

# Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation

*Approved by the Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education on 02.02.2018.*

*Amended on 19.05.2020; 30.06.2021; 7.01.2022.*

*Amended by the Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education of the Estonian Quality Agency for Education on 14.06.2022; 1.02.2023.*

## **I. General provisions**

1. On the basis of § 37 and § 38 of Higher Education Act and considering the Standard of Higher Education of the Republic of Estonia, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, and other legislation and normative documents, the Estonian Quality Agency for Education (hereinafter referred to as 'HAKA') shall establish and disclose the Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation.
2. Institutional accreditation is an external evaluation in the course of which HAKA shall assess compliance of the management, administration, teaching and research activities, as well as the environments of education and research at a higher education institution (HEI), with legislation and with the objectives and development plan of that HEI. The purpose of institutional accreditation is to support the development of strategic management and quality culture that values learning-centeredness, creativity, and innovation in the HEIs, as well as to increase the societal impact of education, research and development delivered by the HEIs.
3. Higher education institutions have an obligation to undergo institutional accreditation at least once in seven years. The HEI may apply to undergo the institutional accreditation process in less than seven years, but no more frequently than every five years.
4. In professional higher education institutions, HAKA will, if possible, combine institutional accreditation with quality assessment of vocational education and training.

## **II. Standards and guidelines for institutional accreditation**

5. These standards and guidelines for institutional accreditation were defined while taking into account the legislation of the Republic of Estonia regulating higher education, national strategies, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and other international agreements.

6. HAKA shall assess the higher education institution according to twelve standards. Assessment focuses on the core processes of the HEI – learning and teaching, research, development, and creative activities (RDC), and service to society – as well as on strategic management of the organisation and resource management. The learning and teaching process is examined under five standards (study programme, teaching staff<sup>1</sup>, learning and teaching, student assessment and learning support processes). Throughout the assessment process, there is a focus on academic ethics, quality culture and internationalisation (see Figure 1, Standards for Institutional Accreditation).
7. To assess the application of principles and regulations established at the institutional level in the learning and teaching process, as well as the performance of an internal evaluation system for study programmes offered at the higher education institution, HAKA shall also assess study programmes on a sampling basis during the accreditation review. When defining a sampling, HAKA will take into account the number of study programmes at the HEI, the results of prior assessments of study programme groups and a justified proposal by the HEI. The sampling may comprise one to ten study programmes, depending on the number of study programme groups and programmes at the HEI.
8. Standards and guidelines for institutional accreditation:

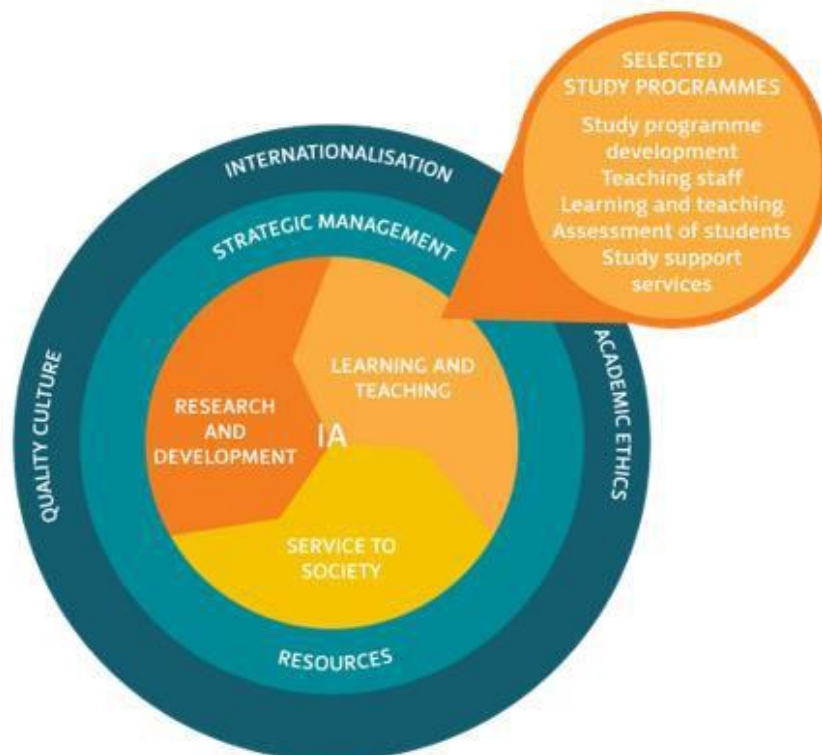


Figure 1. Standards for institutional accreditation

<sup>1</sup> The term ‘teaching staff’ is used in these Guidelines to refer to academic employees (including researchers and visiting lecturers) who conduct teaching (including supervising theses).



## 8.1. Strategic Management

### **Standard:**

**Development planning at the higher education institution is purposeful and systematic, involving various stakeholders. The higher education institution regularly evaluates the achievement of its stated objectives and the impact of its activities.**

### **Guidelines:**

The HEI has formulated the objectives and key results for its core activities – learning and teaching; research, development and creative activities, and service to society – taking into account national priorities and the needs of society, focusing on its strengths and reducing unnecessary duplication both within the HEI and throughout higher education in Estonia.

