

ESTONIAN SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION

1. GENERAL ORGANISATION

The general legal basis of the system of higher education is laid down by Republic of Estonia Education Act, Universities Act, Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act, Private Schools Act, Vocational Educational Institutions Act and the Government of the Republic Regulation of 18 December 2008 No 178 Standard of Higher Education.

Since the academic year 2002/2003, the general structure of the system of higher education has had three cycles that comply with the bachelor-master-PhD model of the European higher education area. In the first cycle of higher education, there are two branches with distinct learning outcomes – Bachelor's study and professional higher education study. Master's study is conducted in the second cycle of higher education and in the third – Doctoral study. In some fields of study, Bachelor's study and Master's study have been merged together into integrated study. Requirements for different cycles of education, including the requirements for their learning outcomes and the correspondence to the Estonian qualifications framework are regulated by the Standard of Higher Education.

Higher education is acquired in universities, institutions of professional higher education and some vocational education institutions. By form of ownership, educational institutions providing higher education are divided into state institutions, universities in public law and private institutions. Universities offer Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral study and may provide professional higher education. Professional higher education institutions offer professional higher education programmes and may offer Master's programmes, but in cooperation with universities. An institution of professional higher education may offer Master's study programme independently according to study programmes of religious studies and theology or military study programmes.

2. STATE RECOGNITION OF DIPLOMAS

State recognition of diplomas is based until 31.12.2011 on a positive accreditation decision of a study programme and since 2009 a right will be given to the educational institution to conduct studies in the relevant study programme group and to issue corresponding academic degrees and diplomas. In years 2009 – 2011 both regulations are valid for issuing state recognised diplomas.

A person who has completed the joint study program shall be awarded with a state recognised joint diploma by multiple institutions. The form of joint diploma is equivalent to the form of diploma that is given upon completion of corresponding study programme.

2.1. Accreditation

Diplomas that are issued after completing an accredited study programme are recognised by the state. Until 1 January 2010 positive accreditation decisions made, including conditional accreditation decisions have validity of seven or three years correspondingly, but no longer than 31.12.2011. Diplomas of universities in public law that are given upon completion of study programmes that were entered into the registry before 1 June 2002 and professional higher education diplomas that are given upon completion of study programmes that were entered into the registry before 30 June 2003 have state recognition without accreditation. Until 31 December 2008, accreditation was performed by the Higher Education Quality Assessment Council. On 1 January 2009, the Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency was formed for carrying out quality assurance procedures and accreditations.

2.2. The right given to an educational institution to conduct studies in a study programme group

Since 2009 on the basis of an assessment of all study programme groups - a transition assessment - the Government of the Republic issues to an educational institution, for an undetermined or determined period of time (one to three years), the right to conduct studies in the relevant study programme group and to issue corresponding academic degrees and diplomas. Since 1 January 2012, an educational institution

may issue state recognized graduation documents only if the right to conduct studies has been granted for the study programme group.

Recognition of qualifications issued for previous higher education systems and their correspondence to the qualifications of the system currently in force is regulated by the Government of the Republic Regulation of 6 June 2005 No 120 Correspondence of Qualifications Issued in Republic of Estonia and Qualifications Issued in Former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics Prior to 20 August 1991.

3. ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

3.1. General requirements

The general admission requirement for the first cycle of higher education is secondary education proved by a corresponding document – an upper secondary school leaving certificate, a certificate for having acquired vocational secondary education, corresponding certificates and diplomas of earlier systems and qualifications allowing admission into educational institutions providing higher education of foreign countries. An upper secondary school leaving certificate is issued upon completion of the 12th year (9 years of basic education and 3 years of general secondary education). Passing of state examinations is proved by a state examination certificate that is valid together with the upper secondary school leaving certificate.

3.2. Specific requirements

In addition to the general requirements, an educational institution may establish additional admission requirements. These may include admission examinations, state examination results, professional tests, interviews, etc.

4. ORGANISATION OF STUDIES

General requirements for studies, study programmes and members of teaching staff are established by a framework document Standard of Higher Education. The nominal duration of study is measured in academic years, the study load for a programme in credit points. One credit point (*AP*) of the credit point system in force until 31 August 2009 corresponds to 40 hours or one week of study by a student. One academic year amounts 40 credit points (*AP*), corresponding to 60 credit points (ECTS credits) of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).

