

## Assessment decision for Doctoral Study of Teacher Training and Educational Sciences Study Programme Group Tallinn University

**08/04/2019**

**The Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA) decided to approve the report of the Assessment Committee and to carry out the next quality assessment of the Doctoral Study in the Teacher Training and Educational Sciences Study Programme Group of Tallinn University in seven years.**

Pursuant to clause 40.1 of the document “Quality Assessment of the Study Programme Groups at the level of Doctoral Studies” established on the basis of the authorization contained in § 10 (4) of the University Act and clauses 3.7.3 and 3.7.1 of the Statutes of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education, the Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (hereinafter the Council) states the following:

1. Tallinn University coordinated the quality assessment period of the study programme group with EKKA on 12.10.2017.
2. By the order of 13.09.2018, the Director of EKKA approved the Committee for Quality Assessment of the Doctoral Study of the Teacher Training and Educational Sciences Study Programme Group of the University of Tartu and Tallinn University (hereinafter the Committee) in the following composition

<b>Pavel Zgaga (chairman)</b>	Professor; University of Ljubljana; Slovenia
<b>Raija Hämäläinen</b>	Professor; University of Jyväskylä; Finland
<b>Eleni Kyza</b>	Associate Professor; Cyprus University of Technology; Cyprus
<b>Tõnis Lukas</b>	Director; Tartu Vocational Education Center; Estonia
<b>Joni Lämsä</b>	Doctoral student; University of Jyväskylä; Finland
<b>Peter van Petegem</b>	Professor; University of Antwerp; Belgium
<b>Rupert Wegerif</b>	Professor; University of Cambridge; United Kingdom

3. Tallinn University submitted the following Doctoral study programme for assessment in the Teacher Training and Educational Sciences Study Programme Group:

## **Educational sciences**

4. Tallinn University submitted a self-analysis report to the EKKA office on 26.08.2018, which was sent to the Committee by the assessment coordinator on 7.09.2018.
5. The assessment visit to Tallinn University took place on 29.-30.11.2018.
6. The Committee sent the draft assessment report to the EKKA office on 16.01.2019, which EKKA forwarded to the institution of higher education for comment on 17.01.2019 and to which Tallinn University submitted a reply on 28.01.2019.
7. The Committee submitted the final assessment report to the EKKA office on 8.02.2019. The assessment report is an integral part of the decision. The report is available on the EKKA website.
8. The Secretary of the Assessment Council forwarded the final assessment report and self-analysis report to the members of the Assessment Council on 27.03.2019.
9. The Council discussed the received documents at the meeting of 08.04.2019 with the participation of 10 members and decided to highlight the following strengths, recommendations and areas for improvement concerning the Doctoral Study of the Teacher Training and Educational Sciences Study Programme Group of Tallinn University.

## **In the case of the Doctoral Study of the Teacher Training and Educational Sciences Study Programme Group of the University of Tartu and Tallinn University, the Committee identified the following strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations:**

### **Strengths**

- 1) The study programmes of Doctoral study of both the University of Tartu and Tallinn University have recently been reformed and updated and are of high quality. The study programmes are well structured and organized, allow for an individual approach, are flexible and meet the needs of doctoral students and Estonian society. Both universities have worked hard to provide optimal resources for the study programmes with limited opportunities.
- 2) Both universities have taken steps to provide doctoral students with an additional income that is at the same level as the national average. This is very positive as it gives students the opportunity to focus mainly on their studies. Universities have used a variety of funding sources to provide additional income, including EU funds. However, ways need to be found to ensure the sustainability of these solutions.
- 3) Cooperation between the Universities of Tartu and Tallinn is close and fruitful, and the University of Helsinki is also involved. Such tripartite cooperation increases the critical mass of doctoral studies, ensures better quality and, if necessary, professional support for doctoral students (eg co-supervision, joint seminars, etc.). It is also an excellent starting point for strengthening international cooperation and involving foreign doctoral students with other universities, especially in Europe.

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

- 1) The data show that in recent years, many students have dropped out of school. Clearly, major efforts have recently been made to prevent this, such as improved annual assessment procedures, additional scholarships for students, and greater use of a project-based approach. At the same time, this issue needs continued attention and input.
- 2) At both universities, efforts are being made to reorganize doctoral studies towards so-called doctoral schools. The Assessment Committee was under the impression that the concept is currently used very differently in practice. For an idea to work effectively, the concept of a doctoral school needs a clear structure and wording, especially at university level. In the process of integrating doctoral programs (mainly in organizational terms), the Committee recommends "looking for the golden mean" while preserving the identity of doctoral programs in educational sciences.
- 3) Dependence on EU funding is an obvious long-term risk. This could be mitigated by diversifying sources of research funding, for example by exploring ways to build relationships with the business sector, as well as seeking more funding from the government, its various agencies and NGOs.
- 4) It is necessary to strengthen the cooperation between the university and the external environment (schools, public and state institutions, economic sector).
- 5) It is recommended to designate a person to whom all doctoral students can turn for work space, equipment and other related resource needs.
- 6) The possibility of long-term mobility (1 month or more) has not been sufficiently used. Alternatives ("mobility at home", e-mobility) that would allow networking with international students and institutions should be considered.

