Rakenduskõrgkoolide Rektorite Nõukogu

Estonian Rectors' Conference of Universities of Applied Sciences

PROFESSIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION IN 2035

Vision Document

Estonian Rectors' Conference of Universities of Applied Sciences

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The current Vision Document was compiled from April to December 2019 by the members of the Estonian Rectors' Conference of Universities of Applied Sciences: Ulla Preeden, Ülle Ernits, Helle Noorväli, Enno Lend, Mait Rungi, Enno Mõts, Vallo Nuust, Marek Link, Jaanus Jakimenko, Illari Lään and Jana Praun, the member of the board of the Estonian Rectors' Conference of Universities of Applied Sciences. We would also like to thank the employees of the higher education department of the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, and the participants of the Vision Day on October 22, 2019 at the Estonian Aviation Academy who contributed to the Vision Document.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education and the future of higher education is a widely discussed topic in Estonia at the moment. Vision documents, prognoses, development documents and education strategies are being compiled with a purpose to enhance the living standard of the Estonian people and to value (higher) education. Since the beginning of 1990s, when the development of professional higher education institutions started in Estonia and the Estonian Rectors' Conference of Universities of Applied Sciences (hereinafter RCUAS) was founded, the rectors of the universities of applied sciences have continuously dealt with the development of high-quality applied higher education that meets the needs of society, and with the development of education policies. For this, experience has been acquired from study trips to other European countries and from the conferences, seminars and projects organized by EURASHE (*European Association of Institutions in Higher Education* https://www.eurashe.eu).

The changes of the last 15 years on the higher education landscape have been more rapid than the changes of the previous 50 years combined. Student-centred learning pathways designed according to individual development and needs are becoming more and more important, and in the future, it is probable that success will be measured rather by general skills and knowledge. It is important to understand, adapt and be ready for the vast technological changes, changes in acquired skills, and for the constant need for retraining. Important questions have to be answered: what is the purpose and the volume of applied higher education offered in Estonia? How to plan the offer of applied higher education in Estonia? How to guarantee the necessary resources for a sustainable and high-quality applied higher education in Estonia?

1. General data

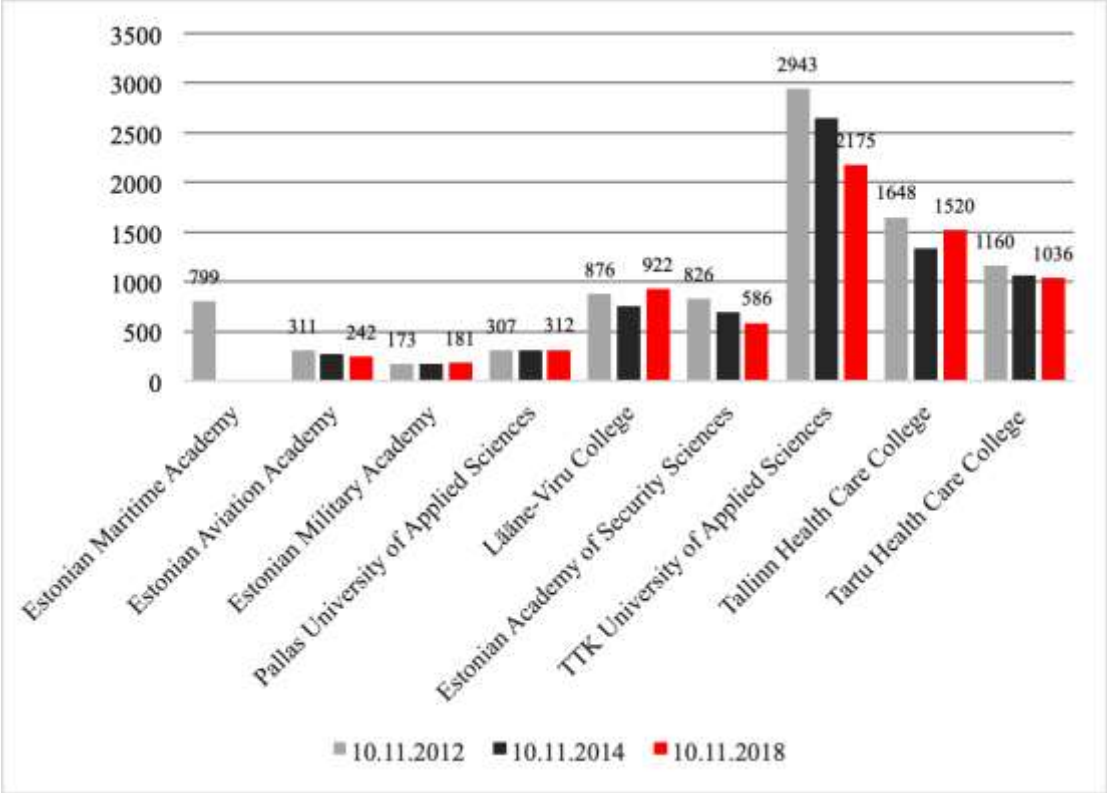
1.1. General data and the main factors influencing applied higher education

The current report aims to look at what has happened in recent years and what have we accomplished. We are also about to analyse the development trends of higher education, the questions concerning the funding of higher education, and the role of applied higher education and the institutions of applied higher education in the Estonian higher education landscape.

