworks

LTQF and EQF are composed of eight levels of qualifications, are based on learning outcomes (the concept of EQF learning outcomes in the LTQF corresponds not only to learning (study) outcomes but also to the term "competences") and include all qualifications of different educational sectors that can be acquired, both by learning and studying in an educational institution and by learning independently or through professional experience.

The main difference between LTQF and EQF is the choice of criteria for level descriptors. In EQF, learning outcomes are described using the criteria of knowledge, skills, responsibility and autonomy.[53] Meanwhile, in the case of the LTQF, the definition of qualification accentuates readiness for a certain activity. In developing the LTQF, the following activity-related criteria were chosen to describe qualification levels:

- *Complexity of activities* – a criterion used to describe the character of activities, the variety and complexity of tasks and the level of knowledge necessary for the performance of activities;

- *Autonomy of activities (autonomy of actor)* – a criterion used to describe changes in activity organisation and nature of subordination, as well as the degree of responsibility;

- *Variability of activities* – a criterion used to describe activities in terms of the changing technological and organisational environment.

After comparing the official LTQF level descriptors and comprehensive descriptors (which are based on the criteria of cognitive, functional and general competences), a number of connections between the criteria employed in the LTQF and the EQF were noted:

1. *Knowledge*. In the EQF, knowledge means "the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study. In the context of the EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual". This definition widely contextualises the concept of knowledge. In every LTQF level descriptor, knowledge characteristic to concrete qualification levels is explicated. In the LTQF concept and comprehensive LTQF level descriptors, cognitive competence is defined as the complex skills of applying knowledge in various professional activities and learning situations.

2. *Skills.* In the EQF, skills are perceived as the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. Skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments). In every LTQF level descriptor, skills characteristics are explicated. In the LTQF concept, cognitive skills are attributed to cognitive competences, while

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[53] The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23rd April 2008 on the Development of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning described learning outcomes in terms of the criteria of knowledge, skills and competences. In the updated Recommendation of 2017, the criterion of "competence" has been reformulated as "responsibility and autonomy", without changing the level descriptors.

practical skills fall under functional competences, which define the skills required to perform certain tasks, operations and functions of professional activities.

3. *Responsibility and autonomy*. In the EQF context, "responsibility and autonomy" means the ability of the learner to apply knowledge and skills autonomously and with responsibility. In LTQF, the level of responsibility is reflected in the criterion of complexity of activities, whereas for autonomy of activities, a separate criterion is dedicated.

4. *Competence*. In EQF, competence means the "proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development". This, in principle, is in line with the concept of competence used in LTQF (*the ability to perform a certain activity on the basis of the entirety of acquired knowledge, abilities, skills and attitudes*). The 2008 EQF recommendation emphasised that in the context of the EQF, "competence" is defined by assessing responsibility and autonomy. In 2017, after reviewing the recommendation and renaming the criterion of the level descriptor "competence" to "responsibility and autonomy", the relationship between the concept of competence and the criteria of "knowledge", "skills" and "responsibility and autonomy" became clearer and, thus, the concepts of competence in EQF and LTQF became even more transparent and comparable.

5. *The criteria used in the definition of qualification levels in EQF and LTQF.* As depicted in Table 6 below, professional improvement and growth have different manifestations (the complexity and range of knowledge and understanding, the complexity of practical application and the range of field, the degree of relevant assistance and instructions, the degree of relevant integrity, autonomy and creativity, the degree of transparency and dynamics of circumstances) that are closely related to the criteria of activities, applied in the definition of the qualifications levels of the LTQF.

Table 6. Criteria used for designing EQF and LTQF

Criteria of professional improvement and growth in the EQF level framework	Criteria of activities applied in the description of qualifications levels in the LTQF
The complexity and range of knowledge and understanding	The complexity of activities
The complexity of practical application and the range of field	
The degree of relevant assistance and instructions	Autonomy of activities
The degree of relevant integrity, autonomy and creativity	
The degree of transparency and dynamics of circumstances	The variability of activities

Based on the European Commission (2008). Explanation of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning: http://ec.europa.eu/education/pub/pdf/general/eqf/broch_lt.pdf

5.2.3. Comparison of the LTQF and the EQF Level Descriptors

LTQF level 1

LTQF level 1 descriptor	EQF level 1 descriptor
The qualification is intended for activities consisting of one or several simple specialised actions or operations. The activities require the ability to apply basic knowledge characteristic of the activities performed. The environment of the activities is clear, the activities are performed in line with detailed instructions, some cases require intensive supervision and guidance. The situations, actions and operations constituting the activities are regular and constantly repetitive.	**Knowledge** Basic general knowledge **Skills** Basic skills required to carry out simple tasks. **Responsibility and autonomy** Work or study under direct supervision in a structured context.

Both EQF and LTQF use the term "basic knowledge" to describe the level of knowledge for level 1 qualifications. In the LTQF, it is indicated that activities for which a person who has obtained the level 1 qualification is ready for consist of one or more simple actions or operations. According to the EQF, qualifications at this level are only intended for simple tasks. Thus, both structures provide for relatively simple operations.

The level of responsibility and autonomy expected in both structures is similar: in both cases, it is indicated that supervision is required (in LTQF, in some cases, this may be intensive), and it is the provision of LTQF that the activity is performed according to detailed instructions and in a clear environment, which corresponds to the EQF provision that the person is ready to work in a structured context.

LTQF level 2

LTQF level 2 descriptor	EQF level 2 descriptor
The qualification covers the activities consisting of actions and operations intended to solve simple problems. The activities performed require the application of the main factual knowledge characteristic of the activities. The activities performed require supervision and guidance. The activities and operations constituting the activities are regular.	**Knowledge** Basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study. **Skills** Basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools. **Responsibility and autonomy** Work or study under supervision with some autonomy.

In both frameworks, at level 2, there is a shift from simple task execution to simple, routine problem solving. The comparison of knowledge requirements in the LTQF and the EQF level descriptors exhibit good correspondence between the two. In both cases, the need for basic factual knowledge in the field of the activities being performed is stressed. The use of the word "factual" is namely an indicator of a new level of knowledge: boundaries of basic knowledge are expanded to some specific knowledge characteristics of the activities performed.

Both LTQF and EQF descriptors mention cognitive and practical skills. The LTQF directly states that the qualification requires the application of basic factual knowledge characteristic to the activities, and practical skills are required to carry out actions and operations, with the intention being to solve simple problems. Meanwhile, the EQF skill requirements are presented in a more general sense. The descriptor indicates general cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools.

Both frameworks foresee that an individual holding a level 2 qualification performs work with the supervision of another person; however, as regards requirements for responsibility and autonomy, it must be admitted that, in the case of EQF, higher requirements may be envisaged as opposed to LTQF. In fact, EQF points out that, despite supervision, a person may work with some autonomy, while the LTQF makes no reference to autonomy. However, compared to level 1 qualifications, level 2 has a greater degree of responsibility and autonomy, since level 1 states that "the activities are performed in line with detailed instructions".

LTQF level 3

LTQF level 3 descriptor	EQF level 3 descriptor
The qualification is intended for activities consisting of actions and operations in narrow areas of activities. The activities may include several or more specialized activity tasks that require the application of well-known and tested solutions. Performance of the activities involves the ability to apply the knowledge characteristic of the activities performed pertaining to the facts, principles and processes of the activity area. The activities are carried out autonomously or under the guidance of an employee with a higher-level qualification and subject to external performance quality control. The activity environment may require the ability to adapt to simple context changes.	**Knowledge** Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study. **Skills** A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information. **Responsibility and autonomy** Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study; adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems.

Compared to level 2, level 3 qualifications are not restricted to simple problem solution. In this case, an activity may cover several specialised activity tasks, related to different areas of activity. Basic cognitive and practical skills are no longer sufficient and a full range of cognitive and practical skills, as well as autonomous activity and responsibility for the completion of tasks, are required. These learning outcome requirements place level 3 qualifications above level 2.

Both frameworks indicate knowledge of the facts, principles and processes of the activity area. In addition, EQF mentions knowledge of the general concepts in a field of work or study. In the case of LTQF, it can be inferred that the requirement for performing activities autonomously and for adjusting to simple context changes pertains to the knowledge of general concepts in the activity area.

What regards requirements for skills, two aspects must be mentioned. First, the EQF refers to the range of cognitive and practical skills that enable an individual to accomplish tasks and solve problems, thus underscoring the abundance of skills. In the LTQF, this is done by stating that "activities may include several or more tasks", and solving problems is already reflected in the level 2 descriptor. Second, activity tasks mentioned in the LTQF, and tasks and problems indicated in the EQF, are of similar complexity. The tasks mentioned in the LTQF require the ability of applying well-known and tested solutions, whereas the EQF points out the requirement to be able to complete tasks and solve problems by applying basic methods.

Comparison of responsibility and autonomy descriptors shows that the EQF refers to responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study; meanwhile, the LTQF refers to carrying out activities autonomously. The LTQF provides that, in some cases, activity may be implemented under the guidance of an employee with a higher-level qualification and under external performance quality control (however, this does not eliminate autonomy and responsibility). Requirements to "adapt to simple context changes" (LTQF) should be also viewed in reference to autonomy, corresponding to the requirement of EQF of solving problems by "adapting own behaviour to circumstances".

LTQF level 4

LTQF level 4 descriptor	EQF level 4 descriptor
The qualification is intended for activities consisting of actions and operations in relatively broad areas of activity. The activities are performed by carrying out several or more specialised activity tasks, solutions to which are not always tested or known. Performance of the activities involves the ability to apply factual and theoretical knowledge characteristic of a broad context related to the activity areas.	**Knowledge** Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study.
The activities are performed autonomously, assuming the responsibility for the quality of the procedures and outcomes of performance. With the acquisition of professional experience of set duration, the qualification allows the transfer of practical skills to the staff with lower-level qualifications as well as supervision of their activities.	**Skills** A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study.
The activity environment requires the ability to adapt to the developments predetermined by the context change, which is normally foreseeable.	**Responsibility and autonomy** Exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change; supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities.

With a broad range of activity contexts and with possible changes in the environment, the requirement for a strong theoretical background of knowledge acquired and the readiness to supervise the activity of others position this qualification level hierarchically above level 3.

In both frameworks, the knowledge requirements are almost identical, comprising factual and theoretical knowledge of a broad context. The LTQF level descriptor provides more information about the possible context for the activity.

Skill requirements in EQF level 4, just like in level 3, provide for the acquisition of a range of cognitive and practical skills. However, in level 3, the skills are designated to "accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information," while level 4 determines the use of such skills to "generate solutions to specific problems". This new skill requirement is introduced in the LTQF by indicating that activities cover "several or more specialised activity tasks, solutions to which are not always tested or known", thus highlighting the specificity of the activity and the necessity of being ready for innovations.

Autonomy and responsibility requirements are defined in the EQF by exercising self-management and the ability to supervise the routine work of others. Both frameworks are almost identical in regard to self-management. However, requirements slightly diverge on the second aspect. The EQF specifies that an individual with this level qualification should be ready to "supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities". Since the LTQF points not only to the supervision of routine work of others but also to more generic supervision of others' activities as well as the transfer of practical skills to others, the requirement to first acquire experience is foreseen (i.e. a person will be ready for this after acquiring professional experience).

LTQF level 5

LTQF level 5 descriptor	EQF level 5 descriptor
The qualification is intended for activities distinguished by integrated coordination of activity tasks in different activity areas. The activities include the evaluation of the competences of lower-qualification employees and training thereof. The activities require coordination of comprehensive knowledge of the activity area with general knowledge in dealing with various specialised activity tasks in several different activity areas. The employee performs the activities independently and is supervised only as regards the evaluation of results. The activity tasks are set by an employee with a higher-level qualification, who frequently grants the employee performing the activities the discretion as to the choice of methods and measures to complete the tasks. The employee supervises the activities of lower-qualification staff, plans and assigns activity tasks, oversees the performance of the activities, provides consulting and verifies the performance quality. The technological and organisational requirements of the activities as well as their environment are constantly changing, the changes are often unforeseeable and may be related to new areas of activity.	**Knowledge** Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge. **Skills** A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems. **Responsibility and autonomy** Exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change; review and develop performance of self and others.

First and foremost, the difference in EQF level 5 from level 4 is determined by the fact that, while acquiring this level qualification, comprehensive specialised knowledge and the ability to distinguish the boundaries of that knowledge is attained. Moreover, a broad range of skills enables creative problem solving, and the individual must be prepared to exercise management over others while reviewing and developing their own performance.

Both frameworks indicate specialised and comprehensive knowledge linked with the activity area. In addition, EQF requires an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge. The LTQF has no direct indications to such requirements, although this is suggested by implications that an individual must learn to coordinate activity tasks and to coordinate knowledge of the activity area with general knowledge.

The fact that an individual who acquires LTQF level 5 qualification will gain a broad range of cognitive and practical skills is testified by the LTQF requirement to be ready to deal "with various specialised activity tasks in several different activity areas". From this point of view, skill requirements in both frameworks may be considered similar. EQF references the skills of developing creative solutions to abstract problems, which may also be inferred from the activity descriptors in the LTQF, e.g. integrated coordination of activity tasks in different activity areas; changes in the activities and their environment are often unforeseeable and may be related to new areas of activity. While the EQF underscores the solution of abstract problems, the LTQF is focused on practice. At the same time, it is stressed that knowledge

from the activity area is coordinated with general knowledge (which enables the solution of abstract problems).

With regard to responsibility and autonomy requirements, both frameworks are aligned: they highlight the importance of management and supervision of others in an environment that is subject to unpredictable changes, reviewing and developing the performance of oneself and others. Nonetheless, some small variations may be observed. For instance, LTQF notes that "activity tasks are set by an employee with a higher-level qualification" with the individual retaining the discretion as to the choice of methods and measures to complete the tasks. LTQF also points out that activity covers the training of employees with lower-level qualifications and assessment of competences acquired. No such requirement is incorporated in the EQF.

LTQF level 6

LTQF level 6 descriptor	EQF level 6 descriptor
The qualification is intended for complex activities distinguished by a variety of tasks and their content. Different means and methods are employed when dealing with problems in various areas of professional activities. Therefore, the performance of activities requires the application of broad theoretical knowledge based on the results of new fundamental and applied research or necessary for the introduction of various innovations. Activities are performed independently, selecting the methods for task completion and organising the work of the respective staff for the completion of the set tasks. Thus, the qualifications in this level include the ability to plan activities with respect to the set tasks, to analyse and record the activity results and to submit reports to activity coordinators, to modify activities based on the activity result analysis and specialist recommendations, and to carry out different project activities. The activity environment requires the ability to adapt to constant and usually unpredictable changes predetermined by the progress of knowledge and technologies in a specific professional sphere. The qualification allows the enhancement and extension of professional knowledge and, following the self-assessment of the activities, enables independent learning (development of cognitive competences) as required by the changing professional activities.	**Knowledge** Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles. **Skills** Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study. **Responsibility and autonomy** Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts; take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups.

Two features are used for defining the level of knowledge in the EQF. First, the knowledge must be advanced, and second, it should not be limited to facts but rather include a critical understanding of theories and principles. In the LTQF, innovative knowledge is very clearly highlighted by stating that it

must be built on the results of new fundamental and applied research. The ability to critically judge knowledge attained is testified by the nature of the anticipated activity. For instance, individuals are supposed to analyse the activity results and modify their activities accordingly in order to adapt to constant and normally unpredictable changes.

In both frameworks, skill requirements are defined by the complexity of activity and unpredictability. The LTQF describes complexity through the variety of tasks and their contents, as well as the means and methods used to solve them, while unpredictability is linked with the progress in knowledge and technologies. Meanwhile, advanced skills that demonstrate mastery and innovation, as stated in the EQF, are represented in the LTQF by the ability to apply broad theoretical knowledge based on the results of new research, to plan one's own activities, to analyse the results and to modify activities based on the activity results analysis, etc.

Regarding responsibility and autonomy, the EQF requires individuals to implement complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts. Such requirements are also reflected in sufficient detail in the LTQF. The LTQF level 6 descriptor states that anticipated activities are complex, that the work environment requires the ability to adapt to constant and usually unpredictable changes, independently select task completion methods and implement different project activities, etc. Responsibility for decisions is demonstrated by the ability to plan activities with respect to set tasks, analyse and record the activity results, submit reports to activity coordinators and modify activities based on activity result analysis and specialist recommendations. EQF requirement of taking responsibility for managing the professional development of individuals and groups is not directly reflected in the descriptor of LTQF level 6; however, it should be noted that the LTQF level 5 already featured a reference to the training of lower-qualification employees and evaluation of their competence.

