

bologna process

NATIONAL REPORTS 2004 – 2005

Country:	Estonia
Date:	18 January 2005
Responsible member of the BFUG (one name only): Official position:	Heli Aru Adviser to the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, Estonian representative in the BFUG.
Email address:	Heli.Aru@hm.ee
Contributors to the report:	During the preparation period valuable comments were provided by Anu Johannes (Tallinn University of Technology), Anzori Barkalaja (Viljandi Culture Academy), Aret Vooremäe (Estonian Agricultural University), Gunnar Vaht (Estonian ENIC/ NARIC), Kairi Solman (Estonian Rectors' Conference), Katrin Kiisler (Socrates Estonia), Katrin Pink (Estonian IT College), Marjaliisa Alop (Federation of Estonian Student Unions), Prof. Volli Kalm (Estonian Higher Education Quality Assessment Council), Ülle Tensing (Tartu University).

1. Main achievements since Berlin

1.1. Give a brief description of important developments, including legislative reforms

The main legislative changes regarding the implementation of the Bologna process (transfer to the two-cycle system, issuing the Diploma Supplement, adopting the accreditation system, ratifying the Lisbon Convention, using a cumulative calculation of credit points) were already implemented in Estonia before the Berlin Ministerial conference. Activities after 2003 have mostly been directed towards strengthening the quality assurance system with the following results:

1.1. Adopting amendments to the **Private Education Institution Act** that establish stricter criteria for the general and financial management of private institutions, including setting the minimum capital requirements for private universities and professional higher education institutions, as of January 1, 2007.

1.2. **The study commissioned by the MoER to evaluate the current HE quality assurance system.** The Panel was led by the President of the Estonian Academy of Sciences and membership included experts from Sweden, Slovenia, Germany and Estonia. The main results of the Panel were presented to the Ministry in November 2004 and included proposals to move towards institutional accreditation, tightening up the licensing process

for opening new programs and institutions, introduction of evaluation and other “softer”, more quality improvement directed mechanisms for quality assurance, and providing better information to the public (students, employers, general public) about the quality of HEI.

- 1.3.The **Quality Assurance Agreement** adopted by all public universities in 2003, which establishes requirements for curricula, academic posts and academic degrees. Two private universities joined the agreement in 2004. In accordance with the agreement, the universities will harmonize quality requirements in the three indicated subsections and undertake to apply the requirements in line with the provisions of the agreement by the start of the academic year 2004/05. The agreement includes an obligation to assess every year the performance of the agreement in the previous academic year, it is done by the Estonian Rectors' Conference.
- 1.4.Estonian Rectors' Conference (for public universities) special initiative to develop a **handbook on the quality of university education**, supported by the MoER. The working group has identified 15 quality criteria that cover various aspects of an university management, e.g. using curricula based on learning outcomes, the number of graduates in PhD and Master Programmes, investment rate and the number of computers per student, collecting feedback from employers and alumni; mobility of students and teaching personnel, etc. Information regarding all this data will be published and distributed to the general public in Estonia and internationally. The Handbook introduces the basic principles of quality management for a university management, including practical suggestions and examples of regulating curricula, administrative processes, study environment and study processes, as well as specifying the role of the administrative and support structure. The Handbook will undergo a pilot phase, after which its content will be re-evaluated and modified.Launching the **governmental initiative called Kristjan Jaak to support the mobility of students and young academic personnel**. In 2004, state support for the mobility schemes amounted to almost 2.3 million euros.
- 1.6.Adopting **the list of the names of academic degrees awarded by educational institutions**, approved by the Government in 2004.

2. National organisation

**2.1. Give a short description of the structure of public authorities responsible for higher education, the main agencies/bodies in higher education and their competencies
(For example, do higher education institutions report to different ministries?)**

1. Responsibilities of the Ministry of Education and Research (MoER) regarding higher education policy include:
 - Regulating the establishment, merger, partition or closure of universities on the basis of decisions made by the Riigikogu (Parliament), and of professional higher education institutions on the basis of decisions made by the Government;
 - Keeping the registry of recognised final documents issued by universities, professional higher education institutions and vocational schools;
 - Approving, discussing, and forwarding the budgets of universities and distributing budgeted funds to the professional higher education institutions and vocational schools;
 - Adopting the procedures for the opening and closing of study fields and specialities;

- Carrying out the State supervisory activities in regards to the study processes. In the case of state professional higher education institutions and vocational schools control functions are broader, including also economic matters.

