

## Decision Regarding Assessment of the Performing Arts Study Programme Group at the Level of Doctoral Studies Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre

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 Performing Arts study programme group at Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre 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 16.10.2017 Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre 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 Performing Arts study programme group at Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre (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 Lūse	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 Music and Theatre submitted the following third cycle study programmes for assessment in the Performing Arts study programme group:

**Music and Dramatic Art**

## **Musicology**

4. Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre submitted the self-analysis report to EKKA on 05.10.2018, which the assessment coordinator forwarded to the committee on 22.10.2018.
5. Assessment visit to Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre took place on 4.12.2018.
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 28.01.2019 and to which Academy of Music and Theatre delivered its response on 18.02.2019.
7. The Committee submitted its final assessment report to EKKA on 18.02.2019. 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 Performing Arts study programme group at the level of doctoral studies at Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre.

### **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 Performing Arts Study Programme Group at the Level of Doctoral Studies at Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre:**

#### **Strengths**

- 1) The Academy continues to build intellectual and material resources to support research in musicology, music and dramatic art that, that in part, are either of international standing or excellent within the national context. In particular the research library, performance rooms and construction of a new concert hall provide outstanding facilities.
- 2) There are common principles for the implementation and on-going development of doctoral programmes based upon the best international practices. The Centre for Doctoral Studies is well managed, is rapidly establishing a sound governance framework for doctoral research and supervision within the Academy. The standard of research is high, many of the supervisors are at the forefront of their research discipline. There is a strong sense of academic community, among doctoral candidates and supervisors. The academic community coheres around a vibrant seminar programme that includes cross-programme meetings and presentations from invited international experts. Conferences are held annually.
- 3) Doctoral students praise the academic environment, international prospects and strong existing networks.
- 4) Students have access to an excellent range of intellectual resources and expertise and receive considerable support from their supervisors.
- 5) There is a clear grasp of the quality assurance process with, for example, the improvement of completion rates being identified as a strategic aim.
- 6) There is a good scheme for sabbatical leave with excellent take up. A good programme of visiting professors operates.
- 7) The application process has three stages that are clearly understood by supervisors and potential applicants to the programmes.

### **Areas for improvement and recommendations**

- 1) The entitlements and obligations need to be more clearly spelt out for both students and supervisors. In this respect the Academy may consider the production of a student handbook that is written and structured in a plain language designed to speak directly to students and being for their specific reference. It should be a 'one-stop-shop' that contains all of the entitlements, obligations and guidance that students and supervisors may need to refer to and could also double as a recruitment tool (the output format could either be a web-based pdf or print).
- 2) Steps could be taken to develop strategies that ensure the next generation of doctoral supervisors are well trained and prepared. In order to bring early career academics having no supervisory experience into the programme it is recommended that the Doctoral Council should consider developing an approach to the formal approval of research supervisory teams that balance different levels of experience and knowledge.
- 3) 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 manage the future impact of their research and how to gather material needed to evidence this.
- 4) The two doctoral study programmes employ different research methodologies. Musicology, generally, employs a traditional scholarly model with embedded traditions on the nature of research rigour evidenced through textual forms such as monographs or research publications in scientific journals. The research outputs of Music and Dramatic Art are, generally, non-text. 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 Arts this is not available yet and there is still work to be done to establish the defining characteristics of artistic research where the outputs are non-text.

- 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 critical mass of doctoral theses and PhD students as of now is not sufficient in order to support investments and intellectual infrastructure. This is not a question of being ‘big’ or ‘small’ but of a size that maximises the creative potential of research programmes and makes them more efficient to operate. The Academy may wish, in its future strategic planning, to consider ways to increase the critical mass of research through doctoral programmes and alternative funding streams.
  - 7) More horizontal relationships could be established between discrete specialist disciplines in order to foster the transfer of good practices and opportunities for collaboration. The Academy could explore opportunities for greater interdisciplinary relationships between the core disciplines within the Academy and with other disciplines (e.g. in the natural and social sciences) located in other institutions.
  - 8) Cooperation with alumnae and employers should be strengthened.
  - 9) The Academy could consult examples of best practices in artistic research in similar institutions abroad with the overall objective being to grow its standing as a research leader in practice-based areas.
  - 10) Training should be offered to doctoral students in the pedagogies of research through which the student as an autonomous learner is fostered and supported.
  - 11) The candidates’ interest in and ability to conduct research should be considered more in the admission process.
  - 12) Greater use could be made of student feedback to feed into the processes of quality enhancement as well as quality assurance.
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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 Performing Arts study programme group at Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre in seven years.**

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

12. The Council proposes that Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre 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**