

Assessment decision for Doctoral Study in the Languages and Cultures Study Programme Group University of Tartu

13/03/2018

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 Languages and Cultures Study Programme Group of the University of Tartu in seven years.

Pursuant to clause 40.1 of the document "Quality Assessment of the Study Programme Group of the Doctoral Study" 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. The University of Tartu coordinated the quality assessment period of the study programme group with EKKA on 18.11.2016.
2. By the order on 31.08.2017, the Director of EKKA approved the Committee for Quality Assessment of the Doctoral Study of the Languages and Cultures Study Programme Groups of the University of Tartu and Tallinn University (hereinafter the Committee) in the following composition

Martin Halliwell	Chairman of the Commission, Professor, University of Leicester (UK)
Kristian Bankov	Professor, New Bulgarian University (Bulgaria)
Anne Boddington	Professor, Kingston University (UK)
Barbara Burns	Assoc. Professor, University of Glasgow (UK)
Julia Dahlberg	Ph.D. student, University of Helsinki (Finland)
Anca Greere	professor, Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania;

	Assistant Director, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (UK)
Hans-Günter Heimbrock	Professor Emeritus, Goethe-University Frankfurt (Germany)
Gerrit Immink	Professor Emeritus, Protestant Theological University Groningen (Netherlands)
Jaakko Leino	Professor, University of Helsinki, Finland
Henrik Meinander	Professor, University of Helsinki, Finland
Irina Moore	Senior Lecturer, University of Wolverhampton (Great Britain)

3. The University of Tartu submitted the following study programme of Doctoral study for assessment in the Languages and Cultures Study Programme Group:

Estonian and Finno-Ugric linguistics
Germanic-Romance Languages and Literatures
Literature and Cultural Research
Russian and Slavonic Philology

4. The University of Tartu submitted a self-analysis report to the EKKA office on 28.08.2017, which was sent to the Committee by the assessment coordinator on 11.09.2017.
5. The assessment visit to the University of Tartu took place on 28. – 29.11.2017.
6. The Committee sent the draft assessment report to the EKKA office on 15.01.2018, which EKKA forwarded to the institution of higher education for comment on 16.01.2018 and to which the University of Tartu submitted a reply on 26.01.2018.
7. The Committee submitted the final assessment report to the EKKA office on 11.02.2018. 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 6.03.2018.
9. The Council discussed the received documents at the meeting of 13.03.2018 with the participation of 8 members and decided to highlight the following strengths, recommendations, and areas for improvement concerning the Doctoral Study of the Languages and Cultures Research Programme Group of the University of Tartu.

With regard to the humanities, languages and cultures, and theology study programme groups, the Committee identified the following cross-cutting strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations for both the University of Tartu and Tallinn University:

Strengths

- 1) Doctoral study programmes are of high quality. Both universities are aware of the important role of the humanities both in the Estonian higher education system and at the national level.
- 2) Lecturers from the universities of Tartu and Tallinn are committed to supporting the intellectual development of doctoral students and encouraging them to participate in academic communities. Both universities attach importance to the international dimension of their doctoral study programmes and encourage their doctoral students to participate in foreign conferences and longer study visits.
- 3) Universities prepare graduates with a clear expression and self-reflection who have acquired all the knowledge and skills relevant to the doctoral level at the end of their studies. Graduates have the opportunity to pursue an academic career as well as work in various professions in the fields of culture, education, and politics.
- 4) Both universities have their own distinctive strengths that make them known and recognized. For example, the wide-ranging study programmes of languages and cultures of the University of Tartu are impressive, while the specializations of the study programme of the Study of Cultures of the University of Tallinn make it possible to launch a creative dialogue between different humanity disciplines in a new way.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) Doctoral student grants are currently below the subsistence level. As a result, many doctoral students have to work with a significantly higher load to survive. It is recommended to consider increasing doctoral grants at the national level so that doctoral students can commit to their studies without additional work.
- 2) When planning doctoral study places, it is recommended to take into account the resources available to the university, including the possibility to create junior researcher positions for doctoral students and to involve them in research projects.
- 3) It is desirable for both universities to take a more systematic approach to data collection in order to support successful completion of studies, curriculum development and to promote diversity and equal treatment in universities.

General strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations of study programme group of Humanities, Languages and Cultures and Theology of the University of Tartu

Strengths

- 1) The academic level of the study programme, supervisors, and doctoral students is high.
- 2) Doctoral students have a positive attitude, and they are enthusiastic.
- 3) The cooperation between supervisors and doctoral students works very well. The supervisors are very committed to the doctoral students and take care of their well-being.
- 4) International mobility opportunities support the professional and academic development of doctoral students.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) The role of different support structures of doctoral studies needs to be more clearly defined. The English terminology concerning the structural units of the university and the doctoral schools could be harmonized and unambiguous for everyone.
- 2) It is necessary to increase the efficiency of doctoral studies in order to ensure the completion of studies within a maximum of six (4+2) years.
- 3) It is necessary to develop a plan to ensure the stability and sustainability of the number and quality of doctoral students, taking into account, inter alia, the need to strengthen links with the world of work.
- 4) Doctoral students should be given a clearer overview of the skills acquired during doctoral studies and the possible roles that they may begin to play in Estonian society after graduation.
- 5) There is currently no systematic communication with alumni in the study programme. The alumni network could be used for out-of-university career guidance for doctoral students. The development the doctoral study programme could make better use of the experience of alumni and information regarding which positions the doctoral degree is relevant for employment.
- 6) It is necessary to ensure uniformly good working conditions (incl. jobs) for doctoral students in all departments and study programme.
- 7) There is a need to clearly define the rules for enrollment in doctoral studies, part-time studies, suspension of studies for a good reason (e.g., maternity leave or sick leave), and to specify the expectations for supervision for lecturers and doctoral students. In the interests of equal treatment of doctoral students, it is recommended to define clear rules regarding the organization of supervision (incl. frequency of supervision meetings, provision of feedback).
- 8) The maximum workload of supervisors per doctoral student should be formally defined and considered as part of the total workload of the lecturer.
- 9) It is recommended to develop mandatory training for supervisors. The principles of co-supervision should be clearly established to ensure the quality of the work of external co-supervisors.
- 10) Instead of the current system of awarding individual prizes to lecturers for doctoral dissertations defended over a six-year period, it would be useful to use the funds more strategically, reinvesting them, for example, in support of the research activities of doctoral students and their supervisors.
- 11) The workload of supervisors and the quality of supervision should be constantly monitored. At the university level, it is necessary to recognize and assess the teaching ability and expertise of lecturers.
- 12) The role of the annual evaluation of doctoral students in the "life cycle" of a doctoral student should be better understood. Consistency of evaluation in all study programmes should also be ensured.
- 13) Interviews with lecturers and doctoral students showed that clear guidelines on research ethics are not always clearly available to everyone, especially when it comes to human research. It is recommended to establish common principles and standards of research ethics at the university level. Lecturers and doctoral students should also be offered advice on research ethics, as appropriate.

Strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations of the Languages and Cultures Study Programme Group

ESTONIAN AND FINNO-UGRIC LINGUISTICS

Strengths

- 1) The Study Programme is very important for both Estonian society and the international Fennougrist community.
- 2) Both students and lecturers have good opportunities for international mobility.
- 3) The Study Programme is well equipped with resources. The Study Programme is conducted in a newly renovated study building.
- 4) The strength of the Study Programme is three national professorships, which are guaranteed direct funding.
- 5) The Department has successfully procured research projects and grants.
- 6) Doctoral students are very satisfied with their supervisors. There are good relations between doctoral students and supervisors, and supervisors are well accessible to doctoral students.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) In Study Programme development, it is recommended to take more account of graduates' possible careers outside the university. Ties with non-university employers could be stronger, and their interests could be taken into account in the selection of doctoral dissertations.
- 2) It should be better explained to doctoral students why there are subjects in the Study Programme that are not relevant in terms of the direction of their research.
- 3) Alumni of the Study Programme could be used more as co-supervisors and guest lecturers and as stakeholders in various development activities.
- 4) Doctoral students must have a practical opportunity to give feedback to supervisors.
- 5) About half of doctoral students are not involved in research projects. Doctoral students must be given the opportunity to participate in research projects, research groups, and thematic discussions.