The HEI is managed in accordance with its mission, vision, and core values, as well as objectives set out based on those principles. Responsibility for implementation of the goals and action plans of the development plan are clearly specified. Achievement of the objectives and effects of the activities are evaluated regularly.

Sustainable development, creativity and innovation are supported and given value in both core and support activities. The HEI is mindful of the opportunities provided by digital technologies in planning for development activities.

Membership of the HEI (including students), as well as external stakeholders, is involved in developing and implementing the HEI's development plan and action plans. The HEI members share the core values that serve as a basis for the institution's development plan.

### **Indicators:**

- The rate of achieving the objectives set in the development/action plan (key results)
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

## 8.2. Resources

### **Standard:**

**The higher education institution develops its staff and manages its physical and financial resources in a purposeful, systematic, and sustainable manner. Internal and external communications of the higher education institution (including marketing and image-building) are targeted and managed.**

### **Guidelines:**

The HEI has an efficient staff development system in terms of both academic and support staff. The principles and procedures for employee recruitment and development are based on the objectives of the HEI's development plan and are fair and transparent. The principles for employees' remuneration and motivation are defined, available to all employees, and followed.

Allocation of the HEI's financial resources is based on the objectives of its development plan. The management and development of its infrastructure (buildings, laboratories, classrooms, digital infrastructure, etc.) are fit-for-purpose and economically sound. The infrastructure is regularly analysed



(including the network, digital equipment, software and services, IT systems, user support, digital security etc.), taking into consideration among others the needs of students, teaching staff and other members of the HEI personnel.

There are sufficient funds available for the updating of the infrastructure for learning, teaching and research; and/or a strategy exists for their acquisition.

The HEI has defined information protection rules (including on data protection and the protection of user privacy) and these are implemented. The development and security of the online learning and teaching environment are ensured. The online learning and teaching environment allows to identify the authorship of student work.

The HEI has a functioning system for internal and external communications, relevant to the target audiences. The information made public about HEI's activities (including study programmes) and the findings of external evaluations is correct, up to date, easily accessible and understandable. The HEI has a system to popularise its core activities and academic career opportunities. The HEI members are informed of the decisions relevant to them in a timely manner.

Employee satisfaction with management, working conditions, information flow, etc., at the HEI is surveyed regularly and the survey results are used in quality improvement activities.

***Indicators:***

- Distribution of revenues and costs
- The results of the staff satisfaction survey
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

### **8.3. Quality Culture**

***Standard:***

**The higher education institution has defined the quality of its core and support processes, and the principles of quality assurance. In the higher education institution, internal evaluation supports strategic management and is conducted regularly at different levels (institution, units, study programmes). The findings of internal and external evaluations are analysed, and quality improvement activities implemented.**

***Guidelines:***

Members of the HEI have agreed upon definitions for the quality of their core and support processes and are guided by them in their daily work. The HEI has established its policies and procedures for internal quality assurance (internal evaluation). The regular internal quality assurance both at the institutional and study programme level takes into account, inter alia, the standards set out in these Guidelines. All members of the HEI, including students and external stakeholders, participate in internal evaluations.

Internal evaluation of study programmes results in feedback from experts within the HEI and/or from outside it. Regular reviews and enhancements of study programmes ensure their relevance, including their compliance with international trends. In the course of internal evaluations, peer learning,



comparisons with other HEIs regarding their results and means for achievement, as well as a sharing of best practices take place, among other things.

Internal evaluation is based on the following key questions in quality management: What do you want to achieve, and why? How do you want to do it? How do you know that the activities are effective and will have the desired impact? Is there an equilibrium between the desired outcomes and the resources used for their achievement (including technological solutions)? How do you manage the quality improvement activities?

**Indicators:**

- Improvement activities implemented based on the analyses of internal evaluations in the HEI's core and support processes (examples from different areas)
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

#### **8.4. Academic Ethics**

**Standard:**

**The higher education institution has defined its principles for academic ethics, has a system for disseminating them among its members, and has a code of conduct including guidelines for any cases of non-compliance with these principles. The higher education institution has a functioning system for handling complaints.**

**Guidelines:**

The HEI values its members and ensures that all its employees and students are treated according to the principle of equal treatment.

Employees and students of the HEI are guided by the agreed principles of academic ethics in all their activities.

The HEI respects fundamental values and policies of research set out in the document, 'Research Integrity', issued jointly by Estonian research institutions, the Estonian Academy of Sciences, the Estonian Research Council and the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research.

The HEI supports its students and teaching staff in their understanding and responding to ethical issues. Teaching staff and students do not tolerate academic fraud, including cheating and plagiarism, and they will act immediately upon any such occurrence. Attention is paid to the application of principles of academic ethics in the digital environment: avoidance of creative theft, the protection of intellectual property rights etc.

Management of complaints from HEI members (including discrimination cases) is transparent and objective, ensuring fair treatment of all parties.