In 2014, the Estonian Rectors' Conference of Universities of Applied Sciences presented a road map for applied higher education that included a vision for 2020 (https://www.tktk.ee/wp-content/uploads/RKRN-teekaart-21märts2014.pdf). Most of the numerical data presented in the current Vision Document in comparison with 2018 data is from 2012 and 2014 (the year the financing of higher education institutions was changed), as presented in the road map. In 2014, the Estonian Rectors' Conference of Universities of Applied Sciences had 12 members, and 14,000 students studied at the Estonian universities of applied sciences.

In 2018, ca 11,000 students studied at the Estonian universities of applied sciences, and the RCUAS had 9 members (starting from September 1st, 2019, RCUAS has eight members). There are seven state universities of applied sciences in Estonia (all are members of the RCUAS), and five private universities of applied sciences (Estonian Entrepreneurship University of Applied Sciences being a member of

RCUAS). Currently 8,545 students are studying at the state universities of applied sciences (Graph 1).



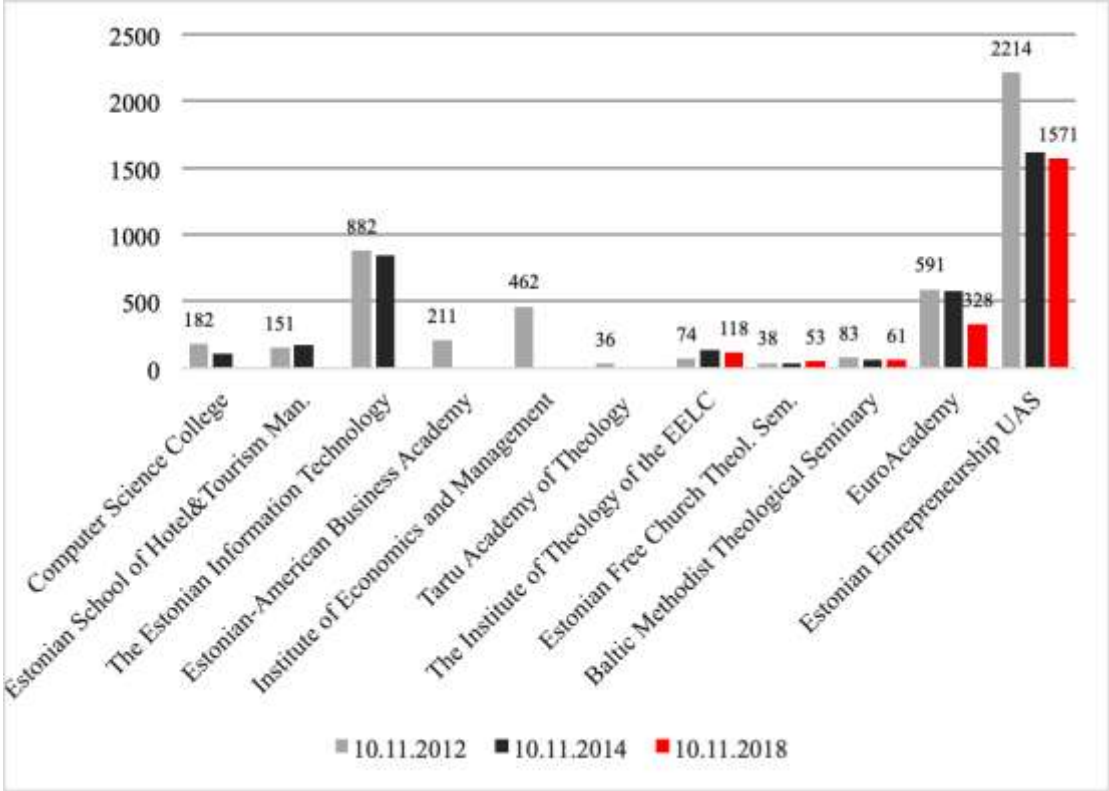
Graph 1. Number of students at the state professional higher education institutions in 2012-2018 (data from HaridusSilm https://www.haridussilm.ee/).

The number of students at the private universities of applied sciences in 2018 was 2,131 (Graph 2). In addition to this, applied higher education can be acquired at the colleges of the University of Tartu, Estonian University of Life Sciences, Tallinn University and Tallinn University of Technology (TalTech), where the total number of students studying in applied higher education curricula in 2018/2019 was 4,044 (data from HaridusSilm). When in average, the number of students in public state universities has decreased by 22% (in 2014/2015 there were 42,205 students and in 2018/2019, 35,343 students), then the number of students in state professional higher education institutions has been relatively stable and has decreased only by 4% (in 2014/2015, 7,259 students and in 2018/2019, 6,974 students; data from HaridusSilm).

The most significant changes that have influenced the activities of higher education institutions

Updating the higher education legislation: in 2016, the modernization of the Estonian higher education legislation began (https://haridusseadustik.wordpress.com/korgharidusseadustik/). The process involved the universities, universities of applied sciences, research and development institutions, the Federation of Estonian Student Unions, Universities Estonia, Estonian Rectors' Conference of Universities of Applied Sciences, organisations representing employers, and education-related competence centres such as the Estonian ENIC/NARIC, Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education and the Estonian Research Council. In the process of modernisation, the legislative acts

concerning higher education were reorganised. However, the main principles of the higher education system such as free higher education, the autonomy of higher education institutions and the tertiary system were not changed.