GERMANIC-ROMANCE LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES

Strengths

- 1) The flexible Study Programme is tailored to the individual needs of doctoral students.
- 2) Lecturers are receptive to doctoral students' feedback on the content of the Study Programme. It is also a good practice for the supervisor and the Study Programme leader to discuss their training needs with each doctoral student individually.
- 3) Doctoral students gain a clear idea of the standards that articles published in peer-reviewed journals and presentations at international conferences must meet and are strongly supported in the above activities.
- 4) The physical infrastructure, library, and doctoral school activities are at a good level.
- 5) Doctoral students find writing camps and other doctoral school activities very useful.
- 6) The guided reading course model, which allows doctoral students to select the most relevant materials in collaboration with their supervisor, suggests that the content of the curriculum is flexible and tailored to individual needs.
- 7) Supervisors are recognized researchers in their field with strong international contacts, which are recognized and valued by doctoral students. International networks of lecturers promote the foreign mobility of doctoral students, for which the necessary funding is also available.
- 8) Students clearly understand the importance of international mobility and are looking for suitable opportunities to participate in study mobility or conferences abroad.

- 9) Foreign researchers are involved in doctoral seminars and in supervising and opposing doctoral theses.
- 10) Doctoral students gain valuable experience by teaching and supervising undergraduate students.
- 11) The Department assists doctoral students collegially - including lecturers who are not officially involved in their supervision.
- 12) The selection procedures for doctoral students are strict and competitive, allowing only the best candidates to be accepted.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) The transferable competencies that doctoral students acquire focus largely on the academic context. It would be useful to develop subject courses that address the broader competencies needed in the labor market: for example, professional behavior/etiquette, management, networking, use of social media, and financial management. It is recommended that the Department work more closely with employers and alumni to identify gaps in the Study Programme and fill them in an appropriate way.
- 2) Supervisors and doctoral schools are encouraged to co-operate more constructively in the development of transferable competence courses.
- 3) Given the small number of students, it is recommended that lecturers be more active in strengthening the profile of Germanic-Romance Language and Literature of the university by establishing more collaborative links with national cultural institutions in the target countries of languages and with other European universities.
- 4) In order to support the timely graduation of doctoral students, it is necessary to adhere to the plans and deadlines and to take a stricter approach to the evaluation of doctoral students. It is recommended to set a certain limit on the teaching load of doctoral students.
- 5) It is recommended that as many lecturers as possible join the research groups to be established. Training on how to successfully apply for project funding should also be provided at the departmental level.
- 6) It would be desirable to introduce a common model of the supervising workload of doctoral students in the College of World Languages and Cultures in order to ensure the comparability of the workload of lecturers and doctoral students between different departments.
- 7) It is recommended to make co-supervision the norm in order to spread the workload, increase accountability and offer doctoral students a broader perspective on their doctoral thesis.
- 8) It is recommended to introduce and explain to doctoral students all standards and procedures related to research ethics, for example, by organizing appropriate training.
- 9) It would be advisable to change the general attitude towards doctoral studies - this should not be seen as a mere personal interest of the doctoral student but as a professional activity with clear annual goals.
- 10) Doctoral students must be able to provide feedback on the quality of supervision at an early stage (e.g., as part of the evaluation).
- 11) The need to support the full well-being of doctoral students should be better recognized, as one of the reasons for dropping out and delaying studies is often problems related to stress and other mental tensions.

LITERATURE AND CULTURAL RESEARCH

Strengths

- 1) It is a broad-based and interdisciplinary Study Programme that fosters an innovative approach to research.
- 2) Doctoral students are well aware of the requirements for peer-reviewed articles and the benefits of international experience. The Department promotes internationalization in every way.
- 3) The Study Programme has strong links with non-university organizations that provide career opportunities for doctoral students upon graduation.
- 4) The Study Programme is well equipped with resources, including access to materials from various non - university partners (e.g., Estonian Literary Museum, Estonian Language Institute, Estonian National Museum, etc.)
- 5) Supervisors' research is of a high standard.
- 6) Funding for international missions such as conferences and longer study visits is provided.
- 7) The academic environment is stimulating, collegial, and inclusive.
- 8) Doctoral seminars serve as a forum for sharing best practices.
- 9) Doctoral students are highly qualified and motivated and deal with complex literary and cultural issues from both a modern and historical perspective.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) When supporting the development of a doctoral student, it is recommended to take into account, among other things, that doctoral students involved in research projects and those not involved in research projects have different learning experiences.
- 2) It is advisable to approach time planning more strictly than before in order to ensure that the majority of doctoral students complete it in nominal time.
- 3) It is recommended to deepen relations with non-university organizations in order to ensure the necessary support and counseling for doctoral students through co-supervisors. It would also include developing new relationships with other public and private organizations to broaden doctoral students' career prospects.
- 4) During the period of foreign mobility, regular contact and support by Tartu supervisors should be maintained.
- 5) A common understanding of the number of research articles required to complete studies must be ensured.

