

# Quality Assurance of Higher Education in Estonia

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# Estonia – some indicators



Population: 1,3 million

45 000 sq km

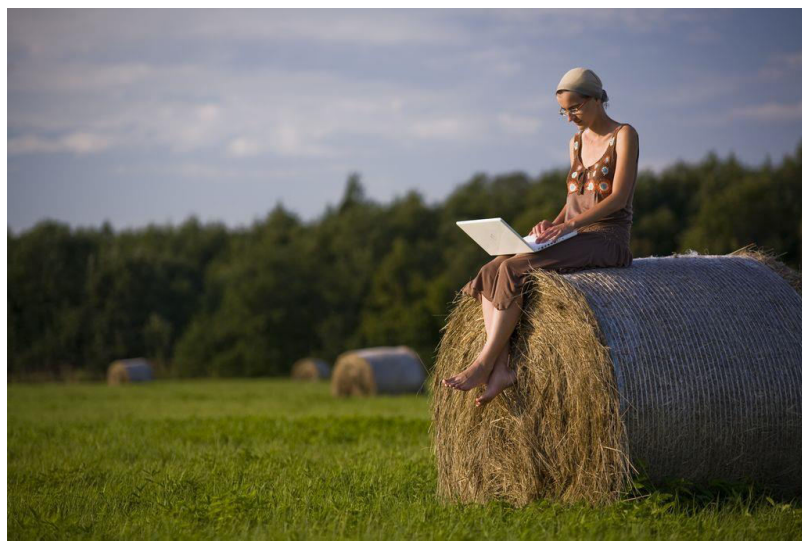
1500 islands

Forests 52,3 % of land area

Average monthly salary 1030 EUR

Unemployment rate 8,1 %

GDP per capita at current prices 18 415 mil EUR



# Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education

**EKKA**



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## Shared responsibilities for QA

The Government or MoE	Institutions	EKKA
<p>Granting the right to conduct studies in study programme groups, based on the results of the assessments of SPGs, carried out by EKKA, checking whether the minimum standards set in the law are met.</p> <p>Financing partly based on quality assessment results</p>	<p>Main responsibility for the quality and continuous improvement of the education provided.</p> <p>Strategic management (including quality management)</p> <p>Regular internal evaluation and benchmarking</p>	<p>Promoting the quality in cooperation with HE and VET institutions through external assessments.</p> <p>Institutional accreditation (IA)</p> <p>Quality assessment /Accreditation of study programme groups (SPG)</p> <p>Initial assessment of SPGs in HE</p>



EKKA's mission is,  
in cooperation with its partners,  
to promote quality in the field of education  
and thereby increase the competitiveness  
of the Estonian society.



## EKKA - Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency

### Eesti Kõrghariduse Kvaliteediagentuur

Admission valid until: 2018-03-31 (listed since 2013-10-23)

Based in\*: Estonia

Agency operates in\*\*: Estonia

Reports by the agency: <http://www.ekka.archimedes.ee/universities/quality-assessment-of-study-programme-groups/assessment-decisions-and-reports>

External review report: [EKKA External Review Report 2013.pdf](#)  
[2013\\_03\\_EKKA\\_ApprovalDecision.pdf](#)

# Higher Education in Estonia – some characteristics



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# ESTONIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

## **Doctoral programmes**

180-240 ECTS credits  
(3 to 4 years)

## **Integrated Bachelor's and Master's programmes**

300-360 ECTS or  
(5 to 6 years)

## **Master's programmes**

60-120 ECTS credits  
(1 to 2 years)

## **Bachelor's programmes**

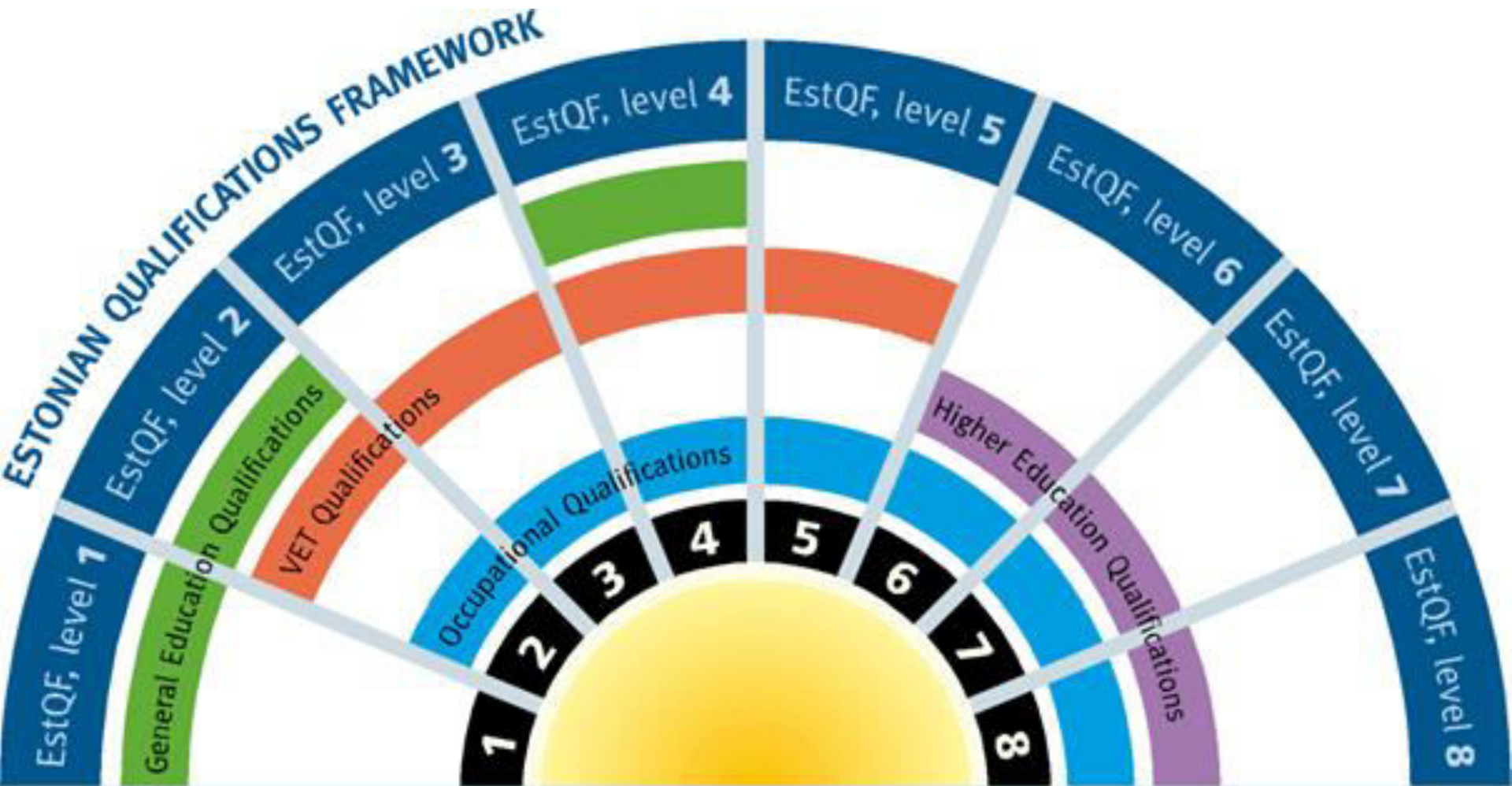
180-240 ECTS credits  
(3 to 4 years)

