

**The decision of the Higher Education Assessment Council
of the Estonian Quality Agency for Education**

INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION

ESTONIAN ACADEMY OF ARTS

2 July 2024

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

Pursuant to clause 43.1 of the document “Guide to Institutional Accreditation” established on the basis of the authorisation contained in subsection 38(3) of the Higher Education Act and subsection 24(5) of the Statutes of the Education and Youth Board, the Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Education (hereinafter referred to as the Council) states the following:

1. The Estonian Academy of Arts and the Estonian Quality Agency for Education agreed on the period for institutional accreditation on 4 May 2023.
2. According to clause 8 of the Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation, the following study programmes were also assessed in the framework of institutional accreditation:

Fine Arts (Bachelor)

Fashion, Accessory and Textile Design (Bachelor)

Architecture and Urban Design (Integrated Studies)

Interaction Design (Master)

Art History and Visual Culture (PhD)

3. On 18 January 2024, the Director of the Estonian Quality Agency for Education (HAKA) approved the following composition of the committee for institutional accreditation (hereinafter referred to as the Committee):

Sarah Bennett (Chair)	Consultant, EQ-Arts Board Member, former Head of School of Art and Architecture, Kingston University (UK)
Philippe Bouillard (Secretary)	Professor, Université Libre de Bruxelles, Brussels Engineering School (Belgium)
Kristel Jakobson-Pallo	Student, Tallinn University (Estonia)
Anu-Maaja Pallok	Adviser (Creative Industries), Ministry of Culture (Estonia)
Gerrit Uittenbogaard	Professor, Head of Textile & Fashion, Royal Academy of Arts (The Netherlands)

Hanna Johansson	Dean, Academy of Fine Arts, Uniarts Helsinki (Finland)
Ieva Skaurone	Rector, Vilnius Academy of Arts (Lithuania)
Jørn Mortensen	Associate Professor, Dean, School of Arts, Design and Media, Kristiania University College, Oslo (Norway)

4. The Estonian Academy of Arts submitted a self-evaluation report to the HAKA Bureau on 31 January 2024 and the HAKA assessment coordinator forwarded it to the Committee on 14 February 2024.
5. An assessment visit was made to the Estonian Academy of Arts on 24–26 April 2024.
6. The Committee sent its draft assessment report to the HAKA Bureau on 5 June 2024. HAKA forwarded it to the higher education institution for its comments on 6 June 2024 and the Estonian Academy of Arts submitted its comments on 21 June 2024.
7. The Committee submitted its final assessment report to the HAKA Bureau on 24 June 2024. The assessment report is an integral part of the decision. The report is available on HAKA's website.
8. The Secretary of the Council forwarded the final assessment report along with the self-evaluation report to the Council members on 25 June 2024.
9. The Committee's assessments were as follows:

Standard	Assessment
Strategic management	Conforms to requirements
Resources	Conforms to requirements
Quality culture	Conforms to requirements
Academic ethics	Conforms to requirements
Internationalisation	Conforms to requirements
Teaching staff	Conforms to requirements
Study programme	Conforms to requirements
Learning and teaching	Conforms to requirements
Student assessment	Conforms to requirements
Learning support systems	Conforms to requirements
Research, development and/or other creative activities	Conforms to requirements
Service to society	Conforms to requirements

★ According to the assessment committee, the following deserves recognition

- 1) The Rectorate of the Academy of Arts should be recognised for the efficient management of unexpected situations (Covid-19; support for Ukraine and Ukrainians) and the development of good governance practices, which in turn promote the horizontal governance model of the Academy.
- 2) Resource management deserves recognition. The logic of budgeting together with the methods for allocating resources ensures agreement on the budget within the Academy.



- 3) The Open Academy of the Academy of Arts deserves recognition as a centre for continuing education that is dedicated to developing creative thinking and creative skills and facilitates the application of these competences in almost all areas of life.
10. The Council with 10 members present discussed these received documents in its session on 2 July 2024 and decided to point out the following strengths¹, areas for improvement² and recommendations, and suggestions for further development regarding the Academy of Arts³.

