

Institutional Accreditation

Approved by the Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education
of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education
on 02.02.2018

I. General Provisions

1. On the basis of clause 10 (1) 1), subsection 10 (4) and § 12 of the Universities Act, subsections 21 (1) to (3) and (5) of the Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act, and subsections 14 (1) to (3) and (5) of the Private Schools Act, the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (hereinafter referred to as 'EKKA') shall establish and disclose a Guide to Institutional Accreditation.
2. Institutional accreditation is an external evaluation in the course of which EKKA shall assess compliance of the management, administration, teaching and research activities, as well as the environments of education and research at a higher education institution (HEI), with legislation and with the objectives and development plan of that HEI. The purpose of institutional accreditation is to support the development of strategic management and quality culture that values learning-centeredness, creativity and innovation in the HEIs, as well as to increase the societal impact of education, research and development delivered by the HEIs.
3. Higher education institutions have an obligation to undergo institutional accreditation at least once in seven years.
4. Institutional accreditation is carried out according to the evaluation schedules which have been agreed upon with the HEIs. The HEI may apply to undergo the institutional accreditation process in less than seven years, but no more frequently than every five years.
5. In professional higher education institutions, EKKA will, if possible, combine institutional accreditation with quality assessments of vocational education and training.

II. Standards and Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation

6. These standards and guidelines for institutional accreditation¹ were defined while taking into account the legislation of the Republic of Estonia regulating higher education, national strategies, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and other international agreements.
7. EKKA shall assess the higher education institution according to twelve standards. Assessment focuses on the core processes of the HEI – learning and teaching, research, development and creative activities (RDC), and service to society – as well as on strategic management of the organisation and resource management. The learning and teaching process is examined in more detail under five standards (study programme, teaching staff², learning and teaching, student assessment and learning support processes). Throughout the assessment process, there is a focus

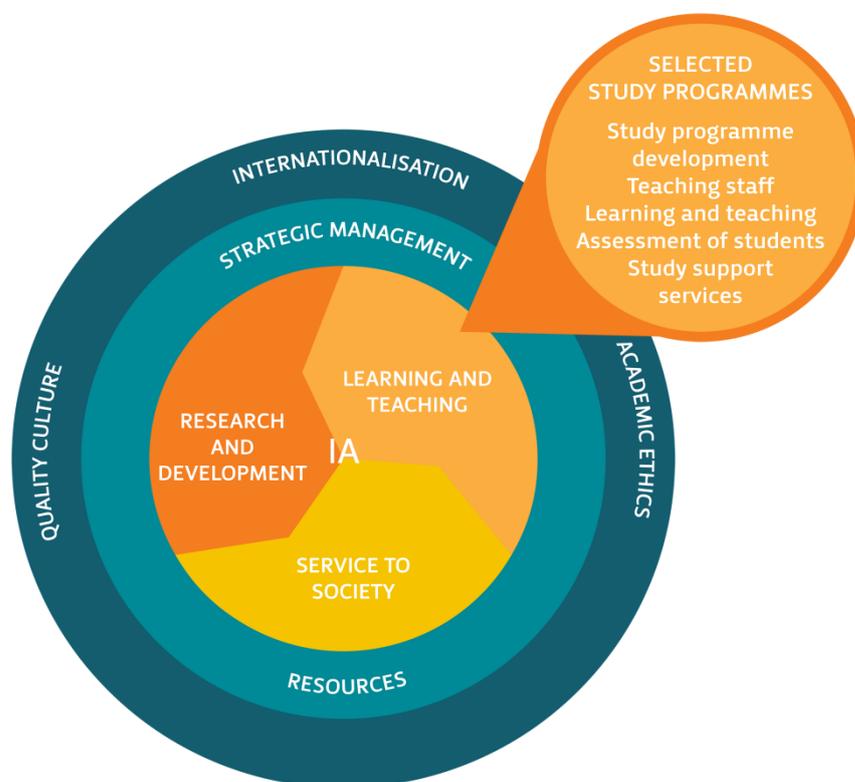
¹ The guidelines highlight the possible examples of good practice for implementing the standards, without claiming completeness or appropriateness for the specific context of an HEI.