LTQF level 7

LTQF level 7 descriptor	EQF level 7 descriptor
The qualification is intended for complex activities consisting of various interconnected tasks that may cover several related professional activities. Therefore, the performance of activities requires expert evaluation and application of the latest knowledge of the professional activities and similar or related areas, discovery of new facts in conducting applied research into the professional activities, and creative application of theoretical knowledge and the latest research results. The activities are performed by means of independent setting of the tasks in the respective activity area and taking independent decisions aimed at activity enhancement and improvement. A peculiar characteristic of the activities is the supervision of other employees' activities. Thus, the qualifications of this level cover the abilities to independently carry out applied research, provide consulting in the activity area, coordinate projects aimed at the improvement of the qualifications of others as well as introduction of innovations, and to analyse and present the activity results. Due to the advancement of the knowledge, technology and labour organisation in various activity areas, the activities of this level and their environment undergo intense changes, the developments are difficult to predict, and the activities consist of constantly changing combinations of tasks. Thus, the activity changes require the ability to adopt innovative solutions based on research results as well as the evaluation of alternative solutions and possible social and ethical consequences of the activities.	**Knowledge** Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research; critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields. **Skills** Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields. **Responsibility and autonomy** Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches; take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams.

Two requirements define knowledge at this level in the EQF. First, it is highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research. Second, the EQF insists that an individual with EQF level 7 qualification must develop a critical assessment of knowledge in a field and at the interface between different fields. The LTQF includes no reference to knowledge specialisation, but it does point out that the performance of an anticipated activity requires expert evaluation, application of the latest knowledge and the discovery of new facts in conducting applied research. Expert evaluation of knowledge, stressed in the LTQF, corresponds to the requirement of critical awareness of knowledge.

Comparison of requirements for skills displays a sufficient level of correspondence between the LTQF and EQF. The specialised problem-solving skills to perform scientific research and introduce innovations as specified in the EQF are clearly indicated in the LTQF, underlining that they are used not only to obtain new knowledge but also to discover new facts, introduce innovations, solve interconnected

tasks, etc. However, EQF mentions scientific research performance skills, whereas LTQF focuses on scientific research application and applied research skills.

Two new features are used to describe responsibility and autonomy in the EQF: the ability to manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex and unpredictable and taking responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice. In both cases, it is stated that strategic thinking and acting must be developed. The LTQF puts forward equivalent requirements for responsibility and autonomy. First, it is stated that an individual with this level of qualification shall be ready to adopt research-based innovative solutions under intense unpredictable changes in activity and environment and evaluate alternative solution options. Second, individuals must be able to evaluate the possible social and ethical consequences of activities, and this presupposes responsibility for one's own activity. The LTQF mentions supervision of the activity of others, which is not directly understood as the management of task group as highlighted already in the descriptor of level 5 qualifications, but rather as the responsibility for changes made in the contents of activity strategy of the managed group.

LTQF level 8

LTQF level 8 descriptor	EQF level 8 descriptor
The qualification is intended for activities of exceptional complexity, distinguished by the development of new knowledge, ideas, technologies as well as work practices, methods and processes. Consequently, the activity demands the discovery of new knowledge in the activity areas on the basis of fundamental and applied research findings, integrating knowledge in different activity areas. The activities are characterised by strategic activity objectives that may cover several different activity areas or research subjects.	**Knowledge** Knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields.
The activities are strategically planned by assuming the responsibility for the results and quality of other employees' activities and independent strategically important decision-making. The training and consulting of the specialists in the respective activity area is another characteristic. Thus, it is necessary to have the ability to adopt strategic decisions of public significance, to independently plan and conduct fundamental and/or applied research, to transfer the latest knowledge (to share know-how) to specialists in the respective area and to coordinate scientific and applied research projects.	**Skills** The most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice.
Intense and unpredictable changes in the activities and their environment require readiness for constant developments, openness to innovation, a positive attitude towards the development of the organisation and society, the ability to address issues originally in the light of their context and the ability to initiate and make changes in various areas of activity and public life.	**Responsibility and autonomy** Demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research

This is the highest level of qualifications in both frameworks. Its main distinctive feature, as opposed to level 7, is the development of new knowledge, processes and work practices. Naturally, this is possible only by acquiring the most advanced knowledge in a given field of the activity and at the interface between related fields, perfectly mastering the highest levels of cognition, namely synthesis and evaluation, learning to apply the latest methods of analysis in research and innovations. It is also obvious that an individual who has acquired this level of qualification demonstrates substantial authority, is able to employ innovation and autonomy, displays scholarly and professional integrity, etc. This is why the key learning outcome descriptors within the LTQF and the EQF match, and each of the requirements defined in the EQF can be referenced to a corresponding requirement in the LTQF.

5.3. Criterion 3

The national qualifications frameworks or systems and their qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and related to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where appropriate, to credit systems.

5.3.1. LTQF and Learning Outcomes

The learning outcomes paradigm is implemented at all levels of education. In Lithuania, both concepts, competence and learning outcomes are used to a varying degree in all education sectors. Thus, for the purpose of this report, it is considered that learning outcomes approach in the context of EQF recommendation, incorporates both, the concept of competence and the concept of learning (study) outcomes. The term of competence is used in general education and VET sector with key and professional competences development being the target of educational processes. In higher education sector the main term is learning (study) outcomes (*studijų rezultatai*). The LTQF is defined as a system of qualifications, based on competences, required for a person's activity. In the LTQF, the eight qualification levels are described through broad statements about a person's competence, guided by three criteria characterising activity: complexity, autonomy and variability of the activity. Moreover, comprehensive LTQF level descriptors have been prepared for the stakeholders, in which each performance criterion of the LTQF qualification level (complexity, autonomy, variability) is detailed by cognitive, functional and general competences (see Annex 2).

The learning outcomes to be achieved in the general programmes of *general education* are described (1) through competences development learning outcomes, which specify how competences will be developed in the subject, and (2) through the learning outcomes of the thematic area defined for a specific programme. Indicators of attainment levels are formulated for each thematic area of learning outcomes and the associated learning outcomes. After reviewing and updating the general education curricula, seven key competences were agreed upon ((1) cognitive competence, (2) communication

competence, (3) cultural competence, (4) creativity competence, (5) citizenship competence, (6) digital competence, and (7) social, emotional and healthy lifestyle competence) that are developed through all subjects. For more details about learning outcomes in general education curricula please see Section 4.1.1.

The formal **VET programmes** ranging from LTQF level 2 to level 5 are standardised and prepared at the national level, giving VET institutions the opportunity to adapt them to the local needs and the needs of their students. After a learner successfully achieves the learning outcomes specified in the programme, a qualification is awarded that is named and described in the sectoral qualification standard (only VET programmes for qualifications that are named and described in the sectoral qualification standards are implemented).

For experts designing formal VET programmes, the qualification's competences and their boundaries specified in the sectoral qualification standard are the essential information from which they directly derive the competences acquired in the programme and the learning outcomes illustrating the achievement of these competences. Programme modules typically correspond to qualification units and are intended to acquire the competences that constitute them up. Thus, learning outcomes of formal VET programmes are derived from the sectoral qualification standards, linked to the LTQF through the description of competences of the qualifications within them (more detailed information is provided in Section 4.2.2). This principle of qualification formation ensures the development of the learning outcomes approach and modularisation of VET programmes.

Learning outcomes are the key aspects for the achievement of which a qualification is awarded. In the course of the modules and at their end, it is evaluated as to whether learners have achieved the intended learning outcomes. At the end of the programme, learning outcomes are evaluated by solving a computerised theoretical test to evaluate all competences foreseen under the qualification and performing practical tasks to evaluate at least two competences under the qualification. During the recognition of competences acquired though non-formal and informal learning, it is evaluated whether the person can demonstrate the competences expressed in learning outcomes.

Learning outcomes are integrated into quality assurance processes for assessing the performance of VET providers. The share of evaluated students whose assessment of acquired competences is "good" (8 points), "very good" (9 points), or "excellent" (10 points) is one of the five VET providers' external evaluation indicators published in the EMIS and updated annually. Training and learning outcomes are a third area of external evaluation of the performance of VET providers. Information about competences achieved is indicated in VET diplomas and the modules' completion certificates as well as in Europass certificate supplements accessible on AIKOS under VET programme information.

In **higher education**, the introduction of the concept of learning outcomes was encouraged by national processes and the development of EHEA. The main initiatives that enabled and shaped the implementation of learning outcomes are:

- Implementation of the provisions of EHEA, in particular the Dublin Descriptors (describing the level of knowledge, understanding and skills of graduates from different study cycles prepared as part of the Bologna process);

- Transition to the ECTS credits in higher education (implementation started in 2009, and formally in use since 2011);

- Implementation of the LTQF.

The implementation of the aforementioned tools has resulted in a change where the expectations of qualifications based on learning outcomes has been transferred into institutional practices.[54] Changes in the regulatory framework have made this expectation mandatory.

Study programmes have been undergoing gradual revision since 2009. Currently the concept of learning outcomes is one of the cornerstones of higher education. All study programmes from LTQF level 5 to level 7 are based on learning outcomes. The concept of learning outcomes is one of the fundamental paradigms shaping higher education and this is reflected in the Law on Higher Education and Research and other legislation.

Some of the key elements in higher education are associated with the concept of learning outcomes:

- A study credit is defined as the student workload required to achieve learning outcomes;

- A study field is defined as an academic, professional and research field that is united by a common concept, learning outcomes and methods for their achievement;

- A study programme is defined as the totality of the implementation of studies within a specific study field(s) in higher education and its descriptor, which stipulates the learning outcomes and the curriculum, learning activities, methods, tools, human and other resources necessary to achieve them;

- Assessment is directly related to the evaluation of the achieved learning outcomes.

Alignment of study programmes leading to the award of qualifications **with relevant learning outcomes** is provisioned in the Law on Higher Education and Research:

- All programmes should be aligned with the learning outcomes in the study field descriptors (programmes of LTQF level 5 should also be aligned with sectoral qualification standards). For more details on the Study Cycle Descriptor and study field descriptors, please refer to Section 4.3.1.

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[54] For example, a national project initiated and coordinated by Vilnius University between September 2009 and February 2012, "Preparation of the national concept of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS): credits harmonization and development and implementation of the methodology of study programmes based on learning outcomes" played an important role in the implementation of ECTS. A quarter of Lithuanian higher education schools participated in the implementation of this project. During the ECTS project, the applicability of the ECTS methodology was tested in several study fields, individual study cycles and different programme profiles.

Learning outcomes are **integrated into quality assurance procedures** aimed at programme evaluation:

- One of the seven evaluation areas in the accreditation of study fields is *Aims, learning outcomes and curriculum* (more detailed information is provided in Section 4.3.3).

Learning outcomes are among the most important elements **in providing information about qualifications** to the public and other stakeholders groups:

- The AIKOS portal[55], which is publicly available to potential students, employers and society in general, provides information on the study programmes, including the level, the learning outcomes, and the qualification to be awarded.

- Study certificates and bilingual Diploma Supplements, which are automatically delivered together with higher education diplomas, provide information about the learning outcomes achieved with the acquired qualification.

Learning outcomes are the main **object and reference point in recognition**:

- The order of the MESS regulating the recognition of periods of study[56] provisions that periods of study are recognised by a higher education institution when the outcomes of partial studies in higher education institutions are recognised if the achieved learning outcomes are comparable.

- When it comes to recognition of foreign qualifications[57], learning outcomes is one of the recognition criteria (the others are level, contents, profile, workload and quality).

Thus, learning outcomes are firmly integrated into Lithuanian higher education with some of the key elements of the higher education system being directly related to them, such as credit, quality assurance, etc. Learning outcomes are among the main elements of information communicated to the public about qualifications. Study programmes could not be offered and comply with legal requirements if they were not based on learning outcomes. As a result, all programmes are based on learning outcomes.

5.3.2. Evaluation and Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

The possibility to evaluate and recognise the learning outcomes obtained through non-formal and informal learning is legalised in laws regulating education. By-laws describe the procedures of how evaluation and recognition should be carried out. The LTQF Description indicates that qualifications of all levels can be acquired not only in the formal education system but also through non-formal or informal learning and professional experience.

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[55] Information about qualifications registered in the RSTPQ:
https://www.aikos.smm.lt/Registrai/Kvalifikacijos/SitePages/Pagrindinis.aspx?ss=c7464900-c1cc-4093-b464-d47757316369.
[56] Description of the Procedure for Recognising the Outcomes of Partial Studies in Higher Education Institutions:
https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/e545c490d7a211eaabd5b5599dd4eebe.
[57] Description of the Procedure for Recognising Education and Qualifications related to Higher Education and Acquired according to the Education Programmes of Foreign Countries and International Organisations:
https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.0DEDE1A7E942.

In **VET**, after sectoral qualification standards have been developed, national-level requirements for learning outcomes (competences) for acquiring the relevant qualification are determined. A person is awarded a qualification after assessing all of the competences required for the qualification, indicated in the VET programme prepared according to the sectoral qualification standard. Recognition is facilitated by the fact that programmes are developed on the basis of competences and learning outcomes. The final assessment of competences (during theoretical and practical exam) is carried out by VET providers who have a licence for the VET programme.

For the organisation and implementation of the competences' assessment process, selected VET providers have been nominated. They have qualified staff to prepare and update competence evaluation tasks (assignments), to consult assessors of the practical examination, and the necessary technical equipment and tools or an access to a real workplace where the evaluation of practical skills can be carried out (more information provided in Section 4.2.4).

The assessment and recognition of individual competences, at the person's request, can be carried out in a VET institution in accordance with its institutional procedures, usually by a commission of vocational teachers (sometimes, this may include both vocational teachers and social partners), to which the person seeking a competences recognition demonstrates a portfolio of his/her documented knowledge and skills. In the case of a positive assessment of competences for the specific qualification, the person is issued a certificate recognised by the state.

Persons who wish to participate in the assessment of competences acquired through work experience, non-formal or informal learning and to obtain a VET diploma certifying a qualification must address the nominated VET provider and submit a request along with a copy of personal identity document, documents certifying his/her learning outcomes and professional experience related to the competences to be recognised and documents confirming the recognition of competences. The qualification and the VET diploma certifying it are granted to a person after passing the theory examination (knowledge assessment test) and receiving a positive assessment of practical skills.[58]

In **higher education**, recognition of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning is carried out by higher education institutions. The main principles reflecting the Council's Recommendation of 20th December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning are regulated at the national level by the Order No. V-289 of the Minister of Education and Science, dated 24th April 2017, "On Approval of the General Principles of Assessment and Recognition of Competences Acquired through Non-Formal and Informal Learning Related to Higher Education in Higher Education Institutions".[59]

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[58] Due to the lack of systematically collected data, it is difficult to estimate the extent to which the recognition of competences is used. Some information is provided by the Employment Authority, who financially supports competence recognition for the unemployed and those seeking employment. According to its data, in 2022, 181 persons have recognised their competences.

[59] General Principles of Assessment and Recognition of Competences Acquired through Non-formal and Informal Learning Related to Higher Education in Higher Education Institutions: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/b765dae028ca11e78397ae072f58c508.

The document outlines the possibility for higher education institutions:

- To carry out the assessment and recognition of acquired competences in accordance with the established general principles and according to the recommended stages;

- To evaluate the competences acquired in various contexts;

- To confirm the result of the process with a document indicating the number of study credits granted;

- To recognise study credits as part of the study programme which the person intends to study;

- The possibility for the applicant to appeal the decision at the higher education institution.

Recognition of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning by higher education institutions is also part of external quality assurance. The procedures and the implementation of recognition of prior learning is one of the indicators for the evaluation area *Student Admission and Support* within study field accreditation. Hence, the establishment and appropriate implementation of these procedures in higher education institutions is one of the basic expectations of the system. As a result, all higher education institutions have these processes in place. However, the overview of the results of quality assurance procedures demonstrates that the provision of information about the processes and opportunities of such recognition could be improved.

Thus, the system provides opportunities to recognise competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning. For now, the regulation only provides for granting credits that can be recognised in the relevant programme on the basis of such recognition; award of qualification or enrolment in the relevant programme after the recognition of such competences is not possible. Although all higher education institutions have recognition procedures, their implementation in practice could still be improved.

5.3.3. Credit Systems

Both, VET and HE programmes are expressed in credits, however, recognition of credits from other sector is performed on *ad hoc*, case by case, basis.

