

FACTSHEET

Higher Education

Estonia

Higher Education Qualifications of the Former Systems

Since 1991 four systems of higher education and qualifications have been in force. In order to ensure equal opportunities and rights for the qualification holders, the comparison of the qualifications of the former systems was established by a government regulation in 2005.

Reform of higher education cycles and degrees

In order to implement the Bologna Declaration (The European Higher Education Area – Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education), which was signed in 1999 by the European Ministers of Education, a working group was formed in Estonia under the guidance of the Minister of Education and Research. The higher education reform was adopted by the Government of the Republic in the summer of 2001.

The transition to new study programmes in the Estonian higher education institutions took place in the academic year of 2002/2003. The new system of higher education has two main cycles, following the bachelor-master model of the European Higher Education Area. The study programmes of some fields have been integrated into a single long cycle.

Recognition of qualifications issued in the former education systems of Estonia is determined by Estonian Government Regulation No 120 (RT I, 32, 241) "Correspondence of qualifications issued in Republic of Estonia and qualifications issued in former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics prior to 20 August 1991".

Degree structure until 1991

Until 1991 the Estonian higher education institutions followed the Soviet system of higher education. In most fields of study the nominal duration of the programmes was 5 years, in a few programmes it was 4 or 4.5 years, in medicine it was 6 years. The final qualification *Specialist's Diploma* or *spetsialisti diplom kõrgema kutsehariduse omandamise kohta* (Specialist's Diploma of Higher Professional Education) as the original title in Estonian, was awarded with an indication to a professional qualification: Engineer (*insener*), Physicist (*füüsik*), Geographer (*geograaf*), Economist (*ökonomist* or *majandusteadlane*), Lawyer (*jurist*), etc. and the indication of a narrow specialisation where applicable.

The first stage of postgraduate studies (*aspirantuur*) leading to the qualification of *Kandidat nauk* normally lasted 3 years and included original research. The second stage of postgraduate studies (*doktorantuur*) led to the degree of *Doktor nauk*.

On 31 July 1990, a year before Estonia declared independence, the Government adopted a regulation according to which the two systems, the Soviet system and the Estonian system, became equally valid. In fact, the Soviet system ceased to function in the spring of 1991.

According to Government Regulation No 120 of 06.06.2005 the Specialist's Diploma issued in the former USSR corresponds to the degree of *magister* (master's degree), except the diplomas issued by the institutions of higher education within the area of administration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Soviet Union and by the institutions of military higher education. The degrees of *Kandidat nauk* and *Doktor nauk* correspond to the degree of *doktor* (doctoral degree).

FACTSHEET

Higher Education

Estonia

Degree structure from 1991 to 1994

In this transition period the first degree *Diplom*, known as *diplomeeritud spetsialisti ülikoolidiplom* (University Specialist's Diploma) was the qualification that followed the structure of the Soviet-time Specialist's Diploma. The nominal duration of most programmes was 5 years as the students had begun their studies in the Soviet higher education system. In some cases, at *Tartu Ülikool* (University of Tartu) for example, the nominal duration was reduced to 4 years. There were several arts programmes where the nominal duration was 5.5-6 years. The qualification obtained was a final university degree, awarded upon completion of a long-cycle programme, giving access to all positions where higher education was required.

The diploma awarded indicated a professional title (*insener, ökonomist, bioloog* etc.) or certified the completion of a programme in a certain field or specialisation.

Instead of the former research-based postgraduate programme *aspirantuur*, a new programme called *magistratuur* (*magister*-study) was developed. Generally, *magister*-study was of the same level as *aspirantuur* in the system of the Soviet period.

The admission requirement for the *magister* programme was a Specialist's Diploma or *diplomeeritud spetsialisti ülikoolidiplom*. The nominal duration of the *magister* programme was 2 years. The graduates were awarded the degree of *magister* after the public defence of original research. The degree of *magister* was introduced as the first research degree in the higher education system and became a requirement for those who wanted to work in research institutes or higher education institutions, or to continue studies towards a doctoral degree (a second research degree) – *doktor*.

According to Government Regulation No 120 of 06.06.2005 the *diplomeeritud spetsialisti ülikoolidiplom* (University Specialist's Diploma) corresponds to the degree of *magister* (master's degree). The degree of *magister* awarded upon completion of a programme entered into the Estonian Education Information System before 01.06.2002 is recognised as a qualification between a *magister* (Master's degree) and a *doktor* (doctoral degree). Higher education institutions may accept the old *magister*-level courses and the thesis as part of the doctoral programme.

Degree structure from 1995 to 2002

According to the Universities Act, the first stage of higher education with the nominal duration of 4 years was fixed for the new admissions effective from 01.01.1995. At the end of the 1990s there were very few programmes with the nominal duration of 3 years (business administration at some private universities, for example). Generally, the reduction of studies from 5 years to 4 years resulted from the development of new programmes with higher quality standards and more intensive courses, different from the former 5-year programmes leading to the qualification of *diplomeeritud spetsialisti ülikoolidiplom*. The graduates of these programmes were awarded the degree of *bakalaureus* or *kraadita diplom* (University Diploma). The qualification *kraadita diplom* was issued until 1998 and was awarded upon completion of professionally oriented programmes. At the same time, some universities (*Tartu Ülikool* and *Tallinna Pedagoogikaülikool*, for example) awarded the degree of *bakalaureus* not only to the students who had begun their studies in 1995, but also to those who graduated that year. Other universities (*Tallinna Tehnikaülikool* and *Eesti*

FACTSHEET

Higher Education

Estonia

Põllumajandusülikool, for example) continued to award the qualification of *diplomeeritud spetsialisti ülikoolidiplom* under the new title of *kraadita diplom* to those who had started their studies before 01.01.1995. In some fields a professional title was awarded – *inseneri nimetus* (Title of Engineer), *ökonomisti nimetus* (Title of Economist), etc.

