



## Register Committee

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6. The Register Committee welcomed the claims by the agency that ESG standards ESG 1.3 and ESG 1.6 feature more strongly within EKKA's new institutional accreditation procedure (ESG 2.1).
7. With a view to the additional changes reported by EKKA the Committee noted the following:
  - the adoption (as of May 2020) of the "*Guideline for initial assessment and re-assessment of study programme groups*" which combines EKKA's existing initial assessment and the re-assessment of study programme groups into one single procedure in order to achieve more consistency in the reviews of the agency.
  - the adoption (as of May 2020) of the "*Guidelines for the Accreditation of Study Programmes*" which concern procedure for cross border accreditation of study programmes. EKKA revised its assessment criteria by introducing more clearly i.e. references to student centred learning in its assessment process and by providing for more flexibility in the composition of the expert review panels.
8. Considering the revised procedure the Register Committee concluded that EKKA continues to work in line with the ESG and therefore took note of the changes.
9. The Committee further underlined that a full assessment of the new procedure is to be carried out as a part of EKKA's upcoming external review.
10. Following the additional reported changes (see annex of 07/08/2020) the Register Committee further took note that EKKA's organisational structure was transferred from the Archimedes Foundation to the Education and Youth Authority (a governmental body under the administration of the Ministry of Education and Research).
11. The Committee welcomed the claims by the agency that the changes in EKKA's parent entity does not affect the current functioning of the organisation.
12. **The Committee however underlined that the new organisational arrangements should be considered in detail, and therefore asks EKKA to report back on its operational and organisational changes once its statutes are revised. In particular EKKA should provide documentation and elaborate on how its director and the members of its assessment council are selected and appointed, and what are the rules for dismissing its members. The agency is further asked to clarify how the agency ensures its independence in its external assessments considering its close structural and operational interlink with the Ministry of Education and Research.**

# Guidelines for Initial Assessment and Re-assessment of Study Programme Groups

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Approved by EKKA Higher Education Quality Assessment Council on 19.05.2020

## I. General provisions

1. According to subsections 9 (2); (3); and 11 (3) of the Higher Education Act, and taking into consideration the Republic of Estonia's Standard of Higher Education, Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and other legislative and normative documents regulating quality assurance in higher education, the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher Education and VET (hereinafter 'EKKA') shall lay down and publish the requirements and procedure for conducting assessments in a study programme group and cycle of higher education (hereinafter *assessment*) in order to apply for the right to provide instruction in a study programme group and cycle of higher education (hereinafter *right to provide instruction*).
2. When an institution applies for the right to provide instruction, it is ascertained whether the quality of instruction meets the requirements laid down for the relevant cycle of higher education; and whether resources and sustainability are adequate for the provision of instruction.
3. When applying for the right to provide instruction for the first time, EKKA shall conduct an initial assessment of the study programme group and cycle of higher education (hereinafter *initial assessment*). In the case the right to provide instruction has been granted for a specified term, EKKA shall, within a specified period, conduct a re-assessment of the study programme group and cycle of higher education (hereinafter *re-assessment*).
4. Pursuant to subsection 9 (2) of the Higher Education Act, the higher education institution shall, in order to obtain the right to provide instruction, submit at least nine months prior to the start of the academic year an application to the Ministry of Education and Research, containing:
  - a) information about the study programmes, on the basis of which instruction is to be provided;
  - b) information about academic staff providing instruction, including their qualifications;
  - c) information about financing sources for the learning, teaching and research infrastructure and similarly for conducting the studies;

- d) reasoning underpinning the need to launch studies, including data about the prospective target group as well as endorsements by professional associations and bodies.

The Ministry of Education and Research shall assess compliance of the application with applicable regulations and shall relay the application to EKKA for assessment.

5. Information submitted by the educational institution, publicly available data on the Estonian Education Information System ([www.ehis.ee](http://www.ehis.ee)) and on the Estonian Research Information System ([www.etis.ee](http://www.etis.ee)), and information received during a visit to the educational institution shall serve as the basis for initial assessment of a study programme group.
6. In the case of joint study programmes, initial assessment may be conducted without visiting educational institutions (*hereinafter simplified proceeding*) if the right to provide instruction is requested for a joint study programme for which the other partners have the right to provide instruction in the corresponding study programme group and academic cycle for an unspecified term; or in the case of a foreign educational institution, the study programme and/or the educational institution has unconditional national recognition granted by the country of location.
7. The costs of the assessment shall be borne by the educational institution applying for the right to provide instruction. The actual costs depend on the number of study programmes in the study programme group under assessment and the number of assessment experts in the assessment committee. Assessment rates are published on the EKKA website ([www.ekka.archimedes.ee](http://www.ekka.archimedes.ee)).

## II. Assessment areas and criteria for initial and re-assessment

8. EKKA conducts initial assessment and re-assessment using three assessment areas: I Quality of instruction; II Resources and III Sustainability. The Quality of instruction is divided into three sub-areas – Study programme; Learning and teaching; and Organisation of studies. The Resources area also has three sub-areas – Academic staff; Learning and teaching environment; and Financial resources. When assessing sustainability, assessments for quality of instruction and resources are taken into account as well as further sustainability criteria.
9. The difference in the criteria for initial and re-assessment as a rule lies in the following: preparedness, capability and intentions of the higher education institution to meet the requirements for the study programme group and cycle of education for which the application has been submitted, are assessed in the course of initial assessment. Re-assessment is for assessing the extent to which these intentions have materialized and requirements have been met.

| INITIAL ASSESSMENT  | I | RE-ASSESSMENT  |
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| <b>I QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION</b>   |   |  |
| <b>1. Study programme</b>   |   |  |
| <p>1.1. Launching and developing of the study programme is based on the Development Plan of the higher education institution, national development plans and analyses (including labour market and advisability analyses) and strives for top quality.</p> <p>1.2. Employers and other stakeholders of the study programme group are involved in the study programme's development.</p> <p>1.3. The study programme meets the requirements and trends in international legislation that regulate the professional field and if a professional standard exists, takes into consideration the acquisition and implementation of the knowledge and skills described therein.</p> <p>1.4. The learning outcomes of the study programme are equivalent and comparable to the learning outcomes of the academic cycles of higher education described in Annex 1 of the Standard of Higher Education.</p> <p>1.5. Different parts of the study programme form a coherent whole. The title of the study programme is consistent with the content and the structure; and content of the study programme supports the acquisition of the objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme.</p> <p>1.6. The joint study programme and cooperation agreement thereof meet the requirements set in subsections 11 and 19 of the Higher Education Act.</p> |   | <p>1.1. Launching and developing of the study programme is based on the Development Plan of the higher education institution, national development plans and analyses (including labour market and advisability analyses) and strives for top quality.</p> <p>1.2. Employers and other stakeholders (incl. students) of the study programme group are involved in the study programme's development.</p> <p>1.3. The study programme meets the requirements and trends in international legislation that regulate the professional field and if a professional standard exists, takes into consideration the acquisition and implementation of the knowledge and skills described therein.</p> <p>1.4. The learning outcomes of the study programme are equivalent and comparable to the learning outcomes of the academic cycles of higher education described in Annex 1 of the Standard of Higher Education.</p> <p>1.5. Different parts of the study programme form a coherent whole. The title of the study programme is consistent with the content and the structure; and content of the study programme supports the acquisition of the objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme.</p> <p>1.6. The joint study programme and cooperation agreement thereof meet the requirements set in subsections 11 and 19 of the Higher Education Act.</p> |
| <b>2. Learning and teaching</b>   |   |  |
| 2.1. Conditions for admission and graduation are clear and  |   |  |

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| <p>transparent; requirements to prospective students stem from prerequisites for the completion of the study programme.</p> <p>2.2. Academic staff members to be involved are aware of the objectives of the study programme and their role in achieving these objectives.</p> <p>2.3. Planned study methods motivate learners to take charge of their studies and achieve learning outcomes.</p> <p>2.4. Appropriate methods are planned for the assessment of learning outcomes; assessment is transparent, objective and supports the development of students.</p> <p>2.5. The content and volume of independent work and practical training (in the case of doctoral studies, implementation of professional activities) support the achievement of learning outcomes of the study programme.</p> <p>2.6. The academic staff members to be involved have adequate teaching competences in order to support the autonomy of students and ensure adequate and professional supervision.</p> <p>2.7. The level and volume of research, development and creative activities of academic staff to be involved is sufficient to provide instruction and supervise academic work by students in the appropriate cycle of higher education.</p> | <p>2.1. Conditions for admission and graduation are clear and transparent; requirements to prospective students stem from prerequisites for the completion of the study programme.</p> <p>2.2. Academic staff members are aware of the objectives of the study programme and their role in achieving these objectives.</p> <p>2.3. Study methods motivate learners to take charge of their studies and achieve learning outcomes.</p> <p>2.4. Appropriate methods are used for the assessment of learning outcomes; assessment is transparent, objective and supports the development of students.</p> <p>2.5. The content and volume of independent work and practical training (in the case of doctoral studies, implementation of professional activities) support the achievement of learning outcomes of the study programme.</p> <p>2.6. The academic staff members have adequate teaching competences in order to support the autonomy of students and ensure adequate and professional supervision.</p> <p>2.7. The level and volume of research, development and creative activities of academic staff is sufficient to provide instruction and supervise academic work by students in the appropriate cycle of higher education.</p> |
| <p><b>3. Organisation of studies</b></p>  |  |
| <p>3.1. The organisation of studies is unambiguously regulated and information thereof publicly available; it allows to cater for the needs of different learners as well as specificities of the study programme group.</p> <p>3.2. Practical training (in doctoral studies applied professional activities) is regulated, requirements for the completion of practical training have been laid down and</p>   | <p>3.1. The organisation of studies is unambiguously regulated and information thereof publicly available; it allows to cater for the needs of different learners as well as specificities of the study programme group.</p> <p>3.2. Practical training (in doctoral studies applied professional activities) is regulated, requirements for the completion of practical training have been laid down and</p>  |

