# Self-Evaluation Report

## External Review of Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA)

## 2017

EKKA

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EKKA / ARCHIMEDES

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# PREFACE

The Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA) is a leading competence centre in the field of external evaluation of educational institutions in Estonia. EKKA acts in accordance with agreements and trends in the European education sphere, likewise possessing information about trends and best practices outside Europe; applies up-to-date know-how tailored to the local context; and employs analyses of the results of external quality evaluations to enhance competitiveness of the Estonian educational system.

Based on legislation of the Republic of Estonia regulating higher education, EKKA's function is to conduct institutional accreditation and quality assessment of study programme groups as well as the accreditation of study programme groups in vocational education and training.

The purpose of this self-evaluation report is to assess how EKKA and its activities related to higher education conform to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Although EKKA is also responsible for the accreditation of study programmes in vocational education and training (VET), the assessment of VET activities is not the object of analysis in this report. Part 1 provides an overview of the development of the quality assurance system for higher education in Estonia as well as EKKA's role, status and key activities. In Part 2 the progress made after the previous review is described. Part 3 contains an analysis of EKKA's compliance with the European standards and guidelines for the external quality assurance of higher education, and Part 4 comprises an analysis of EKKA's compliance with European standards and guidelines for external quality assurance agencies. The report ends with a summary of those compliance analyses.

The first phase of the self-evaluation was launched already in June 2015 after the new Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area were adopted by the Ministers responsible for higher education in the European Higher Education Area. The self-evaluation team consisting of EKKA's director (Heli Mattisen), lawyer (Lagle Zobel) and assessment directors (Hillar Bauman, Liia Lauri and Tiia Bach) analysed the compliance of current procedures with new standards and developed amendments to the regulations. The second phase was launched in June 2016 in connection with EKKA's new development plan. Feedback from stakeholders and the achievement of strategic goals was analysed by EKKA self-evaluation team and discussed during the joint meeting of EKKA quality assessment councils in January 2017. As a result, the new development plan for 2017-2022 was approved by the councils.

The entire EKKA self-evaluation process is closely linked with the analysis and plans for the review of the higher education assessment system in Estonia. In section 1.9 of this report, the SWOT analysis of the system in force and the principles for the review of the system have been outlined. The interim analysis results were discussed with different stakeholders: the department for higher education at the Ministry of Education and Research (December 2016, March 2017), vice rectors for academic affairs of public universities (April 2017), Estonian Rectors' Conference of Universities of Applied Sciences (May 2017), the Estonian Employers' Confederation (June 2017), members of the Management Board of the Federation of Estonian Student Unions (May 2017), subgroups and steering committee of the legal framework for higher education (April and May 2017).

The self-evaluation report has been prepared by the self-evaluation team consisting of EKKA staff members Lagle Zobel, Hillar Bauman, Liia Lauri, Marge Kroonmäe, Maiki Udam and Tiia Bach. The initial version of the self-evaluation report underwent discussion at the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education (hereinafter referred to as HEQAC) in April 2017 and the final version was approved in June 2017. The self-evaluation report is available on EKKA website.

The self-evaluation process motivated us to critically reflect on the existing systems; it clearly identified our strengths and gave us an impetus for improvement activities.

**Heli Mattisen**
Director of EKKA

**Tõnu Meidla**
Chairman of EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education

## ABBREVIATIONS

EE          document/material in Estonian

EKKA        Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency *(until 2015)*

            Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education

HEQAC       EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education

ESF         European Structural Funds

ESG         Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

HEI         higher education institution

IA          institutional accreditation

MER         the Ministry of Education and Research

ProfHE      professional higher education

SPG         study programme group

VET         vocational education and training


Relevant documents referred to in this report can be found on the following webpage: http://ekka.archimedes.ee/enqa-review-2017/

# PART 1: QUALITY ASSURANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN ESTONIA AND EKKA

## 1.1 RECENT HISTORY

Traditions of external quality evaluation of Estonian higher education go back to 1997 when the first study programmes were accredited. The Universities Act imposed the task of organising accreditations on the Higher Education Quality Assessment Council, which had been formed for the first time by a government regulation as early as 11 April 1995. The first international assessment committees were appointed in the second half of 1996. To support the Quality Assessment Council, the Estonian Higher Education Accreditation Centre was established on 1 September 1997 as a separate structural unit of the Archimedes Foundation.

In 1997–2008, the Estonian Higher Education Accreditation Centre organised accreditation of study programmes of all higher education institutions (hereinafter referred to as HEI). A positive accreditation decision on a study programme was a mandatory prerequisite for the higher education institution to issue state-recognised graduation documents. Accreditation committees were comprised of experienced foreign experts. Pursuant to law, the Minister of Education and Research by his or her directive was mandated to confirm the decisions of the Higher Education Quality Assessment Council.

Institutional accreditation was voluntary during that period. The Estonian Higher Education Accreditation Centre conducted six institutional accreditations of HEIs.

A total of more than 1400 study programmes were accredited in years 1997–2009 in Estonia.

On 15 November 2006, the *Riigikogu* (the Parliament of Estonia) approved the Estonian Higher Education Strategy for 2006–2015. Action 2 of that strategy, "Quality Assurance", was to a great extent based on the ESG, and among other things envisaged a change to the system of external evaluation of higher education.

In 2007, involving higher education stakeholders the Ministry of Education and Research (hereinafter referred to as the MER) prepared amendments to the Universities Act; and after having consulted with HEIs, it convened a working group tasked to develop a new standard of higher education. The amendments to the Universities Act entered into force on 1 September 2008. The new Standard of Higher Education was approved by the Government on 18 December 2008.

## 1.2 CURRENT SYSTEM

The 2008 amendments to the Universities Act envisaged a transition to a new quality assurance system of higher education:

**1.** In order to provide higher education, all educational institutions must have the right to conduct studies. An educational institution is granted such right by the Government of the Republic of Estonia in a specific study programme group and in a specific academic cycle (professional higher education, bachelor degree studies master degree studies, doctoral studies), which allows the HEI to issue state-recognised diplomas under all study programmes contained in the corresponding study programme group. Before such right is granted, the study programme group must undergo an initial assessment[1], which the MER orders from EKKA.

**2.** Once in every seven years HEIs must undergo the quality assessment of study programme groups (quality

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[1] Instead of the notion "assessment of the quality of instruction" used in the Universities Act and other legislation regulating higher education, EKKA uses the notion "initial assessment of study programme groups" which reflects more clearly the content of that evaluation and is also understood outside the context.

assessment of SPGs) in all the study programme groups in which they have been granted the right to conduct studies. The principles and procedures for quality assessment of SPGs are developed and the assessment conducted by EKKA. Final decisions are adopted by HEQAC.

**3.** Once in every seven years HEIs must undergo institutional accreditation. The principles and procedures for institutional accreditation are developed and the evaluation organised by EKKA. Final decisions are adopted by HEQAC.

**4.** The functions of EKKA and the principles for formation of the HEQAC are established in § 10 *Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency* of the Universities Act.

Alongside institutional accreditation and quality assessment of study programme groups carried out by EKKA, a different foundation – the Estonian Research Council – is responsible for conducting regular and targeted evaluation of different fields of research pursuant to the Organisation of Research and Development Act. A positive outcome in regular evaluation allows the university to compete for national research financing and offer PhD programmes.

## 1.3 STATUS AND ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF EKKA

### 1.3.1 Status

As established in § 37 of the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, the provision of education is overseen by the national government. To clearly separate the external evaluation of higher education from governmental structures, the MER decided, on the basis of a contract under public law, to delegate this function to the Archimedes Foundation, the founder of which is the Republic of Estonia with the founder's rights being exercised by the MER. The Foundation was established in 1997 as a legal person governed by private law to process international cooperation programmes in the field of education and research in Estonia. Besides its other units, which primarily administer the EU and Estonian cooperation and development programmes, the Foundation also comprises the Estonian ENIC/NARIC Centre.

According to clauses 3.3.1.1 and 3.3.5 of the Statutes of the Archimedes Foundation and clause 1.2 of the Statutes of EKKA, approved by the Supervisory Board of Archimedes Foundation, EKKA is a structural unit of the Archimedes Foundation, which performs independent functions. In order to ensure the independence of assessing the quality of higher education, the Supervisory Board of the Foundation has delegated the approval of EKKA regulations and the adoption of assessment decisions exclusively to HEQAC.

The powers of the Supervisory Board of the Foundation regarding EKKA's activities are as follows:

• approving the composition of HEQAC according to the rules set in law;

• selecting the director of EKKA;

• approving the general budget of the Foundation, including the budget of EKKA;

• approving the annual report of the Foundation, including the annual report of EKKA.

The Supervisory Board of the Foundation elects members of the Management Board of the Foundation and the director of EKKA. The Management Board consists of 2 members responsible for the general management of the whole Foundation.

As of 2010, EKKA also conducts accreditation of study programme groups in vocational education and training. In the beginning, the accreditation which was at the time voluntary for the educational institutions, was launched as a project under the EU Structural Funds framework. In 2014, the new Vocational Educational Institutions Act was adopted which rendered accreditation compulsory in vocational education and the task

of accrediting was delegated to EKKA by the Ministry of Education and Research. This resulted in the need for a new name for EKKA and as a consequence as of April 2015 EKKA's formal full name is Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education.

EKKA is independent in developing the principles and procedures for quality assessment in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, approving assessment regulations and in adopting assessment decisions. The decisions by HEQAC regarding evaluation of the quality of higher education are final. For the assessment of study programme groups in VET the accreditation decisions taken by Quality Assessment Council for Vocational Education and Training form a basis for the Minister of Education and Research to extend the right to conduct studies.

## 1.3.2 Composition of EKKA

EKKA consists of permanent staff and two quality assessment councils: HEQAC and Quality Assessment Council for Vocational Education and Training. EKKA office comprises nine permanent employees, whose areas of responsibility and duties are specified in their job descriptions and described in subsection 1.2.1 of EKKA Quality Manual.

Figure 1. Organisational chart of EKKA

| Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education | Quality Assessment Council for VET |
|---|---|
| elected by the Supervisory Board of Archimedes Foundation | approved by the Minister of Education and Research based on the criteria set in legislation |
| - approving the quality assessment regulations for higher education | - approving the quality assessment regulations for VET |
| - adopting assessment decisions | - adopting assessment decisions |
| - approving EKKA's development plan and annual reports in joint sessions | |

**Director of EKKA**

elected by the Supervisory Board of Archimedes Foundation

- EKKA's general management (strategic planning, finances, staff development)
- ensuring the compliance of EKKA's activities with legislation and regulations for evaluations
- reporting

**EKKA OFFICE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Assessment Director (IA)** | institutional accreditation, development activities; feedback system, periodic reviews |
| **Assessment Director (SPG)** | initial assessment, re-evaluation, and quality assessment of study programme groups; Secretary of HEQAC |
| **Assessment Director (VET)** | accreditation of study programme groups in VET; Secretary of the Quality Assessment Council for VET |
| **Director of International Cooperation** | management of projects and development activities in the area of international cooperation |
| **Assessment Coordinator (HE)** | coordinating the work of assessment committees, document management, coordinating the activities related to IQA (Quality Manual) |
| **Assessment Coordinator (VET)** | coordinating the work of assessment committees, document management, correspondence |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Communication Manager** | internal and external communication; coordinating the work of assessment committees |
| **Lawyer** | regulations, contracts, drafts of assessment decisions, appeals |
| **Accountant** | accounting, financial reporting |
| **Additional support services provided by the Foundation:** document management, personnel records, legal services, IT support | |

The composition of HEQAC is approved by the Supervisory Board of Archimedes Foundation. Candidates for HEQAC may be submitted by universities, institutions of professional higher education, research and development institutions, registered professional associations, associations of employers and associations of student bodies. According to the Procedure for Formation of HEQAC and the Appeals Committee, HEQAC is composed of 13 members who are selected according to the following principles:

1) HEQAC shall include at least one expert from each broad group of studies;

2) no more than two members from the same institution may belong to HEQAC;

3) a member of HEQAC cannot be a rector or a vice rector of a higher education institution nor an official of the Ministry of Education and Research;

4) the candidates whose previous activities have been serving the purpose of improving the quality of Estonian higher education as a whole shall be prioritised;

5) preference is given to candidates with previous experience in external quality assurance of higher education;

6) at least one employer and one student member belong to the composition of HEQAC;

7) both universities and institutions of professional higher education are represented in HEQAC and gender balance is maintained among HEQAC members;

8) no person may be a member of HEQAC for more than six years;

9) as a result of elections of members to HEQAC, at least 1/3rd of the members of the previous HEQAC composition shall be replaced and at least 1/3rd of the members shall continue their work in HEQAC.

## 1.4 EKKA'S MISSION AND KEY ACTIVITIES

EKKA's mission, in cooperation with its partners, is to support the development of quality culture in the field of education and thereby increase the openness and competitiveness of the Estonian society.

EKKA's core values are *impartiality*, *competence*, *cooperation* and *openness*.

EKKA's main target groups are the educational institutions under evaluation, the Ministry of Education and Research and individuals who continue to pursue education.

EKKA involves educational institutions, student organisations, ministries, professional associations and employers' organisations as partners in its development activities. Estonian Student Union, Rectors' Conferences (both, of public universities as well as professional higher education institutions), Estonian

Employers' Confederation, Estonian Qualifications Authority (incl the Sector Skills' Councils) are the most frequent cooperation partners in EKKA's activities. EKKA has regular meetings (at least twice a year) with the higher education department of the MER, the Board of the Estonian Student Union and the Vice Rectors' Body of universities to discuss new initiatives, share ideas and get suggestions for further development.

EKKA's activities in the area of higher education are based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

EKKA's core process is the external assessment of educational institutions which includes the following key activities:

- Institutional accreditation of higher education institutions

- Quality assessment of study programme groups in higher education

- Carrying out expert analyses in the context of granting higher education institutions the right to conduct studies: initial assessment of study programme groups and re-evaluation of study programme groups

- Accreditation of study programme groups in vocational education and training

- Analysing assessment results

- Informing the general public about the outcomes of assessments

- Training the assessment experts

- Providing training on self-evaluation for the educational institutions

- Participating in international networks for external quality assessment of educational institutions

EKKA builds its internal quality assurance system and external evaluation processes on the Continuous Quality Improvement approach. The organisation's desire for its activities and the results thereof to meet the needs and expectations of different stakeholders serves as the basis for that continuous quality improvement. EKKA's internal quality assurance process is elaborated at section 3.6 (see also *EKKA Quality Manual*).

Internationalisation is a crosscutting principle in all activities undertaken by EKKA ranging from the recruitment of foreign experts to participation in international cooperation networks to development projects of external quality assessment abroad to cross-border quality assessment.

EKKA's objectives and indicators for their achievement are defined in EKKA Development Plan for 2017-2022.

## 1.5 QUALITY ASSESSMENT PROCESSES AND METHODOLOGIES

EKKA's core assessment activities (institutional accreditation and quality assessment of study programme groups in higher education and accreditation of study programme groups in VET) follow the classic assessment model based on the PDCA cycle.

| A training conducted by EKKA for the educational institution |
| --- |

⌄

| The drafting of the self-evaluation report by the institution |
| --- |

⌄

| Assessment visit |
| :---: |
| ⌄ |
| Preliminary drafting of the assessment report and requesting feedback to the report from the educational institution |
| ⌄ |
| Completion of the final report and submitting it to the EKKA  Quality Assessment Council |
| ⌄ |
| Adoption of a decision by the Assessment Council |
| ⌄ |
| Publication of the assessment results |
| ⌄ |
| Follow-up actions |

Specific requirements and assessment procedures are described in the assessment regulations published on EKKA website.

On top of that there are other types of assessments (initial assessment, re-evaluation of study programme groups) that do not fully follow this classic approach.  When a higher education institution applies for the right to conduct studies under a new study programme group, EKKA will conduct an initial assessment of that study programme group on the basis of written information (not a co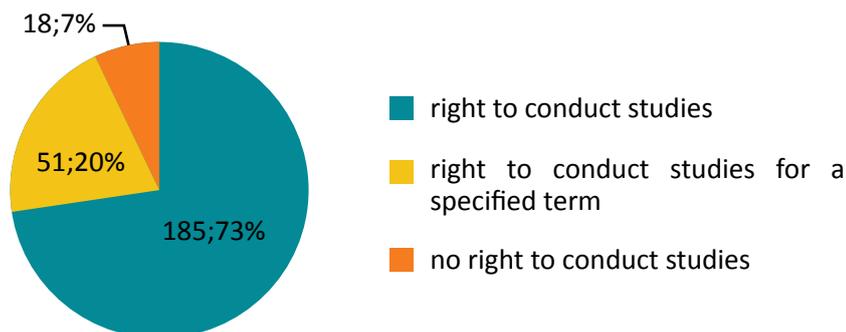mprehensive self-evaluation report) submitted by the higher education institution, and an assessment visit. The written information will include a compliance analysis on learning outcomes of study programmes with those in the Standard of Higher Education, descriptions of the organisation of practical training as well as student and teaching staff mobility, among other things.

### 1.5.1 Transitional Evaluation and Re-evaluation of Study Programme Groups

In 2009–2011, Estonia transitioned to a new system for external quality evaluation of higher education. To give all HEIs the opportunity to switch to the new system on an equal basis, EKKA conducted evaluations of all study programme groups (in total 28) of all HEIs (in total 33) during that period. The purpose of the transitional evaluation was to reach a situation in Estonian higher education whereby all HEIs had the right to issue state-recognised diplomas in the fields in which they operated. According to the amendments to the law passed in 2008, starting from 1 January 2012 studies can be conducted only on the study programmes contained in the study programme group for which a particular HEI has been granted the corresponding right by the Government of the Republic. The transitional evaluation was necessary for the government to have confidence in the quality of instruction, adequacy of resources and sustainability of HEIs.

Figure 2. Breakdown of transitional evaluation decisions by type of education licences



- right to conduct studies
- right to conduct studies for a specified term
- no right to conduct studies

18;7%

51;20%

185;73%

A comprehensive analysis of the results of transitional evaluation and feedback thereof is provided in EKKA publication Transitional Evaluation: A Special Case of External Evaluation of Higher Education in Estonia 2009-2011.

HEIs which were granted the right to conduct studies in their study programme groups for a specified term must undergo a re-evaluation of similar procedures and criteria within two to three years. According to the law, a HEI may be granted the right to conduct studies for a specified term for a second time as well, but not for the third time; in that case studies in that study programme group must be terminated. The assessment reports together with the decisions of HEQAC are publicly available in EKKA Database (in Estonian).

During years 2012–2016, a total of 41 re-evaluation decisions for transitional evaluation were adopted; 28 of those granted the right to conduct studies for an unspecified term, 12 for a specified term, and on one occasion the decision was not to grant right to conduct studies. Last re-evaluations will take place in 2017.

## 1.5.2 Initial Assessment of Study Programme Groups

Initial assessment of study programme groups (initial assessment of SPGs) occurs when an educational institution wants to provide higher education in a new study programme group or study level, or when an institution that does not yet have the right to provide higher education applies for such right. According to the Universities Act, the MER involves EKKA in the initial assessment of SPGs. The transitional evaluation conducted over the period of 2009–2011 basically represented a similar kind of evaluation, the difference being that only the already existing study programme groups were evaluated. Unlike other external evaluations, costs of the initial assessment of SPGs are incurred by the applicant. EKKA forwards the results of initial assessment of SPG to the MER; the decision on granting a HEI the right to conduct studies is taken by the Government of the Republic of Estonia. In the course of initial assessment it is judged whether the qualification requirements for the teaching staff, as determined by the educational institution, are sufficient, and whether the actual qualifications of the teaching staff involved with the new study programme group are adequate; whether the available resources needed for conducting studies are adequate; whether the described learning outcomes are achievable by a given study programme and whether they are in conformity with the requirements for conducting studies at the level of higher education.

The outcome of an initial assessment can be granting the right to conduct studies for an unspecified term, the right to conduct studies for a specified term or a decision not to grant the right to conduct studies. If the right to conduct studies is granted for a specified term, the study programme group will have to undergo a reassessment (similarly to the re-assessment of transitional evaluation). The assessment reports together with the decisions of HEQAC are publicly available in EKKA Database (in Estonian).

The right to conduct studies in a study programme group allows the higher education institution to open new study programmes within the study programme group without the need for further assessment. Exceptionally for joint study programmes the Ministry of Education and Research may commission an expert analysis from EKKA to verify whether the joint study programme complies with all the requirements stipulated in the Universities Act. The MER specifies in the terms of reference provided to EKKA on which of the requirements EKKA's expert assessment is requested. The MER also sends a copy of the terms of reference to the institution of higher education that submitted the application. For the higher education institution to be informed about the scope of the potential assessment, EKKA has devised the Guidelines for Assessing Joint Study Programmes. During the period of 2012–2016, the MER has requested from EKKA expert analysis of 8 joint study programmes. A total of 21 joint study programmes have been registered with the MER over this period.

## 1.5.3 Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in Higher Education

According to the Universities Act, quality assessment of study programme groups is an external evaluation which assesses the compliance of study programmes, including their delivery and instruction-related development activities — measuring them against legislation as well as national and international standards and trends, with the aim to provide recommendations for improving the quality of instruction.

