

**Assessment Report**  
**Economics; Business and  
Administration; Law**

PhD studies

University of Tartu

Tallinn University of Technology

Estonian Business School

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## Introduction

Quality assessment of a study programme group involves the assessment of the conformity of study programmes and the studies and development activities that take place on their basis to legislation, national and international standards and developmental directions with the purpose of providing recommendations to improve the quality of studies.

The goal of quality assessment of a study programme group is supporting the internal evaluation and self-development of the institution of higher education. Quality assessment of study programme groups is not followed by sanctions: expert assessments should be considered recommendations.

Quality assessment of a study programme group takes place at least once every 7 years based on the regulation approved by EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education *Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups at the Level of Doctoral Studies*.

The aim of the assessment team was the evaluation of the Study Programme Groups (SPG) of Social Sciences (Economics), Business and Administration and Law at the level of doctoral studies in three universities: University of Tartu, Tallinn University of Technology and Estonian Business School.

The team was asked to assess the conformity of the study programmes belonging to the study programme group and the instruction provided on the basis thereof to legislation and to national and international standards and/or recommendations, including the assessment of the level of the corresponding theoretical and practical instruction, the research and pedagogical qualification of the teaching staff and research staff, and the sufficiency of resources for the provision of instruction.

The following persons formed the assessment team:

<b>Roger Levy (chairman)</b>	Professor, London School of Economics, UK
<b>Andrew Clark</b>	Professor, Paris School of Economics, France
<b>Aalt Willem Heringa</b>	Professor, Maastricht University, The Netherlands
<b>Per Læg Reid</b>	Professor, University of Bergen, Norway
<b>Maris Moks</b>	PhD student, Hertie School of Governance, Germany
<b>Janek Uiboupin</b>	Member of the Management Board, Coop Pank AS, Estonia

The assessment process was coordinated by Hillar Bauman (EKKA).

After the preparation phase, the work of the assessment team in Estonia started on Monday, 15 October 2018, with an introduction to the Higher Education System as well as the assessment procedure by EKKA, the Estonian Quality assurance organization for higher and vocational education. The members of the team agreed the overall questions and areas to discuss with each group at the three institutions, who were part of the assessment process. The distribution of tasks between the members of the assessment team was organised and the detailed schedule of the site visits agreed.

During the following days, meetings were held with the representatives of the University of Tartu (Tuesday 16 October and Wednesday 17 October), Tallinn University of Technology (Thursday 18 October) and Estonian Business School (Friday 19 October). 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 team members to exchange information, discuss conclusions and implications for further questions.

On Saturday, October 20, the team held an all-day meeting, during which both the structure of the final report was agreed and findings of team meetings were compiled in a first draft of the assessment report. This work was executed in a cooperative way and the members of the team intensively discussed their individual views on the relevant topics.

In the following three sections, the assessment team summarise their general findings, conclusions and recommendations which are relevant across all the SPG-s. In so doing, the team provides an external and objective perspective on the programmes and the contexts within which they are delivered. Ultimately, the intention is to provide constructive comment and critique which may form the basis upon which improvements in the quality of the programmes may be achieved. In formulating its recommendations, however, the assessment team has not evaluated the financial feasibility associated with their implementation.

## **General findings and recommendations**

### General findings

Comparing the programmes in the three institutions, we found a number of common patterns and issues evident in the Self Evaluation Reports (SERs), supporting documentation and from the meetings we had with university managers, PhD supervisors, students and alumni. At the institutional level, all three universities had good or very good paper based quality systems in their statutes and regulations covering Doctoral programme requirements, feedback systems, supervisory arrangements and evaluation. On the other hand, there was only patchy use of common Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) (student progression and journal rankings for example), and no single comprehensive framework of KPIs for doctoral programmes. For example, the majority of action plans in the SERs did not have SMART objectives linked to indicators. This was rather surprising for disciplines such as economics and management.

All three institutions had also embarked on various forms of structural reorganisation over the past few years which had impacted directly on these programme groups, the long term effects of which are as yet unclear. Some were still in the early phases of implementation, others more or less complete. It was apparent from our discussions with staff that these had not been universally welcomed, but that the perceived negative effects were minimised where departmental integrity had been maintained. The objective of reducing the number of cost centres and amalgamating post-graduate studies into fewer units was a work in progress. Awareness of the benefits of this process was not general among staff. Questions about the sustainability of small programmes is an issue that staff would rather not talk about.

