

HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE IN LATVIA

Section 1) Types of programmes and higher education institutions (What kind of diplomas are offered and in which schools are they provided.

There are three levels of higher education programmes in Latvia — Bachelor, Master and Doctor. According to recent statistics¹ from 2013 there are 34 public institutions of higher education and 27 higher education institutions established by legal bodies. One can receive higher education in Latvia in 6 Universities, 30 Institutions of higher education and 25 Colleges. Universities and colleges implement academic and professional higher education programmes as well as scientific activities, research and artistic creativeness. Colleges provide first level professional higher education programmes. Colleges can act as colleges established by higher education institutions or as independent educational institutions.

More information in <http://izm.izm.gov.lv/education/education-system.html> and <http://izm.izm.gov.lv/education/higher-education.html>

Academic programmes leading to a bachelor's degree 160-180 ECTS

The duration of full-time studies is 6 - 8 semesters (3-4 years).

Academic programmes leading to a master degree 120 ECTS

The duration of full-time studies is 4 semesters (2 years) and requires at least 5 years total length of bachelor and master studies.

Professional programmes leading to a professional bachelor's degree 240 ECTS

The duration of full-time studies is 8 semesters (4 years).

Professional higher education programmes leading to a professional master's degree 60 - 150 ECTS

Duration of full-time studies is 2-5 semesters (1-2,5 years).

First-level professional higher education (college) programmes 120-180 ECTS

Second-level professional higher education programmes 60 ECTS

The degree of master or equivalent is required for admission to **doctoral studies**. The duration of doctoral studies is 3-4 years. (<http://www.studyinlatvia.lv/node/13>)

Section 2) National quality assurance system (a few words on national accreditation bodies and how they work (i.e. is there an accreditation body? What does it do?))

National Higher Education accreditation system has been established in 1995 and the Higher Education Quality Evaluation Centre" (HEQEC) has been established with responsibility to organize **accreditation procedure of study programmes and higher educational institutions**. Procedure included self-assessment and evaluation in place by a team of

¹ http://izm.izm.gov.lv/upload_file/Izglitiba/Augstaka_izglitiba/2014/Parskats_2013.pdf

independent experts (including experts from other countries). **Accreditation certificates after successful procedure were issued by the Ministry of Education and Science.**

This Centre² and all system was operational and worked well more than 15 years till changes in legislation introducing **accreditation of study directions** (covered by several similar study programmes) instead of accreditation of the particular study program. As a result since 22.03.2013 accreditation is transferred to the full responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science and its authorized body.

Section 3) How the national accreditation system works - of programmes (how does it evaluate, accredits and starts programmes (for the different degrees and for existing and new programmes)). How do these bodies interact with internal QA bodies

According to Government Regulation³ from 25.04.2013, **to start a new study programme HEI must apply for and receive a licence** issued by special committee established by the Ministry of Education and Science. Application must contain detailed information on the study programme, academic staff involved and other resources. This Licensing Committee is evaluating ability of HEI to implement the programme according to the established quality standards. **Not later than after 1.5 year from starting implementation of the study programme HEI must apply for Accreditation.** Just graduates of the accredited study programmes can be awarded with the State Approved Diploma.

According to Government Regulation⁴ from 25.09.2012 accreditation of the study programmes from particular study direction is responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science and its authorized body.

There is a list of 29 approved study directions in Latvia. The study direction No 17 is "Information technology, computers, electronics, telecommunications, computer science and computer control". At the Riga Technical University there is 31 study program (college, bachelor, master, doctoral) assigned to this study direction.

HEI is applying for accreditation of the particular study program (or several programs from the direction). All procedure and documentation is described in Regulation. It includes self-assessment report for the whole study direction (including all programs) and evaluation in place by a team of at least assigned experts. Based on evaluation report produced by expert team the Accreditation Committee assigned by the Ministry of Education and Science take a decision of accreditation of the set of particular programmes included in the study direction. Then HEI receives accreditation Certificate. **Certificate is valid for 6 years and then re-assessment with simplified procedure is required.**

Every year HEI must produce a self-assessment report of all accredited programs included in the study direction. These reports are used in the procedure of repeated accreditation after 6 years. Just one independent expert is selected for re-assessment of the study direction.

Besides licensing and accreditation committees there has been established the State Education Quality Service⁵ performing monitoring of the quality of education and providing support in the implementation of educational process. Final decision is taken by the Accreditation Committee.

Section 4) How the national accreditation system works - of institutions (how does it evaluate and accredits

² <http://www.aiknc.lv/en/index.php>

³ <http://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=256418>

⁴ <http://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=252142>

⁵ <http://ikvd.gov.lv/aboutus.html>

The decision of **accreditation of the university or college** are taken by the Council of Higher Education. The Council of Higher Education shall be an independent institution which develops the national strategy in higher education implements the cooperation between higher educational establishments state institutions and the general public in the development of higher education oversees the quality of higher education guarantees accepting of the best decisions in issues related to higher education. (http://www.aip.lv/eng_info.htm)

Section 5) Students and accreditation policy

5.1 Admission

Admission of students to study programs of Higher education is based on results of Centralized Examination covering all secondary educational institutions in Latvia. Only few institutions and study programs include some additional entrance examinations and tests.

5.2 Involvement in decision making

The students are involved in decision making at the faculty board level as well as at the level of the Senate of the Higher Education Institution. Students at the faculties elect their representatives and they represent the student body at the university Senate. University representatives constitute the National Council of Students which is the top representative body of the university students in Latvia.