According to subsection $12^2$ (1) of the Universities Act, subsection $21^1$ (2) of the Institutions of Professional

Higher Education Act and subsection 14 (7) of the Private Schools Act, higher education institutions or their organising bodies have an obligation to ensure that EKKA assesses the quality of their study programme groups at least once in every seven years or within a shorter term if so decided by HEQAC. The starting point for calculating the time for a subsequent assessment of a specific study programme group is the date when the right to conduct studies was granted (i.e., the date of entry into force of a regulation of the Government of the Republic).

*Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education*

HEQAC adopted conditions and procedures for Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education on 13 June 2012.

As the definition reveals, quality assessment of SPGs focuses on study programmes, the content of studies and on instruction-related development activities within a study programme group. These aspects are not evaluated in the course of institutional accreditation. Self-evaluation and assessment are conducted in five assessment areas: 1) study programme and study programme development; 2) resources; 3) teaching and learning; 4) teaching staff; and 5) students.

Each assessment area specifies standards based on the Standard of Higher Education, the ESG and other Estonian legislation that regulates quality assurance in higher education. Upon developing the requirements for quality assessment of SPGs, EKKA took into consideration the practices and results of transitional evaluation. The results of study programme group assessments in the first and second cycles can be found on EKKA website.

*Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups at the Level of Doctoral Studies*

The universities were granted the right to conduct studies on doctoral level as a result of having undergone transitional evaluation in 2010–2011. Therefore, the first quality assessments of doctoral studies will take place no sooner than in 2017 and 2018. In the preparatory phase of drafting the regulation for the quality assessment of doctoral studies EKKA asked major stakeholders (the Rectors' Council, MER, The Academy of Sciences, the Federation of Estonian Student Unions, and The Estonian Research Council) to nominate their representatives to the working group for quality assessment of doctoral studies. In March 2016, the working group comprised of representatives of major stakeholders convened with the objective of devising the regulation for quality assessment of doctoral studies. HEQAC approved the regulation at its meeting on 13 June 2016.

The working group used the structure and assessment areas of existing requirements (the regulation for Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education) as the basis and made modifications deriving from the specificities of doctoral studies.

The quality of doctoral studies is assessed according to the following assessment areas and standards: 1) Study programme; 2) Resources; 3) Teaching and learning, research and/or creative activity; 4) Teaching staff; and 5) Doctoral students.

Each assessment area specifies standards based on the Standard of Higher Education, the ESG and other Estonian legislation that regulates quality assurance in higher education. The quality assessment takes place at least once every 7 years.

The first assessments of doctoral studies are conducted in autumn 2017 and the whole cycle of doctoral level assessments will be completed by the end of 2018.

*Assessment results*

The result of quality assessment is a decision of HEQAC, which sets out whether the next assessment will take place in seven years or in a shorter time, and specific suggestions for the educational institution to improve the quality of its studies. HEQAC will approve an assessment report within three months after receipt of the report. HEQAC will weigh the strengths and areas for improvement pointed out by an assessment committee and its recommendations and then will decide whether to conduct the next quality assessment

of that study programme group 1) in seven years, if the study programmes, the teaching conducted on these programmes and development activities regarding teaching and learning conform to legislation, national and international standards and trends; 2) in five years in case it is a field where, according to HEQAC's reasoned assessment, rapid development prompts the need to receive feedback from foreign experts in less than seven years; and/or in case there is some nonconformity of the study programmes, the teaching conducted on these programmes and development activities regarding teaching and learning with legislation, national and international standards and trends, the elimination of which, in the opinion of HEQAC, needs feedback from foreign experts and/or in case there are some other reasons resulting from the specifics of the study programme group and international requirements; 3) in three years if, in the opinion of HEQAC, the majority of study programmes and/or assessment areas reveal substantial nonconformity with legislation and/or national and international standards.

At the same time, the quality agency is obliged to inform the MER if the quality of studies has worsened significantly compared to the results of the previous quality assessment. In that case, the Minister must initiate state supervision, which may, in the worst case scenario, result in the revoking of the right to conduct studies.

However, the main goal of quality assessment of a study programme group is supporting the internal evaluation and self-development of the institution of higher education. Quality assessment of study programme groups is not followed by sanctions: expert assessments should be considered as recommendations.

## 1.5.4 Institutional Accreditation

According to subsection 12 (1) of the Universities Act, subsection 21 (2) of the Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act and subsection 14 (2) of the Private Schools Act, higher education institutions have the obligation to ensure that EKKA performs their institutional accreditation (IA) at least once in every seven years or within a shorter timeframe if so decided by HEQAC.

HEQAC approved the Conditions and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation on 1 April 2011. The existing regulation was last changed on November 11, 2016.

Institutional accreditation is an external evaluation in the course of which EKKA assesses the compliance of management, administration, academic and research activity, and academic and research environment of universities and institutions of professional higher education (i.e., higher education institutions) with the legislation as well as with the purposes and development plans of the institutions of higher education. The purpose of IA is to support the development of strategic management and culture of quality in HEIs, inform stakeholders of the outcomes of the main activities thereof, and enhance the reliability and competitiveness of Estonian higher education. IA includes four assessment areas: 1) organisational management and performance; 2) teaching and learning; 3) research, development and/or other creative activity; and 4) service to society.

The final decision on institutional accreditation is adopted by HEQAC. Based on the self-evaluation report of the HEI, component assessments by the committee, comments by the HEI and additional materials submitted by the institution on the request of HEQAC, HEQAC assesses whether the management, administration, academic and research activity, and academic and research environment are consistent with the requirements, and takes a well-considered and reasoned decision on accreditation either for seven years or three years (if there are some minor deficiencies). If HEQAC weighs between these two options and finds that if the HEI were to satisfy certain conditions, a more positive decision would be possible, HEQAC may make such a decision subject to a secondary condition. In the case of major deficiencies, the Council may decide not to accredit the institution.

In its assessment report, an assessment committee may recognise an exceptionally outstanding practice in process management or development activity in one or several assessment areas with an additional note of 'worthy of recognition'. The latter does not affect the final decision for or against the accreditation, but allows the committee to recognise and highlight innovative initiatives/approaches, thereby supporting the development of the organisation.

Two years from the accreditation decision the higher education institution will submit to EKKA a written report on the actions planned and taken, as well as their outcomes, on the basis of the recommendations made by the assessment committee.

The first cycle of institutional accreditation takes place from 2011 to 2018. By the time of submittal of this self-evaluation report, 19 higher education institutions will have undergone the accreditation – 6 universities and 13 professional higher education institutions. The results of institutional accreditation can be found on EKKA website.

## 1.5.5 Cross-Border Quality Assurance/Assessment

In 2014, EKKA won the procurement of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Moldova for the accreditation of Master's degree programmes in Law at the universities of Moldova.

In the period from January to October 2015, EKKA conducted the accreditation of 25 Master's level study programmes of Law in 12 higher education institutions in Moldova commissioned and financed by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Moldova; additionally, one private institution asked EKKA to accredit one of their Law programmes at the same time. Thus, a total of 26 programmes in 13 different higher education institutions were accredited.

For conducting these accreditations EKKA developed accreditation methodology (Requirements and Procedure for Accreditation of Study Programmes in Moldova) based on Moldovan legislation, the ESG, and EKKA's requirements. The study programmes were evaluated in five separate assessment areas: 1) Study programme and its development; 2) Teaching and learning; 3) Teaching staff; 4) Students; and 5) Resources.

Five accreditation committees were formed, each consisting of international experts, among them also Estonian and Moldovan members. EKKA conducted training sessions for university staff and evaluation experts in Chisinau in January 2015. An introductory training was provided to all experts one day before the accreditation visits (see also Guidelines for Accreditation Experts of Law Programmes in the universities of Moldova). The HEI-s submitted their self-evaluation reports to EKKA in April 2015 and the site visits to the universities took place in May 2015. Accreditation decisions were made by HEQAC in its meeting on October 12, 2015, and were presented as proposals to the Minister of Education of the Republic of Moldova. Three out of 26 Master's study programmes were proposed to be accredited for 5 years and 18 programmes for 3 years. HEQAC proposed not to grant accreditation to 5 study programmes. All proposals made by the Council were approved by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Moldova. EKKA has also compiled a general report on the accreditation of the Master programmes in Moldova.

Cross-border quality assessment is by no means an aim in itself for EKKA. Rather, it is part of the development activities within external quality assessment aiming to spread the European principles of higher education quality assurance beyond the EU, support the spreading of quality culture in third countries and share best practices. To that effect, the accreditation of Law Master's programmes in Moldova had an indirect link to EKKA development project aiming at capacity building of the Moldovan quality agency. In Azerbaijan, where EKKA is implementing a Twinning project in collaboration with FINEEC, the development of the quality assessment system is accompanied by pilot assessments.

## 1.5.6 Accreditation of Study Programme Groups in Vocational Education and Training

As the external assessment of VET is not the object of the current review the area will not be elaborated in other parts of the SER. Therefore, the following section will try to offer a brief but sufficient overview about the external QA of VET in Estonia.

Principles for the accreditation of SPGs in VET were developed and are implemented within the framework of the ESF programme entitled "Substantive Development of Vocational Education 2008–2013", promoted by Innove Foundation. Since August 2010, EKKA has partnered with the programme promoter to organise and conduct accreditations of SPGs in VET.

A pilot cycle of assessments was conducted between 2011 and 2013, which has allowed evaluating the readiness of educational institutions for accreditation, testing the accreditation procedure and acquiring information about the quality of teaching and learning. The results thus far have demonstrated that accreditation is an efficient instrument for steering teaching and learning as well as supporting activities towards quality improvement.

As of 2014, the MER extends the right of vocational education institutions and professional higher education institutions offering VET to conduct vocational education and training in a study programme group. In order to extend the right to conduct studies, the study programme group of an educational institution undergoes accreditation. The study programme group aggregates all similar study programmes.

Accreditation takes place in accordance with the traditional model of external assessment, which is preceded by internal assessment and followed by an accreditation decision by the Quality Assessment Council for VET.

Upon accreditation the current state of teaching and learning is assessed as well as the sustainability of development in the following five areas: 1) The teaching and learning process; 2) Leadership and management; 3) Human resources management; 4) Cooperation with stakeholders; and 5) Resource management.

2016 saw the completion of the first cycle of accreditations meaning that all VET SPGs in educational institutions had been accredited in years 2011–2016.

A total of 866 members have served in assessment committees, including 411 representatives of employers. In autumn 2016, the first integrated assessment of VET and higher education took place, where the assessment committee for the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences also included experts from abroad (which is normally not the case in the assessment of VET SPGs).

On the basis of assessment reports, the committees have more frequently pointed out active study programme development – both on-going and in the development perspective – across different VET schools and SPGs, which indicates that the educational institutions are undergoing an intensive study programme revision. The reports show more often that new study programmes have been developed in cooperation with employers, in particular with the involvement of the region's employers. Periodic analyses are available on EKKA website.

The SPGs of educational institutions have achieved a learning and work environment conducive to learners' development, the study methods are diverse and led by learners' needs and expectations. Study facilities are mostly modern and there are sufficient study materials and equipment available.

The summaries by study areas indicate that cooperation with stakeholders has often been rated less highly. Therefore, educational institutions should aim at improving results oriented and systemic cooperation with industry, including on a regional level in developing study programmes, in involving practitioners in teaching and learning, in supervising work experience, in providing work training opportunities for teaching staff as well as training work practice supervisors at companies and in promoting the programmes. Goal setting, organization and grading of work practice in line with the required study outcomes remains a distinct area in need of improvement. Summaries of accreditation results are available on EKKA website.

In 2016–2017, the accreditation model for VET will undergo revision and amendment on the basis of guidelines by the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET); recommendations issued in the study by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (*Cedefop*) entitled *„Assuring quality in vocational education and training. The role of accrediting VET providers"*; the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy; and the VET programme supporting its implementation as well as stakeholder feedback to the process so far.

In 2016, EKKA convened a development working group comprising of VET partners and those involved in accreditation, which analysed feedback from all parties and took into account the parties' needs and suggestions while reviewing and amending the areas, criteria and procedures for accreditation. The new concept focuses to a larger extent on the student as well as on learning and teaching. EKKA has submitted proposals to the MER on how to improve the organization and principles of accreditation, i.e., suggesting to aggregate similar SPGs for accreditation, on how to develop the HaridusSilm database in order to make the

results better comparable by SPGs and on ways to enhance the formative assessment aspect of accreditation. The new concept for the accreditation of VET will be disseminated for broader consultation in May 2017 and should take effect in 2018.

## 1.6 INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND ACTIVITIES

One of the critical success factors in implementing EKKA's mission and vision according to EKKA Development Plan for 2012–2016 as well as for 2017–2022 is cooperation and visibility at the international level.

EKKA has involved foreign experts in all assessment committees both in institutional accreditation and quality assessment of study programme groups (see http://ekka.archimedes.ee/en/universities/institutional-accreditation/assessment-committees/ and http://ekka.archimedes.ee/en/universities/quality-assessment-study-programme-group/assessment-committes/).

Countries of origin of EKKA's foreign experts in 2012–2016
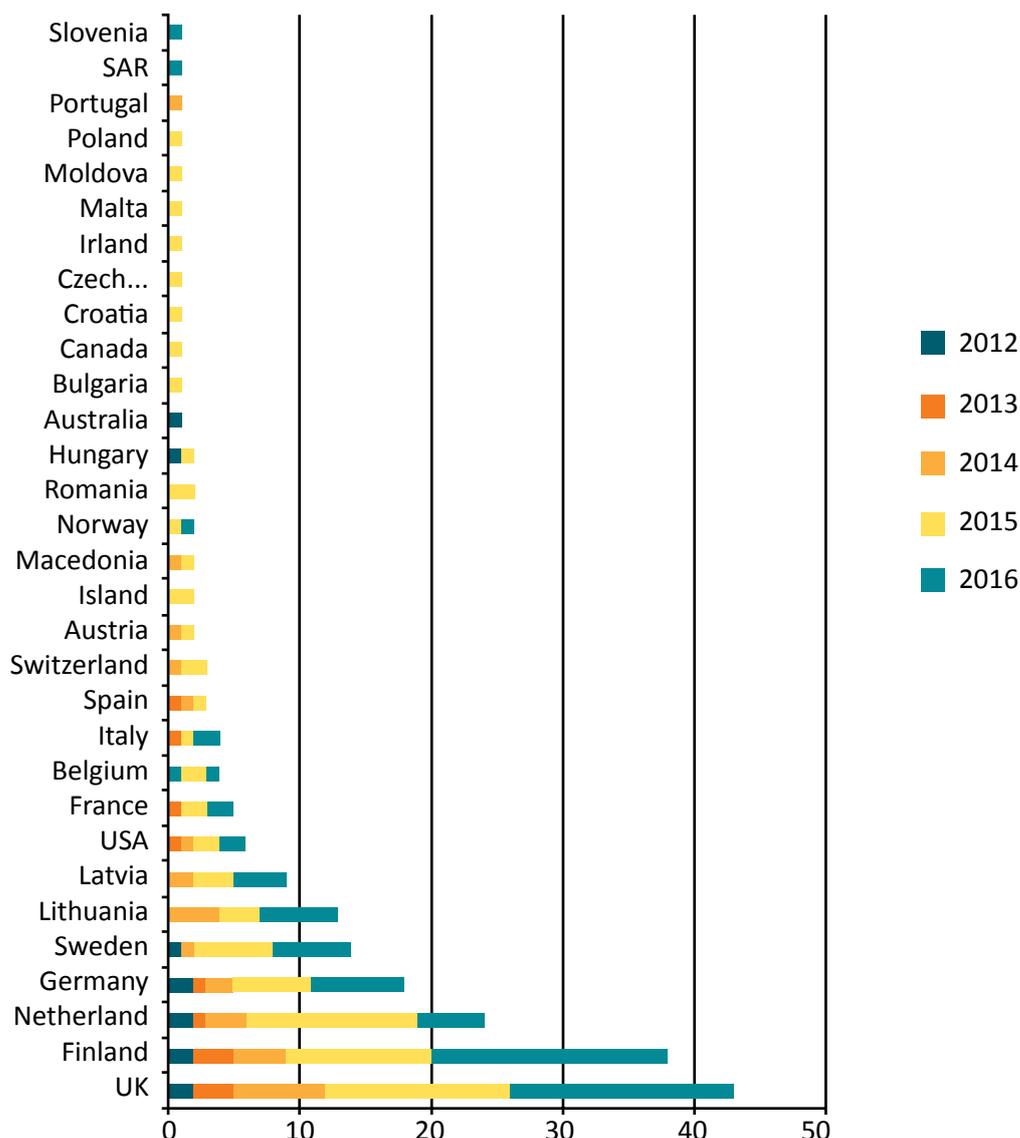
EKKA has actively forged partnerships with quality agencies of other countries as well as with governments (e.g., Moldova, Tajikistan, and Azerbaijan). Likewise, EKKA has participated in several European and international cooperation projects both in the role of the project manager and in the role of a partner. Whereas during the period when EKKA had only just been established (2009–2012), it was us gathering bits and pieces of know-how from other countries, in recent years EKKA has evolved from being a recipient to being a donor by, among other things, offering to share its competence in cross-border assessments (in Moldova) and by initiating the work shadowing project aimed at ASEM countries. In spring 2017, we hosted a Master's student of educational studies who did her three-month internship at EKKA. Naturally, we continue to benefit from international contacts in order to gain knowledge and keep track of global developments of quality assurance in education. A list of our main international projects can be found below.

Projects:

- 2012–2014: EKKA participated in the ENQA project "Transparency of European higher education through public quality assurance reports" (EQArep).

- 2014–2016: EKKA staff members were involved as experts in a Finnish-Estonian Twinning project "Empowerment of the Tertiary Level Education of the Republic of Armenia for European Higher Education Area Integration "EHEA" ".

- 2014–2016: EKKA coordinated the Estonian Development Cooperation project "Creation and Capacity Building of Quality Assurance Agency for Professional Education in the Republic of Moldova" (2014-2015) and "Capacity Building of Accreditation Experts at the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Professional Education (ANACIP) in the Republic of Moldova" (2016).

- 2015: EKKA won a procurement of the Moldovan Ministry of Education and Research to conduct accreditation of study programmes in Law at Moldovan universities: 26 study programmes in 13 different higher education institutions underwent accreditation.

- 2015: EKKA was a partner in an international (Poland, Slovenia, UK, Estonia) Erasmus+ project „European Solutions in Quality Assurance" (ESQA).

- 2015–2017: EKKA is a junior partner in the Finnish-Estonian Twinning project "Support to the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan for Further Adherence of the Higher Education System to the European Higher Education Area (AZ-ad-EHEA)".

- 2016: Financed by the MER, EKKA implemented a work shadowing project with the aim of enabling two employees of ASEM Asian countries quality authorities to visit EKKA, to learn about external quality assessment protocols in Europe and about EKKA's work and participate in one assessment visit as observers. The project participants came from the Ministry of Education of Vietnam and the quality agency in Thailand. The MER will continue financing the ASEM cooperation project at least until the year 2019. We are planning on repeating the work-shadowing project in autumn 2017.

In addition, the Director of International Cooperation has been invited as expert and consultant to various projects, e.g., World Bank project "Technical Assistance to the Ministry of Education and Science on the Establishment of a Quality Assurance System for Higher Education in Tajikistan" (2015); Finnish-Estonian Twinning project "Further Support to Public Safety Education in Kosovo" (2016-2018); Council of Europe project "Report on the development of Review procedures and standards for the Authorization of Higher education institutions in Georgia" (2016); HAQAA (Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation) initiative in Ghana (2017).

Cooperation with other quality assurance agencies and participation in reviews:

- EKKA staff members and members of HEQAC have participated in evaluations organised by other quality assurance agencies (e.g., in Lithuania, Latvia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Germany).

- The Director of EKKA and the Director of International Cooperation have participated in ENQA reviews as experts in Germany (ACQUIN), Kazakhstan (IQAA) and France (HCERES).

- EKKA staff members have been elected to the boards of quality assurance agencies in Russia and Kazakhstan.
- In 2016, one of EKKA staff members participated in a quality audit in Finland as an observer. In return, EKKA has hosted representatives from Azerbaijan (within FINEEC-EKKA Twinning Project in 2016 in higher education), Moldova (2014 in VET and 2016 in higher education), Lithuania (2013 in higher education) and Latvia (2017 in higher education) as observers in our reviews.

In 2014, EKKA organised the INQAAHE Biennial Forum "Partnerships in Quality Assurance in Higher Education" in Tallinn (delegates gathered from 60 countries, see http://archimedes.ee/inqaahe/).

Starting from 2011, annual tripartite seminars involving the Baltic States — Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania — have been held to discuss the main trends in external quality assessment. Since 2016, at the initiative of EKKA, the National Reference Points for VET are also invited to the seminars. Since 2015, EKKA has participated in annual Nordic-Baltic seminars.