MoER exercises the listed rights regarding all the HEI-s, with the exception that budgetary matters for the Public Service Academy of Estonia and the Estonian National Defence College are run by other ministries (respectively, the Ministry of Interior Affairs and Ministry of Defence).

The economic control of activities of public universities rests with the State Audit Office. It is an external auditor for the Government with the aim to audit the use of funds in the public sector and its performance. The resulting recommendations and conclusions are reported to the Parliament and the Government.

2. The MoER is assisted in its role by a number of management and consultative bodies with an administrative function:

- Eesti Teadus- ja Arendusnõukogu (Estonian Research and Development Council), a consultative body in the Government chaired by the Prime Minister.
- Eesti Teadusfond (Estonian Science Foundation), a consultative body of experts, representatives of universities and of the MoER deciding on financing science projects for individuals.
- Teaduskompetentsinõukogu (Science Competence Council), a consultative body of experts, representatives of universities and research institutes deciding on financing research teams.
- Kõrgarhiduse Hindamise Nõukogu (Higher Education Quality Assessment Council), a body responsible for the accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes.

In addition, organizations such as Rectors' Conferences, Estonian Federation of Students Unions and employers' associations are consulted before adopting major decisions in higher education field.

3. The Archimedes Foundation is an independent unit under the MoER responsible for organising and managing the activities of different aid and co-operation programmes of the European Union and national mobility programs. In addition, Archimedes plays an important role as the organisation home of the Higher Education Quality Assessment Centre which is a operative unit for the Higher Education Quality Assessment Council. Units within Archimedes include:

- EU Co-operation Programmes, including Youth for Europe and Socrates (ERASMUS and COMENIUS).
- Higher Education Quality Assessment Centre;
- Centre for Academic Mobility;
- Academic Recognition Information Centre, which is also operating as the Estonian ENIC/NARIC;
- Innovation Centre, including the national contact point for the EU RTD Fifth Framework Programme;
- EU information projects.

2.2. Give a short description of the institutional structure

(For example, number of public/private universities/other HE institutions or numbers/percentage of students in public/private sector. To what extent are private and State higher education institutions covered by the same regulations?)

	No. of Institutions	No. of Students
Public universities	6	40 711
Private universities	6	6 409
State professional higher education institutions	7	4 648
Private professional higher education institutions	18	6 634
State vocational education schools	9	6 972
Private vocational education schools	1	285
Total	47	65 659

Source: Statistical Office of Estonia, "Higher Education 1993-2003", pp. 54-57.

The overall percentage of students for whom the state covers tuition fees is 47% in the current academic year 2004/05. The population with tertiary educational attainment among 25-64 years old is 30 % in Estonia.

2.3. Give a brief description of the structure which oversees the implementation of the Bologna Process in your country

(National Bologna group, thematic working groups, composition and activities, stakeholder involvement)

Matters related to the Bologna process are discussed by the Rectors' Conference, vice-rectors of universities for academic affairs, Federation of Estonian Student Unions, and representatives of ENIC/ NARIC, the Higher Education Accreditation Centre, and Centre for Academic Mobility. Structurally, these discussions have been taking place, since February 2004, under the Special Task Force for developing a new higher education strategy.

3. Quality assurance

The following questions have been included in the template at the request of the Working Group on Stocktaking.

3.1. National quality assurance systems should include a definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved.

Please specify the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved.

An institution of higher education and its curricula are accredited by the Higher Education Quality Assessment Council, which is appointed by the Government of the Republic and which operates under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Research.

The Higher Education Quality Assessment Council is comprised of twelve members and is formed, and its membership is approved for three years, by the Government of the Republic on the proposal of the Minister of Education and Research. Candidates for the post of member of the council are submitted to the Minister of Education and Research by universities, institutions of professional higher education, research and development institutions, registered professional associations, associations of employers and associations of Student Bodies. No more than two members from the same university, institution of professional higher education, research and development institution, registered professional association, association of employers or association of Student Bodies may belong to the Higher Education Quality Assessment Council.

The procedure for the formation of the Higher Education Quality Assessment Council and its rules of procedure are established by a regulation of the Government of the Republic.

