

Learning and Teaching of International Students in Estonian Higher Education Institutions

Summary report

The full version of the report: http://ekka.archimedes.ee/wp-content/uploads/Temaatilise_hindamise_aruanne_2019.pdf (in Estonian)

The report "Learning and Teaching of International Students in Estonian Higher Education Institutions" serves the purpose of outlining the areas of improvement and best practices relating to the learning and teaching of first- and second-cycle international students in Estonian higher education institutions (HEIs) and of giving relevant recommendations to the institutions as well as policy-makers.

The main reason for the choice of the subject is the rapid growth in the number and relative share of international students over the past decade, while the overall number of students in Estonia is decreasing and there is a considerable shortage of qualified workforce in the Estonian labour market.

Related studies have revealed a number of differences between international and Estonian students: the former are much less likely to drop out, but they are also less satisfied with the availability of information and counselling, as well as the teaching staff's command of English. The scope of available practical training has been a particular concern. There have also been difficulties in integrating international students in extracurricular academic and other activities.

The share of international students is one of the performance indicators for financing HEIs from the state budget. One of the purposes why HEIs are launching study programmes in English, is to obtain additional income from tuition fees and/or compensate for the decreasing number of local students. Among other things, this study aims to clarify the reasons for launching study programmes in English and enrolling more international students in HEIs.

Participation in the pilot assessment was voluntary for HEIs. Those institutions that had at least one study programme in a foreign language and at least ten international students were invited to participate. Six HEIs agreed to participate in the assessment: the Estonian Entrepreneurship University of Applied Sciences Mainor (Mainor), Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre (EAMT), Estonian Business School (EBS), Tallinn University of Technology (TalTech), Tallinn University and University of Tartu. Each university was able to choose which study programmes it wanted to assess.

Assessed institutions and study programmes

Mainor	Game design and development (RAK) Enterprise and business innovation (RAK) International business administration (MA)
EAMT	Music (BA) Music (MA)
EBS	International business administration (BA, EBS intBBA) International business administration (MA, EBS MAi)
TalTech	International business administration (BA) Technology governance and digital transformation (MA)
Tallinn University	Audiovisual media (BA) Communication management (MA)
University of Tartu	Medicine (INT) European Union – Russia studies (MA) Philosophy (MA) Computer science (MA) International relations and regional studies (MA)

Involved in this study were:

- Ministry of Education and Research
- Higher education institutions
- Federation of Estonian Student Unions
- Ministry of the Interior
- Estonian Employers' Confederation
- Archimedes Foundation Education Agency
- Archimedes Foundation Academic Recognition Information Centre (Estonian ENIC/NARIC)

The assessment focused on the following aspects:

- a) launch of study programmes and admission;**
- b) financing the studies;**
- c) learning and teaching;**
- d) practical training and employment of international students;**
- e) support systems for students and teaching staff.**

Method:

- Questionnaire-based self-analyses by HEIs
- Results of earlier studies and analyses
- Background information from the Ministry of Education and Research

- Interviews with the heads of the HEIs, representatives of support structures, heads of study programmes, teaching staff and students (November, December 2018)
- Interviews with representatives of practical training providers

The assessment committee consisted of:

Kristiina Tõnnisson, Head of Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu, Chair

Maiki Udam, higher education consultant, Secretary of committee

Sigrid Lainevee, Head of EBS in Helsinki, Estonian Business School

Jekaterina Masenko, student, Tallinn University

Britt Järvet, student, University of Tartu, Chairperson of the Board of the Federation of Estonian Student Unions

Anne Pikkov, Vice Rector for Academic Affairs, Estonian Academy of Arts

Gunnar Pih, Associate Professor in Department of Software Science, Vice Dean for Master's Studies in School of Information Technology, Tallinn University of Technology

Kai Treier, Analyst in Archimedes Foundation Education Agency

The assessment was coordinated by **Liia Lauri**, Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA).

Overview of the current situation and previous studies

The relative share of international students is a key indicator for the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 and the Higher Education Programme 2018–2021. The target is 10% of the total number of students. The Higher Education Programme formulates the broader purpose of internationalisation of higher education: to support the growth areas of Estonian economy and improvement of the quality of higher education. The programme states that the development of international study programmes should, among other things, focus on the added value of studies in foreign languages, i.e. the opportunities for each graduate to enter the Estonian labour market. According to the programme, special attention should be paid to teaching Estonian in the study programmes for international students. It is the private sector's responsibility to offer support to HEIs in offering practical training to international students and information on potential jobs. The administrative agreements signed with universities at the end of 2018 contain more specific details on study programmes in English and the Estonian courses covered by them. In developing study programmes taught in foreign languages, the universities are to pay increased attention to the needs of the Estonian labour market and economy, considering the strengths of Estonian research, and ensure that Estonian language and culture are taught in a minimum volume of 6 ECTS in all two-year or longer study programmes taught in English. The interviews conducted for this study were held in November 2018, which is why these administrative agreements are not reflected in the results of this study. The results nevertheless indicate a need for such agreements.