## **Professional higher education programmes**

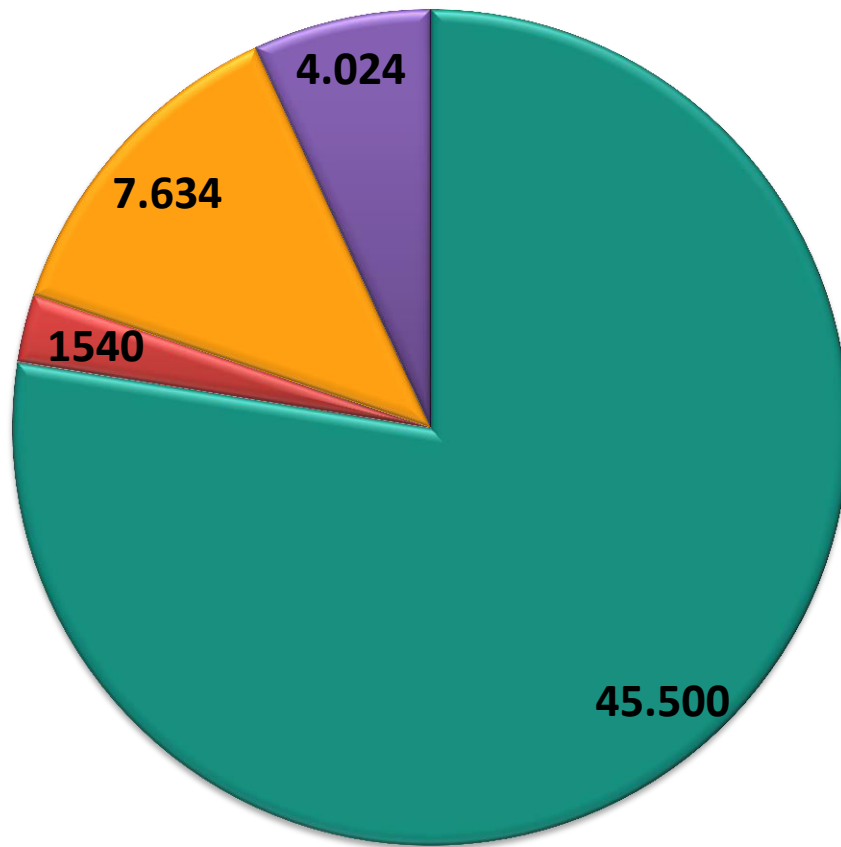
180-270 ECTS credits  
(3 to 4.5 years)



# Estonian Qualifications Framework



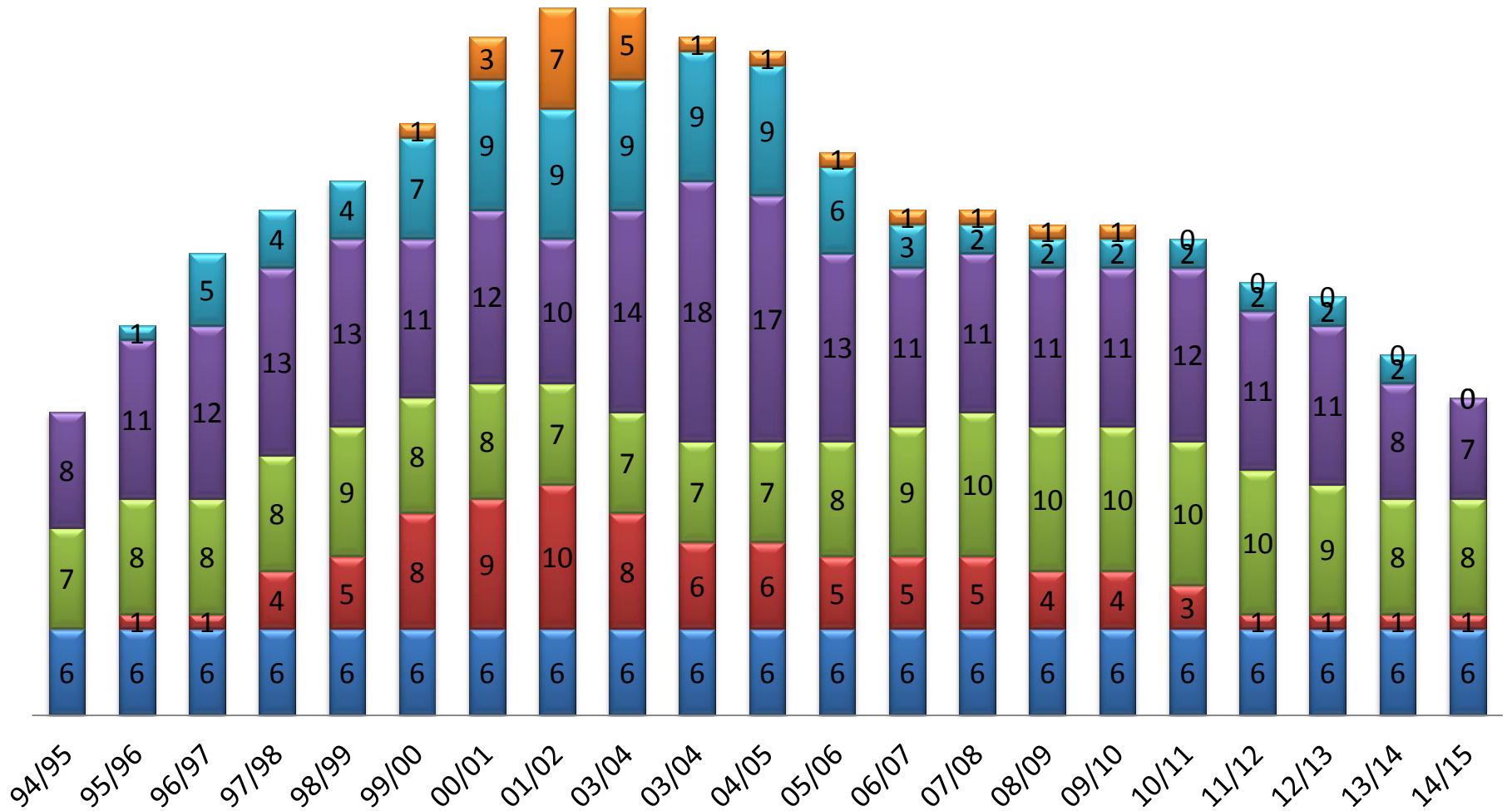
# Types of HEI-s and student numbers 2015