On the other hand, there was a general appreciation of the decision to introduce full time only PhD study with university top-up. It is far too early to say whether this will either increase the quality of applicants or the rate of completions, both of which are in need of serious improvement from the evidence of the figures contained in the SERs. As far as applications are concerned, there was no evidence in the SERs that applicant numbers had increased. The view of many staff was that as the number of PhD places had decreased, competition was higher so quality is improved, and therefore final outputs would also improve in due course. There was a widespread belief that the new funding model of full time study had ushered in a new era. This remains to be seen, as it was the case that the overwhelming majority of students we interviewed still held other jobs, sometimes multiple other jobs.

It may be that there is a process of adjustment going on, but most students while liking the additional funding, did not think that the E660 + E400 was enough to live on. The new system also puts the status of part time study into question. While existing students can continue in this mode, or become externals, it is not clear that there is any opportunity for a new student to join as a part time PhD. This was felt to be a real disadvantage by some students and staff that we met. The status of external is seen as very much a last resort as those students get no state recognition or support for themselves or the university.

Collaboration between departments internally and between sister departments across the three institutions was generally weak, not helped of course by the competitive funding environment and the small pool of qualified staff and eligible candidates for PhD studentships. We found very few examples of such collaboration, the really stand-out exception being the joint Doctoral School in Economics and Innovation which was mentioned by practically everyone, and was well liked and valued by students.

A strong research culture and practice is essential in shaping and sustaining a healthy PhD programme. We found a varied picture here from the evidence of scholarly activities and successful research grant applications in the SERs, in the 2017 research evaluations and in our discussions. While one department had achieved a high level of research activity comparable to other good European schools, this was not the case elsewhere where standards were satisfactory but not more. Where research grants were driving the research agenda, then the PhD programme reflected the imperatives of those grants. Thus students were

focussed on more specific topics and their activities were driven by outputs/publications required to achieve the outcomes set by grant holders. In other contexts, the research culture was reactive, driven by problems defined by PhD students themselves, and thus was in a very early stage of development, lacking in focus.

On the other hand, PhD programmes can serve very specific societal needs, have a specific vocational role (particularly training for an academic career), and we can report from our discussions that this is the case in most of the programmes. But it was also the case that a significant number of students thought that outside of pursuing an academic career, the PhD had no real value in the marketplace. The Industrial PhD appears so far to have been a failure from the feedback we heard from various sources.

Regarding the content of the PhD programme, there seems to be a lot of variations and a lack of a clear academic profile or approach. We have seen discipline based programmes, interdisciplinary programmes, thematic/topic based programmes, problem based programmes, project based and grant based programmes. But generally the SERs do not address the content and profile of the PhD programmes to any great extent which is a weakness of the self-evaluations.

Moving to the more technical issues of programme design, mobility, assessment, study routes, there are some contentious problems. On the balance between taught and research elements, there was no demand coming from the students for any change to the 60/180 ECTs formula. This was only coming from staff and more particularly from senior staff. The students seemed to be happy with flexible regimes which *de facto* allowed them to do their coursework over a number of years. They seem fairly relaxed about the transition between taught elements and research, although the progression figures would suggest otherwise. However, there is some minor dissatisfaction with the course mix offered, its level and the relevance of some of it. We heard evidence that credit is given for activities which to us would not merit the 'coursework' moniker. A desire for an increase in formal methods courses was mentioned to us by a number of students.

As far as mobility is concerned, all students we spoke to were very satisfied with the opportunities for international mobility and the funding support for it. This was confirmed in data and appendices in the SERs. However, it transpired that most of the mobilities we heard about were for short periods only and in the case of part time students, mobility opportunities were often nil. Given how many Estonian PhD students are *de facto* part time and have family responsibilities, this is a problem. On the incoming side, there were many examples of visiting foreign professors – but not in all programmes – but for short periods typically.

There are varied practices within the supervision and assessment process, often within the same Faculty. Thus, not all students are co-supervised for example; some programmes include an external (i.e. external to the university) in the pre-defence panel event while others do not; there do not seem to be any common standards, bar the absolute minimum of an annual Progress Review to prepare

for the annual attestation/evaluation, for the amount of supervision. Some supervisors say they meet with their students twice per year, others once a month, others once per week. In the context of the high drop-out rates, Progress Reviews are not seen as effective.