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| <p>preliminary agreements concluded with organisations offering opportunities for practical training.</p> <p>3.3. The higher education institution has in place rules for academic recognition as well as for recognizing prior studies and work experience.</p> <p>3.4. Students have access to counselling (study and career counselling and preferably psychological counselling); measures for monitoring and supporting academic progress of students have been devised.</p> <p>3.5. The higher education institution has devised a plan for fostering international mobility among students enrolled in the study programme group.</p> <p>3.6. The higher education institution implements fair and transparent rules for dealing with complaints.</p> <p>3.7. Plans are in place for regular internal assessment of study programmes by the higher education institution, including the analysis and taking into account of feedback from various stakeholders (students, alumni, employers, academic staff).</p> | <p>preliminary agreements concluded with organisations offering opportunities for practical training.</p> <p>3.3. The higher education institution has in place rules for academic recognition as well as for recognizing prior studies and work experience; these are implemented in the study programme group under assessment.</p> <p>3.4. Students enrolled in the study programme group have access to counselling (study; career and preferably psychological counselling); there are effective measures in place for supporting academic progress of students and preventing premature leaving.</p> <p>3.5. Students enrolled in the study programme group participate in international mobility programmes.</p> <p>3.6. Fair and transparent rules for dealing with complaints are used in the study programme group.</p> <p>3.7. Regular internal assessment is conducted in the study programme group, including the analysis and taking into account of feedback from various stakeholders (students, alumni, employers, academic staff).</p> |                      |
| <b>INITIAL ASSESSMENT</b>  | <b>II RESOURCES</b>  | <b>RE-ASSESSMENT</b> |
| <b>4. Academic staff</b>   |  |                      |
| <p>4.1. Requirements for academic staff are based on the Higher Education Standard and further rules put in place by the higher education institution, procedures for the selection and recruitment of staff are fair and transparent.</p> <p>4.2. The qualifications of prospective academic staff members meet the requirements laid down in legislation as well as those stemming from the specificities of the study programme group and academic cycle.</p> <p>4.3. The number of academic staff to be involved in the study programme group is adequate and enables</p>  | <p>4.1. Requirements for academic staff are based on the Higher Education Standard and further rules put in place by the higher education institution, procedures for the selection and recruitment of staff are fair and transparent.</p> <p>4.2. The qualifications of academic staff members meet the requirements laid down in legislation as well as those stemming from the specificities of the study programme group and academic cycle.</p> <p>4.3. The number of regular academic staff in the study programme group is adequate and enables achieving the objectives of the study programmes as well as the learning</p>  |                      |

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| <p>achieving the objectives of the study programmes as well as the learning outcomes.</p> <p>4.4. Prospective academic staff members regularly engage in continuing education at institutions of higher education or research from abroad, take part in international research projects and deliver presentations at high level conferences.</p> <p>4.5. The higher education institution has plans for creating opportunities for continuing education and personal development for academic staff members involved in the study programme group, including for benefitting from international mobility opportunities.</p>  | <p>outcomes.</p> <p>4.4. Academic staff members regularly engage in continuing education at institutions of higher education or research from abroad, take part in international research projects and deliver presentations at high level conferences.</p> <p>4.5. Regular academic staff members have undergone required attestation and/or received regular feedback on their performance; and have been topping up their professional and pedagogical skills.</p>  |
| <p><b>5. Learning and teaching environment</b></p>   |  |
| <p>5.1. There are facilities (lecture rooms, labs, seminar rooms, rooms for independent work by students etc.) available for studies and study-related research, development and creative activities; these are adequately furnished and equipped with up-to-date equipment needed for achieving the objectives of the study programmes; or alternatively concrete financing decisions/projects exist in order to meet the extended needs.</p> <p>5.2. The making available of up-to-date textbooks; research publications and other study materials as well as providing access to research databases necessary for conducting studies, research, development and creative activities in the study programme group is ensured.</p> <p>5.3. State of the art and fit for purpose information and communication technological solutions, including study information system, document management system, online learning environment, have been envisioned in order to support learning and teaching.</p> | <p>5.1. There are facilities (lecture rooms, labs, seminar rooms, rooms for independent work by students etc.) available for studies and study-related research, development and creative activities; these are adequately furnished and equipped with up-to-date equipment needed for achieving the objectives of the study programmes.</p> <p>5.2. Research, development and creative activities in the study programme group are supported by adequate amount of up-to-date and pertinent textbooks, research publications and other study materials, access to research databases is ensured.</p> <p>5.3. State of the art and fit for purpose information and communication technological solutions, including study information system, document management system, online learning environment support learning and teaching.</p> |
| <p><b>6. Financial resources</b></p>   |  |



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| <p>6.1. The educational institution has adequate funds necessary for conducting high quality studies in the study programme group as well as for the provision of adequate and up-to-date support services and supporting the development of academic staff.</p> <p>6.2. The higher education institution has a strategy for raising funds needed for the advancement of the study programme group related research and development.</p> <p>6.3. Financial reports for the higher education institution or keeper thereof are publicly available. Annual reports for the higher education institution or keeper thereof have undergone financial auditing unless stipulated otherwise in legislation.</p> | <p>6.1. The educational institution has adequate funds necessary for conducting high quality studies as well as for the provision of adequate and up-to-date support services, for implementing learning and teaching related developments and for supporting the development of academic staff.</p> <p>6.2. The higher education institution has sufficient funds for research and development activities related to the study programme.</p> <p>6.3. The higher education institution has a long-term strategy for ensuring the sustainability of financial resources, including a risk analysis and financial projections. The strategy describes, among others, risks stemming from the operating environment and planned mitigating measures thereof.</p> <p>6.4. Financial reports for the higher education institution or keeper thereof are publicly available. Annual reports for the higher education institution or keeper thereof have undergone financial auditing unless stipulated otherwise in legislation.</p> |                      |
| <b>INITIAL ASSESSMENT</b>   | <b>III<br/>SUSTAINABILITY</b>   | <b>RE-ASSESSMENT</b> |
| <b>Aggregated assessment: quality of instruction</b>  |   |                      |
| <b>Aggregated assessment: resources</b>   |   |                      |
| <b>7. Further sustainability criteria</b>   |   |                      |
| <p>7.1. The higher education institution has a development plan along with an action plan aimed at ensuring the sustainability of high-quality studies in the higher education institution as a whole as well as in the study programme group under assessment. In the case of a brand new higher education institution, a development plan and draft action plan exist.</p> <p>7.2. When planning studies in the study programme group,</p>  | <p>7.1. Regular development planning and risk management are on-going in the higher education institution, aimed at ensuring the sustainability of high-quality studies in the higher education institution as a whole as well as in the study programme group.</p> <p>7.2. Development trends for student admissions, graduations and budgetary resources indicate sustainability of the higher education institution as a whole and the study</p>   |                      |

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| <p>the higher education institution has conducted a risk analysis and devised a long-term financial projection, which among other things includes the calculation of a student place, an analysis of risks stemming from the operating environment and planned mitigating measures thereof.</p> <p>7.3. The age structure of academic staff to be involved as well as share of young teachers ensures sustainability of instruction provision in the study programme group.</p> <p>7.4. In the case of doctoral studies, sustainability is achieved when doctoral studies in the study programme group are based on well established fields of research and development within the higher education institution that have successfully undergone evaluation. Supervisors of doctoral theses are actively engaged in research and have supervised successfully defended doctoral theses.</p> | <p>programme group under assessment.</p> <p>7.3. The higher education institution has a long-term financial projection of financial resources needed for conducting high quality studies in the study programme group and sources for the provision thereof, which takes into account risks stemming from the operating environment.</p> <p>7.4. The age structure of academic staff as well as share of young teachers ensures sustainability of instruction provision in the study programme group.</p> <p>7.5. In the case of doctoral studies, sustainability is achieved when doctoral studies in the study programme group are based on well established fields of research and development within the higher education institution that have successfully undergone evaluation. Supervisors of doctoral theses are actively engaged in research and have supervised successfully defended doctoral theses.</p> |
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### III. Formation of an assessment committee

10. In order to conduct an assessment, the Director of EKKA shall form an assessment committee (hereinafter *committee*) and appoint an assessment coordinator.
11. The assessment coordinator (hereinafter *coordinator*) is an EKKA staff member. The coordinator provides support to the committee and manages the assessment procedure. The coordinator's main task is to ensure the smooth running of the assessment process on the basis of substantive requirements detailed in this document as well as making sure that the time frame is followed. The coordinator is not a member of an assessment committee.
12. There are at least 4 members in a committee. The number of members depends on the number of study programmes and specializations within the study programme group under assessment.
13. The selection criteria for committee members followed by EKKA are as follows:
  - 13.1. Members of a committee are recognized experts in the vocation, profession or occupation, or outstanding practitioners in the fields of the study programme group under assessment, including from foreign countries, if needed.
  - 13.2. Members of a committee are chosen from different organisations.
  - 13.3. A committee includes at least one student or a person who has graduated (at the moment of the approval of the committee) from a higher education institution within the previous year.
  - 13.4. A committee includes at least one member from outside of higher education institutions.
  - 13.5. Members of a committee know the functioning of the higher education system and the legislation that regulates it; they are knowledgeable about trends in higher education in the European Union and sectorial strategies in Estonia.
14. Requirements to committee members:
  - 14.1. Members of a committee shall be independent; they shall not represent the interests of the organisation they belong to.
  - 14.2. A committee member is unprejudiced and has no conflict of interest with the higher education institution under assessment within the meaning of point 15.
  - 14.3. A committee member has teamwork skills necessary for the execution of the task.
  - 14.4. A committee member is proficient in the working language of the committee.

- 14.5. A committee member preferably has prior experience of external assessment in higher education.
  - 14.6. Academic committee members have participated in developing similar study programmes in various higher education institutions, have devised modern study materials and have international merits in research, development or other creative activities.
  - 14.7. A non-academic committee member is a recognized expert and usually has experience in teaching or supervising in a higher education institution, or has taken part in the work of advisory or decision making bodies of higher education institutions.
  - 14.8. A student member of a committee has usually participated in the development of study programmes, or in the work of decision-making bodies of various levels at a higher education institution.
15. Members of a committee shall confirm by signature in their contract for services an obligation to maintain the confidentiality of information that has become known to them in the course of assessment, and a lack of conflict of interest. In the case of conflict of interest, a committee member shall, without delay, notify the Director of EKKA and withdraw from the work of the committee. A conflict of interest is presumed to be present in the following cases:
- 15.1. A committee member has an employment or other contractual relationship with the higher education institution under assessment, or he or she has had an employment relationship with that higher education institution within three years prior to the assessment visit.
  - 15.2. A committee member is participating in the work of a decision-making or advisory body of the higher education institution under assessment at the time of assessment.
  - 15.3. A committee member is studying in the study programme group of the higher education institution under assessment, or graduated from it less than three years ago.
  - 15.4. A staff member or student connected with the study programme group of the higher education institution under assessment is closely related to a committee member.
16. In justified cases, EKKA may involve in a committee members from abroad. In such cases, the working language of the committee is English. If the higher education institution wishes to use interpretation services during the assessment visit, the interpreter shall be coordinated with EKKA prior to the assessment visit. The interpreter must fulfil the following requirements: the interpreter has adequate training for providing consecutive interpretation (a Master's degree in interpretation, interpretation as an additional specialty, continuing education in the field of interpretation, etc.) and previous experience in providing consecutive interpretation; the interpreter is familiar

with higher education terminology. The higher education institution books the interpretation services and covers the costs incurred.

