

Decision Regarding Assessment of the Arts Study Programme Group at the Level of Doctoral Studies Estonian Academy of Arts

08/04/2019

The Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education at the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education decided to approve the report by the Assessment Committee and to conduct the next quality assessment of the third cycle of Arts study programme group at Estonian Academy of Arts in seven years

On the basis of subsection 10 (4) of the Universities Act and point 40.1 of the 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups at the Level of Doctoral Studies', authorised in points 3.7.3 and 3.7.1 of the Statutes of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (hereinafter referred to as 'EKKA'), the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education (hereinafter referred to as 'the Council') affirms the following:

1. On 13.10.2017 Estonian Academy of Arts and EKKA agreed upon a time frame to conduct the quality assessment of the study programme group.
2. The Director of EKKA, by her order of 22.10.2018, approved the following membership of the quality assessment committee for the quality assessment of the third cycle of higher education in the Arts study programme group at Estonian Academy of Arts (hereinafter referred to as 'the Committee'):

Bruce Brown (<i>chair</i>)	Research Professor, Royal College of Art, London (United Kingdom)
Anna-Mari Almila	Research Fellow, London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London (United Kingdom)
Ankna Arockiam	PhD student; Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (United Kingdom)
Hans Hellsten	Professor, Quality assurance coordinator for the Faculty of Fine and Performing Arts, Lund university (Sweden)
Laura Lüse	Head of Art Research Department, Rundale Palace Museum (Latvia)
Anu Vehviläinen	Lecturer, DocMus Doctoral School, Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki (Finland)

3. Estonian Academy of Arts submitted the following third cycle study programmes for assessment in the Arts study programme group:
Art History and Visual Culture

Cultural Heritage and Conservation Art and Design

4. Estonian Academy of Arts submitted the self-analysis report to EKKA on 03.09.2018, which the assessment coordinator forwarded to the committee on 22.10.2018.
5. Assessment visit to Estonian Academy of Arts took place 5.-6.12.2018.
6. The committee submitted the draft assessment report to EKKA on 21.01.2019, which was sent to the university for comments by EKKA on 31.01.2019 and to which Estonian Academy of Arts delivered its response on 21.02.2019.
7. The Committee submitted its final assessment report to EKKA on 06.03.2019. The assessment report is an integral part of the decision. The report is available on the EKKA website.
8. The Secretary of the Council forwarded the Committee's final assessment report along with the University's self-evaluation report to the Council members on 27.03.2019.
9. The Council with 11 members present discussed these received documents in its session on 8.04.2019 and, based on the assessment report, decided to point out the following strengths, areas of improvement, and recommendations regarding the Arts study programme group at the level of doctoral studies at Estonian Academy of Arts.

The committee listed the following recommendations on the national level:

- 1) The stipend for PhD students is below the national living wage. This impacts both on their quality of life as well as completion rates and time to completion. The state could explore raising the level of this stipend either through additional funding to support the same number of doctoral stipends or by reducing the number of places to which the existing level of resources is then directed.
- 2) Estonia's national indicators for research are based on the assessment of text-based outputs and, therefore, exclude creative forms of research. Furthermore, this removes the possibility of artistic research receiving performance-based research funding. It is now a standard in the international research community to consider artefacts and performances as legitimate outputs where the research component has been made discoverable and accessible in the public domain. Generally, most nations now consider research, innovation and creativity to be key drivers to national prosperity and well-being and this is certainly so in the EU research framework. The Assessment Committee encourages the Estonian Research Council and/or relevant government agencies to consider extending the assessment of research to also include non-text outputs.

Areas for improvement and recommendations by the Committee for the Arts Study Programme Group at the Level of Doctoral Studies at Estonian Academy of Arts:

Strengths

- 1) Doctoral programmes at the Academy are well established and vibrant with new design solutions being under consideration. The consolidation of the Academy into one campus creates

excellent conditions for a new start that can harness some of the opportunities missed during the decade of physical fragmentation and to open up new opportunities — especially where cross subject collaboration, interdisciplinary approaches and common practices can be further enhanced and better shared.

- 2) The programmes benefit from the support of a Doctoral School, which, in turn, has effective, experienced and committed leadership. The Doctoral School has developed a strong regulatory framework for its programmes that is made accessible to all students and supervisors through a general handbook. Additionally, the doctoral framework provides a scholarly environment through which all students are helped to achieve their maximum potential.
- 3) There is a broad range of expertise available through supervisors, many of whom are at the forefront of their disciplines within the international context.
- 4) There is a strong network of links with alumnae and employers and with other researchers both in Estonia and abroad. Both students and their supervisors benefit from outward international experiences that expose them to other researchers who are at the forefront of their discipline.
- 5) There is a good relationship between the institution, students and supervisors with good feedback mechanisms, students overall expressed satisfaction at the amount of supervisory time they received each year.
- 6) A vibrant seminar programme that offers opportunities for students to gain experience in the management of research and exposure to international debates and practices.
- 7) High quality research supervision that is well embedded in traditional scholarly areas and has continuous development for more recent areas of research in practice-based disciplines.
- 8) The programme of visiting academics is excellent.
- 9) Students have access to an excellent international mobility programme that is effectively managed.
- 10) Many of the doctoral students enter the programme with substantial existing experience of professional practice.
- 11) There is a good range of extra-curricular activities available to students.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) Future strategic planning could more systematically consider the contribution of research to the institution's overall reputational standing along with its role in both supporting and nourishing the undergraduate curriculum. The critical mass of doctoral research is currently not sufficient to support the range of investment and intellectual infrastructure needed. This is not a question of being big, or being small, but of sufficient size to be efficient in the use of resources along with the capacity to invest in fresh initiatives. More generally, the Academy has all of the potential to be considered an international leader in research in the creative arts and design, amongst other leading research universities, if that were to be its strategy over the next decade or so and grew the critical mass to realise it.
- 2) It is essential that the next generation of researchers are well trained and prepared for the supervision of doctoral students and that supervisory teams are constituted so as to assist this aim. In this respect there are a number of critical issues that emerged during the assessment visit (these being common to many institutions in the creative arts and design). Firstly, it cannot be assumed that an excellent practitioner will, by virtue of this experience, automatically transform into an excellent research supervisor. Secondly, early career researchers need the opportunity to gradually gather experience of supervision through membership of supervisory teams led by more experienced supervisors. In this respect the institution may consider developing a more systematic approach to the formation of supervisory teams and the training of both current and future supervisors.

