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Standard of Higher Education

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This Regulation is established under § 5(2)7) and § 28(2¹) of the Republic of Estonia Education Act and § 3 (4) of the Higher Education Act.

Chapter 1

General provisions

§ 1. Scope of regulation

The Standard of Higher Education establishes:

- 1) uniform requirements for study at higher education level;
- 2) general requirements for academic staff;
- 3) principles for recognition of prior learning and professional experience;
- 4) objectives and learning outcomes to be achieved at higher education levels (Annex 1);
- 5) a list of broad areas of study, fields of study, and study programme groups (Annex 2);
- 6) a correspondence table of study programme subgroups and study programme groups and a list of academic degrees awarded in study programme groups (Annex 3).

§ 2. Scope of application

(1) The Standard of Higher Education applies to all levels and forms of study of higher education level, regardless of the legal status of the educational institution.

(2) The provisions of the Standard of Higher Education apply to medical training, veterinary training, pharmacist training, dentistry training, midwifery training, nursing training, architectural studies, and civil engineering studies taking account of the specifications arising from § 7(3) of the Higher Education Act established by a regulation of the Government of the Republic and to teacher training arising from § 7 (4) of the Higher Education Act taking account of the specificities laid down in a regulation of the minister responsible for the field.

(3) The Standard of Higher Education is a source document for granting the right to organise studies at higher education level, for conducting institutional accreditation and thematic evaluations, and organising studies in higher education institutions.

Chapter 2

Study requirements

§ 3. Requirements for study programmes and quality of studies

(1) The basis for studies at the level of higher education is a study programme pursuant to § 2(3) of the Higher

Education Act.

(2) The structure and content of a study programme support the objectives of the study programme and the achievement of its learning outcomes. Learning outcomes mean knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired at the level which is necessary for completion of the described study programme. The learning outcomes of a study programme are formulated in a way that they provide a basis for evaluation of the level of the knowledge and skills of graduates and the achievement of the objectives of the programme.

(3) A study programme is in line with the areas of activity of an educational institution that are based on the development plan, statutes or regulations of the institution, and with the modern concept of learning. A study programme contributes to fulfilling the mission of an educational institution and to achieving its goals and takes into consideration the needs of the labour market, the society and the target group.

(4) Study programmes and the organisation of studies are consistent with the internal requirements of an educational institution as well as with national and international quality requirements and agreements.

(5) The objectives and learning outcomes of a study programme are equal and comparable with the learning outcomes of the cycles of higher education level described in Annex 1 to this Regulation, meet the requirements and trends of national and international legal acts that regulate the professional field and take into consideration the relevant occupational qualification standard.

(6) A study programme is composed of modules structured in a way that enables a student in the first or second cycle of higher education to specialise in a main field of study. Module is the unit of structuring of the content of the study programme which groups subjects into a purposeful set or which is constituted of one single subject.

(7) A study programme is coherent and structured as a whole. The title of a study programme, and the objectives and learning outcomes of a study programme, modules and courses are consistent.

(8) The study and assessment methods and means and learning environments used in the implementation of a study programme are appropriate, take into consideration the needs of learners and support the achievement of learning outcomes.

(9) Studies, including independent work and practice, are coherent and comprehensive, motivate learners to develop themselves and support, in addition to professional skills, the development of general skills that help to cope with the challenges of a changing world.

(10) The organisation of studies conforms to requirements if:

1) academic staff are available for the studies, who meet the qualification requirements established in legal acts and whose number is, based on their responsibilities, the volume of conducted studies, research, development and creative work and the number of supervised students, adequate for achieving the objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme;

2) a member of the academic staff who conducts studies in a given subject has the necessary teaching competence and qualification that supports achievement of the objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme;

3) ordinary academic staff who are conducting studies have properly undergone evaluation, have received regular feedback on their activities and have regularly furthered their professional and teaching skills and developed their digital competences;

4) the necessary learning environment for studies and research, development and creative activities related to Doctoral studies is available (auditoriums, laboratories, seminar rooms, digital learning environment and a library), the furnishings and equipment of which are ample and up-to-date for achieving the objectives of study programmes and the condition of which meets the health and safety requirements established in legal acts;

5) up-to-date and relevant information and communication technology solutions, including study information system and document management system, are used to support teaching activities;

6) educational and research literature and other learning materials are available and access to research databases is ensured;

7) a support structure exists that supports the work of the academic staff, and support systems for students are available (support for digital learning and IT, study and career counselling and for counselling on recognition of prior learning and professional experience);

8) financing sources for conducting studies and for research and development activities related to Doctoral studies and a strategy supporting their obtainment are in place.

