

# Higher Education in Estonia 2017

## Legal framework

General legislation for higher education in Estonia is detailed in the following legal acts:

- Republic of Estonia Education Act
- Universities Act
- Organisation of Research and Development Act
- Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act
- Private Schools Act
- Standard of Higher Education

The legal acts are available [here](#).

The purpose of the Universities Act is to provide the procedure for the establishment, termination of the activities of universities, the bases for the activities, principles of management of universities, the forms of and conditions for acquiring higher education, the legal status of the assets of universities, the procedure for financing universities, the basic rights and obligations of students, and state supervision over the activities of universities.

The purpose of the Organisation of Research and Development Act is to provide the grounds for the organisation of research and development and to ensure legal means for the preservation and further development of scientific and technological creation as a component of Estonian culture and the Estonian economy.

Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act lays down the grounds for the establishment of state institutions of professional higher education, the principles of management of such institutions, the conditions for acquiring higher education, the grounds for the organisation of studies, the basic rights and obligations of students, and the grounds for the budget, financing and state supervision of institutions of professional higher education.

The Private Schools Act is applicable to legal persons in private law which provide the possibility to acquire pre-school, basic, and secondary or higher education. This Act sets foundation of private schools, organisation of teaching staff, management of institutions, requirements for studies, financing and state supervision, and procedure for the closure of private schools.

The framework document, the Standard of Higher Education, establishes requirements for higher education programmes, objectives and learning outcomes to be achieved, requirements for the members of the teaching staff, and study programme groups where given educational institutions have the right to conduct studies and to issue qualifications. The Standard of Higher Education is based on other acts related to higher education and is valid for all cycles and forms of higher education, irrespective of the ownership or the legal status of the higher education institution.

The Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for the implementation of the Standard of Higher Education. The administration of higher education is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Research (except higher education in the fields of public security and national defence).

The Ministry defines the principles of higher education policy. The responsibilities of the Ministry of Education and Research include:

- Regulation of the establishment, merger, division or closure of universities on the basis of decisions made by the Riigikogu (Parliament), and in case of professional higher education institutions on the basis of decisions made by the Government;
- keeping the registry of state diplomas issued by higher education institutions and vocational education institutions;
- development of the rules for state financing of education, and distributing budgeted funds to higher education institutions;
- approval of the development plans of state professional higher education institutions;
- preparation and implementation of the national education and research development programmes;
- carrying out the state supervisory activities.

In its role, the Ministry of Education and Research is assisted by a number of management and consultative bodies with an administrative or teaching capacity. Professional higher education institutions for public security are state agencies administered by the Ministry of the Interior and professional higher education institutions for national defence are structural units of the Defence Forces.

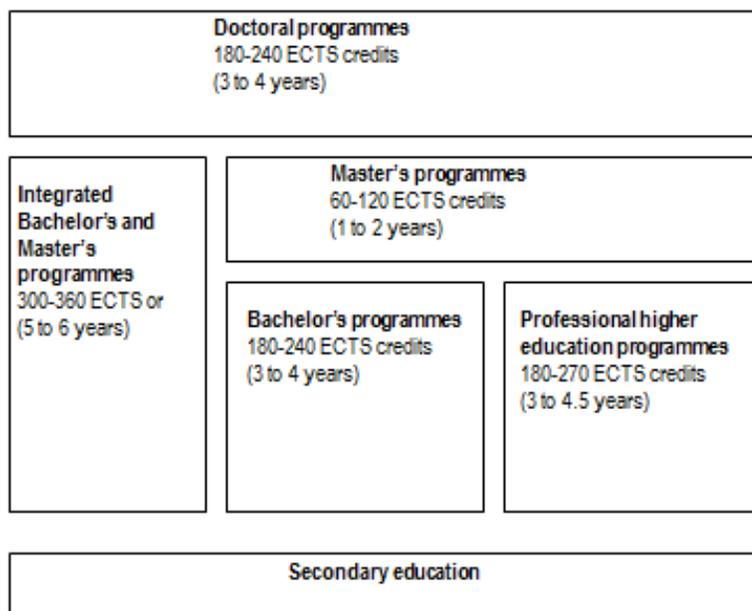
## **Higher Education Qualifications**

As a result of a major higher education reform and the restructuring of study programmes, the present system of higher education qualifications (degrees and diplomas) was introduced in the 2001/2002 academic year.

