

**Decision Regarding Assessment of the National Defence
Study Programme Group
Estonian National Defence College**

12/06/2017

The Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education decided to approve the report by the Assessment Committee and to conduct the next quality assessment of the National Defence study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at the Estonian National Defence College in seven years

On the basis of subsection 21¹ (2) of the Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act, subsection 10 (4) of the Universities Act, point 3.7.3 of the Statutes of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (hereinafter referred to as 'EKKA') and point 41.1 of the document, 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education', authorised in point 3.7.1 of the above-mentioned EKKA Statutes; the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education (hereinafter referred to as 'the Council') affirms the following:

1. On 1.03.2016 the Estonian National Defence College and EKKA agreed upon a time frame to conduct a quality assessment of the study programme group.
2. The Director of EKKA, by her order on 18.02.2017, approved the following membership of the quality assessment committee for the National Defence study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at the Estonian National Defence College (hereinafter referred to as 'the Committee'):

Prof. Dr. Frans Osinga, Chair	Air Commodore, Chair in War Studies, Head of the Military Operational Art and Science Section at the Faculty of Military Sciences, the Netherlands Defence Academy; Netherlands
Hardi Lämmergas	Major, Air Force, Air Surveillance Wing Commander, Estonia
Igors Rajevs	Colonel, Deputy Director of Centre for Strategic and Security Research of the National Defence Academy of Latvia; Latvia
Petteri Rokka	Colonel G.S., Deputy Commandant on the Army Academy; Finland
Liina Hirv	Student, University of Tartu, Estonia

3. The Estonian National Defence College submitted the following programmes for evaluation under the National Defence study programme group:
 - Military Leadership for Land Forces (Prof HE)**
 - Military Leadership for Land Forces (MA)**
 - Military Leadership for Navy (Prof HE)**
 - Military Leadership for Air Force (Prof HE)**
4. The Estonian National Defence College submitted a self-evaluation report to the EKKA Bureau on 8.02.2017 and the assessment coordinator forwarded it to the Committee on 17.02.2017.
5. An assessment visit was made to the Estonian National Defence College during 4–5.04.2017.
6. The Committee sent its draft assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 26.04.2017, EKKA forwarded it to the Estonian National Defence College for its comments on 5.05.2017, and the College delivered its response on 19.05.2017.
7. The Committee submitted its final assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 21.05.2017. That assessment report is an integral part of the decision, and is available on the EKKA website.
8. The Secretary of the Council forwarded the Committee's final assessment report along with the College's self-evaluation report to the Council members on 29.05.2017.
9. The Council with 10 members present discussed these received documents in its session during 11–12.06.2017 and, based on the assessment report, decided to point out the following strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations regarding the National Defence study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at the Estonian National Defence College.

Strengths

- 1) The study programmes have been developed while taking into account the needs of the Estonian Defence Forces. There is strong cooperation with the Headquarters and structural units of the Estonian Defence Forces (EDF). The Defence Forces are satisfied with the quality of graduates.
- 2) The study programmes have a strong focus on practical skills that enables graduates to start working immediately in different positions.
- 3) Resources allocated for R&D have increased tenfold at the College over the last four years.
- 4) Both teaching staff and students are satisfied with the amount and availability of learning materials, as well as with the information systems supporting the learning process.
- 5) Close collaboration with the EDF Headquarters allows the College to plan for needed resources in a detailed and sustainable manner and mitigate possible risks.
- 6) The teaching staff comprises professionals with academic backgrounds and military experience.
- 7) A positive working environment and rapport have been established between the lecturers and students, which fully foster the studies.
- 8) Students and alumni are satisfied with the way the knowledge and skills acquired through studies prepare them for their work in the Defence Forces. According to the students, there is a good balance between theoretical and practical learning as well as extracurricular activities in the programmes.
- 9) In cooperation with both the Defence Forces and the Defence League, the Collage has created very good practical training conditions for its students. During practical training the students can apply the knowledge acquired as well as develop their leadership, technical and tactical skills.
- 10) Members of the teaching staff are enthusiastic about applying new and modern teaching methods.

