

## **BOLOGNA PROCESS TEMPLATE FOR NATIONAL REPORTS: 2005-2007**

**Final:** 9 May 2006

### **Notes:**

The deadline for submitting National Reports is **Friday 15 December 2006**.

BFUG members are encouraged to consult other stakeholders about the contents of their National Report.

Please complete your National Report in English using this template and return it to the Secretariat by email. Your report should not exceed **20 pages in length**, using Times New Roman font size 12. Where appropriate, please include precise web references to legislation or other documentation. For any topic where there has been no change since 2005, please refer to your National Report for the Bergen conference.

Please attach your country's action plan to improve the quality of the process associated with the recognition of foreign qualifications.

National Reports will be posted on the Bologna website in their original form.

Information from National Reports will form the basis of the Stocktaking Report to be presented to Ministers when they meet in London in May 2007.

This template has three sections:

- A. Background information on your Higher Education system
- B. Main stocktaking questions, including scorecard elements
- C. Current issues in Higher Education.

Elements that will inform the scorecard element of stocktaking are clearly indicated in the template.

Information for the stocktaking, including the scorecard element, will also be drawn from the Eurydice survey "Focus on the Structure of Higher Education in Europe". These elements are also indicated in the template. Please use your National Report to supplement, but not repeat, your country's input to the Eurydice survey.

### **A. Background information on your Higher Education system**

#### **Details**

Country	Estonia
Date	
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#### **Main achievements since Bergen**

1. Describe the important developments relating to the Bologna Process, including legislative reforms, since Bergen.

On the national level the most important developments have been:

- Adopting the new higher education strategy paper for 2006-2016 by the Parliament,
- Preparation of the internationalization strategy document for higher education 2006-2015;
- The Government Regulation “The assessment and academic recognition of foreign qualifications” (2006) - as the main instrument in the regulation of recognition criteria and procedures.
- The complex survey on students’ socio-economic conditions and attitudes towards study organisation. The study was carried out first time in Estonia with such a representative scale;
- Preparation of legislation for joint degrees and program development (adopting learning outcomes approach). This work is ongoing.

A very crucial process has been started by 15 partner-organisations with the support of EU structural funds for the

- development of study programmes and training methods,
- general improvement of the quality of studies,
- development of a support system for students and study support counselling,
- development of support systems for internship and the taking into account of previous study and work experience.

The development of study activities also includes assistance to improve the social and economic situation of the students.

## National organisation

2. Describe any changes since Bergen in the structure of public authorities responsible for higher education, the main agencies/bodies in higher education and their roles.

Please include:

- whether higher education institutions (HEIs) report to /are overseen by different ministries
- how funds are allocated to HEIs
- areas for which HEIs are autonomous and self governing.

There are no changes in regards to the management of the higher education sector since Bergen. All higher education provision is integrated at the national level, led by the Ministry of Education and Research. Although the governance of two HEIs is incorporated under the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of the Interior, the main legislation governing the activities of these institutions is the same as for the rest of the sector. These HEI-s are respectively the Estonian

National Defence College (Ministry of Defence) and the Public Service Academy<sup>1</sup> (Ministry of Interior Affairs).

From 1999 the state finances HEI-s through a system called state-commissioned education. The planning for the state commissioning is done in cooperation with partners such as the line ministries, Estonian Employers' Confederation, Statistical Office, Qualification Authority, Rectors' Council, Rectors' Council of Institutions of Professional Higher Education, Rectors' Council of Private Universities, and the Federation of Estonian Student Unions. Funding is allocated to HEI-s as a lump sum. The final amount of funding is calculated based on a number of graduates in the broader study field, the cost for the program type (BA; MA; PhD, PHEI) and various factors of a certain field. Both the costs for the program types as well as the factors are regulated on the level of the Cabinet. Funding is allocated for universities after the Minister and Rector have signed the contract for the state commission. Funding for PHEI-s is allocated based on a Ministerial decree. For both, universities as well as PHEI-s, there are separate contracts signed for special projects (i.e. extra funding for students with special needs).

Public universities have broad autonomy, which is expressed in their right to possess assets and buildings, to contract a loan, to freely use their budgets with a view to fulfilling their statutory objectives, to develop an appropriate organisational structure and a content of instruction, to employ and terminate staff, to determine the wage level of employees, to decide upon the total number of students admitted and to specify the rate of tuition fees for fee-based study places. A university has the right to establish legal persons in private law. This possibility is used for services supporting the university's statutory activities (publishing, bookshops, rental of premises, etc.), as well as for businesses (e.g. pharmacies). In addition, a university may provide services related to the main activities of the university for a charge (continuing education for a charge, in-service training for a charge, contractual research, professional consultations, etc.) and any revenue received thereby accrues to the budget of the university. Pursuant to law, a university does not have the right to sponsor support, grant loans or credit or make donations to foundations or to secure the obligations of other persons with its assets. Founding private schools and research and development institutions in private law through legal persons in private law founded by the university is also prohibited. Although universities have extensive rights in using their property and in entrepreneurship, such activities must be related to the main activities of the university and be necessary for achieving its teaching and research goals.