Student workload is measured in credits. As of academic year 2009/2010, 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, which corresponds to 60 ECTS credits.

The Estonian higher education system now comprises three main cycles.

## ESTONIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM



### Degree of Bakalaureus

The first cycle qualification obtained is the degree of Bakalaureus (Bachelor). The nominal length of studies is predominantly 3 years and the workload is 180 ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) credits. In exceptional cases, the nominal length of studies extends to 4 years (240 ECTS credits). The thesis or the final examination should form no less than 5 ECTS credits of the total workload for the study programme. The purpose of these studies is to increase the students' level of general education, so that they will be able to acquire the basic knowledge and skills within their field of study, to obtain the competencies necessary for a master's programme. The degree awarded at the bachelor's level should also be relevant to the labour market at an appropriate level of qualification. All first cycle degrees should give access to second cycle studies.

### Rakenduskõrghariduse diplom

First cycle programmes are also provided in the professional higher education branch. Such programmes are provided by professional higher education institutions (rakenduskõrgkool) and universities. The purpose of these programmes is to acquire the competence necessary for working in the relevant profession or for continuing studies at the master's level. The nominal length of studies is 3 to 4.5 years (180-270 ECTS credits). The thesis or the final examination should form no less than 5 ECTS credits. Students who have completed a professional higher education programme are awarded a Rakenduskõrghariduse diplom (Diploma of professional higher education) certifying the completion of the corresponding study programme. The diploma of professional higher education is a first cycle, bachelor's level degree and corresponds to a degree of Bakalaureus awarded by universities. The graduates have the right to continue studies towards a degree of Magister (a master's level qualification).

### Degree of Magister

The second cycle degree in the Estonian higher education system is Magister (Master). Master’s programme is devoted to in-depth preparation for the field of study and includes a narrow specialisation. It also prepares the students for independent work after graduation. The main purpose of such study programmes is to educate a specialist of profound professional knowledge. The access requirement for master’s study is a degree of Bakalaureus, a diploma of professional higher education or a corresponding foreign qualification. The nominal length of studies is 1 to 2 years (60-120 ECTS credits), but together with a first cycle programme no less than 5 years (300 ECTS credits). The thesis or the final examination should form no less than 15 ECTS credits of the total credit requirement for the study programme. Master’s programmes are provided by universities and since 2004, also by professional higher education institutions.

**Qualification of integrated long-cycle programmes**

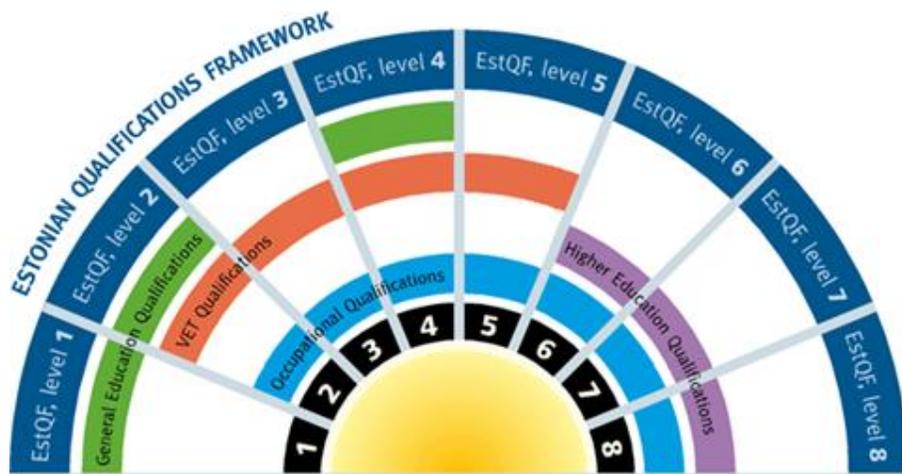
In addition to the two-cycle general structure, the study programmes in the field of medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, veterinary medicine, architecture, civil engineering, and class-teacher training are one long-cycle studies. The nominal length of programmes in medicine, and beginning in the 2002/2003 academic year, also in veterinary medicine, is 6 years (360 ECTS credits); in other fields mentioned above it is 5 years (300 ECTS credits). Such single long-cycle studies, called integrated bachelor-master studies, are based on an integrated programme which contains both basic studies and profound specialisation.