- 3) The doctoral programmes Art and Design and Art History and Visual Culture employ different research methodologies. Art History and Visual Culture, generally, employs a traditional scholarly model with a deep understanding of the traditions of research rigour being evidenced in textual forms such as monographs and journal papers. The research outputs of Art and Design are, generally, in a non-text format (artefacts or systems). They employ different methodological approaches and criteria for the assessment of research rigour. Though a “White Paper” on artistic research is being prepared in collaboration with the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre this was not available to the Assessment Committee and there is still work to be done to establish the defining characteristics of artistic research where the outputs are non-text.
 - 4) The presentation of research output by the Academy is more inward looking than it is public facing. Consequently, there could be improvements made in areas of outward facing activities such as communicating (on the Academy website among other channels) some research undertaken within the programmes that has had significant impact on society, economy and public at large. Likewise, students would benefit from training, when on the doctoral programme, on how to communicate the future impact of their research.
 - 5) More opportunities to diversify financial support for doctoral studies could be explored. Whereas Estonian state funding for doctoral studies is the major source of financial support, research grants funded by the EU Horizon 2020 programme, for example, could incorporate doctoral scholarships and so bring additional funding. Also, the possibility of recruiting international students (i.e. non-EU) at full cost could be more fully explored.
 - 6) The good relationships with alumnae and employers could be used more strategically to help develop policy and strategic debates outside the Academy and to help advance the contribution of research in the creative arts and design so that the Academy is recognised as a leader.
 - 7) The degree to which the intellectual and reputational strengths of the doctoral programme may be central to the Academy’s reputation as a leading international research institution could be more fully considered within a the development planning cycle.
 - 8) In practice-based doctoral programmes the criteria for admission and assessment should be clearly articulated.
 - 9) Support and training should be offered to faculty members on the bridge between research study and professional practice in order to ensure good quality of doctoral research in the artistic PhD branch.
 - 10) In case the PhD students are yet to engage in professional practice outside the Academy, help should be provided to them in building bridges between academic research and professional practice.
 - 11) Consider creating further opportunities for the sharing of good practices between disciplines/departments and enhancing the opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaboration.
 - 12) The quality assurance process should operate on an annual cycle in order to identify and respond to issues as they emerge.
 - 13) Ensure that the workload of supervisory hours between supervisors does not disadvantage any doctoral student.
- 10.** Point 40 of the 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups at the Level of Doctoral Studies' establishes that the Quality Assessment Council shall approve an assessment report within three months after receipt of the report. The Council shall weigh the strengths, areas of improvement, and recommendations outlined in the assessment report, and decide whether to conduct the next quality assessment of that study programme group in seven, five or three years
- 11.** The Council weighed the strengths, areas of improvement, and recommendations presented in point 9 of this document and found that the study programme, the teaching conducted under

these programmes, and development activities regarding teaching and learning conform to the requirements, and

DECIDED

to approve the assessment report and conduct the next quality assessment of the third cycle of studies in the Arts study programme group at Estonian Academy of Arts in seven years.

Decision was adopted by 11 votes in favour. Against 0.

12. The Council proposes that Estonian Academy of Arts submit an action plan to EKKA concerning the areas for improvement and recommendations pointed out in the report no later than 8.04.2020.

13. A person who finds that his or her rights have been violated or his or her freedoms restricted by this decision may file a challenge with the EKKA Quality Assessment Council within 30 days after the person filing the challenge became or should have become aware of the contested finding.

The Council shall forward the challenge to its Appeals Committee who shall provide an unbiased opinion in writing regarding the validity of the challenge to the Council, within five days after receipt of the challenge. The Council shall resolve the challenge within ten days of its receipt, taking into account the reasoned opinion of the Appeals Committee. If the challenge needs to be investigated further, the deadline for its review by the Council may be extended by a maximum of thirty days.

A legal challenge to this decision is possible within 30 days after its delivery, by filing an action with the Tallinn courthouse of the Tallinn Administrative Court under the procedure provided for in the Code of Administrative Court Procedure.

Eve Eisenschmidt
Chair of the Council

Hillar Bauman
Secretary of the Council