- 11) Students are able to provide feedback both anonymously and in discussions with lecturers. The percentage of students who have provided feedback is high.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) The academic portion of the study programmes falls short. In order to make the level of these study programmes comparable to that of civilian higher education programmes and to offer more intellectual challenges to students, it would be necessary to strengthen the theoretical components of the programmes and, by doing so, better develop students' critical thinking skills. The students also find that learning objectives are very easily achieved.
- 2) It is recommended that uniform rules be put in place to calculate the student workloads for independent work. It should be reviewed whether the actual workload of a student corresponds to the value of ECTS credits given.
- 3) Both civilian and military teaching staff should better explain to students the relevance of academic education to carrying out the future duties of an officer.
- 4) Textbooks written in English and learning materials published by NATO should be used in the study process to a greater extent, and students' writing skills in English should be improved.
- 5) It is recommended that two programme councils be set up – one for the professional higher education programmes and one for the master degree programmes – that would be responsible for developing study programmes and for assuring programme quality.
- 6) The quality assurance system should be reviewed in order to allow for identifying possible areas for improvement aside from collecting data.
- 7) Students should be better informed about the possibilities for contesting their grades and about the study process as a whole. It is advisable to set up an independent committee for handling such challenges, which should certainly include student representatives.
- 8) The courses offered by the Estonian Aviation Academy and the Estonian Maritime Academy of TUT have received poor ratings from students. The content of those courses and the quality of teaching must be critically evaluated and changes planned in collaboration with partners.
- 9) Although the self-evaluation report refers to a College's student-centred philosophy of education, none of the interviewees could explain what the concept actually meant. It is recommended that the concept of student-centredness be described in a more explicit manner and then introduced to all parties.
- 10) It is recommended that representatives of civilian higher education institutions be involved in assessing students' theses.
- 11) E-learning and the potentials of the simulation centre should be utilised to a greater extent.
- 12) The teaching workload of the staff leaves little time for programme and course development, professional development or research. It is necessary to allocate more resources (including recruiting more lecturers) in order to create more opportunities for the teaching staff to develop courses, attend international conferences, undergo professional development and conduct research. In the short term, the Language Training Department must be expanded rapidly.
- 13) It would be desirable to expand the composition of the teaching staff by adding specialists from the air force and navy, which would also reduce the need for visiting lecturers from the Estonian Aviation Academy and the Estonian Maritime Academy in the teaching process.
- 14) Support for R&D must continue and more resources must be allocated for staff mobility and for their participation in international seminars.
- 15) More resources must be allocated for involving visiting lecturers from other Estonian and foreign higher education institutions.
- 16) More attention should be paid to the preparation and support of new members of the teaching staff in their teaching duties.

- 17) It is recommended that academic performance of the staff members who teach military subjects be annually assessed (separate from evaluations conducted by the Defence Forces), in order to foster their academic development.
- 18) Given that adequate competition for student places at the College is lacking, the College should increase its efforts, in collaboration with partners and employers, to promote its specialties more widely to society.
- 19) The counselling system should be structured and made more understandable for students. It should be clear as to where to seek advice regarding personal or gender-related issues, for example.
10. Point 41 of the document, 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education', establishes that the Quality Assessment Council shall approve an assessment report within three months after receipt of the report. The Council shall weigh the strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations pointed out in the assessment report, and then shall decide whether to conduct the next quality assessment of that study programme group in seven, five or three years.
11. The Council weighed the strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations referred to in point 9 of this document and found that the study programmes, the teaching conducted under these programmes, and development activities regarding teaching and learning conform to the requirements, and, on the basis of point 41.1 of the document, 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education',

DECIDED

to approve the assessment report and to conduct the next quality assessment of the National Defence study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at the Estonian National Defence College in seven years.

The decision was adopted by 10 votes in favour. Against 0.

12. The Bureau of EKKA will coordinate a date for the next quality assessment of the study programme group with the Estonian National Defence College no later than 12.06.2023.
13. The Council proposes that the Estonian National Defence College will submit an action plan to EKKA with regard to the areas for improvement and recommendations pointed out in the report no later than 12.06.2018.
14. A person who finds that his or her rights have been violated or his or her freedoms restricted by this decision may file a challenge with the EKKA Quality Assessment Council within 30 days after the person filing the challenge became or should have become aware of the contested finding. A judicial challenge to the decision may be submitted within 30 days after its delivery, filing an action with the Tallinn courthouse of the Tallinn Administrative Court pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Code of Administrative Court Procedure.

Tõnu Meidla
Chair of the Council

Hillar Bauman
Secretary of the Council