**Degree of Doktor**

Doctoral programmes represent the third cycle of higher education with the purpose of acquiring knowledge and skills necessary for independent research, development or professional creative work. The access requirement for doctoral studies is a degree of Magister or a corresponding qualification. The nominal length of doctoral studies is 3 to 4 years (180-240 ECTS credits). Doktor is a research degree obtained after the completion and public defence of a dissertation – independent research or creative work. Estonian universities award the following doctoral degree: Filosoofiadoktor – Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), with an indication of the field of study or the area of specialisation.

**Estonian Qualifications Framework**

An eight-level EstQF was established in 2008, with the [Occupational Qualifications Act](#). [The descriptions of the qualification levels](#) are identical with the EQF



descriptions.

## Higher Education 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.

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

## Recognition of Qualifications

As of 1 January 2012, higher education programmes may be provided only if the quality of the respective study programme group has been assessed and the Government of the Republic has granted a license to provide instruction in the respective group. Annex 3 to Regulation no. 178 of the Government of the Republic of 18 December 2008 “Standard of Higher Education” sets out the study programme groups and cycles of higher education where educational institutions have the right to provide instruction. The right to provide instruction involves the right to issue national diplomas.

## Quality Assessment

Since 2009, higher education quality has been assessed by Eesti Kõrghariduse Kvaliteediagentuur (Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency), an independent agency functioning under the umbrella of the Foundation Archimedes. In 2015 EKKA was renamed Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education.

### Quality assessment of study programme groups

Since 2010, the quality of study programme groups has been assessed instead of the former assessment of study programmes. Quality assessment involves assessment of the compliance of study programmes, teaching and study-related development efforts based thereon with legislation, national and international standards and developments the study programme, study programme development, availability of resources, the study process, teaching staff and students are assessed).

Quality assessment takes place once every seven years, unless the Agency has established a term of up to three years based on the results of quality assessment. The result of quality assessment is a decision made by the Assessment Council of the 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 every seven years, but if the Agency has detected any defects in the previous 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.

## Higher Education Institutions

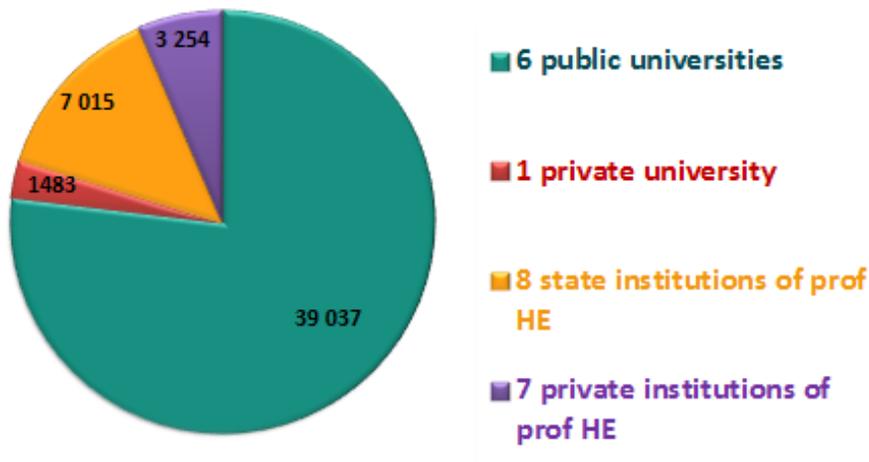
There are two types of higher education institutions in Estonia: universities and professional higher education institutions.

A university is an educational, creative, research and development institution where instruction corresponding to the Standard of Higher Education is provided at the three levels of higher education. Universities provide bachelor's, master's, and doctoral programmes, but may also offer professional higher education programmes.