The powers of the state institutions of professional higher education and the vocational educational institutions providing higher educational curricula are more limited. Unlike public universities they are state authorities, which are subordinated to the Minister using public service procedure. For example, their statutes are established by the Government or the Minister, their development plans are approved by the Minister; unlike public universities, the minimum

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<sup>1</sup> The name in English is somewhat misleading - this institution offers mostly professional higher education programs for specialities in the area of state internal security (police, prisons, border guard, rescue, etc).

tuition fee for a non-state commissioned student place is regulated by the requirement to keep it at least at the level of the price payable for a student place by MoER (in contrast to public universities, some of whom charge fees that are lower than the commission paid by the state for a study place); in opening curricula, a relevant decision by the Minister is needed; the Minister also establishes the procedure for the admission and the expulsion of students. Nevertheless, they are free to decide upon their structure, content of studies, employees to be employed and their wage levels. They have the right to provide services related to their main activities for a charge (continuing education for a charge, in-service training for a charge, contractual research, professional consultations, etc.). The autonomy of the institutions of professional higher education has been increased in the field of teaching activities – e.g. the Minister no longer decides upon the broad fields and forms of in-service training organised by institutions of professional higher education and this freedom is planned to be increased, e.g. they are planned to be granted broader freedom in organising the election of teachers, which is strictly regulated by the Minister at the moment. In the conduct of professional higher educational studies and in the organisation of its activities, the situation of a vocational educational institution is similar to that of an institution of professional higher education as there are no differences on regulation on study process. As regards the use of assets, institutions of professional higher education and vocational educational institutions are the users of state assets, which they use and govern with the Minister's authorisation and under his or her supervision.

Although institutions have an extensive autonomy in recent years there are few changes introduced that may limit institutional autonomy – i.e. with the purpose of defending students' rights HEI-s are limited to increase the tuition level more than 10% per year.

### 3. Describe any changes since Bergen to the institutional structure.

Please include:

- the number of public/private HEIs
- are there different types of institutions delivering higher education (i.e. academic/professional, university/non-university etc.)
- the number/percentage of students admitted in academic session 2006-2007 to each type of institution
- the extent to which different types institutions are covered by the same regulations.

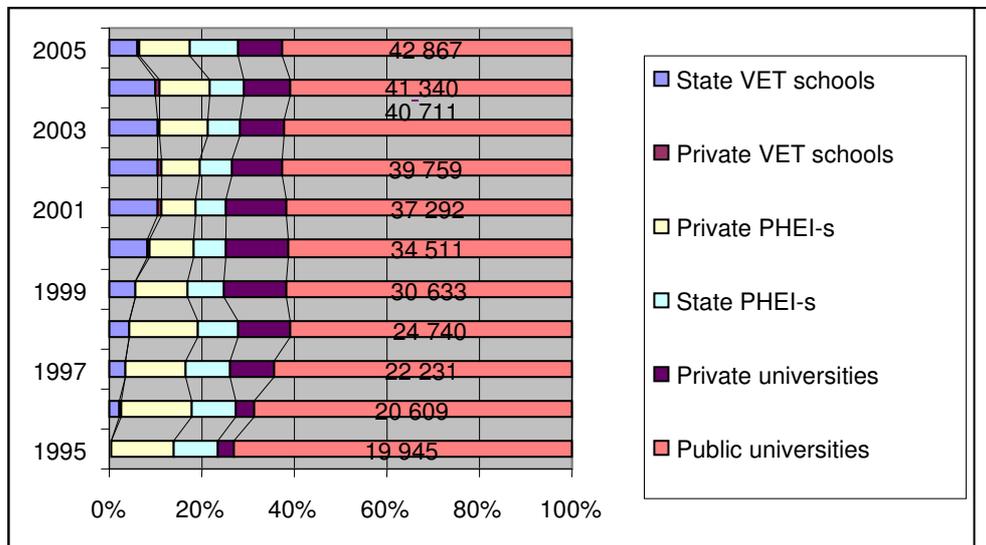
HEI-s are covered by the same legislation – there are no differences for study organisation dependent on legal status of HEI. Some differences are applied regarding the management and registration of programs with Ministry of Education and Research.

2006/07 the total number of institutions is 35, division by legal status is following:

- public universities – 6
- private universities – 5
- state professional higher education institutions – 9
- private professional higher education institutions – 11
- state vocation education institutions with the authority to provide HE

- programs – 3,
- private vocation education institutions with the authority to provide HE programs – 1.

### Students on the higher educational level during the academic year of 1995-2005, by type of institution



Source: Statistical Office, 2006.

Due to several reasons the number of HEI-s has started to decrease considerably. By 2006/07 the number is down to 35 institutions (the highest number of institutions the country has had was in 2001/02 and 2002/03 when the respective figure was 49). The reasons for downsizing have been: amendments to the Private Schools Act in 2004 establishing more transparent requirements for running private institutions, including establishing the minimum amount of the share capital for the owner of a private institution. In addition there have been negative accreditation results of programs in small private education institutions that have caused the closing of HEI-s.

A major change was approved by the Parliament in 2006 when the new higher education strategy was adopted with the new policy direction to upgrade state VET institutions providing HE programs on HE level (based on the results of institutional accreditation).

## Partnership

4. Describe the structure which oversees the implementation of the Bologna Process in your country.

Please include:

- the membership and role of any national Bologna group (for example policy committee, promoters' group)
- the membership and role of students, staff trade unions, business and