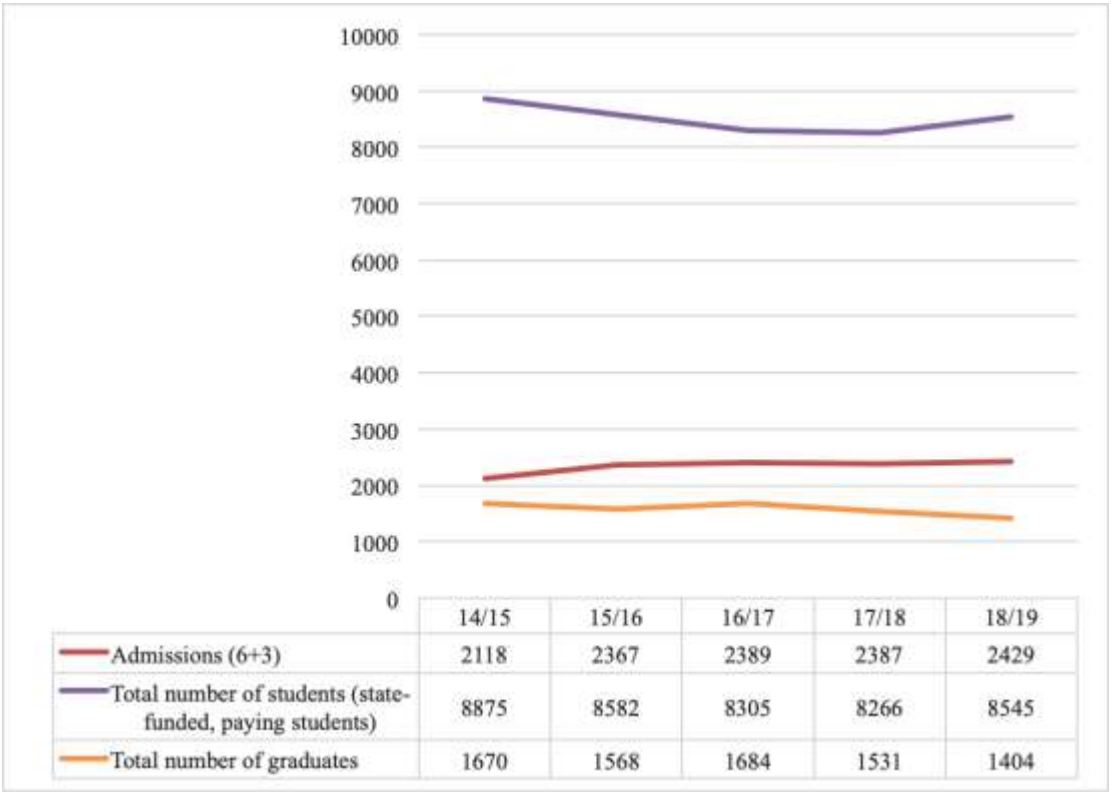
Graph 2. Number of students in private professional higher education institutions in 2012-2018 (data from HaridusSilm).

On September 1, 2019, The Higher Education Act took into force (https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/529082019022/consolide). The most significant change for the universities of applied sciences is that the students accepted in 2019/2020 will get a bachelor's degree at graduation. However, the requirement of practical training will not change – in applied higher education, practical training must form at least 15% of the curriculum. The specialties of applied higher education are tightly connected to professional standards, which ensures that, in addition to overall knowledge competences, the students of applied higher education shall acquire professional skills needed for working in a certain profession.

The main goal for implementing free state higher education through the higher education reform in 2013 was to ensure equal access to higher education, to make higher education sector less fragmented and to minimize the doubling of curricula. The most significant and tangible change for universities and higher education institutions was that the intake of paying students was no longer allowed. Partially, the losing of paying students was compensated to higher education institutions, but not to the full extent. The effect of losing paying students and getting the state compensation varied a lot in different institutions. Financially, the institutions who bore the biggest losses were the ones where the number of paying students was higher. The actual effect of free state higher education was twofold: financial, and expressed by students' learning behaviour: many students decided to interrupt their studies and apply for a state-paid student place. Higher education institutions had to

start dealing with drop-out events, and, due to the principles of the new financing system, with the negative relation between “input” and “output”.