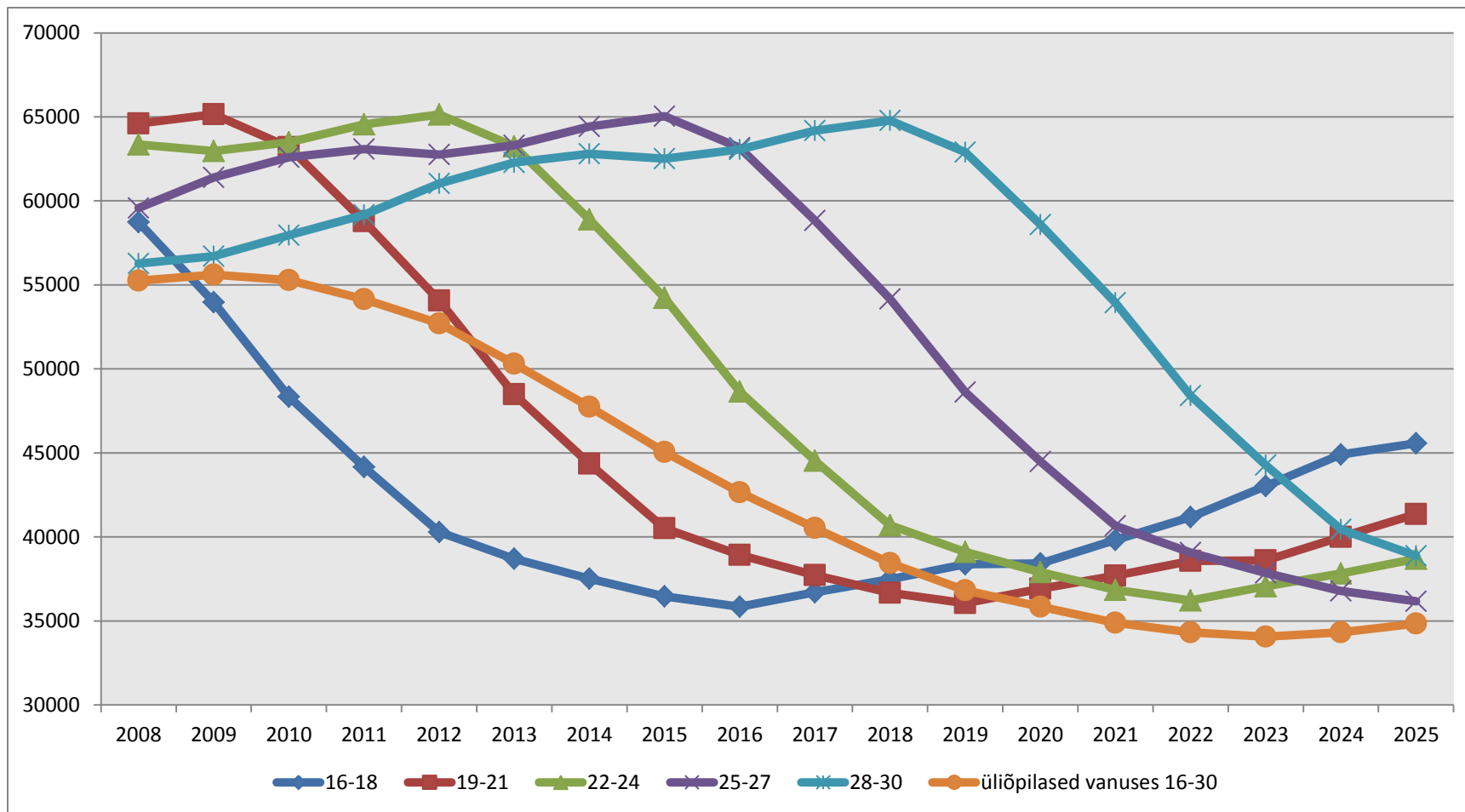
- 6 public universities
- 1 private university
- 8 state institutions of prof HE
- 7 private institutions of prof HE

# Higher Education Institutions in Estonia 1994-2015

- Public University
- Private University
- State Prof HEI
- Private Prof HEI
- State VET Institutions
- Private VET Institution



