

Institutional Accreditation Decision

Estonian Aviation Academy

27.01.2021

The Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education decided to accredit Estonian Aviation Academy for three years.

Pursuant to clause 43.2 of the document "Guide to Institutional Accreditation" established on the basis of the authorization contained in § 38 (3) of the Higher Education Act and section 24 subsection 5 of the Statutes of the Education and Youth Board, the Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (hereinafter the Council) states the following:

1. Estonian Aviation Academy and EKKA agreed on the time frame for institutional accreditation on 16.12.2019.
2. Based on point 8 of the document *Guide to Institutional Accreditation*, the following study programmes were also assessed within the framework of institutional accreditation:

Aeronautical Engineering, Professional higher education

Air Traffic Service, Professional higher education

3. By order 1-19/43/2020 of 15.05.2020, the Director of EKKA approved the institutional accreditation committee (hereinafter committee) in the following composition

Mark Richardson (Chair)	Professor Emeritus, University College Dublin, Ireland
William Agius	Deputy Head of the Centre for Aviation, ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences, Switzerland
Mari Kasemets	Student, Tallinn University of Technology, Estonia
Mikko Paronen	Vice President for Sales, Patria Pilot Training Oy, Finland

Pascal Revel	Counsellor for Science & Technology, French Embassy in Germany, France
Kalle Tammemäe	Director, IT College, Tallinn University of Technology, Estonia
Kristo Vallimäe	Project Manager, Estonian Air Navigation Services, Estonia

4. Estonian Aviation Academy (EAA) submitted the self-analysis report to EKKA on 31.08.2020, EKKA assessment coordinator forwarded the self-analysis report to the committee on 07.09.2020.
5. The hybrid assessment visit to EAA took place 3-4.11.2020.
6. The committee sent the draft assessment report to EKKA on 2.12.2020, EKKA forwarded the draft assessment report to the higher education institution for comments on 8.12.2020 and EAA submitted its comments on 17.12.2020.
7. The Committee submitted the final assessment report to EKKA on 18.12.2020. The assessment report is an integral part of the decision. The report is available on the EKKA website.
8. The Secretary of the Assessment Council forwarded the final assessment report along with the self-analysis report to the members of the Assessment Council on 19.01.2021.
9. The assessments of the assessment committee were as follows:

Standard	Assessment
Strategic management	Conforms to requirements
Resources	Conforms to requirements
Quality culture	Conforms to requirements
Academic ethics	Conforms to requirements
Internationalisation	Partially conforms to requirements
Teaching staff	Conforms to requirements
Study programme	Conforms to requirements
Learning and teaching	Conforms to requirements
Student assessment	Conforms to requirements
Learning support systems	Conforms to requirements
Research, development and/or other creative activity	Partially conforms to requirements
Service to society	Conforms to requirements

10. The Council with 10 members present, discussed these received documents in its session on 27.01.2021 and, based on the assessment report, decided to point out for EAVA the following strengths¹, areas for improvement, and recommendations² as well as suggestions for further developments³.

10.1. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Strengths

1. An active and engaged Advisory Board strongly representative of Estonian aviation enterprises.
2. Alignment of the mission, vision and core values of Estonian Aviation Academy, underpinned by clearly enunciated principles, with values and principles integral to the ethos of an institution preparing graduates for the global aviation industry. The core values of openness, courage, enthusiasm and devotion were developed in consultation with the vast majority of staff. The values are published on the EAVA Intranet and public website.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. EAVA is not yet devoting sufficient targeted resources and energy to achieving international recognition and becoming an international player. A multi-faceted approach to 'internationalisation' is required, rather than just being reactive to international mobility schemes and such like. It is recommended that management take a wider view of the term 'internationalisation', build consensus on this across the Academy and invest in a proactive approach – perhaps including a senior management post and/or an international member of the Advisory Board.
2. The strategic development of the Academy as a centre for research and innovation is not achieving the same level of success as its role in training and education. It is recommended that in the new Strategic Plan there is more focus on research activity, with clear strategic objectives and a deeper shared understanding across the Academy of the high benchmark for research impact in an aviation institution of international repute.
3. The Academy should refine key performance indicators to ensure progress in research and development as well as building the Academy's international brand. The progress on key performance indicators should be monitorable and should be monitored and rate of progress communicated annually across the Academy.

