

FACTSHEET

Higher Education

Estonia

Higher Education: Cycles and Qualifications

As a result of a major higher education reform and the restructuring of study programmes, the present system of higher education qualifications (degrees and diplomas) was introduced in the 2001/2002 academic year. The Estonian higher education system now comprises three main cycles. The National Higher Education Qualifications Framework was adopted on 18 December 2008.

The Estonian academic degree titles, their translations into English and abbreviations are stipulated by Government Regulation “Standard of Higher Education”.

Degree of *Bakalaureus*

The first cycle qualification obtained is the *Bakalaureus* (Bachelor). The nominal length of studies is predominantly 3 years and the workload is 180 ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) credits. In exceptional cases, the nominal length of studies extends to 4 years (240 ECTS credits). The thesis or the final examination should form no less than 5 ECTS credits of the total workload for the study programme.

The purpose of these studies is to increase the students’ level of general education, so that they will be able to acquire the basic knowledge and skills within their field of study, to obtain the competencies necessary for a master’s programme. The degree awarded at the bachelor’s level should also be relevant to the labour market at an appropriate level of qualification. All first cycle degrees give access to second cycle studies.

Professional higher education programmes

First cycle programmes are also provided in the professional higher education branch. Such programmes are provided by professional higher education institutions (*rakenduskõrgkool*) and universities. The purpose of these programmes is to acquire the competence necessary for working in the relevant profession or for continuing studies at the master’s level. The nominal length of studies is 3 to 4.5 years (180-270 ECTS credits). The thesis or the final examination should form no less than 5 ECTS credits.

Until 2018/2019 admission, the qualification awarded upon completion of a professional higher education programme was the *Rakenduskõrghariduse diplom*. As of 2019/2020 admission, students who have completed a programme are awarded the *Bakalaureusekraad* (Bachelor). The graduates of the professional higher education programme have an equal access to Master’s programmes.

Until 2016, some state vocational education institutions had the right to provide professional higher education programmes and award the *Rakenduskõrghariduse diplom*.

Estonian higher education institutions award the following Bachelor’s degrees:

Haridusteaduse bakalaureus – Bachelor of Arts in Education (BA);

Humanitaarteaduse bakalaureus – Bachelor of Arts in Humanities (BA);

Loodusteaduse bakalaureus – Bachelor of Science (BSc);

Põllumajandusteaduse bakalaureus – Bachelor of Science in Agriculture (BSc);

Meditšiiniteaduse bakalaureus – Bachelor of Medicine (BSc);

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Sotsiaalteaduse bakalaureus – Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences (BA);
Sportiteaduse bakalaureus – Bachelor of Arts in Sport (BA);
Sõjateaduse bakalaureus – Bachelor of Arts in Military Sciences (BA);
Tehnikateaduse bakalaureus – Bachelor of Science in Engineering (BSc);
Terviseteaduse bakalaureus – Bachelor of Science in Health Sciences (BSc).

The name of the study programme or the area of specialisation can be added, in brackets, to the degree title.

Degree of *Magister*

The second cycle degree in the Estonian higher education system is *Magister* (Master). Master's programme is devoted to in-depth preparation for the field of study and includes a narrow specialisation. It also prepares the students for independent work after graduation. The main purpose of such study programmes is to educate a specialist of profound professional knowledge.

The access requirement for master's study is a degree of *Bakalaureus*, a Diploma of Professional Higher Education or a corresponding foreign qualification. The nominal length of studies is 1 to 2 years (60-120 ECTS credits). The thesis or the final examination should form no less than 15 ECTS credits of the total credit requirement for the study programme.

Master's programmes are provided by universities and since 2004, also by professional higher education institutions. Until 2011, professional higher education institutions had to have a co-operation with a university to provide master's programmes (except in the fields of theology, national defence and public security).

Estonian higher education institutions award the following master's degrees:

Haridusteaduse magister – Master of Arts in Education (MA);
Humanitaarteaduse magister – Master of Arts in Humanities (MA);
Kunstide magister – Master of Arts (MA);
Loodusteaduse magister – Master of Science (MSc);
Õigusteaduse magister – Master of Arts in Law (MA);
Põllumajandusteaduse magister – Master of Science in Agriculture (MSc);
Sotsiaalteaduse magister – Master of Arts in Social Sciences (MA);
Sportiteaduse magister – Master of Arts in Sports (MA);
Sõjateaduse magister – Master of Arts in Military Science (BA);
Tehnikateaduse magister – Master of Science in Engineering (MSc);
Terviseteaduse magister – Master of Science in Health Sciences (MSc);
Usuteaduse magister – Master of Arts in Theology (MA);
Ärijuhtimise magister – Master in Business Administration (MBA).

The name of the study programme or the area of specialisation can be added, in brackets, to the degree title.

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Qualification of integrated long-cycle programmes

In addition to the two-cycle general structure, the programmes in the field of medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, veterinary medicine, architecture, civil engineering, and class-teacher training are one long-cycle studies.

The nominal length of programmes in medicine, and beginning in the 2002/2003 academic year, also in veterinary medicine, is 6 years (360 ECTS credits); in other fields mentioned above it is 5 years (300 ECTS credits). Such single long-cycle studies, called integrated bachelor-master studies, are based on an integrated programme which contains both basic studies and profound specialisation. Generally, the graduate of an integrated programme is awarded a degree of *Magister*, except in the fields of medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine, where the degrees awarded are *Arstikraad*, *Hambaarstikraad* and *Loomaarstikraad* respectively. The qualifications give access to doctoral programmes.

Persons who have completed an integrated long-cycle programme are awarded the following degrees:

Arstikraad – Degree in Medicine (MD);

Hambaarstikraad – Degree in Dentistry (DD);

Farmaatsiamagister – Master of Science in Pharmacy (MSc);

Loomaarstikraad – Degree in Veterinary Medicine (DVM);

Arhitektuurimagister – Master of Science in Architecture (MSc);

Haridusteaduse magister – Master of Arts in Education (MA);

Ehitusteaduste magister – Master of Science in Civil Engineering (MSc).

Degree of *Doktor*

Doctoral programmes represent the third cycle of higher education with the purpose of acquiring knowledge and skills necessary for independent research, development or professional creative work. The access requirement for doctoral studies is a degree of *Magister* or a corresponding qualification. The nominal length of doctoral studies is 3 to 4 years. *Doktor* is a research degree obtained after the completion and public defence of a dissertation (*doktoritöö*) – independent research or creative work.

Estonian universities award the following doctoral degree:

Filosoofiadoktor – Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), with an indication of the field of study or the area of specialisation.