# Inhabitants of Estonia aged 16-30, and the estimated number of students



# Higher Education Quality Assurance System in Estonia



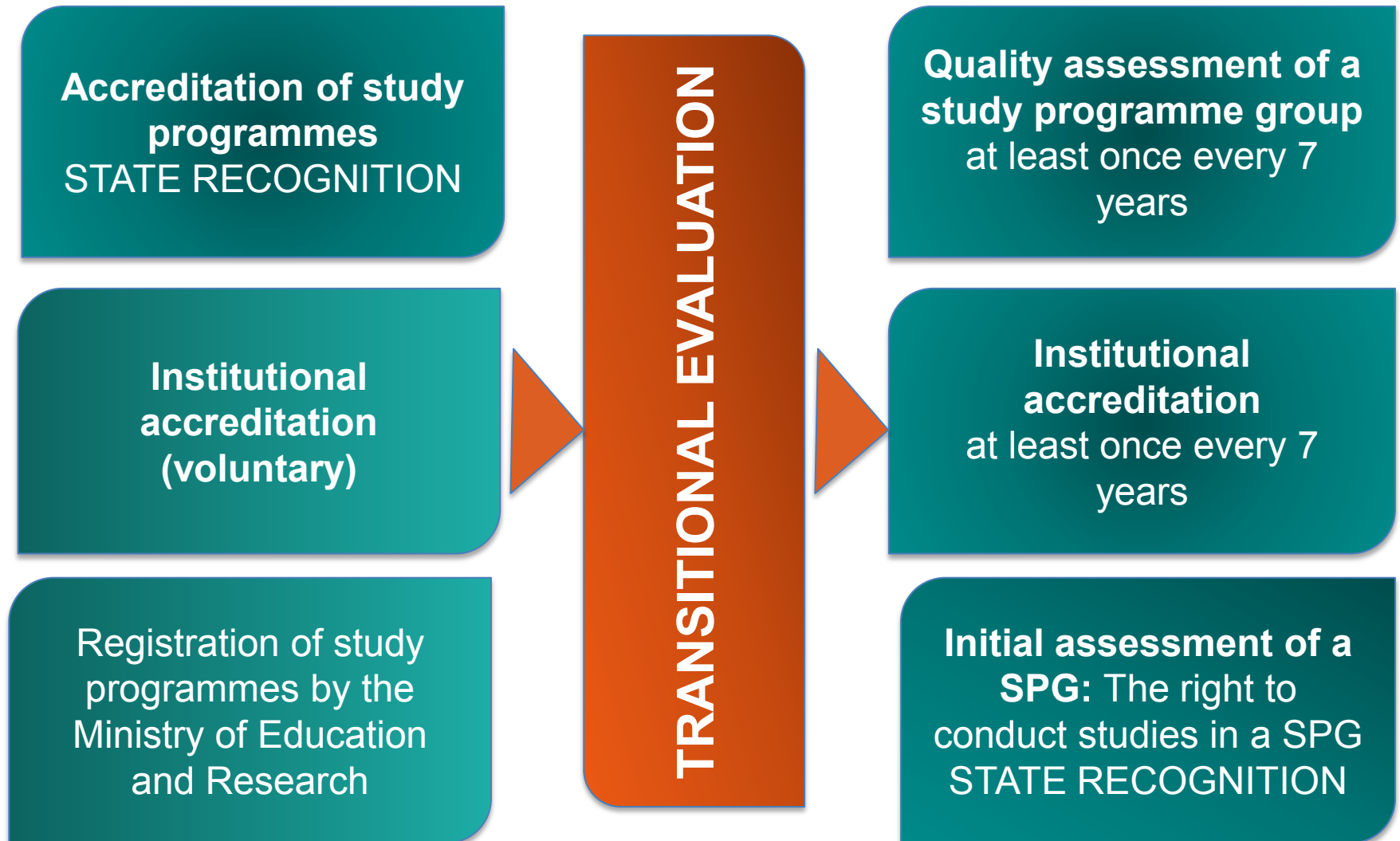
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# Higher Education Quality Assessment System in Estonia

1997-2009

2009-2011

2011 ...



# Accreditation of study programmes



- Every single study programme had to be accredited in order to issue state recognised diplomas to graduates
- International panel members only
- Accreditation decisions – full accreditation (7), conditional accreditation (3), no accreditation – were proposals to the minister of education
- Minister had the right to make another decision or order a re-accreditation
- Accreditation of a programme after students had passed at least 2/3 of the study period

# Why to change the system?



- The existing system was resource and time consuming for both higher education institutions (HEIs) and the state.
- Accreditation of curricula did not have much impact on organisational learning and development of the university as an organisation.
- The focus of accreditations was too broad. They were simultaneously focused on controlling and on giving recommendations for further development.
- In the case of a negative decision, the result of the accreditation could be closure of the study programme, thus the honesty in analysing development needs was strongly challenged.

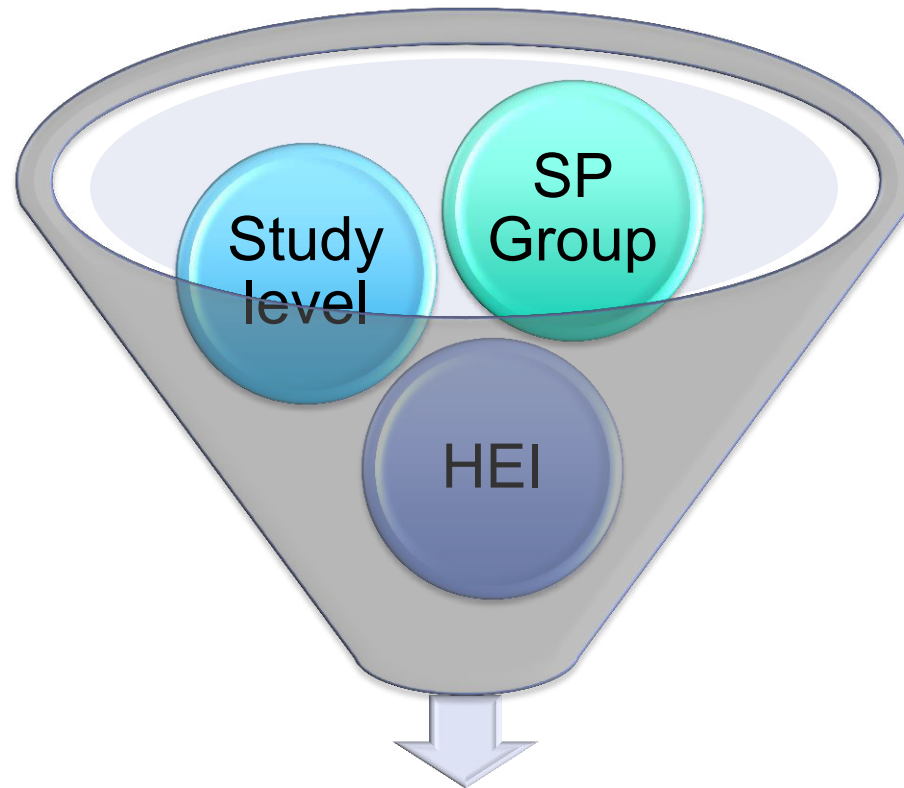


# Accountability vs Enhancement



Focused on accountability	Focused on enhancement
<u>Transitional evaluation and re-evaluation</u>	<u>Institutional accreditation</u>
<u>Initial assessment of a study programme group</u>	<u>Quality assessment of study programme groups</u>
Assessment of joint programmes	