In **VET**, the concept of learning credits was legalised in 2015 by the Order No. V-232 of the Minister of Education and Science, dated 23rd March 2015, "On Amendment of Order No. V-1435 of the Minister of Education and Science, dated 27th August 2010, "On Approval of the Description of the Procedure for Preparation and Legalisation of Formal VET programmes." The legal act states that the volume of the modular programme is determined in credits - units of workload (learning outcomes and time for learning). One learning credit is equal to 27 hours (contact and non-contact learning hours); one academic year usually corresponds to 60 learning credits. Since then, there has been a shift to estimating programmes and their modules with learning credits (more explanation is provided in the Section 4.2.3). The volume of the formal initial VET programme cannot be less than 30 study credits or more than 110 learning credits (20-90 learning credits for continuing VET programmes).

In 2000, the Law of the Republic of Lithuania on **Higher Education** introduced the study credit term. Here, it is defined as a unit of measurement of study workload which is equal to 40 contractual hours of student work (in auditoriums, laboratories, independently, etc.), i.e. in the higher education sector, the measurement of study volume using credits has been applied for a long time.

Since 2009, the implementation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) began, in which credits were linked not only to the workload of studies but also to the learning outcomes. Since 2011, this credit has been applied universally. Moreover, since 1st September 2011, the rule that one study year corresponds to 60 credits has been followed.

The General Requirements for Conducting Studies[60] foresee that the principles of granting and accumulating credits must meet the provisions of the ECTS user guide. Their implementation is evaluated through external quality assurance processes. During the study field evaluation and accreditation processes, when assessing the compliance of the study field and cycle study programmes with the requirements of legal acts, the principles of establishing study credits are also considered, ensuring that they are set based on learning outcomes and student workload.

5.4. Criterion 4

The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualification system are transparent.

In the LTQF Description approved by the Government, the following paths for the acquisition of qualifications are indicated:

- Qualifications at levels 1-4 are acquired upon completing VET and/or general education programmes;

- Qualifications at level 5 are acquired upon completing training programmes for persons having a VET qualification professional experience of a fixed duration or short cycle study programmes;

- Qualifications at level 6 are acquired upon completing first cycle or professional study programmes;

- Qualifications at level 7 are acquired upon completing second cycle, integrated or professional study programmes;

- Level 8 qualifications are awarded upon completion of third cycle studies;

- Any level of qualification can be acquired through professional experience and independent studies.

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[60] General Requirements for Conducting Studies https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/739065a0ce9911e69e09f35d37acd719/asr.

In the context of Lithuania, the inclusion of individual qualifications in the national qualifications framework can be interpreted as the registration of the qualifications and the programmes provided in the RSTPQ. State-recognised documents certifying the acquisition of educational attainment levels and the qualification (diplomas, certificates of educational achievements, study certificates, etc.) are issued only after the completion of study and training programmes that provide the qualification registered in the RSTPQ. In the case of a doctorate - the diploma is awarded by institutions having the right for a doctorate (such rights are granted in a field of science).

In the RSTPQ, qualifications and the study and training programmes providing them are registered. The procedures for the inclusion of qualifications and study and training programmes in the RSTPQ are transparently described in the Description of the Procedure for Registration of Objects of the Register of Study, Training Programmes and Qualifications, approved by the Order No. V-1335 of the Minister of Education and Science, dated 23rd December 2015 (the previous procedure was approved by the Order No. V-1913, dated 29th October 2010). The controller of the RSTPQ is the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. The National Education Agency has been appointed as the manager of the RSTPQ.

Level 1-5 qualifications awarded in the VET system

The QVETDC assigns a state code to the LTQF level 1–5 qualifications, acquired according to VET programmes, and submits the qualification data to the NEA for registration. When preparing sectoral qualification standards and the qualification descriptors included within, the LTQF level descriptors and comprehensive level descriptors are the key documents for formulating the competences that constitute qualifications and their boundaries. All qualifications are referenced to the corresponding LTQF level. The experts designing the qualification propose to which LTQF level the qualification should be assigned, and this proposal is reviewed by QVETDC analysts. When endorsing qualification descriptors in sectoral professional committees the proposed LTQF qualification levels are reviewed and discussed.

The methodology for the preparation of the sectoral qualification standards (QVETDC, 2019) describes the procedures for determining and/or verifying the proposed qualification level (the 5th step of preparation of the qualification descriptor "Referencing of qualifications to LTQF and EQF levels") which qualification designers need to follow. The referencing of qualifications and qualification units to LTQF levels is carried out in the following stages:

- The information provided in the "Qualification description" part of the descriptor is analysed, and other collected information is evaluated (e.g. the tasks of the occupation);
- This information is compared with the essential threshold criteria presented in the LTQF level descriptors;
- Based on this comparison, the hypothetical level of qualification LTQF is determined;
- The statements of the competences and their boundaries that comprise the qualification unit are analysed, and essential keywords are distinguished, revealing the complexity of the activity, the autonomy of the performer of the activity and the variability of the activity;

- The statements of the competences that constitute the qualification unit are compared with the descriptors of the expected LTQF level and the levels adjacent to them in order to determine for which LTQF level this qualification unit is best suited;

- After evaluating and verifying the compliance of the content of the qualification unit, i.e. the competences and their boundaries, with the LTQF levels, a final decision is made on the LTQF level of the qualification.

VET programmes are prepared in accordance with sectoral qualification standards and the descriptors of qualifications included in them. The QVETDC coordinates the preparation of VET programmes. In the programme, competences are further described through learning outcomes, taking into account the LTQF level descriptors. Their compliance with the LTQF levels is supervised by QVETDC analysts responsible for coordinating the development of programmes. After the programme has been positively evaluated by external experts, the QVETDC then submits the data of the programme and its modules to the NEA for registration.

Level 5-8 qualifications awarded in higher education

All qualifications awarded in higher education across various study cycles—short cycle studies, Professional Bachelor, Bachelor, and Master—are aligned with the corresponding LTQF levels. The regulations governing this system take into account the level of qualification and the expectations associated with it. Generally, there is widespread agreement that the alignment of higher education qualifications with LTQF levels is well-established and accepted within society.

For the qualifications of LTQF level 5–8 obtained through higher education programmes, higher education institutions are responsible for developing and awarding these qualifications. In doing so, they are guided by the provisions of the Law on Higher Education and Research, the General Requirements for Conducting Studies and the descriptors of the LTQF levels, study cycles and study fields. The implementation of a study programme begins once the programme and/or the field of study in which it is offered is accredited and the programme is registered in the RSTPQ. SKVC provides information about the accredited programme to the NEA, which then assigns a state code to the programme and links it to the corresponding higher education qualification.

Despite the fact that each higher education institution designs its own study programmes, all qualifications conferred through these programs adhere to established standards and requirements relevant to their level and profile. For example, the Description of General Requirements for Conducting Studies specifies requirements based on the qualification cycle (level).

Compliance with legal requirements and alignment with the appropriate LTQF level and cycle are ensured through both internal and external quality assurance processes. External quality assurance processes applicable to study programmes encompass the ex ante accreditation of programmes and the accreditation of study fields. A program or study field must be properly accredited to be included in the RSTPQ and to be recognized as leading to a legitimate higher education qualification. Additional

information on the external quality assurance procedures and steps in the decision making is available in Section 4.3.3. Quality Assurance.

General education programmes and associations with LTQF

Immediately after the presentation of the first referencing report in 2012, consultations began with representatives of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport and the Education Development Centre (currently, NEA) regarding referencing general education learning outcomes to LTQF levels. In 2012–2014, events about LTQF and EQF were organised for the general education community; meetings of the QVETDC representatives were held with the working group drafting the Descriptor of Primary, Lower and Upper Secondary Education Programmes. In 2016, the Descriptor of Primary, Lower and Upper Secondary Education Programmes has been amended to include provisions regarding the referencing of learning outcomes of the general education programmes to the respective LTQF levels. This alignment was made on the basis of the analysis of the dimensions of the structure of students' competences, including attitudes, knowledge and understanding and skills (see Annex 6) and taking into account the structure of general education programmes.[61] The document outlines that the outcomes of the lower secondary education programmes are related to the LTQF level 3[62], and the outcomes of upper secondary education programmes are related to the LTQF level 4. In 2023, the description was extended to include the provision that the learning outcomes of the primary education programmes are related to the LTQF level 1.

In the general education sector, educational programmes are prepared at the national level according to the Descriptor of Primary, Lower and Upper Secondary Education Programmes.[63] In the preparation of general education programmes (i.e. general curriculum), the Descriptor of Competences Development (Annex 1 of the Descriptor of Primary, Lower and Upper Secondary Education Programmes) became a core document. It outlines definitions of competences, their dimensions and components, the description of development of competences, taking into account the characteristics of the cognitive and social development by the learner's age (in preschool education, grades 1-2, grades 3-4, grades 5-6, grades 7-8, grades 9-10 (gymnasium grades I-II) and gymnasium grades III-IV). The general programmes and the Descriptor of Competences Development have been prepared by expert

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[61] Primary education in Lithuania is carried out according to four-year primary education programmes. Lower secondary education is carried out according to six-year lower secondary education programmes. Its first part covers a four-year lower secondary education stage, and the second part - a two-year lower secondary education stage. Duration of upper secondary programme is two years.

[62] The programmes leading to the award of the lower secondary qualification in Lithuania consists of two parts. The first part is offered in pre-gymnasiums and basic schools, while for the second part the students attend gymnasiums, which are the schools that offer upper secondary education. The second part (the last two years) of lower secondary education is closely integrated with upper secondary education in terms of offering, curriculum, and outcomes. Thus, the outcomes of the second part of the lower secondary education demonstrate more complexity than outcomes traditionally associated with level 2 and are comparable to level 3. This is the reason why lower secondary education is placed on level 3 and the reason why the upper secondary education programme in Lithuania is shorter compared to other countries.

[63] General Programmes of Pre-primary, Primary, Lower and Upper Secondary Education: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/7165e2104baa11ee9de9e7e0fd363afc.

groups involving scholars and practitioners, and the LTQF Description was among the references for their preparation.

5.5. Criterion 5

The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications frameworks or systems and are consistent with the principles on quality assurance as specified in Annex IV to this recommendation.

In accordance with national circumstances and taking into account sectoral differences, quality assurance of qualifications with an EQF level should[64] [65]:

1. Address the design of qualifications as well as application of the learning outcomes approach;
2. Ensure valid and reliable assessment according to agreed and transparent learning outcome-based standards and address the process of certification;
3. Consist of feedback mechanisms and procedures for continuous improvement;
4. Involve all relevant stakeholders at all stages of the process;
5. Be composed of consistent evaluation methods, associating self-assessment and external review;
6. Be an integral part of the internal management, including sub-contracted activities, of bodies issuing qualifications with an EQF level;
7. Be based on clear and measurable objectives, standards, and guidelines;
8. Be supported by appropriate resources;
9. Include a regular review of existing external monitoring bodies or agencies, carrying out quality assurance;
10. Include the electronic accessibility of evaluation results.

Quality assurance policies and procedures cover all qualifications included in the LTQF and their formation and awarding processes. The Law on Education also emphasises that the qualifications system includes the development and implementation of processes related to quality assurance. The principles of quality assurance in general education, VET and higher education systems are described in Sections 4.1.4, 4.2.5 and 4.3.3. These comply with the principles of quality assurance as specified in Annex IV of the EQF Recommendation.

The content of qualifications acquired according to VET programmes is determined by sectoral qualification standards, the preparation and updating of which involve representatives of employers,

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[64] These common principles are fully compatible with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and with European Quality Assurance Reference Framework in VET (EQAVET).

[65] Depending on national circumstances, these principles may not apply to general education.

representatives of educational institutions and (sometimes) representatives of employees. The QVETDC coordinates the processes of preparing and updating the sectoral qualification standards. Sectoral qualification standards and descriptors of new qualifications are discussed in the sectoral professional committees, and only with their approval can the sectoral qualification standard or its renewal be approved by the order of the director of the QVETDC.

Qualifications are designed on the basis of the qualifications research, taking into account the needs of the labour market. When initiating a new qualification, it is always evaluated as to whether there are any qualifications with similar content already described in the sectoral qualification standards. The content of formal VET programmes intended for the acquisition of qualifications of levels 1–5 is formed based on sectoral qualification standards; external evaluation of prepared programmes is always carried out. Sectoral qualification standards also express expectations for short cycle study programmes (LTQF level 5), which, according to the Law on Higher Education and Research, must meet sectoral qualification standards. They are also one of the sources of information for preparing study field descriptors and higher education study programmes.

Study programmes are prepared on the basis of cycle descriptors and study field descriptors, in the preparation of which representatives of higher education institutions and employers must participate.

Pursuant to the Law on Education, the education provider and the institution implementing the owner's rights and responsibilities are responsible for the quality of education. The quality of formal education is ensured by the state; the quality of non-formal education, including the quality of education supplementing formal education, is partially ensured by the state. Quality assurance processes are in place at all levels of the Lithuanian education system and in all sectors; these combine and interconnect internal self-evaluation and external evaluation. External quality assurance evaluation is organised and carried out by three main institutions: SKVC (higher education with the exception of doctoral studies), QVETDC (VET) and NEA (general education and VET). These quality assurance agencies carry out regular evaluation of educational institutions and their programmes.

The areas of self-evaluation in general education schools and the methodology of quality self-evaluation are chosen by the school's council. It analyses the results of the self-evaluation, makes decisions on the improvement of activities and considers the annual activity report of the head of the educational institution. The external evaluation of the school is carried out periodically, initiated by the institution implementing the rights and duties of the school owner. The procedure for the organisation and implementation of the external evaluation of school activities implementing pre-school, pre-primary, general education and formal VET programmes is determined by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport.

The evaluation of the activities of the NEA is a part of strategic planning. The last organisation-wide evaluation of the NEA's activities took place in 2022, and the results were taken into account when preparing the "Strategic Guidelines for the National Education Agency" (2022). After the NEA reorganisation in 2023, the strategic guidelines have been updated with involvement of all organisation on the basis of review of the strategic objectives and analysis of the strengths and areas for improvement relevant to achieving these objectives.

VET quality assurance is secured by implementing internal quality assurance systems, chosen by VET providers, and external evaluation in line with the EQAVET provisions. The legal acts set that external evaluation of the performance of VET providers, taking into account the VET quality monitoring indicators, should be carried out at least once every five years.

The QVETDC regulations state that it is responsible for the appropriate and quality conduct of its functions and the achievement of its objectives and targets. Each year, the QVETDC reports on its activities to its founder, the MESS, and foresees the evaluation of its activities in its planning documents: the strategic plan and the annual action plans. Preparation of the strategic plan and annual action plans involves representatives of the units, who also report on activities and foresee the development of improvement measures. Quality assurance measures are set out in the internal control documents, which are updated each year. The QVETDC acts as the Quality Assurance National Reference Point for VET.

In higher education, quality assurance is based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and is carried out in accordance with the procedure established by the Law on Higher Education and Research. The conformity of the quality assurance system to the ESG is confirmed by the ENQA through regular external evaluations (every five years) of the SKVC as a quality agency.

SKVC evaluations took place in 2012, 2017 and 2022. During these, international expert groups evaluated the compliance of SKVC activities with the ESG. After the first evaluation in 2012, the SKVC became a full member of the European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (ENQA) and was included in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). Based on re-evaluations in 2017 and 2022, SKVC's membership in the ENQA and inclusion in the EQAR were extended for five years. Currently, SKVC membership in ENQA is active until December 2027.

The Law on Higher Education and Research also stipulates that the quality assurance of higher education institutions is based on the ESG. Quality assurance of research is based on the provisions of the European Research Area.

Thus, both external and internal quality assurance mechanisms in higher education are based on the ESG and must meet the above criteria:

- Quality assurance procedures take into account the development of qualifications based on learning outcomes;

- Evaluation is carried out based on ESG, i.e. credible, clear, pre-agreed and learning outcome-oriented standards; after assessment, the appropriate accreditation/licensing decisions are taken;

- External and internal quality assurance mechanisms include the provision of feedback and follow-up activities aimed at improving the performance of the higher education institution;

- Along with members of the academic community, key stakeholders and social partners are involved in both self-evaluation and evaluation processes (e.g. student and employer representatives are involved in external quality assurance procedures);

- Quality assurance procedures include a self-evaluation, an external evaluation (a visit and preparation of a report) and follow-up steps;

- All external quality assurance procedures, criteria and decision-making processes are clearly regulated, publicly available and consistently applied;

- Public funding is available for the application of external quality assurance procedures;

- The results of evaluations (both positive and negative) are publicly available on the websites of higher education institutions and the SKVC and are published in AIKOS (in case of study programme and study field accreditation) and the DEQAR database.

5.6. Criterion 6

The referencing process shall include the stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies that the referencing report is consistent with the relevant national quality assurance arrangements, provisions and practice.

This report, which confirms the referencing of the LTQF with the EQF, was approved by the following institutions:

- Qualifications and VET Development Centre (QVETDC);

- National Education Agency (NEA);

- Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC).