² The term 'teaching staff' is used in this Guide to refer to academic employees (including researchers) who conduct teaching (including supervising theses).

on academic ethics, quality culture and internationalisation (see Figure 1, Standards for Institutional Accreditation).

8. To assess the application of principles and regulations established at the institutional level in the learning and teaching process, as well as the performance of an internal evaluation system for study programmes offered at the higher education institution, EKKA shall also assess study programmes on a sampling basis during the accreditation review. When defining a sampling, EKKA will take into account the number of study programmes at the HEI, the results of prior assessments of study programme groups and a justified proposal by the HEI. The sampling may comprise one to ten study programmes, depending on the number of study programme groups and programmes at the HEI.
9. Standards and guidelines for institutional accreditation:

Figure 1. Standards for institutional accreditation



9.1. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Standard:

Development planning at the higher education institution is purposeful and systematic, involving various stakeholders. The higher education institution regularly evaluates the achievement of its stated objectives and the impact of its activities.

Guidelines:

The HEI has formulated the objectives and key results for its core activities – learning and teaching; research, development and creative activities, and service to society – taking into

account national priorities and the needs of society, focusing on its strengths and reducing unnecessary duplication both within the HEI and throughout higher education in Estonia.

The HEI is managed in accordance with its mission, vision and core values, as well as objectives set out on the basis of those principles. Achievement of the objectives and effects of the activities are evaluated regularly. Creativity and innovation are supported and given value in both core and support activities.

Membership of the HEI (including students), as well as external stakeholders, is involved in developing and implementing the HEI's development plan and action plans. The HEI members share the core values that serve as a basis for the institution's development plan.

9.2. RESOURCES

Standard:

The higher education institution develops its staff and manages its physical and financial resources in a purposeful, systematic and sustainable manner. Internal and external communications of the higher education institution (including marketing and image-building) are targeted and managed.

Guidelines:

The HEI has an efficient staff development system. The principles and procedures for employee recruitment and development are based on the objectives of the HEI's development plan, and are fair and transparent. The career model of academic staff motivates talented young people to start their academic careers, creates opportunities for progress, and ensures sustainability of the academic staff. The principles for employees' remuneration and motivation are defined, available to all employees, and observed.

Allocation of the HEI's financial resources is based on the objectives of its development plan. The management and development of its infrastructure (buildings, laboratories, classrooms, IT systems, etc.) are economically feasible. Sufficient resources are available for updating the infrastructure for education and research, and/or a strategy exists enabling the HEI to acquire them.

A sufficient amount of textbooks and other learning aids are available, they are of uniformly high quality and accessible. Publicly offered information about HEI's activities (including study programmes) and the findings of external evaluations is correct, up to date, easily accessible and understandable. The HEI has a system to popularise its core activities and academic career opportunities. The HEI has a functioning system for internal and external communications, relevant to the target audiences. The HEI members are informed of the decisions relevant to them in a timely manner.

Employee satisfaction with management, working conditions, information flow, etc., at the HEI is surveyed regularly and the survey results are used in quality improvement activities.

9.3. QUALITY CULTURE

Standard:

The higher education institution has defined the quality of its core and support processes, and the principles of quality assurance. In the higher education institution, internal evaluation supports strategic management and is conducted regularly at different levels

(institution, unit, study programme), the findings of internal and external evaluations are analysed and quality improvement activities implemented.

Guidelines:

Members of the HEI have agreed upon definitions for the quality of their core and support processes and are guided by them in their daily work. The HEI develops and publicises its policies and procedures for internal quality assurance (internal evaluation) and conducts regular internal evaluations, which take into account, inter alia, the standards set out in this Guide, and incorporates feedback from its members and/or from external experts. In the course of internal evaluations, peer learning, comparisons with other HEIs regarding their results and means for achievement, as well as a sharing of best practices take place, among other things.

Internal evaluation is based on the following key questions in quality management: What do you want to achieve, and why? How do you want to do it? How do you know that the activities are effective and will have the desired impact? How do you manage the quality improvement activities?

Regular reviews and enhancements of study programmes ensure their relevance, including their compliance with international trends.

9.4. ACADEMIC ETHICS

Standard:

The higher education institution has defined its principles for academic ethics, has a system for disseminating them among its members, and has a code of conduct including guidelines for any cases of non-compliance with these principles. The higher education institution has a functioning system for handling complaints.

