

Decision of the Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Education

Pallas University of Applied Sciences

Institutional accreditation decision

1.02.2023

The Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Education decided to accredit the Pallas University of Applied Sciences for three years.

Pursuant to section 43.2 of the *Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation* established on the basis of the authorisation contained in subsection 3 of § 38 of the Higher Education Act and in subsection 5 of § 24 of the Statutes of the Education and Youth Board, the Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Education (hereinafter the Council) states the following:

1. The Pallas University of Applied Sciences (hereinafter Pallas) and the Estonian Quality Agency for Education (HAKA) agreed on the period for institutional accreditation on 15 November 2021.
2. On the basis of section 8 of the *Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation*, the following professional higher education study programmes were also assessed as part of institutional accreditation:
Photography

Painting and Restoration

Textile
3. By the decision of 26 May 2022, the Director of HAKA approved the composition of the Assessment Committee for Institutional Accreditation (hereinafter the Committee) as follows:

Eva Werner (Chairperson)	Professor and former Rector, IMC University of Applied Sciences Krams (Austria)
Silke Lange (Secretary)	Associate Dean, University of the Arts London (UK)
Anett Pook	Student, Tallinn University of Technology (Estonia)
Annie Doona	Emeritus President IADT, Institute of Art, Design and Technology (Ireland)
Alistair James Payne	Professor, Head of the Kingston School of Art (UK)
Maarit Salolainen	Professor, Aalto University (Finland)
Ieva Skaurone	Rector, Vilnius Academy of Arts (Lithuania)
Liina Siib	Professor, Estonian Academy of Arts (Estonia)



4. Pallas submitted the self-evaluation report to HAKA on 3 August 2022, and the assessment coordinator of HAKA sent the self-evaluation report to the Committee on 16 August 2022.
5. The assessment visit to Pallas took place in hybrid format from 19 to 21 October 2022.
6. The Committee sent the draft assessment report to HAKA on 4 December 2022, HAKA forwarded the draft assessment report to the higher education institution for comment on 5 December 2022, and Pallas submitted its comments on 22 December 2022.
7. The Committee submitted the final assessment report to HAKA on 9 January 2023. The assessment report is an integral part of the decision. The report is available on the HAKA website.
8. The Secretary of the Council forwarded the final assessment report and the self-evaluation report to the members of the Council on 23 January 2023.
9. The Assessment Committee's assessments were as follows:

Standard	Assessment
Strategic management	Conforms to requirements
Resources	Partially conforms to requirements
Quality culture	Partially conforms to requirements
Academic ethics	Conforms to requirements
Internationalisation	Conforms to requirements
Teaching staff	Conforms to requirements
Study programme	Partially conforms to requirements
Learning and teaching	Conforms to requirements
Student assessment	Conforms to requirements
Learning support systems	Conforms to requirements
Research, development and/or other creative activity	Partially conforms to requirements
Service to society	Conforms to requirements

 **Worthy of recognition:**

Pallas is worthy of recognition for the management and implementation of continuing education and lifelong learning. Their activities in these areas are clearly targeted, well planned, systematic and correspond to the needs of a changing society.

10. At its meeting of 1 February 2023, with the participation of 12 members, the Council discussed the received documents and decided to highlight from the assessment report the following strengths¹, areas for improvement² and recommendations, and suggestions for further development³ regarding Pallas.

10.1 STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Strengths

1. Pallas has a dedicated management team that has a clear vision of where to take the institution within the next years to achieve its strategic objectives.
2. In Pallas, student contributions are highly valued and taken into consideration. Stakeholders are well involved in the development planning of the higher education institution.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. Due to the small size of the institution, it is possible to make use of informal communication and decision-making methods. However, such an informal approach also involves a number of risks, particularly with regard to clarity and the consistency and uniformity of processes. To ensure consistency across all departments and units, a systematic approach to planning and decision-making should be implemented, and responsibilities should be clearly communicated and understood. It is recommended to establish and document the strategic management and decision-making structures of Pallas along with related processes at all levels of the institution to enhance clarity and the binding nature of processes and procedures.

10.2. RESOURCES

Strengths

1. The communication between the institute and students is timely, transparent, and collegial. Different information channels are used.
2. External communication is well-targeted. Pallas has a functioning system in place to popularise its activities. The areas of communication and service to society are well-aligned.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. Pursuant to the Higher Education Act, academic staff must undergo an evaluation procedure. To this end, appropriate structures and plans must be put in place within

¹ Achievements that exceed the level of standard (not compliance with the standard) are presented as strengths.

