

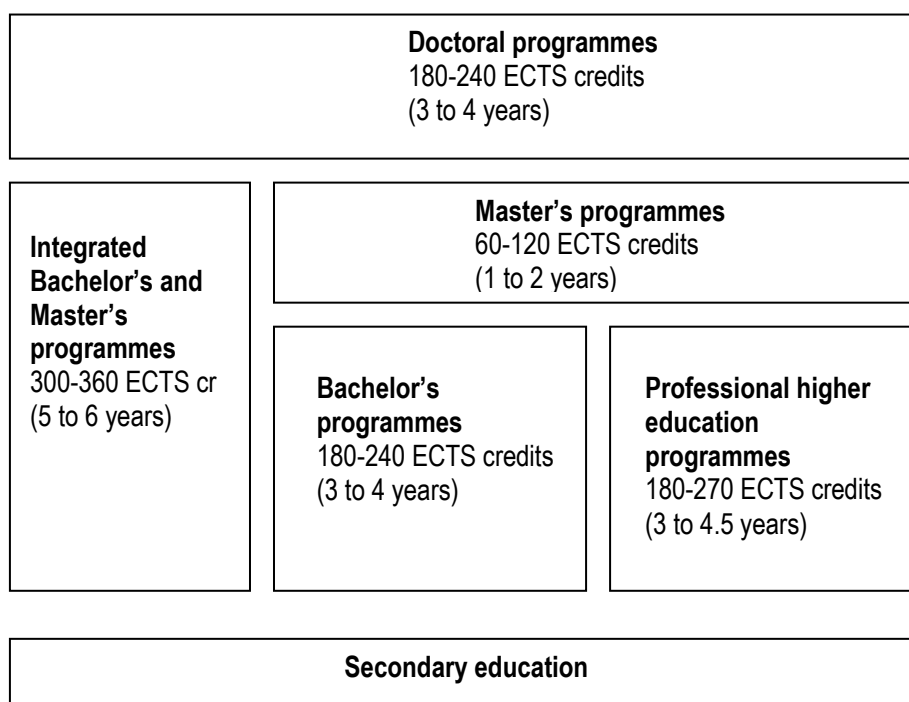
Lisa 4 haridus- ja teadusministri 30. detsembri 2009. a käskkirja nr 1327 juurde
KINNITATUD
haridus- ja teadusministri 1. aprilli 2011. a
käskkirjaga nr 314

INFORMATION ON THE ESTONIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

GENERAL ORGANISATION

General legislation for higher education in Estonia is laid down in the following legal acts: Republic of Estonia Education Act, Universities Act, Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act, Private Schools Act, Vocational Education Institutions Act, and Standard of Higher Education.

Starting from the 2002/2003 academic year higher education comprises three cycles, following the bachelor-master-PhD model of the European Higher Education Area.



Universities provide bachelor's, master's and doctoral programmes, but may also offer professional higher education. Professional higher education institutions and some vocational education institutions offer professional higher education. A professional higher education institution may independently provide master's programmes in the fields of theology, public security and national defence, master's programmes in other fields may be provided in collaboration with a university. As to the form of ownership, educational institutions may be state, public and private.

QUALITY ASSESSMENT

Since 2009 higher education quality has been assessed by an independent agency *Eesti Kõrghariduse Kvaliteediagentuur* (Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency). The responsibility of the agency is to conduct institutional accreditation of higher education institutions and quality assessment of study programme groups.

Within the assessment process of study programme groups it is assessed if the programmes correspond with the current legislation and with the national and international standards, including the quality of theoretical and practical training, the qualifications of the teaching and research staff, as well as the availability of the necessary resources. On the basis of external assessment, the Government of the Republic grants the higher education institution the right, for an indefinite or a fixed (1 to 3 years)

period of time, to conduct studies according to the programme belonging to the respective study programme group.

Until 01.01.2010, external assessment of study programmes resulted in adopting accreditation decisions. Full accreditation was granted for seven years, conditional accreditation is valid for three years.

RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS

Starting from 2009, educational institutions may provide higher education programmes, award academic degrees and issue diplomas, if, as a result of the assessment of the respective study programme group, the Government of the Republic has granted them such a right.

At the same time, until 31.12.2011, official recognition of qualifications is also based upon accreditation decisions. In addition to diplomas issued after accreditation was granted, diplomas issued up to two years before the accreditation decision was adopted, are also recognized. Besides, diplomas issued by public universities, certifying the completion of study programmes entered into the Estonian Education Information System (database) before 01.06.2002, and diplomas issued by state professional higher education institutions, certifying the completion of study programmes entered into the database before 30.06.2003, are officially recognized without accreditation.

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 national examinations certified with the national examination certificate.

The higher education institution may introduce specific admission requirements, such as entrance examinations, national examination minimum scores, interviews, etc.

CREDIT SYSTEM

Student workload is measured in credits. Effective from the 2009/2010 academic year the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, ECTS has officially been in use. One ECTS credit corresponds to 26 hours of work by a student. The workload of one academic year is 1560 hours that corresponds to 60 ECTS credits.

In the credit system valid until the 2009/2010 academic year, one credit (*ainepunkt*, AP) corresponds to a workload of one week or 40 hours. The workload of one academic year is 40 AP that 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 acquire the competencies necessary for working in a certain profession or for continuing studies at the master's level. The nominal duration of programmes is 3 to 4 years (180-240 ECTS credits). Midwifery studies and specialized nursing studies last 4.5 years (270 ECTS credits). The qualification awarded upon completion of the programme is *Rakendus kõrgharidusõppe diplom* (Diploma of Professional Higher Education) (a grayish-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 broaden the scope of general education, to develop the basic knowledge and skills required for a certain field of study necessary for continuing at the master's level or for access to the labour market. 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 *bakalaureusekraad* (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 develop the knowledge and skills required for a certain field of study and to acquire the necessary competences in order to enter the labour market or to continue studies at the doctoral level. 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), but together with the first-cycle studies it is at least 5 years (300 ECTS credits). The qualification awarded upon completion of a master's degree programme is *magistrikaad* (a silvery diploma form marked M). The qualification gives access to doctoral programmes.

On completion of study programmes entered into the database before 01.06.2002, the qualification *magistrikaad* is awarded as a research or professional degree. In the research degree programme, research comprises at least 50% of the studies and the final thesis involves a novel scientific approach to a problem within the respective field of study. In the professional degree programme, research, development or creative work comprises at least 25% of the studies which are aimed at finding a novel solution to a creative professional problem. Under the conditions and pursuant to the procedures established by the university, successful completion of the programme entered into the database before 01.06.2002 may be recognized as part of doctoral studies.

The qualification awarded upon completion of such programmes is *magistrikaad* (a brown diploma form marked C).

Integrated Bachelor's and Master's Programmes

Integrated bachelor's and master's programmes comprise both basic and specialized studies. Such long-cycle programmes are offered in the fields of medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, veterinary medicine, architecture, civil engineering, and class-teacher training.

The nominal duration of programmes in medicine and veterinary medicine effective from the 2002/2003 academic year admissions, is 6 years (360 ECTS credits). The nominal duration of other integrated programmes is 5 years (300 ECTS credits).

The qualification (a silvery diploma form marked M) awarded upon completion of an integrated study programme in the fields of pharmacy, architecture, civil engineering, and class-teacher training is *magistrikaad*, the other qualifications are *arstikraad* (Degree in Medicine), *hambaarstikraad* (Degree in Dentistry) and *loomaarstikraad* (Degree in Veterinary Medicine). The qualifications give access to doctoral programmes.

Doctoral Programmes

Doctoral programmes represent 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 *magistrikraad* or a corresponding qualification. The nominal duration of programme is 3 to 4 years (180-240 ECTS credits). The qualification awarded upon completion of doctoral studies is *doktorikraad* (a golden diploma form marked O, in case of programmes entered into the database before 01.06.2002, a white diploma form marked D). *Doktorikraad* is a research degree obtained after the completion and public defence of a dissertation based on independent scientific research or creative work.

Mart Laidmets
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