

Institutional Accreditation Decision

Estonian Business School

29.10.2020

The Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education decided to accredit Estonian Business School for seven years.

Pursuant to clause 43.1 of the document "Guide to Institutional Accreditation" established on the basis of the authorization contained in § 38 (3) of the Higher Education Act and clauses 3.7.3 and 3.7.1 of the Statutes of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education, the Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (hereinafter the Council) states the following:

1. Estonian Business School (EBS) coordinated the time of institutional accreditation with EKKA on 13.06.2019.
2. Based on point 8 of the document *Guide to Institutional Accreditation*, the following study programmes were also assessed within the framework of institutional accreditation:

Entrepreneurship and Business Administration, Bachelor's studies

International Business Administration (in English), Master's studies

3. By order 1-19/25/2020 of 03.03.2020, the Director of EKKA approved the institutional accreditation committee (hereinafter committee) in the following composition

Martin Jes Iversen (Chair)	Vice Dean of International Education, Associate Professor, Copenhagen Business School (Denmark)
Matthew Kitching (Secretary)	Student, Edinburgh Business School, Heriot-Watt University (United Kingdom)
Maarja Beerkens	Assistant professor, Director of Studies, University of Leiden (The Netherlands)

Muhammad Rauf	Abdul	Head of the School of Business, Wittenborg University (The Netherlands)
Luis Carvalho		Assistant Professor, Director of Master in Innovation Economics and Management, University of Porto (Portugal)
Peeter Võrk		Managing Director, Chairman of the Board, PW Partners (Estonia)

4. EBS submitted the self-analysis report to EKKA on 21.02.2020, the EKKA assessment coordinator forwarded the self-analysis report to the committee on 10.03.2020.
5. The hybrid assessment visit to EBS took place on 17-19.08.2020.
6. The committee sent the draft assessment report to EKKA on 21.09.2020, EKKA forwarded the draft assessment report to the higher education institution for comments on 05.10.2020 and EBS submitted its comments on 14.10.2020.
7. The Committee submitted the final assessment report to EKKA on 16.10.2020. The assessment report is an integral part of the decision. The report is available on the EKKA website.
8. The Secretary of the Assessment Council forwarded the final assessment report along with the self-analysis report to the members of the Assessment Council on 26.10.2020.
9. The assessments of the assessment committee 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 activity	Conforms to requirements

10. The Council with 12 members present discussed these received documents in its session on 29.10.2020 and, based on the assessment report, decided to point out for EBS the following strengths¹, areas for improvement, and recommendations² as well as suggestions for further developments³.

11.1. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Strengths

1. EBS conducts annual in-depth analysis on how strategic goals have been reached and has amended the development plan according to the results of this analysis. Achievement of the objectives and effects of the activities are thus evaluated regularly. Staff and students are involved in the annual follow up process and EBS' Senate is discussing the development plan – aside from the management – before approval. This implies that faculty members are involved in the strategic development of EBS.

11.2. RESOURCES

Strengths

1. Well managed and strong financial position. According to financial statements EBS is liquid, well-capitalised, and uses little or no borrowed capital.
2. Calculated decisions have been taken on developing various e-solutions for the enhancement of internal communication and learning possibilities, such as the recently introduced intranet and e-learning environment Canvas.

Suggestions for further developments

1. EBS has set a goal to work out and implement new talent development processes for both faculty and staff by the end of 2020, including investment in new Talent Management software. EBS has established the position of Talent Acquisition and Development Manager to enable a systematic talent

¹ Achievements exceeding those required by the standard have been listed as strengths (not conformity with standard).

² Areas for improvement and recommendations indicate shortcomings in conforming to the requirements of institutional accreditation standards and shall have an impact on the final decision adopted by the council.

³ Suggestions for further developments are suggestions for improvements that do not refer to non-conformity with standards and which the higher education institution is at liberty to take into account or disregard. Suggestions for further developments have no impact on the final decision adopted by the Council.

acquisition process. The newly appointed Talent Acquisition and Development Manager is making real progress, however subsequent steps might include the promotion of the institution's motivation scheme and overseeing the delivery and monitoring of a more comprehensive development programme for staff.

2. Based on interview comments, internal communication has been improving but still needs to be developed to ensure that all students and staff are informed about actions taken by the School in a timely manner. For instance, there were comments that PhD students are occasionally on their own and other students reported that they experienced a lack of coordination between EBS Tallinn and EBS Helsinki. It is advisable to enhance coordination of internal communications mechanisms and flows across the organisation.