The number of international students has rapidly increased over the past ten years, and their relative share has increased even faster as the total number of students in Estonia has dropped. The share of international students in the academic year 2017/2018 was 9.5%. At the beginning of the academic year 2018/2019, their share was 11%, exceeding the target. The shares of international students are the largest in doctoral studies (21.4%) and master's studies (18%). In the bachelor's studies of universities in public law, international students account for 9% of all students. The shares of international students vary considerably across HEIs. According to the Estonian education information system EHIS, the share of students in private HEIs has decreased, while the share of international students in these institutions has increased faster than their respective share in universities in public law.

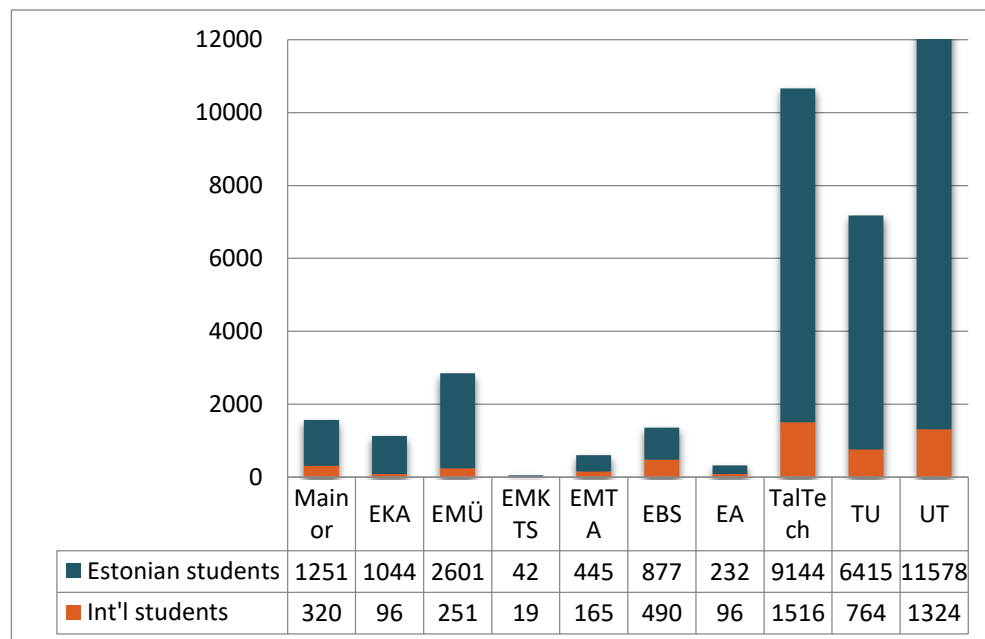


Figure 1. Students in HEIs, including shares of international students (EHIS, 2019)

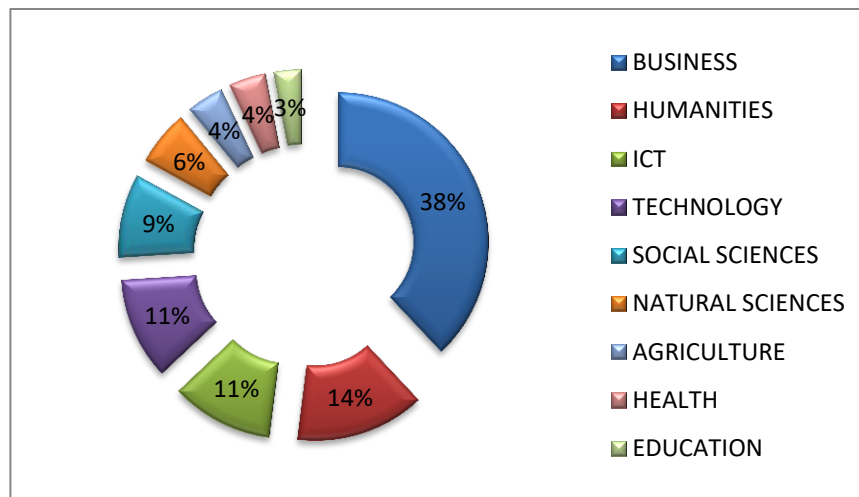


Figure 2. Distribution of international students by field of study (EHIS, 2019)

Various studies and analyses have been conducted in 2014–2018, covering, among other things, aspects relating to international students.