social partners in any national Bologna Group.
In 2005 Estonia officially established (by Ministerial decree) a national follow-up group. The mandate of the WG is to coordinate information and activities regarding the Bologna process in Estonia, approval of the country's position for BFUG on a European level and the preparation of national reports for EHEA. The membership includes representatives of Rectors' Conferences, students, ENIC/ NARIC centre, national Quality Assessment Council, relevant staff members from MoER. Three current BFUG members on the national level are also Bologna promoters.
<p>5. Describe the arrangements for involving students and staff trade union/representative bodies in the governance of HEIs.</p> <p>Please include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• precise references (preferably with web links) to any legislation (or equivalent) in place to ensure students and staff are represented on HEI governing bodies</li> <li>• the role of students in the governance of HEIs</li> <li>• the role of staff trade union/representative bodies in the governance of HEIs.</li> </ul>
<p>According to legislation students have to make up at least one-fifth of the membership of the highest decision making body of a HEI – either a council of a university or a PHEI. The relevant legislation is available - <a href="http://www.legaltext.ee/">http://www.legaltext.ee/</a> after typing the name of the relevant act – either University Act or Professional Higher Education Institution Act.</p> <p>The actual impact of students on the decision-making process on an institutional level varies across institutions. Several activists from the national level student federation have admitted that the student impact is of less importance on the subunit level of HEI where the most practical decisions affecting student academic life are made. At the same time, students may have very influential or even a decisive voice on an institution's highest ranking body – the council – regarding the approval of institutional developmental plans or the election of the rector.</p> <p>Councils of institutions usually have a member that at the same time also has trade union affiliation but there are no national level regulations for this. Council membership consists of representatives of the teaching staff and the research staff, students, rector and vice-rectors, which means that staff opinions are always considered. The voice of society at large is represented in the <i>kuratoorium (Board)</i>, but these bodies do not have a clear mandate for decision-making since they are of a consultative nature.</p>
6. Describe the measures in place to ensure the co-operation of business and social partners within the Bologna Process.
The cooperation and coordination mechanisms are in place as part of the consultative nature of the policy-making, and not specifically related to the Bologna agenda. As a rule, partners and stakeholders are involved in all working groups that focus on the broader development issues (such as working on a new strategy document, etc.). Since 2003 there is a requirement that all HEI-s need to have curricula councils where relevant employer's or professional associations are represented. In recent years business community has shown

increased interest towards higher education by creating scholarships for students or establishing professorships.

In 2005 when doctoral schools were created by the financial support of MoER one important criteria for applicants included cooperation with business.

## B. Main stocktaking questions, including scorecard elements

### Degree system

(Scorecard and Eurydice)

Stage of implementation of the first and second cycle

7. Describe the progress made towards introducing the first and second cycle.

Please include:

- the percentage of the total number of students below doctoral level enrolled in the two cycle degree system in 2006/07.

The share of students on a university track in two-stage programs below doctoral level is 79%. 9% of students on a university track study in integrated programs (mostly regulated professions) that have been reformed under the Bologna structural changes carried out during 2002-2003. Only 12% of all university students (below PhD studies) are subscribed with "old programs".

( Eurydice )

Stage of implementation of the third cycle

8. Describe the progress made towards implementing doctoral studies as the third Bologna cycle.

Please include:

- the percentage of 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle students following structured doctoral programmes
- the normal length of full-time doctoral studies
- the elements that are included in doctoral study programmes, e.g. do they include taught courses or independent research only
- the supervisory and assessment procedures for doctoral studies
- are doctoral studies included in your country's qualifications framework and are they linked to learning outcomes
- are interdisciplinary training and the development of transferable skills integrated in doctoral studies

are credit points used in measuring workload in doctoral studies?

According to the national legislation the duration of PhD programs varies between 3-4 years, and the length for each program is decided on a university level. However, the vast majority of programs registered with MoER are with the length of 4 years. Usually, these programs include both independent research as well taught courses but the volume of each component is decided on an institutional level due to the high institutional autonomy (i.e. at University of Tartu the volume of taught courses in PhD is 60 ECTS). Due to the structural

changes in first and second cycle there is a clear trend towards more taught courses to be included in PhD programs. According to the Higher Education Standard minimum volume for an independent research is fixed – it has to be 70% of all PhD program, i.e. between 126-168 ECTS.

Since institutions have such a large autonomy regarding the programs' structure we cannot report you the data on percentage of 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle students following structured PhD programs.

Very often doctoral studies take longer time than four years. The study made in 2005 show that only about 13% of students defended their degree during nominal period between 1991-1999. Only one third of PhD students did defend their PhD during 7 years.

Credit points have been used for measuring the workload in programs for a number of years since the mid 90-s. Some universities require at the beginning of a first semester that each full-time doctoral student submits an Individual Study Plan, which includes a plan of research, studies, use of infrastructure and is approved by the supervisor. Each doctoral student may also be asked to sign a study agreement which outlines the topic and period of study and research, competences and expected results, responsibilities of student and supervisor, etc. In addition to the latter, all study programs are registered with the Ministry and need to meet certain quality requirements. There is no explicit requirement in the legislation at the moment concerning the learning outcomes on the doctoral level. However, there a special working group dealing with this matter and its report is due spring 2007. Learning outcome based PhD studies will be part of the national qualification structure in the future.

Attestation or progress review is carried out for all PhD students according to inner regulations. The aspects assessed include subjects and credit points taken as part of the course work, (also, separate subjects taken at other universities), research (incl. research work, conference papers presented, work published, etc; volume and results of the work done in credit points) and other tasks related to PhD study (incl. information concerning the carrying out of grants and research themes and any joint study projects).

(Scorecard and Eurydice )

Access<sup>2</sup> to the next cycle

9. Describe the arrangements for access between the first and second cycles and second and third cycles.

Please include:

- the percentage of first cycle qualifications that give access to the second cycle
- if appropriate, the percentage of first cycle qualifications that give access to the third cycle
- the percentage of first cycle qualifications that give access to both the

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<sup>2</sup> Access as defined in the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Access: the right of qualified candidates to apply and be considered for admission to higher education.

second and third cycles

- the percentage of second cycle qualifications that give access to the third cycle
- specify any first cycle qualifications that do not give access to the second cycle
- specify any second cycle qualifications that do not give access to the third cycle.
- specify any examples where bridging courses are necessary to transfer between cycles in the same subject area
- any measures planned to remove obstacles between cycles.