EKKA is a member of the following organisations:

- INQAAHE (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education). In 2015, the Director of International Cooperation was elected to the INQAAHE Board;
- ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education);
- CEENQA (Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education);
- EKKA participates actively in the work of the European VET quality assurance network EQAVET.
- EKKA is registered with EQAR since 2013.

In conclusion it can be said that EKKA has been very successful in its international activities. All objectives pertaining to internationalisation set in EKKA Development Plan for 2012–2016 were achieved: EKKA is a full member of EQAR and ENQA; EKKA is a National Reference Point for vocational education and training (NRP); EKKA has coordinated evaluations at foreign educational institutions; EKKA participates in development projects for the quality systems of third countries; EKKA representative has been elected to the INQAAHE Board, and EKKA has organised a major international event concerning the evaluation of higher education (INQAAHE Forum 2014). There are limits to the expansion of the international dimension set by the scarcity of human resources as well as the threat of diverting from domestic core activities.

## 1.7 RESOURCES

EKKA office is located in central Tallinn at Toompuiestee 30. Its space of 185m$^2$ comprises five workrooms, one conference room for 15 people, one common room and utility rooms. The conference room is furnished with up-to-date video equipment and accommodates sessions of the EKKA's Councils as well as working meetings of the assessment committees.

Pursuant to law, the Estonian government finances regular external evaluation of higher education (IA and quality assessment of SPGs). In consultations with HEIs and the MER, EKKA prepares a long-term projection of expected external evaluations, and based on that requests funds for external evaluations from the state budget. Appropriations from the state budget cover both the costs directly associated with the external evaluations and the costs connected with a broader quality development of higher education (trainings, conferences, seminars, publications of results, analyses).

In the area of vocational education and training, the Estonian state is covering the costs of accreditation of

study programme groups and respective development activities from the European Structural Funds.

Funding Sources for EKKA in 2013–2017



Legend:
- State funds (HE)
- Fees from institutions
- Total funds
- European Structural Funds (VET)
- International project
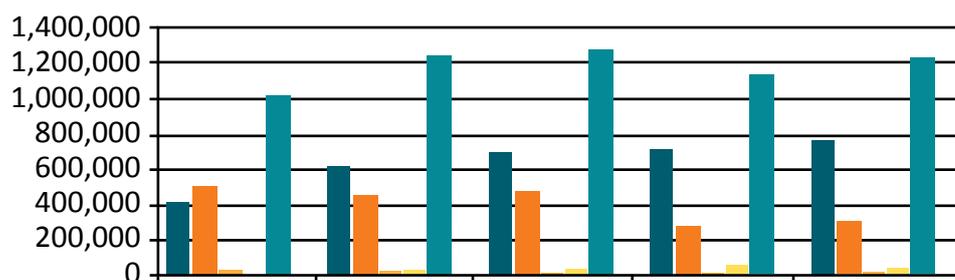
|  | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| State funds (HE) | 427,833 | 651022 | 723172 | 742190 | 798868 |
| European Structural Funds (VET) | 574194 | 487476 | 508871 | 314000 | 339045 |
| Fees from institutions (HE) | 46,637 | 37662 | 13740 | 10500 | 15150 |
| International projects | 0 | 53000 | 57000 | 95500 | 59678 |
| Total | 1,048,664 | 1,229,160 | 1,302,783 | 1,162,190 | 1,212,741 |

A higher education institution who wants to launch studies in a new study programme group covers the costs of the corresponding review itself. The rates and the calculations thereof are published on EKKA website; HEIs have the obligation to pay the invoice before the evaluation process begins. The rates include all costs related to the review.

In 2014–2017, EKKA has implemented several international projects with a total budget of € 265 178. More detailed information about projects is provided in section 1.5 "International Cooperation and Activities".

## 1.8 RESULTS OF QUALITY ASSESSMENTS CONDUCTED BY EKKA IN 2012–2016

The table below gives an overview of quality assessments conducted by EKKA in higher education and VET during the years 2012–2016 according to types of assessments.

The green stands for full results (7 years in IA and SPG assessments, granting a right to conduct studies for an unspecified term in initial and re-assessments); the light green stands for full results subject to secondary conditions with a deadline of 1–2 years imposed on the higher education institution (no conditions are set in initial and re-assessments); the orange stands for so called „conditional results" (3 years in IA, 3–5 years in SPG assessment, granting the right to conduct studies for up to 3 years in initial and re-assessments).

| Type of Assessment | No of assessment decisions | Full result | Full with secondary conditions | Conditional | Negative |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Institutional Accreditation | 19 | 13 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 2012 | 3 | 1 | 1 | | 1 |
| 2013 | 4 | 4 | | | |
| 2014 | 4 | 2 | 2 | | |
| 2015 | 5 | 3 | | 2 | |
| 2016 | 3 | 3 | | | |
| Quality Assessment of SPG | 50 | 28 | 13 | 9 | 0 |
| 2012 | | | | | |
| 2013 | 2 | 2 | | | |
| 2014 | 2 | 2 | | | |
| 2015 | 19 | 10 | 3 | 6 | |
| 2016 | 27 | 14 | 10 | 3 | |
| Re-evaluation | 49 | 32 | 0 | 15 | 2 |
| 2012 | 1 | 1 | | | |
| 2013 | 18 | 12 | | 5 | 1 |
| 2014 | 28 | 18 | | 9 | 1 |
| 2015 | | | | | |
| 2016 | 2 | 1 | | 1 | |
| Initial Assessment | 8 | 2 | 0 | 4 | 2 |
| 2012 | 1 | | | | 1 |
| 2013 | 4 | 2 | | 1 | 1 |
| 2014 | 1 | | | 1 | |
| 2015 | 2 | | | 2 | |
| 2016 | | | | | |
| **Total in Higher Education** | **126** | **75** | **16** | **30** | **5** |
| **Accreditation of SPG in VET** | **237** | **167** | **0** | **68** | **2** |
| 2012 | 48 | 29 | | 19 | |
| 2013 | 52 | 42 | | 10 | |
| 2014 | 66 | 48 | | 17 | 1 |
| 2015 | 56 | 38 | | 17 | 1 |
| 2016 | 15 | 10 | | 5 | |
| **CBQA (Moldova)** | | | | | |
| 2015 | 26 | 3 | | 18 | 5 |

In 2012–2016, more than 1,200 experts took part in assessments of higher education and VET conducted by EKKA. The following table gives an overview of the number of committees and their composition.

Composition of assessment committees in 2012-2016 in HE and VET
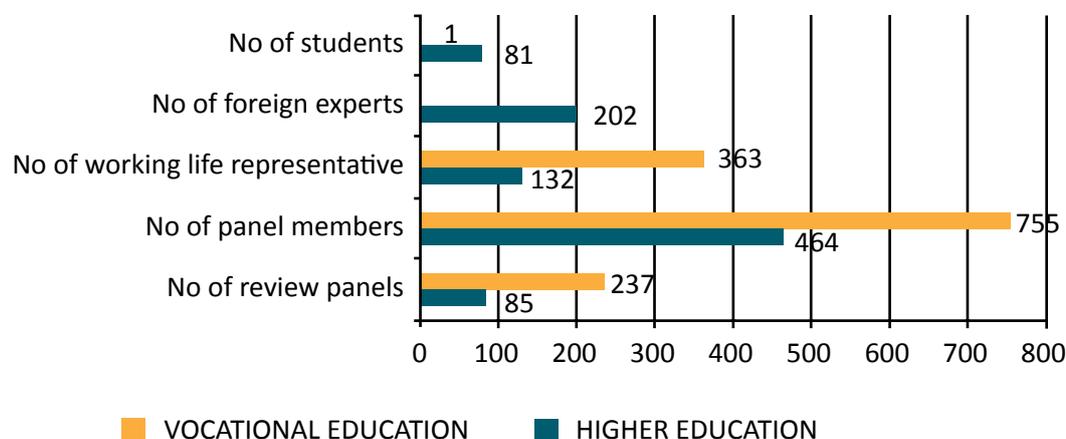


There are more employers represented in the assessment committees of VET SPG assessments than in higher education; on the other hand, students have not been involved in the accreditation of VET so far. As the working language of experts in VET is Estonian, the expert committees are comprised of domestic experts. The only exception has been the integrated assessment of higher education and VET SPGs at the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences in autumn 2016, when both foreign and local experts were involved in the assessment.

In higher education we consistently use experts from abroad both in IA and quality assessment of SPGs, whereas expert analyses that is needed in order to grant the right to conduct studies (e.g., initial assessments) are mainly performed by experts from Estonia. Committees include an employer as well as a student representative. The only exception is the initial assessment of SPG, which does not always follow the rule of involving a student, since teaching and learning under evaluation does not yet occur in reality.

For the time being, most higher education institutions have undergone the first cycle of IA; two privately owned professional higher education institutions teaching in the Theology SPG are yet to undergo accreditation. 2/3 of SPG assessments have been completed. Last assessments (including quality assessments of doctoral studies) will take place in 2017–2018.

EKKA has on a regular basis analysed the feedback from different stakeholders (representatives of management of higher education institutions, teaching staff, students, assessment committees including representatives of employers) and assessment results and published the outcomes on EKKA website as well as in various publications. A list of published analyses is available in Appendix 2 of this report.

## 1.9 RENEWING THE EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN ESTONIA

In relation to the beginning of the new cycle of institutional accreditations in 2019 as well as the process of amending higher education legislation planned by the MER, EKKA convened a development working-group, which includes delegated representatives of all major stakeholders of external quality assessment: higher education institutions, students, employers, and the MER.

As institutional accreditation cannot be regarded in isolation from the higher education quality assessment system as a whole, the first thing to do is to analyse the functioning and effectiveness of the whole system as well as plan for its development in the longer run. This, in turn, will feed into the modernisation of Estonian higher education legislation. One of the issues raised in the preparatory process for amending higher education legislation is the multiplicity and partial overlapping of the various quality assessments. The task of the working group is to assess the functioning and relevance of the existing system and plan for changes if and where necessary.

On the basis of analyses of assessment reports and feedback from different stakeholders obtained both in written form and verbally during follow-up seminars, EKKA prepared a SWOT analysis about the main characteristics of the quality assessment system currently in force (see the table below) to serve as a background analysis and a working document for the development working group. It covers regular quality assessments in higher education: IA, quality assessment of SPGs, and regular research evaluation. Research and development is evaluated by the Estonian Research Council.

## STRENGTHS

- The quality assessment system allows to give feedback on the management of the higher education institution as a whole (including its core processes) and its functioning (IA) as well as development of study programmes and the delivery of studies at grassroots level, i.e., implementation of strategic objectives and principles in academic units (SPG assessments).

- Self-assessment at the institutional level is beneficial, helps to organize the management system, forces to regularly collect and analyse data and can feed into the analysis of the implementation of the current development plan and the compiling of a new one.

- Institutional accreditation is a useful management instrument that can support the implementation of necessary (albeit sometimes unpopular) changes. An objective external perspective is useful even when it reaffirms that the higher education institution is doing the right things the right way.

- SPG quality assessment is oriented towards providing recommendations for development. Most self-assessment reports by higher education institutions are openly self-critical. Experts are able to make recommendations without imposing sanctions on the higher education institution.

- SPG quality assessment supports the spreading of a culture of self-analysis at different levels within the higher education institution (teaching staff, students, study programme, study programme group).

- The regular evaluation of research and development has an impact on the functioning of the higher education system as a whole. As a positive outcome, it gives the higher education institution access to national research financing and the right to conduct doctoral studies.

## WEAKNESSES

- At certain periods, the volume of assessments is very high for a higher education institution and there are too many different assessments to deal with, e.g., in 2018 the larger universities will simultaneously undergo regular evaluation, assessment of doctoral studies as well as the quality assessment of several SPGs.

- In IA, the self-analysis focuses to a large extent on top management and central structures; management at the level of academic units is ignored as is the implementation of university-wide decisions at mid-level.

- The second area of IA – teaching and learning – overlaps with the assessment of SPGs in smaller higher education institutions.

- The process of SPG quality assessment is very burdensome in terms of workload both for the higher education institution and the assessment committee, and the perceived benefits for members of teaching staff are sometimes negligible.

- Smaller higher education institutions find drawing distinctions between the general part and the level of an SPG difficult.

- There is too little time for substantive discussions with experts at the level of study programmes. In large SPGs, the feedback may be quite superficial.

- The outcomes of regular evaluation of research and development are very generic and fail to deliver segmented assessments, which consequently make it necessary for experts assessing doctoral studies to assess the research level in the area of each doctoral programme under assessment individually.

**OPPORTUNITIES**

- Possibility to reduce the assessment burden for higher education institutions by combining different assessments (integrated assessment of VET and higher education at the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, IA and SPG quality assessment at the Estonian Academy of Art).

- Changes are planned for the second cycle of regular evaluation in order to ensure that experts assess the research forming the basis of each doctoral programme; however, it is at this stage unclear what repercussions will follow a negative assessment.

- SPG quality assessment allows for comparison between higher education institutions as well as at the level of study programmes within the higher education institution itself. It encourages peer learning both within the institution and between HEIs.

**THREATS**

- Some higher education institutions focus more on survival rather than development and therefore perceive the assessors more as judges rather than critical friends.

- The organisational structure of higher education institutions might not correspond to the logic of SPGs, and division into SPG does not support interdisciplinary solutions. Therefore, assessment by SPGs is at times artificial both for the higher education institution and the experts.

- With the improvement in quality culture and self-analysis skills of the institutions the benefit factor of external review may decrease both in IA and SPG assessment.

- The cohesion between research and teaching and learning fails to receive sufficient attention with all the different types of assessments going on.

The development working-group kicked off in the beginning of 2017. The concept proposed by EKKA development working-group was discussed by sub-groups working on amending higher education legislation in April 2017. The principles and modalities of the new cycle of institutional accreditation will be discussed in a larger forum in June 2017 and are expected to be approved by HEQAC most likely in October.

The development working-group adheres to the following principles for developing the concept:

1) To maintain continuity – to perfect the existing system by way of further developing its strengths, eliminating weaknesses and mitigating risks.

2) To support the development of quality culture in higher education institutions by way of updating assessment requirements and procedures, to promote creativity and innovation as well as the impact of teaching and learning , research and development on the society.

3) To achieve the best possible result with optimal resources by reducing the volume of various assessments and focusing on the areas that are most critical for the higher education institution or the government and labour market.

4) To take into account the expectations of various stakeholders while simultaneously respecting the higher education institution's prerogative and obligation to be in charge of the quality  of its teaching and learning, research and development, of setting respective objectives and ensuring their achievement.

5) To take into account requirements deriving from European higher education quality assurance standards and guidelines, including the importance of a student-/learning-centred approach.

The new cycle of IA starting from 2019 will already be based on the new concept.

# PART 2: PROGRESS REPORT REGARDING EXTERNAL REVIEW OF EKKA IN 2013

Since the external review of EKKA, which took place in 2012, we have carefully considered the recommendations made by the review panel. Although most criteria of ESG were found to be fully compliant by the review panel, we have, nonetheless, presented below the recommendations extracted from the panel's report and highlighted by the ENQA Board, as well as the changes and improvements that have been implemented in EKKA during the period of 2012–2017.

**ESG 2.3 Criteria for decisions – Substantial compliance**

**ESG 2.7 Periodic Reviews – Full compliance**

**ESG 3.7 External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies – Full compliance**

**ENQA's recommendations:**

Clear decision-making criteria should be identified for both transitional re-evaluations and assessments of study programme groups in the first and second cycle of higher education. This is to increase transparency of EKKA decision-making procedures and to secure interests of learners. The Agency should investigate how to increase transparency in the processes of transitional evaluation and re-evaluation, and initial assessment of study programme groups in first and second cycles of higher education in order to secure fair competition conditions and information provision among education providers.

**EKKA's response:**

EKKA decided to take the recommendations partly into account:

a) As a general note, it has been EKKA's conscious choice to keep the decision-making processes flexible with regard to transitional re-evaluation and assessment of study programme groups, thus providing the Council with a certain right of discretion in a prescribed framework. As the Review Panel has also pointed out in section 262 of the report, such an approach should guarantee that the Council does not rubber-stamp the decisions of the assessment committees but follows its own independent discussion and decision making. It is presupposed that the Council has to exercise this right of discretion in accordance with the limits of its mandate, the purpose of discretion and the general principles of justice, taking into account relevant facts and considering legitimate interests as prescribed by the Administrative Procedure Act. The Council has always an obligation to weigh the relevant strengths and areas of improvement and present the considerations for coming to a particular decision.

b) Until recently, the regulation for transitional re-evaluation stipulated that it was possible for HEQAC to make a proposal to the Minister of Education and Research to grant the educational institution the right to conduct studies in the study programme group for indefinite period of time even in cases where two out of three component assessments were deemed to „partially conform to a required standard". This opportunity was never used by the Council and it would probably not have been appropriate to do so. At its meeting on 4 June 2013, the Council decided to amend the *Requirements and Procedure for Transitional Evaluation and Re-evaluation of Study Programme Groups*, eliminating such a possibility from the regulation. A clause was added to the document, stating that if two component assessments are partially conforming to a required standard, the institution can only be granted a right to conduct studies for a limited time period (from one to three years).

c) The assessment of study programme groups is mainly aimed at improvement and therefore requires a more dynamic and context sensitive approach. However, in 2016 EKKA decided to clarify and specify the decision-making criteria for determining when to conduct the next quality assessment of a study programme group in order to limit the overly wide margin of discretion by HEQAC and guarantee the consistency and predictability of assessment results (the decision-making process has been described in further detail under sub-section 2.2.3).

## ESG 2.5 Reporting – Substantial compliance

### ENQA's recommendations:

Information provision, and its transparency, could be improved through cooperation with other structures and agencies in Estonia, but most importantly, with stakeholders themselves. The Agency should ensure the reports reach the intended readership and that the information provided reach local audiences and is sufficient for international partners. Therefore, user-friendliness of EKKA database with assessment decisions and expert reports should be improved. Institutional accreditation policies should be clarified as to what, why and how has to be made public in relation to external quality assurance procedures. EKKA should address Estonian and English language usage in both institutional self-analyses and evaluation reports. Some agencies have found it useful to develop a label that both the agency and institutions should put on their front page, and that could be used at national websites, with a link leading to all information about accreditation and quality assurance, at different levels; such a link or a label (logo) could be visible from all parts of the HEI website.  Information on accreditation process and results in VET should be available on EKKA website in English.

### EKKA's response:

EKKA has systematically taken into account the needs of different target groups. For example, in the cases of institutional accreditation and quality assessment of study programme groups, a summary report is available alongside the comprehensive assessment report (i.e., the decision of the Council is in a reader-friendly format); the assessment reports are presented on a separate site, although they are also available in the database.

We are glad to report that in 2014 EKKA launched a website with a new design and structure.  We have also developed a database, which contains assessment decisions and reports of both higher education and VET. The database is accessible via a link on the front page of EKKA website. It is now more user-friendly and the assessment results are more easily accessible. The database is linked with the internal document management system of the Archimedes Foundation, thus it is available only in Estonian.  In order to provide information about the assessment results to the international audience we developed a special solution for the English website presenting information about institutional accreditation reports and decisions and quality assessment reports and decisions.

In addition, we have developed a database for study programmes in higher education, which is targeted especially for those who want to get an overview of all the study programmes taught in higher education institutions across Estonia. This database has links to decisions of quality assessment of study programme groups as well as decisions about institutional accreditations. It is available both in Estonian and English. This database is the most frequently viewed subsection of EKKA website (last year the database generated 70% of page-views on EKKA website – in total more than 29,000 visits). The database is used by the national career counselling centres across Estonia as well as the Rajaleidja career portal online.

In June 2014, HEQAC adopted a statute for the usage of EKKA Quality Label, which is awarded to higher education institutions that have been accredited for 7 years. The accredited institutions exhibit the label on their website and link it to the accreditation report and decision *(for example, see the front page of Tallinn University* http://www.tlu.ee*)*.

We have discussed, once again, whether in the case of institutional accreditation the self-evaluation reports of higher education institutions must always be made public in full. We are of the opinion that they can either be made public in full or partly if this is the grounded wish of the institution. If the report is published only partly, this will be indicated on EKKA's website. So far, all self-evaluation reports have been published in full.

Regarding the institutional self-evaluation reports and assessment reports, which are currently only in English but according to the panel's opinion it could be considered translating into Estonian for the local audience. We consider the translation of the self-evaluation reports and assessment reports into Estonian extremely resource consuming, in both time wise and financially. Thus, we do not consider it appropriate and necessary to make the translation of all self-analysis and assessment reports from English into Estonian and vice versa. However, HEQAC adopted a decision to continue to translate all assessment decisions (which are essentially Summary Reports) from Estonian into English and publish them on the English language section of the website.