- Archimedes (2015). Eesti kõrghariduse rahvusvahelise tutvustamise strateegia 2015-2020 (Strategy for International Introduction of Higher Education in Estonia 2015–2020).
- Archimedes (2018). I-Graduate International Student Barometer.
- Centar (2018). Õppekeel Eesti kõrghariduses . Uuringu lõppraport (Tuition Language in Higher Education in Estonia. Final Study Report).
- Ernst & Young Baltic (2017). Eesti kõrgkoolide 2015. aasta vilistlaste uuring (Study of alumni of Estonian higher education institutions in 2015).
- Haaristo, H-S. (2014). Välisüliõpilased Eestis – kas vajame neid ka tööturul? (International Students in Estonia – Do We Need Them in the Labour Market? – Poliitikaanalüüs No 2. Praxis.
- Karu, R. (2018). Välisstudengid – kas väärtuslik ressurss tööturul või kõrghariduse eksport? (International Students – A Valuable Resource for the Labour Market or Export of Higher Education?)
- Kreegipuu, T. (2017). Välisüliõpilased Eesti kõrghariduses. (International Students in Estonian Higher Education) Ministry of Education and Research.
- Lauri, L.; Mattisen, H. (2017). Kõrgharidusõppe kvaliteedi hindamise tulemused 2012–2016. (Higher Education Quality Assessment Results)
- Leppik, M. (2018). Kutse- ja kõrgharidusõpingud lõpetanute edukus tööturul. (Labour Market Performance of Graduates of Vocational and Higher Education)
- Audit by National Audit Office (2015). Overview of the State’s Migration Policy Choices. What is the Role of Migration in Alleviating Labour Shortage?)
- Treier, Kai (2019). Eesti kõrgkoolide Erasmus+ üliõpilaste õpiränne aastatel 2014-2016. (Erasmus+ Learning Mobility of Students of Estonian Higher Education Institutions in 2014–2016)
- Praxis (2017). International Research Project Eurostudent VI.
- Tänav, T.; Villenthal, A. (2018). Rahvusvaheliste üliõpilaste teadlikkus pakutavate tugiteenuste kohta. (International Students’ Awareness of Available Support Services) Eesti Üliõpilaskondade Liit.
- Selliov, R. (2018). Õppekeel Eesti kõrgkoolides EHISe andmetel. Statistiline ülevaade (Tuition Language in Estonian Higher Education Institutions Based on EHIS. Statistical Overview). Ministry of Education and Research.

Summary of topics and issues covered by previous studies

Tuition in English in higher education institutions

According to a study by Centar (2018), tuition in English is about to increase in Estonian HEIs. At the same time, it is crucial to maintain tuition in Estonian on the first level of higher education and integrate tuition in Estonian and English to offer local students an opportunity to improve their foreign language skills and broaden their horizons by studying in a multicultural academic environment. International students should be offered flexible teaching of the Estonian language and culture while ensuring that the English language skills of the students studying and the teaching staff teaching in English are sufficient to provide or participate in high-quality tuition.

Quality of study

Previous research shows that the choices and learning behaviour of international students differ from the average in a number of aspects. International students also have different needs and expectations relating to the higher education system compared to local students.

Feedback given by international students on the quality of studies is varied, suggesting that the level of teaching is not always uniform or in line with students' expectations. There are problems concerning the integration of international students in extracurricular academic and other activities, including due to the lack of information available in English. International students lack contacts with local students (Ernst & Young Baltic, 2017). The different levels of English proficiency of both students and teaching staff sometimes hinder the effective and smooth conduct of studies (Centar, 2018). This is not identified as a problem in the alumni study (Ernst & Young Baltic, 2017).

The share of dropouts is considerably lower among international students (9.4% in 2016/2017, 9.1% in 2018/2019) than among higher education students in general (14.5% in 2016/2017, 13.6% in 2018/2019) (Kreegipuu, 2017; Haridusilm, 2019).

Compared to domestic students, international students participate more actively in international mobility. The share of international students in Erasmus+ learning mobility grew from 18 to 28% during 2014–2016. Their share is even higher among trainees, accounting for one-quarter (25%) of all traineeship participants.

Practical training and employment

The practical training of international students is a matter of concern identified in the reports on the quality assessment of groups of study programmes: international students lack the support of their higher education institution in finding traineeships, HEIs do not consider the unique needs of international students in signing practical training agreements, and other. (Lauri, Mattisen, 2017).

Attractive international study programmes help bring talented international students to Estonian HEIs and thereby provide for partial compensation for the lack of qualified workers on the Estonian labour market. The Strategy for International Introduction of Higher Education in Estonia 2015–2020 sets a target of 30% as the share of international students that have obtained master's and doctoral degrees in Estonia finding employment in Estonia after graduation. The higher the level of education, the larger the share of graduates that remain working in Estonia. According to the audit by the National Audit Office (2015), 20.7% of international students stay in Estonia on average. Students who have come to Estonia to acquire vocational or applied higher education are the most

likely to remain to work in Estonia. The shares of graduates of bachelor's, master's and medical and dentistry studies that remain in Estonia to start a career are smaller: 15.3%, 15.2% and 8%, respectively. As an exception, over one-third of graduates of doctoral studies remain to work in Estonia. According to the University of Tartu survey of international students (2017), 41% of the respondents wanted to remain in Estonia after graduation, and 8% wanted to study here further. A survey by TalTech showed that over 80% of the international graduates wanted to remain in Estonia (Karu, 2018).

The International Student Barometer (2018) shows that in comparison with international students studying in other countries, the (international) students in Estonia are less satisfied with the opportunities to acquire work experience during their studies (57% as opposed to 68%) and find a job after graduation (69% as opposed to 78%).

International students would be more likely to remain to work in Estonia if they were able to find traineeships with Estonian employers, but stakeholders are not motivated enough to support the employment of international students in Estonia. The main perceived obstacle to starting a career in Estonia is poor command of Estonian, which is why study programmes should extend the teaching of Estonian. (Ernst & Young Baltic, 2017) The study by Ernst & Young Baltic (2017) also shows that 55% of alumni are not satisfied with their opportunities for a traineeship in Estonia. Also, the Federation of Estonian Student Unions' study of international students' awareness of support services showed that over 50% of the respondents had no information on traineeship and work opportunities, labour law, permits and contracts. Only 33% of traineeship applicants received relevant help from their higher education institution (Tänav, Villenthal, 2018).