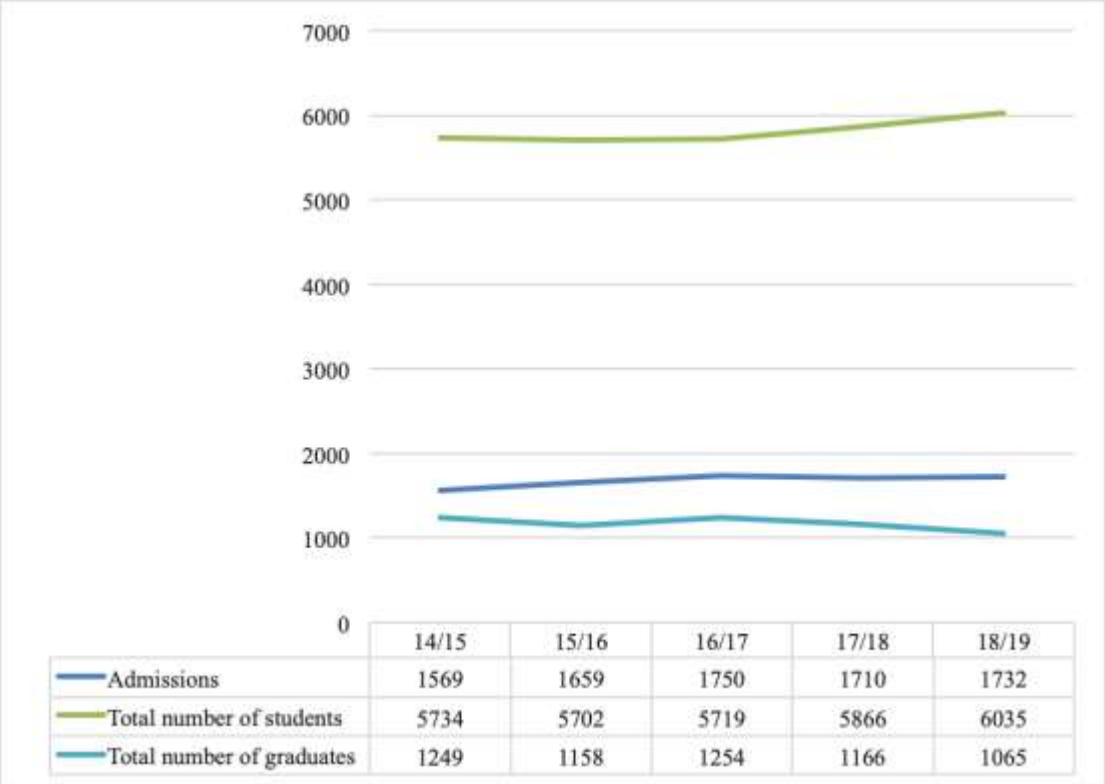
For analysing the effects of the reform to the key performance indicators of the universities of applied sciences, we divided them in two groups: the institutions governed by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research (6), and the universities of applied sciences belonging to the RCUAS (6+3) – the abovementioned plus the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, the Estonian Military Academy and the Estonian Entrepreneurship University of Applied Sciences.



	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19
Admissions (6+3)	2118	2367	2389	2387	2429
Total number of students (state-funded, paying students)	8875	8582	8305	8266	8545
Total number of graduates	1670	1568	1684	1531	1404

Graph 3. The key performance indicators of the members of RCUAS in 2014-2018.

The cumulated number of admissions of the universities of applied sciences belonging to RCUAS during the analysed period increased by 14.7%, and the general number of students decreased by 3.7%. The constant decrease of students lasted until the academic year 2017/2018. Last academic year, the general number of students started to increase. However, the number of graduates has dropped by 18.9%. The number of graduates during the analysed period was mainly influenced by the constant decrease of paying graduates (the last admission of paying students was in 2012/2013).



	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19
Admissions	1569	1659	1750	1710	1732
Total number of students	5734	5702	5719	5866	6035
Total number of graduates	1249	1158	1254	1166	1065

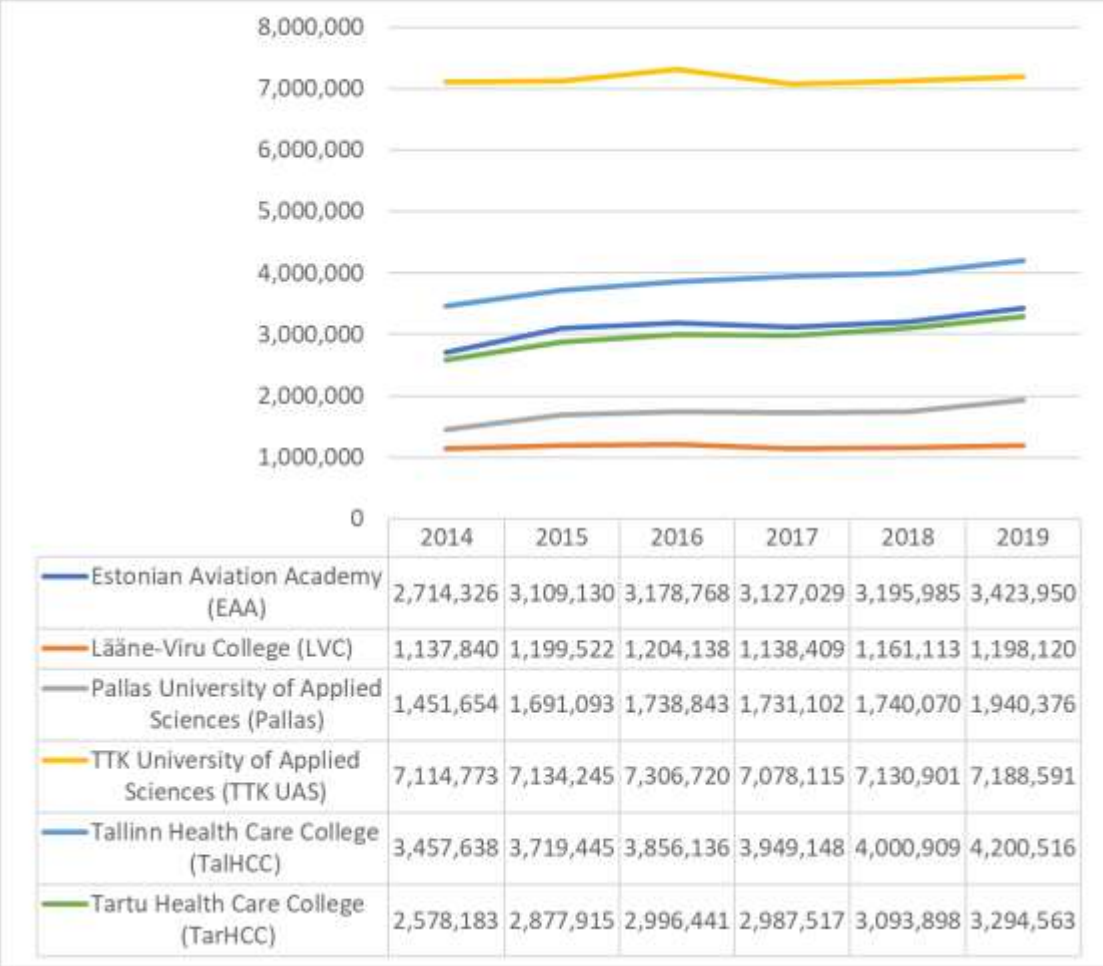
Graph 4. The key performance indicators of the universities of applied sciences governed by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research in 2014-2018.

