

**The decision of the Higher Education Assessment Council
of the Estonian Quality Agency for Education**

INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION

ESTONIAN AVIATION ACADEMY

24 January 2024

The Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Education decided to accredit the Estonian Aviation Academy for seven years.

Pursuant to clause 43.1 of the document “Guide to Institutional Accreditation” established on the basis of the authorisation contained in subsection 38(3) of the Higher Education Act and subsection 24(5) of the Statutes of the Education and Youth Board, the Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Education (hereinafter referred to as the Council) states the following:

1. The Estonian Aviation Academy and the Estonian Quality Agency for Education agreed on the period for institutional accreditation on 11 October 2022.
2. On 7 July 2023, the Director of the Estonian Quality Agency for Education (HAKA) approved the following composition of the committee for institutional accreditation (hereinafter referred to as the Committee):

Auste Kiškiene (Chair)	Entrepreneur, higher education consultant, former Rector of Kazimieras Simonavičius University (Lithuania)
Matthew Kitching (Secretary)	Student at Edinburgh Business School and Heriot-Watt University (UK)
Eurico Pimenta de Brito	Instituto Superior de Educaçao e Ciencias (ISEC Lisboa) Head of Aviation Department, Specialist Professor (Portugal)
Jaroslav Juračka	Brno University of Technology, Director of Institute of Aerospace Engineering, Associate Professor (Czech Republic)
Kristo Vallimäe	Strategic Project Manager, Lennuliiklusteeninduse AS, non-academic member of the Committee (Estonia)
Martti Kiisa	Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs, TTK University of Applied Sciences (Estonia)

3. The Estonian Aviation Academy submitted a self-evaluation report to the HAKA Bureau on 14 July 2023 and the HAKA assessment coordinator forwarded it to the Committee on 14 August 2023.
4. An assessment visit was made to the Estonian Aviation Academy on 16–18 October 2023.

5. The Committee sent its draft assessment report to the HAKA Bureau on 2 December 2023. HAKA forwarded it to the higher education institution for its comments on 11 December 2023 and the Estonian Aviation Academy submitted its comments on 14 December 2023.
6. The Committee submitted its final assessment report to the HAKA Bureau on 29 December 2023. The assessment report is an integral part of the decision. The report is available on HAKA's website.
7. The Secretary of the Council forwarded the final assessment report along with the self-evaluation report to the Council members on 17 January 2024.
8. The Committee's assessments were as follows:

Standard	Assessment
Strategic management	Conforms to requirements
Resources	Conforms to requirements
Quality culture	Conforms to requirements
Academic ethics	Conforms to requirements
Internationalisation	Conforms to requirements
Teaching staff	Conforms to requirements
Study programme	Conforms to requirements
Learning and teaching	Conforms to requirements
Student assessment	Conforms to requirements
Learning support systems	Conforms to requirements
Research, development and/or other creative activities	Conforms to requirements
Service to society	Conforms to requirements

9. The Council with 11 members present discussed these received documents in its session on 24 January 2024 and decided to point out the following strengths¹, areas for improvement² and recommendations, and suggestions for further development regarding the Estonian Aviation Academy³.

9.1 Strategic management

Strengths

- 1) The Estonian Aviation Academy has made significant progress in defining strategic planning, in particular strategic objectives and performance indicators. The strategy of the Academy has been developed taking into account the recommendations from the previous accreditation.

¹The strengths pointed out include achievements beyond the standard (not compliance with the standard).

² The areas for improvement and the recommendations point to shortcomings in meeting the requirements of the institutional accreditation standard and affect the final decision of the Council.

³ The suggestions for further development are suggestions for improvement which do not contain a reference to non-compliance with the standard and which are at the discretion of the higher education institution to either take into consideration or disregard. The suggestions for further development do not affect the final decision of the Council.



- 2) The development of the Academy's strategy for 2021–2025 has been systematic and the process has been well organised. In line with the principles of inclusive governance, various stakeholders, including academic staff and social and business partners, were involved in the development of the strategy.
- 3) The Academy's strategy, shared values and strengths are clearly communicated to the target groups and available to the public on the Academy's website.