**Indicators:**

- The percentage of student papers checked by plagiarism detection systems and the percentage of detected plagiarisms



- Other indicators depending on the HEI, for example statistics about complaints (total number, the proportion of decisions taken in favour of the applicant)

## 8.5. Internationalisation

### **Standard:**

**The higher education institution has set objectives for internationalisation and assesses the attainment of these objectives regularly. The higher education institution has created an environment that encourages international mobility of students and teaching staff, supporting the development of learning, teaching and RDC activities, as well as the cultural openness of its members and Estonian society in general.**

### **Guidelines:**

The HEI creates opportunities for international student exchanges by offering study programmes and/or modules taught in English. The learning environment at the HEI supports internationalisation and cultural openness.

Recognition of qualifications and recognition of prior learning and work experiences for student admission and programme completion are in accordance with the quality requirements set by the HEI, are systemic and consistent with the expected learning outcomes and support international student mobility. The organisation of studies at the HEI facilitates student participation in international (including virtual) mobility (e.g., study programmes enable mobility windows). The HEI has agreements with foreign higher education institutions and, through international exchange, sends its students abroad to study and undertake internship, providing comprehensive support for this. Members of the teaching staff encourage students to participate in international mobility.

International lecturers participate in the process of teaching, including supervision of doctoral theses.

The HEI supports and recognises the participation of its teaching staff in international teaching, research, or creative projects, as well as their teaching, research or creative work and personal development which are performed at HEIs abroad.

### **Indicators:**

- Teaching staff mobility (in-out)
- Student mobility (in-out)
- Other indicators depending on the HEI, for example:
  - Number of English-taught study programmes by main units and levels of study
  - Percentage of foreign students (by study programmes, levels of study, in total in the HEI)
  - Percentage of study programmes that include English-taught subjects (of at least 15 ECTS)
  - Number of ECTS acquired through external mobility



## 8.6. Teaching Staff

### **Standard:**

**Teaching is conducted by a sufficient number of professionally competent members of the teaching staff who support the development of learners and value their own continuous self-development.**

### **Guidelines:**

Distribution of teaching staff by age and the percentage of young members of the teaching staff ensure the sustainability of studies. The career model of academic staff motivates capable young people to start an academic career and creates opportunities for their advancement.

The HEI supports systematically the development of its teaching staff. Members of the teaching staff engage in development of their professional, teaching and digital competences, improve their supervision competence, and share best practices with one another.

IT and educational technological support (including trainings) are available to teaching staff.

Teaching staff's participation in research, development and/or creative activities supports the teaching process and ensures competence for the supervision of students' theses (including doctoral theses).

Members of the teaching staff collaborate in fields of teaching, research and/or creative work within the HEI and with partners outside the HEI, e.g., with field practitioners, public sector organisations, companies, other research and development institutions, and lecturers from other Estonian or foreign higher education institutions. Qualified visiting lecturers and practitioners participate in the teaching process.

When assessing the work of teaching staff (including their periodical evaluations), the effectiveness of their teaching as well as their research, development and creative work is taken into account, including student feedback, the effectiveness of their student supervision, development of their teaching; supervisory and digital competences, their international mobility, and their entrepreneurial experience or other work experience in their fields of speciality outside the HEI.

### **Indicators:**

- Competition for elected academic positions
- Number of students per teaching staff member in full-time equivalent (FTE)
- Percentage of teaching staff holding a PhD degree
- The results of the students' feedback about the teaching staff
- Teaching staff participating in continuing training or other forms of teaching and digital competences and professional development
- Other indicators depending on the HEI



## 8.7. Study Programme

### **Standard:**

Study programmes are designed and developed while taking into account the expectations of stakeholders, higher education and professional standards, and trends in the relevant fields. The objectives of study programmes, modules and courses and their planned learning outcomes are specific and coherent. The study programmes support creativity, entrepreneurship, and development of other general competencies.

### **Guidelines:**

In planning and developing study programmes (incl. programmes conducted in a foreign language), the HEI is guided by its objectives, its competence areas and the needs of the labour market and takes into account national strategies and the expectations of society. The study programmes are based on up-to-date sectoral know-how and research.

The planned learning outcomes are in accord with the requirements for the corresponding level of the Estonian Qualifications Framework, and in planning them the HEI has taken into account the future needs, among other things. In developing study programmes, the HEI has conducted a comparative analysis of similar programmes in leading foreign higher education institutions.

The objectives of the study programme and its modules, the planned learning outcomes, theoretical and practical learning, the proportion of independent work and internship, and the assessment of the achieved learning outcomes form a coherent whole.

The development of general competences (incl. creativity and entrepreneurship) and speciality-related digital competences as well as support for the development of a self-directed learner is a natural part of the study programme, and these are integrated with speciality studies.

Expected student workloads defined in the study programmes are realistic and consistent with the calculation that, on average, 1 ECTS credit equals 26 student learning hours. The study programme offers sufficient challenge for learners with different levels of knowledge and skills.

### **Indicators:**

- Number of students per study programme
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

## 8.8. Learning and Teaching

### **Standard:**

Admission requirements and procedure ensure fair access to higher education and the formation of a motivated student body. The higher education institution systemically implements a student-centred approach that guides students to take responsibility for their studies and career planning and supports creativity and innovation. Graduates of the higher education institution, with their professional knowledge and social skills, are competitive both nationally and internationally.

### **Guidelines:**





Admission requirements and procedure are fair and impartial. In the admission process, student's ability for academic progress on the chosen programme is assessed.