Support services for international students

The international students' satisfaction survey International Student Barometer (2018), which in 2017 covered nearly 110,000 international students in 129 HEIs worldwide, including nine institutions in Estonia, showed that international students generally rate their living and studying experience in Estonia highly, and their satisfaction was on the same level with the European average (life in Estonia – 88%, world – 90%; studying in Estonia – 88%, world – 87%). Counselling services for international students, e.g. career counselling, are pointed out as a weakness: satisfaction with career counselling in Estonia was 53.9% (worldwide 71%), satisfaction with student counselling in Estonia was 85.7% (worldwide 92.8%), and international students' satisfaction with the opportunity to find local friends was 56.8% (worldwide 72.3%).

According to the study by Ernst & Young Baltic (2017), international alumni were generally satisfied with the education they had acquired in Estonia. Their attitudes were more critical of support services, the availability of information and the organisation of studies. Nearly one-quarter of the alumni covered by the study were not aware of the counselling and information services offered, and nearly one-fifth had not received adequate support.

International students need more assistance in finding accommodation and using health services. English information on the HEIs' websites is not sufficient to inform international students about scholarships, jobs, and events and hobby activities in their educational institution that would help them adapt to Estonian society and culture. International students also need more support (from their education institutions) in arranging for banking and health services and finding jobs. (Tänav, Villenthal, 2018)

Summary of thematic evaluation results

1. Launch of study programmes and admission

All the HEIs observed follow a general procedure for launching study programmes in English, while the reasons for that and for recruiting international students vary across institutions and specialisations.

During interviews and in their development plans, HEIs referred to the following objectives regarding the launch of study programmes in English and increasing the number of international students:

- Compensate for the shortage of Estonian students and help the specialisation to survive;
- Ensure an excellent, motivating international learning environment and competitiveness on the labour market, and thereby make a significant contribution to the development of the Estonian economy;
- Support the needs of the Estonian labour market;
- Alleviate the shortage of local teaching staff by involving international teaching staff, and ensure an excellent quality of studies and preparation of sufficient new teaching staff;
- Become an international university;
- Introduce Estonia to the world;
- Acquire international accreditation;
- Offer development aid to the countries east of Estonia (Ukraine, Georgia, and other);
- Earn additional income from study programmes based on market demand.

Large universities tend to initiate new study programmes and motivate the actors on the level of individual academic units. However, the various interest groups in a university (management, representatives of support structures, heads of study programmes) had sometimes very different opinions on how large the share of international students should be.

Recruitment is always based on the principle of ethnic and geographic diversity; excessively large ethnic groups are avoided. Universities have generally not defined specific target countries. University representatives especially appreciated the academic level of Ukrainian and Georgian students, and several of them noted that more students would be welcome from the Baltic and Scandinavian countries.

Admission is based on clear principles in all HEIs; the students perceive the process as simple and understandable. As a rule, documents can be submitted in the DreamApply environment. During admission, all HEIs also cooperate with the Police and Border Guard Board and ENIC/NARIC.

Applicants are usually requested to submit proof of their education and language skills and a motivation letter. English skills have to correspond to the B2 level for most study programmes. In many cases, applicants are interviewed through Skype or face to face. The Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre and the Tallinn University Baltic Film and Media School use exams in addition to interviews.

In the IT programmes of the University of Tartu, the motivation letters of all international students go through a plagiarism test, which has revealed a fairly large number of standard letters. Due to frequent cases of plagiarism, motivational letters are no longer required of applicants for the technology governance and digital transformation study programme of TalTech. On the other hand, the motivation letters from local applicants for the MA study programmes of the University of Tartu Skytte Institute have been noted to be often of a lower quality than those received from international applicants, which is why local applicants have difficulty entering these study programmes despite their high interest.

Most HEIs admitted that application documents do not always adequately reflect the applicants' knowledge and skills, especially their knowledge of the sciences and language skills. The academic level of the admitted students is therefore quite varied. However, the differences are individual and not related to the students' country of origin.

A solution is to assess the academic results of the previous level of education and the knowledge required for the programme, and the submission of portfolios in creative studies.

Most HEIs charge a fee of 50–80 euros for processing application documents. The students interviewed did not have problems with the amount of the fee, but they did mention difficulties with transferring the money.

The application deadlines are usually in March or April. In Mainor, applications are received all year round, and students are admitted twice a year.

The admitted students who have confirmed their commitment to study generally do begin their studies. HEIs did not perceive any problems with visas and residence permits: nearly all the admitted students received the necessary permits. In very few cases, students have not begun studies after receiving residence permits, but have apparently applied only for the purpose of entering the Schengen visa area.

Reasons for studying in Estonia vary. The most common reasons are affordable tuition fees and living, scholarship opportunities, and the general safe living environment. Students also referred to the university's reputation, previous personal contacts as exchange pupils or students, recommendations by friends or teaching staff, the content and flexibility of study programmes, unique specialisation opportunities, and teaching staff that are globally recognised in their respective fields. The international recognition of Estonian musicians was repeatedly mentioned by the students of the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre.