17. EKKA shall notify an educational institution of the composition of a committee, and the educational institution may present its standpoint on it, furthermore, it may request an additional member to be included in the committee, which is treated as a memorandum or request for explanation as defined in clause 32 of this document.
18. All committee members shall undergo EKKA's assessment training.

#### IV. Organisation of assessment and drafting of an assessment report

19. EKKA shall coordinate the time of visits to educational institutions (hereinafter *visits*) with the educational institution.
20. The assessment visit lasts for 1-3 days. The schedule for the assessment visit is drawn up by EKKA in collaboration with the higher education institution and chairperson of the committee.
21. The institution under assessment shall make available to members of the assessment committee an appropriately furnished room and shall enable throughout the assessment visit:
  - 21.1. To have access to documentation of the higher education institution and its bodies, internal normative documents regulating and organising its activities;
  - 21.2. To interview a sample of staff members and students from the higher education institution selected by the experts;
  - 21.3. To have access to data pertaining to learning and teaching as well as to students, study materials and the study information system;
  - 21.4. To have access to biographies (CVs) of teaching staff members; data on workloads, methodological work and research;
  - 21.5. To examine the internal quality assurance system for learning and teaching;
  - 21.6. To examine the state of the infrastructure at the higher education institution;
  - 21.7. To have access to syllabi and substantive guidelines for learning and teaching;
  - 21.8. To have access to student dissertations;
  - 21.9. To have access to financial data for the higher education institution;

- 21.10. To have access to all forms of contact learning (lecture, seminar, lab class etc.);
- 21.11. To obtain, if and when necessary, information on other aspects of learning, teaching and research.
22. An assessment committee shall give an assessment on the study programme group and the relevant cycle of higher education in three assessment areas: quality of instruction, resources and sustainability.
23. The assessments contain a description of the underpinning facts, analysis thereof and reasoning for the assessment. The assessment is based on the assessment template for initial assessment or assessment template for re-assessment, available on the EKKA website.
24. In the assessment report, the committee shall determine for each assessment area, whether the quality of instruction:
- 24.1. Conforms to the required standard;
  - 24.2. Partially conforms to the required standard;
  - 24.3. Does not conform to the required standard.
25. Judgements of the assessment committee on the conformity of the quality of instruction, resources and sustainability to the required standard, are preferably passed on consensual basis. In the case of failure to reach a consensus, a simple majority is needed to take a decision.
26. The assessment coordinator shall electronically forward the draft assessment report to EKKA within ten working days after the assessment visit. EKKA shall check conformity of the assessment report to the format requirements as well as whether all assessments are duly reasoned and, with the approval of the committee chairperson, forward it to the educational institution for comments within twenty working days from the end of the assessment visit.
27. An educational institution may electronically forward its comments on the draft assessment report to the committee within ten working days of receipt of the draft assessment report. The committee shall review the comments and take them into consideration when drafting the final assessment report.
28. The chairperson of the committee shall sign off and forward the final version of the assessment report electronically to EKKA within five days from receipt of comments from the higher education institution. EKKA shall forward the final assessment report to the higher education institution.
29. EKKA shall forward the final assessment report along with comments from the higher education institution to the Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education.

## V. Decision by the EKKA Quality Assessment Council

30. The EKKA Quality Assessment Council shall base its decision on the assessment report, comments received from the higher education institution within a specified time, documents submitted for assessment by the higher education institution, data from the Estonian Education Information System (EHIS) and Estonian Research Information System (ETIS) as well as additional materials submitted upon assessment committee's request.
31. In case of contradictions in the assessment report or inadequate reasoning, the EKKA Quality Assessment Council shall have the right to return the report to the committee to be reviewed and clarified.
32. The Assessment Council shall consider the assessments by the committee and adopt a decision based on the following principles:
  - 32.1. If all three assessment areas have been deemed to 'conform to the required standard', the Assessment Council shall adopt a decision deeming the quality of instruction in conformity with the required standard, and shall submit a proposal to the Minister for Education and Research to grant the higher education institution the right to provide instruction in the relevant study programme group and cycle of higher education.
  - 32.2. If at least one assessment area is deemed by the committee to 'not conform to the required standard', the Assessment Council shall adopt a decision deeming the quality of instruction not in conformity with the required standard and shall submit a proposal to the Minister for Education and Research not to grant the higher education institution the right to provide instruction in the relevant study programme group and cycle of higher education.
  - 32.3. If all three assessment areas are deemed by the committee to 'partially conform to the required standard', the Assessment Council shall weigh the study programme group's strengths and areas of improvement and adopt one of the following decisions:
    - a) adopts the decision that the quality of instruction partially conforms to the required standard, and shall submit a proposal to the Minister for Education and Research to grant the higher education institution the right to provide instruction in the relevant study programme group and cycle of higher education for one to three years; or
    - b) adopts the decision that the quality of instruction does not conform to the required standard, and shall submit a proposal to the Minister for Education and Research not to grant the higher education institution the right to provide instruction in the relevant study programme group and cycle of higher education.

- 32.4. If one assessment area is deemed to 'partially conform to the required standard' and the remaining areas to 'conform to the required standard', the Assessment Council shall weigh the study programme group's strengths and areas of improvement and adopt one of the following decisions:
- a) adopts the decision that the quality of instruction conforms to the required standard, and submits a proposal to the Minister for Education and Research to grant the higher education institution the right to provide instruction in the relevant study programme group and cycle of higher education; or
  - b) adopts the decision that the quality of instruction partially conforms to the required standard, and submits a proposal to the Minister for Education and Research to grant the higher education institution the right to provide instruction in the relevant study programme group and cycle of higher education for one to three years.
- 32.5. If two assessment areas are deemed to 'partially conform to the required standard' and one area to 'conform to the required standard', the Assessment Council shall adopt a decision that the quality of instruction partially conforms to the required standard and shall submit a proposal to the Minister for Education and Research to grant the higher education institution the right to provide instruction in the relevant study programme group and cycle of higher education for one to three years.

## VI. Requests for clarifications and memoranda concerning organisation and results of initial or re-assessment

33. If a person concerned has a doubt that EKKK or an assessment committee has not followed the rules described in these Guidelines when organising and conducting an assessment, he or she may file an appropriate request for clarification or memorandum with the Director of EKKK who shall provide a reasoned written response within 30 days of the date of registration of the request.
34. If a person concerned disagrees with the substantive grounds of the decision of the Assessment Council, he or she may present a challenge to the Council within 30 days of receipt of the decision. The Assessment Council shall forward the complaint to the Appeals Committee, which provides the Assessment Council with an unbiased opinion regarding the validity of the complaint within 5 days from receiving the complaint. The Assessment Council shall issue a reasoned reply to the challenge within 30 days of receipt of the challenge, taking also into account the reasoned opinion of the Appeals Committee.



# Guidelines for the Accreditation of Study Programmes

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*Approved by EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education on May 19, 2020*

## I. General provisions

1. This document outlines the assessment framework and the general procedure for accreditation of higher education programmes as applied by the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA). It is meant to serve as a practical guide for higher education institutions applying for accreditation of their study programmes.
2. Each educational programme for which an institution seeks accreditation must be consistent with national legal requirements. Furthermore, the programmes should be in line with the central requirements of the Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area, the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG) and the ECTS Users' Guide. The following assessment framework is therefore based on these key documents of the European Higher Education Area.
3. Achieving an international accreditation certifies that the individual programme complies with the quality standards of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Upon successful completion of the procedure, universities will receive a certificate as well as report on the quality of the programme.
4. Depending on national regulations, an international accreditation may be obtained in addition to a national accreditation or it may substitute national requirements.
5. An international programme accreditation is also a quality enhancement tool; external reviews from experts outside the national higher education system provide expertise and guidance. The focus is thus put on quality enhancement and the further development of programmes.
6. An international accreditation may also increase international acceptance of degrees and foster mobility of students, staff and research activities. A positive result may have effects on the scope and composition of cooperation projects as well as on the general visibility of the higher education institution. By raising the profile of a programme an increase in student numbers and projects may be envisaged.
7. EKKA offers programme accreditation at Bachelor, Master and PhD-level across all disciplines.

## II. Assessment areas and criteria for the accreditation of study programmes

8. EKKA shall assess the study programmes in five assessment areas: study programme and its development, teaching and learning, teaching staff, students and resources.

### 9. **Study programme and its development**

- 9.1. The title of a study programme is consistent with its content.
- 9.2. The structure and content of modules and courses in a study programme support achievement of the objectives and designed learning outcomes of the study programme.
- 9.3. The objectives and learning outcomes of a study programme are in coherence with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The content of the study programme is internationally comparable.
- 9.4. Study disciplines of the study programme are presented in a logical succession. Different parts of the study programme form a coherent whole.
- 9.5. Development of a study programme takes into consideration the needs of the labour market.
- 9.6. The study programmes support creativity, entrepreneurship and development of other general competencies.
- 9.7. The study programme includes practical training, the content and scope of which are based on the planned learning outcomes of the study programme.
- 9.8. Study programme development is a continuous process which, among others, involves feedback from students, employers and other relevant stakeholders.
- 9.9. The information about study programme on the website of the higher education institution is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible.

### 10. **Teaching and learning**

- 10.1. Study management is regulated, publicly available, and supports the achievement of learning outcomes. In course of study management development, the results of feedback surveys and the analysis of learning activities are taken into account.
- 10.2. The process of teaching and learning supports learners' individual and social development.

- 10.3. Teaching methods and learning tools used in the teaching process are modern, appropriate and effective, and support the achievement of learning outcomes, including general competences.
- 10.4. Organisation of internship is clearly regulated, the requirements for the completion of internship are determined, the instructions for conducting the internship are available and the supervision of students in work environment is ensured.
- 10.5. Assessment of learning outcomes is appropriate, transparent and objective, and supports the development of learners. The assessment criteria are understandable to students and students are informed about them in a timely manner. Members of the teaching staff cooperate in defining assessment criteria and apply similar approaches in assessments.
- 10.6. The higher education institution recognizes prior learning and work experiences.
- 10.7. The process of teaching and learning supports learning mobility.
- 10.8. Systematic analysis of achievement of learning outcomes is performed and improvement measures are undertaken.
- 10.9. Students are involved in research and development activities, the supervision of student research papers (seminar papers, applied projects, final thesis) is well organised and the satisfaction rate with the quality of supervision is high.

