

Decision Regarding Institutional Accreditation Estonian Academy of Arts

29/09/2017

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

On the basis of clause 12 (2) 1) and subsection 10 (4) of the Universities Act, point 3.7.3 of the Statutes of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (hereinafter referred to as 'EKKA') and point 48.1 of the document, 'Conditions and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation', authorised in point 3.7.1 of the above-mentioned EKKA Statutes; the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education (hereinafter referred to as 'the Council') affirms the following:

1. On 24.03.2016 the Estonian Academy of Arts and EKKA agreed upon a time frame to conduct institutional accreditation.
2. The Director of EKKA, by her order on 09.02.2017, approved the following membership of the committee for the institutional accreditation of the Estonian Academy of Arts (hereinafter referred to as 'the Committee'):

Professor John Butler	Chair of the Committee, Chief Executive Officer, EQ-Arts, UK
Mark Dunhill	Dean of the School of Art, University of the Arts London, UK
Marjan Hester Groot	Associate Professor; Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Netherlands
Emma Järvenpää	Student, Leiden University, Netherlands
Žilvinas Lilas	Professor, Kunsthochschule für Medien Köln, Germany
Christine Pybus	Lecturer; CIT Crawford College of Art and Design, Cork, Ireland
Merja Salo	Professor, Aalto University, Finland
Maren Schmohl	Vice Rector, Academy of Applied Design, Art and Media, Germany
Jari Kukkonen	Vitalonga OÜ, Estonia

3. The Estonian Academy of Arts submitted a self-evaluation report to the EKKA Bureau on 8.02.2017 and the assessment coordinator forwarded it to the Committee on 20.02.2017.
4. An assessment visit was made to the Estonian Academy of Arts during 9–11.05.2017.
5. The Committee sent its draft assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 23.06.2017, EKKA forwarded it to the Estonian Academy of Arts for its comments on 26.06.2017 and the Academy delivered its response on 10.07.2017.
6. The Committee submitted its final assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 23.07.2017. That assessment report is an integral part of the decision, and is available on the EKKA website.
7. The Secretary of the Council forwarded the Committee’s final assessment report along with the Academy’s self-evaluation report to the Council members on 25.08.2017.
8. The Committee presented the following component assessments:

Organisational management and performance	Conforms to requirements
Teaching and learning	Conforms to requirements
Research, development and/or other creative activity	Conforms to requirements
Service to society	Conforms to requirements

9. The Council with 9 members present discussed these received documents in its session on 29.09.2017 and, based on the assessment report, decided to point out the following strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations regarding the Estonian Academy of Arts.

Organisational management and performance

Strengths

- 1) The Estonian Academy of Arts (EAA) has developed a comprehensive development plan as the result of a lengthy and inclusive process. A detailed budgetary strategy has been put in place that is in line with the Academy’s main goals.
- 2) The EAA is listed in the 2017 QS World University Ranking among the 200 best art and design universities, which the Committee recognised as a significant achievement. The EAA has cooperation ties with several Estonian higher education institutions, including Tartu Art College.
- 3) The EAA is a leading partner in the Cumulus fashion and textile working group and they have conducted numerous workshops and internships with various international companies. The Academy’s teaching staff and practitioners have participated in steering groups of international working groups and networks. The secretariat of the Cirrus network is also located at the EAA.
- 4) Procedures for recruiting teaching staff are clear, balanced, inclusive and transparent.
- 5) The gender balance of the teaching staff at the EAA is good. Staff mobility is increasing. More than half of the lecturers participate in short-term international exchanges.
- 6) The Academy conducts extensive staff satisfaction surveys.
- 7) Teaching staff have been provided with good conditions for practicing in their specialties and/or engaging in research.
- 8) For more than a decade, EAA’s revenues have grown steadily due to, inter alia, the activities of the *Open Academy*, the School of Restoration and the Academy’s R&D.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) The EAA’s organisational structure should be critically reviewed, streamlined and harmonised; and its areas of competence, functions, membership, activities and methods for sharing

information should be clearly defined for each committee. It would be desirable to optimise the management and administrative structure of the Academy.