The number of admissions of the six universities of applied sciences has grown by 10.4% on the given period, the general number of students has increased by 5.2%, and the number of graduates has decreased by 14.7%. It is important to point out that in the academic year 2014/2015, 659 students had to reimburse study costs (as they failed to reach the full study load and were studying part-time), of them 468 (71%) being the students of TTK University of Applied Sciences. In the end of the period, 172 students reimbursed their study costs (80.1% being the students of TTK University of Applied Sciences). The study behaviour of paying students had an inevitable effect on the number of graduates.

The principles of funding in higher education

In 2017, the new operational support model was implemented in Estonia. The model has two components – baseline funding and the changeable performance funding based on key performance indicators. The principles of the operational support are similar to universities of applied sciences and universities (except for doctoral studies, research funding, etc.). With the new financing model that took into force on January 1, 2017, the obligation of annual reports that was connected to annual contracts was discarded. The new model introduced 3-year administration contracts for public state universities and activity support directives for state universities of applied sciences. Six key performance indicators were determined. The indicator with the highest value is the share of students graduating with nominal time (NOM+1 or NOM+2) (https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/uus_rahastamismudel_0.jpg). The other key performance indicators are: share of graduates in employment, share of students participating in short term mobility (since 2019, also in long term mobility), share of enrolled international students, share of private funding and the operation of a higher education institution in their area of responsibility.

Due to the reform, comparing the data from the period of the beginning of the higher education reform with today's data in the context of higher education funding is not entirely adequate, as in addition to the changes in funding, the study behaviour of students has changed considerably during this time, and the higher education institutions have thoroughly analysed their principles of operation. Therefore, the comparison of the post-reform data of admission, student and graduate numbers, taught credit points and passed credit points to pervious data needs a detailed analysis that is not possible in the scope of the current Vision Document. For example, the higher education institutions are still looking for the ultimate balance between the demand of graduates from enterprises (the need of specialists), the reasonable relation of admissions and graduates, and the key performance indicators of the operational support calculation model.



	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Estonian Aviation Academy (EAA)	2,714,326	3,109,130	3,178,768	3,127,029	3,195,985	3,423,950
Lääne-Viru College (LVC)	1,137,840	1,199,522	1,204,138	1,138,409	1,161,113	1,198,120
Pallas University of Applied Sciences (Pallas)	1,451,654	1,691,093	1,738,843	1,731,102	1,740,070	1,940,376
TTK University of Applied Sciences (TTK UAS)	7,114,773	7,134,245	7,306,720	7,078,115	7,130,901	7,188,591
Tallinn Health Care College (TalHCC)	3,457,638	3,719,445	3,856,136	3,949,148	4,000,909	4,200,516
Tartu Health Care College (TarHCC)	2,578,183	2,877,915	2,996,441	2,987,517	3,093,898	3,294,563

Graph 5. The dynamics of operational support in 2014-2019, in Euros.

The biggest increase of operational support was achieved by Pallas University of Applied Sciences (33.4%), Tartu Health Care College (27.8%) and the Estonian Aviation Academy (26.1%). The operational support increased the least in TTK University of Applied Sciences (by 1%) and in Lääne-Viru College (by 5.6%). When looking at the cost of a student place at the professional higher education institutions governed by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research in 2018/2019, the most expensive student place – 14,200 euros – was in the Estonian Aviation Academy, and the least expensive – 1,340 euros – in Lääne-Viru College. As the cost of a student place in the Estonian Aviation Academy differs considerably from others, we decided

to analyse the dynamics of the cost of student places based on five universities of applied sciences.

In conclusion, we can say that the direct impact of the development gap in operational support is expressed in the fall of competitiveness of the employees' salaries. As the share of staff costs in the budget of universities of applied sciences is ca. 65-80%, we can say that the maximum capacity of staff costs has already been reached in most institutions. The increase of average salary in Estonia between 2014-2019 has been 44% (data from Statistic Estonia: https://www.stat.ee/stat-keskmine-brutokuupalk) and the consumer price index has risen by 10% (Statistics Estonia: https://www.stat.ee/stat-tarbijahinnaindeksi-muutus). Compared to the increase of the cost of a student place being only 2.5% (Table 1), it is clear this is not enough for maintaining the competitiveness of staff costs.

Table 1. The average cost of a student place based on the data of five universities of applied sciences governed by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, in Euros.