Representatives of these institutions participated in updating the referencing report. The results of the report were presented to the main departments of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport and discussed in consultation events with various institutions.

The stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies that the referencing report is consistent with the relevant national quality assurance arrangements, provisions and practice is provided in the Annex 8.

5.7. Criterion 7

> **The referencing process shall involve international experts and the referencing reports shall contain the written statement of at least two international experts from two different countries on the referencing process.**

Three international experts were involved in the referencing process:

1. Gunta Kinta (Latvia);
2. Stefan Sant (Malta);
3. Jenneke Lokhoff (the Netherlands).

In selecting the countries from which to invite international experts, it was decided that one expert would be invited from a Baltic country (Latvia was chosen), one from a country that is well advanced in the implementation of its national qualifications framework (the Netherlands was chosen) and one from a country that is in the process of updating the national qualifications framework and EQF referencing report (Malta was chosen).

The foreign experts communicated with experts assisting in the referencing process, got acquainted with the activities of the institutions responsible for quality assurance in Lithuania (MESS, QVETDC, NEA, SKVC) and with the updated referencing report and provided written comments (provided in Annex 9).

5.8. Criterion 8

> **The competent authority or authorities shall certify the referencing of the national qualifications frameworks or systems with the EQF. One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing, and the evidence supporting it, shall be published by the competent authorities, including the EQF National Coordination Points, and shall address separately each of the criteria. The same report can be used for self-certification to the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area, in accordance with the self-certification criteria of the latter.**

The preparation of the referencing report was coordinated by the QVETDC, which, according to its regulations, implements the functions of the EQF NCP in Lithuania.

The updated report on *Referencing the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area* covers all sectors of Lithuania's education system and provides harmonised answers to all the criteria for the referencing of the national qualifications framework to the EQF and the QF-EHEA. The report was prepared in accordance with the established procedures for referencing the national

qualifications framework to the EQF and the QF-EHEA. Chapter 6 of the report presents how the LTQF is compliant with the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA).

The information provided in the referencing report has been coordinated with the key stakeholders, including the Department of Education, the Department of Lifelong Learning and the Department of Studies, Science and Technology of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport.

5.9. Criterion 9

Within 6 months from having referenced or updated the referencing report, Member States and other participating countries shall publish the referencing report and provide relevant information for comparison purposes on the relevant European portal.

Information about the referencing process and electronic versions of the first and second referencing reports are published on the website dedicated to the LTQF at http://www.ltks.lt. Once the final version of this report has been agreed upon, the report will be published on the websites of organisations representing all sectors of the education system, on the Europass portal and the EHEA website (*www.ehea.info*).

5.10. Criterion 10

Further to the referencing process, all newly issued documents related to qualifications that are part of the national qualifications frameworks or systems (e.g. certificates, diplomas, certificate supplements, diploma supplements) and/or qualification registers issued by the competent authorities should contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications frameworks or systems, to the appropriate EQF level.

LTQF and EQF levels have been indicated in VET diplomas and certificates issued in Lithuania since 2012 and higher education diploma supplements and study certificates since 2016. From 2023, LTQF levels will be indicated in general education certificates. LTQF and EQF levels are indicated in the RSTPQ and in AIKOS (Open Information, Guidance and Counselling System).

6. Compliance of the LTQF with the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA)

At a meeting in Bergen in 2005, European ministers responsible for higher education adopted the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA), which can be used as an instrument to foster international comparability, transparency, recognition of higher education qualifications and student mobility. Simultaneously, European countries were invited to elaborate national qualifications frameworks and reference them to QF-EHEA. Since Lithuania had already started developing its national qualifications framework and integrating all educational sectors into a single system, a separate framework of higher education qualifications was not developed.

In referencing the LTQF to the QF-EHEA, as outlined below, criteria defined by the Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks in 2005 are considered. Further in the chapter, information on how LTQF and its implementation comply with criteria and procedures for verifying the compatibility of qualifications frameworks with the QF-EHEA is provided.

6.1. Compliance with the Criteria for Verifying the Compatibility of LTQF with the QF-EHEA

6.1.1. Criterion 1

The national framework of higher education qualifications and the body or bodies responsible for its development are designated by the national ministry with responsibility for higher education.

The LTQF covers all educational sectors, including general education, VET and higher education. Thus, it acts as a qualifications framework for higher education.

The LTQF Description and referencing of the qualifications to LTQF levels are approved by the Government, which exercises executive power in Lithuania, enforces the laws regulating education, approves strategic goals and progress objectives of the education policy, coordinates the activities of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (MESS), other ministries and institutions in matters of education.

MESS is responsible for all three aforementioned sectors by formulating the state education policy, organising, coordinating and controlling its implementation, etc.

SKVC, which is the higher education quality assurance agency, in cooperation with QVETDC, participates in the implementation of the LTQF in higher education according to its competence. This operational task is defined in the SKVC regulations, which the Minister of Education, Science and Sport approves.

More information about competent authorities is provided in Section 5.1 (EQF Criterion 1).

6.1.2. Criterion 2

There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications in the national framework and the cycle qualification descriptors of the QF-EHEA.

The cycle studies offered in Lithuania are modelled according to the QF-EHEA cycle system and encompass the following cycles and qualifications:

- Short cycle – LTQF level 5 qualification;

- First cycle – Professional Bachelor, Bachelor;

- Second cycle – Master;

- Third cycle – Doctor of Sciences, Doctor of Arts.

In order to ensure that the qualifications awarded at levels 5-8 correspond to the QF-EHEA level descriptors, a Study Cycle Descriptor (*Studijų pakopų aprašas*) [66] was developed. Aligned with the LTQF and the QF-EHEA, it further elaborates on LTQF level descriptors in order to highlight the learning outcomes associated not only with the professional activity (to which the LTQF level descriptors are primarily oriented), but also with the academic activity and its requirements.

The annexes of the document contain the learning outcomes for each type of qualifications awarded within specific cycles:

- Annex 2 of the document provides description of learning outcomes for the short cycle,

- Annex 3 for the first cycle (Professional Bachelor and Bachelor degrees),

- Annex 4 for the second cycle, and

- Annex 5 for the third study cycle.

The Study Cycle Descriptor serves as the basis for development of study field descriptors (*Studijų krypties aprašas)* and study programmes in Lithuanian higher education institutions. More information about the Study Cycle Descriptor is provided in Section 4.3.1.

The analysis of correspondence among LTQF levels, Lithuanian study cycles and QF-EHEA level descriptors below shows how the aspects related to continuation of studies (i.e. further studies) have been clarified.

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[66] Study Cycle Descriptor: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/775fbb90ac0711e6b844f0f29024f5ac/asr. English translation: https://www.skvc.lt/uploads/lawacts/docs/346_53c2f01ae1d71e0119694c2d9abf7a64.pdf.

LTQF level descriptors	Lithuanian Study Cycle Descriptor	QF-EHEA cycle descriptors
Short cycle		
The qualification is intended for activities distinguished by integrated coordination of activity tasks in different activity areas. The activities include the evaluation of the competences of lower-qualification employees and training thereof. The activities require coordination of comprehensive knowledge of the activity area with general knowledge in dealing with various specialised activity tasks in several different activity areas. The employee performs the activities independently and is supervised only as regards the evaluation of results. The activity tasks are set by an employee with a higher-level qualification, who frequently grants the employee performing the activities the discretion as to the choice of methods and measures to complete the tasks. The employee supervises the activities of lower-qualification staff, plans and assigns activity tasks, oversees the performance of the activities, provides consulting and verifies the performance quality. The technological and organisational requirements of the activities as well as their environment are constantly changing, the changes are often unforeseeable and may be related to new areas of activity.	Professional and general knowledge that provides practical knowledge of the field of activity and that can be applied to identify and solve specialised problems in the field of activity in a variety of contexts, as well as to pursue further studies in the first cycle of study. The ability to gather and use data necessary for solving clearly defined specific and abstract issues related to professional activity. The ability to plan, organize and implement practical activities in specific fields of professional activity by choosing technological, organizational and methodical means in an autonomous manner. The ability to communicate with professionals and customers when solving tasks related to professional activity. The ability to work individually and in teams. The ability to communicate the knowledge and comprehension of activity field to others, assume responsibility for the quality of their and subordinate employees' activity following the principles of professional ethics and citizenship. The ability to study in an autonomous manner in their professional activity field. Perceiving of moral responsibility for the impact of their activity and its results on public, economic and cultural development, wellbeing and environment.	Qualifications that signify completion of the higher education short cycle are awarded to students who: - have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon general secondary education and is typically at a level supported by advanced textbooks; such knowledge provides an underpinning for a field of work or vocation, personal development, and further studies to complete the first cycle; - can apply their knowledge and understanding in occupational contexts; - have the ability to identify and use data to formulate responses to well-defined concrete and abstract problems; - can communicate about their understanding, skills and activities, with peers, supervisors and clients; - have the learning skills to undertake further studies with some autonomy.
First cycle (Professional Bachelor)		
The qualification is intended for complex activities distinguished by a variety of tasks and their content.	Knowledge in professional activity providing practical knowledge of the activity field and based on the	Qualifications that signify completion of the first cycle are awarded to students who:

Different means and methods are employed when dealing with problems in various areas of professional activities. Therefore, the performance of activities requires the application of broad theoretical knowledge based on the results of new fundamental and applied research or necessary for the introduction of various innovations.

Activities are performed independently, selecting the methods for task completion and organising the work of the respective staff for the completion of the set tasks. Thus, the qualifications in this level include the ability to plan activities with respect to the set tasks, to analyse and record the activity results and to submit reports to activity coordinators, to modify activities based on the activity result analysis and specialist recommendations, and to carry out different project activities.

The activity environment requires the ability to adapt to constant and normally unpredictable changes predetermined by the progress of knowledge and technologies in a specific professional sphere. The qualification allows the enhancement and extension of professional knowledge and, following the self-assessment of the activities, enables independent learning (development of cognitive competences) as required by the changing professional activities.

newest scientific evidence which can be used for determining and solving complex specific or abstract issues related to the activity field.

The ability to gather and analyse data necessary for solving specific issues related to professional activity and innovation development.

The ability to plan, organize, implement and assess practical activities in specific fields of professional activity by choosing technological, organizational and methodical means in an autonomous manner.

The ability to communicate with professionals and other persons when solving tasks related to professional activity.

The responsibility for the quality of their and subordinate employees' activity following the principles of professional ethics and citizenship.

The ability to communicate the knowledge and comprehension of activity field to the learners.

The ability to study in an autonomous manner in their professional activity field. Perceiving of moral responsibility for the impact of their activity and its results on public, economic and cultural development, wellbeing and environment.

- have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that, whilst supported by advanced textbooks, includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study;

- can apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and have competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study;

- have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgments that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues;

- can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences;

- have developed those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy.

First cycle (Bachelor)

Different means and methods are employed when dealing with problems in various areas of professional activities. Therefore, the performance of activities requires the application of broad theoretical knowledge based on the results of new fundamental and applied research or necessary for the introduction of various

Integrated knowledge in professional activity and study field providing versatile theoretical knowledge of study field and professional activity based on the new fundamental and applied research results which can be used in extensive interdisciplinary fields of studies or professional

Qualifications that signify completion of the first cycle are awarded to students who:

- have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that, whilst supported by advanced textbooks,

innovations.

Activities are performed independently, selecting the methods for task completion and organising the work of the respective staff for the completion of the set tasks. Thus, the qualifications in this level include the ability to plan activities with respect to the set tasks, to analyse and record the activity results and to submit reports to activity coordinators, to modify activities based on the activity result analysis and specialist recommendations, and to carry out different project activities.

The activity environment requires the ability to adapt to constant and normally unpredictable changes predetermined by the progress of knowledge and technologies in a specific professional sphere. The qualification allows the enhancement and extension of professional knowledge and, following the self-assessment of the activities, enables independent learning (development of cognitive competences) as required by the changing professional activities.

activity.

The ability to gather and analyse data necessary for solving important scientific and professional activity issues, and for cultural and artistic creation using scientific evidence and methods of fundamental and applied research.

The ability to plan, organize, implement and assess activities within the context of professions and studies by choosing complex technological, organizational and methodical means in an autonomous manner.

The ability to communicate with specialists and society when solving tasks related to professional activity or study field introducing accomplished work and its results. The responsibility for the quality and assessment of their and subordinate employees' activity following the principles of professional ethics and citizenship.

The ability to communicate the knowledge and comprehension of study and activity field to specialists and other learners.

The ability to study in an autonomous manner in their professional activity and study field and plan the process of learning.

Perceiving of moral responsibility for the impact of their activity and its results on public, economic and cultural development, wellbeing and environment.

includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study;

- can apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and have competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study;

- have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgments that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues;

- can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences;

- have developed those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy.

Second cycle (Master)

The qualification is intended for complex activities consisting of various interconnected tasks that may cover several related professional activities. Therefore, the performance of activities requires expert evaluation and application of the latest knowledge of the professional activities and similar or related areas, discovery of new facts in conducting applied

The newest knowledge in study or activity field based on fundamental or applied scientific research (research parts of art projects) which students (graduates) are able to use when solving issues in new or unknown environment, performing scientific research or engaging in professional artistic activity, or developing innovation.

Qualifications that signify completion of the second cycle are awarded to students who:

- have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with the first cycle, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or

research into the professional activities, and creative application of theoretical knowledge and the latest research results.

The activities are performed by means of independent setting of the tasks in the respective activity area and taking independent decisions aimed at activity enhancement and improvement. A peculiar characteristic of the activities is the supervision of other employees' activities. Thus, the qualifications of this level cover the abilities to independently carry out applied research, provide consulting in the activity area, coordinate projects aimed at the improvement of the qualifications of others as well as introduction of innovations, and to analyse and present the activity results.

Due to the advancement of the knowledge, technology and labour organisation in various activity areas, the activities of this level and their environment undergo intense changes, the developments are difficult to predict, and the activities consist of constantly changing combinations of tasks. Thus, the activity changes require the ability to adopt innovative solutions based on research results as well as the evaluation of alternative solutions and possible social and ethical consequences of the activities.

The ability to analyse, synthesize and assess research data necessary for studies, scientific (art) and professional activity and innovation development; the ability to integrate knowledge, manage complicated situations and make decisions when there is no comprehensive and well-defined information, and assess alternative solutions and possible impact on environment.

The ability to use available knowledge and based on them to prepare new means (technical, methodical, informational and organizational/managerial) based on it necessary for scientific research, studies, and implementation of cultural and artistic activity or innovation development.

The ability to communicate summarized clear and reasoned information to specialists and other persons and evaluate it critically. The ability to work independently and in a team. The responsibility for the quality and assessment of his/her and subordinate employees' activity following the principles of professional ethics and citizenship. The responsibility for the improvement of their and subordinate employees' activity.

The ability to plan the process of learning in an autonomous manner and choose the direction of improvement in an autonomous manner, and study (learn) in an autonomous manner further.

The ability to use scientific research (artistic activity) data and has experience in research work and has skills of systemic and strategic thinking necessary for autonomous professional activity and scientific research work (artistic activity). The ability to make innovative decisions assessing possible public and ethical outcome of activity. Acting on the basis of perceiving moral responsibility for the impact of their

applying ideas, often within a research context;

- can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study;

- have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgments with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities

linked to the application of their knowledge and judgments;

- can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously;

- have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous.

activity and its results on public, economic and cultural development, wellbeing and environment.

The qualification is intended for activities of exceptional complexity, distinguished by the development of new knowledge, ideas, technologies, as well as work practices, methods and processes. Consequently, the activity demands the discovery of new knowledge in the activity areas on the basis of fundamental and applied research findings, integrating knowledge in different activity areas. The activities are characterised by strategic activity objectives that may cover several different activity areas or research subjects.

The activities are strategically planned by assuming the responsibility for the results and quality of other employees' activities and independent strategically important decision-making. The training and consulting of the specialists in the respective activity area is another characteristic. Thus, it is necessary to have the ability to adopt strategic decisions of public significance, to independently plan and conduct fundamental and/or applied research, to transfer the latest knowledge (to share know-how) to specialists in the respective area and to coordinate scientific and applied research projects.

Intense and unpredictable changes in the activities and their environment require readiness for constant developments, openness to innovation, a positive attitude towards the development of the organisation and society, the ability to address issues originally in the light of their context, and the ability to initiate and make changes in

The newest systematic knowledge in the field of scientific research or artistic activity which students (graduates) are able to use when creating new fundamental knowledge and ideas, and solving activity related tasks of the strategic nature.