Guidelines:

The HEI values its members and ensures that all its employees and students are treated according to the principle of equal treatment.

Employees and students of the HEI are guided by the agreed principles of academic ethics in all their activities.

The HEI respects fundamental values and policies of research set out in the document, 'Research Integrity', issued jointly by Estonian research institutions, the Estonian Academy of Sciences, the Estonian Research Council and the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research.

The HEI supports its students and teaching staff in their understanding and responding to ethical issues. Teaching staff and students do not tolerate academic fraud, including cheating and plagiarism, and they will act immediately upon any such occurrence.

Management of complaints from HEI members (including discrimination cases) is transparent and objective, ensuring fair treatment of all parties.

9.5. INTERNATIONALISATION

Standard:

The higher education institution has set objectives for internationalisation and assesses the attainment of these objectives regularly. The higher education institution has created an

environment that encourages international mobility of students and teaching staff, supporting the development of learning, teaching and RDC activities, as well as the cultural openness of its members and Estonian society in general.

Guidelines:

The HEI creates opportunities for international student exchanges by offering study programmes and/or modules taught in English. The learning environment at the HEI supports internationalisation and cultural openness.

Recognition of qualifications and recognition of prior learning and work experiences for student admission and programme completion are in accordance with the quality requirements set by the HEI, are systemic and consistent with the expected learning outcomes and support international student mobility.

The organisation of studies at the HEI facilitates student participation in international mobility. The HEI has agreements with foreign higher education institutions and, through international exchange, sends its students abroad to study and undertake practical trainings, providing comprehensive support for this. Members of the teaching staff encourage students to participate in international mobility.

International lecturers participate in the process of teaching, including supervision of doctoral theses.

The HEI supports and recognises the participation of its teaching staff in international teaching, research or creative projects, as well as their teaching, research or creative work and personal development which are performed at HEIs abroad.

9.6. TEACHING STAFF

Standard:

Teaching is conducted by a sufficient number of professionally competent members of the teaching staff who support the development of learners and value their own continuous self-development.

Guidelines:

Members of the teaching staff engage systemically in development of their professional and teaching skills, improve their supervision competence, and share best practices with one another.

Teaching staff's participation in research, development and/or creative activities supports the teaching process and ensures competence for the supervision of students' theses (including doctoral theses).

Members of the teaching staff collaborate in fields of teaching, research and/or creative work within the HEI and with partners outside the HEI, e.g. with field practitioners, public sector organisations, companies, other research and development institutions, and lecturers from other Estonian or foreign higher education institutions. Qualified visiting lecturers and practitioners participate in the teaching process.

When assessing the work of teaching staff (including their periodical evaluations), the effectiveness of their teaching as well as their research, development and creative work is taken into account, including student feedback, the effectiveness of their student supervision,

development of their teaching and supervisory skills, their international mobility, and their entrepreneurial experience or other work experience in their fields of speciality outside the HEI.

9.7. STUDY PROGRAMME

Standard:

Study programmes are designed and developed while taking into account the expectations of stakeholders, higher education and professional standards, and trends in the relevant fields. The objectives of study programmes, modules and courses and their planned learning outcomes are specific and coherent. The study programmes support creativity, entrepreneurship and development of other general competencies.

Guidelines:

In planning study programmes and student places, the HEI pursues its objectives and the needs of the labour market, and takes into account national strategies and the expectations of society. The planned learning outcomes are in accord with the requirements for the corresponding level of the Estonian Qualifications Framework.

Expected student workloads defined in the study programmes are realistic and consistent with the calculation that 1 ECTS credit equals 26 student learning hours.

Theoretical learning and practical learning are interconnected. The content and organisation of practical trainings support the achievement of learning outcomes of the study programme and meet the needs of all parties.

9.8. LEARNING AND TEACHING

Standard:

Admissions requirements and procedures ensure fair access to higher education and the formation of a motivated student body. The higher education institution systemically implements a student-centred approach that guides students to take responsibility for their studies and career planning, and supports creativity and innovation. Graduates of the higher education institution, with their professional knowledge and social skills, are competitive both nationally and internationally.

