

Institutional Accreditation Decision Estonian Military Academy

27.01.2021

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

Pursuant to clause 43.2 of the document "Guide to Institutional Accreditation" established on the basis of the authorization contained in § 38 (3) of the Higher Education Act and section 24 subsection 5 of the Statutes of the Education and Youth Board, the Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (hereinafter the Council) states the following:

1. Estonian Military Academy and EKKA agreed on the time frame for institutional accreditation on 17.12.2019. The assessment of a VET study programme group was conducted in conjunction with the institutional accreditation.
2. Based on point 8 of the document Guide to Institutional Accreditation, the following higher education study programmes were also assessed within the framework of institutional accreditation:

Military Leadership in the Land Force, Professional higher education

Military Leadership in the Navy, Professional higher education

Military Leadership in the Airforce, Professional higher education

Military Leadership in the Land Force, Master studies

3. By order 1.1-10/20/3 of 16.09.2020, the Director of EKKA approved the institutional accreditation committee (hereinafter committee) in the following composition:

Robin Bryant (Chair)	Professor, Canterbury Christ Church University, UK
Malena Britz	Vice-Chancellor and Head of Research, Swedish Defence University, Sweden



Toomas Lents	Major, Air Force Headquarters, Estonia
Brigita Mass	Student, Tallinn University of Technology (TalTech); Chair of the student council of the Economics Faculty at TalTech; TalTech Student Parliament member, Estonia
Petteri Rokka	Colonel G.S, Planning Manager, Finnish War Veterans Federation; Mentor, Finnish National Defence University, Finland
Aivar Salekešin	Mission of Estonia to the UN, Military Adviser, Estonia
Lauri Tabur	Public Sector Reform Expert, The Estonian Center of Eastern Partnership, Former Rector of the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, Estonia

4. Estonian Military Academy (EMA) submitted the self-analysis report to EKKA on 10.09.2020, the EKKA assessment coordinator forwarded the self-analysis report to the committee on 14.09.2020.
5. The hybrid assessment visit to EMA took place 10.–12.11.2020.
6. The committee sent the draft assessment report to EKKA on 14.12.2020, EKKA forwarded the draft assessment report to the higher education institution for comments on 28.12.2020 and EMA submitted its comments on 8.01.2021.
7. The Committee submitted the final assessment report to EKKA on 8.01.2021. 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 19.01.2021.
9. The assessments of the assessment committee were as follows:

Standard	Assessment	Worthy of recognition
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	Conforms to requirements	

teaching		
Student assessment	Partially conforms to requirements	
Learning support systems	Conforms to requirements	
Research, development and/or other creative activity	Conforms to requirements	
Service to society	Conforms to requirements	Worthy of recognition

10. The Council with 11 members present discussed these received documents in its session on 27.01.2021 and, based on the assessment report, decided to point out the following strengths¹, areas for improvement, and recommendations² for Estonian Military Academy as well as suggestions for further developments³.

10.1. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Strengths

1. In 2019, the changes related to the EMA's most recent structural reform entered into effect, resulting in the optimisation of the EMA's organisational structure as well as strengthening and enhancing the achievement of strategic objectives. A successfully implemented new management and organisational structure, demonstrating the capability to reform and develop.
2. The close planning cooperation with the executive management of the main stakeholder, the Estonian Defence Forces.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. The Academy is preparing a new 10-year Development Plan. This will need careful monitoring through annual reviewing as military leadership training needs to respond quickly to changing national and international circumstances.

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.

Suggestions for further developments

1. Some of the Navy and Air Force subjects are outsourced to the TalTech Maritime Academy and Aviation Academy. It would be advisable to consider greater involvement of these Academies into the planning model of the EMA.

10.2. RESOURCES

Strengths

1. There is a clear connection between the objectives of the EMA and the priorities of the National Defence Action Plan with regard to necessary investments in the future.
2. Active service members as teaching staff are subject to the Estonian Defence Forces annual rotation plans based on the EMA's requirement. On the one hand this helps to ensure the adequacy of teaching staff for the Academy, on the other hand limits the enhancement of their pedagogical skills. Representatives of the Academy are involved in the planning of rotations, which allows for selecting teaching staff candidates that have sufficient basic didactic skills from the outset.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. Investigate why employee job satisfaction has been declining and take corrective measures.

Suggestions for further developments

1. The National Defence Development Plan envisages building additional infrastructure for the Academy in Tartu. Consideration should be given in the new infrastructure for facilities for staff and students to be able to recuperate, meet and hold discussions in informal settings.
2. The Academy uses various channels for its internal communication, which can cause confusion. The Academy should review its internal information channels to determine which are strictly necessary. Information should be better targeted to particular groups (including students).