# Study programme group



**Assessment unit**

**e.g. BA study programmes in social sciences in University Y**

# Study programme groups in HE

1. **Teacher training and educational science**
2. **Humanities** (*excluding theology*)
3. **Languages and cultures**
4. **Arts** (*fine arts, graphic and audiovisual arts, design, craft skills*)
5. **Performing arts**
6. **Theology**
7. **Journalism and information**
8. **Psychology**
9. **Social science** (*excluding psychology*)
10. **Law**
11. **Business and administration**
12. **Social services**
13. **Personal services**
14. **National defence**
15. **Public security**
16. **Life sciences**
17. **Environmental protection**
18. **Physical sciences**
19. **Informatics and information technology**
20. **Mathematics and statistics**
21. **Architecture and building**
22. **Engineering, manufacturing and technology**
23. **Agriculture, forestry and fishery**
24. **Veterinary**
25. **Medicine** (*including dental services*)
26. **Health care**
27. **Sports**
28. **Transport services**

# Transitional evaluation in figures



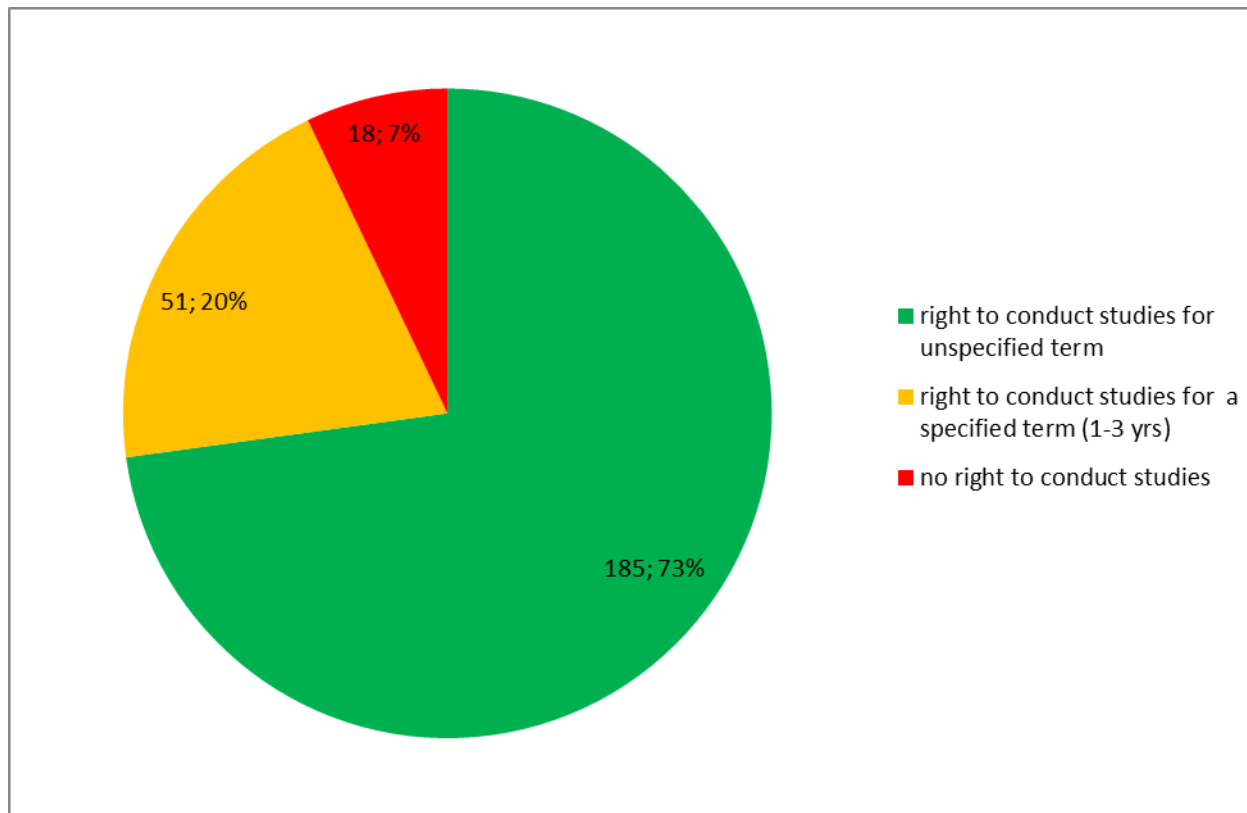
- conducted during the period from autumn 2009 to autumn 2011
- 33 higher education institutions participated
- 28 study programme groups (670 study programmes) were evaluated
- 158 Estonian experts took part in the evaluation process
- 254 assessments – 130 standard proceedings and 124 simplified
- Results: 185 open-ended education licences, 51 fixed-term education licences, 18 negative decisions
- cost of 640,000 euros that counts for 2520 euros per proceeding and 955 euros per study programme
- 89% of the representatives of HEI agreed that TE has increased the reliability of Estonian higher education

# What was evaluated?



- **the quality of conducting studies** – the learning outcomes, study programme development, organization of work practice, qualifications of the teaching staff, student counselling, etc.
- **the resources necessary for conducting studies** – the availability of ordinary qualified teaching staff, adequacy of financial resources, suitability of infrastructure for the needs of the study programme group, etc.
- **the sustainability of conducting studies** – trends in the number of students and graduates and the finances, planning for development, etc.

# Decisions of TE



# Purpose and assessment areas of IA



The purpose of IA is to support the development of strategic management and culture of quality in HEIs, inform stakeholders of the outcomes of the main activities thereof, and enhance the reliability and competitiveness of Estonian higher education.

Areas of assessment:

- organisational management and performance
- teaching and learning
- research, development and/or other creative activity
- service to society.