The ability to offer, analyse, synthesize, systematize and assess critically new and complex ideas by searching for original scientific strategic solutions and strategic solutions of artistic activity and of having public significance, and by solving complex issues related to science, society and cultural development, professional activity or artistic activity. The ability to plan and implement fundamental and applied scientific research or culture and art projects of a large extent which expand the limits of knowledge significantly.

The ability to create original means and instruments of scientific research, studies, cultural and artistic activity and innovation development pursuant to the newest knowledge provided by scientific research. The ability to do intellectual, artistic and creative work in an autonomous manner.

The ability to communicate with peers, scientific society and society at large by communicating novelties of their activity field and prospects of further development and develop creative activity and culture, and encourage technical, public and cultural progress favourable to society's development.

The ability to improve and plan further his/her and expert team

Qualifications that signify completion of the third cycle are awarded to students who:

- have demonstrated a systematic understanding of a field of study and Mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field;

- have demonstrated the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity;

- have made a contribution through original research that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work, some of which merits national or international refereed publication;

- are capable of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas;

- can communicate with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise;

- can be expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge based society.

various areas of activity and public life.	prospects of studying. The responsibility to assess strategic solutions of their activity field critically and the ability to react promptly to dynamic changes in society, economic, cultural and technological environment, and reveal and develop creative intellectual personal abilities.	

6.1.3. Criterion 3

The national framework and its qualifications are demonstrably based on learning outcomes and the qualifications are linked to ECTS or ECTS compatible credits.

All qualifications awarded in Lithuanian higher education system are based on learning outcomes. Key concepts in this system (such as credit, study programme, etc.) are linked to learning outcomes and are designed to support their achievement.

The learning outcomes approach is embedded into internal and external quality assurance mechanisms as well as in the provision of information about qualifications. The ECTS credit system is used, and the credit ranges specified for each study cycle is aligned with the credit ranges of the QF-EHEA (see Table 7). For further details, please refer to Section 5.3 (compliance with EQF Criterion 3).

Table 7. Workload compliance of cycle study programmes to QF-EHEA

	Workload of Lithuanian study programmes	**Credit range in QF-EHEA**
Short cycle	90 or 120 credits	90–120 ECTS
First cycle	180, 210 or 240 credits	180–240 ECTS
Second cycle	60, 90 or 120 credits	Usually 90-120 ECTS, but at least 60 ECTS
Third cycle	240 credits for Doctor of Arts and 4 years (30 credits[67]) for Doctor of Sciences	Not specified

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[67] Only the coursework has an assigned credit load.

Since 2012, a comprehensive system of legal, methodological and practical tools has been established to create a grid for learning outcomes in higher education. This system ensures that learning outcomes are used in all steps of qualification design, beginning with the generic learning outcomes associated with each level and extending to the specific diploma awarded, which provides information about the individual learning outcomes achieved by the holder of the award. Graph 3 illustrates how the learning outcomes grid is applied at different stages of design of a qualification. Additional information about the tools developed since 2012 can be found in Section 4.3.1, while the steps involved in qualification design are outlined in Section 3.2.

Graph 3. Grid for learning outcomes in Lithuanian higher education

Diploma, diploma supplement

Study programme descriptor

Study field descriptor

Study cycle descriptor

LTQF level descriptor
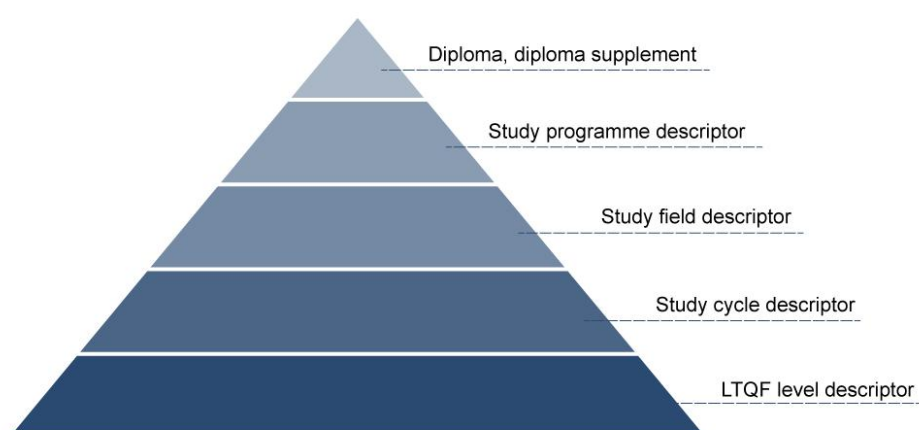
6.1.4. Criterion 4

The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national framework are transparent.

Compliance with this criterion is described in Section 5.4.

6.1.5. Criterion 5

The national quality assurance system for higher education refer to the national framework of qualifications and are consistent with the Berlin Communiqué and any subsequent communiqué agreed by ministers in the Bologna Process.

Compliance with this criterion is described in section 5.5.

SKVC, which is responsible for the quality of higher education, is a full member of the ENQA, CEENQA (Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education) and INQAAHE (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education) networks and is also included in the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies for Higher Education (EQAR). The Baltic Quality Agencies Annual Meeting is organised every year, every second year a meeting of Baltic and Nordics quality assurance agencies takes place. Thus, as the quality assurance agency, SKVC actively participates in international activities in this field and is an active member of international networks of quality assurance agencies.

ENQA membership and inclusion in EQAR demonstrates compliance with the quality assurance system of the Berlin Communiqué and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). In addition, it can be noted that:

- The national quality assurance system for higher education clearly defines the responsibilities of institutions: higher education institutions are responsible for internal quality assurance, SKVC carries out external evaluation and accreditation, and the Research Council of Lithuania promotes the quality of research and experimental development activities and grants the right to award doctoral degrees;

- The SKVC carries out three types of procedures: institutional evaluation, evaluation of study fields and ex ante evaluation of study programmes. Each of these evaluations includes a self-evaluation and an external evaluation involving students. The results of the evaluations are widely available at both the national and international level, as they are published on the SKVC website[68], in the national AIKOS portal under study programme data[69] and in the DEQAR database[70];

- The regular external quality assurance procedures referred to above are followed by a corresponding accreditation decision for the institution (or the study field thereof) and its cycle. The system includes procedures for the granting of authorisation for studies or study-related activities.

6.1.6. Criterion 6

The national framework and its correspondence to EHEA are shown in all diploma supplements.

A Diploma Supplement in Lithuanian and English is automatically issued to all graduates from study programmes since 2006. Since 2016, legal acts provisioned an obligation to indicate the level of the awarded qualification in accordance with LTQF and EQF in the Diploma Supplement. After this regulation entered into force, the qualification level is indicated in the Diploma Supplements of higher education qualifications.

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[68] https://www.skvc.lt/default/lt/valuations and https://www.skvc.lt/default/lt/vertinimo-rezultatai-2020-2024.
[69] https://www.aikos.smm.lt.
[70] https://www.eqar.eu/qa-results/search/.

In addition, the LTQF and EQF level and the study cycle are marked in the outline of the Lithuanian higher education system included in the Diploma Supplement. However, it should be noted that the issuance of the Diploma Supplement is not provisioned for graduates of doctoral studies.

Further information about issued qualification certifying documents may be found in Section 2.6.

6.1.7. Criterion 7

The responsibility of stakeholders involved in qualifications framework is clearly defined and public.

Compliance with this criterion has been demonstrated in Section 5.1.

6.2. Procedures for Verifying the Compatibility of LTQF with the QF-EHEA

6.2.2. Criterion 1

The competent national body/bodies shall self-certify the compatibility of the national framework with the European framework.

SKVC, which is the quality assurance agency in higher education, actively participated in the development and implementation of the LTQF, as well as in the preparation of referencing report. For more information about the SKVC please refer to the Section 2.8.

The results of the referencing report were presented to the main departments of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport and discussed in consultation events with various institutions. This report, which confirms the correspondence of the LTQF to the EQF and the QF-EHEA, was coordinated with the Department of Studies, Science and Technology of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport.

6.2.2. Criterion 2

The self-certification process shall include the stated agreement of the quality assurance bodies in the country in question, as recognised through the Bologna Process.

SKVC, which is the quality assurance body in higher education, is a full member of the ENQA, CEENQA (Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education) and INQAAHE (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education) networks. It has been registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). Representatives of the SKVC have officially participated in referencing LTQF to EQF and QF-EHEA, both in 2011-2012 and in 2023, as well as other related consultations.

6.2.3. Criterion 3

The self-certification process shall involve international experts.

Compliance with this criterion has been demonstrated in Section 5.7.

6.2.4. Criterion 4

The self-certification and the evidence supporting it shall be published and shall address separately each of the criteria set out.

The updated referencing report covers all sectors of Lithuania's education system and provides harmonised answers to all of the criteria for the referencing of the national qualifications framework to the EQF and the QF-EHEA. The report has been prepared in accordance with the established procedures for referencing the national qualifications framework to the EQF and the QF-EHEA. The information provided in the referencing report has been coordinated with the key stakeholders.

Information about the referencing process and electronic versions of the first and second referencing reports are published on the website dedicated to the LTQF at http://www.ltks.lt.

Once the final version of this report has been agreed upon, it will be published on the websites of organisations representing all sectors of the education system, on the Europass portal and on the EHEA website (*www.ehea.info*).

6.2.5. Criterion 5

The ENIC and NARIC networks shall maintain a public listing of States that have confirmed that they have completed the self-certification process.

The ENIC/NARIC network publishes information on its website[71] relating to the education systems and responsible institutions of all its member countries. One of the items of information published for each country is the qualifications framework and its referencing reports.

Once the final version of this report has been agreed upon, the full report will be published on the ENIC/NARIC network website under the Lithuanian system description.

6.2.6. Criterion 6

The completion of the self-certification process shall be noted on Diploma Supplements issued subsequently by showing the link between the national framework and the European framework.

Currently, the Diploma Supplements issued indicate the LTQF level, the EQF level and the study cycle corresponding to the QF-EHEA.

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[71] https://www.enic-naric.net/.

7. Further Actions

Consultations and discussions during updating of the referencing report, have highlighted the challenges in implementing the LTQF and the areas where the actions are needed to address these challenges.

In the field of general education, in the context of the recently initiated curriculum reform and the start of the indication of the LTQF levels in primary and lower secondary education certificates and Matura certificate, it is recommended to:

- Raise awareness among the general education schools community about the LTQF and the referencing of primary, lower and upper secondary educational attainment levels to the LTQF levels, about the LTQF level information provided in the educational documents and the benefits of this information for the learner. To organise targeted information campaigns for career professionals and teachers to convey and explain this information to parents/guardians and pupils;

- Analyse and further develop the definitions of learning outcomes in the curricula, to increase their recognition and understanding in the society, thus also strengthening the perception of the importance of educational attainment levels and of the opportunities for further learning.

In the field of VET, in the light of systemic changes in curriculum, competence assessment and quality assurance, it is recommended to:

- Further strengthen the links between sectoral qualification standards, VET programmes and the levels of LTQF;

- Strive for optimal diversity and offer of VET programmes and qualifications at all levels of the LTQF (from 1 to 5);

- Further improve the relevance of the VET curriculum to the labour market needs and further develop a competences assessment system when seeking the qualification, with a view to increasing business confidence in VET;

- Further develop a systematic VET quality assurance model, covering internal quality assurance systems, external quality assessment and VET quality monitoring, to increase its impact on the performance of VET providers and the quality of the qualifications awarded;

- Strengthen the work of sectoral professional committees, in particular in the areas of initiating new qualifications and updating sectoral qualification standards.

In the field of higher education, it is recommended to:

- Consider and, where appropriate, take actions to diversify the LTQF to include micro-credentials or other qualifications with a narrow professional focus;

- Discuss the possibilities and prerequisites for including residency studies in the LTQF at the appropriate LTQF level;

- Take appropriate actions to facilitate the offer of interdisciplinary studies and the award of interdisciplinary qualifications;

- Continue development of study fields descriptors system by updating existing and developing missing ones.

In order to develop the LTQF in line with the present implications, rapid changes and European initiatives, to increase the LTQF impact on the initiatives in education and other areas and its' visibility, it is recommended to:

- Ensure an easier mobility between educational programmes at the same and different LTQF levels;

- Strive for the qualifications system which would be more open for diverse qualifications and more dynamic;

- Strengthen the decisions about levelling of individual qualifications or their parts to LTQF levels;

- Promote the initiation and delivery of LTQF level 5 qualifications through VET, short cycle study programmes and recognition of prior learning and professional experience;

- Develop the accessibility of non-formal and informal learning recognition system, both for Lithuanian citizens and foreigners who come to Lithuania for work and study;

- Develop the individual learning accounts system and integrate the training provided through it into the LTQF with a view of providing a wide range of lifelong learning opportunities and facilitating fast acquisition of competences relevant to the labour market;

- Support policy, science, education and business discussions on the topic of sustainable development of the qualifications system, while setting precise targets and adequate objectives for the different education sectors;

- Intensify the EQF and the LTQF awareness raising initiatives for formal and non-formal education providers, stakeholders (learners, employers, etc.), employment organisations and the general public about the operation of the qualifications system in Lithuania, opportunities for recognition of qualifications, the referencing of educational attainment levels and qualifications to the respective LTQF levels, information and benefits of the LTQF level for the learner and/or the employer and the expectations for qualifications at a given level;

- Periodically assess the developments of the LTQF and its impact on the national education system, and, where necessary, adjust the LTQF and related legislation to meet the needs of learners and the world of work.

ANNEXES

DESCRIPTION OF THE LITHUANIAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

I CHAPTER
GENERAL PROVISIONS

1. The Description of the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework (hereinafter referred to as "the Description") sets out the system of the levels of qualifications established in the Republic of Lithuania on the basis of competences required for person's activities.

2. The Lithuanian Qualifications Framework is in conformance with the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 May 2017 on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and repealing the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (2017/C 189/03) and the 8 levels of the qualifications framework established therein, the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area agreed by Bergen Communiqué of the conference of European ministers responsible for higher education of 19-20 May 2005 and Paris Communiqué of the conference of European ministers responsible for higher education of 25 May 2018.

3. The provisions of the Description shall be applied to:

3.1. the management of the Register of Studies, Training Programmes and Qualifications, other national and institutional registers as well as information systems;

3.2. the development and approval of sectoral qualification standards and higher education subject benchmark statements;

3.3. the implementation of vocational education and training or higher education programmes, the formulation of learning outcomes of general education programmes;

3.4. the assessment of the competences (or their part) acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning, the award and recognition of the qualification;

3.5. the evaluation and recognition of qualifications acquired according to the programmes of the foreign countries and international organisations;

3.6. the issue of documents certifying qualification acquired to persons and the identification of the level of qualification awarded to them.

4. The terms used in the Description are defined in the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania, the Law on Higher Education and Research of the Republic of Lithuania, the Law on Vocational Education and Training of the Republic of Lithuania, and the Law on the Legal Status of Foreigners of the Republic of Lithuania.

II CHAPTER
LEVELS OF QUALIFICATIONS

5. The Lithuanian Qualifications Framework shall consist of 8 levels of qualifications.

6. The levels of qualifications are defined with regard to the underlying competence of the qualifications and the criteria defining the levels of qualifications:

6.1. complexity of activities shall be a qualification criterion used to describe the character of activities, the variety of tasks and the degree of responsibility;

6.2. autonomy of activities shall be a qualification criterion used to describe changes in the activity organisation and nature of subordination;

6.3. variability of activities shall be a qualification criterion used to describe activities in terms of changing technological and organisational environment.

7. Each level of qualifications includes the qualifications intended for the performance of activities of similar complexity, autonomy and variability.

8. Qualifications of levels I-IV shall be acquired by completing vocational education and training and/or general education programmes and/or through professional experience and/or by independent learning;

9. Level V qualifications shall be acquired by completing training programmes intended for persons with a professional qualification as well as fixed-duration professional experience, short cycle programmes and/or through professional experience and/or by independent study.

10. Level VI qualifications shall be acquired by completing programmes of the first cycle, specialized professional studies and/or through professional experience and/or by independent study.

11. Level VII qualifications shall be acquired by completing programmes of the second cycle, integrated study programmes and programmes of specialized professional studies and/or through professional experience and/or by independent study.

12. Level VIII qualifications shall be acquired by completing programmes of the third cycle and/or through professional experience and/or by independent study.