¹ Achievements exceeding those required by the standard have been listed as strengths (not conformity with standard).

² Areas for improvement and recommendations indicate shortcomings in conforming to the requirements of institutional accreditation standards and shall have an impact on the final decision adopted by the Council.

³ Suggestions for further developments are suggestions for improvements that do not refer to non-conformity with standards and which the higher education institution is at liberty to take into account or disregard. Suggestions for further developments have no impact on the final decision adopted by the Council.

10.2. RESOURCES

Strengths

1. Excellent financial management resulting in lower administrative costs in recent years and allowing for effective use of funds towards core education functions.
2. Flexible use of the resources while transitioning from contact to online delivery during Covid-19 restrictions.
3. Excellent environment for learning and teaching.
4. The state-of-the-art ATC simulator allows for generating extra revenue for the Academy thereby contributing to the quality of learning equipment available to students.
5. High employee and student satisfaction according to surveys.

Suggestions for further developments

1. Staff Satisfaction Surveys could be conducted annually.
2. EAVA's own revenue has decreased over recent years. The reason for the decrease was explained by the Academy with less demand for EAVA's training. The Academy should explore new opportunities for generating revenue from new training courses as well as research and development related products and services for which there is demand on the market.
3. The Academy's international marketing efforts are virtually non-existent (except for social media, which is simultaneously domestic and international in nature). Once EAVA defines its international ambitions more closely, the marketing messages should be targeted accordingly.
4. Awareness needs to be raised among staff of responsibilities under the EU General Data Protection Regulation and of the requirement to report even minor breaches of GDPR.

10.3. QUALITY CULTURE

Strengths

1. The Academy's four core values (openness, courage, enthusiasm, devotion) and five teamwork principles (respect, abidance, sincerity, trust, sharing) are related to the values highlighted in the Estonian Code of Conduct for Research Integrity. The culture is informed by the 'Just Culture in Aviation Safety' and the Academy follows the principles of Just Culture, as expected.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. Academy should apply Compliance, Quality and Safety Management Systems in all activities, not only in the disciplines where they are

mandatory. This would help ensure that all EAVA graduates are among other things fully aware of an individual's role in the system as a whole.

Suggestions for further developments

1. All management manuals, handbooks and training programmes should be available also in English. This would facilitate international cooperation.

10.4. ACADEMIC ETHICS

Strengths

1. The Academy has clearly defined academic ethics' standards for staff. EAVA's values and teamwork principles strongly underpin the ethos of academic ethical behaviour and are clearly presented on the Academy's intranet.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. Consider setting up a systematic approach (process) to register the handling of dishonourable behaviour cases, both minor and major. Statistics are not recorded in respect of minor cases of dishonourable behaviour by students if the cases are resolved at local level.

Suggestions for further developments

1. Reframe the guidance and regulations for students to emphasise the value of ethical behaviour in parallel with the sanctions available in cases of unethical behaviour.

10.5. INTERNATIONALISATION

Strengths

1. The Academy has an international presence online through a MOOC 'Introduction to Aircraft'
2. The number of international lecturers at the Academy is increasing (13% in 2016, 18% in 2017 and 20% in 2018).

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. The term 'internationally recognised' no longer appears in the revised vision statement of the Academy, perhaps inadvertently leading to loss of focus on the importance of internationalisation. It is recommended that the

Academy's international ambitions be unambiguously stated also in the new vision statement.