Academic year	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019
Average cost of student place	2,883	3,052	3,127	2,997	2,956

1.2. Current situation of universities of applied sciences

Strengths

One of the strengths of professional higher education institutions is the quick implementation of changes in the world of work to the academics and curriculum development. In addition, the flexibility of professional higher education institutions is expressed by their willingness to open study groups near the employers' locations to ensure needs-based regional education and the recognition of employers' needs. This is enhanced by the support and feedback from the employers and their will to value graduates on different levels, e.g. specialists with professional diploma.

Another strength of universities of applied sciences is the distribution of the fields of education – every institution has its clear role, which helps to avoid the doubling of curricula and train employees that are needed by the state. As most of the universities of applied sciences are state-owned, the state can determine the student places according to the needs of the world of work. This gives the state the possibility to govern the universities of applied sciences purposefully. However, the clear division of fields of education can also be seen as a weakness, because, for example, there is no input from the Ministry of Culture for educating cultural workers nor from the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications for educating engineers and technical workers. Other areas such as health care and aviation have a clear public procurement. However, in case of health care, the ministry that gives the main strategic input to the public procurement is the Ministry of Social Affairs, but the ministry is not contributing to the financing of health care education.

In conclusion, we can say that the success factors of professional higher education institutions are:

- Curricula and learning outcomes that are dynamically aligned with the world of work, vocational standards and with the needs of enterprises and professional associations;
- The profile of teachers/lecturers – the teachers/lecturers of universities of applied sciences have professional experience with skills and potential for research and development activities;
- Learning environment – universities of applied sciences have the infrastructure that supports the acquiring of skills, knowledge and experience, and participation in research and development activities. Practical training is considered a supervised purposeful activity in a real working environment. Before entering the real working environment, students pass simulation trainings;
- Applied research and product development projects have become an integral part of the learning process.

Weaknesses

- Compared to universities, the number of international students in the universities of applied sciences is relatively low. The essence of this question lies in the role of universities of applied sciences in Estonia: is the purpose of professional higher education institutes to prepare the workforce for the Estonian employment market, or to offer studies in English for international students? Unfortunately, fulfilling these two goals simultaneously is extremely difficult, as the graduates of universities of applied sciences are expected to have high proficiency of Estonian language. Offering studies both in the national language and in English is too resourceful.
- Lack of research funding – so far, professional higher education institutions have conducted applied research relatively successfully according to their own financial means. The state funding directed to applied research and development activities would create favourable conditions for an important and long-awaited development leap which would enable to conduct applied research on a much larger scale. The stable financing for applied research is expected both by the society and the world of work. In many European countries, basic funding for applied research is guaranteed for professional higher education institutions independent from the evaluation of research, and this could also be the first step in the Republic of Estonia in order to support the development of professional higher education. In Ireland, for example, there is an organisation similar to Enterprise Estonia (EAS) who has measures for financing research and development work ordered by companies from universities of applied sciences;
- The operational support for professional higher education institutions is not competitive compared to the average salary and the consumer price index. If the funding decreases further, it poses a threat to the resources of academic personnel and infrastructure;
- In professional higher education institutions, there is no state basic funding for life-long-learning activities like in vocational education institutions;
- The small size of professional higher education institutions is both a strength and a weakness, e.g. small universities of applied sciences may not have

enough resources for financing supporting activities. Strength is the ability to make quick changes.

Opportunities

We see contributing to the following activities as opportunities for universities of applied sciences:

- Mobility and internationalisation – internationalisation can be seen as a relevant opportunity on professional higher education (bachelor) and on master level (incl. health care) by using the study environments and lecturers of different universities of applied sciences;
- Nano-degrees: nano-degrees are seen as people-centred and student-friendly approach to acquire recognized education levels in a shorter period of time. This means organising regulated study modules or levels in a way that it would be possible for a student to pass certain parts and get a certificate of certain skills/competences before graduation. Therefore, when a student returns to education (including a new specialty), they do not have to pass the subjects again, but can implement prior studies automatically. A similar system called "partial profession" is applied in vocational education. Therefore, nano-degrees (https://www.forbes.com/sites/ccap/2015/01/19/nano-degrees-as-a-new-model-to-model-to-integrate-into-higher-education/) that mark the students' skills/competence levels throughout the study period can be seen as opportunity for universities of applied sciences. Nano-degrees could be implemented primarily in specialties that are not strictly regulated. One of the purposes of nano-degrees could be the linking of curricula on different levels, so that when a student enters from a certain level, he/she can choose a study path for graduating either on EQF level 5 or EQF level 6;
- Larger-scale pre-vocational training – in the future, it is important to offer pre-vocational training on a larger scale, e.g. caregiver studies in parallel with secondary education would definitely help decrease the deficiency of skilled workforce;
- Practical training has always been an important strength of professional higher education. As an opportunity, the organisation of practical training can be improved by increased cooperation with employers and by defining learning outcomes more clearly.

Threats

The line between bachelor education and professional higher education is becoming blurred. When the graduates from a professional higher education used to have output in the world of work and the graduates from bachelor's degrees mostly continued in master studies, this is not such a clear-cut process anymore.