13. Qualifications of levels VI-VIII shall be treated as the high professional qualification.

14. The levels of Lithuanian qualifications are described in the Annex.

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Annex amendments:

No. 764, 24-07-2019, TAR 2019-07-25, i. k. 2019-12291

LIST OF LITHUANIAN QUALIFICATION LEVELS

No.	Level of Lithuanian qualifications	Descriptor of the qualification level
1.	I	The qualification is intended for activities consisting of one or several simple specialised actions or operations. The activities require the ability to apply basic knowledge characteristic of the activities performed. The environment of the activities is clear, the activities are performed in line with detailed instructions, some cases require intense supervision and guidance. The situations, actions and operations constituting the activities are regular and constantly repetitive.
2.	II	The qualification covers the activities consisting of actions and operations intended to solve simple problems. The activities performed require the application of the main factual knowledge characteristic of the activities. The activities performed require supervision and guidance. The activities and operations constituting the activities are regular.
3.	III	The qualification is intended for activities consisting of actions and operations in narrow areas of activities. The activities may include several or more specialised activity tasks that require the application of well-known and tested solutions. Performance of the activities involves the ability to apply the knowledge characteristic of the activities performed pertaining to the facts, principles and processes of the activity area. The activities are carried out autonomously or under the guidance of an employee with a higher-level qualification and subject to external performance quality control. The activity environment may require the ability to adapt to simple context changes.
4.	IV	The qualification is intended for activities consisting of actions and operations in relatively broad areas of activity. The activities are performed by carrying out several or more specialised activity tasks, solutions to which are not always tested or known. Performance of the activities involves the ability to apply factual and theoretical knowledge characteristic of a broad context related to the activity areas. The activities are performed autonomously, assuming the responsibility for the quality of the procedures and outcomes of performance. With the acquisition of professional experience of set duration, the qualification allows the transfer of practical skills to the staff with lower-level qualifications as well as supervision of their activities. The activity environment requires the ability to adapt to the developments predetermined by the context change, which is normally foreseeable.
5.	V	The qualification is intended for activities distinguished by integrated coordination of activity tasks in different activity areas. The activities include the evaluation of the competences of lower-qualification employees and training thereof. The activities require coordination of comprehensive knowledge of the activity area with general knowledge in dealing with various specialised activity tasks in several different activity areas. The employee performs the activities independently and is supervised only as regards the evaluation of results. The activity tasks are set by an employee with a higher-level qualification, who frequently grants the

No.	Level of Lithuanian qualifications	Descriptor of the qualification level
		employee performing the activities the discretion as to the choice of methods and measures to complete the tasks. The employee supervises the activities of lower-qualification staff, plans and assigns activity tasks, oversees the performance of the activities, provides consulting and verifies the performance quality. The technological and organisational requirements of the activities as well as their environment are constantly changing, the changes are often unforeseeable and may be related to new areas of activity.
6.	VI	The qualification is intended for complex activities distinguished by a variety of tasks and their content. Different means and methods are employed when dealing with problems in various areas of professional activities. Therefore, the performance of activities requires the application of broad theoretical knowledge based on the results of new fundamental and applied research or necessary for the introduction of various innovations. Activities are performed independently, selecting the methods for task completion and organising the work of the respective staff for the completion of the set tasks. Thus, the qualifications in this level include the ability to plan activities with respect to the set tasks, to analyse and record the activity results and to submit reports to activity coordinators, to modify activities based on the activity result analysis and specialist recommendations, and to carry out different project activities. The activity environment requires the ability to adapt to constant and normally unpredictable changes predetermined by the progress of knowledge and technologies in a specific professional sphere. The qualification allows the enhancement and extension of professional knowledge and, following the self-assessment of the activities, enables independent learning (development of cognitive competences) as required by the changing professional activities
7.	VII	The qualification is intended for complex activities consisting of various interconnected tasks that may cover several related professional activities. Therefore, the performance of activities requires expert evaluation and application of the latest knowledge of the professional activities and similar or related areas, discovery of new facts in conducting applied research into the professional activities, and creative application of theoretical knowledge and the latest research results. The activities are performed by means of independent setting of the tasks in the respective activity area and taking independent decisions aimed at activity enhancement and improvement. A peculiar characteristic of the activities is the supervision of other employees' activities. Thus, the qualifications of this level cover the abilities to independently carry out applied research, provide consulting in the activity area, coordinate projects aimed at the improvement of the qualifications of others as well as introduction of innovations, and to analyse and present the activity results. Due to the advancement of the knowledge, technology and labour organisation in various activity areas, the activities of this level and their environment undergo intense changes, the developments are difficult to predict, and the activities consist of constantly changing combinations of tasks. Thus, the activity changes require the ability to adopt innovative solutions based on research results as well as the evaluation of alternative solutions and possible social and ethical consequences of the activities.

No.	Level of Lithuanian qualifications	Descriptor of the qualification level
8.	VIII	The qualification is intended for activities of exceptional complexity, distinguished by the development of new knowledge, ideas, technologies, as well as work practices, methods and processes. Consequently, the activity demands the discovery of new knowledge in the activity areas on the basis of fundamental and applied research findings, integrating knowledge in different activity areas. The activities are characterised by strategic activity objectives that may cover several different activity areas or research subjects. The activities are strategically planned by assuming the responsibility for the results and quality of other employees' activities and independent strategically important decision-making. The training and consulting of the specialists in the respective activity area is another characteristic. Thus, it is necessary to have the ability to adopt strategic decisions of public significance, to independently plan and conduct fundamental and/or applied research, to transfer the latest knowledge (to share know-how) to specialists in the respective area and to coordinate scientific and applied research projects. Intense and unpredictable changes in the activities and their environment require readiness for constant developments, openness to innovation, a positive attitude towards the development of the organisation and society, the ability to address issues originally in the light of their context, and the ability to initiate and make changes in various areas of activity and public life.

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Comprehensive LTQF Level Descriptors

Qualification level	Criteria of activities	Cognitive competences	Functional competences	General competences
1	**The complexity of activities** • Activities consist of a single or several simple actions or operations. • Activities are narrowly specialised.	Application of basic general knowledge and basic knowledge characteristic of the activities performed.	Performance of simple, narrowly specialised actions or operations through the use of means necessary for the performance of specific activity tasks.	Dealing with specific and basic problems that arise in performing activity tasks.
	Autonomy of activities • Activities are under constant supervision, with intense supervision, leadership, and assistance required in some cases. • Activities are performed following detailed instruction	Using information supplied in the detailed written instructions and those provided orally by the supervising person.	Performance of tasks assigned by the authorised person and following the instructions provided.	Acceptance of information pertaining to the performance of tasks and solving simple problems as well as the ability to provide feedback.
	Variability of activities • Situations, actions, and operations that constitute activities are regular and constantly repetitive. • Activity environment changes have no essential impact on actions and operations performed.	No requirements for cognitive competences.	No requirements for functional competences.	No requirements for general competences.

Qualification level	Criteria of activities	Cognitive competences	Functional competences	General competences
2	**The complexity of activities** • Activities consist of actions and operations intended to solve simple problems. • Activities are narrowly specialised.	Application of basic general and activity-characteristic factual knowledge.	Performance of simple actions or operations through the use of means necessary for the performance of specific activity tasks.	Solving simple activity problems.
	Autonomy of activities • Activities are supervised. • Activities are performed following the instructions provided.	Using the information supplied in the written instructions and those provided orally by the supervising person.	Performance of simple activities following the instructions provided.	Acceptance of information pertaining to the performance of tasks and solving problems as well as the ability to provide feedback.
	Variability of activities • Actions and operations that constitute activities are regular. • Activity environment changes have no essential impact on actions and operations performed.	No requirements for cognitive competences.	No requirements for functional competences	Adapting to changes with the help of the person in charge of supervising activities.

Qualification level	Criteria of activities	Cognitive competences	Functional competences	General competences
3	**The complexity of activities** • Activities consist of actions and operations in narrow areas of activities. • Activities comprise several specialised tasks that require the application of well-known and tested solutions. • Activities are performed by using various methods, materials, and means.	Application of activity-characteristic knowledge regarding facts, principles, and processes of the field of activities.	Performance of various specialised activity actions and operations through the application of well-known and tested solutions, means, and instruments.	Adapting to a variety of methods, materials, and means used to perform specific activities.
	Autonomy of activities • Separate activity tasks are solved autonomously, under the leadership of a person with a higher-level qualification. • Activity supervision is restricted to performance quality control.	Using the provided tasks, plans, simple data systems, and oral instructions.	Autonomous solving of various activity tasks and, if necessary, adjusting activity outcomes with regard to remarks and requirements presented during their assessment.	Autonomous solving of standard activity problems. Planning personal activities with regard to tasks provided and using the assistance of a person with a higher-level qualification.
	Variability of activities • Activities and their environment are subject to change, but changes are simple and easy to adjust to. • Activities and environment changes are predictable.	Updating current knowledge of the field of activities, adapting to foreseeable activity environment changes.	Updating current skills, adapting to specific foreseeable activity environment changes.	Autonomously adapting to simple changes in activity and the environment.

Qualification level	Criteria of activities	Cognitive competences	Functional competences	General competences
4	**The complexity of activities** • Activities consist of actions and operations in several fields of activities. • Activities are performed by implementing several or more specialised tasks, the possible solutions of which may not always be tested or known. • Activities may include passing on practical skills to employees with lower-level qualifications.	Integration of factual and theoretical knowledge of the field of activities along with general education knowledge.	Performance of actions and operations in several fields of activities through the application of various, not always well-known and tested solutions, means, and instruments.	Adoption of solutions in activities performed within a variety of activities and contexts. Passing on the experience and skills to persons with lower-level qualifications.
	Autonomy of activities • Activities performed autonomously, taking responsibility for the quality of activity performance procedures and outcomes. • Activities may include coordination and supervision of activities performed by employees with lower-level qualifications.	Using specialised data systems, received and critically-evaluated oral instructions.	Autonomous solving of activity tasks by choosing methods, procedures, materials, and means of performing activities and controlling activity performance quality.	Planning and organising own activities in team work and co-operation with persons with higher-level qualifications.
	Variability of activities • Activity changes may be frequent and require adapting oneself. • Activity changes pertain to the varying context of activities.	Constant updating of current knowledge in the field of activities and general education, complementing this with the current field of activity knowledge and practice.	Obtaining new skills that are necessary to adapt to changed activity context.	Adapting to the contents of tasks and frequent change of context.

Qualification level	Criteria of activities	Cognitive competences	Functional competences	General competences
5	**The complexity of activities** • Activities are characterised by complex coordination of activity tasks across different fields of activities. • Activities comprise the assessment of lower-level qualification employees competences and their training.	Co-ordination of knowledge of different fields of activities with general knowledge.	Application of various work means, instruments, and methods.	Solving different content problems in varying contexts. Training persons with lower-level qualifications.
	Autonomy of activities • Activities are performed autonomously; supervision is restricted to the evaluation of their outcomes. • Activity tasks are set by a person with a higher-level qualification, often granting the possibility for the person performing the activity to choose methods and means to solve the tasks. • Activities are characterised by the leadership over the activities of other persons.	Application of extensive factual and theoretical knowledge in different fields of activities, consulting with colleagues and specialists with higher-level qualifications. Autonomous use of various information sources.	Autonomous planning of own and lower-level qualification employees' activities. Autonomous selection of methods and means to solve tasks assigned by persons with higher-level qualifications.	Planning and organising own and lower-level qualification persons' activities, supervising the performance of activities, and being able to inspect the quality of activity performance.
	Variability of activities • Technological and organisational requirements of the activities and their environment are constantly changing; the changes are often unforeseeable and may be related to new areas of activity.	Systematic updating of current knowledge through the acquisition of new knowledge required for the adaptation to constant and often unforeseeable changes in several different fields of activities.	Mastering new methods, means, and instruments of solving problems in different fields of activities required to adapt to constant and often unforeseeable changes.	Adopting group-level decisions under circumstances of unforeseeable environment changes. Initiating and organising own and lower-level qualification persons' continuous learning process. Self-motivation and motivation of others for improvement in a chosen field of activities.

Qualification level	Criteria of activities	Cognitive competences	Functional competences	General competences
6	**The complexity of activities** • Activities are complicated, characterised by the variety of tasks and their contents. • Performance of activities involves the use of various means and methods. • Activity tasks may comprise various fields of professional activity.	Integration of extensive theoretical knowledge based on fundamental and applied research findings or required for the introduction of innovation along with practical knowledge by solving tasks in various fields of activities.	Systematic application and management of complex methods, means, and information required for the performance of activities.	Maintaining communication with specialists in the respective professional field, critical evaluation of activities performed and their outcomes presented.
	Autonomy of activities • Activities are performed autonomously by choosing task performance methods. • Activities require the ability to organise the work of respective people for the performance of the tasks set.	Autonomous analysis, comparison, and accumulation of fundamental and applied research findings essential for the chosen field of professional activity as well as the data on innovations that emerge in the field of activities.	Planning complex activities with regard to goals set. Analysis of activity outcomes, referring to them when adjusting activities, and taking responsibility for the quality of activity outcomes. Implementing various project activities.	Passing on information, ideas, and solutions to specialists and non-specialists.
	Variability of activities • Activities are constantly changing due to advancements in knowledge and technology in the specific professional field. • A major part of activity changes is unforeseeable.	Systematic enhancement and extension of the professional field knowledge.	Application of new instruments and means in the performance, management, and adjustment of activities, taking into account changes taking place in respective activities.	Consistent and systematic learning with regard to activity outcomes and evaluation of the requirements raised by continuous activity changes.

Qualification level	Criteria of activities	Cognitive competences	Functional competences	General competences
7	**The complexity of activities** • Activities are complex and comprised of various interconnected tasks. • Activity tasks may comprise several related fields of professional activity.	Expert evaluation and application of the latest theoretical knowledge in professional activity and field of study based on fundamental research findings.	Coordination and implementation of various applied research and innovation introduction employee qualification improvement projects. Setting activity performance quality standards.	Adopting complex and systematic activity improvement solutions based on expert know-how and experience in various fields of activity. Cooperation with specialists in the respective professional and other fields, critical evaluation of activities performed and their outcomes presented.
	Autonomy of activities • Activities are performed by autonomously setting tasks in a respected field of activity. • Activities include taking leadership over other employees' work. • Activities pertain to the adoption of decisions aimed at activity enhancement and improvement.	Discovering new facts through the performance of applied professional activities and/or field of study research.	Autonomous performance of applied research. Providing consultations in the field of activities.	Creative leadership over the activities of people with various qualifications and occupational backgrounds by sharing own experience and expert knowledge. Planning the improvement of own qualification.
	Variability of activities • Activities and their environment are subject to intensive changes, conditioned by the knowledge and technology progress in various fields of professional activity. • Activities are comprised of constantly changing combinations of tasks. • Possible unforeseeable changes in the activity environment.	Creative enhancement and extension of the professional field knowledge through independent learning and applied research.	Improvement and adaptation of various means and instruments required for the performance of applied research, studies, cultural and art activities, or the introduction of innovations.	Adoption of innovative solutions based on research results and the evaluation of alternative solutions and possible social and ethical consequences of activities performed.

Qualification level	Criteria of activities	Cognitive competences	Functional competences	General competences
8	**The complexity of activities** • Activities are complex and characterised by the creation of new knowledge and innovations. • Activities are characterised by a broad variety of tasks and the complexity of their contents. • The activities are characterised by strategic activity objectives.	Application of the latest knowledge based on fundamental and applied research results for the creation of new knowledge, ideas, activity performance methods, methodology, processes, and technology.	Creation, synthesising, and evaluation of new complex ideas, methods, processes, and instruments in handling strategically important science, art, and social evolution and development, professional activities, or cultural and art creation tasks.	Maintaining communication with colleagues, the scientific community, and wider society by passing on the prospects of innovations and further developments in the personal field of expertise. Adoption of public-importance strategic decisions.
	Autonomy of activities • Activities are performed through strategic planning, often taking responsibility for the results and quality of work performed by other employees. • Activities pertaining to the adoption of strategically important decisions. • Activities comprise training and consulting specialists in the respective professional field.	Discovering new knowledge in various fields of activities based on fundamental and theoretical results of applied scientific research performed.	Autonomous planning, implementation, and coordination of fundamental and applied scientific research or cultural and art creation projects. Passing on the latest knowledge to specialists and experts from various fields.	Designing and developing long-term prospects of own and expert team's professional advancement.
	Variability of activities • Activities are subject to constant and intensive changes. • The activity environment is unforeseeable (hardly predictable).	Constantly taking an interest in the latest fundamental and applied research as well as the knowledge created by these.	Initiation and design of original scientific research, study, and cultural and art creation, innovation creation means, instruments, and processes.	Openness to innovation, developing a positive attitude towards the development of the organisation and the society. Assuming responsibility for moral, social, economic, and environmental consequences etc. of the activities performed by oneself and the team.

