

## Decision on the Substantive Change Report by Estonian Quality Agency for Education (HAKA)

**Register Committee**

**Ref.** RC/C152

**Ver.** 1.0

**Date** 2026-02-13

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<b>Decision of:</b>	2026-02-12
<b>Result:</b>	Take note
<b>Report received on:</b>	2025-11-03
<b>Agency registered since:</b>	2013-03-01
<b>Last external review report:</b>	2023-02-17
<b>Registration until:</b>	2028-02-29
<b>Absented themselves from decision-making:</b>	n/a
<b>Attachments:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <a href="#">Substantive Change Report, 2025-11-03</a></li> <li>2. <a href="#">Minuted clarification of 2025-12-02</a></li> </ol>

1. The Register Committee considered the Substantive Change Report of 2025-11-03.
2. The Register Committee took note of the following changes:
  - A) Institutional accreditation of higher education institutions**
3. In 2025, HAKA updated the methodology for institutional accreditation with guidelines tackling new areas such as sustainable development, data protection and security, development of learners in flexible learning pathways and societal impact of research activities.
4. Other changes included broadening the representation of relevant stakeholders in the self-assessment process, including learners; introducing an online pre-visit meeting between the panel and self-assessment team; and involving more international experts in the panels as well as increasing the number of panel members.
5. The new institutional accreditation model also introduced two new forms of follow up - a feedback seminar for the higher education institution with a representative from the review panel and an opportunity for additional external feedback from experts in a selected enhancement area for institutions accredited without conditions.
- 6. The Register Committee took note of the changes and requested that the new approach is evaluated in full (ESG Part 2) as part of the next external review.**

### **B) Initial assessment and re-assessment of study programme groups**

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7. The programme accreditation guidelines have been updated and now include standards aimed at newly established higher education institutions, with particular focus on sustainability and quality of digital infrastructure.
8. Consequently to the changes in the number of standards and areas, the assessment structure and decision-making principles of the HAKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education have been also updated.
9. **The Register Committee took note of the changes and expects that the change will be analysed in full in the next external review of HAKA.**

### C) Quality assessment of study programme groups in non formal continuing education institutions

10. The Register Committee learned that HAKA launched the *Quality assessment of study programme groups in non-formal continuing education institutions* as a regular activity aimed at programmes at levels other than higher education (i.e. not on levels linked to QF EHEA levels). **The Register Committee took note of the changes and inquired that the next external review of HAKA looks into how the agency ensures clear distinction between this activity and its ESG aligned activities, in particular the *Accreditation of continuing education programmes*, for the public.**

### D) External quality assurance for general education schools

11. The Register Committee learned that HAKA developed an external quality assurance model for general education schools, based on experiences from higher and vocational education. Considering that this activity applies exclusively to pre-tertiary education levels, **the Register Committee simply took note of the changes.**
12. Based on the detailed information provided in the Substantive Change Report and the clarification provided by the agency, the Register Committee had no prima facie concerns that the ESG are complied with in the case of the updated institutional and programme accreditation procedures of HAKA.
13. The Committee expects that these activities will be analysed in full as part of HAKA next renewal of registration.

## EQAR Substantive Change Report

Reference #	30523413
Status	Complete
Agency #1	Estonian Quality Agency for Education
Agency acronym	HAKA
Expiry date #1	29/02/2028
Contact #1	Tiia Bach
Phone #1	+372 56606419
Email #1	<a href="mailto:tiia.bach@harno.ee">tiia.bach@harno.ee</a>
Other organisations?	No
A. Has the organisational identity of the registered agency changed?	No
B. Has the organisational structure changed?	No
C. Changes in EQA activities	2. Substantive changes carried out to one or several existing external QA activities (e.g. changes to their methodology, criteria or procedures)
Description new/changed	<p>1. New institutional accreditation model was developed and launched in 2025</p> <p>The new model is much based on the previous procedure. It differs in that instead of 12 standards there are now 3 assessment areas and 9 quality criteria. Some of the aspects that formed separate standards in the previous model are now included across all three assessment areas (eg quality culture, internationalisation, academic ethics). More focus has been placed on sustainable development aspects, data protection and security, evidence-based</p>

activities, development of self-directed learners, scientific and societal impact of RDC activities. One of the changes is also that if an HEI already holds a positive regular RDC evaluation decision, a positive institutional accreditation decision extends its validity.

The evaluation must use both institutional data and centrally collected national indicators. Thus in the new model, lists of possible evidences to meet the criteria have been provided - these include both mandatory evidences that must be considered as well as voluntary evidences that may or may not have to be taken into account when analysing criteria.

The main changes in the procedure include:

1) participation of a broad representation (including learners) and other relevant stakeholders in the self-assessment process and includes learners' input in the self-assessment report 2) requirements set for panel members have been modified; the minimum number is now 5 members and most members should be international, 3) online pre-visit meeting between the panel and self-assessment team, 4) as a follow-up activity, HAKA...