11.3. QUALITY CULTURE

Strengths

1. EBS takes student feedback and results of external assessments regularly into account in various types of development activities. International Business Administration BA – has received the EPAS (*EFMD Programme Accreditation System*) accreditation by EFMD (*European Foundation for Management Development*). Compatibility with the EFMD accreditation criteria constitutes an important element in the quality assurance system of EBS. Furthermore EBS has set the goal to gain the institutional EQUIS (*European Quality Improvement System*) accreditation by 2023.
2. EBS has devised clear and thorough documents describing its quality assurance system. The internal quality assurance responsibilities and processes are described in the document EBS Quality Assurance Framework, from 2016. The Handbook of the EBS Quality Management System has been made available on its website to all staff, students and other interested stakeholders.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. Compared to other elements in the quality cycle, the programme advisory board seems to have less of a role. EBS would benefit from ensuring that the programme advisory board plays an active role in the case of all study programmes; as it fills an important function of evaluating the curriculum as a whole, not only individual courses. Active participation of all stakeholders including students, staff, alumni and external stakeholders in the programme advisory board has to be ensured.

Suggestions for further developments

1. EBS should further refine KPIs to ensure a clear and consistent set exists that can be monitored clearly on an annual basis and communicated across the whole organisation.
2. Ensure those KPIs distinguish between theoretical and applied research as well as consultancy activity.
3. Develop a strategy to increase the response rate of student feedback, to improve their validity and reliability.

11.4. ACADEMIC ETHICS

Strengths

1. EBS is taking a proactive stance towards preventing academic fraud and misconduct, including plagiarism among both the student body and their faculty. EBS has a strong understanding of issues pertaining to inequality and ensures that all its employees and students are treated according to the principles of equal treatment laid down in the procedure for discrimination.

Suggestions for further developments

1. EBS has put into place some good initiatives on academic integrity but there is need to have an inclusive policy to deal with challenges such as self-plagiarism, and open science. EBS should focus on an inclusive academic integrity policy, including self-plagiarism, for faculty research publications, which supports the long-term development of high integrity among the academic community at the institution.
2. EBS has yet to develop a formal and documented approach to tackling the threat posed students resorting to by paper-mills. This document should be benchmarked against good practice at other institutions.

11.5. INTERNATIONALISATION

Strengths

1. It is remarkable that the proportion of international students has increased from 15% in 2013-14 to 40,6% in 2018-19. These figures confirm that EBS is the leading international university in Estonia. This is underpinned by a considerable number of study programmes in English.
2. EBS has been successful in recruiting experienced faculty members from abroad. The permanent faculty span nine nationalities of which eight faculty members are from abroad and forty-five from Estonia.

Suggestions for further developments

1. EBS has several options for further improving internationalisation. First and foremost, EBS should carefully prepare a future international accreditation under AACSB (*Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business*). Secondly, and related, EBS should consider creating closer partnership relations to selected triple crown universities (accredited by AACSB, AMBA and EQUIS) in order to learn best practices. Finally, it is important that EBS ensure that international students are integrated so that national clusters of students are avoided. Representatives of alumni drew attention to the regrettable isolation experienced by international students.
2. Ensure effective plans are in place to meet internal targets relating to the proportion of international faculty. The aim was at least 20% in 2020. In fact, the figure was only 9% of core faculty in 2020.
3. Develop an internationalisation strategy for the International Business Administration Master's programme that accommodates the needs of the particular student population, looking towards other, less traditional, opportunities, for student mobility - i.e. short courses, exchange of virtual electives etc.

11.6. TEACHING STAFF

Strengths

1. The practical orientation of the faculty members, their experiences within industry and of entrepreneurial activity, is of great value. Their involvement in teaching and thesis supervision is therefore very beneficial for the entrepreneurial development of students.

Suggestions for further developments

1. It was not obvious, from the Self-Evaluation Report and the panel discussion with the teachers, how the staff performance management and quality assurance system was being used to identify areas that the institution needed to address through staff development opportunities. It seemed as though a more *ad hoc* approach was in place for this purpose and the panel determined a more consistent approach would be beneficial. Faculty development is in place but needs to be consistently informed by the outcomes of the University's quality assurance processes.
2. It should be possible to engage more PhD qualified visiting faculty members by arranging collaborations with doctorally qualified academics nationally and internationally either individually or through their institutions. They could be engaged only for research, teaching or both. This will also help in increasing the pool of PhD supervisors and can help PhD students find external PhD co-supervisors on diverse research topics from a larger pool. This is important for future international accreditations.

