

PROCEDURE FOR ACADEMIC RECOGNITION OF FOREIGN QUALIFICATIONS AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM FOR DECISION-MAKING

I. General provisions

1. At the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences (hereinafter LSMU), citizens of foreign countries and the Republic of Lithuania who have acquired education abroad are offered studies in full-time integrated, first-cycle and second-cycle study programs taught in English. The list of offered study programs is every year announced in the admission rules, and the information is published on the University website.

2. In the Strategic Guidelines 2018-2020, growing the efficiency of LSMU activities is related to further attracting gifted, talented and motivated highschool graduates to study, by constantly improving the quality of studies, providing students with the highest level of general and specialty competences, and developing the lifelong learning system. The development of international LSMU activities aims to expand the internationality of the University community, propagate the internationality of studies and research, enhance the quality of studies, and improve the process of admission of foreign students and the recognition of international qualifications. In order to flexibly assess international qualifications entitling to higher education, taking into account the increasing internationality and diversity of education, LSMU cooperates with foreign higher education institutions, international institutions providing education and qualifications, and uses the experience of international accredited qualification assessment organizations.

3. The Procedure for the Assessment and Academic Recognition of Foreign Qualifications (hereinafter the Procedure) and the Quality Assurance System for Decision-Making (hereinafter the System) have been developed in accordance with the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereinafter SKVC) programs, evaluation methodology (Order of the Director of the SKVC, 2012, No. V-48, latest edition No. V-23 of 14 February 2020) and the Description of the recognition procedure of education and qualifications related to higher education and acquired in accordance with educational programs of foreign states and international organizations (Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, 2012, No. 212, latest edition No. V-609 of 28 July 2017).

4. The assessment and recognition procedure described in the Procedure shall be carried out in accordance with the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, ETS No.165, 1997 and the Explanatory Report, Riga Recommendations on Criteria and Procedure, and Explanatory Memorandum, Riga 2001, the Revised Code of Good Practice for the Provision of Transnational Education, the EAR and EAR HEI Manuals, Code of Good Practice for the Provision of Information on Recognition, Strasbourg,

2004, bilateral and multilateral agreements, national legislation and internal rules and procedures adopted by LSMU.

5. The Procedure shall be carried out in the determined stages, taking specific actions for inspection, assessment and recognition of qualifications. An internal and external quality assurance system is envisioned to ensure the quality of academic recognition decisions.

6. The assessment and academic recognition of foreign qualifications shall be carried out by a group of employees assigned by LSMU (hereinafter the Working Group), acting under the LSMU Foreign Student Admission Committee following the provisions of this Procedure. The employees of the group have appropriate qualifications and experience in the assessment of foreign qualifications, as well as access to the necessary databases.

II. General principles for the assessment and recognition of qualifications

7. When assessing qualifications obtained abroad, the Working Group shall respect the principle of non-discrimination on grounds of gender, race, language, religion, national or social origin, or any other reason not related to academic qualifications.

8. The qualification assessment procedure shall take into account the models of education systems applied in the world, their specifics and the regulated level of education.

9. The applicable evaluation criteria shall be clearly defined, rational, applied consistently and publicly declared. The terms of the evaluation procedure are based on real time expenditure.

10. The assessment of a specific qualification shall take into account the assessment practice of similar qualifications by applying analogous assessment methods and criteria.

11. Each decision shall be made on the basis of international recommendations, national legislation, internal LSMU documents, available information and documents submitted by the applicant.

III. Criteria and stages of the assessment and recognition procedure

12. Submission and collection of information

12.1. LSMU shall provide information to the applicant in English only. The information is provided free of charge, is clear and complete and is constantly updated and revised. The information is easily accessible and provided in various forms (on the website, by e-mail, telephone, in person, etc.).

12.2. Applicants shall be provided with the following initial information on the recognition of their education:

- evaluation criteria;
- recognition procedure;
- rights and obligations of LSMU and the applicant;
- list of required documents;

- duration of the process;
- references to the documents used (international, national legislation, etc.);
- appeal procedure.