As for the accreditation process and decisions in VET in English:

A separate page in English introduces the accreditation of study programme groups in vocational education and training and also features the accreditation procedure in VET. We do not see any reason for translating self-evaluation reports, expert reports and decisions of Quality Assessment Council for VET into English, because all accreditations in VET are only conducted in Estonian. These materials are very extensive and their translation is, therefore, expensive. The main audience for the decisions and reports are Estonians. In higher education, the potential target audience would be a person who wishes to enter a higher education institution in Estonia. EKKA's decision is to keep the international public informed through periodic analyses of evaluation results in VET, which are translated into English (see periodic analyses for 2014). Thus, we have decided to summarise the results of VET accreditation and make them available in English on the English website, and we have done this only since 2014 when accreditation of study programme groups in VET became a legal requirement.

In addition to these summaries, we prepared a detailed table with accreditation results by VET institutions and study programme groups in English.


## ESG 2.6 Follow-up procedures – Full compliance

### ENQA's recommendation:

It is recommended as a good practice that higher education institutions make their improvement oriented measures known to the target audiences, as this increases public accountability and awareness, and also contributes towards the organizational culture of continuous development. These measures as well could be made public via EKKA website, to complement assessment committee reports and EKKA Council decisions.

### EKKA's response:

We agree that higher institutions should take measures to increase the transparency of how assessment committees' recommendations have been taken into account. We expect institutions to include the committees' recommendations into their regular development activities and development plans and do not see a need for a special document compiled for EKKA and published on EKKA website.

Nevertheless, to be able to assess the possible impact of external evaluations conducted by EKKA, we are using different tools. The institutions are asked to submit an action plan to HEQAC with regard to the areas for improvement and recommendations pointed out in the report one year subsequent to the assessment decision. We have also introduced feedback seminars where the institutions are asked to reflect on the recommendations given by the committee and on the impact of the whole accreditation process.

## ESG 3.2 Official Status – Full compliance

### ENQA's recommendation:

This legal framework where EKKA is judging whether to conduct an assessment itself or let a foreign agency do the job, can be seen as potentially leading towards the conflict of interests, and creating unnecessary tensions between the local and a foreign agency. Higher education institutions are not prevented from choice, but could be effectively discouraged in the fear of being perceived as not loyal towards the national quality assurance agency. Therefore, we recommend that the Minister gives consideration to assigning to an external independent body responsibility for the decision as to whether a review be carried out by EKKA or by a foreign agency.

### EKKA's response:

EKKA has informed the MER of this recommendation. The opinion of the Ministry was that, at the moment, HEQAC has an exclusive competence to decide and evaluate whether the foreign agency meets the requirements set out in our regulations.

Currently, the criteria upon which HEQAC bases its decision whether or not the foreign agency will be allowed to conduct the evaluations, is strictly objective. This should ensure that the subjectivity of HEQAC, and thus the possibility of a conflict of interest regarding this matter, is minimized. The main condition is that the results of the assessment allow HEQAC to adopt a decision in line with Estonian legislation.

The assessment of the Veterinary Medicine study programme group by a competent foreign authority (EAEVE) was approved by HEQAC and carried out in the time period of 2015–2016. The next similar assessment shall be carried out by MusiQuE in autumn 2017. No more such applications have been submitted by higher education institutions.

## ESG 3.4 Resources – Full compliance

### ENQA's recommendation:

In its Development Plan EKKA sets targets for international recognition, among other, to be included in the development projects for the quality systems of third countries. It is advised to consider possibilities take lead in coordination or be more involved in partnerships in other type of international cooperation projects in the field of quality assurance, e.g. via networks EKKA is a member.

### EKKA's response:

During the past couple of years, EKKA has increased its collaboration with other quality assurance agencies, its participation in various working groups, international projects, and networks (for more detailed information, see sub-section 1.5 *International Cooperation and Activities*).

## ESG 3.6 Independence – Full compliance

### ENQA's recommendation:

The Review Panel took notice of only one woman among HEQAC members. However, there is nothing in HEQAC formation procedure or on institutional levels that would prevent from seeking a more gender-balanced representation among the suitable candidates. Therefore, it is suggested to address the gender issue upon the expiry of current membership terms.

HEQAC formation procedure foresees that a service term is three years, and no person may be a member

of the Council for more than six years. It is encouraged to think of introducing rotation terms or other comparable measures assuring that on HEQAC at any given moment there is a proper balance of new and more experienced members, assuring smooth execution of their duties.

**EKKA's response:**

EKKA has taken the recommendation regarding rotation into account and has introduced a set of principles into *the Procedure for Formation of the Estonian Higher Education Quality Assessment Council and the Appeals Committee* that will be taken into consideration by the Supervisory Board of the Archimedes Foundation during the selection process of the members of HEQAC (for more detailed information, see sub-section 2.5.3 of the current report, *Decision-making criteria*).

New principles for forming HEQAC were formally approved by the Supervisory Board of the Archimedes Foundation in June 2015 but have already been applied in practice before. For example, in February 2015, the new HEQAC was elected, in which a much better gender balance has been achieved compared to the previous composition of the council (6 members out of 13 are now female) and 1/3 of previous council members have been re-elected.

### ESG 3.8 Accountability Procedures – Full compliance

**ENQA's recommendation:**

Expert reports, as published by EKKA, could contribute more towards transparency on how conflicts of interest are avoided. Although EKKA provides on its website CVs of experts who served, *e.g.* for institutional accreditation, on the expert reports, review team members are only listed, with no information about their background or representation, which makes it difficult for the general public to assess how EKKA follows the principles in forming the assessment committees.

**EKKA's response:**

We have now clearly indicated the background of experts, who are involved in assessment committees, adding information about their work place and position and, thus, increasing the transparency of how experts are selected and ensuring there is no conflict of interest. This background information about members of assessment committees is available in the assessment reports. We have implemented this practise throughout various assessments.

# PART 3: EKKA'S COMPLIANCE WITH THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE (ESG PART 2)

## 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

### 2.1.1 Standard:

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance described in Part 1 of the ESG.

### 2.1.2 EKKA's compliance

According to clause 2.2.2 of EKKA Statutes, one of the main functions of EKKA is to promote the quality of higher education and to value and disseminate the best quality assurance practices in cooperation with establishments which provide higher education and with other partners. EKKA's core process is the external assessment of higher education, which includes the following key activities:

- institutional accreditation of higher education institutions;
- quality assessment of study programme groups in higher education;
- carrying out expert analyses in the context of granting higher education institutions the right to conduct studies: initial assessment of study programme groups and re-evaluation of study programme groups.

EKKA assumes that the responsibility for the quality of their study programmes and continuous improvement activities lies, first and foremost, with the educational institutions themselves. The primary purpose of external assessment is to provide educational institutions feedback that supports their development. EKKA does not evaluate the quality system per se, but has organically integrated it with the assessment of core processes of HEIs.

In the period from January to October 2015, after successfully taking part in a tender organized by the Ministry of Education of Moldova, EKKA conducted the cross-border accreditation of 26 Master's level study programmes of Law in 13 higher education institutions in Moldova. For this purpose, EKKA developed accreditation methodology (*Requirements and Procedure for Accreditation of Study Programmes in Moldova*) based on Moldovan legislation, the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, and EKKA's requirements.

External assessment procedures are in accordance with the legislation and strategies of the Republic of Estonia (as well as with international trends) and respect the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

The table below illustrates how the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG is addressed in specific requirements and standards in EKKA regulations for assessments.

| Standard ESG Part 1 | EKKA assessment criteria that take into consideration the standard | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Institutional Accreditation | Quality Assessment of SPG in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education | Quality Assessment of SPG at the Level of Doctoral Studies | Initial Assessment of SPG | Transitional Evaluation and Re-evaluation of SPG | Accreditation of Study Programmes in Moldova |
| 1.1 Policy for quality assurance | Requirements for sub-sections 7.1.1 (General management) and 7.3.3 (Student research supervision and doctoral studies) | Standards for sub-section 5.1 (Study programme and study programme development) | Standards for subsection 5.1 (Study programme) | Requirements for sub-section 7 (Study programme and organization of studies) | Requirements for sub-sections 7.1 and 7.3 (Study programmes and learning outcomes; Students) | Requirements for sub-section 5 (Study programme and its development, e.g. clauses 5.1, 5.8 and 5.9) |
| 1.2 Design and approval of programmes | Requirements for sub-section 7.2.2 (Study programme development) | Standards for sub-section 5.1 (Study programme and study programme development) | Standards for sub-section 5.1 (Study programme) | Requirements for sub-section 7 (Study programme and organization of studies) | Requirements for sub-section 7.2 (Study programme development and requirements for teaching staff) | Requirements for sub-section 5 (Study programme and its development) |
| 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment | Requirements for sub-section 7.2.3.2 (Student academic progress and student assessment) | Standards for sub-section 5.3 (Teaching and learning) | Standards for sub-section 5.4 (Teaching, learning, research and/or creative activity) | | Requirements for sub-section 7.1 (Study programmes and learning outcomes) | Requirements for sub-section 6 (Teaching and learning, see e.g. clause 6.2) |
| 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification | Requirements for sub-sections 7.2.1 and 7.2.3 (Student academic progress and student assessment, Effectiveness of teaching and learning, formation of the student body) | Standards for sub-sections 5.1 and 5.3 (Study programme and study programme development, Teaching and learning) | Standards for sub-sections 5.4 and 5.5 (Teaching, learning, research and/or creative activity; Doctoral students) | Requirements for sub-section 7 (Study programme and organization of studies) | Requirements for sub-sections 7.1 and 7.3 (Study programmes and learning outcomes, Students) | Requirements for sub-section 8 (Students) |
| 1.5 Teaching staff | Requirements for sub-section 7.1.2 (Personnel management) | Standards for sub-section 5.4 (Teaching staff) | Standards for sub-section 5.4 (Teaching staff) | Requirements for sub-section 8 (Teaching staff) | Requirements for sub-sections 7.2 and 8.1 (Study programme development and requirements for teaching staff; Resources/ Teaching staff) | Requirements for sub-section 7 (Teaching staff) |

| | Institutional Accreditation | Quality Assessment of SPG in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education | Quality Assessment of SPG at the Level of Doctoral Studies | Initial Assessment of SPG | Transitional Evaluation and Re-evaluation of SPG | Accreditation of Study Programmes in Moldova |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.6 Learning resources and student support | Requirements for sub-sections 7.1.3 and 7.2.4 (Management of financial resources and infrastructure, Support processes for learning) | Standards for sub-section 5.2 (Resources) | Standards for sub-sections 5.2 and 5.5 (Resources, Doctoral students) | Requirements for sub-sections 7 and 9 (Study programme and organization of studies, Resources) | Requirements for sub-section 8 (Assessment of the resources for conducting studies) | Requirements for sub-section 9 (Resources) |
| 1.7 Information management | Requirements for sub-sections 7.1.3 and 7.2.4 (Management of financial resources and infrastructure, Support processes for learning) | Standards for sub-sections 5.1 and 5.3 (Study programme and study programme development, Teaching and learning) | | Requirements for sub-sections 7 and 9 (Study programme and organization of studies; Resources) | Requirements for sub-sections 7.1, 7.2 and 8.3 (Study programmes and learning outcomes; Study programme development and requirements for teaching staff; Assessment of the resources for conducting studies / Teaching and learning environments) | Clause 6.1 under sub-section 6 (Teaching and Learning) |
| 1.8 Public information | Requirements for sub-section 7.1.1 (General management) | | | Requirements for sub-section 9 (Resources) | Requirements for sub-section 8.2 (Financial resources) | Clause 6.1 under sub-section 6 (Teaching and Learning) |
| 1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes | Requirements for sub-section 7.2.2 (Study programme development) | Standards for sub-section 5.1 (Study programme and study programme development) | Standards for sub-section 5.1 (Study programme) | Requirements for sub-section 7 (Requirements for the quality of instruction) | Requirements for sub-section 7.2 (Study programme development and requirements for teaching staff) | Requirements for sub-section 5 (Study programme and its development) |

| | | Institutional Accreditation | Quality Assessment of SPG in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education | Quality Assessment of SPG at the Level of Doctoral Studies | Initial Assessment of SPG | Transitional Evaluation and Re-evaluation of SPG | Accreditation of Study Programmes in Moldova |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.10 | Cyclical external quality assurance | Based on legislation, all external assessments by EKKA are conducted on a cyclical basis. For further information, see sub-sections 1.4.1 (Transitional evaluation and re-evaluation of study programme groups), 1.4.3 (Institutional accreditation) and 1.4.4 (Quality assessment of study programme groups). | Based on clause 33 the HEQAC made the proposal to the Minister of Education of the Republic of Moldova accredit the study programmes on a cyclical basis for three to five years. | | | | |

Based on the table, the following general conclusions can be made:

- On-going re-evaluation of transitional evaluation is a conformity assessment covering all the basic assessment areas on a study programme group level, including study programme development, teaching staff, resources, „life cycle" and support system of students and general sustainability of studies. As the assessment criteria were developed in 2009, the focus of the requirements was less on student-centred teaching and learning than in later regulations.

- In order to open study programmes in a new study programme group, all HEIs have to undergo initial assessment of an SPG. During this process, the potential to conduct studies in an SPG is evaluated, taking into account the learning outcomes and content of the study programme(s), existing teaching staff and resources. As the studies do not yet take place, it is not possible to evaluate certain aspects related to teaching and learning, involvement and „life cycle" of students, which shall be assessed during later evaluations.

- Institutional accreditation reviews the organization and management of studies, teaching and learning, research and development activities and service to society of a HEI at the institutional level, focusing less on coherence and conducting of concrete study programmes.

  However, in case of smaller HEIs, the aspects evaluated under second assessment area (teaching and learning) tend to overlap with the assessment areas of quality assessment of study programme groups. This is an area of improvement addressed in EKKA's current development activities.

- The quality assessment of study programme groups takes an in-depth look at the content and continuous development of study programmes, "life cycle" of students, student-centred teaching and learning and support systems, qualifications and activities of teaching staff and resources related to specific study programme groups, with a special focus on internationalization. The assessment does not address the areas of HEI management and service to society of the institution already covered by the IA criteria. This means that current assessments neglect to address the mid-level management of HEIs, including the implementation of management-level decisions at the level of academic units. This is an area of improvement addressed in EKKA's current development activities.

- The cross-border accreditation of Master's level study programmes of Law in Moldova was based on the assessment areas covered by the transitional and re-evaluation of study programme groups as well as quality assessment of study programme groups, which were adjusted and specified according to the national legal requirements of Moldova.

## Conclusion:

EKKA has aimed to have all the standards and guidelines described in Part I of the ESG covered by its key processes at different (institutional, study programme) levels, avoiding superfluous overlaps between assessment criteria.

## Supporting documents:

The Universities Act

The Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act

The Private Schools Act

Standard of Higher Education

Statutes of EKKA

Conditions and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation

Guidelines for Initial Assessment of Study Programme Groups

Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education

Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups at the Level of Doctoral Studies

Requirements and Procedure for Transitional Assessment and Re-assessment of Study Programme Groups

Requirements and Procedure for Accreditation of Study Programmes in Moldova

Decisions by the EKKA Quality Assessment Council

EKKA Quality Manual

## 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

### 2.2.1 Standard:

External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

## 2.2.2 EKKA's compliance

EKKA builds its external assessment processes on the Continuous Quality Improvement approach, aiming to meet the needs and expectations of both internal and external stakeholders. EKKA involves all principal stakeholders in the development of regulations. All EKKA's regulations are based on existing legislation, include clear aims and descriptions and are published on EKKA website.

The basic principles implemented for all external reviews are as follows (elaborated further in the EKKA Quality Manual):

1. External evaluation procedures are in accordance with the legislation and strategies of the Republic of Estonia as well as with international trends, and respect the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

2. The primary purpose of external evaluation is to provide educational institutions with feedback that supports their development.

3. All principal stakeholders of external evaluation contribute to the process of developing evaluation policies and procedures; in particular educational institutions slated for evaluation in the future.

4. The focus of external evaluations is on the core processes of an educational institution; in the case of institutional accreditation, the focus is on the management and functioning of the organisation as a whole, along with the coherence between the two, and how they each relate to the organisation's strategic objectives.

5. When evaluating educational institutions, experts assess them from national as well as international perspectives.

6. When developing regulations for external evaluation, EKKA follows the logic of the Quality Cycle (PDCA): the processes of planning, implementation, assessment and improvements.

7. Requirements and indicators are formulated in a way that allows the assessment of input, processes and output, and guides higher education institutions to compare themselves with similar higher education institutions in Estonia and abroad.

8. EKKA's use of resources is economical and efficient: the primary purpose of external evaluation must be achieved with the investment of minimum time, finances and human resources.

During 2013–2017, EKKA has constantly reviewed and improved its regulations, based on both changing circumstances and feedback received from stakeholders. For example:

• The assessment criteria for study programme groups have been updated in line with the principles of the renewed ESG and the strategic goals of the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020, which take into account the paradigm shift to student-centred teaching and learning and digitalisation of studies. For example, the following standards were added/amended:

- 5.3.1. The process of teaching and learning supports learners' individual and social development.

- 5.3.7. Assessment of learning outcomes is appropriate, transparent and objective, and supports the development of learners.

- 5.5.3. Students are motivated to learn and their satisfaction with the content, form and methods of their studies is high.

- 5.4.6. 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.

- EKKA has also clarified the decision-making criteria for determining when to conduct the next quality assessment of a study programme group, in order to limit the wide margin of discretion of HEQAC and guarantee the consistency and predictability of assessment results. Previously, the Council could decide to conduct the next assessment after one to seven years in case nonconformities with the legal requirements or national/international standards were identified. In the current version, the Council can decide to conduct the next assessment 1) in seven years when everything conforms to requirements; 2) in five years when rapid developments in a specific field or some nonconformities indicate the need to receive feedback from foreign experts in less than seven years or there are some other reasons resulting from the specifics of the study programme group and international requirements; or 3) in three years when, in the opinion of the Council, the majority of study programmes and/or assessment areas reveal substantial nonconformity with legislation and/or national and international standards (see clause 41 of the *Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education*).

EKKA has also constantly tried to optimize the evaluation process. For example, in 2016, EKKA conducted an integrated assessment of study programme groups in higher education and VET in the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, involving both domestic and international experts from various fields of activity. In case of smaller institutions, EKKA is also carrying out joint evaluations which include both IA and quality assessment of SPGs (e.g., at the Estonian Academy of Arts in May 2017).

In 2016, EKKA developed a separate regulation for quality assessment of study programme groups at the level of doctoral studies, based on the existing structure and principles of existing regulation for QA of SPGs and modified according to the specifics of doctoral studies. The development took place in the following stages (similar to the development of other regulations):

1) EKKA prepared a background analysis to map (and learn from) the best practices in other QA systems.

2) In order to identify stakeholder expectations regarding assessment of doctoral studies, a working group was convened, including representatives from the universities, the Ministry of Education and Research, the Federation of Estonian Student Unions, the Academy of Sciences, the Estonian Research Council, and the Estonian Rectors' Conference.

3) A draft regulation prepared by the working group along with an explanatory memorandum was sent to all relevant stakeholders requesting their feedback.

4) EKKA then informed those who provided feedback about all proposed and implemented amendments.

5) The final draft was submitted to HEQAC, which approved the regulation at its meeting.

6) All interested parties were informed of the adoption of the new regulation entitled *Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups at the Level of Doctoral Studies*.

7) The first assessment will take place in autumn 2017.

Prior to each external assessment, EKKA provides training to the HEIs to be evaluated where it explains the principles of the review and the procedures thereof. Introductory trainings on the assessment of doctoral studies were held in December 2016.

EKKA's policies and principles for developing regulations and planning for assessment periods are described in detail in EKKA Quality Manual (see 2.1 *Planning of core processes, Development of regulations*).

**Conclusion:**

So far, EKKA has managed to successfully involve all essential stakeholders in its development processes and use their feedback in designing the assessment criteria and procedures.

In connection with the development of the new law for higher education, EKKA has this year initiated the development process of a new concept for the external quality assessment in higher education, involving different stakeholders. The aim of the development process is to make the assessments less time and resource intensive, reducing overlaps between the two assessments and seeking ways to make them more interconnected, while maintaining the continuity of the assessment processes. Another goal is to place special emphasis on previously overlooked assessment areas (e.g., mid-level management) and the assessment areas that have proven to be problematic as a result of previous assessments (e.g., internationalization). There is also an intention to introduce subject-specific thematic assessments. For further information regarding the development activities, see sub-section *Renewing the External Quality Assurance System for Higher Education in Estonia*.

**Supporting documents:**

EKKA Quality Manual

Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education

Conditions and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation

Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups at the Level of Doctoral Studies

EKKA Quality Assessment Council's minutes of the proceedings (EE)

Materials compiled by the working group (EE)

## 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

### 2.3.1 Standard:

External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include

- a self-assessment or equivalent;

- an external assessment normally including a site visit;

- a report resulting from the external assessment;

- a consistent follow-up.

### 2.3.2 EKKA's compliance

*Planning of assessment periods*

EKKA plans the assessment periods in close cooperation with educational institutions. For the first cycles of IA and quality assessment of SPG-s, the assessment schedule was agreed with the HEIs several years in advance. In case of regular assessments, assessment directors draft an assessment timeframe, which depends on the results of previous assessments and the specificities of the assessment process. The principles and procedures for planning of assessment periods have been described in further detail in EKKA Quality Manual.