Administrative procedures for the accreditation process are carried out by the Higher Education Accreditation Centre (HEAC). The HEAC forms evaluation committees on the recommendations of which the Council makes proposals to the Minister of Education and Research regarding universities or professional higher education institutions and their operation. These committees are made up of representatives of research and development institutions as well as of researchers from two foreign countries, and the local experts who participate in the evaluation visits are observers. The participation of foreign researchers is intended to guarantee the greater objectivity of the evaluation.

HEAC also agrees with higher education institutions and experts on time schedules for expert visits. Moreover, the HEAC keeps contact with other accreditation centres. In the assessment procedure the HEAC is responsible for the smooth functioning of the organising aspect.

Accreditation is approved by a directive of the Minister of Education and Research on the proposal of the Higher Education Quality Assessment Council. The Minister of Education and Research has the right to reject the proposal of the Higher Education Quality Assessment Council only based on a reasoned directive. Minister can submit the proposal to the Higher Education Quality Assessment Council the programme or institution to be reviewed for a second time. After the second review, the Minister of Education and Research approves the accreditation results on the proposal of the Higher Education Quality Assessment Council or may refuse to approve the accreditation results and initiate a new accreditation of the university or its curricula. When a new accreditation is conducted, the members of the evaluation committee which carried out the previous evaluation of the same HEI or curriculum cannot be members of the new temporary evaluation committee.

The HEAC makes public the accreditation decisions through the Internet. All accreditation decisions are also published in the *State Gazette*.

3.2. National quality assurance systems should include a system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures.

Describe the system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures, if any.

Accreditation is a process by which an institution, a study programme or a specialised unit of higher education periodically evaluates its educational activities. Through the accrediting process the institution seeks an independent judgement by experts that it achieves substantially its own educational objectives and meets the established standards of the body from which it is seeking accreditation.

The system of assessment of quality of Estonian higher education constitutes a continuous process consisting of four parts – self-analysis of the higher education institution (faculties or departments), a foreign expert appraisal, an autonomous body called the Higher Education Quality Assessment Council (HEQAC) that makes decisions regarding study programmes and the institutional accreditation of educational institutions, and self-improvement of higher education institutions.

Pursuant to the laws of Estonia accreditation is not compulsory; however, it is the only

possibility for an institution of higher education to acquire the right to issue officially recognised higher education credentials. Exceptions include only such diplomas of public universities and state professional higher education institutions that are issued for completion of study programmes registered before the beginning of the reform of study programmes (this date is officially regulated as 1.06.2002). As an exception, in case of substantial deficiencies or problems in an institution of higher education, the HEQAC or the Ministry of Education and Research may also initiate accreditation.

A critical self-analysis prepared by an educational institution forms a cornerstone of the system of quality assurance. The self-analysis, depending on its purpose, includes either an analysis of the functioning of the institution as a whole or only a concrete teaching and studying process (study programme, tuition, students, etc.). The experts evaluate both the correctness of the completed self-analysis and the object of the particular analysis. At the end of the assessment visit, they present their comments and recommendations, which along with the results of the self-analysis will form a basis for improving the educational institution as a whole (institutional assessment) or a concrete teaching process (assessment of study programmes). They also forward their recommendation to the HEQAC regarding either full or conditional accreditation of the study programme or for not granting the accreditation. The HEQAC makes the final decision, which determines whether on the basis of the study programme the higher education institution will or will not be entitled to issue officially recognised diplomas. A positive accreditation decision, full or conditional accreditation, is in force for 7 or 3 years, respectively.

In 1997, the administrative office of the Estonian Higher Education Accreditation Centre (Eesti Kõrghariduse Akrediteerimise Keskus) was established in the Archimedes Foundation. The centre prepares all relevant documentation for the Higher Education Quality Assessment Council, including self-analysis reports and reports by expert commissions, as well as the main documents for accreditation of study programmes.

Two types of accreditation are available:

- *Institutional accreditation.* Focused on a higher education institution as a whole or for its structural units, the purpose is to evaluate the institutional organisation and management, the effective use of resources, and the creation of a favourable environment of studies¹.
- *Programmatic accreditation.* Focused on individual study programmes, the purpose is to evaluate the conformity to the Standard of Higher Education (the Government Act that establishes requirements for studies on the higher education level, the objectives and total volume of studies and the requirements for educational institutions regarding the research, pedagogical and professional qualifications of the teaching staff). It also serves to evaluate the quality of education received by the students, especially by graduates.