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... will organise a feedback seminar at the higher education institution with a representative from the assessment panel also participating. 5) A higher education institution that has received a seven-year accreditation (without a secondary condition) has the option to choose a focus area from among the areas of improvement outlined in the institutional accreditation decision and make an application to HAKA for receiving additional external feedback from competent experts as a follow-up activity for development purposes.

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Key updates in the new model have also been outlined on HAKA website: <https://haka.ee/en/institutional-accreditation/>

2. Guidelines for Initial Assessment and Re-assessment of study programme groups were revised in 2024

The main change was that requirements for new institutions that want to be established in Estonia and start providing studies, were specified in the regulation.

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## 2. Changed EQA activity

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1	Institutional accreditation of higher education institutions
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2	Initial assessment and re-assessment of study programme groups
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### ESG 2.1

The following describes how the ESG standards are included in the new IA regulation. Please refer to the attached IA regulation.

ESG 1.1 Policy for quality assurance: covered in all HAKA IA assessment areas - criteria 6.1.Strategic Management and Development; 6.4. Development of Studies and Study Programmes; 6.7. Setting of the Goals and Quality Management in RDC

ESG 1.2 Design and approval of programmes: covered in the IA criterion 6.4. Development of Studies and Study Programmes.

ESG 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment: IA criteria 6.5. Learning and Teaching; 6.6. Support Systems for Learning and Teaching

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ESG 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification: IA criterion 6.5. Learning and Teaching; 6.6. Support Systems for Learning and Teaching

ESG 1.5 Teaching staff: IA criteria 6.2.Human Resource Management; 6.9. Support System for RDC and Career Support for Early-Career Researchers

ESG 1.6 Learning resources and student support: IA criteria 6.1.Strategic Management and Development; 6.3.Infrastructure and Information Management; 6.6. Support Systems for Learning and Teaching

ESG 1.7 Information management: IA criteria 6.3.Infrastructure and Information Management; 6.4. Development of Studies and Study Programmes; 6.7. Setting of the Goals and Quality Management in RDC

ESG 1.8 Public information: IA criterion 6.3.Infrastructure and Information Management

ESG 1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes: IA criterion 6.4. Development of Studies and Study Programmes

ESG 1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance: in IA regulation point 3 in the regulation (external review at least once in 7 years)

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## ESG 2.2

The development of the new model was based on the analyses of the results of the previous model: the IA results in the period of 2019-2023 were analysed; the feedback from HEIs and experts was taken into consideration; an analyses of international practices in IA was

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carried out ([https://haka.ee/wp-content/uploads/Institutsionaalsete\\_hindamiste\\_ANALUUS\\_2024\\_EN.pdf](https://haka.ee/wp-content/uploads/Institutsionaalsete_hindamiste_ANALUUS_2024_EN.pdf)).

In 2024, a working group was formed by HAKA Director which included all the main stakeholders in higher education (representatives of the Rectors' councils, representatives of the HEIs, Federation of Estonian Students Unions, and the Ministry of Education and Research). The working group was led by HAKA director. The task of the group was to develop standard and guidelines for the new IA model, and making suggestions for the entire process, including formation of accreditation decision. The proposals of the working group were discussed in several seminars where feedback was collected from representatives of HEIs. Additionally, the methodology was discussed in the group. The regulation was finalised and adopted by HAKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education in July 2024.

On HAKA website we have shortly described the development process of the IA model together with the working documents of the working group (available only in Estonian): <https://haka.ee/institutsionaalse-akrediteerimise-arendus/>  
On 24 September 2025, HAKA organised a seminar where the new model was introduced to the public by the working group members, moderated by HAKA director: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aOiJq5wqGhE>

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### ESG 2.3

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|---|---|
| 1 | <a href="https://haka.ee/wp-content/uploads/IA_hindamisjuhend-kehtiv-alates-29.04.2025_EN.pdf">https://haka.ee/wp-content/uploads/IA_hindamisjuhend-kehtiv-alates-29.04.2025_EN.pdf</a> |
| 2 | <a href="https://haka.ee/wp-content/uploads/Guidelines-">https://haka.ee/wp-content/uploads/Guidelines-</a>   |
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## ESG 2.4

The following goes for IA regulation, since no changes were introduced in the regulation for initial and re-assessment of study programme groups.

Many aspects regarding ESG 2.4 remained unchanged. The evaluation panel continues to include international experts, who form the majority of the panel.

This ensures international comparability and enhances the visibility of Estonian higher education in the global context.