*Self-assessment of institutions*

Institutional accreditation and assessment of study programme groups follow the classic assessment model which includes self-assessment report prepared by the educational institution. When a HEI applies for the

right to conduct studies in a new study programme group or undergoes re-assessment of study programme groups, EKKA will conduct an initial assessment of that study programme group on the basis of the written information submitted by the higher education institution and publicly available information.

In cases of IA and quality assessment of SPGs, the HEIs submit their self-assessment reports to EKKA two to three months prior to the assessment visits/assessment period. As it is important that HEIs would also understand what is expected of them during different types of assessments, EKKA offers self-assessment trainings to educational institutions. As the quality assessment of study programme groups is a very complex process a guide for drafting a self-evaluation report has been compiled by EKKA.

The preparation of self-assessment reports has been described in further detail in EKKA Quality Manual (see 2.1 *Planning of core processes, Institutions' self-assessment reports*).

### Assessment visits

Assessment visits constitute a compulsory element of all EKKA's assessment procedures. After site visits, EKKA requests written feedback from HEIs about the apparent preparation of committee members, relevance of their questions and other important issues. EKKA takes feedback survey results into consideration while selecting committee members for future assessments. See also the *Feedback after the assessment visit 2012-2016 (SPG)* under subsection 3.6.3.

Principles and procedures for preparing for assessment visits and conducting them have been described in the EKKA Quality Manual [(see 2.1, *Planning of core processes, Assessment visits (preparation and execution); 3 Review, feedback and revision of core processes, Feedback on assessment visits*)]*.* EKKA is continuously striving to improve the professionalism of its experts during the assessment visits. For example, the tasks of the assessment committee members and coordinator before, after and during the assessment visit have been elaborated in its guidelines for experts (see, e.g., *Guidelines for institutional accreditation experts*). The tasks of an assessment coordinator during the whole assessment procedure are described in detail and amended as necessary in the *Guidelines for a coordinator*.

### Assessment reports

EKKA has developed assessment report templates for all key activities. The assessment reports should always recognize the HEIs for their strengths as well as underline the areas of improvement and give suggestions for further improvement activities.

Assessment reports are made public on EKKA website. The principles and procedure for preparing the assessment reports have been described in further detail in sub-section 2.6.3 of this self-assessment report and EKKA Quality Manual (see 2.2 *Implementation of core processes*, *Assessment reports*).

### Follow-up procedures

In cases of IA and quality assessment of SPGs, EKKA will request the HEI to submit, two years after the adoption of the assessment decision by HEQAC, a written overview of the actions planned or taken and of the results thereof to the suggestions made in the assessment report.

As a result of IA and quality assessment of SPGs, HEQAC will adopt administrative decisions and it may also impose secondary conditions in its decisions. If a secondary condition has been imposed, a subsequent follow-up procedure will take place within a set deadline, allowing HEQAC to assess whether the condition has been fulfilled. For example, in 2017 HEQAC analysed the action plan presented by Tallinn University and made a decision that the secondary condition imposed in 2015 for the study programme group of Social Services had not been fulfilled by due date. Thus, HEQAC repealed its prior assessment decision to conduct the next assessment in seven years and made a new decision to conduct it in five years instead.

In the case of re-evaluation of study programme groups and initial assessment of study programme groups in higher education, HEQAC may decide that the aspects under assessment conform only partially to required standards, and a new assessment will therefore be undertaken within a shorter period of time. In the course

of re-evaluations, assessment committees will examine how HEIs have managed to tackle the deficiencies and which improvement activities they have implemented.

EKKA periodically organizes SPG assessment feedback seminars at higher education institutions. After a higher education institution has undergone assessments in several SPGs, at EKKA's initiative discussions have been held on the assessments that had already taken place. Feedback by the higher education institution on the assessment visit has been analysed with representatives of the higher education institution and discussions have been held on what could be improved at subsequent assessments. A similar feedback seminar always takes place at the higher education institution at the end of IA.

EKKA offers HEIs opportunities to participate in seminars in order to present developments that have taken place in educational processes subsequent to assessments and on the basis of outlined areas for improvement and recommendations as well as to exchange best practices amongst one's peers. As a follow-up activity, in December 2014 EKKA organized a workshop where HEIs who had undergone institutional accreditation presented their best practices, introduced their planned activities based on the results and recommendations listed in the assessment reports and received feedback from EKKA as well as other higher education institutions. An overview of the key issues discussed during the workshop can be found under the following link in Estonian: http://ekka.archimedes.ee/institutsionaalse-akrediteerimise-jarelseminar/.

In April 2017, EKKA initiated the presentation of the assessment results of the SPG of Teacher Training and Educational Sciences to the relevant stakeholders (including university representatives, MER, Teachers' Union, Student Union, the relevant Parliamentary Committee), which was followed by a discussion on how the recommendations of experts are perceived and will be dealt with by the universities. Similar discussions involving representatives of employers and relevant public authorities are also planned to be organized in the future.

## Conclusion:

The overall assessment model is applied effectively in all assessments conducted by EKKA.

EKKA is continuously striving to improve the professionalism of its experts during the assessment visits. For example, the tasks of the assessment committee members and coordinator before, after and during the assessment visit have been elaborated in its guidelines for experts (see, e.g., *Guidelines for institutional accreditation experts*). The tasks of an assessment coordinator during the whole assessment procedure are described in detail and amended as necessary in the *Guidelines for a coordinator.*

Although HEQAC thoroughly analyses the written overviews presented by the HEIs regarding their follow-up activities and the feedback-seminars are very much welcomed by the institutions, organizing interactive seminars for HEIs to share good practices has been an area for improvement. Due to lack of time, so far, EKKA has organized only one seminar on the results of institutional accreditation. This area of improvement has been addressed by the new quality assessment concept, which foresees the introduction of thematic evaluations that also include the organization of stakeholder workshops for integrating best practices.

## Supporting documents:

EKKA Quality Manual

EKKA database (assessment reports, decisions of HEQAC) (EE)

Conditions and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation

Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education

Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups at the Level of Doctoral Studies

Requirements and Procedure for Transitional Assessment and Re-assessment of Study Programme Groups

Guidelines for Initial Assessment of Study Programme Groups

Guidelines for Institutional accreditation experts

Guidelines for quality assessment of study programme group experts

Guidelines for a coordinator (EE)

Summaries of feedback received from educational institutions (EE)

Agendas and materials for trainings of assessment experts (EE, EN)

Agendas and materials for workshops on preparing self-assessment reports of higher education institutions for institutional accreditation (EE)

## 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS

### 2.4.1 Standard:

External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

### 2.4.2 EKKA's Compliance

*Composition of the assessment committees*

In conducting IA or quality assessment of SPGs, EKKA involves mainly international experts, including academics, employer representatives and students in its assessment committees. For initial assessment and re-assessment of study programme groups, EKKA may use only national experts if the required expertise can be found within Estonia. As a result of different assessments conducted since 2009, EKKA has formed a pool of local experts who know both the local circumstances and the international context.

*Requirements for experts*

EKKA considers competent experts to be the key for professional external assessment and thus gives special attention to their selection and training. A good expert should:

- be impartial and independent during the assessment process and always rely on evidence;

- value partnership and cooperation, treating other members of the committee and representatives of the educational institution with respect;

- maintain the confidentiality of information revealed during the assessment process; and

- be reliable, sticking to the agreed timeframe and division of tasks.

All EKKA's regulations for external assessments include:

- the principles for forming assessment committees (e.g., clause 10 of the *Conditions and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation*) defining the objective parameters for forming a committee, and

- the requirements for members of an assessment committee (e.g., clause 19 of the *Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education*), defining specific requirements for the competence of experts.

Both criteria may vary depending on the type of external assessment.

*Selection of experts*

For IA and quality assessment of SPGs, as well as other assessments, EKKA employs foreign experts who have been recommended by other agencies, ESU, professional unions, and other foreign experts. Foreign experts of higher education can also apply for the position of an assessment expert by submitting an application form available on EKKA website.

Domestic experts are involved based on assessment timetables depending on the specifics of evaluations. A call for applications will be tailored to a specific target-group (modified to take into account differences among students, employers and representatives of higher education institutions). The coordinator/Assessment Director will also make targeted offers to specific people who will be invited to participate in the competition.

For better results in finding experts, Assessment Directors and/or assessment coordinators cooperate with professional associations, professional councils and employers' organisations by asking them to nominate potential candidates from their organisation to specific assessment committees.

EKKA maintains an electronic database of both local and foreign experts. Opinions of fellow committee members and coordinators are added to the information about experts who have participated in assessments. EKKA takes that feedback into consideration when forming future assessment committees. The expert database continues to grow.

*No conflict-of-interest mechanism*

EKKA has adopted the following measures to avoid conflict of interest when employing external experts:

- the regulations concerning external assessments approved by HEQAC reveal in detail the cases in which a conflict of interest is presumed to be present (for example, see clause 15 of the *Conditions and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation*);

- the HEI under assessment may raise reasoned objections to the planned composition of a committee, and make a request for additional members or for the removal of members (for example, see clause 20 of the *Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education*), and

- the experts confirm the absence of any conflict of interest by signing their service contracts. In the case of a conflict of interest, the committee members are obliged to immediately notify the Director of EKKA about it and withdraw from the work of the committee.

*Expert trainings*

According to clause 2.2.8 of EKKA Statutes, it is one of the main functions of EKKA to provide training and counselling concerning assessments in the field of education and the quality of education. EKKA provides introductory trainings for foreign and Estonian experts before each assessment and counsels them throughout the assessment process. The format of the training may vary depending on the target group and objectives of the training.

EKKA also organizes need-based trainings for Estonian experts already involved in specific assessment committees and general trainings for potential future Estonian experts (including students). During the period of 2011–2016, 282 higher education assessment experts and 570 VET assessment experts participated in the training of experts organized by EKKA (45 and 22 training sessions took place respectively).

The last general training for future higher education experts took place in January 2017. 36 potential domestic experts took part, including 10 students and 8 employers. We have also successfully exported the methodology and format of our expert trainings to Moldova and Azerbaijan in the recent years.

EKKA has developed guidelines for experts of institutional accreditation and quality assessment of study programme groups as well as accreditation of study programme groups in Moldova, which explain the requirements for experts, the tasks of experts and provides practical information regarding the assessment processes.

EKKA Quality Manual describes in further detail the principles for selecting and training experts (see 1.2 *Human resources management*, *Experts;* and 2.2 *Implementation of core processes, Assessment committees*).

### Conclusion:

In general, EKKA is satisfied with the preparation and quality of its experts, including the employer representatives. EKKA has also suggested a number of experts to foreign agencies and received good feedback. The student experts are selected in close cooperation with the Estonian Federation of Student Unions as well as the European Student Union and the German Student Accreditation Pool. EKKA also organised a pilot training specifically for future student experts in April 2017.

### Supporting documents:

EKKA assessment regulations

EKKA Quality Manual

Compositions of assessment committees of institutional accreditation and QA of SPG

Agendas and materials for trainings of assessment experts (EE, EN)

Guidelines for institutional accreditation experts

Guidelines for quality assessment of study programme group experts

EKKA database of experts

Summaries of feedback from assessment committees

Summaries of feedback from higher education institutions regarding assessment visits (EE)

## 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

### 2.5.1 Standard:

Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

### 2.5.2 EKKA's compliance

*Assessment criteria*

According to clause 2.2.9 of EKKA Statutes, it is one of the main functions of EKKA to publicise the principles, regulatory documents, results, international standards, experiences and other relevant information related to assessments in the field of education. EKKA's regulations for assessment processes contain explicit criteria based on laws and other documentation in the field of education (including the ESG) and take into consideration stakeholder expectations. The criteria have been grouped under different assessment areas

relevant to the specific assessment.

All the assessment criteria have been published on EKKA website (also in English) and EKKA updates them regularly. For uniform implementation of the assessment criteria, all experts are required to participate in trainings before each external review, during which EKKA explains to them the content of requirements and the principles of assessment.  EKKA also reviews the draft assessment reports at different stages of assessments and requires experts to supplement or clarify them, if necessary, to ensure the consistency of the reports. EKKA does not interfere with committees' substantive assessments.

EKKA always sends the draft assessment reports to HEIs who then may submit their comments on the assessment reports within a specified time after receipt as determined by the relevant regulation. Committees work through the comments received and, if necessary, take them into consideration in the final assessment reports. Final assessment reports should be consensual or in exceptional cases contain reasoned dissenting views of committee members.

As it is important for the HEIs to also understand what is expected of them during different types of assessments, EKKA provides them with basic trainings or extra trainings upon their request.


### *Decision-making criteria*

Regardless of the formal outcome of the assessment, EKKA's regulations contain specific descriptions of decision-making procedures, including an obligation to base assessments on the predetermined criteria and evidence.

HEQAC bases its decisions on the self-assessment report/written materials presented by the HEI, the assessment report, the comments by the educational institutions received in due time, and on additional materials submitted at the request of HEQAC. In order to make the best possible decisions, HEQAC has the duty to thoroughly analyse assessment reports. In case of contradictions or inadequate justifications in a report, HEQAC has the right to return it to the assessment committee to be clarified or supplemented (see, e.g., clauses 41–43, 47 of the *Conditions and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation)*. Experts' work is considered to be completed only after HEQAC has made its decision based on their report. During the period of 2012–2017, no reports regarding IA or quality assessment of SPGs have been returned to the assessment committees.

HEQAC will base its decisions on strengths and areas for improvement of educational institutions identified in assessment reports (quality assessment of study programme groups); committees' component assessments (institutional accreditation); or assessments on the conformity of the quality of instruction with the required standards (initial assessment and re-assessment of study programme groups and accreditation of study programmes in Moldova).

HEQAC interprets assessment reports and adopts the subsequent decisions in a consistent way, making similar decisions when comparable circumstances are present. While preparing and making decisions, HEQAC also has to comply with the provisions of the Administrative Procedure Act. To ensure the consistency of the assessment decisions of HEQAC, EKKA has also introduced a principle a rotation in clause 2.6.3 of the *Procedure for formation of Estonian Higher Education Quality Assessment Council and the Appeals Committee*, according to which, as a result of the election of the members of the Council, at least 1/3rd of the members of the Council will be replaced and at least 1/3rd of the members will continue their work in the Council. In order to guarantee a balanced representation of different perspectives, both universities and institutions of professional higher education are represented in the Council, which also includes at least one employer and one student member. Also, gender balance has to be maintained within the Council.

News about the sessions of HEQAC as well as decisions and minutes of the HEQAC are made available on EKKA website, allowing all interested parties to compare the outcomes of reviews. In case of institutional accreditation, EKKA composes a press release to inform the general public of the findings of a review, including

a summary of the main strengths and areas for improvement, among other things, and refers to its website for more detailed information.

EKKA's policies for ensuring the quality of decisions of HEQAC are described in detail in EKKA Quality Manual (see 2.2 *Implementation of core processes, Decisions by the Quality Assessment Council*).

### Conclusion:

EKKA's assessment and decision-making criteria comply with the ESG requirements. To guarantee the foreseeability of the assessment results and make the decision-making process more transparent, EKKA has continuously updated the decision-making criteria. For example, the criteria for determining when to conduct the next quality assessment of a study programme group was clarified in 2016.

### Supporting documents:

EKKA Quality Manual

EKKA database (assessment reports, decisions by HEQAC) (EE)

Conditions and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation

Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education

Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups at the Level of Doctoral Studies

Requirements and Procedure for Transitional Assessment and Re-assessment of Study Programme Groups

Guidelines for Initial Assessment of Study Programme Groups

Procedure for accreditation of study programme groups of vocational education and training

Summaries of feedback from higher education institutions (EE)

Agendas and materials for trainings of assessment experts (EE, EN)

## 2.6 REPORTING

### 2.6.1 Standard:

Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

### 2.6.2 EKKA's compliance

EKKA has developed standard assessment report templates for all assessment processes that are reviewed and amended as needed under the responsibility of assessment directors. The assessment reports of IA and SPG take into consideration the following principles:

- The introductory part of a report gives an overview of the individual assessment procedure and the composition of an assessment committee. In cases of IA and quality assessment of SPGs, context description of the HEI or study programme group under assessment is also included.

- At the beginning of a report, committees must summarise the most important conclusions by

assessment areas, including assessment decisions, commendations, areas of improvement and recommendations. In case of IA, experts may recognise sub-areas where an institution has demonstrated outstanding good practices, with an additional note of 'worthy of recognition'.

- Assessment criteria or standards are presented in separate cells. Next to each criterion experts present their analyses: the most important conclusions depending on the type of a review (decisions, commendations, recommendations, and areas of improvement), the arguments that have led them to those conclusions, and evidence to support their claims.

- EKKA improves the assessment templates based on feedback received from experts, HEIs and changes in regulations. For example, the assessment template for QA of SPGs has altogether been changed three times. First, we had an electronic environment for writing the report that did not function well. Then, the first version of the report template was developed, in which we gave the experts a relatively large degree of freedom to design the report. Later, for the purpose of comparability, we developed a more clearly structured report template with concrete instructions for experts.

- The templates of assessment reports in electronic format are available on EKKA website. Assessment reports are published in English and accompanied by a decision of HEQAC both in Estonian and in English. HEQAC decisions contain an aggregation of the strengths and areas for improvement and recommendations produced by an assessment committee.

At the moment, most of the assessment reports of initial assessment and re-evaluation are in Estonian and they lack the comprehensive context of the institution as well as purpose and possible consequences of the assessment. The reason for this is the fact that the main target groups of HEQAC decisions and assessment reports are the MER and the institutions under assessment. However, in order to make reports of initial assessment and re-evaluation accessible and understandable for international audience, we are planning to add to the reports more information about the context of both institution and assessment, and publish the summary reports in English.

EKKA publishes assessment reports on its website and database (together with the assessment decision) after HEQAC has adopted the final decision based on the corresponding report and that decision has been communicated to the educational institution concerned. HEQAC's decision includes the main strengths and areas for improvement provided in the assessment report as well as the justification of the decision. Thus, it can be considered as an equivalent to the summary report.

The principles and process of drafting assessment reports have been described in detail in EKKA Quality Manual (see 2.2 *Implementation of core processes, Assessment reports*).

## Conclusion:

Overall, EKKA is satisfied with the structure and quality of the assessment reports and finds them to be in conformity with the ESG requirements.

EKKA is continuously working on improving the level of content and language editing of the reports, which is at times, inevitably, uneven.

## Supporting documents:

EKKA Quality Manual

EKKA database (assessment reports, decisions by HEQAC) (EE)

Conditions and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation

Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education

Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups at the Level of Doctoral Studies

Requirements and Procedure for Transitional Assessment and Re-assessment of Study Programme Groups

Guidelines for Initial Assessment of Study Programme Groups

## 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

### 2.7.1 Standard:

Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

### 2.7.2 EKKA's compliance

EKKA has introduced an appeals procedure for all external assessment processes, the exact nature of which depends on the outcome of the concrete process.

- Challenges and other complaints on all assessment decisions, regardless of their nature, by HEQAC will be first forwarded to the Appeals Committee of HEQAC. The Appeals Committee operates under EKKA as an independent body elected for a fixed period of three years by the Supervisory Board of the Archimedes Foundation. The task of the Appeals Committee is to provide HEQAC with an unbiased opinion regarding the validity of the complaints or challenges filed upon the decisions taken by HEQAC. The composition, formation and rules of procedure of the Appeals Committee have been described in sub-section 3 of the *Procedure for formation of Estonian Higher Education Quality Assessment Council and the Appeals Committee*:

    - In cases of assessment processes where HEQAC makes final administrative decisions (institutional accreditation and quality assessment of study programme groups), it is the task of HEQAC to adjudicate the challenges filed against the assessment decisions made by HEQAC. Upon deciding whether to satisfy or dismiss the challenge, HEQAC will take into consideration the opinion of the Appeals Committee. After the challenge proceedings (pre-trial proceedings), final assessment decisions by HEQAC can also be challenged/appealed in court (see clauses 52-53 of *Conditions and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation* and clauses 45-46 of *Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education*).

    - In case of re-evaluation of study programme groups, the complaints filed against the assessment decisions made by HEQAC will initially be reviewed by HEQAC, taking into account the opinion of the Appeals Committee. The final assessment decision of re-evaluation of SPG-s by HEQAC may then be disputed in court after the adoption of the corresponding administrative decision by the Minister of Education and Research (see clauses 47-48 of *Requirements and Procedure for Transitional Assessment and Re-assessment of Study Programme Groups*).

- Assessment procedures conducted by EKKA can also be disputed:

    – In cases of IA and quality assessment of SPG-s, the challenge filed against EKKA's procedures shall be reviewed by HEQAC and can then be disputed in court.

    – In cases of re-evaluation of SPGs, procedures conducted by EKKA may be challenged by filing a challenge to the Management Board of the Archimedes Foundation and may then

be disputed in court after the adoption of the corresponding administrative decision by the Minister of Education and Research (see clauses 47-48 of *Requirements and Procedure for Transitional Assessment and Re-assessment of Study Programme Groups*).