2. Many of the targets set in the Strategy for International Cooperation are low, demonstrating a lack of ambition. It is recommended that much greater stretch targets be set, prioritised and supported to integrate international aspects into all the main processes of the Academy.
3. The Academy has construed internationalisation in the narrow sense, focusing on student mobility and recruiting international staff members. Internationalisation barely leaves its mark on the Academy's research activities. However, this is very important in building the Academy's international reputation. International research and development would also contribute to enhanced learning and teaching. A broader view to internationalisation is required. Advancing internationalisation shall require a dedicated effort from the Academy's management.
4. EAVA has not made a strategic investment into the internationalisation of research and development. It is recommended that the Academy select areas of research expertise and develop these areas with international partners.

Suggestions for further developments

1. Develop more MOOC's.
2. The international mobility of students suffers significantly from the fact that the Academy's programmes are four-year programmes whilst most European aviation programmes last three years. A transition to the 3+2 system would expand the students' mobility opportunities.
3. The Academy should twin with synergistic partners and apply to calls of the forthcoming Horizon Europe "widening" programme.

10.6. TEACHING STAFF

Strengths

1. There is a good balance between academic teaching staff and practitioners.
2. Using a mentoring system among teaching staff.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. The number of teaching staff with master's and doctoral degrees should be higher. There were only four teaching staff members with doctoral degrees in 2019. There are limited research and development opportunities for staff development at EAVA. It is recommended to try to tackle achieving growth in research activities and staff career development in a twin track strategy.

2. After having achieved a critical mass of teaching staff with master's or PhDs, a Master programme should be developed (whilst converting the first cycle programmes into three-year programmes).
3. A wider participation of teaching staff members in international mobility programmes is required. Cooperation with domestic higher education institutions as well as those from abroad should be enhanced. It is recommended that the Academy set quantitative objectives for teaching staff members with master's and doctoral degrees as well as their internationalisation in the new Strategic Plan.
4. The downward trend in the proportion of teachers with expertise and experience in aviation causes concern. The Academy has set the objective at 85%, at present the rate is 56%. The problem needs tackling, for example by sending teaching staff to companies to build industry specific expertise.

Suggestions for further developments

1. The gender balance of staff should be improved, reflecting international trends where female participation, especially in air traffic services and flight operations, is increasing. At present the share of men among teaching staff is 94%.

10.7. STUDY PROGRAMME

Strengths

1. Keeping the study programmes simultaneously compliant both to the degree programme requirements and to the aviation industry regulatory requirements.
2. Good feedback processes ensure ongoing input for study programme development. The feedback provided by students via the study information system is voluntary, but study programme managers organize meetings with all students from every curriculum group at the beginning of each semester. Various aspects of study programmes are discussed at these meetings. This is a good way of involving students in study programme development.

Suggestions for further developments

1. Widening the range of English-taught modules.
2. As some students fail to understand the importance of mathematics and physics courses in the curriculum, more examples from the field of aviation should be included in these modules. This might help keep the students motivated.
3. It is recommended to redesign study programmes according to the 3+2 standard model.

10.8. LEARNING AND TEACHING

Strengths

1. A thorough annual admission process contributes significantly to a low drop-out rate compared to other higher education institutions in Estonia.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. It is recommended that the Academy explore the barriers to international mobility of students and proactively address these.

Suggestions for further developments

1. The ambition should be for students to be exposed more regularly to the English language throughout their studies as English is used in the aviation community worldwide.

10.9. STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Suggestions for further developments

1. Although a thorough APEL system is in place at the Academy, there are systemic issues with its application. The seamless transfer of credits earned abroad is prevented by a lack of equivalence, stemming from the different ECTS volumes of study programmes.

10.10. LEARNING SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Strengths

1. Student-centred ethos, demonstrated through its learning support systems, which were fully stress-tested in 2020. EAVA reacted quickly and in a manner that merits recognition to the spring lockdown. Technology, the dedication of teaching staff and support systems succeeded in ensuring that the learning and teaching continued without interruptions.
2. Continuous feedback is collected from students and the results have been very good.