Some of the principles of composing the review team have been revised and /or added: 1) there will be at least 5 members, 2) The panel must include at least two members who have management experience in a higher education institution with a similar profile (previously one member was sufficient); 3) at least one member of the panel has experience in assessing RDC activities specific to the higher education institution under evaluation (in the case of an institution which has been positively evaluated in multiple research fields, the panel includes, where possible, expertise in all relevant research fields), 4) If the panel is evaluating a professional higher education institution offering vocational education, at least one member must be familiar with the vocational education system and has experience in leading the field of learning and teaching in an institution offering vocational education.

When training panel members, more emphasis will be placed on familiarising the experts with the organisation and funding principles of the Estonian higher education and research, and in

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the case of a professional higher education institution offering vocational education, also about the organisation and funding principles of vocational education.

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**ESG 2.5**

The same as before: the principles of forming judgements of the assessment areas in the panel as well as the principles of the formation of the decisions of the Assessment Council are in detail described in the regulation of the Institutional accreditation.

The methods have also not changed in case of Initial and re-assessment of study programme groups.

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**ESG 2.6**

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**1**

IA reports: <https://haka.ee/en/institutional-accreditation/assessment-decisions-reports/>

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**2**

HAKA database of external QA results (all reports, incl initial assessment): <https://haka.edu.ee/higherEducationQueries?lang=ENG>

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**D. Activity outside the scope of the ESG**

Yes

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**Context**

Firstly, In the Substantive Change Report submitted on 29.08.2023 we mentioned that the Quality Assessment Council for Continuing Education was formed at HAKA. We would like inform that since 2025, HAKA conducts quality assessment of study programme groups in non-formal continuing education institutions. This type of evaluation is voluntary for organisations/ companies offering continuing education programmes. However, if such an institution wants to offer a microcredential, the institution must apply for the right to conduct studies in the respective study programme group.

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These external quality assurance activities have been introduced in The Adult Education Act (<https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/525042025003/consolide>).

Secondly, HAKA has also developed an external quality assurance model for general education schools (an institutional model). The quality criteria were developed by a working group (incl various stakeholders) and are very much based on the learning and experiences in higher and vocational education. The model is being piloted during the period of 2024-2027 in at least 30 schools all across Estonia, covering various types and sizes of schools. The main difference of this model compared to other evaluation activities in HAKA is that there is no decision made at the end of the evaluation process - the school prepares a self-evaluation report and receives an assessment report from the panel of experts after the site visit; the purpose is to outline the strengths and identify improvement areas in order to empower the schools in creating a study environment that supports every student in their development. More can be read here <https://haka.ee/en/general-education/>

<b>File #1</b>	<a href="#">Guidelines_for_initial_and_reassessment_EN_2.07.24.pdf (380 KB)</a>
<b>File #2</b>	<a href="#">IA_Procedure_valid_29.04.2025_EN.pdf (597 KB)</a>
<b>Submit form?</b>	I am ready to submit the change report form
<b>Last Update</b>	2025-11-03 10:27:37
<b>Start Time</b>	2025-11-02 22:10:27
<b>Finish Time</b>	2025-11-03 10:27:37
<b>IP</b>	45.156.33.50

<b>Browser</b>	Edge
<b>Device</b>	Desktop
<b>Referrer</b>	<a href="https://www.eqar.eu/">https://www.eqar.eu/</a>

# Substantive Change Report by Estonian Quality Agency for Education (HAKA)

## Minutes of Zoom call

<b>Date of the conversation:</b>	12-02-2025
<b>Representative of HAKA:</b>	Heli Mattisen, Tiia Bach
<b>Representative of EQAR:</b>	Aleksandra Zhivkovikj

1. HAKA has made a Substantive Change Report on 2025-11-03. In order to prepare the deliberations of the Register Committee on the report, EQAR contacted HAKA via call to clarify the matter(s) below.
2. HAKA agreed to clarify the matter(s) by means of a Zoom call.

### **A) Initial Assessment and Re-assessment in Higher Education of study groups**

3. The revised criteria build on the earlier HAKA guidelines by extending the focus beyond programme groups to institution-wide quality considerations relevant for establishing new higher education institutions. The main aim was to focus on new forms of educational provision, such as studies implemented fully remotely, by specifying requirements for online education and the learning environment.
4. The methodology for Initial Assessment and Re-assessment in Higher Education of study groups has been amended in 2024, and 7 criteria have been established.
5. The 7th assessment area will be assessed only in cases of newly established higher education institutions (i.e. institutions that haven't started operating yet). For this purpose, a new criterion has been added, tackling the quality of digital infrastructure.
6. Following the amended methodology, HAKA also changed the principles for forming the decision of the HAKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education.

### **C) Quality assurance model for continuing education**

7. The differentiation from the activity *Accreditation of continuing education programmes* is in the level of education the programmes are offered at as well as the providers - The newly launched methodology tackles provisions that are not linked to QF EHEA level 6 – 8 and are offered by adult learning providers. In addition, this activity is primarily focused on domestic providers.