10.1 Strategic management

Strengths

- 1) The community of the Academy of Arts consisting of dedicated staff, students, alumni and stakeholders, is collaborative, open, flexible and supportive, understands the Academy's mission well and acts accordingly.
- 2) A strong management culture and a well-functioning horizontal management system contribute to the achievement of the strategic objectives of the Academy of Arts.
- 3) Efficient management of crisis situations (Covid-19; support for Ukraine and Ukrainians).

Areas for improvement, and recommendations

- 1) The formal feedback system of external stakeholders is not consistent. It must be made functional by streamlining and formalising the collection of feedback from external stakeholders, including alumni.

Suggestions for further development

- 1) As there is no student representative in the council of the Academy of Arts, it is recommended to revise the composition of the council and add a student member to it.

10.2. Resources

Strengths

- 1) The Academy of Arts has appropriate recruitment regulations and remuneration systems in place for academic staff, a good onboarding programme, a convincing employee motivation policy and a clear staff structure in general.
- 2) The satisfaction level of the academic and support staff at the Academy of Arts is very high.

¹The strengths pointed out include achievements beyond the standard (not compliance with the standard).

² The areas for improvement and the recommendations point to shortcomings in meeting the requirements of the institutional accreditation standard and affect the final decision of the Council.

³ The suggestions for further development are suggestions for improvement which do not contain a reference to non-compliance with the standard and which are at the discretion of the higher education institution to either take into consideration or disregard. The suggestions for further development do not affect the final decision of the Council.



- 3) The digital infrastructure is logically structured, and the information management system as a whole is convincing.
- 4) Workshops are well organised and well equipped.
- 5) The resources of the Academy of Arts are well managed. The logic of budgeting together with the methods for allocating resources ensures agreement on the budget within the Academy.

Areas for improvement, and recommendations

- 1) Student satisfaction with IT systems has not been studied. It is commendable that specific plans are in place to upgrade Moodle, but students should also be involved to better understand user needs. It is recommended to collect feedback more often and regularly on the different IT solutions that students use.

Suggestions for further development

- 1) The procedures for investment in workshops could be reviewed to improve the compliance of investments with academic objectives.
- 2) The need for more space as pointed out by the Academy is based on quantitative and qualitative data, but usage monitoring only involves a 4-month study. The study should be extended to ensure that decisions on spatial needs are based on qualified quantitative data.

10.3. Quality culture

Strengths

- 1) For the Academy of Arts, the term “external stakeholders” is framed by its central role in Estonian art and culture, and most of the external stakeholders and employers are also the alumni of the Academy. Many alumni are also lecturers and researchers at the Academy.
- 2) The internal quality assurance systems supporting quality culture are implemented across the Academy of Arts and generally accepted by internal stakeholders.
- 3) Well-designed software systems bring efficiency to quality processes, such as student feedback to teaching staff in the study information system *Tahvel*.
- 4) What is also commendable is the introduction of regular development interviews for teaching staff, which together with student feedback at the end of each semester create a good opportunity to improve the pedagogical skills of the teaching staff and share good practices.



Areas for improvement, and recommendations

- 1) It is recommended to consider ways to consistently and systematically involve all alumni, including former foreign students, in the quality processes in order to identify international trends, among other things.
- 2) Among the heads of study programmes, and teaching staff, there is currently no clear understanding of how the relevancy of study programmes is measured and assessed. It is recommended to review and update the main activities and recommended outcomes listed under strategic objective 1 “Up-to-date study programmes” in the Development Plan of the Academy of Arts, and to ensure they are widely spread and understood by the members of the Academy.
- 3) Attention should be paid to the concern of the Student Council that students from some faculties are insufficiently represented.

Suggestions for further development

- 1) A way should be found for foreign lecturers who are paid by the hour to also receive regular feedback from students on the teaching they carry out.
- 2) It is recommended to ensure that the formal involvement of external stakeholders in study programme committees is consistent across all study programmes.
- 3) It is recommended to continue developing user-friendly platforms, including digital solutions, in order to simplify and reduce the administrative burden of internal quality assurance.

10.4. Academic ethics

Strengths

- 1) The updating and implementation of the Code of Ethics and the involvement of the Student Council in these processes is commendable. All internal stakeholders are aware of the Code and know how to file complaints and report violations, and where to seek advice. The processing of complaints is fair and transparent.
- 2) Gender equality is well respected at the Academy of Arts.
- 3) Developed by the Academy of Arts, the document “Artificial intelligence in education” provides guidance on the use of artificial intelligence for academic staff, and dialogues on its opportunities and challenges are being held throughout the community of the Academy.