Guidelines:

The teaching process takes into account students' individual abilities and needs, and supports their development. Organisation of independent work and classroom teaching motivates students to take responsibility for their studies.

Teaching methods and learning aids used in the teaching process are modern, appropriate and effective, and support development of a digital culture.

Students are motivated to learn and contribute to improving the quality of their studies by providing meaningful feedback on both the learning process and the organisation of studies.

Doctoral students plan their studies, as well as their research and development activities, in collaboration with their supervisor(s), setting specific objectives for each year and assuming responsibility for achieving those objectives.

9.9. STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Standard:

Assessments of students, including recognition of their prior learning and work experiences, support the process of learning and are consistent with expected learning outcomes. The objectivity and reliability of student assessments are ensured.

Guidelines:

The assessment criteria are understandable to students and students are informed about them in a timely manner. Members of the teaching staff cooperate in defining assessment criteria and apply similar approaches.

Assessment methods are versatile and relevant, and assess the degree of achievement of learning outcomes (including general competencies).

If possible, more than one staff member is involved in the development of assessment tasks and student assessments. Along with assessments, students receive feedback that supports their individual development.

The HEI supports development of the teaching staff's assessment competencies.

Evaluation of doctoral students is transparent and impartial. Its purpose is to support the development of doctoral students, to assess the effectiveness of their current work and to evaluate their ability to complete the doctoral studies on time and successfully defend their doctoral theses.

When recognising prior learning and work experience towards the completion of the study programme, results obtained through the studies and work experiences (the achieved learning outcomes) are assessed.

Students are aware of their rights and obligations, including the procedures for challenges regarding assessments.

9.10. LEARNING SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Standard:

The higher education institution ensures that all students have access to academic, career and psychological counselling. Students' individual development and academic progress are monitored and supported.

Guidelines:

The HEI assists the student in developing an individual study programme based on the student's special needs as well as educational abilities and preferences.

The HEI advises its students (including students with special needs and international students) on finding practical training places as well as jobs. Students are aware of where to get support in the case of psychological problems.

The HEI has a functioning system to support and advise international students (including psychological and career counselling) which, inter alia, helps them integrate smoothly into the membership of the HEI and Estonian society. The HEI analyses the reasons students withdraw from studies or drop out, and takes steps to increase the effectiveness of the studies.

The HEI supports student participation in extra-curricular activities and civil society initiatives.

The HEI monitors student satisfaction with the counselling services provided and makes changes as needed.

9.11. RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND/OR OTHER CREATIVE ACTIVITY (RDC)³

Standard:

The higher education institution has defined its objectives and focus in the fields of RDC based on its mission, as well as on the expectations and future needs of society, and assesses their implementation and the societal impact of its RDC activities. RDC supports the process of teaching and learning at the higher education institution. Support services for RDC are purposeful and support implementation of the objectives of the core process.

Guidelines:

The HEI places a high value on the role and responsibilities of the field of RDC in society and evaluates the results of its RDC activities, their international visibility and societal impact.

The HEI responds flexibly to the current needs of society and the labour market in terms of its research and plans its research in collaboration with enterprises, public sector institutions and organisations of the third sector.

Members of teaching staff introduce students to their research results as well as the latest scientific achievements in their areas of specialisation, and involve students in their R&D projects where possible.

The organisation and management of RDC take into account thematic differences and the mission (profile) of the HEI.

9.12. SERVICE TO SOCIETY

Standard:

The higher education institution initiates and implements development activities, which enhance prosperity in the community and disseminate recent know-how in the areas of the institution's competence. The higher education institution, as a learning-oriented organisation, promotes lifelong learning in society and creates high-quality opportunities for that.

Guidelines:

The HEI contributes to the development of the community's well-being by sharing its resources (library, museums, sports facilities, etc.), by providing consulting and advisory services, and by organising concerts, exhibitions, shows, conferences, fairs and other events.

The HEI involves alumni in activities aimed at the development of the HEI and the knowledge society.

Employees of the HEI participate in the work of professional associations and in other community councils and decision-making bodies as experts, directing society's development

³ Research, development and/or other creative activity (hereinafter referred as 'RDC') – research and development (including basic and applied research) as defined in the Organisation of Research and Development Act, and creative and development activities in the field of the arts.

processes as opinion leaders. The impact academic employees have on society is taken into account when evaluating their work.

