

**Decision regarding Assessment of the Veterinary Medicine Study Programme Group at the level of Doctoral Studies
Estonian University of Life Sciences**

20/06/2018

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 Veterinary Medicine study programme group at the level of doctoral studies at the Estonian University of Life Sciences 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 25.04.2017 the Estonian University of Life Sciences and EKKA agreed upon a time frame to conduct a quality assessment of the study programme group.
2. The Director of EKKA, by her order on 24.01.2018, approved the following composition of the quality Assessment Committee for the Veterinary Medicine, Agricultural Sciences, Forestry and Fisheries study programme group at the level of doctoral studies at the Estonian University of Life Sciences (hereinafter referred to as 'the Committee'):

Peter von Fragstein und Niemsdorff	Chairman of the Committee, Professor Emeritus of Organic Vegetable Production, former Dean of the Faculty of Organic Agricultural Sciences, University of Kassel (Germany)
Maria Fredriksson-Ahomaa	Professor (meat inspection and slaughterhouse hygiene), Department of Food Hygiene and Environmental Health, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Helsinki (Finland)
Rossella Di Palo	Professor, Department of Veterinary Medicine and Animal

	Production, University of Naples Federico II (Italy)
Bengt Kriström	Department of Forest Economics, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences; Research Director, Centre for Environmental and Resource Economics (Sweden)
Tiina Köster	External member; senior specialist, Agricultural Research Centre (Estonia)
Brian Danley	Doctoral student, Department of Forest Economics, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (Sweden)

3. The Estonian University of Life Sciences submitted the following doctoral programmes for evaluation under the Veterinary Medicine study programme group:

Veterinary Medicine and Food Science

4. Estonian University of Life Sciences submitted a self-evaluation report to the EKKA Bureau on 9.01.2018, and the assessment coordinator forwarded it to the Committee on 10.01.2018.
5. An assessment visit to Estonian University of Life Sciences took place on 27–28.02.2018.
6. The Committee sent its draft assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 25.04.2018, and EKKA forwarded it to the Estonian University of Life Sciences for its comments on 30.04.2018 and the University delivered its response on 15.05.2018.
7. The Committee submitted its final assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 18.05.2018. 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 6.06.2018.
9. The Council with 10 members present discussed these received documents in its session on 20.06.2018 and, based on the assessment report, decided to point out the following strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations regarding the Veterinary Medicine study programme group at the level of doctoral studies at the Estonian University of Life Sciences.

The Committee pointed out the following strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations regarding the programmes within the Veterinary Medicine as well as Agricultural Sciences, Forestry and Fisheries groups of programmes:

Strengths

- 1) A quality control mechanism agreed upon between all parties that requires the doctoral students to publish three articles, undoubtedly has a long-term impact, provided that the articles are published in distinguished research journals.
- 2) The process of defending doctoral thesis functions well, an external (often international) reviewer is involved.
- 3) The Doctoral School encourages contact with other areas of specialisation as well as Universities both from Estonia and abroad.

- 4) The University has a good working environment. Critical infrastructure for high-level research (laboratories, auditoriums, fieldwork stations, and other) meets and even exceeds the requirements of international standards.
- 5) All teaching staff is evaluated.
- 6) The teaching staff is highly motivated and research focused.
- 7) Supervisors are selected through a competition.
- 8) Doctoral students are very motivated.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) The long term impact of the University strategy “Knowledge-based bioeconomy” on the development of doctoral studies, remains unclear. We recommend aligning the development of doctoral programmes with the goals of the strategy for bioeconomy more closely.
- 2) The duration of studies tends to be too long. The minimum criterion of three published peer-reviewed scientific papers (a prerequisite for defending doctoral theses) is advisable to review.
- 3) The competition to doctoral studies in general and the share of (good level) international applicants are low. In order to improve both, the criteria, as well as the process for PhD admissions, should be formalised in a way that the admission for each doctoral place is (nationally and internationally) announced with sufficient term/deadline, with explicit admission conditions, and that all top candidates undergo a uniform and documented evaluation.
- 4) The number of full-time doctoral students shall be increased.
- 5) The compulsory 60 credit points could be distributed between the semesters more flexibly.
- 6) A greater focus on applied research topics would attract more support to PhD students from enterprises.
- 7) The teaching staff should be able to benefit from engaging and innovative ways to develop their supervising and teaching skills.
- 8) The number and visibility of (attractive) research projects must be increased.
- 9) Also, the international mobility of the teaching staff shall be increased.
- 10) Cooperation with other (foreign) universities needs to be invested in.
- 11) The doctoral allowance should match the actual cost of living.

Strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations regarding the Veterinary Medicine and Food Science study programme

Strengths

- 1) The fact that foreign experts are used as co-supervisors, opponents and reviewers contributes to internationalisation.
- 2) Various funding schemes support the international mobility of doctoral students.
- 3) Teaching is research-based; doctoral students are involved in research projects.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) Doctoral students fail to defend their doctoral thesis within four to six years because of either working outside the University or teaching at the University, which takes up too much of their

time. It is advisable to set a maximum threshold to the volume of teaching work that doctoral students do. The number of credit points for a doctoral thesis could be increased to 200, while the credit points for compulsory learning could be decreased to 40. Requirements for peer-reviewed papers published in scientific journals that are necessary for defending a doctoral thesis could be changed.

- 2) The number of international doctoral students and post-doctoral researchers should be increased, to gain more international recognition, and there should be more research papers prepared in cooperation with international experts as well as more joint research with esteemed international universities.
 - 3) It is advisable to establish a committee bringing together representatives of various stakeholders or formalise a feedback process to develop a doctoral programme with attractive research topics.
 - 4) Doctoral students are not aware of how their feedback has been taken into account in the study programme.
 - 5) The study programme should reflect the changes on the labour market better to become more attractive for MSc graduates. Subject courses should be better aligned with the labour market needs and the knowledge and skills expected from doctoral students.
 - 6) It is advisable to increase the enrolment to the doctoral programme.
 - 7) Collaboration with other (foreign) universities needs more attention to bring more expertise and interdisciplinary research projects to the University. Co-authoring publications with external experts usually boosts the visibility and citation of research papers.
 - 8) The process of providing feedback about teaching and supervising activities should be improved.
- 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 for 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 for 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 to conduct the next quality assessment of the Veterinary Medicine study programme group at the level of doctoral studies at the Estonian University of Life Sciences in seven years.

The decision was adopted by ten votes in favour and 0 against.

- 12.** The Council proposes that the Estonian University of Life Sciences submit an action plan to EKKA concerning the areas for improvement and recommendations pointed out in the report no later than 20.06.2019.

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