Areas for improvement, and recommendations

- 1) There is no policy on inclusion and diversity in the documents of the Academy of Arts. It is recommended to broaden the excellent work done with regard to gender equality and to draw up an equality, diversity and inclusion plan.



- 2) Accurate referencing of sources contributes to the avoidance of academic misconduct and therefore, correct reference must be made in course annotations to publications, websites, web magazines, exhibitions, etc.

Suggestions for further development

- 1) It is recommended to provide appropriate external training to key researchers so that the ethical approval of applications could be given to the area of responsibility of the Ethics Committee.
- 2) Students' understanding of the circumstances that require ethical approval should be improved by integrating research ethics training into Master's and Doctoral study programmes.

10.5. Internationalisation

Strengths

- 1) The inbound and outbound mobility of the students of the Academy of Arts is at a stably high level. There is a clear support system in place to support mobility.
- 2) The funding for international mobility guarantees support to all interested parties.

Areas for improvement, and recommendations

- 1) The Academy, and in particular its Department of International Relations, has a clear vision of how internationalisation can contribute to the development of study programmes. In this regard, more intensive cooperation with study programme committees is recommended.

10.6. Teaching staff

Strengths

- 1) The teaching staff at the Academy of Arts are highly qualified. They value constant self-development and support the development of students.
- 2) Good teaching seminars and the topics covered in them are excellent examples of good practice.

Areas for improvement, and recommendations

- 1) There is a concern that the research and creative activities of teaching staff do not sufficiently support teaching and supervising in Bachelor's and Master's studies. The quality of research is not doubted, but the Academy must ensure systematic research support to teaching and supervising.



Suggestions for further development

- 1) The proportion of full-time academic staff at the Academy of Arts is small, which can make it difficult to store institutional academic memory. The management of the Academy is aware of this challenge and it is recommended to develop further appropriate measures.
- 2) The competition for elected positions is low. The management of the Academy is aware of this challenge and it is recommended to develop further appropriate measures.

10.7. Study programme

Strengths

- 1) Clear procedures are in place for the development of study programmes, which can be adjusted if necessary.
- 2) Bachelor's programme in Fine Arts: creative activities and art research adequately support the study programme; student exhibitions, public presentations and trips to major foreign exhibitions contribute to the career of future graduates as practising artists; there is a sufficient number of optional and elective subjects available to shape a student-centred approach to teaching; the outbound and inbound mobility indicators for students and teaching staff are remarkably high.
- 3) Bachelor's programme in Fashion, Accessory and Textile Design: the merging of the three specialities has been successful; the study programme is coherent, the modules and subjects are in logical order; the approach to teaching is learner-centred; there is a strong structure of professional networks for communication and for creating development opportunities for students and teaching staff.
- 4) Integrated studies of Architecture and Urban Planning: the research activities of academic staff adequately support the study programme; the learning environment is top level; an original feature of the study programme is the combination of horizontal specialised studios and vertical studios, where students can work on research topics; both outbound and inbound student mobility is significant; the competitive position of graduates is very high and the employment rate is high (88%); the ratio of academic staff and students is very good; the high competence of teaching staff contributes to the development of students and the quality of their learning experience; internationally recognised academic staff is involved in carrying out the study programme.
- 5) Master's programme in Interaction Design: this is a modern, human-oriented design study programme with clear societal ambitions; input from international best practices has been gathered for study programme development; the study programme takes good account of the needs of the labour market; the study programme stimulates students to become competent problem-solvers using various design methods; teaching staff is experienced and dedicated.
- 6) Doctoral programme in Art History and Visual Culture: the study programme is ambitious and the Doctoral School is well organised; supervision is well structured; there is a



functional and supportive relationship with stakeholders, as well as good career prospects; the research work of the teaching staff is well supported by various means, such as a fully paid semester off; there are many great courses available for teaching staff and supervisors to support their work, including good teaching seminars; supported opportunities have been established for mobility and participation in the international research community and discussions.