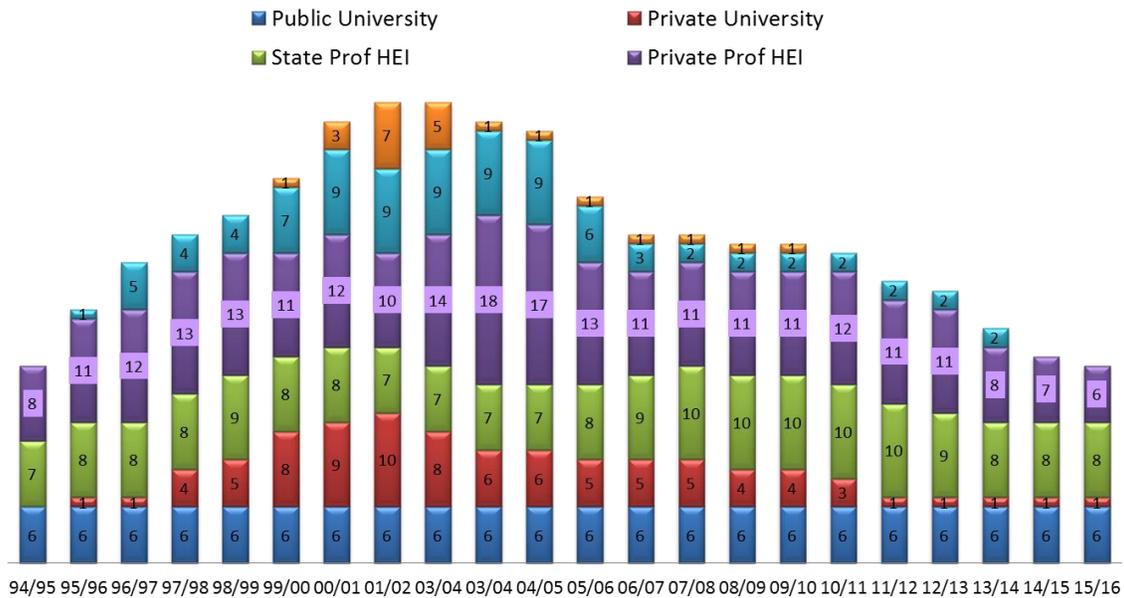
Professional higher education institutions offer professional higher education. A professional higher education institution may also provide master's programmes. The function of an institution of professional higher education is to promote lifelong learning responding to the needs of the labour market, to provide services covering study and development activities, to conduct applied research. In pursuing their mission, institutions of professional higher education cooperate with various institutions and communicate actively with the public, supporting society's development by conducting effective development and innovation activities and applied research in their field.

As to the form of ownership, educational institutions may be state, public, or private.

**Types of HEI-s and student numbers 2016**



## Higher Education Institutions 1994-2016



## Financing of Higher Education

Until 2012, there has been a dual track tuition system in Estonia. The students who score above a certain cut off point on the entrance examinations were admitted to state-funded student places at public higher education institutions. In general the Ministry of Education and Research set the number of state-funded student places at higher education institutions according to predicted needs in the labour market. Those students who were admitted beyond this quota had to pay tuition. In 2010/2011 only about 50% of study places were state-commissioned.

Private university-type higher education institutions were (and are) financed by their own means. Yet, the state may participate in financing certain study programmes if there is a public demand for the qualifications provided by this institution.

In 2011 the Estonian Government initiated significant reforms in the financing of higher education. The main changes were related to the state-funded student places, and to the financing of higher education institutions from the state budget in general. The aim was to increase the fairness of the higher education system and the efficiency of studies, reduce the inequities among the various fields of higher education and increase the accountability of institutions of higher education to ensure the quality of education.

All students who have fully satisfied the requirements of their curricula are able to study for free in Estonian-language curricula as of the 2013/2014 academic year. In order to retain their free student places, the students will have to meet the requirements of their curricula in full each semester (60 credits per year). If a student is unable or unwilling to meet the requirements of the curriculum in full, the institution of higher education will have the option of demanding compensation for the study costs by the student up to the maximum limit established by the Government of the Republic (€ 50 per 1 ECTS).