# Quality assessment of SPG



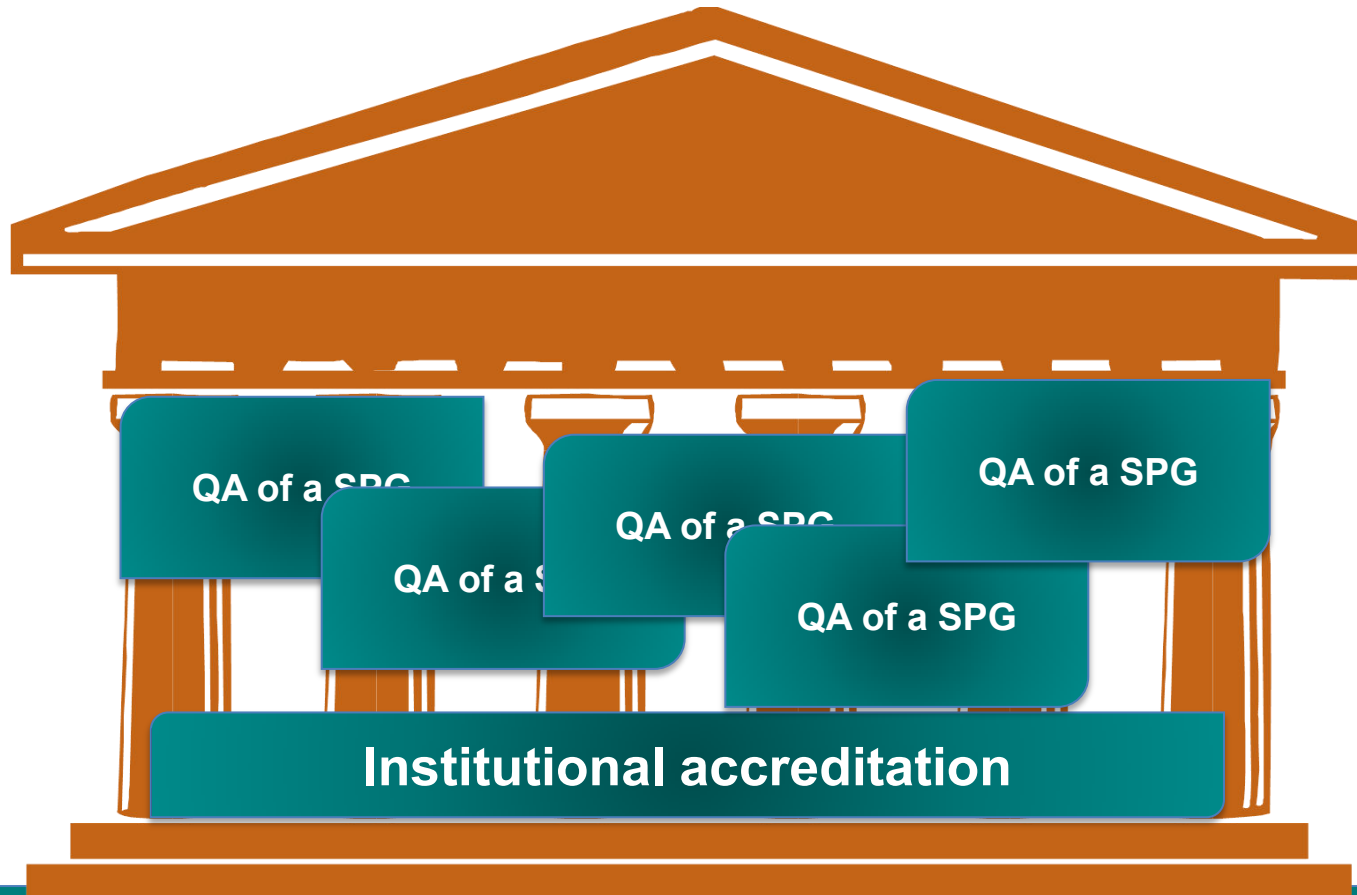
Quality assessment of SPGs focuses on study programmes, the content and organisation of studies and on instruction-related development activities within a study programme group. These aspects are not evaluated in the course of institutional accreditation.

Assessment areas:

- study programme and study programme development
- resources
- teaching and learning
- teaching staff
- students



# External Quality Assurance 2014



Initial assessment → Right to conduct studies in a study program group

# Assessment of study programme groups and/or study programmes



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# Quality assessment of SPG



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Assessment areas:

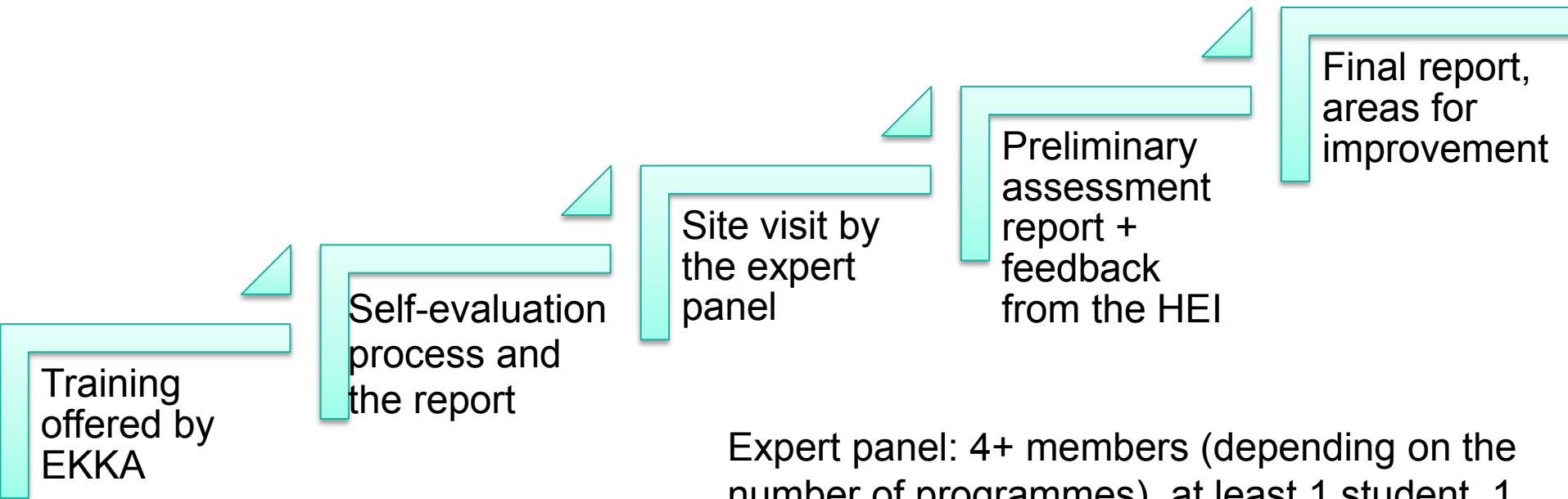
- study programme and study programme development
- resources
- teaching and learning
- teaching staff
- students

# Main purpose of the QA of SPG



- Quality assessment of a SPG involves the assessment of the **conformity** of study programmes and the studies and development activities that take place on their basis to legislation, national and international standards and developmental directions  
**with the purpose** of supporting the self-development of HEI and providing recommendations to improve the quality of studies.
- QA of SPG is not followed by sanctions – expert assessments should be considered recommendations.