## **11. Academic staff**

- 11.1. The number and qualification of full-time teaching staff complies with the requirements established by legislation.
- 11.2. Distribution of full-time teaching staff by age and the percentage of young members of the teaching staff ensure the sustainability of studies in a higher education institution and a study programme.
- 11.3. The total number and qualification of teaching staff is – based on their responsibilities, workload and the number of supervised students – sufficient and adequate for achieving the objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme.
- 11.4. The members of the teaching staff have an adequate teaching competence and improve their teaching methods.
- 11.5. The staff development system is effective: the members of the teaching staff have opportunities for self-improvement, staff development methods are applied by the higher education institution.

- 11.6. Visiting members of the teaching staff (including from foreign higher education institutions) are involved in teaching in a study programme.
- 11.7. The members of the full-time teaching staff of a higher education institution regularly develop their skills at foreign higher education institutions and participate in international networks.
- 11.8. Teaching staff are involved in national and international research projects and participate in forums, national and international scientific conferences.
- 11.9. Members of teaching staff introduce students to their research results as well as the latest scientific achievements in their areas of specialisation, and involve students in their R&D projects where possible.
- 11.10. Assessment of the work by members of the teaching staff (including staff evaluation) takes into account the quality of their teaching as well as of their research, development and creative work, including development of their teaching skills, and their international mobility.

## **12. Students**

- 12.1. Admissions requirements and procedures ensure fair access to higher education and the formation of a motivated student body. The admission of students is performed by procedures stipulated in the normative acts.
- 12.2. The counselling system of students (including study, career and psychological counselling) is targeted and effective. The HEI has a functioning system to support and advise international students.
- 12.3. Students are provided with internal and external mobility opportunities.
- 12.4. Students participate in international mobility programmes. The percentage of students participating in student mobility is stable or growing.
- 12.5. Students are involved in the decision-making process at different levels of the higher education institution.
- 12.6. A system has been established for the detection and prevention of academic fraud.
- 12.7. Higher education institution has a tracking mechanism of graduates' employment and is monitoring the evolution of graduates' career.
- 12.8. The competitiveness of the graduates of a study programme is demonstrated by employment rate according to obtained qualification.
- 12.9. There is a system in place for monitoring academic progress. Effective measures are implemented to reduce the drop-out rates.

### 13. Resources

- 13.1. The financial resources of a higher education institution are adequate for conducting studies, development activities related to studies and supporting the development of the teaching staff.
- 13.2. Trends in the number of students and graduates of a higher education institution in the last three to five years indicate sustainability.
- 13.3. Teaching and learning environments have been developed according to the teaching and learning objectives, include all facilities necessary for conducting studies in a given study programme and are of adequate capacity considering the number of students (auditoriums, seminar rooms, laboratories, rooms for students' independent work and recreation, video projectors, internet etc.).
- 13.4. Both the conduct of studies and other activities of a higher education institution are supported by up-to-date information technology solutions, including the study information system, e-learning opportunities, and communication portals for students and teaching staff.
- 13.5. A library supports the conduct of studies ensuring that up-to-date information sources (including electronic databases) are available, and provides students with the opportunities for independent work.

### III. Self-evaluation of study programmes

14. A higher education institution shall conduct self-evaluation of study programmes by five assessment areas and prepare a self-evaluation report according to the *Template for the self-evaluation report*, see Annex 1.
15. The HEI shall submit its self-evaluation report in electronic format to EKKA no later than three months prior to the agreed assessment visit.
16. EKKA shall review the self-evaluation report within two weeks after receiving it and, if necessary, return it to the HEI for amendments and improvements. The HEI shall send the enhanced report back to EKKA within two weeks.
17. The coordinator shall send the self-evaluation report to the committee no later than two months prior to the assessment visit.
18. EKKA shall provide basic training in preparing self-evaluations of study programmes to higher education institutions.

### IV. Formation of assessment committees

19. Assessment committees (hereinafter referred to as committees) shall have four to six members (depending on the number and variety of study programmes to

be accredited). A committee shall comprise at least two academic representatives and one student representative who is a student at the time of applying. In addition, a member from outside the higher education sector (employer representative) is involved whenever possible.

20. Requirements for members of an assessment committee:

- 20.1. members of an assessment committee shall be independent, they shall not represent neither the interests of the organisation they belong to, nor the interests of any other third parties;
- 20.2. members of an assessment committee shall confirm by signature an obligation to maintain the confidentiality of information that has become known to them by reason of their membership in an assessment committee and the lack of conflicts of interest. A conflict of interest is presumed to be present in the following cases:
  - a committee member has an employment or other contractual relationship with the higher education institution under evaluation at the time of assessment, or he or she has had an employment relationship with that higher education institution within three years prior to the assessment visit;
  - a committee member is participating in the work of a decision-making or advisory body of the higher education institution under evaluation at the time of assessment;
  - a committee member is studying at the higher education institution under evaluation, or graduated from it less than three years ago;
  - the membership connected with the study programme of the higher education institution under evaluation includes a person closely related to a committee member – spouse or life partner or a family member.;
- 20.3. members of an assessment committee shall know the functioning of the higher education system and the legislation that regulates it the respective country, and they are familiar with the ESG as well as trends in higher education in the European Union and worldwide;
- 20.4. members of an assessment committee (excluding the student) shall have past experience in management and/or development in the area of a given study programme, and/or they have undergone training related to external quality evaluation and they shall preferably have past experience in external evaluation of higher education;
- 20.5. members of an assessment committee (excluding the student) shall preferably have experience in teaching or supervising in a higher education institution.

- 20.6. members of a committee shall have the necessary teamwork skills to conduct the assessment.
- 20.7. members of a committee shall be proficient in the working language of the assessment.
- 20.8. the student member of a committee has preferably participated in the process of study programme development or in the work of decision-making bodies at a higher education institution.

21. Duties of members of a committee include the following:

- 21.1. reviewing a self-evaluation report of a higher education institution;
- 21.2. examining documents that regulate the accreditation of study programmes;
- 21.3. completing the assessment training provided by EKKA;
- 21.4. participating in the meetings and discussions of the committee;
- 21.5. contributing to the priming of the assessment report before the assessment visit;
- 21.6. participating in wording of recommendations and preparing the assessment report;
- 21.7. examining the comments of the higher education institution on the assessment report and considering them when coordinating the output of the final assessment report;
- 21.8. performing other tasks related to assessment activities according to the division of tasks among the members of a committee;
- 21.9. adhering to the agreed committee deadlines.

22. Duties of the chairperson of a committee include the following:

- 22.1. chairing the meetings of the committee;
- 22.2. dividing tasks among the members of the committee;
- 22.3. leading the committee during the visit;
- 22.4. after the visit, giving the overview of provisional conclusions of the committee to the higher education institution;
- 22.5. preparing and confirming the assessment report.

23. A higher education institution has the right to present its position on the composition of the assessment committee.

24. The Director of EKKA shall approve the final composition of a committee by his/her order and appoint a chairperson of the committee and an assessment

coordinator (or two coordinators if the number of the study programmes to be accredited is bigger).

25. An assessment coordinator (hereinafter 'coordinator') is a support person of a committee and an administrator of the assessment process whose main duty is to ensure smooth functioning of the assessment process on the basis of the requirements and the timeframe provided in this document.
26. The working language of a committee shall be English. If the HEI wants to use interpretation services, it shall coordinate the selection of an interpreter with the assessment coordinator at least one week prior to the assessment visit. EKKA hereby sets out the following requirements for an interpreter: the interpreter has the necessary preparation for consecutive interpretation (master degree studies in interpreting, in-service training in interpreting, interpreting as an additional specialty, etc.), past experience in consecutive interpretation, and commands the terminology of higher education. The interpreter does not work at the HEI under evaluation. Costs of interpretation services shall be incurred by the HEI under evaluation.
27. EKKA shall enter into contracts for services with members of a committee and compensate the members of a committee for travel and accommodation costs related to performing their duties.

## V. Organisation of work of assessment committees

28. EKKA and the HEI shall agree upon a week for the assessment visit no later than six months ahead of time. The higher education institution who receives an assessment committee shall appoint a contact person who ensures the smooth communication between EKKA and the higher education institution.
29. An assessment visit to a higher education institution shall last two to three days. The coordinator shall prepare a schedule of the visit in cooperation with the higher education institution and the chairperson of the assessment committee.
30. In the course of an assessment visit, a higher education institution shall make an adequately furnished room available to the members of an assessment committee and allow them to:
  - 30.1. access statutes and normative documents which provide for and govern the activities of the higher education institution and its structural units;
  - 30.2. interview employees and students of the higher education institution at the choice of experts;
  - 30.3. access information related to teaching, learning and students; educational materials; and the study information system;
  - 30.4. access information related to the teaching staff concerning their CVs, work load, methodological work and research activities;



- 30.5. examine the internal quality assurance system of teaching and learning;
  - 30.6. examine the condition of the infrastructure of the higher education institution;
  - 30.7. access subject syllabuses/programmes as well as instructional documents related to the content of teaching and learning;
  - 30.8. access students' final papers;
  - 30.9. access information related to financial activities of the higher education institution;
  - 30.10. visit any forms of contact learning (lectures, seminars, laboratory work, etc.);
  - 30.11. if necessary, obtain other information related to teaching, learning and research.
31. Within five days after the visit, EKKA shall ask the higher education institution for feedback on the apparent preparation of members of the committee, the relevance of their questions and other pertinent issues according to the form established by EKKA. The results of the feedback shall be taken as a basis for choosing members of committees for subsequent assessments.
  32. The committee shall provide separate assessments for each of the five assessment areas: the study programme and its development, teaching and learning, teaching staff, students and resources.
  33. Assessment report shall include a description and analysis of information that the assessments of five assessment areas are based upon.
  34. Assessment areas shall be evaluated on a scale of three values: "conforms", "partially conforms" and "does not conform".
  35. Committee shall submit assessment report to EKKA by the end of the fourth week after the visit and EKKA shall forward it to the institution of higher education within one week after receipt of the report.
  36. Higher education institution shall have the opportunity to submit their comments about the assessment report within two weeks after receipt of the report. The committee shall review the comments received and consider them while preparing its final report.
  37. The chairperson of a committee shall forward the electronic version of the final assessment report, signed by the chairperson of the committee, to EKKA no later than by the end of the ninth week after the visit, which EKKA will immediately send to the higher education institution under evaluation.
  38. It is recommended that assessments shall be adopted by consensus. If consensus is not reached, the decision shall be made by a simple majority of members of an assessment committee and the dissenting view(s) together with

the reasons shall be included. In the case of an equal division of votes, the vote of the chairperson of the committee shall be decisive.

39. EKKA shall forward the committee's assessment report and the comments by the higher education institution to EKKA Higher Education Quality Assessment Council.