- Big share of visiting lecturers from the industry – when the share of part-time lecturers becomes too large, the implementation of the main tasks of the universities of applied sciences may suffer, in addition to the motivation of lecturers to contribute to curriculum development and to participate in other research and development activities;
- The discrepancy between students' study behaviour and the key performance indicators set for higher education institutions. The students have the freedom work during their studies or go study abroad, after which they can return to their studies. The education policy and the model of operational support

prioritise the passing of curriculum in a reasonable time (3+1 or 4+2 years), but the student has a right to lengthen their period of studies;

- Tuition fees in applied higher education pose a threat to the competitiveness of certain specialties offered by universities of applied sciences (e.g. health care), especially in the areas where salaries are relatively low in the Estonian employment market. In these specialties, students are motivated to find better paid jobs, including jobs abroad.

2. The development trends of professional higher education

2.1. The development trends of professional higher education in Estonia

When discussing the future of universities of applied sciences, mostly the content and learning outcomes of the programmes are focused on rather than individual institutions. When we think of whether the development trends in professional higher education are Estonian-centred or international, we can say they are rather international. It may be possible that in 2035, we cannot talk about the differences between academic and professional higher education anymore, but of a new type of higher education. Next to teaching professional specialty skills, general skills and knowledge are becoming more and more important.

Apprenticeship studies are common in vocational education institutions, but this type of studies could also be integrated into higher education. Currently, the apprenticeship studies in applied higher education are being piloted in Estonia. It is important that the employers also value this type of study programmes. One of the main points of future discussion will be **whether universities of applied sciences continue to stand out in higher education landscape or will the differences between professional higher education and baccalaureate programmes disappear.** Here it must be analysed whether applied higher education programmes will become similar to bachelor programmes, or vice versa, and what could be the causes and results of these developments.

Standing out on the higher education landscape

The distinction between academic higher education and professional higher education dates back to the 1960s when employers started to need graduates with higher education and practical skills. The output of universities was not practical enough and the one of vocational institutions was not academic and professional enough. Standing out in the future is possible, if: a) the employers still need graduates with different profiles (academic and practice-oriented); b) the students accept this trend and wish to stand out as students/graduates of professional higher education; c) the institutions of higher education are able to offer distinctive programmes.

Other important factors are **the expectations and needs of the employers**. It is known that today, the companies are expecting and valuing specialists with applied higher education background - the people who have acquired certain skills and knowledge and who do not need additional training when entering the world of work. When talking about distinctions, individuality should also be considered – there are people who would like to choose a more theoretical path and others who prefer a more practical approach. Today, the curricula of professional higher education are

based on occupational qualification standards, and the students have a possibility to obtain a professional qualifications certificate when graduating. When an occupational qualification standard changes, so does the curriculum.

By 2035, the significance of professional qualification certificates, diplomas and other status proving regulations will probably decrease, and the formulation of learning outcomes in study programmes will become more dynamic.

The content and role of professional higher education in 2035

The development of innovation and technology happens where it is supported by an educated workforce. Professional higher education is tightly connected to the needs and expectations of the world of work. Let us presuppose that in the future, **the main role of universities is to enhance studies on master and doctoral levels, and to develop (fundamental) research; and, the role of universities of applied sciences is to conduct studies on EQF level 6 primarily directed to the world of work, and to conduct applied research.** In some specific areas, it would reasonable to offer integrated studies and create master level curricula.

Today's institutional organisation does not hinder the development of professional higher education, but what is slightly problematic is the competition-based financing model for universities of applied sciences governed by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, as no funding for applied research is included in this model. Further analysis of the possibilities of consolidating supporting activities of universities of applied sciences is needed, e.g. which activities could be jointly organised in the current ownership system (such as joint legal services, participating in public procurements, developing activities/programmes together across institutions). Although the universities of applied sciences prefer autonomy in their actions, jointly offered services and actions could be organised through a roof organisation (RCUAS).

Education levels in the future

As the economy is moving in the direction where creating higher added value is being appreciated, we are also witnessing a shift where the need for lower-level graduates is decreasing and the need for higher-level graduates is increasing, provided there are outputs in the form of occupational qualification standards or study programmes. The necessity and possibility of offering intermediary levels should also be considered. For example, when a student has almost passed the curriculum of EQF level 6 but has not completed the thesis, he/she could be offered the possibility to finish studies on EQF level 5 (partial profession), if there exists a matching output in the form of a vocational standard or a curriculum. In such case, the acquired specialty subjects would not lose their value and the student could be motivated to continue his/her studies.

The factors (internal and external) that will ensure the distinctive identity of universities of applied sciences: a) lecturer/teacher profile (most important factor, as it ensures the quality of the main process); b) curricula (share of practical training); c) cooperation with employers; d) learning environment; e) practical and applicable in-service training (degree programme content can be offered as in-service training); f) applied research and its funding; g) increase of life-long-learning programmes. The education system of the future should be more open and flexible. Creativity and

individuality should be favoured and encouraged – when a student finds a nonstandard individual study path, possibilities of integrating this student should be found in the system. Social skills and creativity are decreasing in young people. They should be taught to be more open and curious in order to find new possibilities. In today's system, young people are accustomed to preconditioned activities, the roots of which are in secondary school education.

In conclusion, it may be said that **the distinction between academic higher education and professional higher education will probably decrease by 2035. The distinction will remain in specialties where employees with specific skills and knowledge are needed for the development of the state and for essential services.**

2.2. The development trends of professional higher education in Finland

The Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences (ARENE) unites 25 universities of applied sciences and 145,000 students (source: ARENE webpage http://www.arene.fi/the-rectors-conference-of-finnish-universities-of-applied-sciences-arene/). Professional higher education institutions in Finland are regional organisations for training, innovation, research and development. Universities of applied sciences know the needs and stakeholders of their specialty areas.