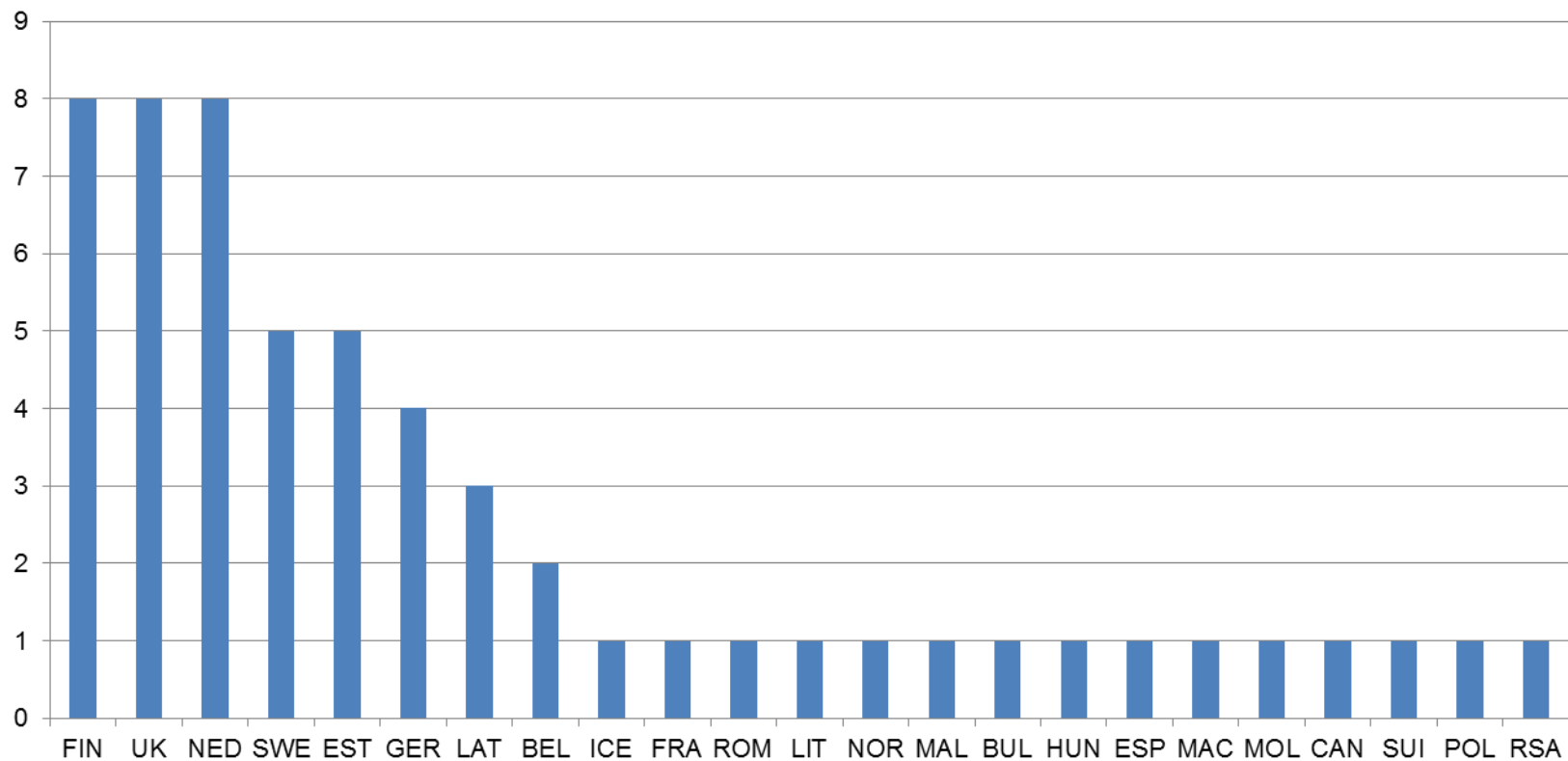
# Evaluation model



Expert panel: 4+ members (depending on the number of programmes), at least 1 student, 1 employer

Supported by the assessment coordinator

# Experts in 2015 – 58 experts from 23 countries



# QA of SPG: decision of EKKA QAC and their impacts



- EKKA QAC makes the final decision: next assessment will take place in 7 years or less.

<http://ekka.archimedes.ee/en/universities/quality-assessment-study-programme-group/assessment-decisions-reports/>

- EKKA carries out follow-up activities (seminar, back-report)
- MoE takes the results of QA into account by financing HEIs, making decisions for further development
- Substantial shortcomings – MoE may start the process of delicensing

# QA of SPG: decision of EKKA QAC and their impacts



- HEI is the main target group – improve the quality of the study programme group
- Main impact – through the involvement of academic staff and students in self-evaluation process and useful external feedback from experts



# 1. Study programme and study programme development



- The content and structure of the study programme are consistent with its objectives and learning outcomes.
- Different parts of the study programme form a coherent whole.
- The launch or development of the study programme is based on legislation, development plans, analyses (including labour market and feasibility analyses), and professional standards; and the best quality is being strived for.
- The study programme development takes into account feedback from students, employers, alumni and other stakeholders.

## 2. Resources



- Resources (teaching and learning environments, teaching materials, teaching aids and equipment, premises, financial resources) support the achievement of objectives in the study programme.
- There is a sufficient supply of textbooks and other teaching aids and they are available.
- Adequacy of resources is ensured for changing circumstances (change in student numbers, etc.).
- Resource development is sustainable.

### 3. Teaching and learning



- Modern teaching methods are used in teaching.
- The process of teaching and learning is flexible, takes into account the specifics of the form of study and facilitates the achievement of learning outcomes.
- The process of teaching and learning supports learning mobility.
- Assessment of learning outcomes (including recognition of prior learning and work experiences) is relevant, transparent and objective.

## 4. Teaching staff



- Teaching staff with adequate qualifications exist to achieve the objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme, and to ensure quality and sustainability of the teaching and learning.
- Overall student assessment on teaching skills of the teaching staff is positive.
- Qualified foreign and visiting teaching staff and practitioners participate in teaching within the study programme.
- The teaching staff is engaged in professional and teaching-skills development.