## VI. Final assessment by the EKKA Quality Assessment Council

40. EKKA Higher Education Quality Assessment Council shall provide a final assessment decision on a study programme at its session according to the document *Rules of Procedure of the Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education*. The Assessment Council shall approve an assessment report within three months after receipt of the report.
41. EKKA Higher Education Quality Assessment Council shall base its final assessment on the assessments of the five assessment areas presented by the assessment committee, and the comments by the higher education institution received within the specified time, as well as additional materials submitted at the request of the Quality Assessment Council.
42. In case of contradictions in assessments of five assessment areas by an assessment committee or inadequate justification, EKKA Quality Assessment Council shall have the right to return the assessment report to the assessment committee to be reviewed and clarified; the assessment committee shall review the assessment report within two weeks after their receipt and return them with additional explanations and reasons to EKKA.
43. EKKA Quality Assessment Council shall make a final decision on study programme accreditation based on the following principles:
  - 43.1. If all five assessment areas are assessed as "conforms to requirements", the Quality Assessment Council shall decide to accredit the study programme for a period of five years.
  - 43.2. If at least one of assessment areas is assessed as "does not conform to requirements", the Quality Assessment Council shall decide not to accredit the study programme.
  - 43.3. If all five of the assessment areas are assessed as "partially conforms to requirements", the Quality Assessment Council shall analyse the strengths and areas of improvement of the study programme and decide to accredit the study programme for a period of three years, or not to accredit the study programme.

- 43.4. If three or four of the assessment areas are assessed as “partially conforms to requirements”, the Quality Assessment Council shall decide to accredit the study programme for a period of three years.
- 43.5. If one or two of the assessment areas are assessed as “partially conforms to requirements, the Quality Assessment Council shall analyse the strengths and areas of improvement of the study programme and decide to accredit the study programme for a period of five years or for a period of three years.
- 43.6. If the Council weighs between two accreditation decisions and finds that if the HEI were to satisfy certain conditions, a more positive decision would be possible, the Council may make that decision with a secondary condition, as defined in § 53 of the Administrative Procedure Act.
44. EKKA shall forward the final assessment by the Quality Assessment Council to the higher education institution, and the members of the assessment committee within ten working days after its adoption.
45. Within two weeks after a decision and an assessment report were forwarded to the higher education institution, EKKA shall publicise both the decision and the assessment report on its website.

## VII. Contestation of evaluation proceedings conducted by EKKA and final assessment by Quality Assessment Council

46. A person who finds that his or her rights have been violated or his or her freedoms have been restricted by assessment procedures conducted by EKKA or by a decision made by the Council may file a challenge pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Administrative Procedure Act. The challenge shall be filed with the Council within thirty days after the person filing the challenge became or should have become aware of the contested finding.
47. The Council shall forward the challenge to its Appeals Committee<sup>1</sup> 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.
48. The final decision by Council may be challenged within thirty days after the delivery of the final decision, filing an action with the Tallinn courthouse of the

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<sup>1</sup> The role and composition of the Appeals Committee of EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education are outlined in the regulation *Procedures for Formation of the Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education and the Appeals Committee*, which is available [here](#).

Tallinn Administrative Court pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Code of Administrative Court.

# Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation

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*Approved by the Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education on 02.02.2018*

*Amended on 19.05.2020*

## I. General Provisions

1. On the basis of § 37 and § 38 of Higher Education Act, and considering the Standard of Higher Education of the Republic of Estonia, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, and other legislation and normative documents, the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (hereinafter referred to as 'EKKA') shall establish and disclose the Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation.
2. Institutional accreditation is an external evaluation in the course of which EKKA shall assess compliance of the management, administration, teaching and research activities, as well as the environments of education and research at a higher education institution (HEI), with legislation and with the objectives and development plan of that HEI. The purpose of institutional accreditation is to support the development of strategic management and quality culture that values learning-centeredness, creativity and innovation in the HEIs, as well as to increase the societal impact of education, research and development delivered by the HEIs.
3. Higher education institutions have an obligation to undergo institutional accreditation at least once in seven years. The HEI may apply to undergo the institutional accreditation process in less than seven years, but no more frequently than every five years.
4. In professional higher education institutions, EKKA will, if possible, combine institutional accreditation with quality assessment of vocational education and training.

## II. Standards and Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation

5. These standards and guidelines for institutional accreditation were defined while taking into account the legislation of the Republic of Estonia regulating higher education, national strategies, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and other international agreements.

6. EKKA shall assess the higher education institution according to twelve standards. Assessment focuses on the core processes of the HEI – learning and teaching, research, development and creative activities (RDC), and service to society – as well as on strategic management of the organisation and resource management. The learning and teaching process is examined under five standards (study programme, teaching staff<sup>1</sup>, learning and teaching, student assessment and learning support processes). Throughout the assessment process, there is a focus on academic ethics, quality culture and internationalisation (see Figure 1, Standards for Institutional Accreditation).
7. To assess the application of principles and regulations established at the institutional level in the learning and teaching process, as well as the performance of an internal evaluation system for study programmes offered at the higher education institution, EKKA shall also assess study programmes on a sampling basis during the accreditation review. When defining a sampling, EKKA will take into account the number of study programmes at the HEI, the results of prior assessments of study programme groups and a justified proposal by the HEI. The sampling may comprise one to ten study programmes, depending on the number of study programme groups and programmes at the HEI.
8. Standards and guidelines for institutional accreditation:

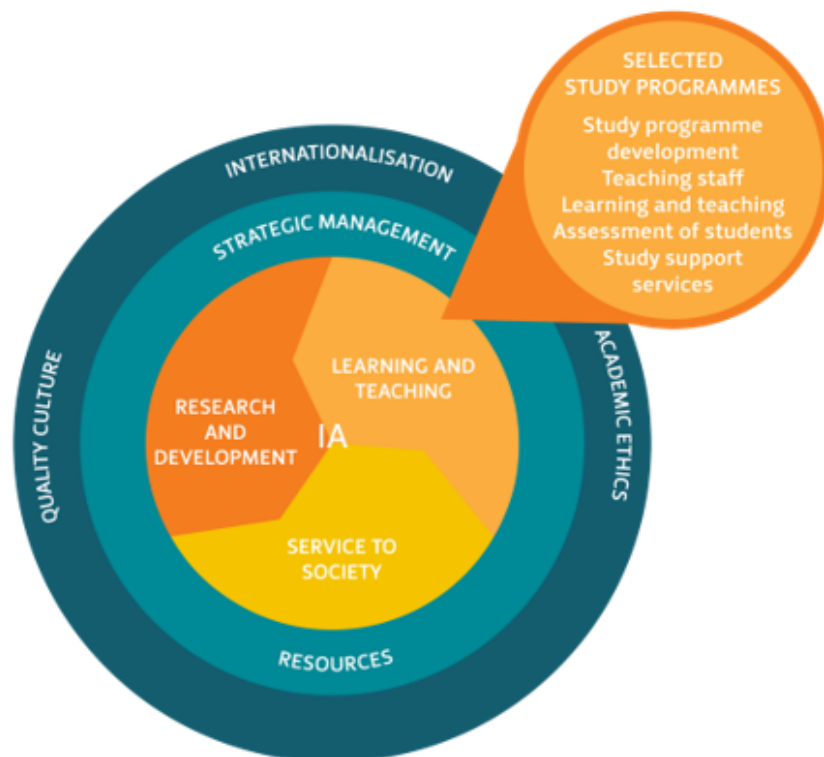


Figure 1. Standards for institutional accreditation

<sup>1</sup> The term 'teaching staff' is used in these Guidelines to refer to academic employees (including researchers and visiting lecturers) who conduct teaching (including supervising theses).

## 8.1 Strategic Management

### **Standard:**

**Development planning at the higher education institution is purposeful and systematic, involving various stakeholders. The higher education institution regularly evaluates the achievement of its stated objectives and the impact of its activities.**

### **Guidelines:**

The HEI has formulated the objectives and key results for its core activities – learning and teaching; research, development and creative activities, and service to society – taking into account national priorities and the needs of society, focusing on its strengths and reducing unnecessary duplication both within the HEI and throughout higher education in Estonia.

The HEI is managed in accordance with its mission, vision and core values, as well as objectives set out on the basis of those principles. Responsibility for implementation of the goals and action plans of the development plan are clearly specified. Achievement of the objectives and effects of the activities are evaluated regularly. Creativity and innovation are supported and given value in both core and support activities.

Membership of the HEI (including students), as well as external stakeholders, is involved in developing and implementing the HEI's development plan and action plans. The HEI members share the core values that serve as a basis for the institution's development plan.

### **Indicators:**

- The rate of achieving the objectives set in the development/action plan (key results)
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

## 8.2 Resources

### **Standard:**

**The higher education institution develops its staff and manages its physical and financial resources in a purposeful, systematic and sustainable manner. Internal and external communications of the higher education institution (including marketing and image-building) are targeted and managed.**

### **Guidelines:**

The HEI has an efficient staff development system in terms of both academic and support staff. The principles and procedures for employee recruitment and development are based on the objectives of the HEI's development plan, and

are fair and transparent. The principles for employees' remuneration and motivation are defined, available to all employees, and followed.

Allocation of the HEI's financial resources is based on the objectives of its development plan. The management and development of its infrastructure (buildings, laboratories, classrooms, IT systems, etc.) are economically feasible. Sufficient resources are available for updating the infrastructure for education and research, and/or a strategy exists enabling the HEI to acquire them.

The HEI has a functioning system for internal and external communications, relevant to the target audiences. The information made public about HEI's activities (including study programmes) and the findings of external evaluations is correct, up to date, easily accessible and understandable. The HEI has a system to popularise its core activities and academic career opportunities. The HEI members are informed of the decisions relevant to them in a timely manner.

Employee satisfaction with management, working conditions, information flow, etc., at the HEI is surveyed regularly and the survey results are used in quality improvement activities.

***Indicators:***

- Distribution of revenues and costs
- The results of the staff satisfaction survey
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

### **8.3 Quality Culture**

***Standard:***

**The higher education institution has defined the quality of its core and support processes, and the principles of quality assurance. In the higher education institution, internal evaluation supports strategic management and is conducted regularly at different levels (institution, units, study programmes). The findings of internal and external evaluations are analysed and quality improvement activities implemented.**

***Guidelines:***

Members of the HEI have agreed upon definitions for the quality of their core and support processes and are guided by them in their daily work. The HEI has established its policies and procedures for internal quality assurance (internal evaluation). The regular internal quality assurance both at the institutional and study programme level takes into account, inter alia, the standards set out in these Guidelines. All members of the HEI, including students and external stakeholders, participate in internal evaluations.



