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Higher Education

Estonia

Legal framework

Higher education is primarily regulated by Universities Act (*Ülikooliseadus* – 1995), Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act (*Rakenduskõrgkooli seadus* – 1998), Private Schools Act (*Erakooliseadus* – 1998), and Standard of Higher Education (*Kõrgharidusstandard* – 1996; 2002; 2008).

The purpose of the Universities Act is to provide the procedure for the establishment, termination of the activities of universities, the bases for the activities, principles of management of universities, the forms of and conditions for acquiring higher education, the legal status of the assets of universities, the procedure for financing universities, the basic rights and obligations of students, and state supervision over the activities of universities.

Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act lays down the grounds for the establishment of state institutions of professional higher education, the principles of management of such institutions, the conditions for acquiring higher education, the grounds for the organisation of studies, the basic rights and obligations of students, and the grounds for the budget, financing and state supervision of institutions of professional higher education.

The Private Schools Act is applicable to legal persons in private law which provide the possibility to acquire pre-school, basic, and secondary or higher education. This Act sets foundation of private schools, organisation of teaching staff, management of institutions, requirements for studies, financing and state supervision, and procedure for the closure of private schools.

The framework document, the Standard of Higher Education, establishes requirements for higher education programmes, objectives and learning outcomes to be achieved, requirements for the members of the teaching staff, and study programme groups where given educational institutions have the right to conduct studies and to issue qualifications. The Standard of Higher Education is based on other acts related to higher education and is valid for all cycles and forms of higher education, irrespective of the ownership or the legal status of the higher education institution. The Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for the implementation of the Standard of Higher Education.

The administration of higher education is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Research (except higher education in the fields of public security and national defence). The Ministry defines the principles of higher education policy. The responsibilities of the Ministry of Education and Research include:

- Regulation of the establishment, merger, division or closure of universities on the basis of decisions made by the *Riigikogu* (Parliament), and in case of professional higher education institutions on the basis of decisions made by the Government;
- keeping the registry of state diplomas issued by higher education institutions and vocational education institutions;
- development of the rules for state financing of education, approving the budgets of universities, and distributing budgeted funds to higher education institutions;
- approval of the development plans of universities and professional higher education institutions;

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- preparation and implementation of the national education and research development programmes;
- adoption of the procedures for opening and closing study programmes;
- carrying out the state supervisory activities.

In its role, the Ministry of Education and Research is assisted by a number of management and consultative bodies with an administrative or teaching capacity.

Professional higher education institutions for public security are state agencies administered by the Ministry of the Interior and professional higher education institutions for national defence are structural units of the Defence Forces.