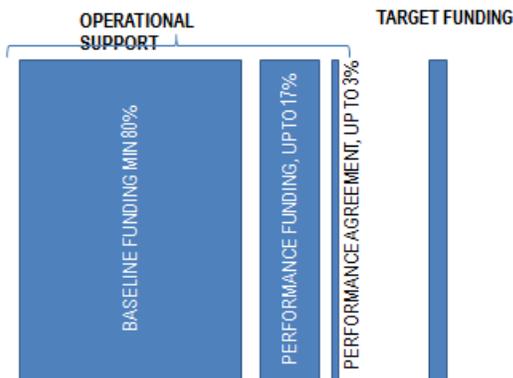
For various reasons, students are usually unable to meet the requirements of their curricula in full while studying abroad; and in order to promote mobility, the law provides exceptions in regard to the study period spent abroad.

Public universities and state professional institutions of higher education receive performance support from the state budget for providing higher education. Institutions of higher education who will receive state funding will make decisions regarding the number of student places created for each field based on their profile and function. Should the state have a specific shortage of graduates in a certain field, it can establish its needs through performance contracts. Private institutions may also apply for state support, but if the state grants their requests, they will lose the right to charge their students full tuition fees.

Since 2017 University Act was changed to increase stability in financing of HEI-s:

- Operational support is dividend in two – baseline funding (at least 80%) and performance funding (up to 20%)
- Performance funding is based on fulfilling performance indicators and fulfilling the performance agreement signed with the MoER
- It is possible to give target funding to support important services provided by HEI-s (like libraries, collections etc)

## Financing



At least 80% will be **baseline funding** based on the last 3 years average operational support to the institution.

In **performance funding** all public HEI-s (public universities and state professional HEI-s) will be competing with each other.

- Institutions with better results will get proportionally more performance funding.

- The proportions between HEI-s established by the distribution of baseline funding are taken into account when transferring the results of performance indicators into performance funding.

Performance indicators:

- Share of students graduating with nominal time, 35%
- Share of students participating in short time mobility, 10%
- Share of enrolled foreign students, 10%
- Share of graduates in employment or in further studies, 20%
- Share of students enrolled in HEI's responsibility areas, 10%
- Share of private funding in study activities compared to the public funding, 10%

## Financial Support for Students

### National study loan

Only 10% of students are taking (1920 euro per year), financial cost is rather high (5%)

### Study support

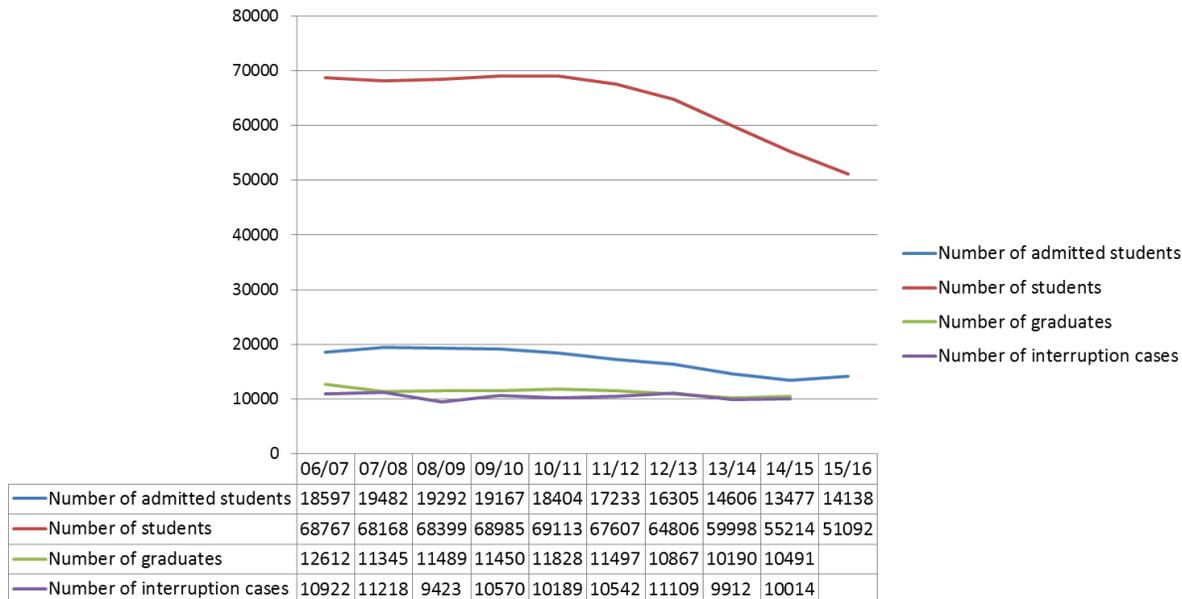
- Need based (paid according to the family income) 75-220 eur/month
- Special support
- Study support in doctoral studies (422 eur/month)

