

**Approval of the Application
by Estonian Quality Agency for Education (HAKA)
for Renewal of Inclusion on the Register**

Register Committee
29-30 June 2023

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Ver. 1.0
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Application of:	2021-10-20		
Agency registered since:	2013-03-01		
Type of review:	Targeted	Site visit:	2022-09-20
External review report of:	2023-02-17	Submitted:	2023-03-03
Review coordinated by:	European Association for Quality Assurance of Higher Education (ENQA)		
Review panel members:	Jakub Bakonyi, Nuria Comet, Tadej Tuma		
Decision of:	2023-06-30		
Registration until:	2028-02-29		
Absented themselves from decision-making:	None		
Attachments:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. External Review Report, 2023-02-17 2. Minuted clarification with HAKA, 2023-06-06 		

1. The application of 2021-10-20 adhered to the requirements of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.
2. The Register Committee confirmed eligibility of the application on 2021-12-17.
3. The Register Committee considered the targeted external review report of 2023-02-17 on the compliance of HAKA with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015 version).
4. The Register Committee sought and received clarification from the agency on 2023-06-06.

Analysis:

5. In considering HAKA's compliance with the ESG, the Register Committee took into account:
 - Institutional Accreditation
 - Initial and re-assessment of study programme group
 - Accreditation of study programmes
 - Accreditation of continuing education programmes

The following activities are not within the scope of the ESG and, thus, not pertinent to the application inclusion on the Register:

- Initial assessment of study programme groups in VET
- Quality assessment of study programme groups in VET
- International development projects
- A pilot project for developing a quality assurance model for continuing education
- A pilot project for developing a quality assurance model for general education

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6. The Register Committee found that the report provides sufficient evidence and analysis on HAKA's level of compliance with the ESG.

7. With regard to the specific European Standards, the Register Committee considered the following:

ESG 2.3 – Implementing processes

8. The Register Committee found the difference between the initial and re-assessments of study programme groups on the one hand and the phasing out of assessments of study programme groups on the other hand not to be completely clear.

9. The agency explained (see clarification of 2023-06-06) that the initial and re-assessment procedures remain compulsory for the opening of any new study programme groups. For existing study programme groups that have gone successfully through multiple assessment processes, the assessments of individual study programme groups are being phased out for a sample of these programmes, within the new model for institutional accreditations.

10. Having considered the agency's explanation and the implementation of the new procedures, the Register Committee concurs with the panel's conclusion of compliance.

ESG 3.5 – Resources

11. The Register Committee noted that the proportion of HAKA's activities financed through state budget has been decreasing. This is caused by the fact that HAKA has taken on activities for other education levels/types not falling under the ESG, which are financed through projects.

12. The Register Committee understood from the agency's clarification (see minuted response of 2023-06-06) that the financial concerns do not affect the agency's ability to carry out its regular external QA activities.

13. The Register Committee therefore concluded that the agency continues to comply with ESG 3.5.

14. For the remaining standards, the Register Committee was able to concur with the review panel's analysis and conclusion without further comments.

Conclusion:

15. Based on the external review report and the considerations above, the Register Committee concluded that HAKA demonstrated compliance with the ESG (Parts 2 and 3) as follows:

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Standard	Previous decision (2018-06-13)	Review panel conclusion	Register Committee conclusion
2.1	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
2.2	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
2.3	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
2.4	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
2.5	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
2.6	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
2.7	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
3.1	Compliance	Full compliance	Compliance
3.2	Compliance	Full compliance	Compliance
3.3	Compliance	Compliance	Compliance
3.4	Compliance	Substantial compliance	Compliance
3.5	Compliance	Full compliance	Compliance
3.6	Compliance	Full compliance	Compliance
3.7	Compliance	(not expected)	Compliance (by virtue of applying)

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16. HAKA therefore continues to comply substantially with the ESG as a whole.

17. The Register Committee therefore approved the application for HAKA's renewed inclusion shall be valid until 2028-02-29¹.

¹ Inclusion is valid for five years from the date of the external review report, see §3.25 of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.

Application by HAKA for Renewal of Registration

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Clarification provided by the Agency

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Date of the conversation:	06-06-2023
Agency:	HAKA - Karin Laansoo
Representative of EQAR:	Magalie Soenen & Melinda Szabo

1. HAKA has submitted on 2021-10-20 an application for renewal of registration on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). On 2023-03-03, HAKA submitted the external review panel's report of 2023-02-17.
2. In order to prepare the deliberations of the Register Committee on HAKA's compliance with the ESG, EQAR contacted the Agency to clarify the matter(s) below.
3. ESG 3.1 – Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

The status of the activities “initial and re-assessments of study programme groups” was not completely clear to the Register Committee Rapporteurs. They asked about the difference between initial and reassessment, whether these activities are being phased out or are still be carried out on voluntary basis.

HAKA explained that initial and re-assessment are assessments carried out when a HEI wishes to start offering curricula in a new study programme group. When the assessment is carried out before a programme is opened, it is called initial assessment.

When a programme has been granted the right to provide instruction for a fixed term (in our case usually 3 years) and the HEI wishes to carry on offering the programme after this term elapses, it will have to undergo re-assessment, which follows to a very large extent the same methodology as is used for initial assessment. There are some minor differences because some aspects can only be assessed in theory before a programme is launched whereas after three years, the actual implementation can be scrutinized. The regulation caters for both eventualities and uses similar but not identical criteria (see the two column table on pages 3-9, https://haka.ee/wp-content/uploads/Initial_Assessment_Guidelines.pdf).

This type of assessment is not voluntary, it is a statutory prerequisite for the opening of any new study programme groups and is not going to be phased out in the foreseeable future.

The phased out study programme group (SPG) assessments in the first, second and third cycle of higher education – were a different assessment type from initial and re-assessment. They were intended for regular monitoring of progress within a study programme group and for providing external feedback. The decision, which was taken, had no instant ramifications on the HEI, the only indication of how well the study programme group at a HEI was doing was the interval before the subsequent assessment. Over time it was notified that the performance of the HEIs improved so much that the majority of SPGs received the maximum 7 year result, but undergoing a large number of assessments was a heavy burden for the HEIs. So it was decided to include a sample of study programmes in the new model for institutional accreditations, which are mandatory at least every 7 years and phase out the individual study programme group assessments. Only the study programme groups that had received the full 7 year result were able to join the new system.

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4. ESG 3.5 – Resources

The Register Committee Rapporteurs learned from the Self Evaluation Report that the share of current national funds might pose a threat to the sustainability of HAKA’s activities and asks some feedback from the agency on this matter?

HAKA explained that the proportion of HAKA’s activities financed from the state budget has been decreasing, but not because the amounts that are allocated have been decreasing (they have been stable over recent years), rather because HAKA has taken on activities for other education levels/types not falling under the ESG (namely general education and continuing education) and these are financed from projects.

They have also conducted VET reviews for more than a decade and these are also financed from ESF funds. As with any project based financing there is a degree of uncertainty regarding what happens after the end of the project, but this only concerns HAKA’s non-ESG-related activities. The allocation from the state budget is also clearly earmarked for the regular reviews in higher education and cannot be used for other purposes. So the concern over the sustainability of HAKA’s activities is valid, but 1) they currently see no threat for higher education related activities; 2) the uncertainty is more of a long term concern than an immediate threat.