Table 3.1. New types of qualifications in LTQF

LTQF level	Qualification documents, situation 2012	Qualification documents, situation 2023	EQF level
8	Doctoral diploma	Doctoral diploma	8
7	Master's diploma	Master's diploma	7
6	Bachelor's diploma Professional Bachelor's diploma	Bachelor's diploma Professional Bachelor's diploma Study certificate (awarded after completion of a teacher training programme)	6
5		Diploma (awarded after completion of a short cycle programme) VET diploma	5
4	VET diploma Matura certificate	VET diploma Matura certificate (**)	4
3	VET diploma (qualification certificate), IVET and CVET	VET diploma Lower secondary education certificate (**)	3
2	VET diploma (*) Lower secondary education certificate	VET diploma	2
1	VET diploma (qualification certificate), CVET	VET diploma (*) Primary education certificate (**)	1

(*) – included in the LTQF, but not implemented
(**) – LO of the primary education programme are related to the LTQF level 1, LO of the lower-secondary education programme are related to the LTQF level 3, and LO of upper-secondary education programme are related to the LTQF level 4.

Table 3.1. Information accumulated in the RSTPQ about qualifications (Paragraph 16.6 of the Regulations of the Register of Study, Training Programmes and Qualifications; Annex 4 of the Description of the Procedure for Registration of Objects of the Register of Study, Training Programmes and Qualifications)

No.	Parameters
1.	Qualification state code
2.	Level of the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework
3.	Level of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning
4.	Qualification description in Lithuanian and English
5.	Date of preparation or update of qualification description (if applicable)
6.	Minimum education attainment level to obtain the qualification (if any)
7.	Code and name of the legal entity that made the decision to legitimise the qualification (if such an institution is established)
8.	Date, number and title of the legal act that legitimises the qualification (if established)
9.	Codes of the source defining the qualification requirements (VET standard or sectoral qualification standard or, in their absence, the relevant VET or study program)
10.	Code and name of the legal entity that has the right to authorise the education provider to award qualifications (if such an institution is established)
11.	Date, number and title of the legal act that granted the right to award qualifications to the education provider (if established)
12.	Codes and names of legal entities that have the right to award qualifications to a person (if such an institution is established)
13.	Date, number and title of the legal act by which the institution was granted the right to award qualifications to a person (if established)
14.	Reason for removal from the Registry

Table 3.2. Information about programmes collected in the RSTPQ (Paragraphs 16.1–16.4 of the Regulations of the Register of Study, Training Programmes and Qualifications; Annexes 1, 2, and 6 of the Description of the Procedure for Registration of Objects of the Register of Study, Training Programmes and Qualifications)

No.	Parameters
1.	Programme state code
2.	Programme code according to the International Standardised Classification of Education (ISCED)
3.	Minimum educational attainment level required to start learning (studying) according to the programme (if established)

4.	Title of the qualification provided, state code (if established);
5.	Title, state code (if set) of qualifications required to start learning (studying) according to the programme
6.	Summary of the programme description in Lithuanian and English*; dates of preparation and update of the summary of the programme description
7.	Programme implementation language(s)
8.	Name and code of the education certificate form to be issued (if any)
9.	Code and name of the legal entity that submitted the programme for registration
10.	Codes and names of the legal entities with which the programme was coordinated; the dates of programme coordination
11.	Codes and names of the legal entities which approved the programme and dates of approval
12.	Codes and names of the legal entities which performed expert evaluation of the programme; dates of expert evaluation
13.	Education area of the programme
14.	Educational sub-area of the programme
15.	Programme level
16.	Reason for removal from the Registry

Additional data			
	For general education programmes	**For formal VET programmes**	**For higher education study programmes**
17.	Educational attainment level to be acquired (if provided)	Name of programme specialisations (if any)	Names and codes of descriptors of study field (fields' groups) or study area (if available), regulations of the study fields (if available)
18.	Description of learning outcomes	Competences to be acquired in Lithuanian and English	Code and name of the legal entity that accredited the programme
19.	Programme duration in years	Sectoral qualification standard code (if applicable)	Date of submission of the programme for self-analysis
20.		Names of programme modules, state codes of modules, LTQF levels of modules, acquired competences, length of modules (in credits, if established), module description	Date and number of the decision on programme accreditation, type of accreditation and term of accreditation (if established)
21.		Competence provided for performance a job or function regulated by law in Lithuanian and English (if	Programme accreditation assessment findings

		provided) and its description	
22.		If established: form of learning, duration of learning, scope of learning, duration of theoretical learning, duration and location of practical learning (including the final practical placement / internship)	Code and name of the higher education legal entity implementing the programme
23.		Health requirements for those wishing to learn according to the programme (if established)	Option to choose minor studies (yes/no)
24.		Age requirements for those wishing to learn according to the programme (if established)	Programme volume (in credits), form of studies, duration of studies (in years, if determined), year of admission to the programme
25.		Other data/requirements for those wishing to learn according to the programme (if established)	Names of programme specialisations in Lithuanian and English; description of programme specialisation (if available)
26.		Professional activity that the holder of the qualification and learning outcomes document can engage in	Qualification to be awarded
27.		Purpose of the programme /structural parts of VET	Qualification degree to be awarded
28.			Programme financial group code
29.			Structure of the study system
30.			Type of studies

* When describing study programmes, the following information is provided: study programme objective(s); learning outcomes; training and learning activities; methods of evaluation of learning outcomes; study subjects (modules); practice; specialisations; student choices; distinctive features of the study programme; opportunities for professional activities and further studies; opportunities for professional activities; and opportunities for further studies.

LIETUVOS ŠVIETIMO SISTEMOS STRUKTŪRA
STRUCTURE OF THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN LITHUANIA
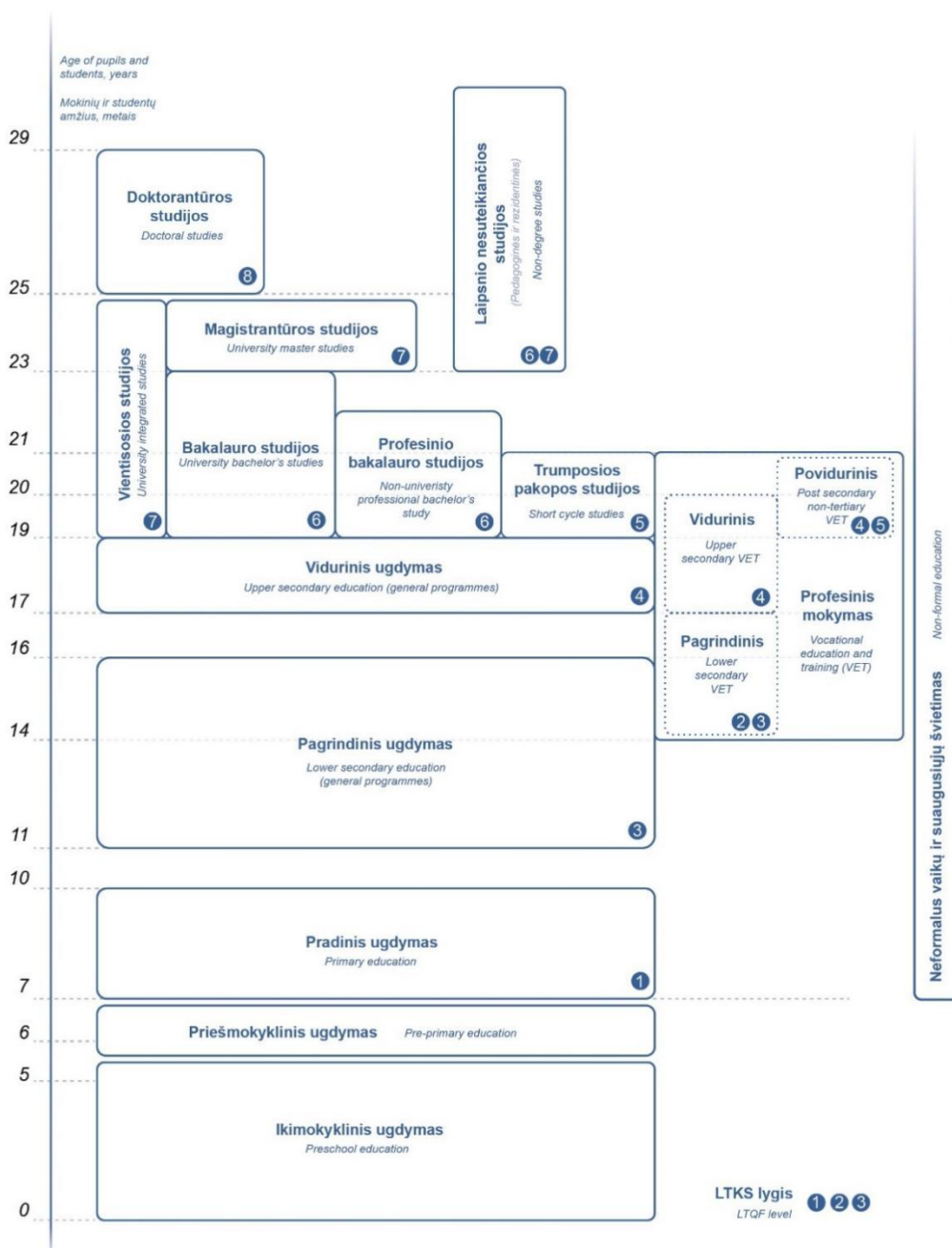
Source: Statistics Lithuania

Table 5.1. Learners by education level

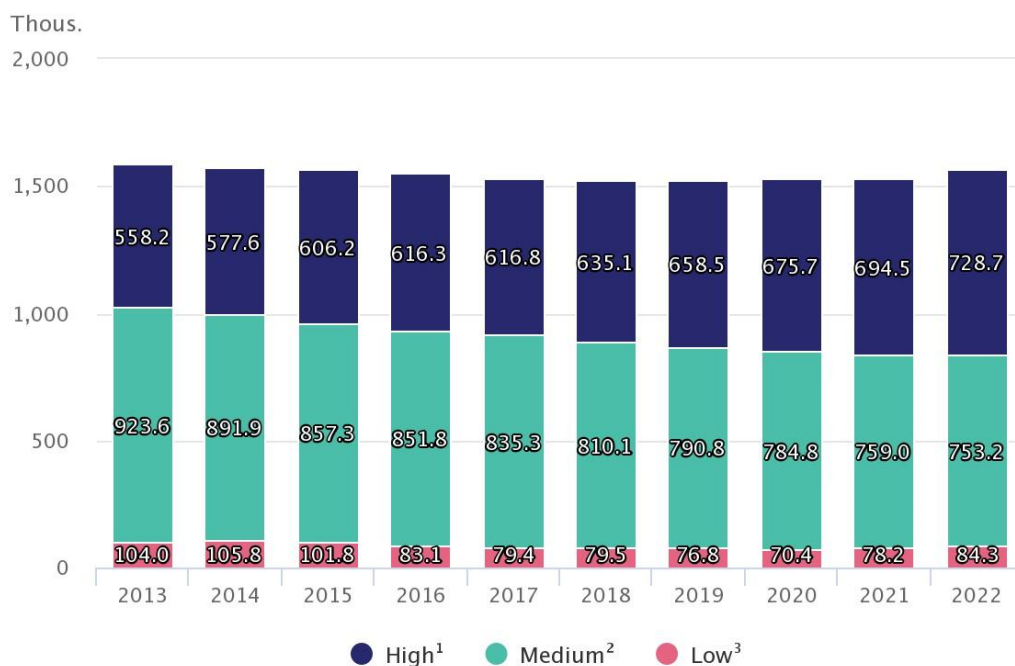|	2018–2019	2019–2020	2020–2021	2021–2022	2022–2023
Total by education levels (ISCED 1-8)	599 422	591 352	591 892	594 231	610 206
Pre-school education (ISCED 0)	131 158	131 397	132 503	134 480	135 972
Primary education (ISCED 1)	117 676	118 616	116 682	116 245	121 533
Lower secondary education (ISCED 2)	162 768	164 579	167 020	170 489	179 035
Upper secondary education (ISCED 3)	63 458	59 681	60 697	60 111	61 897
VET at post-secondary education level (ISCED 4)	12 594	10 625	10 091	8 989	8 866
Bachelor and Professional Bachelor studies (ISCED 6)	82 178	77 130	75 171	74 038	73 171
Master studies (ISCED 7)	26 870	26 591	27 004	27 222	27 067
Doctor studies (ISCED 8)	2 720	2 733	2 724	2 657	2 665

Source*:* https://osp.stat.gov.lt/statistiniu-rodikliu-analize?hash=13da514a-bbf4-4933-bb3b-da1738df744c#/

Table 5.2. Number of educational institutions

		2012-2013	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Public and non-public establishments	Total number	1 364	1 168	1 085	1 063	999
	General school	1 242	1 056	977	957	910
	Vocational school	75	71	67	70	53
	College	24	22	22	19	19
	University	23	19	19	17	17
Public establishments	Total number	1 305	1 074	990	956	892
	General school	1 206	982	902	867	821
	Vocational school	73	68	64	66	48
	College	13	12	12	12	12
	University	14	12	12	11	11
Non-public establishments	Total number	58	94	95	107	107
	General school	36	74	75	90	89
	Vocational school	2	3	3	4	5
	College	11	10	10	7	7
	University	9	7	7	6	6

Source: https://osp.stat.gov.lt/statistiniu-rodikliu-analize#/.

Graph 5.2. Population education level

Thous.

Year	High[1]	Medium[2]	Low[3]
2013	558.2	923.6	104.0
2014	577.6	891.9	105.8
2015	606.2	857.3	101.8
2016	616.3	851.8	83.1
2017	616.8	835.3	79.4
2018	635.1	810.1	79.5
2019	658.5	790.8	76.8
2020	675.7	784.8	70.4
2021	694.5	759.0	78.2
2022	728.7	753.2	84.3

● High[1] ● Medium[2] ● Low[3]

[1] **High level of education** – post-secondary, higher (until 2013 – ISCED 5, 6, from 2014 – ISCED 5, 6, 7, 8).
[2] **Medium level of education** – vocational lower secondary, general upper secondary (without/with VET qualification), special upper secondary (ISCED 3, 4).
[3] **Low level of education** – no primary, primary (without/with VET qualification), general lower secondary (ISCED 0, 1, 2).

Source: https://osp.stat.gov.lt/lietuvos-svietimas-ir-kultura-2023/svietimas/bendrieji-svietimo-rodikliai

Dimensions of Students' Competences and Guidelines for Their Development (General Education)

Dimension	Primary education programme	Lower secondary education programme	Upper secondary education programme
Attitudes	In cooperation with the teacher, educational support specialists: psychologist, speech therapist, special educator, teacher's assistant, etc. (hereinafter - "educators"), peers, to be interested, curious, to investigate, have a desire to know, create, take responsibility for one's own learning or other activities, independently make daily decisions, to behave safely, healthily, and positively in the educational and living environment, to learn and create together with other people.	To take the initiative independently, to be interested in various areas of life, to discover one's strengths and talents, to take responsibility for own learning or other activities, decisions made in a personal, social, civic, and cultural context, to behave safely, healthily, positively, taking into account the circumstances, to act constructively, and to cooperate with other people.	To take the initiative to create, act actively, positively change the environment, take responsibility for a safe and healthy lifestyle, work, or learning activity, its assessment and improvement, persistently search for solutions to problems, assume the role of a leader, act independently and positively, taking into account the circumstances, accept self-directed learning, persistent work, and other activities challenges, and to constructively cooperate and work in a team with other people.
Knowledge and understanding	Basic general knowledge and understanding of facts, phenomena, processes, simple procedures in the field of learning and various areas of life and their practical application.	Theoretical knowledge and understanding of facts, principles, processes, and general concepts, laws, procedures in the field of learning and various areas of life, and their practical application.	Theoretical and practical broad-context, sufficiently deep knowledge in the field of compulsory and optional learning and various areas of life and conceptual understanding of facts, principles, processes, laws, complex procedures, and their practical application.

Skills	General cognitive (logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and general practical (knowledge application, methods of operation, use of tools, etc.) skills; communication and cooperation, creativity and initiative, citizenship, activity skills required for performing simple tasks and solving simple problems of everyday life and the closest environment, reflecting on one's activities and their results.	More complex thinking skills based on cognitive (logical, intuitive, creative, critical thinking) and more complex procedures based on practical skills (application of knowledge, methods of operation, use of tools); communication, cooperation, citizenship, creativity and initiative, activity, and reflection skills needed to overcome challenges and solve real problems; self-awareness and the ability to choose the direction of further learning.	Cognitive (logical, intuitive, creative, critical, productive thinking) skills based on theoretical thinking skills and practical skills (application of complex knowledge systems, operational methods, responsible use of equipment and tools) based on complex procedures and technologies; citizenship, entrepreneurship, leadership, communication, creative implementation of innovations, overcoming learning and operational challenges and management of critical situations, reflection, orientation in the world of occupations and personal career decision-making skills.