12.3. Upon acceptance of the application, applicants shall be provided with the following information:

- acknowledgment of receipt of the application;
- notification about any missing documents;
- the progress of the application.

12.4. Following the decision, applicants shall be provided with the following information:

- the result of the decision, stating the reasons;
- the possibilities provided by the decision;
- the possibility of appeal if the decision is not satisfactory.

13. Application for admission to studies, assessment of documents and recognition of qualifications.

13.1. On the application acceptance platform (www.apply.lsmuni.lt), applicants shall submit one application form, which provides information and copies of documents required for both the admission procedure and the evaluation of documents.

13.1. In the application form, the applicant shall indicate and submit with it:

- personal information (CV);
- contact information;
- an electronic copy of an identity document;
- electronic copies of educational documents and appendices;
- a certificate of English language proficiency, if applicable;
- additional documents proving the level of education, if necessary.

13.2. The documents submitted by applicants must meet the following requirements:

- the documents must be official, i.e., issued by authorized, competent and accredited bodies;
- electronic copies are made from the originals or properly certified copies (the originals of the mentioned documents are required to confirm the decision upon arrival to study);
- the submitted document must certify the final qualification of secondary or higher education (preliminary education documents may be submitted at the initial stage, if at the time of submitting the documents, the training or studies have not been completed or the documents have not been issued by the teaching or research and study institution);

- documents are provided in the original language, and an official translation of the documents into English or Lithuanian (at the applicant's choice) is requested when the language of the document is other than English.

13.3. The authenticity of the educational documents is verified using the following means, which are selected based on the specifics of each country:

- accreditations of educational establishments and study programs which are officially recognized by the country's education system where the issuing educational institution is established;
- by sending a request for validation to the authority that issued or validated the document;
- verification in recognized international networks and/or recognized databases;
- by consulting the SKVC;
- by requesting legalization of submitted documents and checking legalization marks and stamps.

14. Assessment and recognition criteria

Qualifications are assessed and recognized as suitable for study at the university on the basis of the following main (14.1 and 14.2) and supplementary (14.3, 14.4 and 14.5) criteria:

14.1. Compliance of the qualification with the requirements for admission to a certain study program;

14.2. Compliance of the value and level of the qualification in the country of origin to the analogous qualification in Lithuania;

14.3. Testing knowledge and skills in biology and chemistry/mathematics during the entrance examination in accordance with the "Procedure for Admission to LSMU Study Programs in a Foreign Language;"

14.4. Refugees and persons from conflict zones who are unable to submit original documents, etc., or when qualifications have been acquired in non-traditional ways apply formally for consultation with the SKVC, and follow their recommendations;

14.5. When along with a recognized secondary education qualification or equivalent (International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) level 3) a prerequisite for an additional year of courses, studies, etc. is applied, the assessment of competencies acquired in non-formal additional training shall be performed based on the criteria described in Article 15.8.

15. Stages and sequence of the evaluation procedure of educational documents received with the application for studies

15.1. Upon receipt of the application for studies submitted to the LSMU through the application platform, the responsible employee sends an acknowledgment of receipt of the application for studies, indicates the deficiencies, if any, and provides comments on the revision of the application. If necessary, additional documents are requested;

15.2. The authenticity of the submitted documents and whether these documents are legally owned by the applicant shall be verified. In case the documents are found to be forged, the procedure for recognition of the qualification shall be discontinued;

15.3. It shall be verified whether the educational institution and the completed or partially completed secondary education or study program are recognized and accredited in the education system of their origin;

15.4. The assessment shall take into account the claimed level of study, the qualification obtained in the country of origin and its content and learning outcomes, as well as previous practice in similar cases, information obtained from the SKVC, other ENIC/NARIC centers or other available sources. When, in addition to secondary education, additional courses or studies, etc. are required, the assessment shall be carried out in accordance with the criteria set out in Chapter 16.