There are three accreditation categories:

- Accredited: Indicates that the higher education institution or the study programme meets the set of requirements. The decision may also include recommendations for eliminating minor shortcomings. Accreditation is valid for seven years from the date of decision.

¹ So far, institutional accreditation has not been widely used. There are only four institutions that have gone through this exercise. In two cases, it has been a vocational school for whom the institutional accreditation is a precondition for upgrading itself into a professional higher education institution.

- Conditionally Accredited: Indicates that an institution or study programme under review has major shortcomings that need to be eliminated or addressed. In this case accreditation will be in force for three years from the date of the decision. At the end of this period the re-accreditation is relevant, but the “Conditionally Accredited” status cannot be renewed.
- Not Accredited: Indicates that the institution or study programme has serious shortcomings that jeopardise the quality of graduates’ knowledge and skills.

In the event of a negative accreditation decision concerning a curriculum, the university must terminate the admission of students and the provision of education pursuant to the curriculum and, in co-operation with the Ministry of Education and Research, must ensure that the students have the opportunity to continue their studies at the same or another HEI in the same or a similar field of study. In the event of a negative accreditation decision concerning a HEI, dissolution of the institution must be initiated and the HEI shall, in co-operation with the Ministry of Education and Research, ensure that the students have the opportunity to continue their studies at another institution of higher learning in the same or a similar field of study.

3.3. National quality assurance systems should include international participation, co-operation and networking.

Are international peers included in the governing board(s) of the quality assurance agency(ies)?

The HEAC is a member of the European Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE).

Inclusion of foreign peers in the accreditation process is described under p. 3.2.

There are no representatives of international organizations in the Higher Education Quality Assessment Council.

Please add any general comments, reflections and/or explanations to the material on quality assurance in the stocktaking report.

4. The two-cycle degree system

The two-cycle degree system is covered by the stocktaking exercise. Please add any comments, reflections and/or explanations to the stocktaking report.

Estonia adopted the *bachelor-master* degree system in 2002. Extensive explanations regarding the structural changes were presented in the national report for the Berlin ministerial conference. There are no further developments in this regard.

5. Recognition of degrees and periods of study

Recognition of degrees and periods of study is covered by the stocktaking exercise. Please add any comments, reflections and/or explanations to the stocktaking report.

Estonia has developed the principles of evaluation and recognition of foreign qualifications arising from the *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher*

Education in the European Region (the Lisbon convention), ratified by the Estonian parliament, the *Riigikogu*, on 1 April 1998, and is guided by the document of the ENIC and NARIC network, “*Recognition Issues in the Bologna Process*”. Detailed information is available in the report for the Berlin Conference.

6. Doctoral studies and research

6.1. Give a short description of the organisation of third cycle studies

(For example, direct access from the bachelor level, balance between organised courses, independent study and thesis)

Doctorate study is study at the highest level of higher education during which a student acquires the knowledge and skills necessary for independent research, development or professional creative activity. The standard period of Doctoral study is three to four years. The pre-condition for the commencement of Doctoral study is a Master's level degree or a qualification equal thereto. Doctoral study ends with the defence of a Doctoral thesis. A person who has completed Doctoral study is awarded a research degree – a Doctoral level degree.

Only universities have the right to award doctoral degrees. According to the Quality Assurance Agreement signed by the rectors of eight universities in 2003, the precondition of opening a PhD program is a positive evaluation of the research group corresponding to the profile of the program. The requirement is enforced as of the current academic year.

MoER is currently at the stage of preparing a new initiative – the launch of doctoral schools that function as a consortium to concentrate resources between different HE and research institutions within Estonia, linking foreign institutions and industry. The aim is to increase the efficiency of PhD training and lower the age of PhD graduates.

6.2. What are the links between HE and research in your country?

(For example, what percentage of publicly-funded research is conducted within HE institutions?)

A major restructuring of science in Estonia began in 1988 in connection with the aim to integrate all the intellectual resources of the country. The change was directed towards overruling the important feature of Soviet research policy – the establishment of research institutes outside universities. In 1997 a new law on the Organisation of Research and Development was adopted. The Estonian Academy of Sciences in its Soviet form ceased to exist and was reconstituted as an honorary society drawing together the most distinguished researchers from across Estonia. The Academy is no longer responsible for research institutes but plays an advisory role in advancing the general level of research and development in Estonia.