Source: Paragraph 13 of the Descriptor of Primary, Lower and Upper Secondary Education Programmes. Online access: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/37350520a7bc11e5be7fbe3f919a1ebe

Sectoral Qualification Standards and Qualifications Included in Them by LTQF Levels (data of 13-06-2023)

Title of the sectoral qualification standard	Number of qualifications by LTQFF level							Total number of qualifi-cations
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Accommodation and food service sector qualifications standard (further on – SQS)	3	4	6	4	2	2		21
Environmental protection SQS	1	1	2	3	7	1		15
Architectural SQS					1	2	1	4
Chemical products manufacturing SQS		1	5		3	3	2	14
Electrical equipment, computers, electronic and optical products manufacturing SQS		3	5	3	5	3		19
Information and communications technology SQS		1	6	6	11	4		28
Manufacturing of machinery and equipment, vehicle manufacturing, maintenance and repairs SQS	1	5	8	6	4	4		28
Wood and wood products, furniture, paper, and paper products manufacturing SQS	1	4	5	1	3	2		16
Real estate, financial, accounting, and insurance activities SQS			5		7	5		17
Basic pharmaceutical products and pharmaceutical preparations manufacturing SQS			1		3	2		6
Service administration, office support, and security assurance SQS	1	1	3		4	3	1	13
Publishing, media, and advertising SQS			9	5	12	4		30
Trade SQS	1	1	2	1				5
Social services SQS		1	2		1	2	1	7
Construction SQS	16	19	19	19	1	1	1	76
Healthcare and beauty services SQS		2	6	1	14	17		40
Education sector and library activities qualifications standard			2	6	12	7		27
Textiles, wearing apparel, and leather products manufacturing SQS	1	7	12	8	13			41

Title of the sectoral qualification standard	Number of qualifications by LTQFF level							Total number of qualifications
Transport and storage services SQS	2	11	17	3	5	1		39
Tourism, sports, events, and recreation services SQS			4	3	6	3		16
Visual arts and crafts SQS	4	2	13	3	16	12		50
Public administration SQS			8	3	5	4	1	21
Manufacture and repair of welded and brazed metal products (excluding machinery and equipment) and vehicles (excluding motor vehicles) and their equipment SQS	5	11	9	6	2	2		35
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries, veterinary, and food production SQS	3	6	9	3	10	9		40
Total number	**39**	**80**	**158**	**84**	**147**	**93**	**7**	**608**

The Stated Agreements of the Quality Assurance Bodies

NACIONALINĖ ŠVIETIMO AGENTŪRA

Biudžetinė įstaiga, K. Kalinausko g. 7, 03107 Vilnius, tel. 8 658 18 504,
el. p. info@nsa.smm.lt, http://www.nsa.smm.lt
Duomenys kaupiami ir saugomi Juridinių asmenų registre, kodas 305238040

Kvalifikacijų ir profesinio mokymo plėtros
centrui

2023-12-28

DĖL INFORMACIJOS LIETUVOS IR EUROPOS KVALIFIKACIJŲ SANDAROS SUSIEJIMO ATASKAITOJE

REGARDING THE INFORMATION IN THE REFERENCING REPORT OF THE LITHUANIAN AND EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

Nacionalinė švietimo agentūra veikia švietimo valdymo srityje, įgyvendindama švietimo politiką pagal nustatytus veiklos tikslus: sudaryti vienodas sąlygas ikimokyklinio, priešmokyklinio ir bendrojo ugdymo prieinamumui ir geros kokybės švietimui, vykdyti mokinių pasiekimų vertinimą, analizuoti mokinių pasiekimų rezultatus, atlikti valstybinę švietimo teikėjų veiklos priežiūrą, organizuoti pedagoginių darbuotojų kvalifikacijos tobulinimą, vykdyti valstybės švietimo stebėseną, užtikrinti valstybiniuose švietimo registruose ir informacinėse sistemose tvarkomų duomenų teisėtumą, prieinamumą ir kokybę.

Patvirtiname, kad Lietuvos kvalifikacijų sandaros susiejimo su Europos mokymosi visą gyvenimą kvalifikacijų sandara ir Europos aukštojo mokslo erdvės kvalifikacijų sandara ataskaitoje pateikta informacija apie bendrojo ugdymo kokybės užtikrinimą atitinka nacionalines kokybės užtikrinimo priemones, nuostatas ir praktiką.

The National Education Agency operates in the field of education management, implementing education policy in accordance with the established operational goals. Agency prepares projects of preschool, pre-school, primary, basic and secondary education general programs, organizes and administers student achievement tests and international studies, coordinates and develops the educational staff qualification improvement system, evaluates and analyzes the activities of education providers, administers and develops state educational information systems and educational registers, ensures data quality and accessibility to users.

We confirm that the information provided in the report on referencing the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area on quality assurance in general education is consistent with the relevant national quality assurance arrangements, provisions and practice.

Direktorė   Rūta Krasauskienė

2023-12-22

DĖL INFORMACIJOS LIETUVOS IR EUROPOS KVALIFIKACIJŲ SANDAROS SUSIEJIMO ATASKAITOJE

REGARDING THE INFORMATION IN THE REFERENCING REPORT OF THE LITHUANIAN AND EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

Kvalifikacijų ir profesinio mokymo plėtros centras organizuoja ir atlieka juridinių ar fizinių asmenų, kitų juridinio asmens statuso neturinčių kitos valstybės narės organizacijų bei jų padalinių, norinčių gauti licenciją vykdyti formalųjį profesinį mokymą ir su profesiniu mokymu susijusią veiklą, atitikties teisės aktuose nustatytiems reikalavimams vertinimą ir išduoda ekspertizės aktą. Taip pat, teikia konsultacinę pagalbą atliekant profesinio mokymo įstaigų ir kitų profesinio mokymo teikėjų išorinį vertinimą bei vykdo Nacionalinio profesinio mokymo kokybės užtikrinimo orientacinio punkto funkcijas Lietuvoje.

Patvirtiname, kad Lietuvos kvalifikacijų sandaros susiejimo su Europos mokymosi visą gyvenimą kvalifikacijų sandara ir Europos aukštojo mokslo erdvės kvalifikacijų sandara ataskaitoje pateikta informacija apie profesinio mokymo kokybės užtikrinimą atitinka nacionalines kokybės užtikrinimo priemones, nuostatas ir praktiką.

Qualifications and VET Development Centre (QVETDC) organises and carries out the assessment of how legal persons or natural persons, willing to obtain a licence to carry out formal VET and related activities, comply with the requirements laid down in the legislation, and issue an expert examination report. It also provides consultancy assistance in the external evaluation of VET providers and performs the functions of the Quality Assurance National Reference Point for Vocational Education and Training in Lithuania.

We confirm that the information provided in the report on referencing the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area on quality assurance in VET is consistent with the relevant national quality assurance arrangements, provisions and practice.

Direktorius
Director

Tadas Tamošiūnas

STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS
CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION
Budgetary institution, A. Goštauto g. 12, LT-01108 Vilnius, Lithuania, tel. +370 5 211 3694, www.skvc.lt, e-mail: skvc@skvc.lt.
Data has been accumulated and stored in the Register of Legal Entities, code 111959192

To whom it may concern

27 December, 2023
S-603

REGARDING INFORMATION IN THE REFERENCING REPORT OF THE LITHUANIAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK AND THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) acts as a national quality assurance agency for higher education and academic information and recognition centre. Among other tasks, SKVC carries out external evaluation and accreditation of higher education institutions and their study programmes, advises higher education institutions within its competence, publishes accreditation results, carries out the follow-up of the external evaluation, analyses indicators related to the quality of studies, and performs other thematic analysis.

We confirm that the information provided in the report on referencing the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area on quality assurance in higher education is consistent with the relevant national quality assurance arrangements, provisions and practice.

Sincerely yours,
Director

Almantas Šerpatauskas

Reports by International Experts

International expert: Dr. Sc. Admin. Gunta Kinta, Head of Projects Department, Academic Information Centre – Latvian NCP

Statement about the Updated Referencing Report of Lithuania

In 2023, Lithuania has prepared the Updated National Report to describe the developments and changes in the national qualifications and education system in the context of Lithuanian Qualifications Framework (LTQF) since 2012, when the initial report "Referencing the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area" was published. Interestingly, the LTQF has been developed alongside the EQF since the designing of qualifications system in the country was initiated before the adoption of the European Parliament and the Council endorsed the Recommendation on the Establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning in 2008. The report shows that development of LTQF has been a driving force for not only introducing changes in education system, but also revising conceptual approaches to various terms, for example, as regards national understanding of concept "qualification".

The Report reflects on both referencing and self-certification processes, which is highly valuable for promoting transfer between education sectors and comparability of Lithuanian qualifications of all levels. The reforms in education outlined in the Report highlight the initiatives to build bridges between education sectors. For example, legal provision of qualification system in 2017 has been shifted to the Law on Education, although the system includes only VET qualifications.

In general, the Report is very informative and provides detailed overview of the qualifications system and LTQF, their development and legal framework. This approach allows reader to get acquainted with the state of art in the country as regards LTQF. However, the reader should have some previous knowledge and experience about qualifications frameworks and related concepts. This detailed description may be not considered as a drawback of the Report as the Council Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and repealing the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (2017) or other legal acts do not clearly indicate the target audience of the referencing reports.

Some sections of the Report should be particularly highlighted. First, the section "LTQF application" is quite valuable because it indicates that the NQF is fully operational and has a certain function within the system. Second, the Chapter 3 about the qualifications of Lithuania ensures that those readers who are not familiar with the system may gain some contextual information. Third, for capturing potential future directions of actions and also revealing some of challenges to be faced the Report includes the section "Further actions". The latter example shows that the LTQF is seen as tool for improving the national system and that Lithuania has set particular aims for next years.

The LTQF is referenced to the EQF according to the ten criteria prescribed. The descriptions are understandable and comprehensive. Particular attention is paid to the Criterion 2 about the demonstrative link between level descriptors of NQF and EQF; the analysis and comparison of both descriptors is with high quality and shows thorough methodology.

The LTQF levels 5-8 are self-certified to the QF-EHEA using the seven criteria and six procedures for verifying the compatibility of qualifications frameworks with the QF-EHEA. The provided descriptions reflect on current situation and recent developments. Higher education stakeholders have been included in the composing of the Report and the referencing process; hence, the self-certification process is thoroughly integrated in other developments.

To summarise, the Report imparts convincing arguments that the LTQF has been referenced to the EQF and self-certified to the QF-EHEA, and that the LTQF is fully operational qualifications framework. I thank and congratulate colleagues for their great efforts and diligence when preparing the Report.

International expert: Dr. Stefan Sant – Head of Malta Qualifications Recognition Information Centre, ENIC-NARIC for Malta

This Report is being submitted in accordance to Criterion 3 of Chapter 6.2.3 of the Lithuanian 2023 Reference Report.

Overview:

The updated Lithuanian 2023 Reference Report is a timely update to the 2012 Lithuanian Reference Report reflecting the various legislative developments taking place at a national and regional level. The basis of the actual Lithuanian Qualification Framework (LTQF) have remained the same, indicating that the original national framework was established on solid foundations. This is positive, as continuity promotes consistency, and ease of mind to end users, be they students, educators, or employers.

This report considered the following nine benchmarks as to whether this Referencing Report successfully conveys the correct information about the LTQF in a manner as to make it a useful and reliable source of information throughout the European Higher Education Area:

1. Consistency and Clarity

   The document has consistent use of terminology and language throughout, and any issues raised were addressed. Attention was paid as to whether definitions align with established standards, and that the Report ultimately is understandable by individuals from outside the educational sphere.

2. Alignment with the European Framework

   The authors of the Report were careful to ensure that the Lithuanian Framework, and all the bureaucracy behind it, such as accreditation of academic programmes of study, VETS, quality assurances, were carefully aligned with the European Qualification Framework for Lifelong Learning, and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area. Noteworthy is the information where the LTQF and the EQF level descriptors are matched under Annex 2, highlighting the Lithuanian approach of evaluating cognitive competence.

3. Transparency and Accessibility

   The Referencing Report is on the whole considered as being able to communicate all the information in a manner that may be understood by an audience unfamiliar with the topic. Concerns raised regarding parts of the Report that were unclear have been addressed. As a tool for persons working in education, this document is highly satisfactory.

4. Cross Referencing

   The layout of the document appropriately cross-references all the relevant chapters, without unnecessary jumping back and forth from one chapter to another, which would hamper the logically train of though and explanation of the LTQF.

5. Quality of References

   All references were noted to be up-to-date and correct. It was observed that hyperlinks usually led to webpages that could be read both in Lithuanian and English.

6. Alignment with best practices

   A comparison with the Maltese Referencing Report 2023, which is being drafted contemporaneously with this same Report, indicated that the overall layout of the Lithuanian Referencing Report is aligned with the customary format for such Reports, with an overarching review of the entire educational system of the country. It must be noted, that while this is the customary practice for most Referencing Reports, this can make them unwieldy for users from outside the educational field, as for example employers who make be seeking to carry out an assessment themselves of foreign academic programmes against their national framework.

As regard the substantive issues under review, it is to be noted that the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education is a member of ENQA and EQAR. This in itself demonstrates an overarching standard of quality and implementation of bests practises that has been already confirmed by external parties.

7. Stakeholder Involvement

The Reference Report demonstrates two aspects – the broad number of Lithuanian entities involved in the education sector, and also the varies bodies consulted both in the process of updating this Report, and throughout the evolution of the LTQF. The ongoing involvement in the various facets of Lithuanian education, including bodies representing teachers, students and national authorities, is laudable.

8. Compliance with Regulations

This aspect of the Referencing Report, particularly Chapter 6.1.2 up to Chapter 6.2.2 is very clear, concise, and probably the most crucial part of the entire document. It distills the entire document to the most important information that will be of most usefulness and likely to be most regularly referenced, specifically the structure of Lithuanian study cycles, credit volume, and learning outcomes.

9. Recommendations and Improvements

The Referencing Report identifies various recommendations, many of which are aligned with the points raised by the external international experts. Amongst these are the development of micro-credentials, noting the Reference Report indicates that the foundations to include programmes similar to micro-credentials to be almost in place. Another issue that merits attention going forward is the referencing to the LTQF of professional oriented qualifications, where inconsistencies of approach have been identified.

Conclusion

In reviewing the Report, it is clear that all aspects of the LTQF were presented in the document, and in great detail. The new developments, such as those pertaining to VETS, and the RPL of informal and non-formal education are easy to understand, and instil trust in the Lithuanian authorities' pursuit of quality assurance throughout the entire educational journey of students.

This updated Lithuanian 2023 Referencing Report will be an excellent source of reference.

International expert: Jenneke Lokhoff, Senior Policy Officer, Nuffic (the Netherlands)

I offer sincere congratulations to our Lithuanian colleagues for their significant achievement in completing this referencing report. Additionally, I was honored to be invited by the Lithuanian Qualifications and VET Development Centre to act as an external expert to provide feedback on the Referencing the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area. Reading this report was a pleasure; I found it informative, thoughtful, and inspirational - well beyond the exercise itself.

This is the second time the Lithuanian qualifications framework has been referenced. Readers of this report may agree that there was a clear rationale and identified need to pursue this undertaking, which was explained in detail in the report. The exercise was also timely (not to early, not too late). In the report, the areas of change and update were identified and well-explained.

The report's authors have produced an easy to read document, presenting complex information in a transparent, logical and accessible way. The decision to engage of a variety of national experts in the reference process, together with reflections from international experts, contributed to this positive result. Additionally, the external experts' reflections on the draft version were thoroughly addressed in the final version of this document.

In general, I concluded that all referencing and self-certification criteria have been met. The report offered a thorough and comprehensive overview of the LTQF in reference to the EQF and QF-EHEA, addressing all elements to understand the LTQF and its relation to the two European qualification frameworks. Chapters 2 to 4 provide a detailed description of the LTQF, and the legal and governance context in which it operates. Compliance of the LTQF and the EQF and QF-EHEA is thoroughly explained in chapter 5 and 6, as well as throughout the document. It is very clear how the frameworks are arrayed – the entire exercise succeeded in its purpose.

The placement of residencies and micro-credentials was highlighted as a point of development during the informal expert discussions. Yet, placing micro-credentials into the qualifications framework is a challenging task, and not one unique to the Lithuanian context but an important question for many qualification frameworks to resolve. It is one example of how the further actions recommended in chapter 7 which comprise a comprehensive, and yet still concise, list, contribute to wider European discussion and the evidence base to pursue European cooperation and peer learning on common challenges.