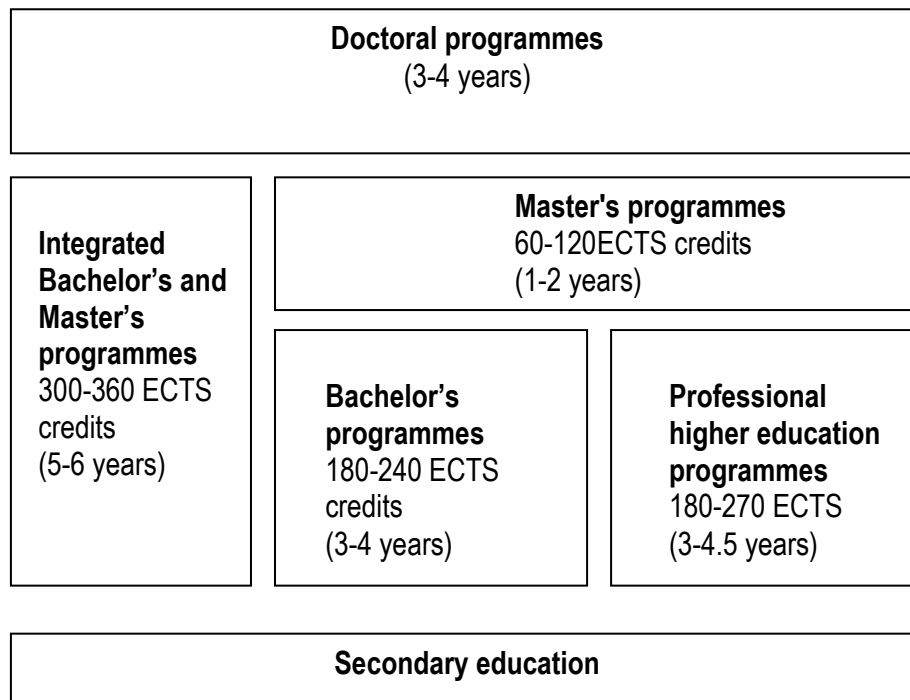


## DESCRIPTION OF THE ESTONIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

### OVERALL ORGANISATION

Higher education in Estonia is regulated by the following legislation: the Republic of Estonia Education Act, the Higher Education Act, and the Standard of Higher Education.

The higher education system in Estonia comprises three cycles, following the Bachelor-Master-PhD model of the European Higher Education Area.



Universities provide professional higher education, bachelor's, master's and doctoral programmes. Professional higher education institutions and vocational education institutions may provide professional higher education. A professional higher education institution may also provide master's programmes. In terms of ownership, institutions are divided into state, public and private institutions.

### RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS

Higher education programmes may be provided only if the quality of the respective study programme group has been assessed and granted the right to organise studies at the level of higher education. The minister responsible for the field has the right to grant the right to organise studies. The right to organise studies involves the right to issue national diplomas.

## **QUALITY ASSESSMENT**

Higher education quality is assessed by *Eesti Kõrg- ja Kutsehariduse Kvaliteediagentuur* (Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education), an independent agency.

### **Institutional accreditation**

Institutional accreditation focuses on the internal quality assurance system of the educational institution and the functionality thereof, incl. the fulfilment of the tasks, duties and functions of the educational institution, the compliance of the management system with the goals and development plan of the higher education institution.

Higher education institutions are required to undergo institutional accreditation once in seven years, but if the Agency has detected any deficiencies in the accreditation, it may grant a term of up to three years and during the term the educational institution must undergo the institutional accreditation again. The decision on institutional accreditation will be made by the Assessment Council of the Agency.

## **ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS**

The requirement for access to higher education is secondary education, certified by *Gümnaasiumi lõputunnistus* (Upper Secondary School Leaving Certificate), *Lõputunnistus kutsekeskhariduse omandamise kohta* (Certificate of Vocational Secondary Education), the corresponding qualifications of earlier education systems, and foreign qualifications giving access to higher education. The *Gümnaasiumi lõputunnistus* is issued after 12 years of schooling (9 years of basic education and 3 years of general upper secondary education). In order to complete general upper secondary education, it is necessary to take state examinations certified with the state examination certificate.

A higher education institution may introduce further admission requirements, such as entrance examinations, minimum scores of state examinations, interviews, etc.

## **CREDIT SYSTEM**

The workload is measured in credits. The national credit system is the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). One ECTS credit corresponds to 26 hours of work by a student. The workload of one academic year is 1560 hours, which corresponds to 60 ECTS credits.

## **HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES AND QUALIFICATIONS**

### **Professional Higher Education Programmes**

Professional higher education is higher education of the first cycle, the purpose of which is to deepen general educational knowledge, acquire the basic knowledge and skills of the field as well as knowledge, skills and attitudes required for employment, independent work and master's studies and in addition to those also to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes for employment in a specific profession. The nominal duration of programmes is 3 to 4 years (180-240 ECTS credits). Midwifery studies and specialised nursing studies last 4.5 years (270 ECTS credits). The qualification awarded upon completion of the programme is *bakalaureus* (bachelor's degree) (a greyish-blue diploma form marked E). The qualification gives access to master's programmes.

### **Bachelor's Programmes**

Bachelor's programmes are first-cycle higher education programmes. The purpose of bachelor studies is to deepen general educational knowledge, acquire the basic knowledge and skills of the field as well as knowledge, skills and attitudes required for employment, independent

work and master's studies. The nominal duration of the programmes is generally 3 years (180 ECTS credits). As an exception, it may be up to 4 years (240 ECTS credits). The qualification awarded upon completion of the programme is *bakalaureus* (bachelor's degree) (a greenish-yellow diploma form marked L). The qualification gives access to master's programmes.

### **Master's Programmes**

Master's programmes are second-cycle higher education programmes. The purpose of master's level studies is to deepen the students' knowledge and skills of the specialisation and acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes required for employment, independent work and doctoral studies. The access requirement is a first-cycle higher education qualification. The nominal duration of the programmes is 1 to 2 years (60-120 ECTS credits). The qualification awarded upon completion of a master's degree programme is *magister* (master's degree) (a silvery diploma form marked M). The qualification gives access to doctoral programmes.

### **Integrated Bachelor's and Master's Programmes**

Integrated bachelor's and master's programmes comprise both basic and specialised studies. Such long-cycle programmes are offered in the fields of medicine, veterinary medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, architecture, civil engineering, and teaching in primary school. The nominal duration of programmes in medicine and veterinary medicine is 6 years (360 ECTS credits). The nominal duration of other programmes is 5 years (300 ECTS credits).

The graduates receive a qualification (a silvery diploma form marked M) certifying the completion of the integrated study programme. The graduates of a pharmacy, architecture, civil engineering and primary school teacher training programme are awarded a degree of *magister* (master's degree). The graduates of a medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine programme are awarded *arstikraad* (Degree in Medicine), *hambaarstikraad* (Degree in Dentistry) or *loomaarstikraad* (Degree in Veterinary Medicine). The qualifications give access to doctoral programmes.

### **Doctoral Programmes**

Doctoral programmes represent the third cycle of higher education, the purpose of which is to acquire knowledge and skills necessary for independent research, development or professional creative work. The access requirement for doctoral studies is a degree of *magister* (master's degree) or corresponding qualifications. The nominal duration of programme is 3 to 4 years. The qualification awarded upon completion of doctoral studies is *doktor* (doctorate degree) (a golden diploma form marked O). A doctorate degree is a research degree obtained after the completion and public defence of a dissertation based on independent scientific research or creative work.