- In the case of initial assessment of SPGs where HEQAC acts solely as an expert body, a possibility is provided for persons concerned to file an appropriate request for explanation or a memorandum to the Director of EKKA and then to the Management Board of the Archimedes Foundation if he or she has a doubt that EKKA or the assessment committee has not followed the rules described in the *Guidelines for Initial Assessment of Study Programme Groups* when organizing and conducting an expert analysis (see clauses 31-33 of the mentioned Guidelines).

As of 2017, no appeals have been filed in court against administrative actions or decisions taken by HEQAC. However, two challenges have been filed with HEQAC since 2010. In 2015, the University of Tartu filed a challenge with HEQAC against the decision to conduct the quality assessment of study programme group in five years instead of seven years. The university argued that the decision was not sufficiently justified and it should therefore be repealed. According to the Administrative Procedures Act, HEQAC had to then review its own decision and decided to leave it in force, but added to its reasoning more specific references to international standards that had been breached. As it was quite difficult for HEQAC to remain completely unbiased reviewing its own decision, this incident prompted EKKA to found the Appeals Committee, which was introduced to the Statutes of EKKA on September 28, 2016.

In May, 2017, the Estonian Business School filed a challenge with HEQAC against the decision to impose a secondary condition on the decision of HEQAC to conduct the next quality assessment of study programme group of Business and administration in seven years, which obligated the higher education institution to submit to the HEQAC in two years a report about the elimination of deficiencies underlined in the assessment decision. The main reasons for imposing the secondary condition were the shortage of permanent full-time staff on the study programmes and insufficient emphasis on academic research – there has been a steady decline in publication of high-level articles and the research load between academic staff is distributed unevenly. The Estonian Business School was of the opinion that the decision to impose a secondary condition on the assessment decision was not sufficiently substantiated and therefore asked the HEQAC to proceed with the challenge and revoke the assessment decision. The Director of EKKA then summoned the Appeals Committee and asked them to present an independent opinion on the merits of the challenge. The Appeals Committee came to the conclusion that the secondary condition imposed on the quality assessment decision under question was not adequately grounded in its current form and additional substantive justifications were needed. The opinion of the Appeals Committee was forwarded to the HEQAC who reviewed the challenge during its session in June, 2017, taking into account all the necessary materials relevant to the matter. Following the discussions, the HEQAC decided to leave the decision in force, but substantially elaborated on the main arguments supporting the imposition of the secondary condition. As of July, 2017, the Estonian Business School has neither contested the final decision of the HEQAC nor submitted any further inquiries regarding this matter.

EKKA's appeals procedure has been described in EKKA Quality Manual (see 2.2 *Implementation of core processes, Appeals*) as well as in EKKA's assessment regulations, which are publicly available on EKKA website.


### Conclusion:

EKKA has defined procedures for reviewing complaints and appeals filed by the HEIs in all its assessment regulations that are publicly available on EKKA website. In order to guarantee the clarity and impartiality of its complaints procedures, in 2016 EKKA established the Appeals Committee acting as an advisory body to HEQAC with a task to provide HEQAC with unbiased opinions on the validity of the complaints filed against the assessment decisions.

**Supporting documents:**

Statutes of EKKA

Procedure for formation of Estonian Higher Education Quality Assessment Council and the Appeals Committee

EKKA Quality Manual

Conditions and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation

Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education

Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups at the Level of Doctoral Studies

Requirements and Procedure for Transitional Assessment and Re-assessment of Study Programme Groups

Guidelines for Initial Assessment of Study Programme Groups

# Part 4: EKKA's Compliance with Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance Agencies (ESG Part 3)

## 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

### 3.1.1 Standard:

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

### 3.1.2 EKKA's compliance

The previous part of this document describes how EKKA's procedures for external quality assurance take into account the processes of external quality assurance contained in Part 2 of the ESG, and the effectiveness thereof.

EKKA's mission, as defined in its Development Plan for 2017–2022, is – in cooperation with its partners – to support the development of quality culture in the field of education and thereby increase the openness and competitiveness of the Estonian society.

EKKA's objectives are based on EKKA's mission statement and core values (impartiality, competence, cooperation and openness). According to the Development Plan, by the year 2022:

1. EKKA should be a reliable partner;

2. EKKA's activities should be effective and efficient; and

3. EKKA should be internationally known and recognized.

The Development Plan also lists assessment criteria and indicators for measuring the achievement of these goals.

To plan necessary actions for achieving the objectives in the Development Plan, EKKA prepares a work plan for each calendar year. Implementation of the planned developments are evaluated at EKKA's development seminars as deemed necessary, but at least once a year. EKKA reports once a year to HEQAC about the progress regarding the achievement of the objectives of the Development Plan.

For further information on EKKA's mission statement, values, objectives and key activities, see sub-section 1.4 of this report, EKKA Development Plan, and EKKA Quality Manual.

### Conclusion:

EKKA has clearly defined its mission and objectives in its Development Plan for the years 2017–2022, which is made publicly available on EKKA website.  To plan necessary measures for achievement of these objectives, EKKA prepares a work plan for each calendar year and measures its achievement. External stakeholders are regularly involved in both EKKA's core and development activities.

## 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS

### 3.2.1 Standard:

Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.

### 3.2.2 EKKA's compliance

According to § 37 of the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, the provision of education is overseen by the national government. To clearly separate the external assessment of higher education from governmental structures, the MER decided, on the basis of a contract under public law, to authorise this function to be performed by the Archimedes Foundation, the founder of which is the Republic of Estonia with the founder's rights being exercised by the MER.

According to clauses 3.3.1.1 and 3.3.5 of the Statutes of the Archimedes Foundation and clause 1.2 of the Statutes of EKKA, approved by the Supervisory Board of the Foundation, Estonian Quality Agency for Higher Education and VET is a structural unit of the Archimedes Foundation, performing independent functions and, based on § 10 of the Universities Act, was set up in 2009 to continue the work by the Estonian Higher Education Accreditation Centre and the Higher Education Quality Assessment Council (operating from 1997 to 2008). EKKA is comprised of EKKA permanent staff and the Quality Assessment Councils for Higher Education and VET.

Based on the laws of the Republic of Estonia, the Supervisory Board of the Foundation also includes representatives of the state, but in order to ensure the independence of assessing the quality of higher education, it has delegated the approval of EKKA's regulations and the adoption of assessment decisions exclusively to EKKA. Therefore, EKKA is independent in developing its principles and procedures for quality assessment and in adopting assessment decisions.

EKKA bases its activities on legislation, regulations issued by the Minister of Education and Research and other normative documents in the field of education; EKKA performs the functions assigned to it by § 10 of the Universities Act and clause 2 of its own Statutes.

### Conclusion:

EKKA has a solid legal basis and is formally recognised as a quality assurance agency by the Ministry of Education and Research.

### Supporting documents:

Constitution of the Republic of Estonia

Universities Act

Standard of Higher Education

Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act

Statutes of EKKA

Contract under public law between Ministry of Education and Research and the Archimedes Foundation (EE)

## 3.3 INDEPENDENCE

### 3.3.1 Standard:

Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

### 3.3.2 EKKA's compliance

*Organisational independence*

According to clauses 3.3.1.1 and 3.3.5 of the Statutes of the Archimedes Foundation and clause 1.2 of the Statutes of EKKA approved by the Supervisory Board of the Archimedes Foundation, EKKA is the Foundation's structural unit, performing independent functions and being independent in making quality assessment decisions.

*Operational independence*

EKKA is independent in carrying out its key activities, while it is the exclusive responsibility of HEQAC to establish the principles and procedures for external quality assessment processes and adopt assessment decisions.

To actually ensure EKKA's independence in the field of external assessment from the MER (whose employees are represented on the Supervisory Board of the Foundation), the Supervisory Board has approved EKKA Statutes in which clauses 3.7.1 and 3.7.3 authorise HEQAC to provide the final approval of regulations for assessments (establishing assessment criteria and procedures) and to adopt assessment decisions.

HEQAC makes final quality assessment decisions, which in cases of IA and QA of SPGs are also administrative decisions. EKKA is accountable for the outcomes of the quality assurance processes as described in § 10 of the Universities Act.

*Independence of formal outcomes*

The responsibility for the validity of assessment decisions lies with HEQAC. The members of HEQAC are obliged to sign a declaration of confidentiality and independence confirming that they are independent in their activities and do not represent either the interests of the organisation who nominated their candidacy or the interests of their employers. If a member's relationship with his or her employer changes, that member will be obliged to immediately notify the Director of EKKA of this in writing (See clause 1.3 of the *Procedure for formation of Estonian Higher Education Quality Assessment Council and the Appeals Committee*).

Rectors, vice rectors and officials of the MER cannot be members of HEQAC (see clause 2.5.3 of the *Procedure for formation of Estonian Higher Education Quality Assessment Council and the Appeals Committee*).

A member of HEQAC who is affiliated with the HEI under assessment has an obligation to leave the meeting room for the time of the discussion and decision-making.

## Conclusion:

EKKA enjoys organizational and operational independence as well as independence of formal outcomes in the field of external evaluation of higher education. EKKA is independent in adopting its quality assessment regulations and its assessment decisions are final.

## Supporting documents:

Universities Act

Statutes of the Archimedes Foundation

Statutes of EKKA

Procedure for formation of Estonian Higher Education Quality Assessment Council and the Appeals Committee

Declaration of Confidentiality and Independence (EE)

## 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

### 3.4.1 Standard:

Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

### 3.4.2 EKKA's compliance

According to clause 2.2.10 of EKKA Statutes, one of EKKA's main functions is to analyse assessment results and to make recommendations for improvement to the educational institutions and the MER. EKKA regularly draws up annual and period-based analyses of assessment results for both vocational and higher education. The yearly summaries of assessments are discussed at the joint meetings of assessment councils and published in the MER's annual compilations. Period-based analyses are prepared according to specific needs, e.g., an analysis of the period of transitional assessment or an interim analysis of the results of quality assessment of study programme groups as well as interim results of institutional accreditation.

EKKA takes part in international conferences, seminars and workshops, presenting the results of their studies and analyses as well as publishing in international peer reviewed research publications (see Appendix 2).

For example, an analysis has been compiled on the integrated pilot assessment of higher education and VET study programme groups carried out in the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences and presented at the INQAAHE annual conference in 2017. Also, in 2014, a more general study was conducted on the perceived impact of external assessment in higher education institutions. The results of the analysis were presented at the INQAAHE annual conference in 2016. An analysis was also prepared on the assessment results of the cross-border accreditation of Master's programmes of Law in Moldova.

The perceived needs for analyses are discussed with the Assessment Directors and planned at least a year in advance. See also EKKA Quality Manual (3 *Review, feedback and revision of core processes, Analysis of feedback results and discussion on suggestions for revisions*.)

## Conclusion:

EKKA is successfully using the results of the thematic analyses in its internal development activities, presenting them at self-assessment trainings and feedback seminars for higher education institutions as well as to the

higher education department at the MER. The assessment results have been discussed at meetings of vice rectors for academic affairs with the aim to share best practices and develop solutions for common problems. Communication of the analyses to the wider public remains a challenge, as the dissemination of positive news in the media has proven to be quite difficult.

**Supporting documents:**

List of Analyses and Publications in Appendix 2

Statutes of EKKA

EKKA Quality Manual

# 3.5 RESOURCES

## 3.5.1 Standard:

Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.

## 3.5.2 EKKA's compliance

### *Human resources*

In order to achieve its goals, EKKA employs an optimum number of competent specialists who are motivated and engage in constant professional development.

EKKA office currently employs 9 permanent staff and is managed by the Director of EKKA. EKKA employees are selected through public competition. During the years 2012–2017, the employee turnover in EKKA has been low: two persons have left the team to look for challenges in other areas, one is on maternity leave. The majority of staff (7) has been involved with EKKA for a minimum of six years, resulting in competent and experienced employees. Still, new positions have also been created based on the need for additional competencies arising from objectives of the Development Plan or the increase in the workload in specific areas.

The qualifications of EKKA employees correspond to the specific demands of their tasks. All employees possess at least one Master's degree or equivalent qualification. Two employees (the Director and the Head of International Relations) have PhDs and experience in academic and research work, the Assessment Director also performing the tasks of an analyst is to graduate her doctoral studies in the field of Information Sciences, her doctoral theses being entitled Information Culture in Higher Education Institutions.

The duties of EKKA employees are determined by job descriptions and further specified by EKKA annual action plans. Each employee has up to three main areas of responsibility based on his or her competencies, and co-responsibility in each area is delegated to one more colleague.

The Director of EKKA conducts a development interview with every employee at least once a year. During the interview, the employee's more essential goals and development needs for the coming year are identified, and the implementation of those will be analysed during the following interview. EKKA employees regularly improve their professional skills by attending conferences, seminars and trainings.

The salaries of EKKA employees are competitive compared to employees with similar qualifications. The salaries of both employees with PhD or Master's degree are above the average salaries in the fields of education and social sciences at universities. A performance bonus in the amount of a total monthly payroll is foreseen in each annual budget. The contribution and effectiveness of each individual employee is taken

into account when awarding bonuses. Besides a competitive salary, EKKA employees are motivated by the oportunity to flexibly arrange their working time.

Being stretched to the limits at times due to the nature of the assessments can be pinpointed as an issue. It is impossible to distribute the workload evenly between months as the assessment periods follow the logic of the academic calendars of educational institutions. Futhermore, EKKA is unable to plan all assessments, i.e., the number of initial assessments to be performed depends on the number of respective requests submitted; the number of re-evaluations, on the other hand, depends of the outcomes of previous evaluations. Autumn 2016 and spring 2017 were negative examples of this phenomenon with record high work load for EKKA. As the situation is to normalise by 2018 and the number of assessments will see a significant drop as of 2020, hiring additional employees was not considered reasonable.

EKKA also comprises HEQAC, which is composed of 13 members. The tasks of HEQAC are laid out in clause 3.7 of the Statutes of EKKA. To fulfil its functions, EKKA involves different experts under separate contracts for services. The selection procedures and requirements for experts have been further described in sub-section 2.4.3 of the current report.

EKKA Quality Manual contains a detailed description of the principles and procedures for selecting, developing and motivating EKKA permanent staff, members of HEQAC and experts (see 1.2 *Human resources management*).

### *Information Resources*

In 2014, EKKA launched a website with a new design and structure.  We have also developed a database, which contains assessment decisions and reports for both higher education and VET. The database is linked with the internal document management system of the Archimedes Foundation, thus it is available only in Estonian. In order to provide information about assessment results to the international audience we developed a special solution for the English website presenting information about institutional accreditation reports and decisions and quality assessment reports and decisions.

In addition, we have developed a database for study programmes in higher education, which is targeted especially for those who want to get an overview of all the study programmes taught in higher education institutions across Estonia. The database has links to decisions on quality assessment of study programme groups as well as decisions about institutional accreditations. It is available both in Estonian and English. This database is the most frequently viewed subsection of EKKA website (last year the database generated 70% of page-views on EKKA website – in total more than 29,000 visits). The database is used by the national career counselling centres across Estonia as well as the Rajaleidja career portal online (https://rajaleidja.innove.ee/).

### *Financial Resources*

A detailed overview of EKKA's funding principles and finances can be found under sub-section 1.7 (Resources).

EKKA's core process and related development activities are covered by sufficient funds and the use of resources is efficient.  Additional resources for EKKA's development activities are sought from different projects, including international projects.

Negotiations with the Ministry of Eduction and Research on the financing of EKKA's activities have always been constructive and all justified requests granted. No development activities or secondments have been abandoned for fiancial reasons. On top of allocations designated for development activities from the government budget EKKA has raised sufficient extra funds through international projects.

### Conclusion:

EKKA has sufficient resources for conducting its activities. However, the amount of different assessments in different years is causing workload fluctuations. During the periods of heavier workloads, EKKA has paid an extra fee to their permanent staff and also insourced some extra workforce as a temporary solution (e.g.,

coordinators for the assessment committees). For the first half of 2017, EKKA has subcontracted a person to launch the students' quality network. During the period of February-April 2017, EKKA also offered a three-month internship opportunity to a Master's student from the University of Oulu, consisting mainly of analytical work.

**Supporting documents:**

Statutes of EKKA

EKKA Quality Manual

Job descriptions (EE)

Minutes of development interviews (EE)

Contracts for services

EKKA's budget

EKKA's annual action plans (EE)

## 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

### 3.6.1 Standard:

Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

### 3.6.2 EKKA's Compliance

EKKA bases its activities on its mission and main functions as provided for in legislation, and consistently implements the principles of the so-called quality circle (PDCA). Based on its mission, EKKA has identified its role in Estonian higher education and declared its core values and vision. EKKA has accordingly identified its principal objectives for the period 2017–2022 in its Development Plan, reviews them regularly, and plans and implements improvement activities. The principal objectives set out in the Development Plan serve as the basis for preparing annual action plans, designing longer-term development activities, and for EKKA's employee development interviews.

The requirements for the competence, tolerance and integrity of all the persons involved in EKKA's activities have also been integrated into EKKA's core values.

The procedure for EKKA's internal quality assurance is described in EKKA Quality Manual, which consists of three parts (*Management and functioning of the organization*, *Core processes, and Communication*) and is available on EKKA website.

EKKA implements different external and internal feedback mechanisms that should lead to continuous improvement within the agency. For instance, EKKA holds weekly meetings with its permanent staff where new information is discussed and processed. At least once a year, EKKA holds development seminars where necessary changes are planned based on the results of these discussions, analyses of various feedback surveys, suggestions by experts and HEIs under evaluation, examples of best practices throughout the world, subject-related publications, changes in the environment and legislation, etc.

For instance in the planning phase of the Development Plan for 2017-2022 two development seminars took place in the summer of 2016 (in June and in August), where potential future scenarios for higher and vocational education as well as for quality assurance were discussed as a team effort. As an outcome of
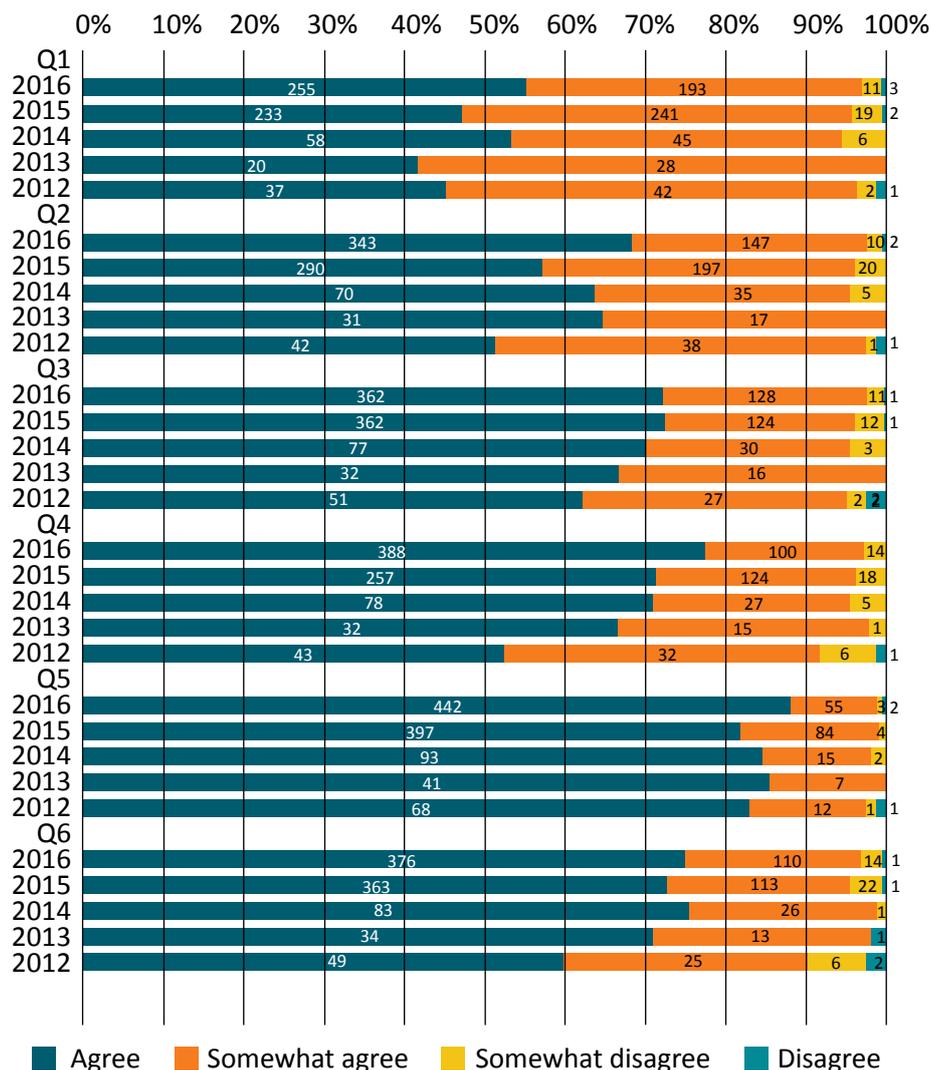
the seminars, the following objectives, reflected either directly or indirectly in the Development Plan, were defined: prioritizing the learners' needs and learner-centeredness, broadening the scope of grading – devising grading principles for further training and e-learning, finding one's niche in international external assessment, including in cooperation with other agencies (e.g., FINEEC). At the development seminar held in December 2016, the principles for quality assessment in higher education were laid down, which were later on discussed in a working group comprising representatives of various stakeholders.