10.3. QUALITY CULTURE

Strengths

1. The use of benchmarking with other military education institutions in Europe to ensure that Academy programmes remain up-to-date, and staff are cognisant of trends elsewhere.
2. The principles of quality assurance in the Academy are clearly articulated in the Academy's Development Plan that is available on the website as well as intranet.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. It became evident in the course of the assessment visit that not all members of staff of the Academy are fully aware of the principles and therefore there is no guarantee that these principles are applied in their everyday work. Quality assurance measures need to be introduced amongst the Academy's staff (both full-time and part-time teaching staff; civilian and military teachers) and students, so that those at the Academy better understand their role in fostering the effectiveness of the quality system and understand their role within the quality improvement process.

10.4. ACADEMIC ETHICS

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. The checks on plagiarism and other potential modes of academic fraud are only limited to Master level and furthermore carried out only if deemed necessary by the supervisor. This is not adequate. Procedures for suspected plagiarism in all written assignments need to be developed in a transparent manner and carefully explained to all staff and students as well as implemented. Checking for academic misdemeanours should be extended to possible Estonian translations of unattributed English-language publications.

Suggestions for further developments

1. The current practice at the Academy is for decisions made by the Appeals Committee to be subject to the approval of the Commandant of the EMA. The Academy should clearly define the grounds under which the Commandant should retain the right to overturn decisions of the Appeals Committee.

10.5. INTERNATIONALISATION

Strengths

1. The EMA has an ambitious view on internationalisation and has formulated an internationalisation policy with clear objectives and priorities.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. In the Self-Evaluation Report mobility of teaching staff, internationalisation of studies and increasing cultural awareness are highlighted as the objectives of internationalisation. However, increasing cultural awareness has been defined in a very general way. The extent to which these specific

objectives are reached, or which strategies are used to reach these objectives, are less clear. A plan of action where priorities in the internationalisation policy are connected to specific actions should be developed.

2. Deliver courses in English in order to facilitate international mobility.

Suggestions for further developments

1. Consider extending teaching related cooperation with other Estonian higher education institutions, such as the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, Estonian Aviation Academy and Estonian Maritime Academy, especially in the Civil-Military Co-operation area.
2. More opportunities for short term mobility of teaching staff could be created. Furthermore, more foreign teaching staff could be involved in teaching.

10.6. TEACHING STAFF

Strengths

1. The teaching staff is sufficient, qualified and dedicated.
2. The teaching staff has created an open and enthusiastic learning atmosphere to serve self-managing students.
3. The Academy has created and follows an induction programme for new teaching staff members, especially those with active service background. EMA offers diverse courses for the enhancement of pedagogical skills to its teaching staff members.
4. Some of the teachers contributing to Academy programmes are from an Estonian Defence Forces elite unit. They are considered the best practitioners in Estonia within their field, thus making them a valuable asset in supporting student learning.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. There is currently only one designated full-time navy and one air force teacher/expert at the Academy. We recommend recruiting more experts with navy and air forces background, particularly in the light of curriculum and programme development.
2. There is a limited number of faculty members with PhDs and some teachers on the professional higher education programmes only hold professional higher education diplomas. The proportion of senior members of teaching staff with professional higher education diplomas should decrease and more teaching staff members with PhDs should be recruited.

Suggestions for further developments

1. The recruitment of teaching staff from active service should be more systematic, for example by way of aligning the requirements set for teaching staff to those set for master's students.
2. Practitioners should be better integrated into the academic environment.
3. To locate additional teaching opportunities abroad and foster this as an opportunity to develop English and other foreign language skills for the Academy teaching staff.
4. To create synergy, teaching staff could be more involved in research and development, and researchers more in teaching.

10.7. STUDY PROGRAMME

Strengths

1. The study programmes meet the needs of the Estonian Defence Forces (and thus also Estonian society).
2. Estonian Military Academy staff, the students and the most important stakeholders are comprehensively involved in the development process of the curricula. Study programme development is systemic.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. There is a lack of direct evidence that study programmes support creativity and entrepreneurship, although these are requirements in the standard. At the same time military leaders often need to find creative solutions to unpredictable and life-threatening situations. We recommend that the EMA more extensively develops students' creativity and entrepreneurship and develops transferable and also other general competencies in the study programmes. The curricula should also include respective learning outcomes.
2. More attention should be paid to the development of students' leadership skills, using teamwork and simulation exercises in conjunction with providing thorough feedback to students.

Suggestions for further developments

1. Focus more on the underlying academic content of courses and students' participation in R&D projects.
2. As English is the main NATO main working language, greater emphasis needs to be put on its acquisition by students.
3. E-learning could be made an integral part of the programmes.