3. EBS should consider setting-up a strong and ambitious "Teach & Learn" unit which could provide support to under-performing lecturers. The purpose should also be to keep the standards of teaching high and to ensure the "state-of-art" level, which is so critical to EBS' international ambitions.
4. EBS should consider making the course 'Teaching at a Higher Education Institution' (either in-house or provided externally) compulsory for all faculty members and implementing an in-house or even external teaching certification for higher education teaching and learning. This could help to give more priority to the development of faculty members' teaching skills.
5. In some study programmes, i.e. International Business Administration, only approximately 50% of faculty members hold PhDs. EBS should consider including a new ambition to ensure that at least 75% of faculty hold a PhD within the next 2-3 years. It is important that the academic level is sustained, and the principle of research-based teaching is not jeopardised by the need for teaching by practitioners.

11.7. STUDY PROGRAMME

Strengths

1. The most important feature of the EBS programmes is the ability to bridge theory and practice while at the same time remaining relevant. Programmes are evaluated positively, and their practical relevance has been in evidence for a number of years.
2. EBS has used international expertise in the development of the programme including researchers from WU in Vienna, Nottingham Business School and Oxford Brookes University.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. It is important that the procedures for ensuring coherence between the intended learning outcomes of the courses are explicitly linked to the intended learning outcomes of the programmes. We also suggest creating a formal procedure to ensure that overall principles of EBS are reflected in the programmes and courses.

Suggestions for further developments

1. EBS plans to launch a new International Entrepreneurship Bachelor's programme, from autumn 2020, to attract more international faculty and students. It is important that this new initiative makes use of the faculty's existing network among practitioners in order to ensure the relevance to society of the new programme.
2. Foster linkages between the programme and the start-up accelerator, soon to be established at EBS's premises, both for EBS students and staff (e.g. internships, mentoring, thesis development).

3. Set up an advisory board for the International Business Administration Master's programme, which can support a continuous assessment of the relevance of the programme curriculum.

11.8. LEARNING AND TEACHING

Strengths

1. A personalised approach and interview-based admission process that cover all prospective applicants, providing information that allow students to assess the adequacy of the programmes in relation to expectations.
2. Varied and modern approaches to teaching employed across the School.
3. Digital culture, reflected in the continuous improvement of digital platforms, and the development of modern learning environments with the support of e-learning platform LMS Canvas.
4. Student-centred approaches at the level of study programmes and support services.
5. Recognition by the labour market of graduates' professional and social skills, including the ability to solve concrete real-life challenges, practical approach and ability to think 'out-of-the-box'.
6. The active Student Council keeps close contact between the management (including heads of study programmes) and students. The Student Council also publishes the Ebster newsletter.

Suggestions for further developments

1. Consider the creation of an office for digital learning. As IT moves from providing technical support towards the core of EBS mission – embracing pedagogy, teaching methods and course quality – the organisational structure of EBS should reflect this shift. This change will help to ensure that all lecturers become equally competent in operating the School's online platforms.
2. Keep strengthening the links between teaching and research, with an eye to maintaining updated programmes that not only focus on practical challenges but also provide a solid theoretical background to understand real-life affairs.

11.9. STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Strengths

1. Systematic initiatives to improve the transparency and quality of assessment at a course and programme level.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. While the diversity of assessment methods is valued and encouraged, the coordination of different assessments at a programme level is not yet fully developed. The link between learning objectives and assessment is also not formalised, as mentioned elsewhere in the Self-Evaluation Report. A comprehensive assessment of study programmes should be undertaken in order to test linkages between learning outcomes and student assessment as well as examine the diversity of assessment methods.

Suggestions for further developments

1. Increase collaboration and communication between different staff members to improve consistency in grading theses.

11.10. LEARNING SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Strengths

1. The role of study consultants – acting as a “one-stop-shop”, supporting students in academic planning and administrative issues (including for international students).