Development interviews are held annually between the EKKA Director and all employees in order to draw conclusions on the previous period, discuss job satisfaction and lay down main objectives for the upcoming period. A summary of all development interviews is presented to all employees by the Director at the EKKA development seminar and made available in the EKKA documents folder. The outcomes of the 2016 development interviews indicate high employee satisfaction with working conditions and colleagues. Participating in international projects, integrated assessment of higher and vocational education study programmes carried out at the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences as well as improvements in the overall quality of both self-evaluation reports and assessment reports were seen as positive. On the downside high workload and fragmentation of tasks were mentioned and better information sharing between colleagues was mentioned as an area of improvement.

EKKA requests regular feedback on the implementation of its core activities from various stakeholders. Subsequent to each assessment all interviewees are sent an electronic questionnaire in which they are asked to rate the assessment committee's preparedness for the assessment visit, relevance of questionions, ability to stick to the time schedule etc.

Based on the feedback we have received on assessment visits , we have during introductory trainings for assessment committee members focused more on brushing up interviewing techniques; we also give experts an insight into research financing (despite this not being directly relevant for the assessment); we explain to the experts thoroughly the difference between universities and professional higher education institutions; and we have reduced the interviewee numbers during assessment visits. As feedback has also indicated that many interviewees upon meeting the assessment committee are not aware of the nature of the assessment, who the assessors are and what topics are covered during discussions, we have drafted an explanatory letter that we recommend the higher education institutions to share with the interviewees prior to the visit. The feedback from higher education institutions on visits by committees has been constantly good from 2012 to 2016, although a slight upward trend can still be detected.

## Feedback after the assement visit 2012-2016 (SPG)



| | Agree | Somewhat agree | Somewhat disagree | Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Q1** | | | | |
| 2016 | 255 | 193 | 11 | 3 |
| 2015 | 233 | 241 | 19 | 2 |
| 2014 | 58 | 45 | 6 | |
| 2013 | 20 | 28 | | |
| 2012 | 37 | 42 | 2 | 1 |
| **Q2** | | | | |
| 2016 | 343 | 147 | 10 | 2 |
| 2015 | 290 | 197 | 20 | |
| 2014 | 70 | 35 | 5 | |
| 2013 | 31 | 17 | | |
| 2012 | 42 | 38 | 1 | 1 |
| **Q3** | | | | |
| 2016 | 362 | 128 | 11 | 1 |
| 2015 | 362 | 124 | 12 | 1 |
| 2014 | 77 | 30 | 3 | |
| 2013 | 32 | 16 | | |
| 2012 | 51 | 27 | 2 | 2 |
| **Q4** | | | | |
| 2016 | 388 | 100 | 14 | |
| 2015 | 257 | 124 | 18 | |
| 2014 | 78 | 27 | 5 | |
| 2013 | 32 | 15 | 1 | |
| 2012 | 43 | 32 | 6 | 1 |
| **Q5** | | | | |
| 2016 | 442 | 55 | 3 | 2 |
| 2015 | 397 | 84 | 4 | |
| 2014 | 93 | 15 | 2 | |
| 2013 | 41 | 7 | | |
| 2012 | 68 | 12 | 1 | 1 |
| **Q6** | | | | |
| 2016 | 376 | 110 | 14 | 1 |
| 2015 | 363 | 113 | 22 | 1 |
| 2014 | 83 | 26 | 1 | |
| 2013 | 34 | 13 | | 1 |
| 2012 | 49 | 25 | 6 | 2 |

*Questions asked: Q1 The composition of the committee enables to make competent and objective assessment decisions; Q2 The committee members had sufficiently prepared for the assessment visit; Q3 Questions asked by committee members were appropriate; Q4 Interview time was used purposefully by committee members; Q5 The atmosphere at the interviews was efficient and friendly; Q6 There was enough time to express my opinion during the interview.*

On top of that, feedback seminars are held at higher education institutions after institutional accreditation and quality assessment of SPGs where the clarity and comprehensibility of the assessment report and pertinence of recommendations are discussed and suggestions made on the potential changes in the organisation as well as substance of future assessments. These suggestions have been taken into account by EKKA when devising the new assessment concept (e.g., the integration of different assessments).

Subsequent to each assessment the coordinators will request feedback on the organisation of the assessment from members of the assessment committee. Feedback from experts has given impetus to the introduction of a more structured assessment report template in the quality assessment of SPGs.

EKKA also presents annual reports to the Supervisory Board of the Archimedes Foundation. The members of HEQAC give feedback on an on-going basis in their sessions, as a rule. Once a year EKKA's development and action plans are reviewed by HEQAC. Aggregated analyses of assessment periods are presented to EKKA Assessment Councils for Higher Education and VET during the yearly joint seminar that also include results of feedback surveys.

The principles and procedures for EKKA's internal and external feedback mechanisms have been described in Part 3 of EKKA Quality Manual.

*Communication with relevant authorities*

EKKA holds regular meetings with the Ministry of Education and Research and the Director of EKKA has been invited to participate in different working groups established by the MER. For example, the Director belongs to the Steering Group responsible for developing and monitoring the implementation of the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 as well as to the Steering Group responsible for reviewing the legislation for higher education in Estonia EKKA's Assessment Director responsible for QA of SPG belongs to the ministerial commission assessing the conformity of new study programmes with national requirements. EKKA also communicates actively with the Federation of Estonian Student Union and participates in Vice Rectors' meetings, which are held twice a year. Representatives of employers have been involved in EKKA's development activities.

*Subcontracting other agencies*

EKKA's regulations foresee procedures for the cases when HEIs want a competent foreign quality assurance agency to conduct the external assessment. The prerequisite for using a foreign agency is an approval of the suitability of such a foreign agency by HEQAC. If HEQAC approves the use of that assessment authority, EKKA will conclude a tripartite contract with the HEI and the assessment authority, stipulating the rights and responsibilities of the parties during the assessment process and the procedure for reimbursement of expenses. HEQAC must make sure that the given assessment report allows them to make a final decision that is consistent with Estonian legislation.

In the time period of 2013–2016, there were two cases of higher education institutions requesting assessment by a foreign assessment agency. Both requests were granted. The European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE) conducted the quality assessment of Veterinary Medicine study programme group at the Estonian University of Life Sciences. This was a necessary prerequisite for international recognition of the study programme. HEQAC found that the assessment criteria and procedures of EAEVE were comparable to those employed by EKKA and therefore it was possible for HEQAC to adopt the assessment decision based on the assessment report prepared by EAEVE. HEQAC has also approved another foreign agency (MusiQuE) to conduct the quality assessment of Performing Arts study programme group at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre in 2017–2018. The tripartite contract between EKKA, MusiQuE and the Academy has already been finalized.

## Conclusion:

As a quality assurance agency, EKKA considers it most important to follow the Continuous Quality Improvement approach in all its activities. To make sure that we do the right things the right way whilst being "effective and efficient" – this is the motto guiding EKKA's work.

## Supporting documents:

EKKA Quality Manual

Records from EKKA's development seminars (EE)

Records from joint meetings of HEQAC and Quality Assessment Council for VET (EE)

### 3.7.1 Standard:

Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.

### 3.7.2 EKKA's compliance

EKKA has taken part in ENQA's external review once before (in 2012) and intends to continue to do so in the future. The next review has been scheduled for autumn 2017.

EKKA follows the requirements of the ISO 9001 quality management system implemented by the Archimedes Foundation and therefore once a year undergoes regular internal and external audits, which as a rule focus on EKKA's documentation and documentation management.

The Director of EKKA reports to the Management Board of the Archimedes Foundation on EKKA's activities and the results thereof on a quarterly basis. At the end of each calendar year, the Director of EKKA prepares annual activity and financial reports which form integral parts of the Foundation's annual report and which are approved by the Supervisory Board of the Foundation.

# SUMMARY AND REFLECTIONS

Since the previous external review of EKKA in 2012, we have constantly improved our processes and regulations based on changing circumstances, EKKA Development Plan for 2012–2016, recommendations made by ENQA review panel, and feedback received from various stakeholders. Changes have also been introduced in accordance with the renewed ESG and the strategic goals of the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020, which take into account the paradigm shift towards student-centred teaching and learning and digitalisation of studies. For example, the following important improvement activities have been implemented during the time period of 2012–2017:

- To guarantee the foreseeability of the assessment results and make the decision-making process more transparent, the decision-making criteria have been clarified in EKKA's regulations.

- The assessment criteria for study programme groups have been updated in line with the principles of the renewed ESG and the strategic goals of the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020.

- To ensure the consistency of the assessment decisions of HEQAC, EKKA has introduced a principle of rotation in the procedure of formation of HEQAC.

- In order to guarantee the clarity and impartiality of its complaints procedures, in 2016 EKKA established the Appeals Committee acting as an advisory body to HEQAC with a task to provide the Council with unbiased opinions on the validity of the complaints filed against assessment decisions.

EKKA has clearly defined its mission and objectives in its Development Plan for the years 2017–2022. Based on discussions with different stakeholders, feedback on different evaluation processes, the SWOT analysis conducted before producing the development plan and the current self-evaluation report, we have identified EKKA's main **strengths**, as follows:

1. **Methical approach**: EKKA has adopted a methodical approach to its development activities. As a quality agency, EKKA aspires to base all its activities on the Continuous Quality Improvement approach in an effective and efficient manner. EKKA is also successfully using the results of the thematic analyses in its internal development activities. The overall assessment model described in the ESG is applied effectively in all assessments conducted by EKKA. EKKA has also aimed to have all the standards and guidelines described in Part I of the ESG covered by its key processes at different levels, avoiding superfluous overlaps between assessment criteria.

   In 2014, EKKA also conducted a general study on the perceived impact of external assessment in higher education institutions, in line with the targets of the previous Development Plan.

2. **Involvement of stakeholders**: EKKA has very successfully managed to involve all essential stakeholders in its development processes and use their feedback in designing the assessment criteria and procedures.

3. **EKKA's strong national position**: In Estonia, EKKA is considered to be the main authority regarding the external evaluation of HEIs. Representatives of EKKA have continuously been involved in various working and discussion groups addressing the issues of higher education. For example, Ministry of Education and Research has delegated to EKKA the main responsibility for developing the new concept of the external quality assessment of higher education.

4. **Professionalism of permanent staff and experts:** Due to efficient motivation mechanisms, staff turnover in EKKA has been very low. The majority of staff (7 out of 8) has been involved with EKKA

for a minimum of six years, resulting in competent and experienced employees. EKKA has managed to train several professional assessment coordinators who guarantee the smooth functioning of the assessment process and are highly appreciated by the experts in their feedback.

EKKA has also paid special attention to the selection and preparation of its external experts. As a result, EKKA has developed a significant pool of skilled experts from Estonia and also abroad.

5. **International cooperation:** EKKA has significantly increased its activities at the international level. EKKA's participation in different international projects has been active and led to tangible results (e.g., the establishment of ANACIP in Moldova).

Alongside the strengths described above, we have also identified some **areas** in need **of improvement** regarding EKKA's activities:

1. **Partly overlapping /neglected assessment areas**: In case of smaller HEIs, some assessment areas of IA tend to overlap with the assessment areas of quality assessment of study programme groups. Also, current assessments fail to address the mid-level management of HEIs, including the implementation of management-level decisions at the level of academic units. This is an area of improvement already addressed in EKKA's current development activities.

2. **Follow-up activities:** Although HEQAC thoroughly analyses the written overviews presented by the HEIs regarding their follow-up activities, and the feedback-seminars are very much welcomed by the institutions, organizing interactive seminars for HEIs to share good practices has been an area of improvement. This area of improvement has been addressed by the new quality assessment concept, which foresees the introduction of thematic evaluations that also includes the organization of stakeholder workshops integrating best practices.

3. **Communication and visibility**: The communication of the thematic analyses to the wider public remains a challenge, as the dissemination of positive news in the media has proven to be quite difficult. It is still necessary to find ways how to ensure that assessment results reach their target audiences (also beyond the HE area), who could benefit from them, using the potentials of social media more effectively. In order to meet the objective of addressing more specific target groups, as opposed to the general public, in April 2017 EKKA initiated the presentation of the assessment results of the SPG of Teacher Training and Educational Sciences to the relevant stakeholders, which was followed by a discussion on how the recommendations of experts are perceived and will be dealt with by the universities. In order to make reports of initial assessment and re-evaluation accessible and understandable also for international audience, we are planning to include more information about the context of both institution and assessment, and publish the summary reports in English.

EKKA conducts self-analysis on an ongoing basis: twice a year, development seminars are held where necessary changes are planned based on the results of different discussions; analyses of various feedback surveys are conducted; suggestions by experts and HEIs under evaluation are considered; examples of best practices throughout the world are collected and analysed; subject-related publications are issued; changes in the environment and legislation are taken into account, etc. Once a year, EKKA's development and action plans are reviewed by HEQAC. Also, a more thorough self-examination was carried out in 2016 in connection with the preparation of EKKA's new Development Plan.

# APPENDIX 1: HIGHER EDUCATION IN ESTONIA 2017

## LEGAL FRAMEWORK

General legislation for higher education in Estonia is laid down in the following legal acts:

- Republic of Estonia Education Act

- Universities Act

- Organisation of Research and Development Act

- Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act

- Private Schools Act

- Standard of Higher Education

The legal acts are available here.

The purpose of the Universities Act is to provide the procedure for the establishment, termination of the activities of universities, the bases for the activities, principles of management of universities, the forms of and conditions for acquiring higher education, the legal status of the assets of universities, the procedure for financing universities, the basic rights and obligations of students, and state supervision over the activities of universities.

The purpose of the Organisation of Research and Development Act is to provide the grounds for the organisation of research and development and to ensure legal means for the preservation and further development of scientific and technological creation as a component of Estonian culture and the Estonian economy.

Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act lays down the grounds for the establishment of state institutions of professional higher education, the principles of management of such institutions, the conditions for acquiring higher education, the grounds for the organisation of studies, the basic rights and obligations of students, and the grounds for the budget, financing and state supervision of institutions of professional higher education.

The Private Schools Act is applicable to legal persons under private law that provide the possibility to acquire pre-school, basic, and secondary or higher education. This Act sets out foundation of private schools, organisation of teaching staff, management of institutions, requirements to studies, financing and state supervision, and procedure for the closure of private schools.

The framework document, the Standard of Higher Education, establishes requirements for higher education programmes, objectives and learning outcomes to be achieved, requirements for the members of teaching staff, and study programme groups where given HEIs have the right to conduct studies and to issue qualifications. The Standard of Higher Education is based on other acts related to higher education and is valid for all cycles and forms of higher education, irrespective of the ownership or the legal status of the higher education institution.

The Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for the implementation of the Standard of Higher Education. The administration of higher education is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Research (except for higher education in the fields of public security and national defence).

The MER defines the principles of higher education policy. The responsibilities of the Ministry of Education and Research include:

- regulation of the establishment, merger, division or closure of universities on the basis of decisions made by the *Riigikogu* (the Parliament), and in case of professional higher education institutions on the basis of decisions made by the Government;

- keeping the registry of state diplomas issued by higher education institutions and vocational education institutions;

- development of rules for state financing of education, and allocating budgeted funds to higher education institutions;

- approval of development plans of state professional higher education institutions;

- preparation and implementation of national education and research development programmes;

- carrying out national supervisory activities.

In its role, the Ministry of Education and Research is assisted by a number of management and consultative bodies with an administrative or teaching capacity. Professional higher education institutions for public security are state agencies administered by the Ministry of the Interior and professional higher education institutions for national defence are structural units of the Defence Forces.
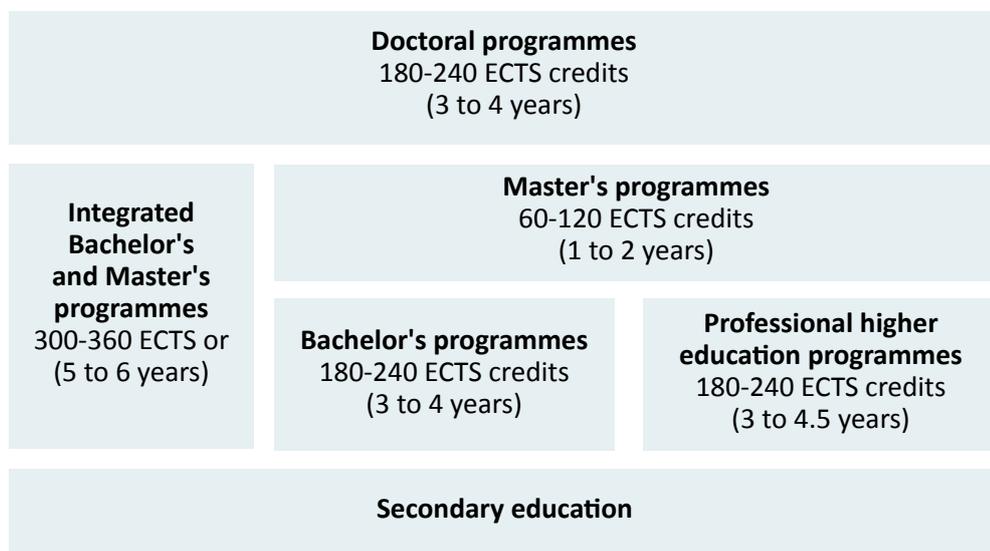
## HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS

As a result of a major higher education reform and the restructuring of study programmes, the present system of higher education qualifications (degrees and diplomas) was introduced in the 2001/2002 academic year.

Student workload is measured in credits. As of academic year 2009/2010, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) has officially been in use. One ECTS credit corresponds to 26 hours of work by a student. The workload of one academic year is 1560 hours, which corresponds to 60 ECTS credits.

The Estonian higher education system now comprises three main cycles.

Estonian higher education system

| Doctoral programmes 180-240 ECTS credits (3 to 4 years) | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Integrated Bachelor's and Master's programmes** 300-360 ECTS or (5 to 6 years) | **Master's programmes** 60-120 ECTS credits (1 to 2 years) | |
| | **Bachelor's programmes** 180-240 ECTS credits (3 to 4 years) | **Professional higher education programmes** 180-240 ECTS credits (3 to 4.5 years) |
| Secondary education | | |

### Degree of Bakalaureus

The first cycle qualification obtained is the degree of Bakalaureus (Bachelor). The nominal length of studies is predominantly 3 years and the workload is 180 ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) credits. In exceptional cases, the nominal length of studies extends to 4 years (240 ECTS credits). The thesis or the final examination should form no less than 5 ECTS credits of the total workload for the study programme. The purpose of these studies is to increase the students' level of general education, so that they will be able to acquire basic knowledge and skills within their field of study, to obtain the competencies necessary for a Master's programme. The degree awarded at the Bachelor's level should also be relevant to the labour market at an appropriate level of qualification. All first cycle degrees should give access to second cycle studies.

### Diploma of professional higher education (Rakenduskõrghariduse diplom )

First cycle programmes are also provided in the professional higher education branch. Such programmes are provided by professional higher education institutions (rakenduskõrgkool) and universities. The purpose of these programmes is to acquire the competence necessary for working in the relevant profession or for continuing studies at Master's level. The nominal length of studies is 3 to 4.5 years (180-270 ECTS credits). The thesis or the final examination should constitute no less than 5 ECTS credits. Students who have completed a professional higher education programme are awarded a Rakenduskõrghariduse diplom (Diploma of professional higher education) certifying the completion of the corresponding study programme. The diploma of professional higher education is a first cycle, Bachelor's level degree and corresponds to a degree of Bakalaureus awarded by universities. The graduates have the right to continue studies towards a degree of Magister (a Master's level qualification).

### Degree of Magister

The second cycle degree in the Estonian higher education system is Magister (Master). Master's programme is devoted to in-depth preparation in the chosen field of study and includes a narrow specialisation. It also prepares the students for independent work after graduation. The main purpose of such study programmes is to educate a specialist of profound professional knowledge. The access requirement for Master's studies is a degree of Bakalaureus, a diploma of professional higher education or a corresponding foreign qualification. The nominal length of studies is 1 to 2 years (60-120 ECTS credits), but together with a first cycle programme no less than 5 years (300 ECTS credits). The thesis or the final examination should form no less than 15 ECTS credits of the total credit requirement for the study programme. Master's programmes are provided by universities and since 2004, also by professional higher education institutions.

### Qualification of integrated long-cycle programmes

In addition to the two-cycle general structure, the study programmes in the field of medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, veterinary medicine, architecture, civil engineering, and class-teacher training are one long study cycle . The nominal length of programmes in medicine, and beginning in the 2002/2003 academic year, also in veterinary medicine, is 6 years (360 ECTS credits); in other fields mentioned above it is 5 years (300 ECTS credits). Such single long-cycle studies, called integrated Bachelor-Master studies, are based on an integrated programme that contains both basic studies and profound specialisation.