15.5. The aim of the assessment procedure is to determine whether there are significant differences in the qualification compared to the analogous qualification awarded in Lithuania, such as:

- substantial differences in learning outcomes with analogous qualifications in Lithuania, if any, and which could lead to non-recognition of foreign qualifications;
- differences between the essential elements of the qualification program;
- whether the level of knowledge and skills provided by the qualification meets the requirements for preparedness to study in LSMU programs;
- whether the qualification can be recognized as equivalent to the qualification provided by LSMU without limitations or only with additional requirements;
- the extent to which the foreign qualification meets the general (qualification equivalent) and specific requirements (e.g., level of achievement, content, etc.).

15.6 If the above-mentioned significant differences are not identified, a conclusion of the foreign qualification assessment is issued, i.e., a positive decision (recognition is granted);

15.7. If significant differences in the quality of learning outcomes, program elements, programs or higher education institutions are identified, a negative conclusion of the foreign qualification assessment and a decision not to recognize it as equivalent to the minimum required qualification is issued. In the event of non-recognition, the applicant shall be clearly informed of the reasons for the decision and of the possibility of appeal;

15.8. Where additional courses, studies, etc. are required with a secondary education or equivalent qualification, they are considered acceptable when their curricula meet the following criteria:

- these are transnational in nature and scope per se;
- have been acquired in one of the EU or EEC countries;
- additional courses or study program take at least one year to complete and correspond to the course of the LSMU study program in a general sense;

- the courses have a quality assurance system including external independent supervision;
- courses are recognized by other EU and EEC universities as suitable for further education.

16. Application and comparison of general and specific requirements for applicants' qualifications during the assessment procedure

16.1 The general qualification requirements for studying in a certain study program are defined by the following criteria:

- level of education (secondary, higher university or non-university and study stage) according to the Lithuanian education system;
- level of education according to the education system of the country where it was acquired;
- descriptions of study programs.

16.2. The assessment based on the general requirements is performed in accordance with the SKVC recommendations and the database accumulated by LSMU;

16.3. Specific requirements are applied taking into account the level (stage) of the study program and special requirements for a certain study program:

- consultation with the LSMU department, faculty supervising specific study program;
- application of special requirements previously defined by the Working Group and in the admission rules when applying to certain study programs;
- conclusions provided by LSMU departments on compliance with specific requirements discussed at the Working Group meeting and when shaping the practice of recognition of education in relation to a certain study program.

16.4. Final decisions on the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications are made centrally by the LSMU Working Group.

IV. Execution and appeal of decisions on recognition of qualifications

17. The decision shall be made only following the completion of all stages of inspection and the assessment, but not later than within 1 month from the date of the receipt of documents;

18. In case the qualification is recognized as suitable for admission to a certain study program (cycle), a letter signed by an authorized member of the Working Group shall be issued, indicating the reasons for the decision;

19. In case the qualification is not recognized, a letter signed by an authorized member of the Working Group shall be issued, clearly stating the reasons for the decision and proving

information on the possibility to file a reasoned appeal should the applicant disagree with the decision.

20. In case the recognition is conditional, a letter signed by an authorized member of the Working Group shall be issued, clearly setting out the reasons for the decision, indicating the additional requirements to be met and their alternatives.

21. A copy of the letter of recognition decision shall be uploaded in the LSMU application electronic system in the personal file of the respective applicant. If the applicant wishes, the University may issue the original of the letter.

22. Pursuant to Article 36 of the “Description of the procedure for recognition of education and qualifications related to higher education and acquired according to the educational programs of foreign states and international organizations” (Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, 2012, No. 212), an Applicant disagreeing with the LSMU decision on foreign academic recognition of qualifications shall be informed about the possibility to submit an appeal to the Appeal Commission for the recognition of Education and qualifications related to higher education and acquired according to the educational programs of foreign states and international organizations, established by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education, within 14 calendar days from the receipt of the decision.

23. The decision to recognize a qualification obtained abroad does not mean a decision to admit to study at LSMU. The selection criteria are applied, and the competitive score is calculated according to the admission rules approved by LSMU every year.