Areas for improvement, and recommendations

- 1) Some of the Academy's performance indicators are not very ambitious, in particular, in terms of research and development. Although internationalisation is clearly a focus area, it does not have a specific strategy map. These topics should be reviewed, and an appropriate strategy ensured across all focus areas, as well as the performance indicators relevant to the Academy's ambitious strategic objectives.
- 2) Some fields, such as service to society, are under-represented in the strategy. Furthermore, although there is evidence of a shift toward prioritising innovation, the current objectives and activities do not sufficiently emphasise innovation and creativity. In this regard, the Academy should specify its strategy to include an explicit focus on all strategic priorities, including service to society, innovation, and creativity.

9.2. Resources

Strengths

- 1) The Academy is characterised by a wide range of high-quality physical resources, including well-equipped classrooms, technical hangar, speciality workshops and simulators.
- 2) The Academy has put in effort to make buildings more automated and efficient.
- 3) Investments in human resources have helped establish knowledgeable and motivated academic staff focused on the objectives of the Academy.

Suggestions for further development

- 1) In order to maintain a sustainable and manageable workload for staff, it is important to regularly review the staff workload model. Although there are numerous opportunities for staff to undertake additional responsibilities, such as research and development (R&D) activities and extra teaching roles, it is crucial to monitor these to ensure that everyone's workload remains manageable. If necessary, the hiring of additional staff should be considered instead of excessively increasing the working hours of current employees.
- 2) Upgrading the aircraft simulator should be considered to ensure that the Academy's facilities provide for cutting-edge training.

9.3. Quality culture

Strengths



- 1) The established quality procedures are detailed and in accordance with sector-specific regulations.

Areas for improvement, and recommendations

- 1) The low response rates to feedback surveys are an issue. The result is a lack of data for reviewing the study programmes. Effective strategies must be developed for increasing the response rates, and response options, to student and alumni surveys.

Suggestions for further development

- 1) Mutual observations currently focus on pointing out positive practices. It is recommended to expand these observations by pointing out areas for improvement as well.
- 2) Annual employee performance interviews aimed at supporting their continuous professional development should be carried out consistently.
- 3) Separate performance indicators should be established for support services.

9.4. Academic ethics

Strengths

- 1) An extensive regulatory system has been established and implemented for monitoring adherence to academic ethics.

Suggestions for further development

- 1) Ethical regulations should be amended to address the challenges posed by the increased role of artificial intelligence.

9.5. Internationalisation

Strengths

- 1) There is a visible commitment to internationalisation in the activities and strategy of the Academy. The Academy should be commended for its integrated approach to communication with the international aviation community, including through participation in start-up accelerators, R&D projects and sectoral associations such as the Air Transport and Aeronautics Education and Research Association (ATAERA).
- 2) The Academy has been very successful in the internationalisation of its study programmes. Two study programmes have been opened in the English language: Commercial Aviation Management and Commercial Air Transport Pilot.

Areas for improvement, and recommendations

- 1) A significant gap in strategic documents lies in the little emphasis put on international research and development. The strategic objectives do not adequately reflect participation in international R&D funding programmes. In addition, there are no clear



performance indicators for international research and development projects and for publications involving foreign lecturers and international co-authors. Therefore, the Academy must establish clear strategic objectives and performance indicators for its international research and development activities.

Suggestions for further development

- 1) An action plan to increase the international mobility of employees could be considered. This would, in turn, help promote international cooperation.

9.6. Teaching staff

Strengths

- 1) The teaching staff are competent, motivated and focused on the strategic priorities of the Academy.

Areas for improvement, and recommendations

- 1) It is difficult to find competent and experienced teaching staff who wish to work in Estonia. The Academy must continue to develop an efficient plan for finding teaching staff that meet the requirements (including holding a Doctoral degree) and the strategic goals of the Academy.

Suggestions for further development

- 1) The involvement of both Estonian and foreign visiting lecturers and professionals of the field in narrower fields such as unmanned aviation could be expanded.
- 2) Continuous support must be provided to teaching staff acquiring their Master's and Doctoral degrees.

9.7. Study programme

Strengths

- 1) The study programmes are characterised by flexible response to market needs and changing sectoral requirements.
- 2) The opening of two study programmes in the English language will provide more opportunities for students and will increase the Academy's income.

Suggestions for further development

- 1) Although the involvement of visiting lecturers poses logistical challenges, efforts should be made to stabilise the timetable for students.
- 2) In order to increase the attractiveness and efficiency of study programmes, common elements of the study programmes could be expanded and then carried out together for students of different study programmes.