² Areas for improvement and recommendations refer to shortcomings in meeting the requirements of the institutional accreditation standard and affect the formation of the final decision of the Council.

³ Suggestions for further development are proposals that do not contain a reference to non-conformity with the standard and the inclusion or exclusion of which is at the discretion of the higher education institution. Suggestions for further development do not affect the final decision of the Council.

the institution. Pallas' approach to evaluation procedures is inconsistent. Standardisation of evaluation procedures is needed along with the implementation of a consistent documentation and follow-up system.

2. As the approach of Pallas to development meetings is in part informal and unstructured, there is a risk of losing essential information about the development needs of the teaching staff. No institution-wide plan for staff competence development has been established. The competence development needs of staff members must be documented systematically and a competence training plan must be prepared to meet these needs.

Suggestions for further development

1. Both students and alumni expressed their wish for more interdisciplinary learning with peers from other programmes. In this context, it is recommended to review the current allocation of space to create more opportunities for cross-departmental and interdisciplinary teaching and learning.
2. As the recruitment of qualified staff is becoming increasingly more difficult, it is recommended to prepare a succession plan and lay down any potential staff-related risks in a risk management plan.

10.3. QUALITY CULTURE

Strengths

1. A purposeful set of surveys for collecting feedback from internal and external stakeholders has been developed.
2. Regular and systematic analysis of learning activities as well as feedback from external stakeholders both help improve the quality of teaching.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. A common and thorough understanding of the quality of teaching, research, and service to society must be established within the institution. At present, such understanding varies by study programme. On that account, common definitions and principles for quality should be developed and their dissemination among staff and stakeholders should be assured. These principles must be implemented across all study programmes to guarantee equal and quality-driven learning experiences for all students.
2. Pallas needs to collect, centralise and document its approach to quality assurance, including policies, quality procedures, models, and indicators. Additionally, quality-related risks should be assessed and the obtained risk assessment should be used for quality development.

Suggestions for further development

1. Consideration should be given to the creation of a Quality Handbook that addresses in a consistent and comprehensive manner all quality issues and is readily available

to both students and staff. At present, there are many different documents concerning quality issues.

10.4. ACADEMIC ETHICS

Strengths

1. Pallas has developed a wide range of formats (information sessions, guidelines for written papers, rules for final projects, etc) to ensure consistent dissemination of the principles of academic ethics among its students.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. The Pallas Committee of Academic Ethics is set up only on a case-by-case basis. To ensure consistency and transparency in the handling of critical incidents, a permanent working committee consisting of academic staff, students, and external stakeholders should be set up. All members of the Pallas community should have the possibility to contact this committee directly.
2. In addition, a document on academic ethics should be prepared that would provide for the principles applied by Pallas to all activities. This document should also establish a link with the Estonian Code of Conduct for Research Integrity recently adopted by professional higher education institutions. The institution should further expand the scope of academic ethics to include principles for equity, fairness and non-discriminatory practices. Moreover, the tasks and responsibilities for the handling of complaints and ethical issues should be clearly defined.

10.5. INTERNATIONALISATION

Strengths

1. A good support system is in place for incoming international students.
2. Both students and staff share their international experiences and encourage other students and staff members to participate in international mobility as well.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. Although Pallas has made good progress in its internationalisation work, the understanding of internationalisation of study programmes varies by department. Strategies for the teaching and learning of foreign languages have not been developed or implemented with regard to teaching staff. The content and activities for the internationalisation of study programmes must be defined in a more explicit and systematic manner.
2. The objective of Pallas is to become an internationally recognised higher education institution that attracts more international visiting students. However, the institution has not placed sufficient emphasis on the cultural diversity training of

staff. A cultural awareness training programme for all staff should be developed and implemented across the institution.