Internal evaluation of study programmes results in feedback from experts within the HEI and/or from outside it. Regular reviews and enhancements of study programmes ensure their relevance, including their compliance with international trends. In the course of internal evaluations, peer learning, comparisons with other HEIs regarding their results and means for achievement, as well as a sharing of best practices take place, among other things.

Internal evaluation is based on the following key questions in quality management: What do you want to achieve, and why? How do you want to do it? How do you know that the activities are effective and will have the desired impact? How do you manage the quality improvement activities?

***Indicators:***

- Improvement activities implemented based on the analyses of internal evaluations in the HEI's core and support processes (examples from different areas)
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

#### **8.4 Academic Ethics**

***Standard:***

**The higher education institution has defined its principles for academic ethics, has a system for disseminating them among its members, and has a code of conduct including guidelines for any cases of non-compliance with these principles. The higher education institution has a functioning system for handling complaints.**

***Guidelines:***

The HEI values its members and ensures that all its employees and students are treated according to the principle of equal treatment.

Employees and students of the HEI are guided by the agreed principles of academic ethics in all their activities.

The HEI respects fundamental values and policies of research set out in the document, 'Research Integrity', issued jointly by Estonian research institutions, the Estonian Academy of Sciences, the Estonian Research Council and the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research.

The HEI supports its students and teaching staff in their understanding and responding to ethical issues. Teaching staff and students do not tolerate academic fraud, including cheating and plagiarism, and they will act immediately upon any such occurrence.

Management of complaints from HEI members (including discrimination cases) is transparent and objective, ensuring fair treatment of all parties.

**Indicators:**

- The percentage of student papers checked by plagiarism detection systems and the percentage of detected plagiarisms
- Other indicators depending on the HEI, for example statistics about complaints (total number, the proportion of decisions taken in favour of the applicant)

**8.5 Internationalisation****Standard:**

**The higher education institution has set objectives for internationalisation and assesses the attainment of these objectives regularly. The higher education institution has created an environment that encourages international mobility of students and teaching staff, supporting the development of learning, teaching and RDC activities, as well as the cultural openness of its members and Estonian society in general.**

**Guidelines:**

The HEI creates opportunities for international student exchanges by offering study programmes and/or modules taught in English. The learning environment at the HEI supports internationalisation and cultural openness.

Recognition of qualifications and recognition of prior learning and work experiences for student admission and programme completion are in accordance with the quality requirements set by the HEI, are systemic and consistent with the expected learning outcomes and support international student mobility. The organisation of studies at the HEI facilitates student participation in international mobility (e.g., study programmes enable mobility windows). The HEI has agreements with foreign higher education institutions and, through international exchange, sends its students abroad to study and undertake internship, providing comprehensive support for this. Members of the teaching staff encourage students to participate in international mobility.

International lecturers participate in the process of teaching, including supervision of doctoral theses.

The HEI supports and recognises the participation of its teaching staff in international teaching, research or creative projects, as well as their teaching, research or creative work and personal development which are performed at HEIs abroad.

**Indicators:**

- Teaching staff mobility (in-out)
- Student mobility (in-out)

- Other indicators depending on the HEI, for example:
  - Number of English-taught study programmes by main units and levels of study
  - Percentage of foreign students (by study programmes, levels of study, in total in the HEI)
  - Percentage of study programmes that include English-taught subjects (of at least 15 ECTS)
  - Number of ECTS acquired through external mobility

## 8.6 Teaching Staff

### ***Standard:***

**Teaching is conducted by a sufficient number of professionally competent members of the teaching staff who support the development of learners and value their own continuous self-development.**

### ***Guidelines:***

Distribution of teaching staff by age and the percentage of young members of the teaching staff ensure the sustainability of studies. The career model of academic staff motivates capable young people to start an academic career and creates opportunities for their advancement.

The HEI supports systematically the development of its teaching staff. Members of the teaching staff engage in development of their professional and teaching skills, improve their supervision competence, and share best practices with one another.

Teaching staff's participation in research, development and/or creative activities supports the teaching process and ensures competence for the supervision of students' theses (including doctoral theses).

Members of the teaching staff collaborate in fields of teaching, research and/or creative work within the HEI and with partners outside the HEI, e.g. with field practitioners, public sector organisations, companies, other research and development institutions, and lecturers from other Estonian or foreign higher education institutions. Qualified visiting lecturers and practitioners participate in the teaching process.

When assessing the work of teaching staff (including their periodical evaluations), the effectiveness of their teaching as well as their research, development and creative work is taken into account, including student feedback, the effectiveness of their student supervision, development of their teaching and supervisory skills, their international mobility, and their entrepreneurial experience or other work experience in their fields of speciality outside the HEI.

**Indicators:**

- Competition for elected academic positions
- Number of students per teaching staff member in full-time equivalent (FTE)
- Percentage of teaching staff holding a PhD degree
- The results of the students' feedback about the teaching staff
- Teaching staff participating in continuing training or other forms of teaching skills development
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

**8.7 Study Programme****Standard:**

**Study programmes are designed and developed while taking into account the expectations of stakeholders, higher education and professional standards, and trends in the relevant fields. The objectives of study programmes, modules and courses and their planned learning outcomes are specific and coherent. The study programmes support creativity, entrepreneurship and development of other general competencies.**

**Guidelines:**

In planning and developing study programmes (incl. programmes conducted in a foreign language), the HEI is guided by its objectives, its competence areas and the needs of the labour market, and takes into account national strategies and the expectations of society. The study programmes are based on up-to-date sectoral know-how and research.

The planned learning outcomes are in accord with the requirements for the corresponding level of the Estonian Qualifications Framework, and in planning them the HEI has taken into account the future needs, among other things. In developing study programmes, the HEI has conducted a comparative analysis of similar programmes in leading foreign higher education institutions.

The objectives of the study programme and its modules, the planned learning outcomes, theoretical and practical learning, the proportion of independent work and internship, and the assessment of the achieved learning outcomes form a coherent whole.

The development of general competences (incl. creativity and entrepreneurship) and support for the development of a self-directed learner is a natural part of the study programme, and these are integrated with speciality studies.

Expected student workloads defined in the study programmes are realistic and consistent with the calculation that, on average, 1 ECTS credit equals 26 student learning hours. The study programme offers sufficient challenge for learners with different levels of knowledge and skills.

***Indicators:***

- Number of students per study programme
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

## **8.8 Learning and Teaching**

***Standard:***

**Admission requirements and procedure ensure fair access to higher education and the formation of a motivated student body. The higher education institution systemically implements a student-centred approach that guides students to take responsibility for their studies and career planning, and supports creativity and innovation. Graduates of the higher education institution, with their professional knowledge and social skills, are competitive both nationally and internationally.**

***Guidelines:***

Admission requirements and procedure are fair and impartial. In the admission process, student's ability for academic progress on the chosen programme is assessed.

The academic recognition of foreign qualifications is based on international conventions, agreements between countries, and the Estonian legislation.

Learning and teaching process takes into account students' individual abilities and needs and supports their development. Learning offers sufficient challenge for students at different levels. Students participate in planning and implementation of the learning process. Organisation of independent work and face-to-face teaching motivates students to take responsibility for their studies.

Teaching methods and learning aids used in the learning and teaching process are modern, appropriate and effective and support the development of digital culture, contributing – among other things – towards the development of a self-directed learner, creativity, innovation and the development of other general competencies.

The internship is integrated with speciality studies, the requirements for the internship are defined and the student's supervision ensured.

Students are motivated to learn and contribute to improving the quality of their studies by providing meaningful feedback on both the learning and teaching process and the organisation of studies.

Doctoral students plan their studies, as well as their research and development activities, in collaboration with their supervisor(s), setting specific objectives for each year and assuming responsibility for achieving those objectives.

***Indicators:***

- Student satisfaction with the content and organisation of studies
- Alumni satisfaction with the quality of studies
- Employer satisfaction with the preparation of the graduates
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

## **8.9 Student Assessment**

***Standard:***

**Assessments of students, including recognition of their prior learning and work experiences, support the process of learning and are consistent with expected learning outcomes. The objectivity and reliability of student assessments are ensured.**

***Guidelines:***

The assessment criteria are understandable to students and students are informed about them in a timely manner. Members of the teaching staff cooperate in defining assessment criteria and apply similar approaches.

Assessment methods are versatile and relevant, assess the degree of achievement of learning outcomes (including general competencies), and support the development of a self-directed learner.

If possible, more than one staff member is involved in the development of assessment tasks and student assessments. Along with assessments, students receive feedback that supports their individual development.

The HEI supports the development of teachers' assessment competencies.

Evaluation of doctoral students is transparent and impartial. Its purpose is to support the development of doctoral students, to assess the effectiveness of their current work and to evaluate their ability to complete the doctoral studies on time and successfully defend their doctoral theses.

When recognising prior learning and work experience towards the completion of the study programme, results obtained through the studies and work experiences (the achieved learning outcomes) are assessed. Students are aware of their rights and obligations, including the procedures for challenges regarding assessments.

***Indicators:***

- The number of credit points applied for and awarded under the accreditation of prior and experiential learning scheme (APEL)
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

## **8.10 Learning Support Systems**

### ***Standard:***

**The higher education institution ensures that all students have access to academic, career and psychological counselling. Students' individual development and academic progress are monitored and supported.**

### ***Guidelines:***

The HEI assists the student in developing an individual study programme based on the student's special needs as well as educational abilities and preferences.

The HEI advises its students (including students with special needs and international students) on finding internship places as well as jobs. Students are aware of where to get support in the case of psychological problems.

The HEI has a functioning system to support and advise international students (including psychological and career counselling) which, inter alia, helps them integrate smoothly into the membership of the HEI and Estonian society. The HEI analyses the reasons students withdraw from studies or drop out, and takes steps to increase the effectiveness of the studies.

In order to carry out studies and research, development and creative activities, the availability of up-to-date study and research literature, other study materials and tools (including those for independent work) and access to research databases is ensured. Study literature, materials and other teaching aids are of equally high quality.

To support study activities, timely and relevant information and communication technology solutions have been planned, including the study information system, document management, and e-learning environment.

The HEI supports student participation in extra-curricular activities and civil society initiatives.

The HEI monitors student satisfaction with the counselling services provided and makes changes as needed.

### ***Indicators:***

- The average duration of the study by levels of study
- Dropout/withdrawal rate (during the first year and the whole study period)
- Students' satisfaction with the support services

- Other indicators depending on the HEI

### **8.11 Research, Development and/or Other Creative Activity (RDC)<sup>2</sup>**

#### ***Standard:***

**The higher education institution has defined its objectives and focus in the fields of RDC based on its mission, as well as on the expectations and future needs of society, and assesses their implementation and the societal impact of its RDC activities. RDC supports the process of teaching and learning at the higher education institution. Support services for RDC are purposeful and support implementation of the objectives of the core process.**

#### ***Guidelines:***

The HEI places a high value on the role and responsibilities of the field of RDC in society and evaluates the results of its RDC activities, their international visibility and societal impact.