The research, development and innovation activities of universities of applied sciences in Finland support the creation of new knowledge and skills and the renewal and competitiveness of local companies. The capacity and will for long-term specific development activities connect the universities of applied sciences to different cooperation partners on national and international level.

The mission of professional higher education institutions in Finland is to train specialists according to the needs of the world of work and to conduct research and development activities which enhance regional development. The universities of applied sciences in Finland prioritise cooperation with enterprises, industry and service sector mainly on local level. Finnish universities of applied sciences offer studies on bachelor and master level. The curricula have been developed in a way that they would match the changing needs and developments of the world of work, clearly emphasising the specialty. The graduates of professional higher education institutions are qualified to fulfil a variety of professional tasks.

ARENE has defined the following values for their 2016-2020 strategy:

- Open cooperation;
- Proactivity;
- Respect of competences.

ARENE's strategic goals for 2016-2020 are:

- To communicate the functions and strengths of universities of applied sciences;
- To support the role of universities of applied sciences in renewal of working and economic life;
- To strengthen the cooperation, networking and internationalisation between universities of applied sciences as part of European Higher Education Area;

- To advance operating conditions of universities of applied sciences and to strengthen their role in society.

2.3. The development trends of professional higher education in Europe & EURASHE

RCUAS has been a member of EURASHE since 2002. EURASHE (European Association of Institutions in Higher Education) is the main advancer of the European professional higher education by supporting the development of its members and ensuring their active participation and role in designing the future of European applied higher education.

EURASHE (founded in 1990) is the organisation representing the interests of universities of applied sciences and university colleges in Europe, enhancing the importance and quality of professional higher education. In 2018, EURASHE presented its policy statement for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) Ministerial Conference in Paris with recommendations to ministers to release the full potential of professional higher education to serve our societies, as follows:

- EURASHE as the acknowledged representative of European professional higher education institutions recognises and welcomes the achievements of the Bologna process and the current emphasis of its basic values as the foundation for the future development of higher education;
- EURASHE welcomes the focusing on the main obligations (of higher education institutions) and the strengthening of mutual respect, collegiality, trust and the principle of including stakeholders;
- EURASHE supports the proposal to renew teaching processes and to redefine learning, while strengthening the connection to research and supporting the internationalisation of European higher education.

The priorities of EURASHE are:

- Supporting regional engagement in professional higher education through relevant policy measures and financial instruments that would enhance the broad recognition, support and evaluation of teaching, innovation and research activities in professional higher education institutions;
- Promoting the user-centred approach to applied research where the capacity and potential of professional higher education institutions would be used in cooperation with the partners from the world of work in order to meet the innovation and development needs of enterprises. Promoting the integration of teaching and research activities for enhancing the development of students' competences for their future success;
- Recognising and encouraging diversity in higher education – by respecting and promoting its role, mission and the diversity of its goals and provisions, based on commonly agreed values, principles and resources; while recognizing the achievements on improving professional development and competitiveness through the strengthening of applied higher education;
- Promoting short-cycle higher education programmes, at the same time paying close attention to the development and relevance of first cycle programmes and to programmes directed to advanced learners;
- Promoting innovation in teaching and learning – better recognition of relevant and efficient teaching and learning methods, including joint initiatives in

cooperation with the world of work and other stakeholders, supported by suitable teaching and evaluation methods compatible to the profile of professional programmes, especially apprenticeship training programmes;
- Culture of quality – the systematic implementation of quality assurance standards, principles and developments for anchoring the culture of quality.

3. Conclusions and recommendations for policy makers

Considering the suggestions proposed at the round table of RCUAS, the strategic goals of ARENE and the recommendations by EURASHE, **we recommend focussing on the following future trends**:

- Providing skills and knowledge connected to professional specialties and the needs of the world of work in the curricula of universities of applied sciences;
- Acknowledging the diversity of learning forms, including enhancing the broader use of apprenticeship study in higher education;
- Ensuring regional access to higher education, decreasing the role of location in entering higher education;
- Financing of applied research and creative activities, including achieving the steady state financing for research, development and creative activities in universities of applied sciences; having more flexibility and sources for financing research and development projects;
- Broadening the offer of life-long-learning (in-service training) programmes, supported by a suitable financing model and the needs of the world of work;
- Integration of EQF level 5 to professional higher education;
- Developing master programmes, incl. one-year master programmes primarily directed to area-specific specialisation;
- Networking of education institutions, piloting of an action-based consortium;
- Developing heterogenic financing models – considering the diversity of student profiles, e.g. a person entering professional higher education may already have a master's degree. The current model presupposes that a student follows a linear study path;
- Internationalisation of higher education for supporting and improving the quality of teaching, research and creative activities and for supporting smart immigration.

For curriculum development we offer the following directions:

- Decreasing the fragmentation of subjects in curricula and enhancing the integration of subjects inside and over curricula;
- Finding a reasonable balance between general secondary education subjects and specialty subjects in the process of preserving the relevance of shorter study programmes;
- Taking into account the needs of the world of work (creating even more practical study programmes focussing on the development of specialty skills);
- Enhancing research, development and creative activities in professional higher education institutions and integration of research, development and creative activities to study process.