

ASSESSMENT REPORT

Higher Education Institution	Kuressaare College, Tallinn University of Technology
Study programme group	<i>Personal Services</i>
Study Programme (s)	Tourism and Catering Management Prof HE

INTRODUCTION

The aim of the assessment panel was the evaluation of the following professional higher education study programmes of the Personal Services study programme group:

Estonian School of Hotel and Tourism Management	Hotel Management
Estonian School of Hotel and Tourism Management	Tour Operation
Estonian School of Hotel and Tourism Management	Catering Management
Tallinn University of Technology, Kuressaare College	Tourism and Catering Management
University of Tartu, Pärnu College	Tourism and Hotel Management

The evaluation looked at each of the study programmes separately, but also at their similarities and differences.

The following persons formed the assessment panel:

Prof Peter Mason, Department of Marketing, Tourism and Hospitality, Faculty of Business, Bedfordshire University, UK - chairman

Dr Rong Huang, Plymouth School of Tourism and Hospitality, UK

Associate Prof Remigijus Kinderis, Klaipeda State College, Lithuania

Feliks Mägus, Nordic Hotels OÜ, Chairman of the Management Board, General Manager of Nordic Hotel Forum, Estonia

Rasmus Kuusemets, Lääne-Viru Rakenduskõrgkool, student, Estonia

After the preparation phase, the work of the assessment panel in Estonia started on Monday 24th November 2014 with an introduction to the Higher Education System as well as the assessment procedure by EKKA, the Estonian Quality assurance organisation for higher education. The members of the panel agreed the overall questions and areas to discuss with each group at the three institutions, which were part of the assessment process. The distribution of tasks between the members of the assessment panel was then organised and the concrete schedule of the site visits agreed.

During the following days meetings were held at the Kuressaare College of the Tallinn University of Technology (Tuesday), Pärnu College of the University of Tartu (Wednesday) followed by the site visit to the Estonian School of Hotel and Tourism Management on Thursday and Friday. In all cases, the schedule for discussion on site for each of the various study programmes only allowed for short time slots to be available for panel members to exchange information, discuss conclusions and implications for further questions.

In all three institutions the discussions with the persons responsible for the study programmes, the staff, the students and the representatives from the employment market (employees, employers and alumni) were very open and interesting and allowed for an exchange of ideas.

On Saturday 29th November, the panel held an all-day meeting, during which both the structure of the final report was agreed and findings of panel meetings were compiled in a first draft of the assessment reports. This work was executed in a cooperative way and the members of the panel intensively discussed their individual views on the relevant topics.

Kuressaare College is located on the Island of Saaremaa and according to the Self-evaluation Report, was established as a local learning, research and development centre, representing the regional policy of Tallinn University of Technology (TUT). During the visit on November 25th 2014, the evaluation team (henceforth ‘the team’) had open and detailed discussions with the College Director, a TUT representative, those responsible for the study programme management, teaching staff, students and industry representatives (employees, employers and alumni).

The programme at Kuressaare College is the only programme of TUT which belongs to the Personal Services Study Programme Group. The team noted that the Tourism curriculum of the College specialises in Tourism and Catering Management and was the first study programme of Kuressaare College, beginning in 1999. The current 3.5-year applied programme was registered in 2002. However the learning outcome-based assessment system was only adopted in 2009, when efforts were taken in relation to coherency of the objectives and outcomes of the study programme.

The College had very recently moved to new premises, just prior to the visit of the team. These new premises have been well converted and modernised and offer a very good learning environment. However, student numbers on the course were relatively low at the time of the visit and have been low for some years. At the time of the visit, a mix of full-time and part-time staff was used in the delivery of the programme, but the Tourism aspect of the programme was covered solely by part-time staff.

The only other institution offering Professional Catering courses is EHTE, the private higher education institution located in Tallinn. However, courses on ‘Tourism Management’ are also offered at Pärnu College and EHTE. Nevertheless, the two related themes of Catering Management and Tourism Management offered together, means that Kuressaare College is the only institution in Estonia to focus on both areas together.