According to Estonian law all graduates of first cycle programs are eligible to continue their studies in the second cycle, and the same principle continues further – all graduates with master level qualification can be considered for admission to the PhD level. Thus, all first cycle qualifications give access to several second cycle programs and all second cycle qualifications give access to at least one third cycle programme without major transitional problems.

Statistics shows that graduates from professional higher education in state institutions are readily accepted for further studies on the Master's level in public universities. In 2005/06, 7% of the total intake to the second cycle in public universities were graduates with professional higher education backgrounds.

Considering that, there are no special measures planned on the national level on this specific topic in Estonia.

(Scorecard and Eurydice )

#### Implementation of national qualifications framework

10. Describe the stage of implementation of the national qualifications framework to align with the overarching Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA<sup>3</sup>.

Please include:

- the stage of development of your national qualifications framework (for example: has your national QF been included in legislation or agreed between all relevant stakeholders; has a working group been established; have national outcomes-based descriptors of the main types of qualifications been prepared; has a timetable for implementation been agreed?)
- the extent to which your national qualifications framework is in line with the Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA
- the role of stakeholders in the development of your national qualifications framework.

There is a special working group with the mandate to design national qualification framework (in line with QF for EHEA) since 2006 - established by Ministerial decree. Membership of WG extends to all major stakeholders in the

<sup>3</sup> A Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA: <http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/>

field: representatives of employers' associations, trade unions, qualification and recognition agencies, relevant ministries, students, rectors' conferences.

The WG is expected to complete it's work by autumn 2007.

11. What measures are being taken to increase the employability of graduates with bachelor qualifications?

Please include where possible:

- the percentage of first cycle graduates who found employment after graduating in 2005/06
- the percentage of first cycle graduates who continued into the second or third cycles in 2005/06
- the extent to which this is expected to change in 2006/2007.

Due to the booming economy (economic growth rate for the third quarter of 2006 was 11.6%) and job opportunities in Estonia as well as other EU member countries, there is no perceived problem with the employability of graduates with bachelor qualifications. The feedback from HEI-s suggests quite a different problem – institutions face problems in filling Master level study groups due to the attractive offers in the labour market. The registered unemployment level for people with tertiary level qualifications is very low - less than 4%. Since the official unemployment data does not reflect the qualification level within tertiary education, we do not know whether the “new bachelors” face any bigger problems in the transfer to the labour market than people with “old qualifications”.

47% of all first cycle graduates on 2005/06 did continue their studies immediately in the second cycle next academic year (2006/07).

## Quality assurance

(Scorecard and Eurydice)

National implementation of the Standards and Guidelines for QA in the EHEA<sup>4</sup>

12. To what extent is your national system of QA already in line with the Standards and Guidelines for QA in the EHEA?

Please include:

- the stage of implementation of the national quality assurance system in line with the Standards and Guidelines for QA in the EHEA
- any action that has been taken to ensure that the national quality assurance system is in line with the Standards and Guidelines for QA in the EHEA
- any deadlines set for taking action to ensure that the national quality assurance system is in line with the Standards and Guidelines for QA in the EHEA
- any action planned to ensure that the national quality assurance system

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.enqa.net/files/BergenReport210205.pdf>

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resources.

- Although the Estonian Accreditation Centre has the right for follow-up procedures after accreditation decisions have been taken, these rights have never been executed.
- Most institutions publish up to date, impartial and objective qualitative and quantitative information about the programmes they are offering;

The listed requirements are under public discussion in the context of the new higher education strategy paper, which foresees the reform of the HE accreditation system. According to the new HE strategy document (adopted in November 2006), in the future, external QA procedures should be more quality improvement oriented and less focused on the control of standards. The respective amendments to the law have been prepared and are expected to be adopted after the national elections in spring next year. Along with the changes in the external QA system, the founding principles of the Accreditation Agency are under review.

(Scorecard and Eurydice)

Stage of development of external quality assurance system

13. Describe the quality assurance system operating in your country.

Please include:

- the stage of implementation of your external quality assurance system
- the scope of your external quality assurance system: does it operate at a national level; does it cover all higher education<sup>5</sup>
- which of the following elements are included in your external quality assurance system:
  - internal assessment
  - external review
  - publication of results
- whether procedures have been established for the peer review of the national agency(ies) according to the Standards and Guidelines for QA in the EHEA.

The system of assessment of quality of Estonian higher education

<sup>5</sup> higher education: all types of courses of study or sets of courses of study, training or training for research at the post secondary level which are recognised by the relevant authorities as belonging to a country's higher education system.

constitutes a continuous process consisting of four parts:

1. self-analysis of HEI-s (faculties or departments),
2. a foreign experts' appraisal,
3. a decision regarding study programmes and the institutional accreditation of educational institutions by an autonomous body called the Higher Education Quality Assessment Council (HEQAC);
4. a publication of results on the Internet.

Program accreditation as a main tool for QA and a requirement for diploma recognition has been in place since 1996. There is also a possibility for institutional accreditation, the logic of which follows the same principles.

There are no procedures in place for a peer review of the national QA agency yet. However, in the strategy paper for HE development it is clearly said that the national QA needs to pass an external peer review.

(Scorecard and Eurydice)

Level of student participation

14. Describe the level of student participation in your national quality assurance system.

Please include:

- whether students are included in the following aspects of quality assurance:
  - the governance of national agencies for QA
  - as full members or observers in external review teams
  - as part of the decision making process for external reviews
  - in the consultation process during external reviews (eg arrangements for external reviewers to consult with students)
  - in internal evaluations.