The most controversial issue is the 3 publications vs. monograph routes of study – although one might add, many staff and students don't see any problem with the former, or if they do, argue that the reality of the modern job market is that students need to have publications. There are a number of aspects which impinge on independent work of the students, the role of supervisors and the outsourcing of assessment, namely: 1) co-authorship with supervisors, 2) co-authorship generally, 3) the quality of the journals and the ranking list.

Where there is co-authorship, the basic problem with the 3 publication route is that in the absence of any scientific way of determining the contribution of each author, it is not possible to know the independent contribution of the student concerned. The growing practice of requiring that at least one of the published articles is single authored is a partial recognition of this problem. Second, there is a fundamental conflict of interest and power in play where the supervisor is a co-author. Third, long turnover time and high rejection rates in recognized peer reviewed international journals means that it is difficult for students to finish on time due to the rule that all papers have to be published before submitting. This rule might also lead the students to target lower quality outlets of dubious provenance. With the exception of some academics in Estonia, no-one takes the ETIS ranking seriously anyway. Finally, by outsourcing the assessment of the student to journal editors, supervisors and assessment committees abdicate their responsibility to supervise and assess. Given the small world of academia in Estonia, there is a chance that journal editors are professors who are also the supervisors of the students submitting articles. But this is hardly a practice which recommends itself. We make recommendations on this subject (see below).

Given the focus on inputs and processes in the programme assessment exercise, the committee welcomes the inclusion of research output/ research quality data in the supplementary materials (i.e. the Estonian Research Council evaluations carried out in 2017) supplied to us. These data were invaluable in helping us judge the results of the programmes we were examining (see below).

### Conclusions and recommendations

In the light of these common findings, we make the following 12 recommendations for all the programmes:

1. The objectives and goals of institutional reorganisation, insofar as they affect these PhD programmes, need to be refreshed and sharpened, more effectively communicated to staff, and shared with and internalised by the staff in order to create ownership in the institutes and departments.
2. Where they do not already exist, a broader range of PhD programme specific KPIs need to be developed, articulated, shared and monitored regularly. At the least, recruitment, progression and graduation targets, research excellence indicators, supervision standards, supervisor workload, supervisor training goals, annual student output targets,

student satisfaction indicators, and international mobility targets should be included. Action Plans need to be linked to these KPIs, and SMART goals adopted.

3. To give greater prominence to the research outputs from the PhD programmes, we suggest that in future the research SERs and the evaluations of them be attached to the SPG SERs as appendices.
4. The 4/4+2 system of fulltime PhD studentships is widely viewed as a game changing measure. Given the small numbers of PhD studentships available and the small pool of domestic talent, it has to adapted to make specific provision for part time PhD study.
5. In this context, all grant applications for research funding should include provision for funding new PhD students whether full or part time.
6. As achieving critical mass is a challenge in most discipline areas, the role of the Joint Doctoral School (MIDOK) should be enhanced to include research groups in the institutions in order to foster greater departmental and institutional collaboration.
7. New pathways to lengthier international sojourns for PhD students should be developed. Requirements and financial incentives may need to be strengthened for example.
8. In regards to supervision, (a) it should be a requirement that all students are co-supervised, (b) schools/faculties should be more pro-active in the development of supervisors' skills, and (c) greater priority should be given to involving active researchers as supervisors.
9. We encourage the presence of two external (to the university) reviewers at both the pre-defence and at the formal defence. These can of course be the same reviewers at both defences. The crucial element is a written evaluation of the quality of the research in the PhD theses at the pre-defence stage by reviewers who are external to the institution.
10. With regard to the '3 paper' vs. 'monograph' route to PhD, we recommend that (a) for future PhD candidates, the monograph route should be made as equally available as a practical option as the 3 paper route (b) for those existing PhD students on the 3 publication route, at least one article should be single authored and a maximum one article co-authored with the supervisor (see below 11) (c) articles/monographs should reach publishable standards according to objective peer review criteria, but not necessarily have been published prior to thesis submission.
11. Co-authorship between students and supervisors should be limited to one output for the PhD, and written safeguards and standards should be developed to govern it. There should be a minimum requirement for one substantive single authored paper by the PhD student.
12. The ETIS ranking system must be replaced with one that is more internationally robust.