The academic recognition of foreign qualifications is based on international conventions, agreements between countries, and the Estonian legislation.

Learning and teaching process takes into account students' individual abilities and needs and supports their development. Learning offers sufficient challenge for students at different levels. Students participate in planning and implementation of the learning process. Organisation of independent work and face-to-face teaching motivates students to take responsibility for their studies.

Teaching methods and learning aids used in the learning and teaching process are modern, appropriate and effective and support the development of digital culture, contributing – among other things – towards the development of a self-directed learner, creativity, innovation and the development of digital and other general competencies. The HEI has a Code of Good Learning and Teaching (including online) and it is applied in practice.

The internship is integrated with speciality studies, the requirements for the internship are defined and the student's supervision ensured.

Students are motivated to learn and contribute to improving the quality of their studies by providing meaningful feedback on both the learning and teaching process and the organisation of studies.

Doctoral students plan their studies, as well as their research and development activities, in collaboration with their supervisor(s), setting specific objectives for each year and assuming responsibility for achieving those objectives.

***Indicators:***

- Student satisfaction with the content and organisation of studies
- Alumni satisfaction with the quality of studies
- Employer satisfaction with the preparation of the graduates
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

## **8.9. Student Assessment**

***Standard:***

**Assessments of students, including recognition of their prior learning and work experiences, support the process of learning and are consistent with expected learning outcomes. The objectivity and reliability of student assessments are ensured.**

***Guidelines:***

The assessment criteria are understandable to students and students are informed about them in a timely manner. Members of the teaching staff cooperate in defining assessment criteria and apply similar approaches.



Assessment methods are versatile and relevant, assess the degree of achievement of learning outcomes (including general competencies), and support the development of a self-directed learner.

If possible, more than one staff member is involved in the development of assessment tasks and student assessments. Along with assessments, students receive feedback that supports their individual development.

The HEI develops the teachers' assessment competence and supports the solid application of digital technologies in assessment.

Evaluation of doctoral students is transparent and impartial. Its purpose is to support the development of doctoral students, to assess the effectiveness of their current work and to evaluate their ability to complete the doctoral studies on time and successfully defend their doctoral theses.

When recognising prior learning and work experience towards the completion of the study programme, results obtained through the studies and work experiences (the achieved learning outcomes) are assessed. Students are aware of their rights and obligations, including the procedures for challenges regarding assessments.

***Indicators:***

- The number of credit points applied for and awarded under the accreditation of prior and experiential learning scheme (APEL)
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

## **8.10. Learning Support Systems**

***Standard:***

**The higher education institution ensures that all students have access to academic, career and psychological counselling. Students' individual development and academic progress are monitored and supported.**

***Guidelines:***

The HEI assists the student in developing an individual study programme based on the student's special needs as well as educational abilities and preferences.

The HEI advises its students (including students with special needs and international students) on finding internship places as well as jobs. Students are aware of where to get support in the case of psychological problems.

The HEI has a functioning system to support and advise international students (including psychological and career counselling) which, inter alia, helps them integrate smoothly into the membership of the HEI and Estonian society. The HEI analyses the reasons students withdraw from studies or drop out and takes steps to increase the effectiveness of the studies.

To carry out studies and research, development and creative activities, the availability of up-to-date study and research literature, other study materials and tools (including those for independent work) and access to research databases is ensured. Study literature, materials and other teaching aids are of equally high quality.



To support study activities, timely and relevant information and communication technology solutions have been planned, including the study information system, document management, online learning environments, analytical tools for teaching and learning. Support for online learning and IT is available to students.

The HEI supports student participation in extra-curricular activities and civil society initiatives.

The HEI monitors student satisfaction with the counselling services, the online learning and IT support provided and makes changes as needed.

***Indicators:***

- The average duration of the study by levels of study
- Dropout/withdrawal rate (during the first year and the whole study period)
- Students` satisfaction with the support services
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

**8.11. Research, Development and/or Other Creative Activity (RDC)<sup>2</sup>**

***Standard:***

**The higher education institution has defined its objectives and focus in the fields of RDC based on its mission, as well as on the expectations and future needs of society, and assesses their implementation and the societal impact of its RDC activities. RDC supports the process of teaching and learning at the higher education institution. Support services for RDC are purposeful and support implementation of the objectives of the core process.**

***Guidelines:***

The HEI places a high value on the role and responsibilities of the field of RDC in society and evaluates the results of its RDC activities, their international visibility and societal impact.

The HEI responds flexibly to the current needs of society and the labour market in terms of its research and plans its research in collaboration with enterprises, public sector institutions and organisations of the third sector.

Members of teaching staff introduce students to their research results as well as the latest scientific achievements in their areas of specialisation and involve students in their R&D projects where possible.

The organisation and management of RDC take into account the profile and the mission of the HEI.

The HEI applies digital tools for the administration and re-use of research data.

***Indicators depend on the specificities of the HEI:***

- Numerical data: (1) scientific publications by classifiers; (2) public presentations of creative work; recognition from international competitions; reviews in professional publications, etc.; (3) patent



applications, patents; (4) textbooks, study aids of various formats, etc.; (5) system development solutions; product development solutions; environmental applications solutions; (6) contracts concluded with enterprises; (7) spin-off companies, etc., in line with the profile and priorities of the HEI; etc.