It was emphasised during interviews that **opposition to study programmes in English and to "immigrants", which is amplified by the Estonian media and public statements, puts universities in a complicated situation and may discourage good applicants from choosing Estonia. Universities expect society to value internationalisation.**

2. Financing the studies

Payment for tuition is regulated in all HEIs and is fixed in a tuition contract between the institution and the student. The amount of the fee and payment schedules vary in different institutions.

Fees for the sampled study programmes (based on information submitted by the education institutions)

Higher education institution	Fees for sampled study programmes	Tuition fee discounts
Mainor	€ 4,240 per year plus an annual fee of € 400 for EU students and € 800 for third-country students for beginning the academic year. Third country students pay the fee for the whole first year in advance.	Scholarships are available to cover the tuition fee: a master's studies scholarship programme has been launched for foreigners; in spring 2019 Mainor plans to offer a scholarship to students with excellent academic results.
Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre	€ 600 per year for EU students € 6,000 per year for non-EU students	About 10% of non-European bachelor's students are granted EAMT scholarships that cover 25–50% of the tuition fee.
Estonian Business School	In Tallinn € 4,400–5,200 per year In Helsinki € 6,200–7,000 per year	All students can apply for EBS scholarships that cover the annual tuition fee for 24 bachelor's students and 10 master's students.

Tallinn University of Technology	€ 3,300 per year for full-time study Third country students pay the fee for the whole first year in advance.	Scholarships are granted to 10 bachelor's and 3 master's students. A reduction in the number of scholarships is planned.
Tallinn University	€ 3,600–4,000 per year plus a supervision fee of € 165 and a graduation thesis fee of € 242.	No scholarships are awarded. In 2018/2019 an <i>ad hoc</i> scholarship was awarded to one international student.
University of Tartu	€ 3,400–4000 per year; € 11,000 per year in medical studies	In master's studies, 70% of students on average are exempted from tuition fee, but it is planned to reduce the availability of scholarships. No scholarships are available for medical students.

The study shows that the income that public universities receive from international students does not cover all the actual costs for most study programmes, and the universities (e.g. the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre) subsidise the studies of international students from other teaching and R&D activities. At the same time, the direct additional cost of teaching international students in some study programmes is less than the income earned by the university, which is why it is financially profitable to teach international students (e.g. the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies).

The private universities EBS and Mainor only offer tuition for a fee. The fees are based on the total costs of studying and teaching, including administrative and payroll expenses.

All HEIs confirmed that in the event of payment difficulties, students benefit from flexible payment schedules, and they are not easily expelled for failing to pay for tuition.

3. Learning and teaching

The international students interviewed were generally satisfied with their study programmes. They pointed out that in most cases, the study programmes exceeded their expectations (e.g. in TalTech, the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre). During interviews, international students expressed their wish to be more involved in the development of study programmes.

Students are also satisfied with the teaching. Students find that teaching staff use innovative study methods, can involve and guide students, have provided e-study support, and other. In a few cases, the teaching and assessment methods were said to be one-sided, and there were shortcomings in the exchange of information on the organisation of studies and in the ability of teaching staff to involve and motivate students of different levels. Students of various HEIs criticised the lack or the small number of elective courses taught in English. Students of all the educational institutions appreciated the opportunity to communicate with their teaching staff personally and informally.

Representatives of all HEIs, including teaching staff and local and international students, agreed that the presence of international students enriched discussions and improved the quality of studying. The joint teaching of local and international students was perceived as especially valuable for both sides: international students broaden the horizons of Estonians and the latter, who usually also work, provide practical examples in class and help the international students understand and adapt to the local culture.

The teaching staff interviewed confirmed being aware of different cultures and having the competence to cope in a multicultural learning environment. This competence is usually achieved by trial and error. The need to

discuss politically sensitive issues on which students from different countries have opposing views have forced the teaching staff to check and adjust the methods they use in teaching and leading discussions. Teaching materials have also been critically reviewed. At the same time, it is tried to communicate to all the parties that views indeed vary across countries.

Teaching staff are more concerned about coping with the varying academic levels of the students. Although teaching staff from all HEIs assured that the level of students has considerably improved over the years, differences are still noticeable and relate among other things to variations in the education systems of the students' home countries. The differences are especially evident in science subjects.

International students drop out very rarely and dropping out was not perceived as a major problem in any of the educational institutions.

Several institutions, especially international teaching staff, pointed out the broader issue of cheating and plagiarism. It was identified that most HEIs use the plagiarism detection program URKUND and have usually agreed on the code of conduct concerning plagiarised diploma theses, but not concerning cheating during classroom tests.

Learning materials are available to students in their tuition language, and there are generally no problems in this respect.

According to teaching staff, the students' command of English varies, and their certificates of proficiency do not always reflect the actual situation. According to students, the teaching staff's command of English also requires attention and is currently too varied, causing difficulties in understanding the content of some subjects. Also, the teaching staff's accent is sometimes a concern.