### Doctoral degree

Doctoral programmes represent the third cycle of higher education with the purpose of acquiring knowledge and skills necessary for independent research, development or professional creative work. The access requirement for doctoral studies is a degree of Magister or a corresponding qualification. The nominal length of doctoral studies is 3 to 4 years (180-240 ECTS credits). Doktor is a research degree obtained after the completion and public defence of a dissertation – independent research or creative work. Estonian universities award the following doctoral degree: Filosoofiadoktor – Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), with an indication of the field of study or the area of specialisation.

## ESTONIAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

An eight-level EstQF was established in 2008, with the Occupational Qualifications Act. The descriptions of the qualification levels are identical with the EQF desriptions.
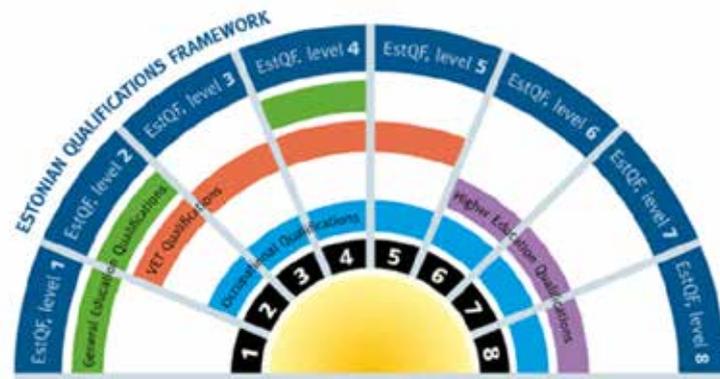


## HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

The requirement for access to higher education is secondary education, certified by *Gümnaasiumi lõputunnistus* (Upper Secondary School Leaving Certificate), *Lõputunnistus kutsekeskhariduse omandamise kohta* (Certificate of Vocational Secondary Education) the corresponding qualifications of earlier education systems, and foreign qualifications giving access to higher education. The *Gümnaasiumi lõputunnistus* is issued after 12 years of schooling (9 years of basic education and 3 years of general upper secondary education). In order to complete general upper secondary education it is necessary to take national examinations certified with the national examination certificate.

A higher education institution may introduce further admission requirements, such as entrance examinations, minimum scores of national examinations, interviews, etc.

## RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS

As of 1 January 2012, higher education programmes may be provided only if the quality of the respective study programme group has been assessed and the Government of the Republic has granted a license to provide instruction in the respective group. Annex 3 to Regulation no. 178 of the Government of the Republic of 18 December 2008 "Standard of Higher Education" sets out the study programme groups and cycles of higher education where HEIs have the right to provide instruction. The right to provide instruction involves the right to issue national diplomas.

## HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

There are two types of higher education institutions in Estonia: universities and professional higher education institutions.
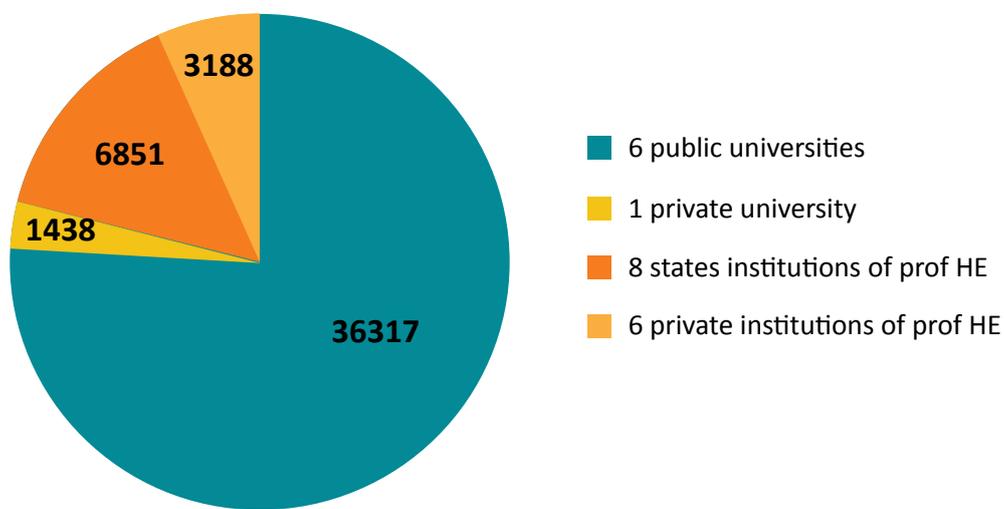
A university is an educational, creative, research and development institution where instruction corresponding to the Standard of Higher Education is provided at the three levels of higher education. Universities provide

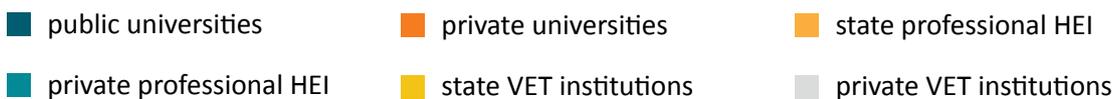Bachelor's, Master's, and doctoral programmes, but may also offer professional higher education programmes.

Professional higher education institutions offer professional higher education. A professional higher education institution may also provide Master's programmes. The function of an institution of professional higher education is to promote lifelong learning responding to the needs of the labour market, to provide services covering study and development activities, to conduct applied research. In pursuing their mission, institutions of professional higher education cooperate with various institutions and communicate actively with the public, supporting society's development by conducting effective development and innovation activities and applied research in their field.

As to the form of ownership, educational institutions may be state, public, or private.

## Types of HEI-s and student numbers 2017



Legend:
- 6 public universities
- 1 private university
- 8 states institutions of prof HE
- 6 private institutions of prof HE

Values shown: 3188, 6851, 1438, 36317

## Higher Education Institutions in Estonia 1994-2017

Legend:
- public universities
- private universities
- state professional HEI
- private professional HEI
- state VET institutions
- private VET institutions

Until 2012, there has been a dual track tuition system in Estonia. The students who score above a certain cut off point on the entrance examinations were admitted to state-funded student places at public higher education institutions. In general the Ministry of Education and Research set the number of state-funded student places at higher education institutions according to predicted needs in the labour market. Those students who were admitted beyond this quota had to pay tuition. In 2010/2011 only about 50% of study places were state-commissioned.

Private university-type higher education institutions were (and are) financed by their own means. Yet, the state may participate in financing certain study programmes if there is a public demand for the qualifications provided by this institution.

In 2011 the Estonian Government initiated significant reforms in the financing of higher education. The main changes were related to the state-funded student places, and to the financing of higher education institutions from the state budget in general. The aim was to increase the fairness of the higher education system and the efficiency of studies, reduce the inequities among the various fields of higher education and increase the accountability of institutions of higher education to ensure the quality of education.

All students who have fully satisfied the requirements of their curricula are able to study for free in Estonian language curricula as of the 2013/2014 academic year. In order to retain their free student places, the students will have to meet the requirements of their curricula in full each semester (60 credits per year). If a student is unable or unwilling to meet the requirements of the curriculum in full, the institution of higher education will have the option of demanding compensation for the study costs by the student up to the maximum limit established by the Government of the Republic (€ 50 per 1 ECTS).

For various reasons, students are usually unable to meet the requirements of their curricula in full while studying abroad; and in order to promote mobility, the law provides exceptions in regard to the study period spent abroad.

Public universities and state professional institutions of higher education receive performance support from the state budget for providing higher education. Institutions of higher education who receive state funding will make decisions regarding the number of student places created for each field based on their profile and function. Should the state have a specific shortage of graduates in a certain field, it can establish its needs through performance contracts. Private institutions may also apply for state support, but if the state grants their requests, they will lose the right to charge their students full tuition fees.

Since 2017, Universities Act was changed to increase stability in financing of HEI-s:

- Operational support is dividend in two – baseline funding (at least 80%) and performance funding (up to 20%)

- Performance funding is based on fulfilling performance indicators and fulfilling the performance contract signed with the MER

- It is possible to give target funding to support important services provided by HEI-s (like libraries, collections etc.)

At least 80% will be baseline funding based on the last 3 years average operational support to the institution.

In performance funding all public HEI-s (public universities and state professional HEI-s) will be competing with each other.

- Institutions with better results will get proportionally more performance funding.

- The proportions between HEI-s established by the distribution of baseline funding are taken into account when transferring the results of performance indicators into performance funding.

Performance indicators:

- Share of students graduating within nominal time, 35%

- Share of students participating in short time mobility, 10%

- Share of enrolled foreign students, 10%

- Share of graduates in employment or in further studies, 20%

- Share of students enrolled in HEI's responsibility areas, 10%

- Share of private funding in study activities compared to the public funding, 10%

## FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

National study loan

Only 10% of students are taking (1920 euro per year), financial cost is rather high (5%)
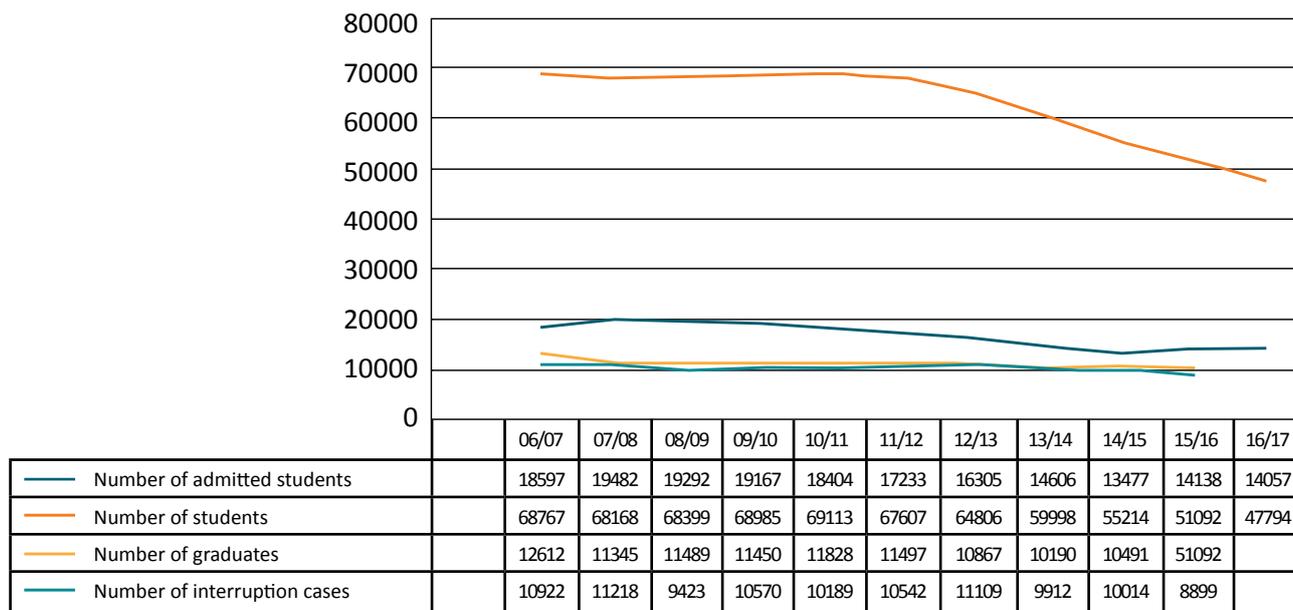
Study support

a) Need based (paid according to the family income) 75-220 eur/month

b) Special support

c) Study support in doctoral studies (422 eur/month)

Scholarships

a) Nationally important curricula (160-300 eur/month)

b) For good study results (100 eur/month)

c) Scholarship for doctoral studies in fields of Smart Specialisation

(422 eur/month)

SEN student scholarship (60-510 eur/month)

Dynamics in student numbers in Estonia 2006–2017



| | 06/07 | 07/08 | 08/09 | 09/10 | 10/11 | 11/12 | 12/13 | 13/14 | 14/15 | 15/16 | 16/17 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of admitted students | 18597 | 19482 | 19292 | 19167 | 18404 | 17233 | 16305 | 14606 | 13477 | 14138 | 14057 |
| Number of students | 68767 | 68168 | 68399 | 68985 | 69113 | 67607 | 64806 | 59998 | 55214 | 51092 | 47794 |
| Number of graduates | 12612 | 11345 | 11489 | 11450 | 11828 | 11497 | 10867 | 10190 | 10491 | 51092 | |
| Number of interruption cases | 10922 | 11218 | 9423 | 10570 | 10189 | 10542 | 11109 | 9912 | 10014 | 8899 | |

## FUNDING OF R&D

The main principles of R&D in Estonia are defined in the Organisation of Research and Development Act. The purpose of the Organisation of Research and Development Act is to provide the grounds for the organisation of research and development and to ensure legal means for the preservation and further development of scientific and technological creation as a component of Estonian culture and the Estonian economy.

The main instruments of financing Estonian R&D activities:

1. Baseline funding for R&D institutions;

2. Research grants;

3. National R&D programmes;

4. Financing of centres of excellence and doctoral schools;

5. Covering the expenses of R&D.

Baseline funding involves the financing of R&D institutions with the aim of realizing strategic development goals, co-financing foreign and domestic projects and opening up new research directions. It is provided from the state budget.

Research grants are applied for in a public competition on the conditions and in accordance with the procedure established by the Estonian Research Council. The Council awards research grants to individual researchers and research groups.

Research and development programmes are launched and funds allocated by the ministry responsible for the implementation of the programme. Estonia is currently running two national R&D programmes:

• Estonian Language Technology (2011-2017);

• Estonian Language and Cultural Memory (2014–2018).

Through Enterprise Estonia and its sub-units, the Ministry of Economic Affairs finances R&D programmes that involve product development, co-operation with enterprises and entrepreneurs, and technology programmes in priority areas. Enterprise Estonia provides support for new companies as well as assistance to R&D activities of already active companies, NGOs and R&D institutions.

Infrastructure expenses of a state R&D institution, which are not covered from other funding instruments, shall be covered from the state budget through the budget of the ministry under whose area of government the research and development institution belongs. The Ministry of Education and Research together with the Estonian Academy of Sciences have launched a process of compiling the Estonian roadmap for research infrastructures. The roadmap is a long-term (10-20 years perspective) planning instrument, which lists research infrastructure units of national importance that are either new or in need of modernizing.

Researcher mobility support enables both Estonian and foreign researchers to carry out research in a new research environment to exchange experience, expand their co-operation networks and obtain new skills. The aim of postdoctoral grant is to support researchers with PhD degree or those with equivalent research qualifications to continue their independent research careers in strong collaborative research groups for up to three years.

## STRATEGIES

Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020

Strategy "Knowledge-based Estonia 2014-2020"

Implementation Plan 2016-2019 for achieving the objectives of the Estonian Research and Development and Innovation Strategy 2014-2020

## DATABASES

The visual educational statistics database HaridusSilm provides statistical data about education, research and development, language policy and youth field in Estonia.

The Estonian Research Information System (ETIS) concentrates information on research- and development institutions, researchers, research projects and various research results. ERIS is also an information channel for submitting and processing grant applications and for submitting and confirming project reports.

ERIS is an information channel and a tool for researchers as well as R&D institutions. Researchers can use the Information System as a place where they can submit applications for grant competitions, read news and chat in the forum about research. R&D institutions can submit through the Estonian Research Information System applications and introduce their research results more widely. Research funding organisations use ERIS for evaluating and processing applications and giving feedback.

# APPENDIX 2: LIST OF ANNUAL AND PERIODIC ANALYSES

## 2017

- Marge Kroonmäe, Hillar Bauman (2017). *Integrated Assessment of Higher Education and VET Programmes – Mission Possible! Estonian Experience in Breaking Barriers Between Higher and Vocational Education Assessments.* Paper and presentation at the INQAAHE conference, Bahrain

- Beerkens, Maarja; Udam, Maiki (2017). *Stakeholders in Higher Education Quality Assurance: Richness in Diversity?* Higher Education Policy, 1–19, 10.1057/s41307-016-0032-6.

## 2016

- Kroonmäe, Marge; Lauri, Liia; Puik, Margit (2016). *On accreditation of SPGs in VET*. pp. 32-35 (EE)

- Lauri, Liia; Bauman, Hillar (2016). *The Main Strengths and Development Needs in Estonian Higher Education Against the Backdrop of Outcomes of Quality Assessment of SPGs*. pp. 42-46 (EE)

    Both articles published in: Ministry of Education and Research (2016) An Overview of External Assessments of the Estonian Education System 2015-2016 (EE)

- Seema, Riin; Udam, Maiki; Mattisen, Heli; Lauri, Liia (2016). *The Perceived Impact of External Assessment: the System, Organisation and Individual Levels—the Estonian Case*. Higher Education: The International Journal of Higher Education Research.

- Seema, Riin; Udam, Maiki; Mattisen, Heli (2016). *Attitudes of Academic Staff Towards Their Own Work and Towards External Evaluation, From the Perspective of Self-Determination Theory: the Estonian Case*. Quality in Higher Education, pp. 117–126.

- Lauri, Liia; Heidmets, Mati; Virkus, Sirje (2016). *The Information Culture of Higher Education Institutions: the Estonian Case.* Information Research, 21(3), paper 722.

## 2015

- Kroonmäe, Marge; Mattisen, Heli; Seema, Riin (2015). *An Overview of Accreditation of VET SPG in 2014 on the Basis of Reports by Assessment Committees*. pp. 33-36 (EE)

- Seema, Riin; Udam, Maiki; Mattisen, Heli; Lauri, Liia (2015). *The Impact of External Assessments As Perceived by Staff Members of Estonian Higher Education Institutions*. pp. 37-39(EE)

    Both articles published in: Ministry of Education and Research (2015) An Overview of External Assessments of the Estonian Education System 2014-2015 (EE)

- Lauri, Liia (2015). *The Main Strengths and Development Needs in Estonian Higher Education Against the Backdrop of Outcomes of Quality Assessment of SPGs* (EE)

- Udam, Maiki; Seema, Riin; Mattisen, Heli (2015). *Estonian Higher Education in the Light of Institutional Accreditation.* Summary

- Seema, Riin; Kroonmäe, Marge; Mattisen, Heli (2015). *A Summary of Accreditations of Curriculum Groups of Vocational Training in 2014 Based on Reports by Assessment Committees.*

- Mandel, Karine (2015). *Quality Issues With VET SPGs and Their Improvement Measures on the Basis of the Pilot Cycle in 2011 and the Reports on the Accreditation Process From 2014.* (EE)

- Mattisen, Heli (2015). *Who is Able to Attract Tourists to Estonia.* Äripäev (EE)

- Mattisen, Heli (2015). *Is Interrupting Studies a (Perceived) Inevitability*. Õpetajate Leht (EE)

## 2014

- Kroonmäe, Marge (2014). *An Overview of Accreditation of SPGs in VET.* pp. 46-49 (EE)

- Mattisen, Heli; Seema, Riin; Udam, Maiki (2014). *An Interim Summary of Institutional Accreditation.* pp. 49-52 (EE)

  Both articles in: Ministry of Education and Research (2014) An Overview of External Assessments of the Estonian Education System 2013-2014 (EE)

- Udam, Maiki; Seema, Riin; Mattisen, Heli (2014). *Estonian Higher Education Against the Backdrop of Outcomes of Institutional Accreditation or in Other Words What the Leaders Should Know* (EE)

- Seema, Riin; Udam, Maiki; Mattisen, Heli; Lauri, Liia (2014). *The perceived impact of external assessment: the organisation vs the individual. Summary of the study.*

## 2013

- Kroonmäe, Marge (2013). *On Accreditation of SPGs in VET.* pp. 30-33 (EE)

- Lauri, Liia (2013). *External Assessment in Higher Education*. pp. 33-36 (EE)

  Both articles published in: Ministry of Education and Research (2013) An Overview of External Assessments of the Estonian Education System 2012-2013 (EE)

- Bach, T; Dragojevic, D; Findlay, P; Hering, S; Lauri, L; Lynch, O; Olcen, Z; Udam, M (2014). *Transparency of European Higher Education through public Quality Assurance Reports. Final report of the project.*

- Tüür, Liia; Mattisen, Heli (2013). *From Study Programme Accreditation to Study Programme Group Assessment*. Paper and presentation in the INQAAHE conference, Taipei

- Udam, Maiki (2013). *Meeting state, market and academic concerns: Challenge for external quality assurance of higher education institutions. The Estonian Case.* Tallinna Ülikool. Sotsiaalteaduste dissertatsioonid, 70. Tallinn: TLÜ kirjastus 2013. 153 p. ISSN 1736-3632 ISBN 978-9949-29-110-6

- Udam, Maiki; Heidmets, Mati (2013). *Conflicting Views on Quality: interpretations of 'a Good University' by Representatives of the State, the Market and Academia*. Quality in Higher Education

- Udam, Maiki; Lauri, Liia; Bach, Tiia (2013). *Results of the survey on the use and usefulness of external quality assurance reports for different stakeholders*. Transparency of European higher education through public quality assurance reports (527137-LLP-1-2012-1-BE-ERASMUS-EMGR).

## 2012

  Mattisen, Heli; Bauman, Hillar (2012). Transitional Assessment: A Special Case of External Assessment of Higher Education in Estonia 2009-2011