10.8. LEARNING AND TEACHING

Suggestions for further developments

1. Continuous development of the Academy teaching staff e-teaching competences would allow better adjustment in situations like the recent Covid-19 'lockdown' and might also open new opportunities for the wider use of distance learning in the future.
2. The competency of work practice supervisors needs continuous enhancement as well as explaining the roles and expectations of students and supervisors to both cohorts.

10.9. STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. The assessment of students at the Academy level requires better coordination. Assessment deadlines often occur close to each other and the lack of clarity regarding assessment methods does not allow the students to demonstrate their full potential. In addition to further training of academic staff on assessment methods, the Academy should also consider introducing a programme-level mechanism (e.g., a meeting of programme teaching teams before teaching commences) for a harmonized approach to student assessment.
2. There is scope for greater collaboration with the Estonian Defence Forces on a more consistent approach to assessment criteria. The Academy should find appropriate ways to ensure that the marking of students' assessed work is more consistent among the staff of the EMA as well as visiting staff.
3. The procedures for retake examinations and sanctions need to be harmonized at the level of both individual courses and study programmes.

Suggestions for further developments

1. The Academy could consider developing an online system to enable the APEL process to be streamlined.
2. Look at ways to better communicate to staff and students the right to appeal. For example, consider including this as a standard provision in assignment briefs.

10.10. LEARNING SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Strengths

1. The Academy can benefit from active support by the Estonian Defence Forces regarding support systems for students. The Estonian Defence Forces offer psychological (24/7 phone counselling), social and religious support.
2. The Academy ensures accommodation, catering, medical services, uniforms, IT support, transportation, library and study related equipment to all students.
3. The library is well-stocked in the military sciences.

Suggestions for further developments

1. Consider increasing access for students and staff to non-military electronic journals, e.g., those in engineering, natural and social sciences.

10.11. RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND/OR OTHER CREATIVE ACTIVITY

Strengths

1. There is widespread engagement with research throughout the Academy, including both military and civilian staff. The EMA organizes research 'boot camps' and provides funding for international conferences.
2. The EMA has very clear research objectives, established in collaboration with stakeholders and an efficient and effective system for enacting research projects.
3. The Academy has been successful in attracting external funding to support its research and development activities. The number of externally funded research projects has grown significantly. For example, in 2020 there were three externally funded research projects in the total amount of 371 thousand euros.

Suggestions for further developments

1. The Academy should continue to develop the 'local' research and knowledge transfer environment within the EMA in order to further increase productivity and to help establish the Academy within the international research community.

10.12. SERVICE TO SOCIETY

★ Worthy of recognition:

The EMA plays a very active role in 'Services to Society'. The EMA's contribution to medical training is particularly impressive. The Academy is very active in serving the society.

Strengths

1. The increasing offering and uptake of EMA continuing education courses by Estonian Defence Forces personnel, which allows for meeting all significant training needs.

Suggestions for further developments

1. Engagement with alumni needs further development, particularly in terms of more frequent, more proactive and focussed communication. The alumni would like to contribute more to the development of the Academy than just participating in a survey carried out once every four years.
11. If one to four component assessments have been deemed to 'partially conform with requirements' and the remaining component assessments 'conform with requirements', the Assessment Council shall analyse the higher education institution's strengths and areas for improvement and deem that the management, procedures, learning, teaching and research as well as study and research environment conform with the requirements and decides to accredit the higher education institution for seven years; or deem that there are shortcomings in the management, procedures, learning, teaching and research or study and research environment, provides guidance for corrective action and decides to accredit the higher education institution for three years.
12. The Council analysed Estonian Military Academy's strengths and areas for improvement and decided to point out the following:
 - 1) The Academy's actions under the Service to society standard are worthy of recognition. Its contribution in the area of medical training is impressive.
 - 2) The new management and organisation structure have been successfully implemented and are a sign of readiness to change and develop.
 - 3) Teaching staff from both military and civilian background have been involved in research at the Academy. The distinctive research objectives at the Academy have been developed in collaboration with stakeholders. An efficient system has been created for carrying out research projects. The Academy has been successful in raising external funds to support their research and development. The

number of research projects receiving international funding has significantly increased.

13. Based on the above mentioned the Council

DECIDED

To accredit the Estonian Military Academy for seven years.

The decision was adopted with 11 votes in favour. Against 0.

14. The accreditation is valid until 27.01.2028. EKKA shall coordinate the time of the next institutional accreditation with Estonian Military Academy by 27.01.2027.

15. The Council suggests that Estonian Military Academy submit by 27.01.2022 an overview of actions taken by the higher education institution in response to the areas of improvement and recommendations listed in the decision by the Council, paying special attention to standards pertaining to quality culture, academic ethics and student assessment.

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