- Number of scientific publications / creative works per member of academic staff and per employee with the requirement to do research (FTE, by areas)
- Number and volume of externally funded projects of RDC activities
- Proportion of projects with a positive financing decision out of the submitted project applications
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

## 8.12. Service to Society

### ***Standard:***

**The higher education institution initiates and implements development activities, which enhance prosperity in the community and disseminate recent know-how in the areas of the institution's competence. The higher education institution, as a learning-oriented organisation, promotes lifelong learning in society and creates high-quality opportunities for that.**

### ***Guidelines:***

The HEI contributes to the development of the community's well-being by sharing its resources (library, museums, sports facilities, etc.), by providing consulting and advisory services, participating in the development of non-profit sector and charitable activities, and by organising concerts, exhibitions, shows, conferences, fairs and other events.

The HEI involves alumni in activities aimed at the development of the HEI and the knowledge society.

Employees of the HEI participate in the work of professional associations and in other community councils and decision-making bodies as experts, directing society's development processes as opinion leaders. The impact academic employees have on society is taken into account when evaluating their work.

The HEI has clearly defined the objectives for in-service training, measures their implementation and plans improvement activities. The HEI plans in-service training based on the present and future needs of the labour market target groups. Evidence-based learning supports the learning and self-development of adult learners.

The HEI takes advantage of digital means in order to provide trainings and services to the public at large.

### ***Indicators:***

- Number of people in continuing training and other privately financed open forms of study (by responsibility areas or structural units)
- Other indicators depending on the HEI



### III. Formation and tasks of assessment committee

9. An assessment committee (hereinafter referred as 'committee') shall consist of at least four members.
10. Committees shall be formed based on the following principles:
  - 10.1 a committee includes experts in the areas being assessed and those who have experience in managing an HEI or an academic unit;
  - 10.2 at least one member is chosen from outside of HEIs;
  - 10.3 a committee includes at least one expert from abroad;
  - 10.4 at least one member of a committee is a student or a person who has graduated from HEI no more than one year prior (at the time of approval of the committee);
  - 10.5 at least one member of a committee has management experience in an HEI, preferably with a similar profile as the one being assessed;
  - 10.6 at least one member of a committee has past experience in assessing a higher education institution.
11. The following requirements shall apply to members of a committee:
  - 11.1 members of a committee are independent, they do not represent the interests of the organisation they are associated with;
  - 11.2 members of a committee are unbiased in their assessments;
  - 11.3 members of a committee know the functioning of a higher education system and are aware about trends in higher education and the principles of external evaluation;
  - 11.4 members of a committee have the teamwork skills necessary to implement the work;
  - 11.5 members of a committee are proficient in both spoken and written English.
12. After coordinating the preliminary composition of a committee with the HAKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education (hereinafter referred to as 'the Council'), the HAKA Secretariat shall forward the relevant information to the HEI, who then has one week to present its opinion on the composition of the committee and, when justified, to ask for additional members or for the removal of a member. 13. The Director of HAKA shall approve the final composition of a committee by their order and appoint a chairperson, a secretary and an assessment coordinator for the committee.
14. An assessment coordinator (hereinafter referred to as 'coordinator') shall be an HAKA employee. The coordinator is not a member of a committee.
15. Members of a committee shall confirm by signature the absence of any conflicts of interest and an obligation to maintain the confidentiality of information that has become known to them in the course of the evaluation as well as the content of committee discussions. In the case of a conflict of interest, committee members shall immediately notify the Director of HAKA of it and remove themselves from the work of the committee. A conflict of interest shall be presumed to be present in the following cases:



- 15.1 A committee member has an employment or other contractual relationship with the HEI under evaluation at the time of evaluation, or he or she has had an employment relationship with that HEI within three years prior to the assessment visit.
  - 15.2 A committee member is participating in the work of a decision-making or advisory body of the HEI under evaluation at the time of evaluation and/or is associated with any governing body of the owner of the private HEI under evaluation.
  - 15.3 A committee member is studying at the higher education institution under evaluation or graduated from it less than three years prior.
  - 15.4 The membership connected with the HEI under evaluation includes a person closely related to a committee member (spouse or life partner, child, or parent).
16. The working language of a committee shall be English. If the HEI wants to use interpretation services, it shall coordinate the selection of an interpreter with the assessment coordinator at least one week prior to the assessment visit. HAKA hereby sets out the following requirements for an interpreter: the interpreter has the necessary preparation for consecutive interpretation in Estonian-English-Estonian (master's degree studies in interpreting, in-service training in interpreting, interpreting as an additional specialty, etc.), past experience in consecutive interpretation, and commands the terminology of higher education. The interpreter does not work at the HEI under evaluation. Costs of interpretation services shall be incurred by the HEI under evaluation.
17. With consent of the chairperson of a committee and by an order of the Director of HAKA, up to two observers from other organisations practicing external evaluation can be appointed. Observers shall confirm by signature an obligation to maintain the confidentiality of the content of assessment committee discussions. Observers have no right to intervene in the process of evaluation.
18. Tasks of the members of a committee:
- 18.1 to examine documents regulating institutional accreditation and complete the assessment training provided by HAKA;
  - 18.2 to review the self-evaluation report of an HEI and fill out the assessment form with initial comments and information based on the self-evaluation report;
  - 18.3 to participate in the meetings and discussions of the committee;
  - 18.4 to participate in the preparation of an assessment visit and the visit itself;
  - 18.5 to participate in composing the assessment report according to the agreed allocation of responsibilities;
  - 18.6 to examine the comments by the HEI regarding the assessment report and take them into consideration when finalising the assessment report;
  - 18.7 to perform other tasks related to evaluation activities according to the division of tasks among members of the committee;
  - 18.8 to adhere to the agreed committee deadlines.
19. The Secretary is a member of the committee who, in addition to the tasks that apply to all members, collects and unifies the individual parts of the report written by the committee members.



