

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

## Pallas University of Applied Sciences Institutional Accreditation Decision

28 January 2026

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

In accordance with § 38(3) of the Higher Education Act and clause 43.2 of the document 'Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation', established on the basis of the authorisation contained in § 24(5) of the Statutes of the Education and Youth Board, the Higher Education Assessment Council of HAKA (hereinafter the Council) states the following:

1. Pallas University of Applied Sciences (hereinafter Pallas or the Institution) coordinated the period of institutional accreditation with HAKA on 11 September 2024.
2. On 21 May 2025, the Director of the Estonian Quality Agency for Education (HAKA) approved the following composition of the expert panel for institutional accreditation (hereinafter referred to as the panel):

<b>Ieva Skaurone</b> (Chair)	Rector, Vilnius Academy of Arts (Lithuania)
<b>Paula Ranne</b> (Secretary)	Quality Management Specialist, European University Institute (Italy)
<b>Helen Link</b>	Student member of the Commission, student, University of Tartu Viljandi Culture Academy (Estonia)
<b>Taina Erävaara</b>	Head of Education and Research, Turku University of Applied Sciences (Finland)
<b>Marge Monko</b>	Freelancer (Estonia)
<b>Jørn Mortensen</b>	Dean, School of Arts, Design and Media, Kristiania University College; 2015–2019 Rector, Oslo National Academy of the Arts (Norway)

3. Pallas submitted the self-evaluation report to the HAKA Bureau on 15 August 2025; the HAKA assessment coordinator sent the self-evaluation report to the panel on 26 August 2025.



4. Within the framework of institutional accreditation, the panel assessed the following professional higher education study programmes:
  - Furniture and Interior Product Design
  - Photography
  - Painting
5. An assessment visit was made to the Pallas on 29–31 October 2025.
6. The Panel sent its draft assessment report to the HAKA Bureau on 11 December 2025. HAKA forwarded it to the higher education institution for its comments on 12 December 2025 and the Pallas submitted its comments on 8 January 2026.
7. The Panel submitted its final assessment report to the HAKA Bureau on 12 January 2026. 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 along with the self-evaluation report to the Council members on 21 January 2026.
9. The Panel's assessments were as follows:

<b>Standard</b>	<b>Assessment</b>
STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	Conforms to requirements
Resources	Conforms to requirements
Quality culture	Conforms to requirements
Academic ethics	Conforms to requirements
Internationalisation	Conforms to requirements
Teaching staff	Partially conforms to requirements
Study programme	Conforms to requirements
Learning and teaching	Conforms to requirements
Assessment of students	Partially conforms to requirements
Learning support systems	Conforms to requirements
Research, development and/or other creative activities	Conforms to requirements
Service to society	Conforms to requirements

 **According to the panel, the following deserves recognition**

Service to society: Pallas deserves recognition for its versatile engagement with society, which demonstrates a commitment to extending the impact of higher education beyond the academic community. Through its own gallery, library, student-led projects, continuing education, and active cooperation with cultural, professional, and policy-making institutions, Pallas effectively promotes public engagement, cultural development, and lifelong learning.

10. The Council discussed the submitted documents at its meeting on 28 January 2026 with 10 members participating and decided to highlight the following Pallas' strengths<sup>1</sup>, areas for improvement and recommendations<sup>2</sup>, and proposals for further development<sup>3</sup> from the assessment report.

## **10.1 STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT**

### Strengths

1. The management culture of the Institution is strong and inclusive, based on transparency and trust.
2. A systematic approach to preparing the development plan ensures clearly formulated goals, measurable results, clarity of responsibility, and continuous development.
3. Stakeholders actively participate in planning, assessment, and management processes, supporting a culture of shared responsibility and cooperation.
4. A functioning PDCA (plan-do-check-act) cycle, together with quality support, ensures evidence-based management and continuous improvement.
5. Pallas' adaptability and resilience enable effective response to changes, thereby ensuring long-term stability.
6. The strengthened research and development structure of the Institution promotes coordination, innovation, and academic excellence, positioning Pallas as a forward-looking and strong organisation.

### Opportunities for further improvement

1. It is recommended to strengthen the integration of the RDC (research and development) Council into the broader management framework of Pallas to ensure stronger strategic coherence and clearer communication between different governing bodies.
2. It is recommended to strengthen the role of the Student Council by promoting a more proactive and inclusive approach to representing student interests and participating in Pallas' decision-making processes.

## **10.2 RESOURCES**

### Strengths

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<sup>1</sup> Achievements exceeding the level of the standard (not compliance with the standard) are highlighted as strengths.