Student representatives are officially part of the Higher Education Quality Assessment Council, the decision-making body for accreditations. They also take part in external reviews (both for decision-making regarding external reviews as well as during external reviews). One of the requirements in the accreditation rules is to meet with students. Usually students' work also gets assessed during the peer review visits. Most HEI-s collect feedback from students at the end of each semester (in written form) as well as from graduates.

(Scorecard and Eurydice)

Level of international participation

15. Describe the level of international participation in your national quality assurance system.

Please include:

- whether there is international participation in the following aspects of quality assurance

- the governance of national agencies for quality assurance
- the external evaluation of national quality assurance agencies
- teams for external review, either as members or observers
- membership of ENQA
- membership of any other international network.

International participation is a very important instrument in peer reviews for programme and institutional accreditation. The review teams are usually made up solely of foreign experts, for information purposes there is also a representative of the Higher Education Quality Assessment Council but she/he has observer status. There is no international involvement in the governance of the Higher Education Quality Assessment Council. Estonian Accreditation Centre has not been assessed officially by any foreign accreditation agency, although, feedback has been asked from individual QA specialists for the improvement of the agency's work.

The Estonian Accreditation Agency is a full member of ENQA and INQA.

## Recognition of degrees and study periods

(Scorecard and Eurydice )

Stage of implementation of Diploma Supplement

16. Describe the stage of implementation of the Diploma Supplement in your country.

Please include:

- the percentage of students graduating in 2007 who will receive a Diploma Supplement
- which of the following apply to Diploma Supplements issued in your country:
  - issued in a widely spoken European language
  - free of charge
  - automatically
  - correspond to the EU/CoE/UNESCO Diploma Supplement format.

According to the regulation of the Government of the Republic of the Estonia, the Statute and Form of Diploma and Academic Record (Diploma Supplement), adopted in March 2003, it is the obligation of all higher education institutions to issue a Diploma Supplement in English from 1 January 2004. With regards to the regulation pertaining to both the Estonian and English document the format of the Diploma Supplement (*akadeemiline õiend* in Estonian) elaborated by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES has been complied with.

The Diploma Supplement in English and *akadeemiline õiend* (the Diploma Supplement in Estonian) are automatically issued to each graduate along with the diploma, except for those persons who graduate with a bachelor degree and

continue in Master's level study at the same university in the same year, and in this case they receive the Diploma Supplement (*akadeemiline õiend*) automatically in Estonian only, and the Diploma Supplement in English upon request.

The Diploma Supplement is issued free of charge.

(Scorecard)

National implementation of the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention

17. Describe the stage of implementation of the main principles and later supplementary documents<sup>6</sup> of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

Please include:

- whether your country has ratified the convention (including depositing ratification instrument at either CoE or UNESCO)
- whether all appropriate legislation complies with the legal framework of the Convention and the later Supplementary Documents
- which of the following principles are applied in practice
  - applicants' right to fair assessment
  - recognition if no substantial differences can be proven
  - demonstration of substantial differences, where recognition is not granted
  - provision of information about your country's HE programmes and institutions
- whether you have a fully operational ENIC
- any action being taken to ratify or fully implement the Convention and the later Supplementary Documents.

The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region (the Lisbon Recognition Convention) was ratified by the Estonian parliament, the *Riigikogu*, on 10 February 1998. Ratification instruments are deposited at the Council of Europe.

The assessment and academic recognition together with the principles, criteria and procedures in assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications are regulated by Government Regulation No. 89 "The assessment and academic recognition of foreign qualifications" (adopted on 06.04.2006). The regulation is the national overarching legal instrument in the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and it includes the nomination of competent assessment and recognition authorities, the role of the Estonian ENIC/NARIC office in assessment of foreign qualifications and information provision, general principles of assessment and academic recognition. The applicants' right to fair assessment and recognition if no substantial differences can be proven are also included in the Government Regulation.

<sup>6</sup> Recommendation on the Criteria and Procedures for Recognition (2001); Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees (2004); Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education (2001)

Government Regulation No. 89 was developed to cover most of the issues stated in the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its supplementary documents, such as Recommendation on the Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications and Periods of Study (2001); Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees (2004), Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education (2001). The official translation of the Government Regulation into English is on the agenda for 2007.

National legislation, including Government Regulation No. 89, that is relevant to the recognition of foreign qualifications, is planned to be reviewed regularly according to the amendments of recognition issues in the European Higher Education Area, and development of supplementary recommendations under the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

The Estonian ENIC/NARIC office was established as a structural unit of the Archimedes Foundation in 1997. The office is functioning in accordance with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. The main tasks and activities of the Estonian ENIC/NARIC are regulated by the bilateral agreement between the Ministry of Education and Research and the Archimedes Foundation, signed on 20 November 2002. The main tasks and activities, resources and expertise of the Estonian ENIC/NARIC office correspond to the guidelines expressed in the Joint ENIC/NARIC Charter of Activities and Services.

(Scorecard and Eurydice)

#### Stage of implementation of ECTS

18. Describe the credit and accumulation system operating in your country.

Please include:

- the stage of implementation of ECTS in academic year 2006/2007
- the percentage of first and second cycle programmes using ECTS in academic year 2006/2007
- how any other credit or accumulation system in use relates to ECTS: is it compatible with ECTS; what is the ratio between national and ECTS credits.

There are no changes regarding the credit and accumulation system used currently in HEI-s since Bergen. However, Estonia plans to undertake extensive changes for implementing the ECTS system. Based on legislative amendments from 19.11.06 to the University Act, the transfer to ECTS credit points will be completed by the 2009/2010 academic year. During four years (between 2006 and 2009) higher education institutions have the responsibility to rearrange study programs using the learning outcomes approach. The necessary guidance and support will be provided nationally via the developmental project that has been in existence since 2005. For designing the needed legislative changes a special working group has been convened by the Ministry of Education and Research. The results are due in autumn 2007.

