

Guidelines for Thematic Review

Approved by EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education on 27.04.2020. Amended on 31.03.2022.

Amended by the Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education of the Estonian Quality Agency for Education on 14.06.2022.

I. General provisions

1. According to subsections 39 (1-3) of the Higher Education Act, the Estonian Quality Agency for Education (hereinafter *HAKA*) shall publish the guidelines for thematic review.
2. Thematic review is part of the higher education external assessment system, aimed at providing input to the Ministry of Education and Research (hereinafter *Ministry*) for preparing higher education policy decisions and measures or assessing impact and implementation thereof as well as at providing feedback for higher education institutions. Thematic reviews allow for taking stock of the state of higher education, sharing best practices and getting independent feedback and recommendations from experts.
3. A thematic review is conducted either in all or selected higher education institutions, depending on the theme.
4. According to the Higher Education Act, the themes, timetable and participating institutions are approved by the Minister for Education and Research (hereinafter *Minister*).
5. Thematic reviews are conducted no more than once per year.
6. Main stakeholders for thematic reviews are higher education institutions, students, employers, and the Ministry.

II. Review process

7. HAKA submits a proposal to the Ministry along with Draft Terms of Reference for launching a Thematic Review, taking into consideration outcomes of previous quality assessments, suggestions from higher education institutions, future trends and strategic goals in education.
8. Representatives of HAKA and the Ministry shall discuss the Draft Terms of Reference - the focus of the selected theme, the review sample, preliminary schedule and principles that constitute the basis for the Minister's directive.
9. HAKA along with involved experts processes the relevant know-how and available data and devises a draft review plan, which includes detailed schedule and description of methodology. HAKA chooses the methodology based on the principles of fostering cooperation between higher

education institutions and aims to not increase the administrative burden for institutions considerably.

10. HAKA shall form a steering committee for the thematic review, tasked with coordinating a detailed plan and methodology for the review. Members of the steering committee include representatives of main stakeholders mentioned in point 6. If and when necessary, other stakeholders shall be included on the basis of relevance to the review theme.
11. HAKA along with involved experts conducts the review and drafts a report. If necessary, HAKA shall also involve experts from abroad.
12. HAKA shall send the first draft of the report for comments to higher education institutions that participated in the review as well as other main stakeholders and if necessary, makes changes to the report on the basis of this round of comments. Then HAKA shall relay the draft of the report to the steering committee for approval. Upon approval of the report by the Director of HAKA, HAKA shall send the report to the Ministry and publish it on its website.
13. After the publication of the report, HAKA shall conduct thematic discussions in a suitable format that is tailored to the theme and review sample size.
14. HAKA with the involvement of the steering committee plans follow-up activities aiming at keeping track of developments on the topic and inviting stakeholders to reconvene after a period to discuss the situation and further developments.
15. If a person concerned has a doubt that HAKA has not followed the rules described in these Guidelines when organising and conducting an assessment, or has objections on the substance of the report, he or she may file an appropriate request for clarification or memorandum with the Director of HAKA, who shall provide a reasoned written response within 30 days of the date of registration of the request. If the response does not satisfy the person concerned, they can file a challenge, which HAKA shall forward to the Higher Education Quality Assessment Council Appeals Committee. The Appeals Committee shall, within five days after receipt of the challenge, provide an unbiased opinion to the Director of HAKA. The Director of HAKA shall formulate a reasoned response to the challenge within 30 days, taking into consideration the reasoned opinion by the Appeals Committee.