# 1. Assessment report of SPGs at the University of Tartu

## 1.1. Introduction

In 2017, the University of Tartu (UT) celebrated the 385th anniversary of its founding. According to the University of Tartu Act, adopted on 16 February 1995, the University of Tartu is the national university of the Republic of Estonia. Its mission is to advance science and culture, provide the possibilities for the acquisition of higher education based on the development of science and technology on the three levels of higher education in the fields of humanities, social, medical and natural sciences and to provide public services based on teaching, research and other creative activities.

The Faculty of Social Sciences as such at the University of Tartu came to be at the beginning of 2016 as the result of a structural reform which also saw the creation of three other faculties. The Faculty consists of four institutes, two schools and two colleges. Teaching and research in the fields of law, economics, business, educational science and educational management, psychology, sociology, politics, and media and communication studies is conducted in the faculty. The faculty's colleges in Narva and Pärnu are important regional higher education and research centres as well as development leaders in the regions.

All of the institutes and schools of the faculty (but not the colleges) have their own PhD programmes. There are all together seven - economics and business administration, educational science, law, media and communication, political science, psychology and sociology.

### Data of student numbers of the Faculty of Social Sciences (source: SER of UT)

#### Total number of students

Curricula	2012/13		2013/14		2014/15		2015/16		2016/17	
	No. of students	Incl. working at the UT	No. of students	Incl. working at the UT	No. of students	Incl. working at the UT	No. of students	Incl. working at the UT	No. of students	Incl. working at the UT
Economics	71	19	67	17	63	14	64	16	61	17
Political Science	21	2	21	3	17	2	15	4	13	6
Law	104	9	95	6	94	6	81	7	73	9
Psychology	37	17	34	14	30	11	27	10	24	6

Educational Science	34	18	32	17	35	16	37	15	35	15
Science Education	13	6	13	6	12	4	9	2	6	0
Media and Communication	36	9	32	6	29	10	30	10	28	11
Sociology	28	9	20	6	16	7	13	6	12	4
<b>Faculty of Social Sciences total</b>	<b>344</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>314</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>296</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>UT total</b>	<b>1504</b>	<b>502</b>	<b>1457</b>	<b>493</b>	<b>1401</b>	<b>487</b>	<b>1348</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>1258</b>	<b>362</b>

### Total number of international students

Curricula	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Economics	4	3	8	9	14	16
Political Science	5	6	5	7	7	9
Law	1	1	2	2	3	3
Psychology	2	1	2	3	1	1
Educational Science	0	1	2	2	1	2
Science Education	0	0	0	0	0	0
Media and Communication	4	3	2	2	1	1
Sociology	1	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Faculty of Social Sciences total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>UT total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>186</b>

### Total number of students admitted

Curricula	2012/13		2013/14		2014/15		2015/16		2016/17	
	No. of students	including those continuing at	No. of students	including those continuing at	No. of students	including those continuing at	No. of students	including those continuing at	No. of students	including those continuing at

		UT								
Economics	9	6	7	6	10	6	6	4	8	5
Political Science	4	0	2	2	2	1	2	1	2	1
Law	4	4	4	4	3	2	3	3	6	6
Psychology	4	4	4	3	4	3	5	4	4	4
Educational Science	3	2	4	3	5	4	5	5	5	5
Science Education	2	2								
Media and Communication	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	3	3	3
Sociology	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1
<b>Faculty of Social Sciences total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>UT total</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>133</b>

### Students who left studies

Curricula	2012/13		2013/14		2014/15		2015/16		2016/17	
	Total	Incl. at student's request								
Economics	8	5	12	2	6	2	11	8	7	2
Political Science	2	0	2	2	5	2	3	0	0	0
Law	8	2	2	1	12	6	14	7	11	6
Psychology	5	3	3	3	7	6	4	1	2	1
Educational Science	7	5	1	1	2	2	4	2	2	1



## 1.2. General findings and recommendations at study programme groups level

### General findings

The organization of post-graduate studies in UT is currently in a state of transition. According to the Vice Rector for Research, the plan is to reduce the current 30 programmes down to 6 graduate schools by 2020, although this number is not specifically mentioned in the University's strategic plan for 2015-2020. For social sciences, this will come on top of the Faculty reorganisation of 2016 bringing together 6 institutes and 2 colleges, and will potentially mean a single doctoral school in place of the current 3 (with 7 discipline areas). While senior Faculty staff expressed a willingness to start the discussion, they were anxious that the rules of other disciplines would not be applied to the Faculty.