20. The chair of the committee fulfils the following tasks in addition to the tasks of other committee members:
  - 20.1 leads the work of the committee;
  - 20.2 chairs the meetings of the committee;
  - 20.3 divides tasks among the members of the committee;
  - 20.4 after the visit gives the overview of provisional conclusions of the committee to the institution;
  - 20.5 ensures that the committee's assessments are justified;
  - 20.6 approves the assessment report.
21. Tasks of a coordinator:
  - 21.1 to ensure smooth functioning of the evaluation process based on the requirements and timeframe laid down by this Guide;
  - 21.2 to incorporate the committee's preliminary input into a single format;
  - 21.3 to coordinate with the members of a committee a list of people whom the committee would like to interview and a list of additional materials that the committee needs in order to prepare for the visit;
  - 21.4 to coordinate with a HEI a schedule for the visit, the names and the titles of positions of the people participating in the meetings and, if necessary, to request additional materials from the HEI;
  - 21.5 to perform other one-time tasks related to the specific evaluation process as assigned by the committee chairperson.
22. HAKA shall document interviews conducted during visits.
23. HAKA shall enter into contracts with committee members for their services.

#### **IV. Preparation of self-evaluation report**

24. The HEI shall prepare a self-evaluation report based on the guide prepared by HAKA. This self-evaluation report shall be in English.
25. Upon request, HAKA shall provide a training to the HEI for writing a self-evaluation report.
26. The HEI shall submit its self-evaluation report in electronic format to HAKA no later than three months prior to the agreed assessment visit.
27. The HAKA Bureau shall review the self-evaluation report within two weeks after receiving it and, if necessary, return it to the HEI for amendments and improvements. The HEI shall send the enhanced report back to HAKA within two weeks.
28. The coordinator shall send the self-evaluation report to the committee no later than two months prior to the assessment visit.



## **V. Assessment visit**

29. The HAKA Secretariat and the HEI shall agree upon a week for the assessment visit no later than six months ahead of time. The HEI receiving a committee shall appoint a person who will be responsible for a smooth process of the visit and will ensure appropriate working conditions for the members of the committee.
30. In the course of the visit, the HEI shall make an appropriately furnished room available to the committee members and allow the committee to:
  - 30.1 access internal normative documents that provide for and govern the activities of the HEI;
  - 30.2 interview employees and students of the HEI at the discretion of committee members;
  - 30.3 access information and information systems related to education, research, development and students;
  - 30.4 access information related to employees of the HEI (their CVs, job descriptions, etc.);
  - 30.5 inspect the infrastructure of the HEI;
  - 30.6 access students' research, development and creative works;
  - 30.7 access information related to financial activities of the HEI;
  - 30.8 if necessary, obtain other information related to the management and administration of the HEI.
31. Within five working days after the visit, HAKA shall request that the HEI provide written feedback on the apparent preparation by the committee members, the relevance of their questions and other pertinent issues.

## **VI. Assessment report and formation of assessments by the committee**

32. The committee shall provide separate assessments for each of the twelve standards to the HEIs:  
strategic management, resource management, quality culture, academic ethics, internationalisation, teaching staff, study programme, learning and teaching, student assessment, learning support systems, research, development and/or other creative activity, and service to society (hereinafter referred to as 'assessments').
33. Standards shall be evaluated by the Committee on a scale of three values: 'conforms', 'partially conforms' and 'does not conform'.
34. Standards where the institution has shown outstanding results and/or initiatives, the committee may recognise it with an additional note 'worthy of recognition'.





35. Committee's assessments shall preferably be based on decisions adopted by consensus. If consensus is not reached, a simple majority of members of the committee shall make the decision, and the dissenting view(s) together with the reason(s) shall be included. If the votes are equally divided, the vote of the chairperson shall decide.
36. The HAKA Secretariat shall forward the assessment report to the HEI no later than by the end of the sixth week after the visit. If more than one HEI is being evaluated at the same time, it is possible to extend the deadline for the report by up to two weeks.
37. The HEI shall have the opportunity to submit its comments regarding the assessment report within two weeks after receipt of the report. The committee shall review these comments and take them into account when preparing the final report.
38. An electronic version of the final assessment report, approved by the committee chairman, shall be forwarded by the committee chairman to the HAKA Secretariat no later than by the end of the ninth week after the visit.
39. The HAKA Secretariat shall forward the committee's assessment report to the Council and to the HEI under evaluation.