### **The Committee highlighted the following strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations for the Educational Sciences Study Programme of Tallinn University:**

#### **Strengths**

- 1) The introduction of pre-school of Doctoral Study will enable candidates to be better prepared for Doctoral Study.
- 2) Writing camps and experience cafes have become good practice.
- 3) The effort to integrate doctoral students into research projects is commendable.
- 4) Lecturers have a wide range of competencies. The Center for Educational Innovation enables research to be linked to educational stakeholders.
- 5) Supervisors from other structural units of the university are involved, which promotes inter- and multidisciplinary of research and cooperation between different units.
- 6) The workload of supervisors is regulated, 50 hours of supervision per year are provided for one doctoral student.
- 7) The funds are aimed at providing international co-supervision and integrating doctoral students into international research networks.
- 8) Efforts have been made to recruit foreign doctoral students and some positive results have been achieved.

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

- 1) There are only four compulsory subjects in the study programme. Students need more in-depth counseling when choosing an elective.
  - 2) Excessive specializations should be avoided. The study programme should ensure students' awareness of different methodologies and approaches.
  - 3) Attention must be paid to the standardization of credit points allocated to different courses and activities.
  - 4) Research ethics, data retention and security issues need to be addressed more systematically.
  - 5) When assessing doctoral students, additional possibilities for formative assessment could be considered.
  - 6) The fact that most students study *de facto* part-time jeopardizes the effectiveness of the study programme in achieving timely completion and lower drop-out rates. Doctoral students should be offered the opportunity to study full-time, equating their scholarship with the national average salary.
  - 7) The study programme should include more subjects that develop entrepreneurial skills, which would enable doctoral students to acquire the necessary competencies for work outside the academic sector.
  - 8) The rights of doctoral students in challenging different decisions should be more clearly defined.
  - 9) During the last three academic years, 9 doctoral students have defended their doctoral thesis, whereas 26 have interrupted their studies. In order to reduce drop-outs, the admission procedure needs to be streamlined and only highly motivated candidates selected.
  - 10) The university should create more junior researcher positions for doctoral students, which would allow students to be better integrated into research groups and reduce drop-out rates.
- 10.** Clause 40 of the document “Quality Assessment of the Study Programme Groups at the level of Doctoral Studies” stipulates that the Assessment Council shall approve the assessment report within 3 months after its receipt. The Council will consider the strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations identified by the Assessment Committee and decide to carry out the next quality assessment of the Study Programme Group in seven, five or three years.
- 11.** The Council considered the strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations set out in point 9 and found that the study programme, the studies provided on it and the development activities related to the studies meet the requirements and:

### **DECIDED**

**To approve the assessment report and to carry out the next assessment of the quality of the Doctoral study in the Teacher Training and Educational Science Study Programme Group of Tallinn University in seven years.**

The decision was adopted by 10 votes in favor. None opposed.

- 12.** The Assessment Council proposes to Tallinn University to submit to EKKA no later than 8.04.2020 an action plan on taking into account the areas for improvement and recommendations presented in the report.

13. A person who considers that the decision has violated his or her rights or restricted his or her freedoms may file a challenge with the Assessment Council of EKKA within 30 days after the appellant became aware of or should have become aware of the contested act.

The Assessment Council shall send the challenge to the challenge committee of the Assessment Council of EKKA, which shall submit a written, impartial opinion to the Assessment Council on the reasoning of the challenge within 5 days of receipt of the challenge. The Assessment Council shall resolve the challenge within 10 days of receipt, taking into account the reasoned position of the appeal committee. If the challenge needs to be further investigated, the Assessment Council may extend the term for reviewing the challenge by up to 30 days.

Contestation of a decision in court is possible within 30 days as of its service by submitting an appeal to the Tallinn Courthouse of the Tallinn Administrative Court pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Administrative Court Procedure Act.

**Eve Eisenschmidt**  
**Chair of the Council**

**Hillar Bauman**  
**Secretary of the Council**