- 2) Inter- and trans-disciplinary collaborations should be strengthened between the different faculties, with other universities and also outside the academic sector, thereby fully utilising the potentials of the new building which will be ready soon.
- 3) The quantitative indicators should also be defined and clearly set out under the qualitative indicators in the Academy's development and action plans, by which to measure the achievement of the objectives. Individuals should be appointed who are responsible for achieving the main objectives of the action plan, not just single measures. Achievement of the objectives of the action plan should be monitored year by year at the management level, the results presented publicly and transparently, and then the next steps planned for the future.
- 4) Staff development (including supervisor training) should place special emphasis on the nature and potential results of practice-based artistic research, in order to fully engage the Fine Arts, Design and Architecture Faculties in research.
- 5) The EAA should be better marketed in order to recruit more international students and lecturers to study or teach there. Long-term international mobility of the teaching staff must be strategically supported. A thorough market analysis should be undertaken for all study programmes.
- 6) The IT systems should be upgraded to strengthen web-based management, communication and e-learning platforms.
- 7) The Assessment Committee believes that the EAA should no longer regard itself as "a small higher education institution", since it is a rather large and complex organisation (compared to other European art schools).
- 8) The Quality Committee should be part of the structure of the Academy with clearly defined objectives and the means to achieve them, and the right to develop a more far-reaching quality management policy.
- 9) Top-down measures in the assessment of staff performance should be balanced better with opportunities for support and development. Otherwise, an exodus of the talented lecturers to the private sector may become a serious problem for the Academy, since punitive and interventionist approaches inhibit staff members' satisfaction and motivation.
- 10) Members of the teaching staff repeatedly expressed dissatisfaction with their salaries. The process of calculating staff remuneration should be made more transparent, more understandable and comparable across the various faculties of the Academy – for example, staff could have it explained in more detail how remuneration for additional tasks is calculated. Also, staff salary levels should be aligned with the salary levels of teaching staff at other comparable universities.
- 11) It is advisable to analyse the justification and necessity of the unusually high percentage of professors at the Academy.
- 12) Response rates should be raised in surveys regarding satisfaction with management of the Academy.
- 13) It is necessary to set clearer internal rules for violation of ethical requirements.

Teaching and learning

Strengths

- 1) A number of innovative teaching practices are employed at the Academy resulting from staff engagement in professional development (especially junior staff).
- 2) A strong and productive sense of community exists between teaching staff and students. Both local and international students feel that they are supported and they highly appreciate direct communications with the lecturers.

- 3) Employers are very pleased with the professional preparation of students and their ability to cope with various practical work situations.
- 4) The Academy's initiative to create laboratories and use them as central resources to conduct interdisciplinary learning and teaching and practice-based artistic research, as well as to apply new learning and teaching methods, is laudable.
- 5) The EAA supports international student mobility, which has high participation rates and forms a significant part of the student learning experience. Compared to other Estonian higher education institutions, the EAA is one of the flagships of internationalisation, by making the most of opportunities available through the Erasmus programmes, and also by participating in Nordplus and other international networks.
- 6) Staff members organise study trips for students in Estonia and abroad with support from the Academy.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) The Academy should better define the concept of 'learner-centred learning' so as to be understood by all stakeholders. The students should be informed about the content and delivery of courses in a more systematic and user-friendly manner, in order to allow them, inter alia, to plan their own studies.
- 2) Students who are engaged in independent projects or entrepreneurship should be recognised to a greater extent.
- 3) The quality of course descriptions, objectives, learning outcomes, teaching methods and assessment criteria vary significantly among faculties.
- 4) The Academy seems to lack a uniform approach to interdisciplinary collaborations.
- 5) There is no clear overview of the form or format of entrepreneurship training in the study programmes.
- 6) The Academy lacks clear guidelines on how the students' international internship experiences are assessed or incorporated into their study programmes.
- 7) There is widespread agreement among staff and students that the collection of student feedback through the Study Information System (SIS) is not effective. One option would be to set up a more anonymous feedback system.
- 8) A sufficient introduction to research methods is currently lacking at the BA level, and research methodology is also insufficiently taught at the MA level.
- 9) The Academy lacks a uniform assessment system, which would ensure comparability of assessment results and a correlation between assessment standards and learning outcomes. It is advisable to formalise the assessment processes and to consider possibilities of providing written feedback to students and to engage them in peer assessment.
- 10) Reasons for students' dissatisfaction with their counselling regarding recognition of prior learning and work experiences should be identified.
- 11) The availability of psychological and career counselling should be improved as there is a high demand for these services.
- 12) It is recommended that the Academy formalise a process for taking student feedback into account and for using that feedback to make changes at the Academy and study programme levels.