Suggestions for further developments

1. Continue efforts to make the first year more aviation related in order to further reduce cases of early leaving.

2. Continue student recruitment marketing efforts to attract talented applicants to EAVA, with particular attention on students applying to the Aeronautical Engineering programme.

10.11. RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND/OR OTHER CREATIVE ACTIVITY

Strengths

1. Strong connection to the Estonian aviation ecosystem, private companies and the Estonian Aviation Cluster.
2. Labs and technology for applied research and prototyping.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. On the basis of the Self-Analysis Report and the assessment visit, it remains unclear which objectives in the area of RDC have been met by the Academy. There are no set objectives or strategy for research at the Academy, nor have the competences (both existing and required) been mapped. Strategic partners in RDC for the Academy have not been identified. The commitment of both teaching staff members and students to research is low, the research culture weak and number of publications and international projects insufficient. The number of teaching staff members with PhDs is low, the research development opportunities for teaching staff at the Academy limited.
2. The academic staff have limited experience in grant writing for international research calls. Support should be provided to staff in this area.
3. Limitations imposed by the Estonian legislation on research projects by professional HEI. No institutional public funding. It is recommended that the Academy do a comprehensive international benchmarking to better understand the potential of niche expertise applications and apply for research grants in collaboration with international partners.
4. It is recommended that the Academy map strategic academic partners for increasing the Academy's participation in European research projects. The Academy should twin with synergistic partners and apply to calls of the forthcoming Horizon Europe "widening" programme.
5. Low funding of research and development projects due to the limited needs of R&D expertise from the Estonian aviation ecosystem. It is recommended that there be improved external communication about the Academy's areas of expertise towards potential customers, not least by highlighting research on the Academy's website.

Suggestions for further developments

1. Deepen cooperation with Estonian universities to encompass the applied research domain, in addition to existing teaching networks.
2. Increase the involvement of aviation companies in their needs expression.
3. Use the newly created RDC Council for tapping expertise outside the Academy and open the RDC Council to some external experts.

10.12. SERVICE TO SOCIETY

Strengths

1. Strong support and connection with the main stakeholders in the Estonian aviation sector.
2. Organiser of the largest aviation industry seminar in Estonia.
3. Multifaceted approach to keeping aviation as high interest to society, from large scale events (Estonian Aviation Day) to guided tours.
4. Library is a national specialist resource.
5. High quality conference facilities available to the region.

Suggestions for further developments

1. Greater use of the Academy's knowledge and expertise as aviation-related domain opinion leaders.
2. Offer training for remote tower operations, together with Estonian Air Navigation Services.
3. Creating an aviation-related 1-year curriculum for non-aviation-related personnel.

11. If one to four component assessments have been deemed to 'partially conform with requirements' and the remaining component assessments 'conform with requirements', the Assessment Council shall analyse the higher education institution's strengths and areas for improvement and deem that the management, procedures, learning, teaching and research as well as study and research environment conform with the requirements and decides to accredit the higher education institution for seven years; or deem that there are shortcomings in the management, procedures, learning, teaching and research or study and research environment, provides guidance for corrective action (see recommendations listed under individual standards) and decides to accredit the higher education institution for three years.

12. The Council analysed the strengths and areas for improvement for Estonian Aviation Academy and concluded that there is an excellent work and study environment at the higher education institution, the study programmes conform with the requirements set for higher education as well as to the expectations of the aviation industry, there is proof of learner-centred approach to learning and teaching at the higher education

institution, the satisfaction with support systems for learning is high and cooperation with main stakeholders in the aviation sector is of commendable quality.