The main purpose of the *bakalaureus* programmes registered before 1 June 2002 was to give the students theoretical knowledge and practical skills for work in the chosen field and the completion of such programmes gave the right to work in positions requiring higher education. Research and professional or creative work, including the final thesis, constituted no less than 10% of the programme. The nominal length of the programme was predominantly 4 years, except teacher training that could be extended up to 5 years. The student workload was 180-240 ECTS credits. According to the internal regulations of some universities, a Latin designation of the academic degree was also used on the state-standard diploma (*baccalaureus artium* or *baccalaureus scientiarum*).

The qualifications of *bakalaureus* (bachelor) or *kraadita diplom* were final university degrees of the same academic and professional value as the former Specialist's Diploma or *diplomeeritud spetsialisti ülikoolidiplom*.

The second stage of higher education was *magistratuur* (a *magister* programme) introduced at the beginning of the 1990s.

The main purpose of a *magister* programme was to deepen the theoretical and specialist knowledge and to develop proficiency in research, professional or other creative work. The admission requirement was the degree of *bakalaureus* or a corresponding qualification. The length of the programme was 1-2 years (until 1999 – 2 years), but together with the *bakalaureus* programme no less than 5 years, with the total workload of 60-120 ECTS credits or 120 ECTS credits until 1999. Research constituted at least 50% of the research-oriented *magister* programme and a novel scientific treatment of a topic in the corresponding field was required. In the professionally-oriented *magister* programme research, development or creative work made up at least 25% of the student workload. The programmes were completed with the defence of a thesis.

Upon completion of *magister* programmes registered before 1 June 2002, the degree of a professional or research *magister* was awarded. According to the internal regulations of some universities, a Latin designation of the academic degree was also used on the state-standard diploma (*magister artium*, *magister scientiarum*, *magister theologiae* or *magister iuris*).

Even if there were the degrees of *bakalaureus* and *magister* in the Estonian higher education system at that time, this was not a traditional bachelor-master or two-tier or undergraduate-graduate structure. The *bakalaureus* programme was one long-cycle programme with the nominal duration of 4-5 years in most fields of study, including engineering, teacher training, law, etc. The *bakalaureus* and *magister* are the degrees typical of and specific to the Estonian higher education system only and are not comparable with the generally known degrees of the European bachelor-master systems.

In October 1998, the *diplomiõppe diplom* (Diplom-Study diploma) and *kutsekõrghariduse diplom* (Diploma of Vocational Higher Education) were introduced for professional higher

FACTSHEET

Higher Education

Estonia

education programmes. Such diplomas were awarded beginning in October 1998. The last admission to these programmes was the 2001/2002 academic year.

The *diplom*-study programme was a programme of an applied nature the purpose of which was to acquire practical knowledge and skills. The programmes could be taught at a university or a professional higher education institution. In practice, according to the requirements established by the university, the credits of such programmes could be transferred in order to continue studies in the *bakalaureus* programme.

According to the Vocational Education Institutions Act (1998), some vocational education institutions could provide higher education programmes. Vocational higher education was offered by postsecondary vocational schools or professional higher education institutions. The aim of higher vocational education was to offer general education as well as professional and occupational knowledge and skills.

The nominal duration of both *diplom*-study and vocational higher education programmes was 3-4 years, the student workload being 180-240 ECTS credits.

Until 2002 there were two kinds of doctoral degrees – the research *doktor* and the professional *doktor*. The programme for the research degree included research of no less than 70%. The professional degree programme included research or creative work of no less than 50%. The professional and research doctoral degrees were degrees of the same academic level. The nominal duration of doctoral programmes was 3-4 years (180-240 ECTS). Upon completion of such programmes the degree of *doktor* was awarded. According to the internal regulations of some universities, a Latin designation of the research degree was also used on the state-standard diploma (*doctor philosophiae*, *doctor iuris*, *doctor medicinae* or *doctor theologiae*).

According to Government Regulation No 120 of 06.06.2005 the degrees of *bakalaureus* and *kraadita diplom* (University Diploma) awarded upon completion of a programme entered into the Estonian Education Information System before 01.06.2002 correspond to the degree of *magister* (Master's degree). The degree of *magister* awarded upon completion of a programme entered into the Estonian Education Information System before 01.06.2002, is recognised as a qualification between a *magister* (Master's degree) and a *doktor* (Doctoral degree). Higher education institutions may accept the old *magister*-level courses and the thesis as part of the doctoral programme. The qualifications of *diplomiõppe diplom* and *kutsekõrghariduse diplom* are officially recognised at the bachelor's level.