Research, development and/or other creative activity

Strengths

- 1) The EAA has given substantial consideration to the needs of society while planning and implementing its research strategy.
- 2) Cooperation with designers practicing in companies, as well as support given by the Academy for the start-up companies of its graduates, serves as an example of good practice.

- 3) The in-house publisher is well-suited for publishing doctoral theses, and improves visibility for the quality of EAA's research work.
- 4) A key strength of the Academy is the requirement for teaching staff's creative activity established in their job descriptions based on their contracts, and for which the Academy provides them adequate time.
- 5) Funds have been allocated in the Academy's central budget to support practice-based artistic research. The Academy has established research grants to stimulate research.
- 6) Students of all academic cycles are involved in research, creative or project activities.
- 7) Thesis exhibitions are displayed in the most important exhibition spaces in Tallinn, providing the EAA with needed visibility in society.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) Teaching staff should receive more training regarding practice-based artistic research, to enable lecturers of different faculties to understand its essence and outputs, and be prepared to participate in joint projects.
- 2) Publications on research methodologies should be perused and new and innovative approaches to artistic research should be explored.
- 3) The number of peer-reviewed research papers published in international journals should be increased in order to enhance the EAA's international reputation.

Service to society

Strengths

- 1) The EAA's strong and innovative collaboration with stakeholders from the communities, state authorities and creative industries is laudable. Stakeholders are involved in developing study programmes and they provide practical training opportunities for students.
- 2) The EAA organises numerous public exhibitions, performances and events that are well known in Estonian society. Faculties of the Academy participate in international festivals, fairs, exhibitions and conferences. Students of the Academy participate successfully in international competitions.
- 3) Teaching staff of the Academy participate in the activities of numerous professional networks.
- 4) Dedicated employees are engaged in popularising the core activities of the Academy, and resources are allocated for this purpose.
- 5) The *Open Academy* has long traditions and plays an important role in Estonian society. Marketing of the *Open Academy* has been successful and large numbers of students have participated in its activities. Student feedback for the *Open Academy* has been positive, and modern and spacious rooms have been designated for its use in the new building which will be ready soon. Alumni of the Academy also participate in the activities of the *Open Academy*.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) When popularising EAA's activities, more attention could be paid to the large Russian speaking population.
- 2) Even more ambitious goals could be set for the *Open Academy* for 2020. The Academy is currently located in temporary locations around the city and therefore it is difficult for people to participate in its activities.
- 3) It is recommended that the Academy evaluate the societal impact and outcomes of its activities in order to further develop them in the future.

The Council's recommendation to the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research

The Ministry of Education and Research does not sufficiently recognise practice-based artistic research and therefore does not allocate adequate funds for this research practice. This directly

affects the EAA's ability to recruit world-class teaching staff and attract doctoral students, as well as obtain resources needed for research. Inadequate research, in turn, has a direct negative impact on the student learning experience. In addition, given that the fields of art and design are among major contributors to the development of a creative economy, the Ministry is strongly encouraged to change its attitudes to be in line with other European partners, and to provide adequate funding for practice-based artistic research.

10. If all component assessments are presented as 'conforms to requirements', the Quality Assessment Council shall conclude that the management, administration, academic and research activity, and academic and research environment meet the requirements; and decide to accredit the institution of higher education for seven years.
11. On the basis of the foregoing, the Council

DECIDED

to accredit the Estonian Academy of Arts for seven years.

The decision was adopted by 9 votes in favour. Against 0.

12. This accreditation will be valid until 29.09.2024, and the EKKA Bureau will coordinate a date for the next institutional accreditation with the Estonian Academy of Arts no later than 29.09.2023.
13. The Council also decided to award the EKKA Quality Label to the Estonian Academy of Arts for the period ending on 29.09.2024.
14. A person who finds that his or her rights have been violated or his or her freedoms restricted by this decision may file a challenge with the EKKA Quality Assessment Council within 30 days after the person filing the challenge became or should have become aware of the contested finding. A judicial challenge to this decision is possible within 30 days after its delivery, by filing an action with the Tallinn courthouse of the Tallinn Administrative Court pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Code of Administrative Court Procedure.

Maaja-Katrin Kerem
Chair of the Council

Hillar Bauman
Secretary of the Council