RUSSIAN AND SLAVONIC PHILOLOGY

Strengths

- 1) The Study Programme is flexible, allows the individual needs of doctoral students to be taken into account, and encourages them to work with archival materials, use new research methods and participate in local and international conferences.
- 2) The international reputation of the Department of Slavic Studies and its wide cooperation network also benefit other departments, e.g., by involving guest lecturers.
- 3) Doctoral students are widely involved in research projects.
- 4) A sufficient number of highly competent and motivated doctoral students from outside Estonia, such as Russia and Latvia, are recruited to the Study Programme.
- 5) Doctoral students are very satisfied with the quality of the study rooms and the tools available at the university.
- 6) Doctoral students positively highlighted the obligatory monthly doctoral seminars.
- 7) Both lecturers and doctoral students consider the compulsory subject Learning and Teaching in

an Institution of Higher Education to be a valuable part of the Study Programme, as it allows doctoral students to acquire practical teaching skills and feel like a full part of the academic community.

- 8) Doctoral students' commitment to studies is expressed in their enthusiasm to develop their theoretical, methodological, and practical skills, which means that they sometimes acquire even more credits than required by the Study Programme.
- 9) Doctoral students give very good feedback on the quality of teaching. Doctoral students communicate closely and regularly with supervisors. Supervisors are cooperative and well available to doctoral students.
- 10) Lecturers are widely involved in foreign mobility.
- 11) Doctoral students and colleagues from other departments highlight the good learning and teaching practices of the Department of Slavic Studies and their internationally high level.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) Although the name of the Study Programme of Russian and Slavic Philology, conversations with lecturers and doctoral students showed that the interest in Slavic philology has steadily decreased, and currently, no doctoral students are engaged in research on other Slavic languages. It is recommended to consider restructuring the curriculum and changing its name (e.g., to Russian philology) in order to put a clearer focus on the Study Programme and optimize the admission of doctoral students.
- 2) Given the ever-changing functions of the Russian language in the post-Soviet space and in the world, it is astonishing that topics such as the historical geopolitics of the Russian language, geolinguistics, language policy and multilingualism are not treated as separate modules in the Study Programme. It would be advisable to consider including geo-policy and social-policy elements in the Study Programme that would analyze the position of the Russian language in the Baltic States and the globalizing world and its changing functions in the post-Soviet space, taking into account the university's expertise in language ecology and Baltic interethnic processes. It could also provide inspiration for new dissertation topics different from traditional philological topics and increase the interdisciplinary aspect of doctoral students' research and its practical application possibilities. The Study Program should be systematically compared with similar study programmes in Estonia and abroad.
- 3) The Study Programme would benefit from a clear and consistent marketing strategy in the long run.
- 4) The Department does not have a system for collecting regular information about alumni. It would be advisable to gather information on the employment of alumni and use it, for example, in the development of new modules and in the selection of topics for new doctoral theses and research projects.
- 5) In order to increase the social impact of the Study Programme, it would be desirable to develop the professional skills of doctoral students also for employment outside the academic world.
- 6) It would be advisable to introduce a system in the Department for sharing good teaching, supervision, assessment, and research practices among lecturers.
- 7) It would be desirable to introduce a common model of the supervising workload of doctoral students in the College of World Languages and Cultures in order to ensure the comparability of the workload of lecturers and doctoral students between different departments.
- 8) Due to the lack of financial resources, doctoral students are not able to take advantage of longer-term mobility opportunities, as most of the available funding is intended for short-term mobility to work in Russian archives and libraries. In order to free up funds for longer periods of mobility, it is advisable to conclude agreements with Russia's central archives to gain access

to their digital collections. Interlibrary loan agreements could also be concluded with major Russian universities.

10. Clause 40 of the document "Quality Assessment of the Study Programme Group of the Doctoral Study" stipulates that the Assessment Council shall approve the assessment report within three 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 curriculum, 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 Languages and Cultures Study Programme Group of the University of Tartu in seven years.

The decision was adopted by eight votes in favor, and none opposed.

12. The Council proposes to the University of Tartu to submit to EKKA no later than 13.03.2019 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 five days of receipt of the challenge. The Assessment Council shall resolve the challenge within ten 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