Areas for improvement, and recommendations

- 1) Some of the learning objectives of the Academy of Arts are difficult to achieve (interdisciplinary cross directions, elective subjects) and students find it difficult to shape their learning path. This problem should be addressed.
- 2) Many learning outcomes (at study programme, module or subject level) require further review to be consistent with the recommendations of the ECTS Users' Guide.
- 3) Bachelor's programme in Fine Arts: to ensure sufficient equipment and software in the digital laboratory and in the faculty, a specific action plan must be prepared; the study programme committee should reconsider the volume of the Bachelor's thesis and reduce the number of subjects taught in the last semester; the concept of internship must be better defined and attention must be paid to the implementation of the internship.
- 4) Integrated studies of Architecture and Urban Planning: not all learning outcomes at all levels (study programme, modules, subjects) correspond to the ECTS Users' Guide, and are often not suitable for that specific level of education. They should be thoroughly reviewed. The organisation of studies prevents students from taking full responsibility for their studies, and the Academy of Arts should develop and provide more suitable elective subjects. Mobility opportunities should be improved for teaching staff (especially those paid hourly).
- 5) Master's programme in Interaction Design: the number of learning outcomes of the study programme (over 20) is too high. This number must be reduced.
- 6) Doctoral programme in Art History and Visual Culture: not all learning outcomes comply with the ECTS Users' Guide and must be reviewed. The study programme lacks mediaeval art history that is considered important for Estonian culture and museums, and it is recommended to include this topic in the study programme.

Suggestions for further development

- 1) It is recommended to improve the monitoring of students' workload in order to avoid a break year before the final examination.
- 2) A clearer link should be established at the Master's and Doctoral level with regard to the long-term objectives set out in national development and action plans.
- 3) Bachelor's programme in Fine Arts: it is recommended to continue seeking solutions to the issue of space in case of larger art projects; the proportion of small-scale subjects in the study programme should be reviewed.



- 4) Bachelor's programme in Fashion, Accessory and Textile Design: it is recommended to cover the UN Sustainable Development Goals in the learning outcomes of all three specialisations.
- 5) Integrated studies of Architecture and Urban Planning: in order to fulfil the international ambitions of the Academy of Arts, more attention should be paid to publishing in international peer-reviewed journals; it is recommended to reduce the number of small-scale internships in order to develop longer internships with clear learning outcomes, which are also supervised by the Academy's teaching staff.
- 6) Master's programme in Interaction Design: the needs of students should be monitored and the issue of space as raised by students should be addressed. The self-analysis of the Academy of Arts shows that the teaching tools are mainly digital, but students believe that a better physical environment is also needed to achieve the expected learning outcomes.
- 7) Doctoral programme in Art History and Visual Culture: the Academy of Arts should make efforts to establish Doctoral studies in knowledge transfer alongside junior researcher-doctoral student spots – this could help reduce discontinuation and suspension of studies due to the workload of Doctoral students; the committee supports the Academy's ambition to recruit more international students, as this would make the study programme even stronger; it is recommended to develop interdisciplinary cooperation between art history and art studies; a more precise system for remunerating supervisors should be defined.

10.8. Learning and teaching

Strengths

- 1) The individual needs of students are respected, and support staff is competent and available.
- 2) The students are happy with their studies and proud to be members of the community.
- 3) The Academy of Arts is open to innovations in both teaching and learning, as evidenced by a good digital learning environment and many other innovative methods.

Areas for improvement, and recommendations

- 1) The duration of internships in the study programmes should be extended so that students could get real and relevant work life experience. Clear internship guidelines must be developed.



10.9. Student assessment

Strengths

- 1) Teaching staff can use various IT platforms for their studies and can choose the one most suitable for them. The use of IT systems in teaching and assessment is clear to all those concerned.
- 2) What is positive is that discussions are ongoing on assessment-related topics, including differentiated and non-differentiated assessment, which broaden knowledge of assessment methods and approaches in general.

Areas for improvement, and recommendations

- 1) Clear and unambiguous guidelines should be developed for the assessment of internship.

10.10. Learning support systems

Strengths

- 1) A clear and coherent system of counselling services has been established to meet the needs of students. In addition to local students, foreign students are also provided various counselling services, such as the intensive Estonian language course that helps them immerse themselves in the Estonian culture.
- 2) The Academy of Arts makes various international publications available through translation.
- 3) It is commendable that the Academy's technical staff is part of ETHO (European Technical Heads Organisation). This way, technicians have access to innovative practices and can receive support through a professional network.