The organisation of studies is regulated by the relevant rules of the educational institutions and, as a rule, no exceptions are made to international students. However, in some cases, diversity, such as religious differences are taken into account.

Learning mobility of international students is generally supported, and the mobility indicators of students are good. The Erasmus+ and Dora+ programmes are mainly used. Less frequently have universities set specific numeric mobility goals and created mobility windows for that purpose.

Interviews revealed that students were aware of, but not very enthusiastic about learning mobility. They explained that studying in Estonia was itself like student exchange and they had already used learning mobility in their previous levels of study, but also that Estonian universities were on a high level and there was no need to go to another university of a lower level. Those who had considered learning mobility had calculated that they would need additional funding or savings, as the scholarship was not enough to cover mobility. Another concern was the potential loss of a place in the dormitory after the return.

HEIs have different approaches to charging for exchange semesters: some do not charge at all, while in others, the student has to pay 50% or even 100% of the tuition fee. International students use international mobility much more actively than domestic students. The share of international students in Erasmus+ learning mobility grew from 18 to 28% during 2014–2016.

4. Practical training and employment of international students

The traineeship is mandatory in most of the study programmes covered by this study. In all higher education institutions, traineeship coordinators work on the university and academic unit levels, intermediating traineeships and advising students on traineeship matters. Students usually have to find a traineeship themselves.

The most significant problem for international students in applying for traineeships and jobs is the lack of Estonian language proficiency. Estonian is often used as the working language even in international businesses. According to entrepreneurs, international students also lack an understanding of the Estonian business environment, and their guidance uses up too many resources. Entrepreneurs expect education institutions to prepare students for coping in the Estonian business environment before traineeship. Some institutions have begun to do so.

Traineeships can also be completed abroad through the Erasmus+ programme. Some students (Tallinn University BFM, University of Tartu medical faculty) have completed traineeships in their home countries.

Generally, Estonian HEIs do not recognise the need to train the workforce for the Estonian labour market in their international study programmes. Instead, the graduates are seen as "Estonian envoys in their home countries" or competent professionals in their fields. The situation is different in Mainor, where the needs of the Estonian labour market are among the primary considerations in developing study programmes.

Students have different opinions on whether or not to work in Estonia after graduation. For example, students of the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre have thought about master's or doctoral studies in Estonia, but the Estonian income level is considered too low and the language requirements too strict. The Academy has noted an increasing trend in its graduates' staying in Estonia in recent years. Graduates of University of Tartu IT programmes have already found engagement in the Estonian labour market, while other University of Tartu students interviewed for this study wanted to continue studying or start working in Estonia: of the 11 philosophy and Skytte Institute students interviewed, ten were willing to remain in Estonia. Medical students of the University of Tartu prefer to return to their home countries after graduation.

The International Student Barometer (2018) shows that in comparison with international students in other countries, the (international) students in Estonia are less satisfied with their opportunities for acquiring work experience during studies (57% in Estonia, 68% in other countries) and finding a job after graduation (69% in Estonia, 78% in other countries). Information on work and traineeship opportunities for foreigners in Estonia is poor and not always available to international students. For example, information on the national initiative Work in Estonia is available on the websites of several HEIs, but none of the students interviewed were aware of the initiative.

5. Support systems for students and teaching staff

International students are provided comprehensive counselling in all higher education institutions. In large universities, counselling is carried out centrally and by study counsellors in the academic units. Smaller HEIs do not offer all the services themselves (e.g. psychological counselling), while students appreciate the individual communication and sense of community in these smaller schools.

Most of the HEIs visited for the purposes of the study organise information days for international students at the beginning of each academic year to introduce the school and life in Estonia. Large universities additionally organise information days at the academic unit or study programme level. The institutions' levels of awareness and communication, e.g. regarding the adaptation programme offered by the Ministry of Interior, are different.

Tutoring programmes have been successfully implemented in Tallinn University, University of Tartu and EBS. In EBS, tutors help the students that have newly arrived in Estonia with any adaptation and everyday issues, e.g. they meet the students at the airport, help them use public transport and find accommodation. Each student tutor handles up to five international students and can receive ECTS for elective courses or a small scholarship for this. During the

interviews, international students of large universities also mentioned that help from permanent tutors would help them adapt. **International students of all universities except EBS expressed the desire to have more contacts with local students and mentioned having problems finding such contacts.**

International students' most significant concerns were finding accommodation and accessing health care.

Although the websites of HEIs provide information on family doctor centres that offer services in English, the international students of all universities were dissatisfied with these health services. It is complicated to find a family doctor as only a few speak English, and their patient lists are too full. It is easier to access Estonian-speaking family doctors, but the language barrier prevents the actual use of their services.

The internal information of all HEIs is available in English, and study information and document management systems are usually bilingual.

All universities support their teaching staff by internal training in teaching methods, but a large part of the courses are in Estonian. Therefore, the international teaching staff has no access to such courses.

Most education institutions do not offer special adaptation programmes to international teaching staff, but only current information on relevant topics.

Universities have different approaches to helping students catch up in their studies. They may provide preparation courses, compensatory learning, introductory courses in Estonian and English, and student tutors. As regards the latter, this system is said by university representatives to be more effective than remedial courses by teaching staff, as students communicate well with their peers and their results are better thanks to individual studies.