When asked about the vision for PhD programmes at UT, the Vice Rector for Research argued that the unique advantages of e-processes in Estonian government and society informed the UT doctoral programme. However, there is no reference to this in the strategic plan. In fact, the underlying rationale for re-organisation is achieving greater internal efficiencies (with some possible redundancies by the end of the process), and improving completion rates. As can be seen in the SER, UT is strong in having a relatively broad range of KPIs to measure progress. While it is not clear the extent to which these are used as decision making tools within the Faculties (the Vice Rector comments that progress of faculty plans activities 'are mostly evaluated based on KPI'), it is evident that a performance element has been introduced in the allocation of new PhD studentships.

In respect of social sciences, the figures in the SER for intake, progression and graduations show it is the worst in the University; in terms of economics and law specifically, Law is worse than Economics. There has been some improvement in these two disciplines: comparing 2012 with 2016, the number of PhD students dropped from 175 to 134, the number of graduates remained the same at 9, dropouts rose slightly from 16 to 18, and admissions were 13 compared to 14 (SER figures). Thus, the completion rate is improving in the context of falling numbers and a steady intake, but the dropout rate remains the same at roughly twice the graduation rate. While Economics has been quite successful at raising international student numbers (from 4 to 16 by 2016), this masks a fall in domestic intake. On the other side, the Law PhD programme does not attract many international students because of its domestic focus. While we recognise that the profound changes in the PhD funding regime reduces student numbers, the consequence is that long term sustainability is an issue for both these programmes, as it is for others in the Faculty.

The overall health of the programmes is a concern. To its credit, the Dean's office carried out a survey of current PhD students in the Faculty in 2016 (SER, p14). Amongst its findings were that 88% of respondents were inhibited from completing on time because of their job commitments, 73% felt isolated with

their thesis topic, 69% were discouraged by the length and complication of the publication process, 39% were dissatisfied with the curriculum, and 47% felt that progress reviews were simply a formality. The role of the supervisor was considered to be rather small. When challenged in our discussions, supervisors from both institutes responded that these were figures for the Faculty as a whole and did not necessarily reflect the situation in their institutes. Senior managers were pessimistic that there was much they could do, but were keen to do a follow up survey and tie it into the new SIS. The view from senior management is that 'The new suggested graduate schools is one of the offered solutions, which could create interdisciplinary and decrease the feeling of being isolated'. Maybe so, but there is no evidence yet.

There was a recognition in our meetings with students and staff that the Progress Review system was not working well in the Faculty, and that other Faculties were doing better, especially when it came to the 4<sup>th</sup> year of enrolment. The answer given to us by staff was to have more reviews rather than actively intervene to improve the practice of individual supervisors. It was felt that the University's Code of Practice of Doctoral Studies and Doctoral Studies Agreement provided a sufficient framework for supervision. It was put to us that the Faculty was too lenient with students who were not progressing timeously. The practice of suspending studies for periods of years and then re-enrolling at the next level as if this had not happened (i.e. stopping the clock), seemed to be widespread from evidence we heard.

Data in the SER on publications, staff qualifications, research projects, scholarly activities etc showed that research underpinning the PhD programmes in Law and Economics was sufficient. In terms of obtaining grant funding, Economics staff were much more successful than Law staff despite the latter claiming to be very highly qualified. The effect of these diverging landscapes means that Economics PhD applicants are more directed in the choice of their topics towards those related to grant funded projects than those in Law.

#### Strengths.

- These are well-established nationally recognized institutes operating within a strongly defined regulatory framework (links in SER refer).
- There is a comprehensive set of university KPIs to help measure progress in the faculty (SER refers).
- The introduction in 2016 of a performance element for the allocation of PhD funding between Faculty departments (SER and staff refer).
- Opportunities for student mobility are numerous, available and well funded (SER and students refer).
- Supervisory staff are generally well qualified and meet the standards required (SER refers).
- There has been an in-depth analysis of the PhD student experience coupled with a willingness to confront difficult questions. This is to be commended. (SER reports).