The HEI responds flexibly to the current needs of society and the labour market in terms of its research and plans its research in collaboration with enterprises, public sector institutions and organisations of the third sector.

Members of teaching staff introduce students to their research results as well as the latest scientific achievements in their areas of specialisation, and involve students in their R&D projects where possible.

The organisation and management of RDC take into account the profile and the mission of the HEI.

#### ***Indicators depend on the specificities of the HEI:***

- Numerical data:
  - (1) scientific publications by classifiers;
  - (2) public presentations of creative work; recognition from international competitions; reviews in professional publications, etc.;
  - (3) patent applications, patents;
  - (4) textbooks, study aids of various formats, etc.;
  - (5) system development solutions; product development solutions; environmental applications solutions;
  - (6) contracts concluded with enterprises;

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<sup>2</sup> Research, development and/or other creative activity (hereinafter referred as 'RDC') – research and development (including basic and applied research) as defined in the Organisation of Research and Development Act, and creative and development activities in the field of the arts.



- (7) spin-off companies, etc., in line with the profile and priorities of the HEI; etc.
- Number of scientific publications / creative works per member of academic staff and per employee with the requirement to do research (FTE, by areas)
- Number and volume of externally funded projects of RDC activities
- Proportion of projects with a positive financing decision out of the submitted project applications.
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

## **8.12 Service to Society**

### ***Standard:***

**The higher education institution initiates and implements development activities, which enhance prosperity in the community and disseminate recent know-how in the areas of the institution's competence. The higher education institution, as a learning-oriented organisation, promotes lifelong learning in society and creates high-quality opportunities for that.**

### ***Guidelines:***

The HEI contributes to the development of the community's well-being by sharing its resources (library, museums, sports facilities, etc.), by providing consulting and advisory services, participating in the development of non-profit sector and charitable activities, and by organising concerts, exhibitions, shows, conferences, fairs and other events.

The HEI involves alumni in activities aimed at the development of the HEI and the knowledge society.

Employees of the HEI participate in the work of professional associations and in other community councils and decision-making bodies as experts, directing society's development processes as opinion leaders. The impact academic employees have on society is taken into account when evaluating their work.

The HEI has clearly defined the objectives for in-service training, measures their implementation and plans improvement activities. The HEI plans in-service training based on the present and future needs of the labour market target groups. Evidence-based learning supports the learning and self-development of adult learners.

### ***Indicators:***

- Number of people in continuing training and other privately financed open forms of study (by responsibility areas or structural units)

- Other indicators depending on the HEI

### III. Formation and Tasks of Assessment Committee

9. An assessment committee (hereinafter referred as 'committee') shall consist of at least four members.
10. Committees shall be formed based on the following principles:
  - 10.1 a committee includes experts in the areas being assessed and those who have experience in managing an HEI or an academic unit;
  - 10.2 at least one member is chosen from outside of HEIs;
  - 10.3 a committee includes at least one expert from abroad;
  - 10.4 at least one member of a committee is a student or a person who has graduated from HEI no more than one year prior (at the time of approval of the committee);
  - 10.5 at least one member of a committee has management experience in an HEI, preferably with a similar profile as the one being assessed;
  - 10.6 at least one member of a committee has past experience in assessing a higher education institution.
11. The following requirements shall apply to members of a committee:
  - 11.1 members of a committee are independent, they do not represent the interests of the organisation they are associated with;
  - 11.2 members of a committee are unbiased in their assessments;
  - 11.3 members of a committee know the functioning of a higher education system and are aware about trends in higher education and the principles of external evaluation;
  - 11.4 members of a committee have the teamwork skills necessary to implement the work;
  - 11.5 members of a committee are proficient in both spoken and written English.
12. After coordinating the preliminary composition of a committee with the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education (hereinafter referred to as 'the Council'), the EKKA Bureau shall forward the relevant information to the HEI, who then has one week to present its opinion on the composition of the committee and, when justified, to ask for additional members or for the removal of a member.

13. The Director of EKKA shall approve the final composition of a committee by their order and appoint a chairperson, a secretary and an assessment coordinator for the committee.
14. An assessment coordinator (hereinafter referred to as 'coordinator') shall be an EKKA employee. The coordinator is not a member of a committee.
15. Members of a committee shall confirm by signature the absence of any conflicts of interest and an obligation to maintain the confidentiality of information that has become known to them in the course of the evaluation as well as the content of committee discussions. In the case of a conflict of interest, committee members shall immediately notify the Director of EKKA of it and remove themselves from the work of the committee. A conflict of interest shall be presumed to be present in the following cases:
  - 15.1 A committee member has an employment or other contractual relationship with the HEI under evaluation at the time of evaluation, or he or she has had an employment relationship with that HEI within three years prior to the assessment visit.
  - 15.2 A committee member is participating in the work of a decision-making or advisory body of the HEI under evaluation at the time of evaluation and/or is associated with any governing body of the owner of the private HEI under evaluation.
  - 15.3 A committee member is studying at the higher education institution under evaluation, or graduated from it less than three years prior.
  - 15.4 The membership connected with the HEI under evaluation includes a person closely related to a committee member (spouse or life partner, child or parent).
16. The working language of a committee shall be English. If the HEI wants to use interpretation services, it shall coordinate the selection of an interpreter with the assessment coordinator at least one week prior to the assessment visit. EKKA hereby sets out the following requirements for an interpreter: the interpreter has the necessary preparation for consecutive interpretation in Estonian-English-Estonian (master degree studies in interpreting, in-service training in interpreting, interpreting as an additional specialty, etc.), past experience in consecutive interpretation, and commands the terminology of higher education. The interpreter does not work at the HEI under evaluation. Costs of interpretation services shall be incurred by the HEI under evaluation.
17. With consent of the chairperson of a committee and by an order of the Director of EKKA, up to two observers from other organisations practicing external evaluation can be appointed. Observers shall confirm by signature an obligation to maintain the confidentiality of the content of assessment committee discussions. Observers have no right to intervene in the process of evaluation.
18. Tasks of the members of a committee:

- 18.1 to examine documents regulating institutional accreditation and complete the assessment training provided by EKKA;
  - 18.2 to review the self-evaluation report of an HEI and fill out the assessment form with initial comments and information based on the self-evaluation report;
  - 18.3 to participate in the meetings and discussions of the committee;
  - 18.4 to participate in the preparation of an assessment visit and the visit itself;
  - 18.5 to participate in composing the assessment report according to the agreed allocation of responsibilities;
  - 18.6 to examine the comments by the HEI regarding the assessment report and take them into consideration when finalising the assessment report;
  - 18.7 to perform other tasks related to evaluation activities according to the division of tasks among members of the committee;
  - 18.8 to adhere to the agreed committee deadlines.
19. The Secretary is a member of the committee who, in addition to the tasks that apply to all members, collects and unifies the individual parts of the report written by the committee members.
20. The chair of the committee fulfils the following tasks in addition to the tasks of other committee members:
- 20.1 leads the work of the committee;
  - 20.2 chairs the meetings of the committee;
  - 20.3 divides tasks among the members of the committee;
  - 20.4 after the visit gives the overview of provisional conclusions of the committee to the institution;
  - 20.5 ensures that the committee's assessments are justified;
  - 20.6 approves the assessment report.
21. Tasks of a coordinator:
- 21.1 to ensure smooth functioning of the evaluation process based on the requirements and timeframe laid down by this Guide;
  - 21.2 to incorporate the committee's preliminary input into a single format;
  - 21.3 to coordinate with the members of a committee a list of people whom the committee would like to interview and a list of additional materials that the committee needs in order to prepare for the visit;

- 21.4 to coordinate with a HEI a schedule for the visit, the names and the titles of positions of the people participating in the meetings and, if necessary, to request additional materials from the HEI;
- 21.5 to perform other one-time tasks related to the specific evaluation process as assigned by the committee chairperson.

22.EKKA shall document interviews conducted during visits.

23.EKKA shall enter into contracts with committee members for their services.

#### IV. Preparation of Self-evaluation Report

- 24.The HEI shall prepare a self-evaluation report based on the guide prepared by EKKA. This self-evaluation report shall be in English.
- 25.Upon request, EKKA shall provide a training to the HEI for writing a self-evaluation report.
- 26.The HEI shall submit its self-evaluation report in electronic format to EKKA no later than three months prior to the agreed assessment visit.
- 27.The EKKA Bureau shall review the self-evaluation report within two weeks after receiving it and, if necessary, return it to the HEI for amendments and improvements. The HEI shall send the enhanced report back to EKKA within two weeks.
- 28.The coordinator shall send the self-evaluation report to the committee no later than two months prior to the assessment visit.

#### V. Assessment Visit

- 29.The EKKA Bureau and the HEI shall agree upon a week for the assessment visit no later than six months ahead of time. The HEI receiving a committee shall appoint a person who will be responsible for a smooth process of the visit and will ensure appropriate working conditions for the members of the committee.
- 30.In the course of the visit, the HEI shall make an appropriately furnished room available to the committee members and allow the committee to:
  - 30.1 access internal normative documents that provide for and govern the activities of the HEI;
  - 30.2 interview employees and students of the HEI at the discretion of committee members;
  - 30.3 access information and information systems related to education, research, development and students;

- 30.4 access information related to employees of the HEI (their CVs, job descriptions, etc.);
  - 30.5 inspect the infrastructure of the HEI;
  - 30.6 access students' research, development and creative works;
  - 30.7 access information related to financial activities of the HEI;
  - 30.8 if necessary, obtain other information related to the management and administration of the HEI.
31. Within five working days after the visit, EKKA shall request that the HEI provide written feedback on the apparent preparation by the committee members, the relevance of their questions and other pertinent issues.

## VI. Assessment Report and Formation of Assessments by the Committee

32. The committee shall provide separate assessments for each of the twelve standards to the HEIs:
- strategic management, resource management, quality culture, academic ethics, internationalisation, teaching staff, study programme, learning and teaching, student assessment, learning support systems, research, development and/or other creative activity, and service to society (hereinafter referred to as 'assessments').
33. Standards shall be evaluated by the Committee on a scale of three values: 'conforms', 'partially conforms' and 'does not conform'.
34. Standards where the institution has shown outstanding results and/or initiatives, the committee may recognise it with an additional note 'worthy of recognition'.
35. Committee's assessments shall preferably be based on decisions adopted by consensus. If consensus is not reached, a simple majority of members of the committee shall make the decision, and the dissenting view(s) together with the reason(s) shall be included. If the votes are equally divided, the vote of the chairperson shall decide.
36. The EKKA Bureau shall forward the assessment report to the HEI no later than by the end of the sixth week after the visit. If more than one HEI is being evaluated at the same time, it is possible to extend the deadline for the report by up to two weeks.
37. The HEI shall have the opportunity to submit its comments regarding the assessment report within two weeks after receipt of the report. The committee

shall review these comments and take them into account when preparing the final report.