International students can learn Estonian in all HEIs. Estonian courses are offered as mandatory and elective courses and are sometimes integrated with cultural history. For example, the University of Tartu students find language learning to be more effective if it is provided as an elective and not a mandatory course and the results are not graded. As Estonian is a difficult language to learn, students are afraid that graded assessment may affect their grade point average and scholarship entitlement, which is why they tend not to choose these courses.

Tallinn University and the University of Tartu offer Estonian courses to international teaching staff, and the University of Tartu also to their family members. About 40 members of international teaching staff participate in the University of Tartu language courses every year. **In large universities, teaching staff can participate in English courses, and EBS also provides English training for its teaching staff.**

Interviews showed that HEIs expect more support from the state and local governments in offering various services. The International House in Tallinn was referred to as an example of good practice. In both Tartu and Tallinn, the racial discrimination of students and teaching staff is an occasional concern, which the universities try to solve in cooperation with the police.

Best practices, recommendations and conclusions

This section outlines the best practices identified in the universities' self-analysis reports and interviews, which could be of interest to other HEIs in Estonia. Attention is also drawn to areas in need of improvement, and

recommendations are given to HEIs as well as state and local government agencies. More specific information on best practices and recommendations is provided in the relevant subsections on each higher education institution.

Best practices

- **The balance between Estonian and international students.** The Tallinn University audiovisual media study programme has an excellent balance between international and Estonian students (their numbers are almost equal). Studying in mixed groups helps international students adapt better, enriches the study process and provides an international learning environment for Estonian students.
- **Involvement of international students in study programme development.** In Tallinn University, international students are involved in the activities of the student council and the constant development of studies.
- **Adaptation support for international students.** EBS International Club helps the EBS international students adapt and solve any daily issues through a tutorship system. Each tutor guides up to five international students and receives either ECTS for elective courses or a small scholarship for their work. For example, the tutors receive the exchange students at the airport, teach them to use public transport and help find accommodation.
- **Multilingual and multi-disciplinary study information system.** The Mainor study information system is in three languages and integrates a large amount of (study, administrative and financial) information into a single platform, thus simplifying the work of teaching staff, support staff and students.
- **Supporting the mobility of international students.** EBS has a mobility window in its study programmes, i.e. one semester consists entirely of elective courses. This mobility window makes it much easier for students to go on an exchange semester. The EBS study programmes are structured so that students can study abroad for one semester and fill the semester with elective courses in a foreign university. The organisation of studies ensures that mandatory and other courses can be taken in EBS without extending the duration of study.
- **Personal development counselling programme for students.** The development seminar of the European Union – Russia studies programme at the University of Tartu uses personal development counselling that supports and monitors the professional development of students and provides feedback on it. The development counsellor helps students plan their future career, find a traineeship and match the competencies obtained during traineeship with the studies.
- **Good preparation for employment.** International students of the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre take the "University studies and labour world" course during their first semester, which introduces the opportunities for employment in the field of music and theatre, provides basic knowledge of forms of entrepreneurship, and gives insight into business behaviour and entrepreneurship.
- **Clear internationalisation goal.** EBS is an excellent example of a particular internationalisation goal: to receive EQUIS accreditation by 2021 and reach a 50% relative share of international students. Everyone in the university acknowledges the need to achieve this goal.
- **Integrating Estonian studies with other courses.** The Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre teaches Estonian together with cultural history from the 2018/2019 academic year.
- **Motivating international students to work in Estonia.** In the University of Tartu IT study programme, which is a vital speciality for Estonia, the tuition costs of most international students are covered by scholarships from the university or companies.
- **A minimum English proficiency level has been established for the teaching staff.** In Tallinn University, the teaching staff of international study programmes must meet at least the C1 level of proficiency in English.
- **Comprehensive admission interview.** EBS students highly appreciate the admission interview conducted through Skype, which is based on the student's motivation letter, allows getting acquainted with the teaching staff and is perceived by students as a significant factor for choosing EBS.