9.8. Learning and teaching

Strengths

- 1) Internship is very relevant, and a wide range of cooperation partners has been involved in its implementation.

Suggestions for further development

- 1) A balance should be secured between financial efficiency and preference of students for elective modules.
- 2) In order to assess the efficiency of student admissions, other performance indicators could be used in addition to the ratio of admission applications and the number of students admitted.

9.9. Student assessment

Strengths

- 1) Students are satisfied with the volume and quality of assessments and feedback and the balance between summative and formative assessments.

Suggestions for further development

- 1) Assessment results are typically entered into the Student Information System within 10 working days. According to the Committee, this period is too long and could be shortened twice.

9.10. Learning support systems

Strengths

- 1) Student dropout rate is lower than the Estonian average.

Areas for improvement, and recommendations

- 1) The Academy does not have a support system in place for students with special educational needs. Such a system must be developed.

Suggestions for further development

- 1) Academic counselling for students should not be limited to tutors only but should include more options. This would help improve students' academic outcomes.

9.11. Research, development and/or other creative activities

Strengths



- 1) A clear focus of the research, development and creative activities of the Academy has been established, consistent with the competencies of academic staff. The focus is supported by a detailed work plan and clear performance indicators.
- 2) In order to support research, development and creative activities, thorough guidelines and an efficient motivation system have been established.

Areas for improvement, and recommendations

- 1) Despite the progress made in research, development and creative activities, the Academy has the potential to increase its income, expand international cooperation and cooperation with companies, and contribute to the society on a larger scale. It is recommended to increase the volume of commissioned research, development and creative activities and to adjust the corresponding performance indicators.
- 2) Despite the positive changes in the profiles of academic staff, the number of employees with the required research competencies is currently still insufficient to achieve the goals set. It is recommended to employ additional academic staff who can provide added value in the Academy's research, development and creative activities.

Suggestions for further development

- 1) The Academy has set an objective to secure greater awareness of its results and opportunities in the aviation sector. To do so, it is recommended to place more value on, and set goals for, popular science publications as well.
- 2) The possibility of hiring more students for research, development and creative activity projects could be considered, in order to boost their motivation and a sense of responsibility.
- 3) Due to the availability of state funding for the research, development and creative activities of institutions of professional higher education, the use of these resources could be considered to recruit research-oriented academic staff.
- 4) The Academy should put more emphasis on introducing its research, development and creative services to the society. To do so, a communication plan for research, development and creative activities should be developed.

9.12. Service to society

Strengths

- 1) Development activities are carried out in cooperation with key partners in the field.
- 2) Each year, the Academy organises an aviation seminar and a labour market day to help create cooperation networks and help students find jobs.
- 3) The Academy has developed a number of courses and MOOCs open to the general public.



10. If all standards are assessed as “conforms to requirements”, the assessment council shall decide that the management, work organisation, teaching and research activities, and the study and research environment of the higher education institution meet the requirements and shall accredit the higher education institution for seven years.
11. Based on the above, the Council

DECIDED THE FOLLOWING:

Accredit the Estonian Aviation Academy for seven years. The Estonian Aviation Academy is also awarded the HAKA quality label.

The decision was adopted with 11 votes in favour. 0 were against.

12. This accreditation will be valid until 24 January 2031 or until the decision is declared invalid. The HAKA Bureau shall coordinate a date for the next institutional accreditation with the Estonian Aviation Academy no later than on 24 January 2030.
13. The Estonian Aviation Academy shall submit to the Council by 24 January 2026 at the latest an overview of the consideration of the areas of improvement and recommendations pointed out in clause 9 of this decision.
14. A person who finds that his or her rights are violated or his or her freedoms are restricted by this decision may file a challenge with the HAKA Assessment Council within 30 days after he or she became or should have become aware of the decision. The Assessment Council shall send the challenge to the HAKA Appeals Committee, which shall, within five days of receipt of the challenge, provide a written unbiased opinion to the Assessment Council on the validity of the challenge. The Council shall resolve the challenge within 10 days of its receipt, taking into account the reasoned opinion of the Appeals Committee. If further examination of the challenge is necessary, the Assessment Council may extend the deadline for examining the challenge by up to 30 days. Judicial contestation of a decision is possible within 30 days from the date of service of the decision by filing an appeal with the Tallinn Administrative Court pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Administrative Court Procedure Act.

Hillar Bauman

Secretary of the Higher Education Assessment Council