38. An electronic version of the final assessment report, approved by the committee chairman, shall be forwarded by the committee chairman to the EKKA Bureau no later than by the end of the ninth week after the visit.

39. The EKKA Bureau shall forward the committee's assessment report to the Council and to the HEI under evaluation.

## VII. Decision by EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education

40. The EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education shall make a grounded decision on institutional accreditation at its session within three months after receiving the assessment report. If necessary, the Council may ask the chairperson of the committee or a member of the committee authorised by the chairperson to attend the session for explanations.

41. The Council shall base its decision on the self-evaluation report of the HEI, the assessments by the committee, comments by the HEI received in a timely manner and on any additional materials submitted upon request of the Council.

42. In case of contradictions in assessments or inadequate justification, the Council shall have the right to return the report to the assessment committee to be reviewed and clarified. The committee shall resend the reviewed report to the EKKA Bureau no later than within two weeks after it was returned to the committee, and the EKKA Bureau shall proceed in accordance with the procedures established by points 37 to 39 above.

43. The Council shall base its decision regarding institutional accreditation on the following principles:

43.1 If all standards are assessed as 'conforms', the Council shall decide that the management, administration, teaching and research activities as well as the environments of learning and research at the HEI meet the requirements, and accredit the HEI for seven years.

43.2 If one to four standards are assessed as 'partially conforms' and all the remaining standards are assessed as 'conforms', the Council shall analyse the strengths and areas for improvement of the HEI and decides that the management, administration, teaching and research activities as well as the environments of learning and research at the HEI meet the requirements, and accredits the HEI for seven years; or shall decide that there are shortcomings in the management, administration, teaching and research activities or in the environments of learning and research at the HEI, provide guidance for their elimination, and accredit the HEI for three years.

- 43.3 If five to eight standards are assessed as 'partially conforms' and all the remaining standards are assessed as 'conforms', the Council shall decide that there are shortcomings in the management, administration, teaching and research activities or in the environments of learning and research at the HEI, provide guidance for their elimination, and accredit the HEI for three years.
- 43.4 If nine to twelve standards are assessed as 'partially conforms' and all the remaining standards are assessed as 'conforms', the Council shall analyse the strengths and areas for improvement of the HEI and decide that there are shortcomings in the management, administration, teaching and research activities or in the environments of learning and research at the HEI, provide guidance for their elimination, and accredit the HEI for three years; or shall decide that the management, administration, teaching and research activities as well as the environments of learning and research at the HEI do not meet the requirements, and decide not to accredit the HEI.
- 43.5 If one to two standards are assessed as 'does not conform', the Council shall analyse the strengths and areas for improvement of the HEI and decide that there are shortcomings in the management, administration, teaching and research activities or in the environments of learning and research at the HEI, provide guidance for their elimination, and accredit the HEI for three years; or shall decide that the management, administration, teaching and research activities as well as the environments of learning and research at the HEI do not meet the requirements, and decide not to accredit the HEI.
- 43.6 If at least three standards are assessed as 'does not conform', the Council shall decide that the management, administration, teaching and research activities as well as the environments of learning and research at the HEI do not meet the requirements, and decide not to accredit the HEI.
- 43.7 If the Council weighs between two accreditation decisions and finds that if the HEI were to satisfy certain conditions, a more positive decision would be possible, the Council may make that decision with a secondary condition, as defined in § 53 of the Administrative Procedure Act.

44. The Council shall specify in its decision:

- 44.1 the strengths of the HEI, which are achievements that exceed the level of the standard;
- 44.2 areas of concern and recommendations that imply non-compliances to the requirements of the standard and impact the formation of Council's decision;
- 44.3 opportunities for further improvement, which do not imply non-compliance to the standard or impact the formation of Council's decision.



45. If the committee has added a note of 'worthy of recognition' to some standards, the Council shall cite the recognition(s) in the accreditation decision.
46. The EKKA Bureau shall electronically forward the accreditation decision by the Council along with the assessment report to the HEI within two weeks after the date of that decision. If the Council has decided not to accredit the higher education institution, EKKA shall also notify the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research of the decision within a reasonable period of time.
47. Within one week after the final decision and the assessment report were forwarded to the institution of higher education, EKKA shall publicise the final decision along with the assessment and self-evaluation reports on its website.

## VIII. Contesting of Accreditation Proceedings Conducted by EKKA and Decision by the Council

48. A person who finds that his or her rights have been violated or his or her freedoms have been restricted by assessment procedures conducted by EKKA or by a decision made by the Council may file a challenge pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Administrative Procedure Act. The challenge shall be filed with the Council within thirty days after the person filing the challenge became or should have become aware of the contested finding.
49. The Council shall forward the challenge to its Appeals Committee<sup>3</sup> 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.
50. The decision by the Council may be challenged within thirty days after the delivery of the final decision, filing an action with the Tallinn courthouse of the Tallinn Administrative Court pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Code of Administrative Court.

## IX. Follow-up Activities

51. EKKA assumes that the responsibility for resolving problems pointed out in the assessment reports and for continuous improvement activities lies with the higher education institutions. EKKA requests that, two years after the accreditation decision was made by the Council, the HEI who was granted accreditation for seven years submit a written overview of its activities, planned

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<sup>3</sup> The role and composition of the Appeals Committee of the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education are outlined in the regulation 'Procedure for Formation of the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education and the Appeals Committee', which is available [here](#)

and implemented based on recommendations in the assessment report, along with the results of such activities.

52.If the Council has added a secondary condition to the accreditation decision in accordance with point 43.7 above, the HEI shall submit a progress report to the Council regarding elimination of the shortcoming described in that secondary condition. The Council shall involve members of the assessment committee in assessing compliance with the secondary condition.

## X. Involving Competent Assessment Authorities of Foreign Countries

53.If a HEI wishes that a competent foreign assessment authority (hereinafter referred to as 'assessment authority') would conduct an institutional accreditation review, the HEI shall submit a well-reasoned request to EKKA no later than two years prior to the expiration date of its current accreditation to include that assessment authority, providing the following information:

53.1 the name and contact details of the assessment authority, including its web address;

53.2 the consent of the assessment authority to conduct the accreditation review, and an estimated expenditure;

53.3 a description of the procedure (including a schedule) and requirements for a planned accreditation process.

54.The HEIs may request accreditation services from internationally recognised assessment authorities that have fulfilled the following conditions:

54.1 The assessment authority has institutional evaluation experience.

54.2 The procedures and requirements for accreditation are transparent and in conformity with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, and the assessment authority has preferably been included in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

54.3 Within the framework of institutional accreditation, a sampling-based evaluation of study programmes will also be conducted.

55.Within one month after receipt of the request, the Council shall make a justified decision on the suitability of the assessment authority to conduct institutional accreditation.

56.If EKKA approves the use of a foreign assessment authority, it shall conclude a tripartite contract with the higher education institution and the assessment authority, providing the rights and responsibilities of the parties and the procedure for reimbursement of expenditures.

57.The assessment authority shall submit its assessment report to EKKA.

- 58.If it becomes evident that there are significant deficiencies in the assessment report, and it is impossible to make a final decision that is consistent with Estonian legislation, the Council shall have the right to return the report to the assessment authority for amendment.
- 59.If it is possible to make a final decision that is consistent with Estonian legislation, the Council shall make one of the following justified decisions:
- 59.1 to accredit the HEI for seven years;
  - 59.2 to accredit the HEI for three years;
  - 59.3 not to accredit the HEI.
- 60.The proceedings described in this chapter and the final decision by the Council may be contested following the procedures provided in Chapter VIII.

## XI. Implementation Provisions

- 61.The HEIs that have been granted accreditation for three years in the first round of institutional accreditation reviews shall undergo a reassessment process in accordance with the version of the document, 'Conditions and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation', which was in effect from 01.04.2011 to 02.02.2018.
- 62.The amendments to the standard and guidelines in this document are mandatory for higher education institutions for which an institutional accreditation assessment visit is planned from 1 September 2021. In other cases, taking into account the changes are recommended.
- 63.Changes to this document will be introduced by the Council following feedback from stakeholders on Council's preliminary amendments and their justifications.

As of the 1st of August 2020, the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA) operates within the Education and Youth Authority, a governmental body under the administration of the Ministry of Education and Research. On June 3, 2020, the parliament passed amendments to the law establishing the Education and Youth Authority on the basis of the services of Innove Foundation, Archimedes Foundation, Information Technology Foundation for Education and Estonian Youth Work Center.

EKKA transferred as a complete structure from the Archimedes Foundation to the Education and Youth Authority and will continue its activities as a unit performing independent tasks. EKKA has been granted a special status by the statute of the Education and Youth Authority. Namely, the approval of EKKA's development plan and annual reports, the selection of higher education and vocational education quality assessment councils and the director of EKKA is within the competence of a curatory, which is formed by the Minister of Education and Research from representatives of EKKA's activities. According to the development plan, the main stakeholders of EKKA are the evaluated educational institutions, student associations, employers' representative organizations, professional and trade associations and the Ministry of Education and Research.

All the decisions on the quality assessment of higher and vocational education are also taken by independent assessment councils within the Education and Youth Authority. All relevant stakeholders can have a say in the formation of these councils. The quality assessment councils that have been operating until now will continue their work in the same composition until the end of the selection period. All guidelines and other regulations related to quality assessment shall remain unchanged.

As of the 1<sup>st</sup> of August, all the contracts signed with Archimedes Foundation EKKA will be transferred without changes to the Education and Youth Authority. From the moment of the transfer, the Education and Youth Authority will be the processor of the personal data related to the contracts. If you have any questions, please let your contractual contact person know.

The registry code of the Education and Youth Authority is 77001292 and legal address Lõõtsa 4, Tallinn 11415.

The address of EKKA will remain the same – Tõnismägi 11, Tallinn 10119. You can find the contacts of our employees on our new website [ekka.edu.ee/en/contacts/](http://ekka.edu.ee/en/contacts/) (<http://ekka.edu.ee/en/contacts/>).

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**Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education**

Education and Youth Authority

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Terms and Conditions of Data Protection (<http://archimedes.ee/en/sihtasutus/terms-conditions-data-protection/>)