10.6. TEACHING STAFF

Strengths

1. A significant number of academic staff at Pallas are visiting lecturers and practitioners in the field. Thanks to this, students are well aware of the current developments and issues in their area of specialisation.
2. The teaching staff of Pallas are committed to educating creative, competent, and skilled graduates.
3. The teaching staff of the Textile and the Painting and Restoration study programmes are characterised by their eagerness to support students as well as their receptiveness to feedback, which creates a strong sense of community within the departments.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. A significant proportion of Pallas' teaching staff consists of part-time practitioners whose integration into the principal activities of the institution requires a more systematic approach. More attention should be given to the integration of part-time and guest lecturers into the institution as a whole, its quality systems and procedures, ensuring that the staff are kept well informed about any changes and developments.
2. While Pallas supports the personal development activities of its teaching staff, these activities are overly reliant on ad hoc and informal approaches. This could result in specific areas of development that are useful for all teaching staff being overlooked. A more systematic approach based on strategic priorities should be applied to the development of teaching staff. In addition, training of teaching staff should include aspects such as pedagogical skills, digital competences, and innovative approaches to learning and research.
3. The practices of staff performance appraisal vary by department (formal vs informal, recorded vs unrecorded). An informal approach to performance appraisal does not benefit either the teaching staff (in determining their development needs) or the management (in obtaining an overview of staff performance and progress). Therefore, Pallas should standardise and formalise its performance appraisal systems institution-wide.
4. Photography study programme: In order for teaching, learning outcomes and assessment to be constructively aligned, structured training opportunities should be provided to teaching staff, especially to novice and guest teachers.
5. Painting and Restoration study programme: The number of teaching staff of the Wall Painting Restoration specialisation should be increased.

10.7. STUDY PROGRAMME

Strengths

1. The study programmes of Pallas have a strong and explicit practical orientation which ensures that students feel well prepared for the world of work and their future career.
2. The practically-oriented Textile study programme is unique and combines both textile and fashion studies. In addition, the study programme also has a great balance of theory, practice, and technological preparation. Strong relations with alumni and external stakeholders contribute to the development of the study programme.
3. The wide array of practical subjects and theoretical courses offered in the Photography study programme provide a solid basis for the development of students' skills and competences.
4. The practical approach of restoration studies in the Painting and Restoration study programme supports the development of students' drawing, painting, and wall-painting skills. Strong relations with alumni and external stakeholders contribute to the development of the study programme.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. The current design of study programmes is characterised by fragmentation and small credit allocation per semester. Such a design does not allow for in-depth learning of the subjects. It is thus necessary for study programme councils to review and redesign the study programmes. The number of courses and assessments should be reduced to enhance students' learning experience and skills development.
2. Textile study programme: To keep study programmes up to date and familiarise students with current and upcoming developments and trends, courses that better reflect the textile and fashion field of today and tomorrow and foster critical thinking should be added to the study programme. In particular, this applies to subjects such as sustainability, novel materials and processes, as well as modern and forward-looking solutions.
3. Photography study programme: Students, alumni and employers are not systematically involved in the design and development of study programmes. To this end, a clear process for capturing input for curriculum development must be established and followed. The study programme must be reviewed to avoid duplication of topics. In addition, the study programme should be more interdisciplinary in nature and more co-operation between departments and study programmes should be fostered.
4. Painting and Restoration study programme: Learning outcomes must be reviewed to ensure that they are international in nature and better aligned with assessment criteria.

Suggestions for further development

1. It would be beneficial to develop minors (15–20 ECTS). Minors would allow for cross-disciplinary understanding, foster thinking across borders, and enable the creation of flexible study paths.
2. To support thinking across borders, co-operation, and interdisciplinarity learning, it is recommended to create stronger links between different courses and disciplines.

3. It is recommended to combine the courses of the Photography study programme into larger modules as it would allow for a greater focus on content and a deeper understanding of photography as part of critical thinking within visual culture and contemporary art, thus enhancing the quality of the programme. In the review of courses, the suggestions of alumni should be taken into account: courses on marketing and economy should be included in the study programme as they are essential for working as an independent photographer.
4. In the Painting and Restoration study programme, it is recommended to increase the volume of specialisations.

10.8. LEARNING AND TEACHING

Strengths

1. The relationship between students and teaching staff is both individualised and collegial.
2. The alumni of the Textile study programme are active in the Estonian textile and fashion fields, which ensures strong relations with other external stakeholders. The student-centred approach of the study programme stimulates student motivation and skills development.
3. The Painting and Restoration programme features a so-called opinion festival, as part of which students discuss their feedback with teaching staff two to three times per semester. The alumni of the study programme are active in their field, which ensures strong relations with other external stakeholders. The student-centred approach of the study programme stimulates student motivation and skills development.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. Students' experiences with assessment and constructive feedback are not comparable, which indicates a disparity in assessment and the provision of feedback. To ensure that all students have the opportunity to develop their potential, it is important to create appropriate guidelines for teaching staff that promote equitable feedback practices and consistent levels of detail.
2. The level of innovation in teaching methods varies across the institution. There are examples of both good and not so good practices. It is necessary to create such a learning environment for teaching staff that would allow for staff members to learn from each other, highlight good practices and thereby promote the development of teaching skills.
3. Textile study programme: In addition to the craft-oriented practical approach, it is advisable to engage in more co-operation with industries. Participating in fairs and competitions is a valuable learning opportunity for students. To this end, it is essential not to focus solely on a few international competitions per year, but to seek out more opportunities for students in the textile and fashion sectors.
4. Painting and Restoration study programme: The institution does not have sufficient studio space for painting studies, therefore, additional space should be sought.