A. General findings (concise analyses of the study programme group):

Strengths

The College has a particular strength and reputation in Catering Management and it is currently well supported by, and is strategically important to TUT. The College also has a strong regional role within Saaremaa County, being a partner with local tourism establishments as well as to the local community in general.

The quality of the study environment is generally good, largely due to the recent move to new premises.

Although the College has a relatively small number of staff and students, there are significant indications that it provides a supportive academic community.

Student access to IT is good. The teaching/learning platform Moodle is available and widely used by students and lecturers.

Students are given the opportunity to provide anonymous, critically constructive, written feedback about the course and teaching staff. Evidence was provided during the evaluation visit that students' feedback can be used to change staffing.

Areas of Improvement

Student numbers on the programmes are low and there appears to be relatively little competition for places.

The study programme currently is not particularly international, in terms of overseas students, and although foreign languages are taught, there could be more parts of the programme delivered in English, or other relevant foreign languages.

Although, the college appear to have a policy regarding assignment deadlines, in reality the deadlines still tend to be too flexible.

There are a large number of assignments – this point was also referred to in the 2003 and 2006 Evaluation Reports. Even though each module leader may believe it is necessary for there to be several assignments per module, when looking at the overall study programme, students have many modules that give relatively few credit points, in addition to the more major modules, so in total there are a large number of assignments per course.

The current teaching staff are ageing and do not feel the pressure to gain a PhD qualification in order to secure their current positions. There does not appear to be a succession plan for when current staff retire. There is a high workload on the relatively small group of teaching staff and yet there appears to be no clear contingency plan for staff absence due to sickness or for other reasons.

Currently, not all the study courses are in Moodle.

Recommendations

Significant efforts need to be made to recruit more students from within ‘mainland’ Estonia and attempts should be made to recruit international students.

A clear policy should be put in place in relation to late submission of assignments, and extenuating circumstances should only be allowed if these are approved by a relevant committee. Deadlines need to be more strictly adhered to.

All modules in the curriculum need to be revisited regularly in relation to their sequencing, rationale, possible overlapping and practical elements.

The smaller modules should regularly reviewed to consider combining some, where possible.

Modules should also be regularly reviewed with regard to the number of assignments, with a view to significantly reducing these.

All the study modules should be in Moodle, as this is currently the choice of the College as the main e-learning platform, and it will provide a mode of communication that is consistent for all students and staff.

To further internationalise the curriculum, there needs to be more modules delivered in English, or other relevant languages.

A contingency plan for staff absence must be put in place.

B: Strengths and Areas for Improvement of the programme of Tourism and Catering Management by assessment areas

(1) Study programme and study programme development

Strengths

The college has a particular strength and reputation in Catering Management.

The practical elements of the course are regarded by staff and industry representatives as very important for attracting students.

The course has very close links with Industry, and Industry makes important inputs to the course development.

The final thesis is closely linked to the practical internship of the course.

Development of the programme takes into account feedback from teachers, students, alumni and employers.

Areas for improvement

Recruitment is a major issue with student numbers low and not rising significantly in the past five years, which threatens the financial viability of the programme.

There is relatively little competition for places on the programme.

Although the College has a good reputation in Catering Management, the Tourism parts appear to be regarded as of lesser importance.

There is some overlapping of the content of modules, for example: 'Tourism Marketing' and 'Marketing'. The team note that some smaller modules have already been incorporated into broader subject areas, however there still appear to be opportunities to combine modules.

There is the disadvantage of a small course in terms of the potential lack of a 'critical mass' of students and staff.

The study programme is not particularly international, at present, in terms of overseas students, and although foreign languages are taught, there could be more parts of the programme delivered in English.

Recommendations

Significant efforts need to be made to recruit more students from within Estonia.

The College should develop strategies for a greater degree of internationalisation of its programme, including recruiting more international students.

The College needs to place more emphasis on the Tourism elements of the programme, particularly theoretical aspects. Also, specialist Hotel Management software used within the Tourism elements of the course should be regularly updated.

Currently overlapping modules should be combined - for example 'Project Management' could be merged with 'Event Management', as well as 'Cleaning and Maintenance' with 'Restaurant Servicing'.

(2) Resources

Strengths

The College is well integrated into the TUT infrastructure.