19. Has your country produced a national plan to improve the quality of the process associated with the recognition of foreign qualifications<sup>7</sup>? If so, give a brief description of the plan and attach a copy.

The Government Regulation "The assessment and academic recognition of foreign qualifications" (adopted on 06.04.2006) is the core legal instrument the purpose of which is in plan to improve the quality of the process associated with the recognition of foreign qualifications.

The Internationalisation Strategy for Higher Education (2006) includes a chapter concerning the national plan for the improvement of the quality of the assessment of foreign qualifications at higher education institutions. According to the Strategy the higher education institutions will take more responsibility in assessment of foreign qualifications. In this connection the higher education institutions will take measures to improve the capacity building within the institution and their structural units. The Estonian ENIC/NARIC office will create a system of regular training courses for the administrative and academic staff of higher education institutions.

## Lifelong Learning

(Scorecard)

Recognition of prior learning

20. Describe the measures in place to recognise prior learning, including non-formal and informal learning.

Please include:

- the stage of development of any procedures or national guidelines to recognise prior learning
- a description of any procedures or national guidelines for assessing prior learning as a basis for access to HE
- a description of any procedures or national guidelines for allocating credits as a basis of exemption from some programme requirements.

Broad regulations for recognizing prior learning and work experience were adopted in the University Act and Professional Higher Education Institution Act in 2003. In 2006 there were some changes added that make the application of APEL in BA programs more flexible. According to the law each institution has to work out the practical guidelines as to how to apply the APEL opportunities described in law. At the moment, the application of APEL is permitted only for the allocation of credits towards qualifications but not for access to programmes. In the future, more flexibility will be allowed also in the latter case but that development requires some structural reforms to be completed first in the Estonian higher education system.

With the purpose of unifying the basic principles, there is a special developmental project initiated by the bigger HEI-s. The project is a substantial investment in terms of time as well as money as it has several purposes. For example, working with the academic staff and students in order to acquaint them with the concept of APEL,

<sup>7</sup> ENIC/NARIC has produced guidelines for National Action Plans for Recognition.

carrying out appropriate training, working out the recommendations on regulations on the national level regarding general guidance to assure the equal treatment of persons. The necessity of agreeing on more detailed principles for admission comes from the fact that there are several reforms being carried out in the higher education sector, especially in the labour market focused part of it (professionally oriented shorter programmes), and there have to be clear rules for the equal treatment of persons (i.e. what diploma gives a person access to what kind of programmes). The project team is expected to come up with an initial recommendation on the national level by 2007. The preparatory work has been substantial as it has involved the closer study of the experiences of other countries (i.e. France, Norway, UK) in this field. The project maintains a separate web page for information management, and a brief overview about the project is also available in English - <http://www.ut.ee/lykka/166042>

21. Describe legislative and other measures taken by your country to create opportunities for flexible learning paths in higher education.

Please include:

- any flexibility in entry requirements
- any flexible delivery methods
- any modular structures of programmes.

According to the law, universities and professional higher education institutions have extensive autonomy in determining the content, structure and delivery methods of studies. We believe that Estonian HEI-s have done a lot in previous years for making study process more flexible by:

- Designing first cycle programs with broader focus and more narrow specialization only in the second cycle.
- Creating e-learning structures for program delivery (modules with E-support, accessibility of information, etc.)
- Provision of programs in “open university” structures. One third of all Estonian students are enrolled via “open universities”, these are students that are more “mature” (in the age group of 26+) and who need more flexibility in combining working, study and family time.,
- Using credit point system in shorter training courses (e.g. summer schools) that allows to consider these studies as part of the formal study process for degree (under certain conditions).

And although there have been discussions to unify the volume of modules on a certain study level (i.e. in first cycle), these agreements are mostly likely to have been formed directly between institutions - not involving the state legislator.

## Joint degrees

(Scorecard and Eurydice)

Establishment and recognition of joint degrees

22. Describe the legislative position on joint degrees in your country.

Please include:

- the stage of implementation of any legislation to establish joint programmes

- whether joint<sup>8</sup> degrees are allowed and encouraged in legislation
- whether joint degrees are allowed and encouraged in all three cycles
- an indication of the percentage of HEIs that have established joint programmes and are awarding nationally recognised degrees jointly with HEIs of other countries
- any action being taken to encourage or allow joint programmes.

The Estonian Ministry of Education and Research has put together a working group of stakeholders with the mandate for legislative amendments concerning joint degrees and programs (start of 2006). So far, the working group has analysed the practice of other countries in regulating the topic and agreed on a model, based on which the legislative amendments will be carried out. The deadline for presenting the amendments to the Government for official approval is spring 2007. Under the current legislation, issuing joint diplomas as a single document is not possible. However, there are cooperation projects where HEI-s have started joint efforts for joint provision, awarding double diplomas.

There is an understanding that the result of the working group will be legislative changes that make it possible to issue a joint diploma, as a single document, by Estonian HEI-s. The issuing of this joint diploma has to follow the national regulations for the designation of degrees and therefore, it is recognized automatically.

As regards to the awarding of joint diplomas by international consortia, however, we expect to see further developments on international arena before taking any concrete actions. We see other instruments than single document as being even more necessary for the provision of joint programs. The internationalization strategy for higher education (adopted in 2006) focuses strongly on the funding support for joint programs. Also, other practical steps on the national level advance similar goals, such as allocating state funding for student dormitories, etc.