Suggestions for further development

1. It is recommended to take up the students' suggestion to build upon the already existing sense of community to create a learning environment that fosters interdisciplinary co-operation.
2. To ensure equal treatment of all students, a formal framework for addressing problems should be established on Photography programme.

10.9. STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. Information communication on the timing and methods of student assessment is unclear and inconsistent within the institution. To promote clarity, consistency and fairness in student assessment, the institution should review and formally document all assessment procedures and practices.
2. To ensure consistent and fair assessment and timely notification of students, measurable quality control criteria and stricter assessment deadlines for teaching staff are necessary.
3. To ensure consistency and quality in assessments, the institution should formulate all course descriptions and learning outcomes in a uniform manner.

Suggestions for further development

1. To ensure consistent alignment of content, teaching and assessment, teaching staff should receive regular training on designing learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

10.10. LEARNING SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Strengths

1. The Student Union of Pallas is very active, committed, and contributes to the creation of a supportive learning environment in co-operation with the management.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. To ensure accessibility for all individuals, improvements should be made to classrooms that are not currently wheelchair accessible or have limited access for persons with a physical disability.

Suggestions for further development

1. To create the conditions for increasing student satisfaction, student feedback on counselling services should be collected more frequently and consistently.
2. Support for students with mental health problems should be provided, not only within the institution-wide counselling system, but also within departments. This would make it possible to offer help earlier, when concerns arise.
3. Staff training sessions on (mental) health counselling, intercultural awareness, equality and diversity, and other such topics is recommended to reduce internal and

external communication risks. Consideration should be given to developing an inclusivity statement to improve communication.

10.11. RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND/OR OTHER CREATIVE ACTIVITY

Strengths

1. Teaching staff are dedicated to pursuing research and creative activities, including in co-operation with external colleagues, and fostering opportunities for students to participate in these activities to develop and disseminate innovative ideas.
2. The research and creative activities of Pallas contribute to society, for example, through the Pallas Gallery and the projects of staff and students.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. Although Pallas has made some progress in its research, development and creative activities (RDC), there is still room for improvement. A clear strategic plan for research should be developed. The strategic plan should outline the criteria and principles for quality research in Pallas as well as research priorities related to staff development activities. This strategic plan should allow for teaching staff to plan, prepare and link their academic research to study programmes and teaching.
2. The strategic plan for RDC should also include a procedure for measuring research performance and societal impact based on transparent criteria.
3. In the overall strategic plan of the institution, RDC should be aligned with learning, teaching and internationalisation, with the focus and priorities of RDC activities being clearly outlined. This requires the building of a strong narrative around applied research (including artistic research) and linking it to the mission of the higher education institution.
4. Research is becoming increasingly more interdisciplinary. To foster interdisciplinary research both within and beyond the higher education institution, it is essential to expand the number of research networks.
5. The competence development plan for teaching staff should provide for the promotion of their research activities as well as the implementation of corresponding support systems in Pallas.

10.12. SERVICE TO SOCIETY

Strengths

1. Pallas is worthy of recognition for the management and implementation of continuing education and lifelong learning. Their activities in these areas are clearly targeted, well planned, systematic and correspond to the needs of a changing society.
2. The ongoing symbiosis between Pallas and the City of Tartu through art projects in the public urban space exemplifies good co-operation and societal engagement.

Suggestions for further development

1. The initiatives of Pallas on shaping the development of art education are valuable. It is recommended to continue this path through regular public seminars and discussions. As Pallas is placing focus on sustainability, it is recommended to lay down the general principles of sustainability and integrate them into all the activities of the institution.
11. 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 assess 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; 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.
 12. The Council analysed the strengths and areas for improvement of Pallas and found that Pallas has a dedicated management team that has a clear vision of where to take the institution within the next few years to achieve its strategic objectives. Pallas is worthy of recognition for the management and implementation of continuing education and lifelong learning. Their activities in these areas are clearly targeted, well planned, systematic and correspond to the needs of a changing society. The teaching staff of Pallas are committed to educating creative, competent, and skilled graduates. The individualised approach and collegial relationship between students and teaching staff fosters the development of personal skills. The Student Union of Pallas is very active, committed, and contributes to the creation of a supportive learning environment in co-operation with the management.