[RT I, 13.06.2024, 4- entry into force 16.06.2024]s

§ 4. Organisation of studies

(1) Studies are undertaken in the form of contact learning, practical training, and independent work.

(2) Contact learning means lectures, seminars, practical training classes, laboratory work, individual classes or other study in a manner determined by an educational institution, aimed at acquiring knowledge and skills,

organised for achieving learning outcomes. Contact learning takes place in a learning environment (including e-learning or workplace-based learning) where both a student and a member of the academic staff or an instructor participate.

(3) Practical training means a purposeful activity organised to achieve learning outcomes, aimed at applying acquired knowledge and skills in a working environment in a form determined by an educational institution and under the supervision of an instructor.

(4) In Bachelor's and Master's studies, practical training is foreseen if it is necessary for achieving the learning outcomes of a study programme. The volume of practical training is determined in the study programme.

(5) In professional higher education studies, practical training constitutes at least 15% of the study load determined in the study programme.

(6) Independent work means acquiring knowledge necessary for achieving learning outcomes independently, according to tasks given by a member of academic staff.

(7) In Doctoral studies, research, development or other creative activity (including the Doctoral thesis) constitutes at least 70% of the study load determined in the study programme.

§ 5. Language of instruction

(1) The language of instruction and other languages necessary for achieving the learning outcomes are determined in the study programme. The ability to use those languages enables achieving learning outcomes of the corresponding cycle of higher education level described in Annex 1 to this Regulation.

(2) In Doctoral studies, if necessary, more than one language of instruction can be determined in the study programme.

§ 6. Completion of studies

(1) Studies at a level of higher education end with the defence of a thesis or taking of a graduation examination.

(2) The workload of a thesis or a graduation examination is:

- 1) in professional higher education studies and Bachelor's studies at least 5 ECTS;
- 2) in Master's studies at least 15 ECTS.

(3) Doctoral studies end with the defence of a Doctoral thesis. A Doctoral thesis is an independent scientific research or creative work.

Chapter 3 Requirements for academic staffs

§ 7. Principles of establishing specific requirements for academic staff

(1) When establishing minimum requirements for academic staff, an employer takes into consideration the requirements of this Regulation and, if necessary for the performance of work tasks, may establish higher requirements than those provided in this Regulation.

(2) In justified cases, an employer may establish in addition to the requirements of this Chapter, for a position presuming a Doctoral level degree, a profession awarded at the 8th level of the qualifications framework as compatible with the requirements.

(3) At least 85% of the subjects determined in the study programme of Doctoral studies is taught by academic staff who have a Doctoral level degree or a corresponding qualification and are active in research and development in the corresponding field of study or are creative persons recognised in artistic fields at a high international level.

§ 8. Professor

(1) An internationally recognised specialist in their field of study who has been awarded a Doctoral level degree or a corresponding qualification and who has pedagogical skills and experience, including experience in supervising students and at least five years of active experience in scientific and development activities or other creative activities, is eligible for the position of a professor.

(2) A recognised specialist in their field of profession who has been awarded a Doctoral level degree or a corresponding qualification and who has pedagogical skills and experience, including experience in supervising

students and at least five years of active experience in research and development activities or other creative activities, is eligible for the position of a professor of an institution of professional higher education.

(3) An internationally recognised creative person who has been awarded a Master level degree or a corresponding qualification and who has pedagogical skills and experience, including experience in supervising students and at least five years of active experience in creative activities, is eligible for the position of a professor in fields of arts.

(4) When a person, when applying for the position of a university professor (except when applying for the position of a professor in fields of arts), has worked as a professor for at least five years prior, at least one Doctoral thesis must have been defended under the candidate's supervision within the past five years.

§ 9. Lecturer

A person who has been awarded a Master level degree or a corresponding qualification and who has pedagogical skills, experience in scientific and development activities, professional work experience or experience in creative activities in their field of profession, is eligible for the position of a lecturer.