<sup>2</sup> Areas for improvement and recommendations refer to deficiencies in meeting the requirements of the institutional accreditation standard and influence the formation of the Council's final decision.

<sup>3</sup> Proposals for further development are suggestions for improvement that do not include a reference to non-compliance with the standard and the consideration or non-consideration of which is at the discretion of the institution. Proposals for further development do not influence the formation of the Council's final decision.

1. Pallas has established a structured system of development interviews and an annual training calendar and is developing a comprehensive induction system for new employees, supporting continuous professional development.
2. State funding and other diverse sources of funding (e.g. self-generated income, project-based funding, etc.) ensure Pallas' financial stability and support ongoing RDC activities.

#### Opportunities for further improvement

1. The development of the Institution would benefit from systematic and transparent internal communication of strategic developments and management decisions.
2. To improve administrative processes and reduce the workload of heads of departments, it is recommended to consider greater centralisation of the budget.
3. In the Painting study programme, the expansion of studio space should be continued to ensure that all students can use sufficient individual workspaces.

## 10.3 QUALITY CULTURE

### Strengths

1. Progress is visible in the strategic management of quality culture. The appointment of a Quality Manager has been transformative, improving the coherence, clarity, and comprehensibility of quality processes for the members of the Institution.
2. Management documentation at Pallas is systematised. More than 30 regulatory documents have been developed or simplified, reducing ambiguity and providing common starting points for staff.
3. Significant progress has been made in improving teaching and learning. Internal training sessions are more targeted. Clearer guidelines developed for visiting lecturers support the quality of teaching.

### Areas of concern and recommendations

1. The limited response rate for course feedback weakens the reliability of data used for quality improvement. It is recommended to make efforts to increase student participation in feedback surveys, harmonise the analysis and follow-up activities of departmental feedback, and improve the monitoring of internal evaluation.
2. Aspects of quality assurance in teaching and learning at Pallas, especially unified principles for course design and clarity of learning outcomes and assessment, require further continuous development. Therefore, strengthening these areas must continue by planning, documenting, and communicating information about learning outcomes and assessment methods to students.

### Opportunities for further improvement

1. It is recommended for Pallas to complete the development of the internal evaluation procedure and quality manual so that they are clearly aligned with actual practice and meet the needs of users. The internal evaluation procedure and quality manual could be merged into a single handbook. This manual could serve as an induction tool for all new employees and should be regularly updated to ensure continued relevance and accuracy.

## 10.4 ACADEMIC ETHICS

### Strengths

1. The regulatory framework for ethics at Pallas is comprehensive. The Code of Ethics, regulations for teaching and research, and work procedures clearly define ethical principles and case handling.
2. Ethical issues are integrated into the curricula. Several courses and training sessions exist for the systematic treatment of plagiarism, intellectual property, and ethical conduct.

### Opportunities for further improvement

1. It is recommended for Pallas to continue active awareness-raising concerning ethical conduct through regular information sessions, visual materials, and student involvement in promoting ethical principles. Such initiatives would contribute to fostering a unified ethical culture across the Institution.
2. Comprehensive guidelines for the use of artificial intelligence (AI) should be developed. Although some guidelines already exist (e.g. for formatting written work), there is a lack of unified written principles for the use of AI, especially considering the specificities of creative work. The development of institution-wide guidelines would support the conscious, transparent, and responsible use of AI in teaching and learning as well as in research and creative practices.

## **10.5 INTERNATIONALISATION**

### Strengths

1. The level of outgoing mobility of Pallas' students is exceptionally high, significantly exceeding the national average. Lecturer mobility is also strong.
2. Membership in CIRRUS, Cumulus, and other networks provides useful opportunities for international cooperation.
3. Erasmus+ coordination is effective. Both staff and students highlighted Pallas' supportive culture of internationalisation.
4. International mobility and masterclasses are well-integrated into the Painting study programme. These enrich the students' learning experience.

### Areas of concern and recommendations

1. It is recommended to expand the provision of English-language instruction to strengthen internationalisation at home and increase incoming mobility. To achieve this, it is important to implement a cross-curricular English-language study module.

### Opportunities for further improvement

1. Internationalisation processes should be formalised, and responsibilities clearly established between departments and central units. More systematic mapping of mobility workflows will improve transparency and clarity.
2. Training in intercultural competence could be beneficial to supplement the Institution's internationalisation efforts and support the provision of English-language instruction.
3. In the Photography study programme, the visibility of Erasmus+ mobility and internship programs and other exchange opportunities should be improved, and full recognition of credit points for mobility periods ensured. It is recommended to increase the number of international guest lecturers and offer courses taught by guest experts to provide students with a broader global perspective and expertise.