The HEI has defined the objectives for in-service training and measures their implementation. In-service training is planned in accordance with the needs of target groups.

III. Formation and Tasks of Assessment Committee

10. An assessment committee (hereinafter referred to as 'committee') shall consist of at least 4 members.
11. Committees shall be formed based on the following principles:
 - 11.1. a committee includes experts in the areas being assessed and those who have experience in managing an HEI or an academic unit;
 - 11.2. at least one member is chosen from outside of HEIs;
 - 11.3. a committee includes at least one expert from abroad;
 - 11.4. at least one member of a committee is a student or a person who has graduated from HEI no more than one year prior (at the time of approval of the committee);
 - 11.5. at least one member of a committee has management experience in an HEI, preferably with a similar profile as the one being assessed;
 - 11.6. at least one member of a committee has past experience in assessing a higher education institution.
12. The following requirements shall apply to members of a committee:
 - 12.1. members of a committee are independent, they do not represent the interests of the organisation they are associated with;
 - 12.2. members of a committee are unbiased in their assessments;
 - 12.3. members of a committee know the functioning of a higher education system and are aware about trends in higher education and the principles of external evaluation;
 - 12.4. members of a committee have the teamwork skills necessary to implement the work;
 - 12.5. members of a committee are proficient in both spoken and written English.
13. After coordinating the preliminary composition of a committee with the EKKK Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education (hereinafter referred to as 'the Council'), the EKKK Bureau shall forward the relevant information to the HEI, who then has one week to present its opinion on the composition of the committee and, when justified, to ask for additional members or for the removal of a member.
14. The Director of EKKK shall approve the final composition of a committee by his or her order and appoint a chairperson for the committee and an assessment coordinator.
15. An assessment coordinator (hereinafter referred to as 'coordinator') shall be an EKKK employee. The coordinator is not a member of a committee.
16. Members of a committee shall confirm by signature the absence of any conflicts of interest and an obligation to maintain the confidentiality of information that has become known to them in the course of the evaluation as well as the content of committee discussions. In the case of a conflict of interest, committee members shall immediately notify the Director of EKKK of it and remove themselves from the work of the committee. A conflict of interest shall be presumed to be present in the following cases:

- 16.1. A committee member has an employment or other contractual relationship with the HEI under evaluation at the time of evaluation, or he or she has had an employment relationship with that HEI within three years prior to the assessment visit.
 - 16.2. A committee member is participating in the work of a decision-making or advisory body of the HEI under evaluation at the time of evaluation and/or is associated with any governing body of the owner of the private HEI under evaluation.
 - 16.3. A committee member is studying at the higher education institution under evaluation, or graduated from it less than three years prior.
 - 16.4. The membership connected with the HEI under evaluation includes a person closely related to a committee member (spouse or life partner, child or parent).
17. The working language of a committee shall be English. If the HEI wants to use interpretation services, it shall coordinate the selection of an interpreter with the assessment coordinator at least one week prior to the assessment visit. EKKKA hereby sets out the following requirements for an interpreter: the interpreter has the necessary preparation for consecutive interpretation in Estonian-English-Estonian (master degree studies in interpreting, in-service training in interpreting, interpreting as an additional specialty, etc.), past experience in consecutive interpretation, and commands the terminology of higher education. The interpreter does not work at the HEI under evaluation. Costs of interpretation services shall be incurred by the HEI under evaluation.
18. With consent of the chairperson of a committee and by an order of the Director of EKKKA, up to two observers from other organisations practicing external evaluation can be appointed. Observers shall confirm by signature an obligation to maintain the confidentiality of the content of assessment committee discussions. Observers have no right to intervene in the process of evaluation.
19. Tasks of the members of a committee:
- 19.1. to examine documents regulating institutional accreditation and complete the assessment training provided by EKKKA;
 - 19.2. to review the self-evaluation report of an HEI and fill out the assessment form with initial comments and information based on the self-evaluation report;
 - 19.3. to participate in the meetings and discussions of the committee;
 - 19.4. to participate in the preparation of an assessment visit and the visit itself;
 - 19.5. to participate in wording the component assessments and preparing the assessment report;
 - 19.6. to examine the comments by the HEI regarding the assessment report and take them into consideration when finalising the assessment report;
 - 19.7. to perform other tasks related to evaluation activities according to the division of tasks among members of the committee;
 - 19.8. to adhere to the agreed committee deadlines.
20. Tasks of the chairperson of a committee:
- 20.1. to lead the work of the committee;
 - 20.2. to chair the meetings of the committee;
 - 20.3. to divide tasks among the members of the committee;
 - 20.4. after the visit, give an overview of the provisional conclusions of the committee to the HEI;
 - 20.5. to ensure that the component assessments are justified;
 - 20.6. to finalise and approve the assessment report.
21. Tasks of a coordinator:

- 21.1. to ensure smooth functioning of the evaluation process based on the requirements and timeframe laid down by this Guide;
 - 21.2. to incorporate the committee's preliminary input into a single format;
 - 21.3. to coordinate with the members of a committee a list of people whom the committee would like to interview and a list of additional materials that the committee needs in order to prepare for the visit;
 - 21.4. to coordinate with a HEI a schedule for the visit, the names and the titles of positions of the people participating in the meetings and, if necessary, to request additional materials from the HEI;
 - 21.5. to perform other one-time tasks related to the specific evaluation process as assigned by the committee chairperson.
22. EKKA shall document interviews conducted during visits. The interviews are recorded with the consent of the participants.
 23. EKKA shall enter into contracts with committee members for their services.

IV. Preparation of Self-evaluation Report

24. The HEI shall prepare a self-evaluation report based on the guide prepared by EKKA. This self-evaluation report shall be in English.
25. Upon request, EKKA shall provide a training to the HEI for writing a self-evaluation report.
26. The HEI shall submit its self-evaluation report in electronic format to EKKA no later than three months prior to the agreed assessment visit.
27. The EKKA Bureau shall review the self-evaluation report within two weeks after receiving it and, if necessary, return it to the HEI for amendments and improvements. The HEI shall send the enhanced report back to EKKA within two weeks.
28. The coordinator shall send the self-evaluation report to the committee no later than two months prior to the assessment visit.

V. Assessment Visit

29. The EKKA Bureau and the HEI shall agree upon a week for the assessment visit no later than six months ahead of time. The HEI receiving a committee shall appoint a person who will be responsible for a smooth process of the visit and will ensure appropriate working conditions for the members of the committee.
30. In the course of the visit, the HEI shall make an appropriately furnished room available to the committee members and allow the committee to:
 - 30.1. access internal normative documents that provide for and govern the activities of the HEI;
 - 30.2. interview employees and students of the HEI at the discretion of committee members;
 - 30.3. access information and information systems related to education, research, development and students;
 - 30.4. access information related to employees of the HEI (their CVs, job descriptions, etc.);
 - 30.5. inspect the infrastructure of the HEI;
 - 30.6. access students' research, development and creative works;
 - 30.7. access information related to financial activities of the HEI;

30.8. if necessary, obtain other information related to the management and administration of the HEI.

31. Within five working days after the visit, EKKA shall request that the HEI provide written feedback on the apparent preparation by the committee members, the relevance of their questions and other pertinent issues, in the form established by EKKA.

VI. Assessment Report and Formation of Component Assessments

32. The committee shall provide separate assessments for each of the twelve standards to the HEIs: strategic management, resource management, quality culture, academic ethics, internationalisation, teaching staff, study programme, learning and teaching, student assessment, learning support systems, research, development and/or other creative activity, and service to society (hereinafter referred to as 'component assessments').
33. Standards shall be evaluated on a scale of three values: 'conforms', 'partially conforms' and 'does not conform'.
34. Standards where an HEI has shown outstanding results and/or initiatives, the committee may recognise it with an additional note 'worthy of recognition'.
35. Committee's component assessments shall preferably be based on decisions adopted by consensus. If consensus is not reached, a simple majority of members of the committee shall make the decision, and the dissenting view(s) together with the reason(s) shall be included. If the votes are equally divided, the vote of the chairperson shall decide.
36. The EKKA Bureau shall forward the assessment report to the HEI no later than by the end of the sixth week after the visit. If more than one HEI is being evaluated at the same time, it is possible to extend the deadline for the report by up to two weeks.
37. The HEI shall have the opportunity to submit its comments regarding the assessment report within two weeks after receipt of the report. The committee shall review these comments and take them into account when preparing the final report.
38. An electronic version of the final assessment report, approved by the committee chairman, shall be forwarded by the committee chairman to the EKKA Bureau no later than by the end of the ninth week after the visit.
39. The EKKA Bureau shall forward the committee's assessment report to the Council and to the HEI under evaluation.