## **VII. Decision by HAKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education**

40. The HAKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education shall make a grounded decision on institutional accreditation at its session within three months after receiving the assessment report. If necessary, the Council may ask the chairperson of the committee or a member of the committee authorised by the chairperson to attend the session for explanations.
41. The Council shall base its decision on the self-evaluation report of the HEI, the assessments by the committee, comments by the HEI received in a timely manner and on any additional materials submitted upon request of the Council.
42. In case of contradictions in assessments or inadequate justification, the Council shall have the right to return the report to the assessment committee to be reviewed and clarified. The committee shall resend the reviewed report to the HAKA Secretariat no later than within two weeks after it was returned to the committee, and the HAKA Secretariat shall proceed in accordance with the procedures established by points 37 to 39 above.
43. The Council shall base its decision regarding institutional accreditation on the following principles:
  - 43.1 If all standards are assessed as 'conforms', the Council shall decide that the management, administration, teaching and research activities as well as the environments of learning and research at the HEI meet the requirements, and accredit the HEI for seven years.
  - 43.2 If one to four standards are assessed as 'partially conforms' and all the remaining standards are assessed as 'conforms', the Council shall analyse the strengths and areas for improvement of the HEI and decides that the management, administration, teaching and research activities as well as the environments of learning and research at the HEI meet the requirements, and accredits the HEI for seven years; or shall decide that there are shortcomings in the management, administration, teaching and research activities or



- in the environments of learning and research at the HEI, provide guidance for their elimination, and accredit the HEI for three years.
- 43.3 If five to eight standards are assessed as ‘partially conforms’ and all the remaining standards are assessed as ‘conforms’, the Council shall decide that there are shortcomings in the management, administration, teaching and research activities or in the environments of learning and research at the HEI, provide guidance for their elimination, and accredit the HEI for three years.
- 43.4 If nine to twelve standards are assessed as ‘partially conforms’ and all the remaining standards are assessed as ‘conforms’, the Council shall analyse the strengths and areas for improvement of the HEI and decide that there are shortcomings in the management, administration, teaching and research activities or in the environments of learning and research at the HEI, provide guidance for their elimination, and accredit the HEI for three years; or shall decide that the management, administration, teaching and research activities as well as the environments of learning and research at the HEI do not meet the requirements, and decide not to accredit the HEI.
- 43.5 If one to two standards are assessed as ‘does not conform’, the Council shall analyse the strengths and areas for improvement of the HEI and decide that there are shortcomings in the management, administration, teaching and research activities or in the environments of learning and research at the HEI, provide guidance for their elimination, and accredit the HEI for three years; or shall decide that the management, administration, teaching and research activities as well as the environments of learning and research at the HEI do not meet the requirements, and decide not to accredit the HEI.
- 43.6 If at least three standards are assessed as ‘does not conform’, the Council shall decide that the management, administration, teaching and research activities as well as the environments of learning and research at the HEI do not meet the requirements, and decide not to accredit the HEI.

43<sup>1</sup>. If the Council weighs between two accreditation decisions and finds that if the HEI were to satisfy certain conditions, a more positive decision would be possible, the Council may make that decision with a secondary condition, as defined in §53 of the Administrative Procedure Act.

43<sup>1</sup>.1. If the Assessment Council adopts a decision that contains a secondary condition, the Assessment Council shall list in its decision the specific shortcomings underlying the imposition of the secondary condition and shall set a deadline by which the higher education institution shall submit a report on the progress on the shortcomings underlying the secondary condition.

43<sup>1</sup>.2. HAKA shall involve 2-3 experts to evaluate the progress made on the secondary condition. HAKA shall conduct an assessment of progress made on the secondary condition within six months of the deadline set in the decision by the Council.

43<sup>1</sup>.3. Members of an assessment committee assessing the progress made on the secondary condition, shall judge in their report whether the shortcomings identified in the secondary condition have been ‘fully eliminated’; ‘substantially eliminated’; ‘partially eliminated’; or ‘have not been eliminated’.

43<sup>1</sup>.4. If all shortcomings have been fully or substantially eliminated, the Assessment Council shall adopt the decision that the secondary condition has been met. If all shortcomings have been partially eliminated, the Assessment Council shall analyse the gravity of the shortcomings and shall



adopt the decision, that the secondary condition has not been met; or shall adopt the decision that the secondary condition has been met. If at least one of the shortcomings has not been eliminated, the Council shall adopt the decision that the secondary condition has not been met.

43<sup>1.5</sup>. If the Council adopts the decision that the secondary condition has not been met, the Assessment Council can, based on §53 (3) of the Administrative Procedure Act, repeal the primary assessment decision; or impose a new secondary condition. According to §66 (2) and (3) of the Administrative Procedure Act, an administrative act which was lawful at the moment of issue may be retroactively repealed if an additional duty was related to the administrative act and the person has failed to perform it.

43<sup>2</sup>. If the Assessment Council adopts the decision to accredit the higher education institution for seven years, they will be awarded the HAKA Quality Label in accordance with the Statute for HAKA Quality Labels, approved by the Director of HAKA. If the Assessment Council adopts the decision to accredit the higher education institution for seven years with a secondary condition, the Quality Label shall be awarded after the Assessment Council has adopted the decision to consider the secondary condition fulfilled.