23.1. Where the selection criteria for studies are based on a competitive score, the latter shall be calculated on the basis of the fulfillment and results of one or more of the following additional requirements, applying the formula and criteria set out in the admission rules:

23.1.1. an entrance examination in chemistry or mathematics and biology, the tasks of which, corresponding to the topics of highschool examinations in Lithuania, are prepared by LSMU lecturers of the respective subject;

23.1.2. certificates of English language proficiency and their assessment;

23.1.3. high school results in chemistry or mathematics and biology;

23.1.4. assessment of completed first cycle studies.

23.2. If it is not possible to determine whether the above-mentioned subjects meet the criteria for selection and calculation of the competitive score, the LSMU entrance examination is mandatory in order to determine the applicant’s preparedness for the chosen study program.

24. The decision not to recognize a qualification does not automatically mean a refusal of the admission to the LSMU study program, as the applicant may still be given an opportunity to submit additional or missing proof of qualification.

25. The applicant shall be informed about the decision to admit to study in a separate letter, when the applicant has already completed all stages of admission to the LSMU study program according to the description of the procedure for admission of foreign students, and his/her qualification was recognized by the decision of the LSMU Foreign Student Admission Committee.

V. Acceptance of credits and transfer of grades for students who previously studied in other higher education institutions

26. LSMU credits study results in accordance with the procedure established in the Study Regulation (Approved by Resolution No. 120-04 of the Senate of the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences of 20 June 2019 and amended by Resolution No. 123-03 of the Senate of the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences of 19 September 2019) (Chapter XII of the Regulation). Acceptance of previous study results is not in scope of the description of the present procedure.

VI. Decision making quality assurance system

27. In the internal quality assurance system, quality principles of qualification recognition activity shall be applied

27.1. The LSMU Working Group shall follow the principle of impartiality and student (applicant)-oriented recognition.

27.2. The recognition process shall be consistent: clear and reasonable criteria shall be applied at each stage.

27.3. Uniform recognition strategy shall be ensured regardless of the country of origin or other distinctiveness.

27.4. Whenever possible, information from more than one source on the qualifications being assessed shall be used.

27.5 LSMU departments (institutes, faculties, centers) shall be consulted regarding the application of special requirements for a qualification before recognizing it as suitable for a particular study program.

27.6. The applied recognition practice and this description are reviewed at least once per academic year; updates and amendments are made in the light of new information and experience gained. The shortcomings identified shall be addressed in order to improve the recognition methods used, to carry out a more in-depth analysis of the documents submitted, and to reduce the decision-making period.

27.7. The established and updated evaluation criteria and procedures are regularly published on the LSMU website in Lithuanian and English.

27.8. The decision not to recognize the qualification for the current admission period may be reviewed if additional information is submitted by the applicant before 1 May of the current year, or at the beginning of a new admission stage for the next academic year.

27.9. The assessment shall be performed by employees with specific knowledge of foreign education systems, methodology for recognition of qualifications and good practice – authorized LSMU employees – Working Group.

27.10. The Working Group shall make a decision only if they have sufficient information and only on the basis of official and reliable documents.

28. External quality assurance measures

28.1. Prior to making a recognition decision, the LSMU Working Group shall:

- take into account general recommendations of the SKVC for education systems of the respective countries;
- in the absence of general recommendations, request the SKVC for an individual recommendation for each specific qualification.

28.2. Cooperation with the SKVC in developing the practice of recognition of qualifications for study purposes in Lithuania, i.e.:

- Working Group provides the SKVC general information about the decisions made or shares examples of individual cases;
- Upon request by the SKVC, Working Group provides documents on the basis of which a specific decision was made.

VII. Accumulation of information and decisions

29. Information about foreign education systems and qualifications is systematized and stored in electronic format and files; the database is constantly updated.

30. Special features of documents, security measures or samples of forged documents shall be accumulated in relevant files, recording the date of receipt and the country of origin;

31. Decisions adopted by the Working Group on the recognition of foreign qualifications:

- are registered in the Foreign Qualifications Recognition Journal;
- the original is kept on the student's file, and the copy is saved in the electronic format;

VIII. Procedural changes and revisions

32. International Relations and Study Center shall be in charge of reviewing and updating the Procedure.

33. The Procedure shall be reviewed at least once a year.