The recognition of double and multiple degrees follows the general procedures for assessment of foreign qualifications and diplomas. The respective governmental act was adopted in Estonia on April 6, 2006.

## C. Current issues in Higher Education

### Higher education and research

23. Describe the relationship between higher education and research in your country - what percentage of research is carried out in HEIs; are any steps being taken to improve the synergy between HE and other research sectors.

Universities play the key role in the Estonian R&D system – as centres creating new knowledge. The share of the higher education sector in all research and development activities' (including private sector) funding was approximately 41%

<sup>8</sup> a joint degree is a single degree certificate awarded by two or more institutions, and where the single degree certificate is valid without being supplemented by any additional national degree certificate.

in 2005 (Estonian Statistical Office 2006, [http://pub.stat.ee/px-web.2001/I\\_Databas/Economy/Economy.asp](http://pub.stat.ee/px-web.2001/I_Databas/Economy/Economy.asp), look for “Research and development activities”). Higher education and R&D activities are concentrated, with a few exceptions, in four public universities and related institutions. The private universities’ main priority is to provide study on a specialist-level, carried out mainly in so-called soft areas, so the extent of Doctoral study and R&D is very limited.

Pursuant to current legislation, the main objective of institutions of professional higher education is teaching, and performing applied research is secondary. There is no earmarked funding in the state budget for these purposes, and PHEI-s need to compete for the R&D funding on an equal footing with universities and institutes. Although the personnel of institutions of professional higher education include research staff, the requirements extend to them on a common basis with universities. Over the past few years, institutions of professional higher education have started to increase the extent of their development projects for business, but no official statistics exist on the financial extent of these contracts.

24. What percentage of doctoral candidates take up research careers; are any measures being taken to increase the number of doctoral candidates taking up research careers?

There is no centrally run statistical surveys to answer this question, however, we estimate that about half of all PhD graduates take up research careers.

We need to point out here that Estonia faces somewhat different problem than many EU member-states. Not that there is only a problem with people taking up a research career but there is clear problem with insufficient overall number of PhD graduates.

Several mechanisms have been launched on the initiative of the Ministry of Education and Research for increasing the number of PhD candidates. The measures introduced are

- an increase in scholarships for PhD candidates since 2004,
- launching pilot projects for Doctoral schools,
- mobility support for various periods, preferably in Doctoral studies as of 2003/04 (to a lesser extent also to young teachers and Master’s candidates),
- assignment of Doctoral candidates to foreign universities for full-time studies with an obligation to defend a degree over there and return to Estonia (since 2002/03), and
- opening state-commissioned education places for foreigners on equal conditions with Estonian Doctoral candidates.

## The social dimension

25. Describe any measures being taken in your country to widen access to quality higher education.

Please include:

- any financial or other measures to widen access in higher education amongst socially disadvantaged groups
- any measures in place to monitor the impact of policies to widen access to higher education, including results if possible
- any further measures planned, following evaluation of the widening access measures already in place.

The most evident policy for equal opportunities has been the provision of free education on a higher education level, and this has been supported by all the recent coalition governments. The policy goal has been to provide 50% of secondary school graduates with the opportunity to free study during their nominal study period.

In order to support young people in their pursuit of post-secondary education, there have been intentions to offer certain social safeguards for students in need. The system of social safeguards comprises

- educational assistance (provision of government guaranteed student loans and grants) and
- tax concessions on tuition fees.

The integrated types of assistance are the educational allowance and the government guaranteed student loan, which are aimed at offering government aid for those pupils and students who are capable of completing their studies within the nominal duration. The student allowance is allocated to institutions that have performance contracts with the Ministry of Education and Research but payments to students are not dependent on whether one is studying in a state-commissioned student place or is paying a tuition fee. The specific conditions for distributing student allowance funds are approved on an institutional level, but they need to follow the broad principles given by the MoER.

In addition, for promoting accessibility to tertiary education for gifted students who are unable, for substantial reasons, to meet all the requirements provided by law, the educational institutions are free to award within their discretion 5% of the basic allowance fund resources (before September 2005 it was 2%), by taking account of other relevant circumstances. Pupils and students are entitled to apply for financial assistance if they are enrolled in full-time or day study and their economic circumstances do not allow for further study (persons in demonstrated financial need; or with medium, moderate, severe or profound disability; persons who are orphans, from large families, parents of under-age children or whose parents are unemployed or retired, etc).

For students coming from Russian language background, the Ministry of Education and Research has funded the provision of advanced Estonian language courses for new entrants. The language courses are offered during

one year for those students who have been admitted to a “free study place” according to the entrance ranking, but whose Estonian language proficiency is below the required level. In addition, HEI-s have launched special support programs for first year students with language problems.

Special grants have been provided to certain population groups under private initiative. For example a well-known programme is the Arno Tali Scholarship awarded to gifted young people in rural areas. But generally, there is no wide discussion in society regarding the equity of outcomes in higher education. One reason for this can be also the reluctance to review the concept of a limited state as an income-contingent support structure implies considerable management costs on the state level.

Estonian participation in the Eurostudent project in 2006 will for the first time provide some information on the ethnic background and socio-economic status of students. Also, there is survey carried out first time to collection of information regarding how many students work during their studies .

26. Describe any measures to help students complete their studies without obstacles related to their social or economic background.

Please include:

- any guidance or counselling services and any other measures to improve retention
- any measures in place to monitor the impact of policies to improve retention, including results if possible
- any further measures planned, following evaluation of the retention measures already in place.