44. The Council shall specify in its decision:

- 44.1 the strengths of the HEI, which are achievements that exceed the level of the standard;
- 44.2 areas of concern and recommendations that imply non-compliances to the requirements of the standard and impact the formation of Council's decision;
- 44.3 opportunities for further improvement, which do not imply non-compliance to the standard or impact the formation of Council's decision.

45. If the committee has added a note of 'worthy of recognition' to some standards, the Council shall cite the recognition(s) in the accreditation decision.

46. The HAKA Secretariat shall electronically forward the accreditation decision by the Council along with the assessment report to the HEI within two weeks after the date of that decision. If the Council has decided not to accredit the higher education institution, HAKA shall also notify the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research of the decision within a reasonable period of time.

47. Within one week after the final decision and the assessment report were forwarded to the institution of higher education, HAKA shall publicise the final decision along with the assessment and self-evaluation reports on its website.

## **VIII. Contesting of accreditation proceedings conducted by HAKA and decision by the Council**

48. A person who finds that his or her rights have been violated or his or her freedoms have been restricted by assessment procedures conducted by HAKA or by a decision made by the Council may file a challenge pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Administrative Procedure Act. The



challenge shall be filed with the Council within thirty days after the person filing the challenge became or should have become aware of the contested finding.

49. The Council shall forward the challenge to its Appeals Committee<sup>3</sup> who shall provide an unbiased opinion in writing regarding the validity of the challenge to the Council, within five days after receipt of the challenge. The Council shall resolve the challenge within ten days of its receipt, taking into account the reasoned opinion of the Appeals Committee. If the challenge needs to be investigated further, the deadline for its review by the Council may be extended by a maximum of thirty days.
50. The decision by the Council may be challenged within thirty days after the delivery of the final decision, filing an action with the Tallinn courthouse of the Tallinn Administrative Court pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Code of Administrative Court.



## **IX. Follow-up activities**

51. HAKA assumes that the responsibility for resolving problems pointed out in the assessment reports and for continuous improvement activities lies with the higher education institutions. HAKA requests that, two years after the accreditation decision was made by the Council, the HEI, which was granted accreditation for seven years, submit a written overview of its activities, planned and implemented based on recommendations in the assessment report, along with the results of such activities.
52. If the Council has added a secondary condition to the accreditation decision in accordance with point 43.7 above, the HEI shall submit a progress report to the Council regarding elimination of the shortcoming described in that secondary condition. The Council shall involve members of the assessment committee in assessing compliance with the secondary condition.

## **X. Involving competent assessment authorities of foreign countries**

53. If a HEI wishes that a competent foreign assessment authority (hereinafter referred to as 'assessment authority') would conduct an institutional accreditation review, the HEI shall submit a well-reasoned request to HAKA no later than two years prior to the expiration date of its current accreditation to include that assessment authority, providing the following information:
- 53.1 the name and contact details of the assessment authority, including its web address;
  - 53.2 the consent of the assessment authority to conduct the accreditation review, and an estimated expenditure;
  - 53.3 a description of the procedure (including a schedule) and requirements for a planned accreditation process.
54. The HEIs may request accreditation services from internationally recognised assessment authorities that have fulfilled the following conditions:
- 54.1 The assessment authority has institutional evaluation experience.
  - 54.2 The procedures and requirements for accreditation are transparent and in conformity with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, and the assessment authority has preferably been included in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).
  - 54.3 Within the framework of institutional accreditation, a sampling-based evaluation of study programmes will also be conducted.
55. Within one month after receipt of the request, the Council shall make a justified decision on the suitability of the assessment authority to conduct institutional accreditation.
56. If HAKA approves the use of a foreign assessment authority, it shall conclude a tripartite contract with the higher education institution and the assessment authority, providing the rights and responsibilities of the parties and the procedure for reimbursement of expenditures.
57. The assessment authority shall submit its assessment report to HAKA.



58. If it becomes evident that there are significant deficiencies in the assessment report, and it is impossible to make a final decision that is consistent with Estonian legislation, the Council shall have the right to return the report to the assessment authority for amendment.
59. If it is possible to make a final decision that is consistent with Estonian legislation, the Council shall make one of the following justified decisions:
- 59.1 to accredit the HEI for seven years;
  - 59.2 to accredit the HEI for three years;
  - 59.3 not to accredit the HEI.
60. The proceedings described in this chapter and the final decision by the Council may be contested following the procedures provided in Chapter VIII.

## **XI. Implementation provisions**

61. The HEIs that have been granted accreditation for three years in the first round of institutional accreditation reviews shall undergo a reassessment process in accordance with the version of the document, 'Conditions and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation', which was in effect from 01.04.2011 to 02.02.2018.
62. The amendments to the standard and guidelines in this document are mandatory for higher education institutions for which an institutional accreditation assessment visit is planned from 1 September 2021. In other cases, taking into account the changes are recommended.
63. Changes to this document will be introduced by the Council following feedback from stakeholders on Council's preliminary amendments and their justifications.