4. In the Painting study programme, international networks could be expanded (e.g. completing the KUNO membership process) to create new opportunities for teaching cooperation and lecturer exchange.

## **10.6 TEACHING STAFF**

### Strengths

1. The Furniture Department employs dedicated, professional, and skilled academic staff whose goal is to integrate teaching with creative work.
2. Lecturers in the Photography Department are dedicated and professional. They value mutual knowledge sharing and a friendly, learner-centred learning environment that takes into account the individual needs of each student.
3. The teaching team of the Painting Department is competent, professionally active, and internationally connected. Competent lecturers ensure the continuity and innovation of the study programme, support the link with contemporary art practices, and enhance the overall quality and relevance of the students' learning experience.

### Areas of concern and recommendations

1. The significant proportion of visiting lecturers poses challenges concerning continuity and coordination at the departmental level. The Institution should address the issue of the balance between academic staff and visiting lecturers and ensure an adequate balance.

### Opportunities for further improvement

1. In the Photography study programme, institutional support for R&D (TAL) should be strengthened to enable lecturers to balance their roles as artists and lecturers at Pallas. The ratio of regular and visiting lecturers needs improvement to reduce the administrative workload of regular lecturers and thereby provide stronger academic support to students.
2. In the Painting study programme, it is recommended to formalise the contribution of visiting lecturers to study programme development.

## **10.7 STUDY PROGRAMME**

### Strengths

1. The study programmes have been restructured. Among other things, the volume of modules has been increased, thereby ensuring greater coherence and depth of study.
2. The Furniture and Interior Product Design study programmes is contemporary and meets the needs of students, academic staff, alumni, and the labour market. The study programme was developed through a thorough PDCA cycle. The study programme is managed ambitiously and inclusively. The department has succeeded in developing a very attractive study programme relevant to both professional life and further education (Master's studies).

3. The Photography study programme has been restructured to offer more integrated and comprehensive courses with a better link between theoretical and practical subjects (e.g. drawing is now directly linked to photography). This gives students more time for creative practice and a better balance between subjects. Significant changes have also been made to the study programme based on student feedback. The study programme takes into account contemporary developments, such as AI and social media, thereby ensuring students stay abreast of the changing landscape of photography and visual arts.
4. The structure of the Painting study programme is clear and coherent. Theory, practice, and entrepreneurship are well-integrated. Greater emphasis is placed on courses supporting students' awareness of entrepreneurship, marketing, and intellectual property.

#### Areas of concern and recommendations

1. In the Photography study programme, it is recommended to reduce the number of specialty courses per semester. Despite the increase in credit points per course, students continue to face problems due to the overlap of specialty courses and a significant number of different tasks, which increases their workload.

#### Opportunities for further improvement

1. In the coming years, consideration could be given to creating even larger, yet more thorough and flexible, study modules.
2. Interdisciplinary cooperation should continue to be encouraged, both within the Institution and with other higher education institutions, so that joint projects become a natural and regular part of life at Pallas.
3. Continued support should be given to quality assurance in teaching and learning, ensuring the consistent implementation and development of new study programmes in all departments.
4. In the Photography study programme, it is recommended to add courses on academic writing, research methods, and critical thinking to strengthen students' theoretical preparation and support their professional and academic career paths.
5. To better support the future career paths of Painting graduates, it is recommended to continue expanding modules on digital media, project management, art entrepreneurship, and interdisciplinary theoretical-practical modules.

## **10.8 LEARNING AND TEACHING**

### Strengths

1. Inclusivity is a characteristic feature of the Pallas community. All stakeholders are involved in the development of learning and teaching processes.
2. Pallas is a small arts college with unique conditions for providing individual support to students and for learning and teaching best practices. In the Furniture and Interior Product Design study programme, these conditions have been well utilised.

3. The Painting study programme is characterised by strong partnerships with cultural and research institutions, enabling the provision of authentic learning experiences through exhibitions and projects. A strong learner-centred culture with lecturers who are accessible and supportive to students is also a characteristic feature. The internship system is effective.

#### Opportunities for further improvement

1. In the Photography study programme, it is recommended to simplify and consolidate feedback channels (e.g. TAHVEL, Moodle, and the document management system) to ensure clearer and easier access for students to assessment criteria and study materials. It is recommended to increase cooperation between departments, similar to the zine creation course in the Textile Department, to encourage broader creativity and skill development.