§ 10. Researcher

(1) A person who has a research degree or a corresponding qualification is eligible for the position of a researcher.

(2) A person who has a Master level degree or a corresponding qualification, who has been matriculated to Doctoral studies and who has entered into an employment contract with a legal person for completing their study and research plan, is eligible for the position of a junior researcher (hereinafter: junior researcher).
[RT I, 07.10.2022, 1- entry into force 10.10.2022]

§ 11. Teacher

(1) A person with higher education or a corresponding qualification is eligible for the position of a teacher.

(2) Specialists who have secondary education, at least three years of work experience in their profession, and who have had pedagogical training, may teach practical courses of a study programme of studies in professional higher education.

Chapter 4

Principles for recognition of prior learning and professional experience

§ 12. Purpose of recognition of prior learning and professional experience

The purpose of recognition of prior learning and professional experience is to value life-long learning and ensure equal opportunities for evaluating and recognising a person's knowledge and skills regardless of the time, place, and manner of their acquisition.

§ 13. Principles for recognition of prior learning and professional experience

(1) An educational institution establishes the conditions and procedure for the recognition of prior learning and professional experience of students.

(2) Recognition of prior learning and professional experience may be applied under the conditions and pursuant to the procedure established on the basis of subsection 1:

- 1) for compliance with the admission requirements established by an educational institution;
- 2) for taking into account credit points priorly acquired during completion of the study programme;
- 3) for completion of a continuing education programme by calculating independent learning and knowledge and skills acquired from professional experience as credit points.

(3) The assessment and recognition of prior learning and professional experience shall not apply to compliance with the graduation requirements specified in § 6 of this Regulation.

(4) Establishing of the conditions and procedure for recognition of prior learning and professional experience and submission of an application, evaluation of an application and making of the decision on recognition and contestation of the decision on the basis thereof shall be based on the principles set out in the Administrative Procedure Act and this Regulation and the quality requirements prescribed by legislation and established in educational institutions.

§ 14. Principles for certification and assessment of prior learning and professional experience

(1) Outcomes of prior learning are certified by a corresponding diploma, certificate or other document certifying education.

(2) Studies which were carried out through professional experience and through independent learning shall be certified by reference to the works prepared, a description of professional experience, a professional certificate, or other documentary evidence.

(3) The senate of a university and the board of a professional higher education institution has the right to establish additional requirements for certification in addition to the provisions of subsections 1 and 2.

Chapter 5

Implementing provisions

§ 15. Application of the qualification requirements of a researcher

The Research Master's degree and Doctoral degree awarded after completion of the Master's study programme entered in the Estonian Education Information System before 1 June 2002, and the Doctoral degree awarded after completion of the Doctoral study programme entered in the Estonian Education Information System as of 1 June 2002, or the corresponding foreign research degree, corresponds to the qualification specified in subsection 1 of section 10.

§ 15¹. Application of variations of the employment contract of a junior researcher

If an employment contract has been entered into with a junior researcher before 1 August 2022, the Act in force at the time of entry into the employment contract shall apply to him or her, taking into account the differences provided for in § 49¹ of the Higher Education Act.
[RT I, 07.10.2022, 1- entry into force 10.10.2022]

§ 16. Graduation from studies in professional higher education

Upon the award of a professional higher education diploma to a student matriculated in studies in professional higher education before the academic year 2019/2020, the titles of the diploma established in the Standard of Higher Education in force until 1 September 2019 shall be applied.

§ 16¹. Updating of study programmes

The study programmes open for admission shall be brought into compliance with this Regulation no later than by the academic year 2028/2029. [RT I, 13.06.2024, 4- entry into force 16.06.2024]

§ 17. Repeal of Regulation No. 178 of the Government of the Republic of 18 December 2008 "Standard of Higher Education"

[Omitted from this text.]

§ 18. Entry into force

This Regulation shall enter into force on 1 September 2019.

[Annex 1](#) Learning outcomes to be achieved at higher education levels
[RT I, 13.06.2024, 4- entry into force 16.06.2024]

[Annex 2](#) List of broad areas of study, fields of study, and study programme groups

[Annex 3](#) A correspondence table of study programme subgroups and study programme groups and a list of academic degrees awarded in study programme groups
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