The most important change in science and research in Estonia has been the re-establishment of research and doctoral level education as a core university mission. While several research institutes remain independent entities, others have been integrated into the universities. The result has been a significant strengthening of the research capacity and intellectual resources of the universities. Currently, far majority of publicly funded research is done in HEI-s.

7. Mobility of students and staff

7.1. Describe the main factors influencing mobility of students from as well as to your country (For instance funds devoted to mobility schemes, portability of student loans and grants, visa problems)

The biggest factor influencing student mobility out of the country, especially in the first stage of studies, is socio-economic discrepancies. On the PhD level, mobility can be hindered by other factors such as work or family ties. Generally, the legislative framework supports mobility schemes – student loans are portable, there are very few signals regarding failure of academic recognition of studies abroad. Although study grants are directed via the Estonian HEI-s and may not be transferred to the other country, this obstacle is overcome by the additional support structure described below, p. 7.2.

As regards foreign students in Estonia, the overall number amounts to 2.4% of the overall student body. The number of exchange students connected with the Erasmus program is 440 in the 2004/05 academic year.

7.2. Describe any special measures taken in your country to improve mobility of students from as well as to your country

MoER has developed a special initiative called *Kristjan Jaak* for the financial assistance of students under the different scholarships categories. Scholarships are mostly for Master and PhD students and cover various periods, starting from a few days abroad up to several years. Students in Bachelor and Professional Higher Education programs are mostly supported either via the EU Erasmus program or by several private initiatives. Students moving out of Estonia under Erasmus are paid a supplementary state benefit in addition to the EU grant. Private scholarships are often awarded in cooperation with the HEI and donor. In 2004, state support for the mobility schemes amounted to nearly 2.3 million euros.

In accordance with the cooperation agreements between Estonia and Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, Israel, Latvia, Lithuania and Switzerland, the Estonian [Ministry of Education and Research](#) offers scholarships for students and lecturers from these countries for study visits, study tours and summer schools.

7.3. Describe the main factors influencing mobility of teachers and staff from as well as to your country (For instance tenure of appointment, grant schemes, social security, visa problems)

It is quite difficult to analyse objectively all the factors that have impact on mobility issues since several funding channels for supporting the mobility of academic personnel have been open only for a year or even less. Until quite recently, the biggest obstacle for mobility was a shortage of funds.

Most HEI-s in Estonia consider internationalisation a very important factor in their development. There are examples where universities have published internationally elections of professorships, opening the competitions to international peers. It is expected that for the coming years most of the universities and professional higher education institutions will have several long-term contracts with foreign teaching and research personnel. These steps are strongly supported by the Government, also financially.

EU citizens do not need a residence permit if the stay is shorter than 3 months, also if they are employed in Estonia. In the case where a citizen of the EU stays in Estonia longer than 3

months, a residence permit should be applied for. One can submit an application for a residence permit at a representation of the Republic of Estonia or at a service bureau of the Citizenship and Migration Board. The residence permit is valid up to 5 years. Family members of a citizen of the EU can apply for a residence permit for the same time as the citizen of the EU. Citizens of third countries may need a visa for a short-term stay in Estonia and they have to apply for a residence permit for employment to be able to work in Estonia for longer than 6 months.

Foreigners are insured through the Estonian Health Insurance Fund if they are permanent residents of the Republic of Estonia or a person living in Estonia with a temporary residence permit, who pays the social tax himself/herself or for whom the employer is required to pay social tax. Some people have the same rights as those who are insured by paying taxes, for example children. The European Health Insurance Card is also valid in Estonia as long as one is insured in another EU member country.

7.4. Describe any special measures taken in your country to improve mobility of academic teachers and staff from as well as to your country

Under the *Kristjan Jaak* initiative there is special scheme for young academic personnel to support their short trips to foreign universities, laboratories, participation in conferences or training programs. Tenured staff funds its international networking under the research grants channelled either via the Estonian Science Foundation (grants for individuals) or the Estonian Science Competence Council (grants for research teams). Additional funding for the mobility of academic personnel in both directions is available via the EU structural funds.

8. Higher education institutions and students

8.1. Describe aspects of autonomy of higher education institutions

Is autonomy determined/defined by law? To what extent can higher education institutions decide on internal organisation, staffing, new study programmes and financing?