- The investment in the E400 top-up for each full time PhD student (SER, staff and students refer).

#### Areas for Improvement and Recommendations

- Supervision still appears to be uneven in quality. Measures have been taken to address this, including a formal mid-term annual performance appraisal in addition to the annual evaluation, and the encouragement of co-supervision. These measures should help ensure a sufficient level of involvement of PhD supervisors with their students.
- Further progress needs to be made in improving progression and graduation rates and in reducing the level of dropouts. It should be an aim of the programme to reduce the ratio of dropouts to completions from 2:1 to 1:1 within 3 years.
- Achieving and sustaining critical mass is a fundamental problem. While there is potential for interdisciplinarity and collaboration across UT and with other institutions in Estonia and elsewhere, it is not fully realised as the SER acknowledges in several places. It can be enhanced through the introduction appropriate new financial incentives, structural reforms, the Joint Doctoral School initiative and joint research collaboration.
- Such collaboration and interdisciplinarity will also aid in obtaining research grants and facilitate future oriented innovative research.

### 1.3. Strengths and areas for improvement of study programmes by assessment areas

#### 1.3.1. Economics

##### Study programme

###### Standards

- ✓ The launch and development of the study programme are based on the Standard of Higher Education and other legislation, national strategies, university development plans, the effectiveness of research and development, various analyses (including labour market and feasibility analyses); striving for the best overall programme quality.
- ✓ Doctoral programmes contain at least 70% research, development or other creative work by doctoral students, making the results thereof public in international peer-reviewed research journals or in other ways that have international dimensions.
- ✓ Study programmes incorporate doctoral student participation in conferences and/or other professional activities, and are counted towards completion of the study programme.
- ✓ Doctoral programmes enable doctoral students to acquire leadership and teamwork skills, develop coaching and teaching skills as well as a proficiency in foreign languages at the level needed for successful participation in international working environments.
- ✓ Different components of a doctoral programme form a coherent whole supporting

- |  |
|--|
| the personal development of each doctoral student.   |
| ✓ Study programme development takes into account feedback from doctoral students, supervisors, employers, alumni and other stakeholders. |

### Comments

The standards for PhD study programmes are broadly met in economics at UT and the programme is compliant with them. The SER 'Economics' details the taught programme elements, skills development, supporting activities for mobility, foreign languages, the research component (set at 75%). Beyond referring to the university statutes on curriculum development, the SER narrative is cryptic, and it is difficult to tell how the change process actually works, or what the reasons are for the proposed actions in the 'Action Plan'. Some detail is given but the narrative is not there. This needs to be rectified, as does the absence in the plan of SMART goals and targets. As it is, it will be very difficult to measure progress in the areas identified for improvement.

Our discussions with staff and students did fill in some gaps insofar as the involvement of students in the process and the introduction of more flexibility in response was concerned. This has been a positive development as far as students are concerned.

The School's action plan made no mention of PhD graduation rates or the duration of studies. It is unclear what kind of labour market analysis if any is done for the programme, and a subsequent search of the SER has not revealed the claimed links to such analysis. It was reported to us by some students and alumni that an economics PhD had no value in the marketplace other than for an academic career.

The recent reduction in admissions is aimed at increasing the quality of admitted PhD students and therefore should not have a negative impact on graduation rates. This and the introduction of the student grant top-up should increase the number of full time students, reducing the number who live (and work) in Tallinn, and so encourage the development of an active PhD research culture at the university.

### Strengths

- The flexibility of the revised taught programme and the ability of students to gain credits for courses taken elsewhere in UT and internationally, and to get credits via APEL/VOTA (SER, staff and students refer).
- We appreciated the Junior Research Fellow positions, which provide one year of full time funding in order to write up the final PhD.
- The rise in the number of international students is an indicator of the attractiveness of the programme beyond Estonia (SER refers).
- The high level of funded research projects supporting the programme. The SER shows the benefits of this: 31% of Faculty PhD students are

employed by the university, with involvement including 'providing research assistance, conducting data collection or analysis, implementing coordination and dissemination activities.. (and).. several large-scale projects... include specific measures designed to boost skills and competences of PhD students' SER, p6-7.

- A number of the students that we met were pursuing research topics with obvious interdisciplinary potential. This naturally allows for co-supervision outside of the School or even outside of the Faculty. In 2018, five PhD theses have and will be defended, with all of them written under co-supervision.