VII. Final Decisions by EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education

40. The EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education shall make a final decision on institutional accreditation at its session within three months after receiving the assessment report. If necessary, the Council may ask the chairperson of the committee or a member of the committee authorised by the chairperson to attend the session for explanations.
41. The Council shall base its decision on the self-evaluation report of the HEI, the component assessments by the committee, comments by the HEI received in a timely manner and on any additional materials submitted upon request of the Council.

42. In case of contradictions in component assessments or inadequate justification, the Council shall have the right to return the report to the assessment committee to be reviewed and clarified. The committee shall resend the reviewed report to the EKKA Bureau no later than within two weeks after it was returned to the committee, and the EKKA Bureau shall proceed in accordance with the procedures established by points 37 to 39 above.
43. The Council shall base its final decision regarding institutional accreditation on the following principles:
 - 43.1. If all component assessments are provided as ‘conforms’, the Council shall conclude that the management, administration, teaching and research activities as well as the environments of learning and research at the HEI meet the requirements, and decide to accredit the HEI for seven years.
 - 43.2. If one to four component assessments are provided as ‘partially conforms’ and all the remaining component assessments are provided as ‘conforms’, the Council shall analyse the strengths and areas for improvement of the HEI and conclude that the management, administration, teaching and research activities as well as the environments of learning and research at the HEI meet the requirements, and decide to accredit the HEI for seven years; or shall conclude that there are shortcomings in the management, administration, teaching and research activities or in the environments of learning and research at the HEI, provide guidance for their elimination, and decide to accredit the HEI for three years.
 - 43.3. If five to eight component assessments are provided as ‘partially conforms’ and all the remaining component assessments are provided as ‘conforms’, the Council shall conclude that there are shortcomings in the management, administration, teaching and research activities or in the environments of learning and research at the HEI, provide guidance for their elimination, and decide to accredit the HEI for three years.
 - 43.4. If nine to twelve component assessments are provided as ‘partially conforms’ and all the remaining component assessments are provided as ‘conforms’, the Council shall analyse the strengths and areas for improvement of the HEI and conclude that there are shortcomings in the management, administration, teaching and research activities or in the environments of learning and research at the HEI, provide guidance for their elimination, and decide to accredit the HEI for three years; or shall conclude that the management, administration, teaching and research activities as well as the environments of learning and research at the HEI do not meet the requirements, and decide not to accredit the HEI.
 - 43.5. If one to two component assessments are provided as ‘does not conform’, the Council shall analyse the strengths and areas for improvement of the HEI and conclude that there are shortcomings in the management, administration, teaching and research activities or in the environments of learning and research at the HEI, provide guidance for their elimination, and decide to accredit the HEI for three years; or shall conclude that the management, administration, teaching and research activities as well as the environments of learning and research at the HEI do not meet the requirements, and decide not to accredit the HEI.
 - 43.6. If at least three component assessments are provided as ‘does not conform’, the Council shall conclude that the management, administration, teaching and research activities as well as the environments of learning and research at the HEI do not meet the requirements, and decide not to accredit the HEI.
 - 43.7. If the Council weighs between two accreditation decisions and finds that if the HEI were to satisfy certain conditions, a more positive decision would be possible, the Council may make

that decision with a secondary condition, as defined in § 53 of the Administrative Procedure Act.

44. If the committee has added a note of 'worthy of recognition' to some standards, the Council shall cite the recognition(s) in the final decision.
45. The EKKKA Bureau shall electronically forward the final decision by the Council along with the assessment report to the HEI within two weeks after the date of that decision. If the has adopted a decision not to accredit the higher education institution, EKKKA shall also notify the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research of that within a reasonable period of time.
46. Within one week after the final decision and the assessment report were forwarded to the institution of higher education, EKKKA shall publicise the final decision along with the assessment and self-evaluation reports on its website.