University autonomy is granted in the Constitution of Estonia and includes the right to determine the admission requirements, curriculum design and content, teaching methods and administrative regulations concerning the study process. Institutions of professional higher education and vocational schools are more limited in their operations and need the approval of the Ministry of Education and Research for opening new curricula and approval of the entrance conditions. Unlike the universities with whom the state concludes a state commissioned education agreement, state funds are allocated to professional higher education and vocational education institutions on the basis of a decree of the Minister of Education and Research.

8.2. Describe actions taken to ensure active participation from all partners in the process

MoER has regular contacts with all different bodies, including the Rectors' Conference and the Federation of Estonian Student Unions. Representatives of different bodies are included in all major working groups that have the task to prepare major policy decisions.

8.3. How do students participate in and influence the organisation and content of education at universities and other higher education institutions and at the national level?

(For example, participation in University Governing Bodies, Academic Councils etc)

According to the University Act and the Professional Higher Education Act, students are granted the right to elect their representatives to and be represented in the collegial decision-

making bodies of the university and professional HEI (making up at least one-fifth of the membership of the council), submit a reasoned request to the Rector for the removal of a member of the teaching staff from teaching activities, and exercise student self-government – to decide on and manage independently issues of student life based on the interests, needs, rights and obligations of students. The fact that students are part of the HEI's council makes them part of all the major decisions affecting the organisation (adopting development plans for the HEI, approving the budget and the annual report of the HEI, decisions regarding the structure, administrative regulations for education and research, etc.).

On the national level, students' representatives (appointed by the Federation of Estonian Student Unions) usually take part in policy making decisions, participate in the Higher Education Assessment Council, including in evaluation visits under the accreditation system.

9. The social dimension of the Bologna Process

9.1. Describe measures which promote equality of access to higher education

Estonia has established a system of study allowances and created the possibilities to get study loans. The main objective of the system of study allowances is to motivate students to study full time and successfully and to complete the study programme within the nominal period. Study loans secured by the state are intended to give students who study full-time but who are not entitled to get study allowances the possibility to finance their studies.

According to the Study Allowances and Study Loans Act (2003) a student who is an Estonian citizen or is staying in Estonia on the basis of a permanent or temporary residence permit and acquires secondary vocational education on the basis of secondary education according to a study programme, which foresees student training places financed by state, or acquires higher education according to a study programme which foresees student places formed on the basis of state commissioned education in full-time study and has not exceeded the nominal period of studies according to the study programme has the right to apply for a basic study allowance. Students whose residence is located outside the local government in which the educational institution at which they study is located or outside the bordering local government are granted a supplementary monetary allowance in order to cover expenses related to housing and transport.

Students have the right to apply for a study allowance (basic allowance and supplementary allowance) for a number of years, which corresponds to the academic years foreseen for the nominal period of studies according to the study programme. Study allowances are granted according to the order of merit lists within the limits of the funds prescribed therefore in the state budget and allocated to educational institutions. The total number of students receiving state grants in the 2003/04 academic year was 17 300, approx. 26% of all students.

Although, Estonia maintains a large proportion of fee paying students, the MoER has covered tuition fees (in the form of state commissioned study places) for approximately 50% of graduates of secondary education during last years.

10. Developments in lifelong learning

10.1. What measures have been taken by your country to encourage higher education institutions in developing lifelong learning paths?

In order to implement the principle of lifelong learning a number of institutions of higher education have formed structures of “open universities” in which the persons not having studies as their main activities can pass both formal education and in-service training programs. The organisation of studies in the open structures is flexible, the speed of study is not limited and this makes studies possible along with family life and work duties. Quite a substantial number of Estonian students are actually implementing the LLL paths – in the 2003/04 academic year nearly 20% of students were of the age of 30 or over. These people generally took advantage of HE via the open university structures.

It has to be acknowledged that governmental support favours students in the age group who continue studying immediately after obtaining the secondary education diploma. Estonia does not have special support schemes for training people in the labour force (with the exception of public servants and teachers), and this drawback must be addressed in order to keep up with the technological developments in the labour market.

10.2. Describe any procedures at the national level for recognition of prior learning/flexible learning paths

Estonia lacks a uniform system of registering previous studies and work experience but the matter has become topical and essential on both the level of legislation and the activities of institutions of higher education. The amendments made to the Universities Act and the Professional Higher Education Act in 2003 bound HEI-s to develop rules and procedures for registering previous studies and work experience by 1 September 2004. In the case of representatives of some selected specialties, such as teachers, universities already had this obligation for the academic year 2003/04. According to the law HEI may take account of the previous study results and professional experience to the extent of up to 50 per cent of the overall curricula.