Suggestions for further developments

1. Closely follow students’ new demands in terms of support services. This would imply providing dedicated training to study consultants, making their role increasingly anticipatory while endowing their job with new skills (beyond the ones acquired through learning-by-doing).
2. Complete appointment of a permanent psychological counsellor.
3. Feedback from staff and students demonstrates that more robust support arrangements for students with disabilities could be put in place. For example currently the whole building is not accessible to persons in wheelchairs.

11.11. RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND/OR OTHER CREATIVE ACTIVITY

Strengths

1. The package of incentives to engage staff in RDC activity (e.g. concrete research time commitments; conference participation, professional development workshops), together with a publication policy and differentiated research requirements among academic staff positions.
2. The empowerment of young staff with international experience in leadership positions and the involvement of doctoral students in research groups, projects and lecturing.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. Until now the majority of research publications by EBS staff have been published in little known journals. Work with the view to strengthen research and support processes thereof as well as finding the necessary funding should be continued.

Suggestions for further developments

1. Beyond monitoring research outcomes, it would be important to develop routines for evaluating (and acting upon) process-related issues as well. These include the organisational mechanisms designed to incentivise research at EBS, such as motivational packages based on research group productivity.
2. EBS should maintain its efforts to ensure the visibility of their researchers in international research environments, incentivising high quality publication and involvement in EU research projects.
3. Strive to combine commissioned and competitive research in the intended work of staff, growing the role of the latter and ensuring this is explicitly reflected in the School's Development Plan.
4. To keep investing in creating an attractive environment for researchers and in hiring new staff with demonstrated research ability and international networks. Together with a "brown-bag" research seminar series, to organise a programme of high-level seminars with leading scholars, in selected fields in which EBS has distinctive expertise and wishes to excel.
5. To develop mechanisms and innovative ways for involving older generations in RDC activity as well, preventing the widening of a generation gap.
6. To ensure sufficiency of supervisors at the PhD level, possibly with contributions from external co-supervisors. A joint PhD programme with another university could be considered in the future.
7. To ensure that the activities of research groups and teaching departments become increasingly connected.
8. EBS should pay attention to assure that research groups have sufficient critical mass. Avoid fragmentation of research groups and closely monitor the research activity and progress of each research group.

11.12. SERVICE TO SOCIETY

Strengths

1. EBS' widespread involvement in societal and industry networks.

Suggestions for further developments

1. During the discussions with alumni who were not part of the Alumni Board, it became evident that their involvement with EBS is comparatively limited. Alumni get invitations to alumni golf events, the EBS annual Gala and the aforementioned quarterly newsletter. It was advised by alumni that more formal networking events like mixers might be a good idea instead of dinners and other events where it can prove harder to talk to as many people and build your contact base. It is advisable to increase promotion of opportunities and activities to alumni in order to extract more value from the EBS network.
 2. EBS could put more emphasis on monitoring the broader societal impact of its research and research dissemination, i.e. by publishing more news on its research on the EBS website or in local media. Likewise open research events and conferences could be organised.
12. If all component assessments are provided as 'conforms with requirements', the Quality Assessment Council shall conclude that the management, administration, academic and research activity, and academic and research environment, meet the requirements; and decide to accredit the institution of higher education for seven years.

13. On the basis of the above mentioned, the Council

DECIDED

to accredit Estonian Business School for seven years.

The decision was adopted by 12 votes in favour. Against 0.

14. The Council decided to commend the university on their comprehensive and analytical Self-Evaluation Report.
15. The accreditation is valid until 29.10.2027. EKKA shall coordinate the time of the next institutional accreditation with Estonian Business School by 29.10.2026.
16. A person who finds that his or her rights have been violated or his or her freedoms restricted by this decision may file a challenge with the EKKA Quality Assessment Council within 30 days after the person filing the challenge became or should have become aware of the contested finding. The Council shall forward the challenge to its Appeals Committee who shall provide an unbiased opinion in writing regarding the validity of the challenge to the Council, within five days after receipt of the challenge. The Council shall resolve the challenge within ten days of its receipt, taking into account the reasoned opinion of the Appeals Committee. If the challenge needs to be investigated further, the deadline for its review by the Council may be extended by a maximum of thirty days. A legal challenge to this decision is possible within 30 days after its delivery, by filing an action with the Tallinn courthouse of the Tallinn Administrative Court under the procedure provided for in the Code of Administrative Court Procedure.

Eve Eisenschmidt
Chair of the Council

Hillar Bauman
Secretary of the Council