At the same time there has been lack of progress by the Academy in two areas that were pointed out as the main causes for imposing a secondary condition in the first institutional accreditation in 2014 – internationalisation as well as research and development. Developments in these areas are held back by the small number of teaching staff with experience and expertise in aviation as well as a doctoral degree. On the basis of the above mentioned, the Council deemed necessary to point out the following significant shortcomings in the management, procedures as well as research and development activities at the Academy:

- 1) The first standard in the Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation states that *Development planning at the higher education institution is purposeful and systematic, involving various stakeholders. The higher education institution regularly evaluates the achievement of its stated objectives and the impact of its activities.* Development planning at Estonian Aviation Academy has not been sufficiently systemic, as there is a lack of clear strategic objectives for research and development and internationalisation has not been given due attention. Research as a long-term area for improvement has failed to be addressed to a sufficient degree in the new EAVA Strategic Plan. There is a need for a shared understanding within the Academy of the importance of research for an aviation academy of international standing. It is necessary to specify and set priorities for the key performance indicators of the higher education institution in order to ensure progress in the areas of research and development as well as internationalisation in the broader meaning of the term.
- 2) Standard number five in the Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation states that *the higher education institution has set objectives for internationalisation and assesses the attainment of these objectives regularly. The higher education institution has created an environment that encourages international mobility of students and teaching staff, supporting the development of learning, teaching and RDC activities, as well as the cultural openness of its members and Estonian society in general.* Estonian Aviation Academy has not invested sufficient resources into attaining international recognition and reputation. Internationalisation has to a large extent been interpreted in the context of mobility schemes, not in its broader meaning. Many objectives set in the Strategy for International Cooperation demonstrate a lack of ambition. The higher education institution has not invested strategically into the internationalisation of research and development activities, which results in the low visibility of internationalisation among the Academy's research activities, whilst

international cooperation plays a key role in the enhancement of research and development.

- 3) Standard number six in the Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation states that *Teaching is conducted by a sufficient number of professionally competent members of the teaching staff who support the development of learners and value their own continuous self-development.* The downward trend at the Estonian Aviation Academy in the number of teaching staff members with expertise and experience in the aviation sector is of concern. The Academy has set 85% as the objective, at present it is 56%. The number of teaching staff members with master's or doctoral degrees is insufficient for ensuring a rise in the research capability of the Academy. The teaching staff's opportunities for development in the area of research and development are few and their participation in international mobility programmes inadequate.
- 4) Standard number eleven in the Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation states that *the higher education institution has defined its objectives and focus in the fields of RDC based on its mission, as well as on the expectations and future needs of society, and assesses their implementation and the societal impact of its RDC activities. RDC supports the process of teaching and learning at the higher education institution. Support services for RDC are purposeful and support implementation of the objectives of the core process.* The objectives and strategy for research at Estonian Aviation Academy have not been defined nor have the existing and required competences been mapped. The potential strategic partners for the Academy in the area of research and development, for instance in conducting applied research, have not been identified. The commitment of both teaching staff members and students to research is low, the research culture weak and number of publications and international projects insufficient.

13. Having weighed the strengths and shortcomings listed in point 12, the Council

DECIDED

To accredit Estonian Aviation Academy for three years.

The decision was adopted with 10 votes in favour. Against 0.

14. The accreditation is valid until 27.01.2024. EKKA shall coordinate the time of the next institutional accreditation with Estonian Aviation Academy by 27.01.2023.

15. A person who finds that his or her rights have been violated or his or her freedoms restricted by this decision may file a challenge with the EKKA Quality Assessment Council within 30 days after the person filing the challenge became or should have become aware of the contested finding. The Council shall forward the challenge to its Appeals Committee who shall

provide an unbiased opinion in writing regarding the validity of the challenge to the Council, within five days after receipt of the challenge. The Council shall resolve the challenge within ten days of its receipt, taking into account the reasoned opinion of the Appeals Committee. If the challenge needs to be investigated further, the deadline for its review by the Council may be extended by a maximum of thirty days. A legal challenge to this decision is possible within 30 days after its delivery, by filing an action with the Tallinn courthouse of the Tallinn Administrative Court under the procedure provided for in the Code of Administrative Court Procedure.

Eve Eisenschmidt
Chair of the Council

Hillar Bauman
Secretary of the Council