11. Contribution to the European dimension in higher education

11.1 Describe any legal obstacles identified by your country and any progress made in removing legal obstacles to the establishment and recognition of joint degrees and/or joint study programmes

Currently, the Governmental Act regulating the issuing of diplomas and diploma supplements excludes the possibility of awarding degrees jointly between different institutions since it prescribes in detail the language and format of diplomas (assigning special imprints for each university or other HEI type, requiring presentation of national symbols on regulated occasions, etc). In addition, based on the legislation effective currently, state recognition is only guaranteed to the diplomas obtained following accredited curricula, etc. It has to be said that although there are many technical difficulties to be worked out in regards to the joint programs and degrees, the MoER sees developments in this direction as a clear necessity in order to broaden the study opportunities for students.

11.1.1. Describe the extent of integrated study programmes leading to joint degrees or double degrees

Difficulties in issuing state recognized diplomas for joint programs do not mean that there are no examples of inter-university cooperation in this area. On several occasions Estonian HEI-s have started the provision of programs provided in cooperation with institutions of other countries. The University of Tartu has a master's level interdisciplinary program, Baltic Studies Program, designed for international students that during the first year (2005/2006) will be launched as an

English taught program but from the year 2006/2007 the students will be admitted to an integrated study program designed as a joint degree program with the following universities: University of Humboldt, University of Copenhagen, University of Turku, University of Latvia, Vitautas Magnus University from Lithuania and University of Tartu. The program will also be opened to students from third countries.

In the spring of 2004 the Estonian Agricultural University submitted a EU Socrates/Erasmus CD project BIOLANDMAN - Master Program "Management of Biodiversity and Multifunctional Landscapes", which aims at the introduction of a joint Master program together with the Latvian University of Agriculture and the Lithuanian University of Agriculture. The project is based on a long-term cooperation experience in the Baltic-Nordic cooperation network Nova-Bova and forms a logical continuation to the arrangement of short-term international Master courses. As the project is just beginning and the joint curriculum is still to be developed, the share of different universities in the program and the admission requirements will become clear in the course of the analyses performed during the project. The graduates are to be awarded a joint-degree diploma.

The Estonian Business School is the only institution of higher education that has participated since 1998 in the International Consortium of Double Degrees (CIDD) that is oriented towards international business administration.

11.1.2. How have these programmes been organised? (joint admissions, mobility of students, joint exams, etc.)

In most of the cases these programs operate based on the cooperation agreement. For example, the Tallinn University of Technology has signed an agreement with Helsinki University of Technology (HUT) according to which HUT accepts TUT students for studies at HUT in the naval architecture programme for the period of 3 semesters starting from the academic year 2005/2006 (autumn). According to the agreement the student will matriculate both at TUT and HUT. Selection will be made among the TUT students who have acquired the bachelor degree either in the field of product development and production engineering (Faculty of Mechanical Engineering) or in technical physics (Faculty of Science). The students shall study at HUT for 3 semesters. After the defence of the graduation thesis both TUT and HUT will issue for each student a double diploma. There is also an initiative called Joint Curriculum development in the Framework of Baltic technical universities (BALTECH consortium). Each participating university issues its own national diploma.

11.2. Describe any transnational co-operation that contributes to the European dimension in higher education

Participation in numerous international professional networks in the framework of which conferences, development projects (development of study programmes, application of principles of quality management, application of information and communication technology in studies, training courses in marketing and fund-raising), exchange of students, members of the academic staff and trainees, is organised, has been a significant development and stimulating power for the academic community over the last ten years. Foreign contacts are fostered both in universities and in institutions of professional higher education and vocational schools that have been founded later.

Most of the HEI-s have signed several cooperation agreements with foreign counterparts. Due to historical reasons, cooperation programs are most active with Finnish, German and Swedish partners. Several institutions participate in thematic networks in fields like agricultural sciences, engineering, nursing, etc. The University of Tartu is the only institution of higher education in the Baltics that belongs to the Coimbra group.

Estonian institutions of higher education participate in the work of EUA, the Institutional Network of the Universities from the Capitals of Europe - UNICA, the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education - EURASHE, regional networks of conferences of rectors, thematic networks supported by the European Commission and other field specific associations or networks.