Since academic year 2009/2010 the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System has been the national credit point system. The Estonian acronym for the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System credit point is *EAP* (*Euroopa Ainepunktisüsteemi ainepunkt*). One ECTS credit corresponds to 26 hours of study by a student – amounting to 1,560 hours or 60 ECTS credits for an academic year.

5. QUALIFICATIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND CORRESPONDING STUDIES

5.1. Professional higher education

Professional higher education is study in the first cycle of higher education, the aim of which is to acquire the competences necessary to work in a certain profession or continue Master's study. The nominal duration of study is 3 to 4,5 years, 180-270 ECTS credits. A person who has completed the education shall be awarded a diploma (on a grey-blue form with the indication E) certifying the completion of the study programme of a professional higher education – professional higher education diploma.

A professional higher education diploma enables access to Master's study.

5.2. Bachelor's study

Bachelor's study is a study in the first cycle of higher education, the aim of which is to improve general educational knowledge and to acquire basic knowledge and skills in a field of study in order to continue Master's study and commence work. Its nominal duration is predominantly 3 years, 180 ECTS credits or, exceptionally, 4 years, 240 ECTS credits.

A person who has graduated the study is awarded a diploma (on a green-yellow form with the indication L) certifying the completion of the study programme. A graduate is awarded a *bakalaureusekraad* (Bachelor's degree). A *bakalaureusekraad* enables access to Master's study.

5.3. Master's study

Master's study is a study in the second cycle of higher education during which a student improves his or her knowledge and skills in his or her field of study and acquires the knowledge and skills necessary for independent work and Doctoral study. The main objective of Master's study is to train a student to become a specialist with in-depth knowledge. The access requirement is completion of the first cycle of higher education (*bakalaureusekraad*, professional higher education diploma or a corresponding qualification). The nominal duration of study is 1-2 years, 60 to 120 ECTS credits, but not less than 5 years and 300 ECTS credits together with the first cycle. Upon completion of a Master's study programme entered into the register before 1 June 2002, the *magistrikaad* is awarded as a research or a professional degree. In the research Master's study, research work shall constitute at least 50% of the study programme's workload and the Master's thesis shall present a novel scientific treatment of a problem of the field of study. In professional Master's study, research, development or creative work shall constitute at least 25% of the study programme's load and the study is aimed at finding a novel solution to a professional problem related to creativity. Under the conditions and pursuant to the procedure established by the university the completion of a Master's study programme entered into the register before 1 June 2002 may be regarded as a part of Doctoral studies.

A person who has graduated Master's study is awarded a diploma (on a silver form with the indication M; for study programmes entered into the register before 1 June 2002, on a brown form with the indication C) certifying the completion of the Master's study programme. A graduate is awarded a *magistrikaad* (Master's degree). A *magistrikaad* enables access to Doctoral study.

5.4. Study based on integrated study programmes of Bachelor's and Master's study

Integrated Bachelor's and Master's study is a study in one single cycle including both basic and specialized studies. Integrated single cycle studies are: medical studies, veterinary medicine studies, pharmacist studies, dentistry studies, architectural studies, civil engineering studies or pedagogical studies for class teachers. The nominal duration of medical studies, and since 2002/2003 admission also of veterinary medicine studies, is 6 years, 360 ECTS credits. The nominal duration of other integrated studies is 5 years, 300 ECTS credits. Upon completion of the study, a diploma (on a silver form with the indication M) is awarded certifying the completion of the study programme. Graduation of the study results in a qualification *magistrikaad* (Master's degree). Exceptionally, in medical, dentistry and veterinary training, an *arstikraad* (Degree in Medicine), a *hambaarstikraad* (Degree in Dentistry) and a *loomaarstikraad* (Degree in Veterinary Medicine), respectively, are awarded.

A qualification awarded upon completion of an integrated study programme enables access to Doctoral study.

5.5. Doctoral study

Doctoral study is study in the third cycle of higher education, the aim of which is to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for independent research, development or professional creative activity. The general access requirement for Doctoral study is a *magistrikaad* or a corresponding qualification. The nominal duration of study is 3 to 4 years, 180-240 ECTS credits. A person who has graduated the study is awarded a diploma (on a gold form with the indication O; for study programmes entered into the register before 1 June 2002, on a white form with the indication D) certifying the completion of the study programme. A graduate is awarded a *doktorikraad* (Doctor's degree). A *doktorikraad* is a research degree for which the candidate has to compose and defend a Doctoral thesis – independent scientific research or creative work.