- **Good cooperation with traineeship providers.** The University of Tartu IT study programmes have excellent cooperation with traineeship providers. Many companies and also students like the industrial master's programme in IT and thanks to it, many international graduates have remained to work in Estonia. Half of the studies in the industrial master's programme are conducted in a partner company of the university.
- **Counselling centre.** TalTech has a help desk that students can access in the event of any concerns.
- **Student family support.** TalTech provides thorough counselling for students who want to arrive in Estonia with their families.
- **Accommodation of international students.** Mainor provides all its first-year international students with a place in a student hostel.
- **International House.** The newly opened International House in Tallinn helps international students and teaching staff and their families to adapt to living in Estonia.
- **Remedial courses for students.** EBS offers remedial courses in mathematics by student tutors. This helps students catch up with their level of mathematics where needed without excessive costs for the university or additional stress for the student.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- **Integration of international students into Estonian society**
 - o International students perceive difficulties in integrating into Estonian society. It is recommended to allow international students to study more together with local students so as to better adapt to Estonian culture and establish personal contacts more easily. This goal should be kept in mind when planning studies (e.g. by providing remedial courses taught by local students or through problem-based learning in mixed groups).
 - o International students should be offered more opportunities for socialising (events, tutoring by locals). They also need real contacts with potential employers already upon arrival in Estonia and should be helped build a contact network throughout the study process (e.g. visits to organisations, Estonian culture / employment landscape / start-up days).
 - o It is advisable to consider adding mandatory Estonian courses to all international study programmes and set a target for the language skill level. Estonian courses can also be integrated with a specialisation course.
- **Accommodation, health care, other services**
 - o According to current feedback, international students have the greatest need for accommodation-related support services: they need much more support in finding accommodation and identifying the accommodation options.
 - o Cooperation with state and local government agencies should focus much more on making primary health care available to international students in English.
 - o It is recommended to appoint a specific helper for international students throughout their studies, e.g. an Estonian student tutor who can handle daily matters, and/or a university counsellor for international students who is familiar with the entire study process. It is essential that international students know whose help to ask in the event of concerns without having to seek the person in the university system.
 - o The purpose of the International House in Tallinn is to advise foreigners in Estonia in matters such as opening bank accounts, using family doctor's services, and moving to Estonia with their families. Education institutions should actively communicate information on these services to their international students.

- **Support for teaching staff**
 - HEIs should consider much more extensive cooperation in organising joint events for the local teaching staff that teach international students (including courses taught in Estonian) as well as international teaching staff (courses taught in English). There is a great need for training to improve teaching skills and focus on the needs of a multicultural learning environment.
 - International teaching staff that begins work in a higher education institution need more systemic support to adapt to the information space relevant to them quickly. HEIs are recommended to hold more internal courses for new international teaching staff to introduce the education system, organisation of studies, credit points, volume of work, working culture, and other.

- **Preparation for traineeship and employment**
 - International students are dissatisfied with the HEIs' support for finding traineeships and jobs. HEIs should find additional ways of making specific traineeship offers to international students in cooperation with employers.
 - Employers are dissatisfied with the knowledge of the international trainees or employees about the Estonian business environment. HEIs should improve the preparation of students for business traineeship by training them in the Estonian business environment, entrepreneurship and working culture, the preparation of CVs where necessary, and other.
 - International students lack awareness of services provided by the state. HEIs should make more use of state-supported projects (e.g. Work in Estonia) to find and intermediate jobs and traineeships for international students.
 - International students' awareness of the opportunities for professional employment in Estonia after graduation should be improved. This is especially important in specialities for which there is a higher demand for on the Estonian labour market. It is recommended to cooperate more actively with various institutions (Police and Border Guard Board), implementing agencies of government initiatives (e.g. Work in Estonia) and third-sector organisations (e.g. "Let's Do It!", "Youth To School" ("Noored kooli"), Lift99).

- **Relationship with Estonian society**
 - A more comprehensive and broad-based information exchange is needed between Estonian HEIs and employers. Students of professions of which there is a particular shortage in the labour market should be given clearer information on the labour market's expectations.
 - The state should have a long-term vision concerning the future of teaching in English. It is essential that study programmes in English are based on a shared understanding of the role of teaching in English on the Estonian higher education landscape.
 - Success stories of international students and employees should be communicated more actively to the public on the universities' and also the national level.
 - Public opposition to teaching in foreign languages may endanger the recruitment of international students and inhibit the development of international studies. To prevent this from happening, various organisations should work together more actively.

Conclusions

The overview of assessment results clearly indicates that the willingness and ability of HEIs to cope with international students has improved in tandem with the increase in the number of international students. This

assessment largely confirmed the results of previous studies: students are generally satisfied with the quality of studies but are concerned about their lack of contact with the local students, as well as the varying levels of proficiency in English of the teaching staff and also of the students themselves. International students have difficulties in finding accommodation, accessing health care and finding traineeship and employment opportunities. HEIs expect more support from the state and local governments in offering various services to international students and teaching staff and their family members.- Employers, in turn, expect universities to better prepare their international students for the Estonian business environment and working culture.

As a new aspect not revealed by previous studies, this study has identified the problem of a negative public attitude to teaching in English and "immigrants". However, much progress has been made in the internationalisation of HEIs, and there are many good examples of excellent counselling systems, teaching experience, employment, and other. Estonian teaching staff and students alike confirmed that a multicultural learning environment has considerably improved the level of discussions and the quality of studies. The international students that have remained to work in Estonia are a useful additional resource for our economy. It is necessary to achieve a national level agreement on the future of English-language education.

This study shows that the funding of HEIs and the calculation of tuition fees are rather arbitrary and do not usually cover the actual cost of teaching in public universities. Additionally, universities offer international students scholarships from their own budgets to cover tuition. Therefore, English-language study programmes are primarily financed from other academic and research activities. However, the added value from teaching in English – an international study environment for Estonian students, which is attractive enough to keep youth in Estonia; talented international students studying specialities that are in high demand in the labour market – may exceed the costs many times over.

The sustainability of Estonian-language higher education depends on the ability of Estonian institutions of higher education to compete internationally. It is equally important to consistently develop the Estonian language as a language of science and make Estonian language and cultural studies attractive to the international teaching staff and students who have arrived here.