11.3. Describe how curriculum development reflects the European dimension

(For instance foreign language courses, European themes, orientation towards the European labour market)

There are a number of activities taking place – increase in the number of Erasmus students (both ways), visiting scholars of the European HEI-s giving lectures on various topics, cooperation programmes under the EU Socrates and Leonardo programmes. Competence-based learning and the Tuning project has been getting increasing attention from the Estonian academic community. The MoER has supported financially the exchange of experience in this area under projects aimed at learning from Finnish colleagues. All universities and several other HEI-s see it as a valuable opportunity to improve the quality of study processes.

There are also a number of projects where Estonian HEI-s have participated in the EU education programs. For example, the Estonian Information Technology College is a partner in a Leonardo da Vinci project EuroMediaStandards with the aim to develop standards for the concept, planning and realisation of further education and training in the multi media sector. The Estonian IT Foundation coordinates, under the Minerva program, a project called "Creating network-based e-university model for small countries in the context of e-learning in Europe".

Viljandi Culture Academy, on the other hand, is a very good example of preserving the ancient Estonian folk traditions and combining it's provision with the modern technologies. The Academy several runs cooperation programs with the Finnish and Dutch HEI-s.

12. Promoting the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area

12.1. Describe actions taken by your country to promote the attractiveness of the EHEA

Estonia is in a phase of working out the internationalisation strategy for higher education, among other aspects it will pose proposals for scholarship schemes for foreign students, preferably on master and PhD level. So far, activities in this area have been initiated mainly on the institutional level and with quite good results – the number of foreign students from outside the EU is increasing. It is widely acknowledged that the key to internationalisation processes is quality in all its different aspects.

13. Concluding comments

13.1. Give a description of your national Bologna strategies

For the coming years, the action plan connected with the Bologna Process includes:

- Enforcing quality management principles on an institutional level along with further work on the better comparability of standards, criteria and procedures for quality assurance;
- Supporting the internationalisation of higher education – increasing the number of foreign born teaching and research staff, creating programs and modules in internationally spoken languages, adoption of legislation enabling the provision of joint programs and awarding of joint degrees;
- Intensifying efforts for increasing academic exchange among students and academic staff, keeping the balance between incoming and outgoing mobility;
- Intensifying studies on PhD level;
- Improving the accreditation of prior learning and work experiences in all institutions of higher learning;
- Transferring to full ECTS principles as of September 1, 2006;
- Spreading information regarding the Bologna process to the wider public.

13.2. Give an indication of the main challenges ahead for your country

There are two key factors Estonia ultimately needs to face in the very near future – the downward demographic trend (during 2003-2016 the number of potential students in Estonia will be reduced by almost 60%) and the necessity to actively take part in the processes of designing the European Research Area and European Higher Education Area. Ultimately, the processes for the common European areas require an increase in the funding level for R&D as well as for higher education. These targets will not be easy to meet as the current rate of investment into the higher education sector in Estonia is already relatively high (3% out of the public sector budget was devoted to HE expenses in 2004). At the same time it has to be considered that the funding level in PPP per student is not competitive internationally and seriously hinders further developments. The government strategy for R&D development aims to increase the costs from GDP from 0.83% (data from 2004) to 1.5% by 2006. The challenging issue under these processes is to increase the funding role of the private sector, making it financially responsible on equal grounds with the public sector. The key area in both HE and R&D funding is the improvement of infrastructure for making it attractive for high level foreign specialists, and participating on equal grounds in international mobility schemes.

Among the other processes, which will dominate the higher education agenda for the coming years, is the enforcement of stricter rules and criteria for private institutions. It is predictable that many of the current HEI-s will cease their activities, and it will be highly important to manage these inevitable processes favourably for students. For MoER it means, most of all, intensifying efforts to make the general public aware of the students' rights and risks. On a more positive side, transfer to the 3-year contracts with universities and professional higher education institutions in regards to the state funding will bring more stability to the HE system. The idea has been discussed in the Governmental Special Task Force and has been widely supported. More specific guidelines will be due by the beginning of February 2005.

Estonia maintains its ambition to act proactively regarding the variety of challenges posed by global processes. Although accustomed to the rapid developments that took place after regaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the biggest challenge for Estonia is to maintain the speed of advancement and to complement it with attention to the aspects of social cohesion.