Areas for improvement, and recommendations

- 1) The documents of the Academy of Arts should be made equally accessible to students and academic staff both within and outside the Academy.

Suggestions for further development

- 1) In order to support the international ambitions of the Academy of Arts, more attention should be paid to creating more dormitory spaces.

10.11. Research, development and/or other creative activities

Strengths

- 1) Dedicated staff and a well-structured strategy and action plan for the development of research culture.



- 2) The Academy of Arts has launched creativity-based research and developed and elaborated relevant vocabulary and guidelines.
- 3) Clear plans are in place to strengthen research capability, as well as an agreed plan to develop research in each research centre.
- 4) There are clear research focus areas that are still sufficiently open to new research projects and initiatives.
- 5) Cooperation with stakeholders in various areas is good, particularly in areas such as cultural heritage and conservation, art history and visual culture, design and textiles, architecture and materials science.

Areas for improvement, and recommendations

- 1) It is recommended to better assess the implementation and societal impact of research, development and creative activities and to determine how to measure the results.
- 2) The Academy of Arts should strengthen the link between research, development and creative activity, and studies at all levels from Bachelor's to Doctoral studies. The link works well in some study programmes such as art history and visual culture, but in fine arts and design, for example, it is not systematic enough.

Suggestions for further development

- 1) It is recommended to develop plans to obtain additional funding for research.
- 2) It is recommended to identify and share best practices in teaching research methods in all study programmes and faculties.
- 3) The Academy of Arts and its foreign partners should strive toward their common goal of establishing a Doctoral programme in knowledge transfer.

10.12. Service to society

Strengths

- 1) Several initiatives and projects are interdisciplinary and therefore disseminate the latest know-how on specialities and areas of life, while also encouraging the influx of new knowledge from other areas.
- 2) Many of the Academy's activities have an international dimension and impact and also address global issues such as sustainability.
- 3) As the centre for continuing education, the Open Academy of the Academy of Arts is dedicated to developing creative thinking and creative skills and facilitates the application of these competences in almost all areas of life.



Areas for improvement, and recommendations

- 1) Currently, insufficient information and evidence is collected and analysed on the social impact of the activities of the Academy of Arts. It is recommended to improve and/or further develop the relevant methods and indicators.

Suggestions for further development

- 1) Although there are examples of activities and projects of the Academy of Arts outside Tallinn, Narva and Tartu, more attention should be paid the development plan and communication of the Academy to regional aspects and different target groups in the society.
11. If all standards are assessed as “conforms to requirements”, the assessment council shall decide that the management, work organisation, teaching and research activities, and the study and research environment of the higher education institution meet the requirements, and shall accredit the higher education institution for seven years.
12. Based on the above, the Council

DECIDED THE FOLLOWING:

Accredit the Estonian Academy of Arts for seven years. The Estonian Academy of Arts is also awarded the HAKA quality label.

The decision was adopted with 10 votes in favour. 0 were against.

13. This accreditation will be valid until 2 July 2031 or until the decision is declared invalid. The HAKA Bureau shall coordinate a date for the next institutional accreditation with the Academy of Arts no later than on 2 July 2030.
14. The Estonian Academy of Arts shall submit to the council by 2 July 2026 at the latest an overview of the consideration of the areas of improvement and recommendations pointed out in clause 10 of this decision.
15. A person who finds that his or her rights are violated or his or her freedoms are restricted by this decision may file a challenge with the HAKA Assessment Council within 30 days after he or she became or should have become aware of the decision. The Assessment Council shall send the challenge to the HAKA Appeals Committee, which shall, within five days of receipt of the challenge, provide a written unbiased opinion to the Assessment Council on the validity of the challenge. The Council shall resolve the challenge within 10 days of its receipt, taking into account the reasoned opinion of the Appeals Committee. If further examination of the challenge is necessary, the Assessment Council may extend the deadline for examining the challenge by up to 30 days. Judicial contestation of a decision is possible within 30 days from the date of service of the decision by filing an appeal with the Tallinn Administrative Court pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Administrative Court Procedure Act.

Hillar Bauman

Secretary of the Higher Education Assessment Council