VIII. Contesting of Accreditation Proceedings Conducted by EKKKA and Final Decisions by the Council

47. A person who finds that his or her rights have been violated or his or her freedoms have been restricted by assessment procedures conducted by EKKKA or by a decision made by the Council may file a challenge pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Administrative Procedure Act. The challenge shall be filed with the Council within thirty days after the person filing the challenge became or should have become aware of the contested finding.
48. The Council shall forward the challenge to its Appeals Committee⁴ who shall provide an unbiased opinion in writing regarding the validity of the challenge to the Council, within five days after receipt of the challenge. The Council shall resolve the challenge within ten days of its receipt, taking into account the reasoned opinion of the Appeals Committee. If the challenge needs to be investigated further, the deadline for its review by the Council may be extended by a maximum of thirty days.
49. The final decision by Council may be challenged within thirty days after the delivery of the final decision, filing an action with the Tallinn courthouse of the Tallinn Administrative Court pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Code of Administrative Court.

IX. Follow-up Activities

50. EKKKA assumes that the responsibility for resolving problems pointed out in the assessment reports and for continuous improvement activities lies with the higher education institutions. EKKKA requests that, two years after the accreditation decision was made by the Council, the HEI who was granted accreditation for seven years submit a written overview of its activities, planned and implemented based on recommendations in the assessment report, along with the results of such activities.

⁴ The role and composition of the Appeals Committee of the EKKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education are outlined in the regulation, 'Procedures for Formation of the Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education and the Appeals Committee', which is available [here](#)

51. If the Council has added a secondary condition to the accreditation decision in accordance with point 43.7 above, the HEI shall submit a progress report to the Council regarding elimination of the shortcoming described in that secondary condition. The Council shall involve members of the assessment committee in assessing compliance with the secondary condition.

X. Involving Competent Assessment Authorities of Foreign Countries

52. If a HEI wishes that a competent foreign assessment authority (hereinafter referred to as 'assessment authority') would conduct an institutional accreditation review, the HEI shall submit a well-reasoned request to EKKKA no later than two years prior to the expiration date of its current accreditation to include that assessment authority, providing the following information:
 - 52.1. the name and contact details of the assessment authority, including its web address;
 - 52.2. the consent of the assessment authority to conduct the accreditation review, and an estimated expenditure;
 - 52.3. a description of the procedure (including a schedule) and requirements for a planned accreditation process.
53. The HEIs may request accreditation services from internationally recognised assessment authorities that have fulfilled the following conditions:
 - 53.1. The assessment authority has institutional evaluation experience.
 - 53.2. The procedures and requirements for accreditation are transparent and in conformity with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, and the assessment authority has preferably been included in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).
 - 53.3. Within the framework of institutional accreditation, a sampling-based evaluation of study programmes will also be conducted.
54. Within one month after receipt of the request, the Council shall make a justified decision on the suitability of the assessment authority to conduct institutional accreditation.
55. If EKKKA approves the use of a foreign assessment authority, it shall conclude a tripartite contract with the higher education institution and the assessment authority, providing the rights and responsibilities of the parties and the procedure for reimbursement of expenditures.
56. The assessment authority shall submit its assessment report to EKKKA.
57. If it becomes evident that there are significant deficiencies in the assessment report, and it is impossible to make a final decision that is consistent with Estonian legislation, the Council shall have the right to return the report to the assessment authority for amendment.
58. If it is possible to make a final decision that is consistent with Estonian legislation, the Council shall make one of the following justified decisions:
 - 58.1. to accredit the HEI for seven years;
 - 58.2. to accredit the HEI for three years;
 - 58.3. not to accredit the HEI.
59. The proceedings described in this chapter and the final decision by the Council may be contested following the procedures provided in Chapter VIII.

XI. Implementation Provisions

60. The HEIs that have been granted accreditation for three years in the first round of institutional accreditation reviews shall undergo a reassessment process in accordance with the version of the document, 'Conditions and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation', which was in effect from 01.04.2011 to 02.02.2018.