### Scholarships

- Nationally important curriculars (160-300 eur/month)
- For good study results (100 eur/month)
- Scholarship for doctoral studies in fields of Smart Specialisation (422 eur/month)

### SEN students scholarship (60-510 eur/month)

## Dynamics in student numbers in Estonia 2006-2016



## Funding of R&D

The main principles of R&D in Estonia are defined in the [Organisation of Research and Development Act](#). The purpose of the Organisation of Research and Development Act is to provide the grounds for the organisation of research and development and to ensure legal means for the preservation and further development of scientific and technological creation as a component of Estonian culture and the Estonian economy.

The main instruments of financing Estonian R&D activities:

1. baseline funding for R&D institutions;
2. research grants;
3. national R&D programmes;
4. financing of centres of excellence and doctoral schools;
5. covering the expenses of R&D

Baseline funding involves the financing of R&D institutions with the aim of realizing strategic development goals, co-financing foreign and domestic projects and opening up new research directions. It is provided from the state budget.

Research grants are applied for in a public competition on the conditions and in accordance with the procedure established by the Estonian Research Council. The Council awards **research grants** to individual researchers and research groups.

[Research and development programmes](#) are launched and funds allocated by the ministry responsible for the implementation of the programme. Estonia has currently running two national R&D programmes:

- Estonian language technology (2011-2017);

- Estonian Language and Cultural Memory (2014–2018).

Through [Enterprise Estonia](#) and its sub-units, the Ministry of Economic Affairs finances R&D programmes that involve product development, co-operation with enterprises and entrepreneurs, and technology programmes for priority areas. Enterprise Estonia provides support for new companies as well as assistance to R&D activities of already active companies, NGOs and R&D institutions.

[Infrastructure](#) expenses of a state R&D institution, which are not covered from other funding instruments, shall be covered from the state budget through the budget of the ministry under whose area of government the research and development institution belongs. The Ministry of Education and Research together with the Estonian Academy of Sciences have launched a process of compiling the [Estonian roadmap](#) of research infrastructures. The roadmap is a long-term (10-20 years perspective) planning instrument, which lists research infrastructure units of national importance which are either new or in need of modernizing.

Researcher mobility support enables both Estonian and foreign researchers to carry out research in a new research environment to exchange experience, expand their co-operation networks and obtain new skills. The aim of postdoctoral grant is to support researchers with PhD degree or those with equivalent research qualifications to continue their independent research careers in strong collaborative research groups for up to three years.

## Strategies

[Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020](#)

[Strategy "Knowledge-based Estonia 2014-2020"](#)

[Implementation Plan 2016-2019 for achieving the objectives of the Estonian Research and Development and Innovation Strategy 2014-2020](#)

## Databases

The visual educational statistics database [HaridusSilm](#) provides statistical data about education, research and development, language policy and youth field in Estonia.

**ETIS is the [Estonian Research Information System](#).** The Estonian Research Information System concentrates information on research- and development institutions, researchers, research projects and various research results. The Estonian Research Information System is also an information channel for submitting and processing grant applications and for submitting and confirming project reports.

The Estonian Research Information System is an information channel and a tool for researchers as well as R&D institutions. Researchers can use the Estonian Research Information System as a place, where they can submit applications for grant competitions, read news and chat in the forum about research. R&D institutions can submit through the Estonian Research Information System applications and introduce their research results

more widely. Research funding organisations use ETIS for evaluating and processing applications and giving feedback.