## 5. Students



- Student places are filled with motivated and capable students.
- Dropout rates are low, the proportion of students graduating within the standard period of study is large.
- Students study as foreign or visiting students at other Estonian and/or foreign higher education institutions as part of their studies.
- Employment rate of alumni is high.
- Alumni and their employers are satisfied with their professional preparation and social competencies.



The panel is asked to compile an assessment report which:

- presents a concise analysis on **the study programme group** of the higher education institution and the **recommendations** for improving the quality of instruction;
- points out **the strengths** and **areas for improvement of study programmes** submitted to the assessment by five assessment areas preferably in international comparison.



We expect the panel to give recommendations how to

- improve the quality of teaching and student learning;
- improve international competitiveness of graduates;
- improve interaction inside and between universities and companies;
- attract more and better local and international students.

# Timetable for experts: an example



- November 30 – Training/Introductory meeting at EKKA
- December 1 – December 4 – visit to the Tallinn University of Technology
- December 4 – writing of expert report at EKKA
- December 4 – January 8 – writing of expert report
- January 29 – universities comment to the report
- February 5 – Final report



# External evaluation means for me ... 1



- **A director:** *A lot of **extra work** and analysis. A lot of **stress**. Forces you to assess realities objectively, which is good.*
- **A teaching staff member:** *Compiling a lot of **bureaucratic documents**, conducting sometimes **pointless analyses**, producing an immense amount of text. Sometimes also content discussion and **team work** (to the effect of "fighting a common enemy"). **Slight frustration**, because a lot of work is done but it has little impact on our everyday work and is not paid for separately. There are not enough explanations of why another evaluation is coming up and what it's good for...*

# External evaluation means for me ... 2



- **A researcher:** *A thorough and **honest overview of my work** and activities from a different angle from everyday feedback.*
- **A researcher:** *It mainly means **stressing external indicators** (the magic of big numbers).*
- **An administrative staff member:** ***Some additional tasks** in helping to prepare for evaluation.*

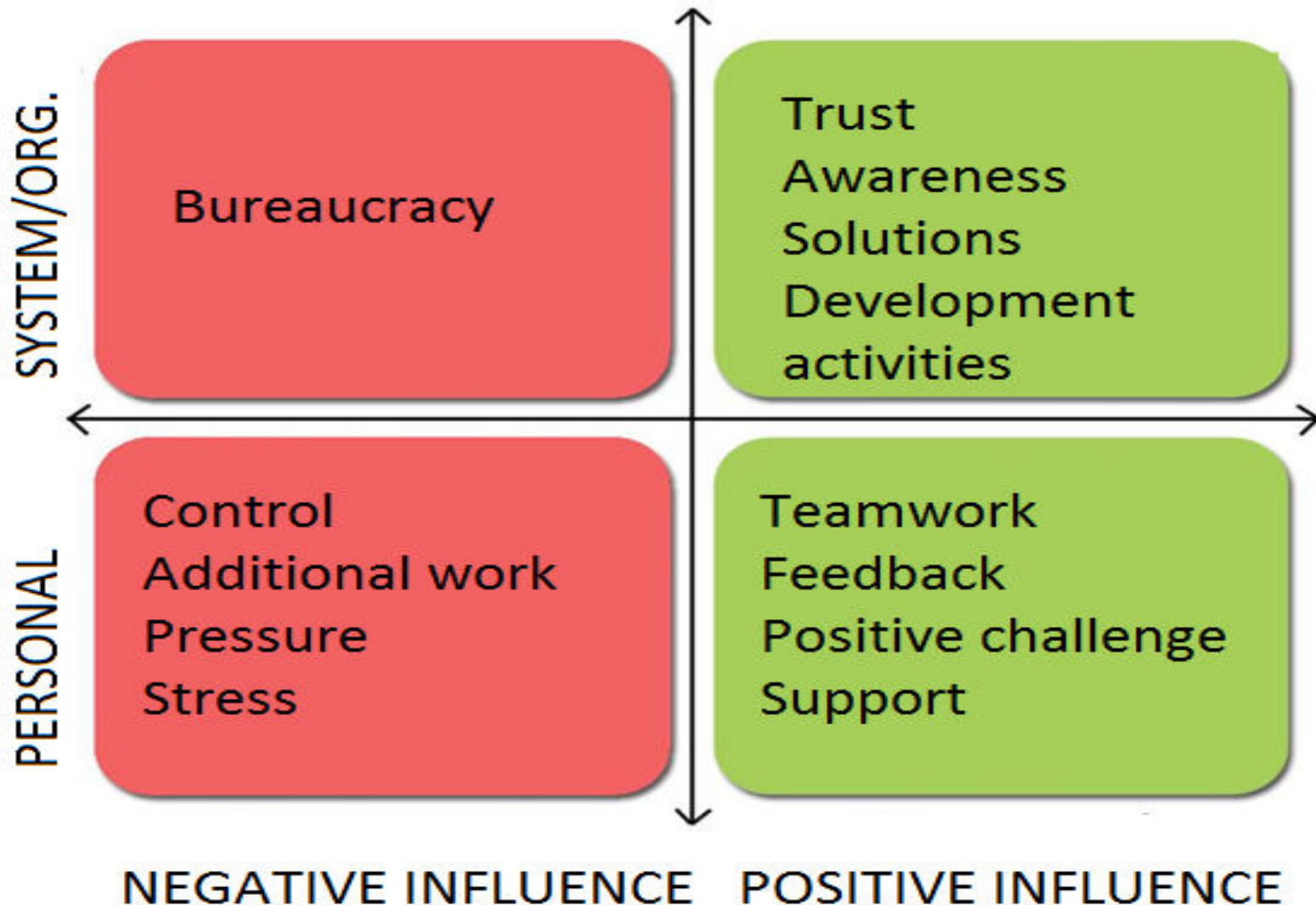


# External evaluation has an impact on ...



- **A director:** *Consolidating staff around a common goal and analysing what's been done supports **increasing and maintaining quality**.*
- **A teaching staff member:** *External evaluation of higher education institutions **forces them to critically analyse** their activities and find ways of making them more efficient.*
- **An administrative worker:** *Primarily **the internal climate** and structure of the organisation, but hopefully the quality of Estonian education and research activities in the long run.*

# Organisation vs individual: the perceived impact of external evaluation



# Collegial Learning!

[www.ekka.eu](http://www.ekka.eu)