However, in the course of the evaluation, several substantial shortcomings were identified, in particular, with regard to the four standards assessed as 'partially conforms'. The Council also deems it necessary to highlight shortcomings in internationalisation, student assessment and the provision of feedback to students.

- 1) **Shortcomings in quality culture.** Standard 3 of the Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation provides that the higher education institution has defined the quality of its core and support processes, and the principles of quality assurance. In Pallas, there are no common quality definitions and the understanding of the quality of teaching, research, and service to society varies by study programme. It is essential to agree on and establish common quality definitions and principles, and to ensure the dissemination thereof among staff and stakeholders. These principles must be implemented across all study programmes to guarantee equal and quality-driven learning experiences for all students.
- 2) **Shortcomings in the development, evaluation, and performance appraisal of academic staff.** Standard 2 of the Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation provides that the higher education institution develops its staff and manages its physical and financial resources in a purposeful, systematic, and sustainable manner. Pursuant to the Higher Education Act, academic staff must undergo an evaluation procedure. Pallas' approach to evaluation procedures is inconsistent. Standardisation of evaluation procedures is

needed along with the implementation of a consistent documentation and follow-up system. The practices of staff performance appraisal vary by department (formal vs informal, recorded vs unrecorded). This, however, presents a risk of losing essential information about the development needs of the teaching staff. Therefore, Pallas should standardise and formalise its performance appraisal systems institution-wide. No institution-wide plan for staff competence development has been established. The competence development needs of staff members must be documented systematically and a competence training plan must be prepared to meet these needs.

- 3) Shortcomings in study programmes.** Standard 7 of the Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation provides that 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 current design of Pallas's study programmes is characterised by fragmentation and small credit allocation per semester. Such a design does not allow for in-depth learning of the subjects. It is thus necessary for study programme councils to review and redesign the study programmes. The number of courses and assessments should be reduced to enhance students' learning experience and skills development.
- 4) Shortcomings in student assessment and the provision of feedback to students.** Standard 9 of the Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation provides that 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. In Pallas, it is not clear within the institution when and how student assessment is carried out. To promote clarity, consistency and fairness in student assessment, the institution should review and formally document all assessment procedures and practices. Students' experiences with assessment and constructive feedback are not comparable, which indicates a disparity in assessment and the provision of feedback. To ensure that all students have the opportunity to develop their potential, it is important to create appropriate guidelines for teaching staff that promote equitable feedback practices and consistent levels of detail.
- 5) Shortcomings in RDC activities.** Standard 11 of the Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation provides that 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. Pallas does not have a clear strategic plan for research that would set out, among other things, what the criteria and principles for quality research are for Pallas. Research priorities for staff development activities have also not been defined. In the overall strategic plan of the institution, RDC should be aligned with learning, teaching and internationalisation, with the focus and priorities of RDC activities (both applied and artistic research) being clearly outlined. The strategic plan for RDC should also include a procedure for measuring research performance and societal impact based on transparent criteria.

13. Having considered the strengths and shortcomings laid down in section 12, the Council

DECIDED TO:

Accredit the Pallas University of Applied Sciences for three years.

The decision was adopted with 12 votes in favour and 0 against.

14. Accreditation is valid until 1 February 2026. HAKA and the Pallas University of Applied Sciences will agree on the next period of institutional accreditation no later than on 1 February 2025.

15. A person who considers that his or her rights or freedoms have been infringed by the decision, can lodge a challenge with HAKA's Assessment Council within 30 days of the date on which the objector became aware or should have become aware of the contested act. The Council shall forward the challenge to HAKA's Appeals Committee 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 appeal within 10 days of its receipt, taking into account the reasoned opinion of the Appeals Committee. If further examination of the challenge is necessary, the Assessment Council may extend the deadline for examining the challenge by up to 30 days. Judicial contestation of a decision is possible within 30 days from the date of service of the judgment by filing an appeal with the Tallinn Administrative Court pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Administrative Court Procedure Act.

Hillar Bauman

Secretary of the Assessment Council