In 2005, there was a survey carried out by University of Tartu researchers with the purpose of analysing the reasons behind the non-completion of studies. As the findings suggest, the impact of weak career service development in general education clearly affects the choices young people make. Students who drop out often admit that they had made the wrong choice in the first place as regards their future profession. That in itself affects their study motivation. The reason can also be that some fields are very competitive, so the study decision is made on the basis of available places – where one does not have to pay a tuition fee. Respondents also admitted that they did not have the necessary skills to be successful in higher education studies – they did not have experience in taking notes, preparing for examinations, searching sources, writing essays (Must, 2006). Due to the need to assist students, and changed financial principles, institutions have started offering tutoring opportunities, especially in the areas where there is a high dropout rate (e.g. technology fields). Most of the HEI-s offer counselling services (tutorial, career, psychological help) to their students.

## Mobility

27. Describe any measures being taken to remove obstacles to student mobility and promote the full use of mobility programmes.

Please include:

- any measures to increase inward student mobility
- any measures to increase outward student mobility.

The “busiest” measure is the mobility of Estonian students within the EU Erasmus programme, where participation has grown dramatically in recent years. In terms of geography, the countries preferred under the programme in the early 2000s were Southern European countries, with which Estonia until recently had fewer contacts (in contrast to Finland, for instance, which has been a popular destination for some time). Erasmus will remain an exchange programme for Estonian students, which will help to broaden their general outlook on the world and to better learn about the European cultural environment.

In order to encourage the mobility of academic staff, Master’s and doctoral students, the Kristjan Jaak national initiative has been launched, under which a short stay abroad is supported – visits to libraries, working in laboratories and attendance at conferences. No clear priorities as to the field of study have been set for the allocation of scholarships under this programme – the determining factor is the quality of the application.

A scholarship scheme for doctoral study at foreign universities is different by nature, for the beneficiaries are viewed as the next generation of Estonian faculty. The beneficiaries are given the opportunity to undertake full-time studies at a foreign university and they are expected to return to Estonia after the conferral of the doctorate. State scholarships cover tuition as well as subsistence costs, calculated based on the country’s living standard index.

For inward mobility in 2006 there were first steps made on the national level in order to bring in third country nationals for PhD studies. Until that time, these developments were taking place in an uncoordinated way, based on the initiative of universities. In 2005/06, there were 56 PhD candidates whose country of residence was not Estonia and who did not have permanent residence permits. This forms about 3% of all PhD students.

Active cooperation with Nordic and Baltic countries is proven by a range of internationalisation initiatives launched by higher education institutions, where the biggest sending countries are Finland, Latvia and Lithuania. The relatively large number of Finnish students in Estonia can be explained by the *numerus clausus* restriction used in their home country, which makes students mainly in the medicine-related subject areas come to study in Estonia (primarily in the Medical Faculty of the University of Tartu and the Faculty of Veterinary Science at the Estonian University of Life Sciences).

In order to provide study opportunities for young people from outside Estonia who have some relationship with Estonia and who are economically needy, the fellow nationals and kindred peoples programmes have been introduced. *The fellow nationals programme* is targeted at Estonians living outside the territory of the Republic of Estonia and who need financial assistance, including aid for studies in tertiary education. In 2005, scholarships were awarded to seven young expatriate Estonians from Russia, Georgia, Latvia and Sweden for study in Estonian higher education institutions.

28. Are portable loans and grants available in your country? If not, describe any measures being taken to increase the portability of grants and loans.
Yes, it is possible for study loans. Due to the particularities of operating the loans system, portability is not possible.
29. Describe any measures being taken to remove obstacles to staff mobility and promote the full use of mobility programmes.  Please include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• any measures to increase inward staff mobility</li> <li>• any measures to increase outward staff mobility.</li> </ul>
Based on the law, members of the teaching staff (except staff holding an extraordinary position) have the right to a sabbatical semester with maintained pay once every five years in order to supplement their professional skills or for other creative activity. Members of the academic staff are expected to cover the costs for these self-developmental activities from their research grant or otherwise. Usually, this opportunity is used for research or work in a library abroad.  For established academic staff and researchers, a separate international exchange scheme is administered through the Estonian Academy of Sciences. Estonian scientists collaborate most actively with scientists from Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden. However, the rankings of countries in terms of the field of study may differ greatly.  For young academic staff (not holding a research grant themselves) there is a possibility to apply for special mobility scholarships on the national level.

### **The attractiveness of the EHEA and cooperation with other parts of the world**

30. Describe any measures being taken in your country to promote the attractiveness of the EHEA.
Under the new national higher education internationalization strategy, concrete measures are foreseen for attractiveness purposes.  Estonian universities take part in three Erasmus Mundus Master's program consortia.

### **Future challenges**

31. Give an indication of the main challenges ahead for your country.
On November 8, 2006 the Estonian Parliament approved a new higher education strategy document for 2006-2015. The strategy foresees three main challenges for the sector in the coming years: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ To be prepared for a decrease in the student population. Due to the downward demographic trend, the number of young students starting their studies in higher education will diminish by almost 60% between 2004 and 2016 (in the age group 16-18). Due to LLL the decrease will not be as</li> </ul>

steap, however, all institutions need to go through restructuring processes in coming years;

- There is a clear need to strengthen the international dimension of HEI-s in many respects, including by recruiting academic staff internationally and attracting students from abroad;
- Additional funding is of vital importance for the sustainability of the sector in a globalized world, either for infrastructure investment or competitive salary levels for academic personnel.

Completed National Reports should be sent to the Bologna Secretariat by email no later than **Friday 15 December 2006**.

Please remember to attach a copy of your national action plan to improve the quality of the process associated with the recognition of foreign qualifications.

Bologna Secretariat

May 2006