Recently refurbished premises with relevant study classrooms provide a comfortable, attractive, learning environment, with a friendly and supportive atmosphere.

The equipment and facilities for teaching Catering Management are good.

A sufficient supply of textbooks and academic journals is available in the library, and textbooks can also be ordered from TUT library. Access to the TUT databases, library and other teaching resources are available online.

Computer work stations and copy machine/scanner are readily available and also high speed WiFi.

The teaching platform Moodle is available and widely used by the students and lecturers.

E-learning possibilities are also available.

The current financial status is viable, because the College is state-funded and part of TUT.

There are good opportunities for distant learning students to combine studying with part-time working.

Areas for improvement

There are possible sustainability problems, in terms of financial resources, due to the low number of students.

The College needs to monitor closely its on-going relationship with TUT, particularly in terms of financial sustainability of the programme.

Recommendations

A strategic plan for the College, developed in conjunction with TUT, will be essential in the near future to ensure the long-term financial stability of the College.

(3) Teaching and learning

Strengths

Students are involved in international projects and summer schools.

A plagiarism detecting program called KRATT is used.

The practical nature of the course was welcomed by students and alumni during the visit.

Areas for improvement:

Specialist software for teaching the Hotel Management parts of the course is lacking.

According to employers and alumni during the visit, the length and timing of placements, particularly in the first year, is not appropriate.

Support for individual work is not as well developed as it should be and could lead to an increased drop-out rate.

From examples of assignments the team saw during the visit, students have a tendency to use the internet as their main source of information and there is insufficient use of appropriate academic books and journals.

Recommendations:

Specialist software for teaching and learning Hotel Management should be made available.

The timing and length of placements needs reconsideration and staff should liaise more with employers in planning placements.

All the teaching staff should be encouraged to undertake research and integrate their research into their teaching and where possible involve students in their research projects.

Students should make greater use of academic books and journals in their assignments.

(4) Teaching staff

Strengths

The members of the teaching staff are specialists in their fields.

Teaching staff make use of feedback from students and industry to improve the quality of their courses.

Teaching staff are actively involved in international summer schools.

Overseas teachers from foreign universities have given lectures in the summer schools.

More than one third of the course is taught by industry practitioners, which means professional work is well linked with skills necessary for the programme.

Areas for improvement

There is an ageing staff and the need in the near future to recruit younger teaching staff.

There is a high workload for the teaching staff, and yet, there is no clear contingency plan for staff absence due to sickness or other commitments.

The role of the individual staff member's own research in the design/update of the curriculum is not fully recognised by all teaching staff.

Staff appear to be very flexible in dealing with deadlines of assignments.

There is a strong possibility that 'external' part-time teaching staff may not fully understand requirements for their input to courses and, therefore, this may not be as good as that of the regular teaching staff.

Recommendations

A contingency plan for staff absence must be put in place.

All the teaching staff should be encouraged to undertake research and integrate the research into their teaching.

Teaching staff should be encouraged more to obtain higher academic skills/qualifications.

More teachers and lecturers from TUT and other HE institutions of Estonia and visiting staff from abroad should be encouraged and, in the longer term, there will be a requirement to replace the current, ageing staff.

A clear policy should be put in place in relation to late submission of assignments and extenuating circumstances should only be allowed if such circumstances are approved by the relevant committee.

A clear policy to involve and train 'external' teaching staff should be developed and implemented. Students should be made aware of this policy in order to develop appropriate expectations.

5) Students

Strengths

Students rate the course highly.

Students are involved in the research projects organised by one member of the teaching staff.

Students have an opportunity to anonymously provide critically constructive, written feedback about the course and teaching staff. Evidence was provided that students' feedback is used to change staffing.

Areas of Improvement

Deadlines are very flexible.

Students are over-assessed and a number of students failed to complete the course within the normal time-frame, which has an effect on the graduation rate.

Some students appear to be insufficiently motivated to graduate in the normal time period, and yet are permitted to continue their studies.

Too few teachers are doing academic research and/or involve students in their research projects.

Recommendations

Deadlines need to be more strictly adhered to.

There should be a reduction in the number of assignments.

Students should be more actively involved in the research projects of the teaching staff.

Students should be encouraged to graduate on time.