### **10.9 ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS**

#### Strengths

1. The personalised nature of teaching enables frequent personal feedback, thereby supporting students' creative development and creating a strong sense of academic and social belonging.
2. Involving external experts in the assessment of graduation theses ensures their relevance and increases the objectivity of assessment.

#### Areas of concern and recommendations

1. The timing and clarity of assessment information vary between departments. Assessment criteria must be published in the TAHVEL system (where they are currently often missing), and this should be supported by monitoring mechanisms to ensure compliance.
2. The assessment competence of lecturers is uneven. Training sessions should be conducted covering assessment criteria, aligning assessments with learning outcomes, developing assessment models and methods of constructive feedback.

### **10.10 LEARNING SUPPORT SYSTEMS**

#### Strengths

1. The psychological support system at Pallas is well-developed. To ensure access to psychological counselling, a formal cooperation agreement exists with a professional service provider.
2. Effective support is provided to international students, including induction activities, information sessions, and a student tutoring system, all contributing to smooth integration.

3. The low student-to-lecturer ratio enables individual attention, early identification of needs, and flexible problem-solving.

#### Opportunities for further improvement

1. Greater attention should be paid to improving accessibility for students with physical disabilities.

### **10.11 RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND/OR CREATIVE ACTIVITIES**

#### Strengths

1. Management decisions have enabled Pallas to take significant systemic steps toward a stronger framework for R&D (TAL).

### **10.12 SERVICE TO SOCIETY**

#### Strengths

1. Pallas actively contributes to society, cooperating with cultural institutions, community groups, and professional organisations. The gallery, library, and student-led projects all play a significant role in Pallas' society-oriented activities.
2. Partnerships between the Pallas gallery and local art institutions and participation in professional associations enhance its visibility in the Estonian art landscape and foster international cooperation.
3. Pallas involves staff, students, and alumni in the development of the national art strategy, the updating of educational standards, and the development of professional qualifications. This active participation ensures that Pallas' curricula are aligned with changing societal and professional needs, while also contributing to art education more broadly.
4. Pallas offers a wide range of continuing education courses. Flexible study programmes meet regional and sectoral needs and promote lifelong learning.

11. If one to four sub-assessments are 'partially conforms' and the remaining sub-assessments are 'conforms', the Assessment Council analyses the strengths and areas for improvement of the institution and provides an assessment that the management, administration, study and research activities, and the study and research environment of the institution conform to the requirements and makes a decision to accredit the institution for seven years, or provides an assessment that there are deficiencies in the management, administration, study and research activities, or the study and research environment of the institution, provides instructions for their elimination and makes a decision to accredit the institution for three years.

12. The Council analysed the strengths and areas for improvement of Pallas and considered it necessary to highlight the following:

- The management culture of the Institution is strong and inclusive, based on transparency and trust. A systematic approach to preparing the development plan ensures clearly formulated goals, measurable results, clarity of responsibility, and continuous development.
- Progress is visible in the strategic management of quality culture. The appointment of a Quality Manager has been transformative, improving the coherence, clarity, and comprehensibility of quality processes for the members of the Institution.
- The level of outgoing mobility of Pallas' students is exceptionally high, significantly exceeding the national average. Lecturer mobility is also strong.
- The study programmes have been restructured. Among other things, the volume of modules has been increased, thereby ensuring greater coherence and depth of study.
- Pallas deserves recognition for its versatile engagement with society, which demonstrates a commitment to extending the impact of higher education beyond the academic community. Through its own gallery, library, student-led projects, continuing education, and active cooperation with cultural, professional, and policy-making institutions, Pallas effectively promotes public engagement, cultural development, and lifelong learning.

13. In view of the above, the Council

**DECIDED THE FOLLOWING:**

**Accredit the Pallas University of Applied Sciences for seven years.**

The decision was adopted with 10 votes in favour. 0 were against.

14. This accreditation will be valid until 28 January 2033.

15. HAKA shall coordinate the time of the next institutional accreditation with Pallas by 28 January 2032, at the latest.

16. Pallas University of Applied Sciences shall submit an overview to the Council by 28 January 2028 at the latest on the consideration of the areas for improvement and recommendations highlighted in clause 10 of this decision.

17. A person who considers that their rights have been violated or their freedoms restricted by a decision may submit an appeal to the HAKA Assessment Council within 30 days after becoming aware, or when they should have become aware, of the contested action. The Council forwards the appeal to the HAKA Appeals

Committee, which, within 5 days of receiving the appeal, submits a written impartial opinion to the Council on the validity of the appeal. The Council resolves the appeal within 10 days of its receipt, taking into account the reasoned position 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 decision 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 Council