#### Areas for Improvement and Recommendations

- The criteria for selection of research topics remains unclear, although it has been stated to us that 'Preference belongs to the topics that are developed within project teams and as a rule have project funding but new and innovative research topics are also considered'. There are only relatively few propositions made by potential supervisors (although some are very general), and these may not fit with students' interests.
- The Programme Director needs to be more forceful in leading the PhD programme especially in regard to addressing ongoing problems with supervision.
- Co-authorship of PhD chapters published as journal articles is common. (see general recommendations for all programme groups, above).

## Resources

### Standards

- ✓ In conducting doctoral study programmes, an adequate number of teaching staff and researchers participate, who hold the appropriate qualifications required to carry out doctoral studies and supervise doctoral theses in a given study programme.
- ✓ Universities shall ensure that sufficient funds are available to conduct doctoral studies, to provide development activities associated with doctoral studies and research, and to support the professional development of teaching staff and researchers.
- ✓ Resources (teaching, learning and research environments; libraries; resources required for teaching, learning and research) support the achievement of objectives set out in study programmes as well as the actual teaching, learning and research at the level of doctoral studies. Resource development is sustainable.
- ✓ Trends in the numbers of current learners, admitted learners and graduates (by study programme) in doctoral studies under the study programme group during the last five years indicate sustainability.

### Comments

The standard for PhD study programmes resources are broadly met in economics at UT and the programme is compliant with them. The SER shows that UT is providing adequate levels of funding to support the full time student model, to provide properly qualified staff able to supervise PhD students, to sustain the infrastructure including a new building for the Economics department due for completion in 2019/20, for library facilities etc.

However, the reliance on outside funding, particularly European Union supported research programmes (currently at 46% on average according to Estonian State figures), makes sustainability beyond 2020 uncertain. It is also the case that the full time funding model and consequent drop in the number of students will mean that the long term sustainability of the programme will be in question. If completion rates improve, then this may not be a problem. However, the imperative for cross institutional collaboration in this discipline area will only grow with lower numbers of students.

### Strengths

- The commitment to fund the full time programme and the extra resources generated by externally funded research (SER refers).
- The new DELTA building scheduled for completion in the next 18 months with an additional building next door where 'firms could rent a space and develop their knowledge intensive activities', SER p19.
- Support for student mobility which is documented in the SER link: 'Various mobility programmes and specific scholarships are also available. Students can, for example, apply for the DoRa Plus programme, which encompasses both long-term as well as short-term mobility. Graduate schools are an additional source of support'.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Owing to uncertainties regarding long term research funding from the EU, new income streams need to be developed now to sustain the programme's future viability.
- The Action Plan is a series of statements which needs to have performance indicators linked to definite timelines.

## **Teaching, learning, research and/or creative activity**

### Standards

- ✓ Uniform principles, based on best international practices and agreed upon at the university level, shall be followed while implementing doctoral programmes and assuring the quality of the doctoral studies (including supervision of doctoral theses).
- ✓ Doctoral studies support students' personal and social development, including creating an environment which will prepare them to successfully participate in international working environments at research and development institutions, as well as in the business and public sectors.
- ✓ Supervision of doctoral theses; modern methodology used in teaching and research; organisation of studies; and doctoral students' professional research,

	<p>development and/or other creative activities all support achievement of the objectives and learning outcomes of doctoral studies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Assessment of outcomes of the learning, research and creative work done by doctoral students is relevant, transparent and objective, and supports the development of doctoral students.</li><li>✓ Doctoral students are asked for feedback regarding supervision on a regular basis and the results of these surveys are taken into account for quality improvement activities.</li><li>✓ Effectiveness of the doctoral studies is analysed and such analyses serve as a basis for planning quality improvement activities.</li></ul>
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### Comments

The standards for PhD study programmes in teaching, learning and research are broadly met and the programme is formally compliant with them. There are concerns around supervision arrangements (as documented in the Dean's survey in the SER and by students we met), with the relevance of the taught programme (according to some students we spoke to), and the degree to which student feedback has an impact on programme improvement (the Dean's survey in the SER refers).

There is a functioning feedback system for students via the Study Information System (SIS, ÕIS in Estonian) in which teaching quality, teaching staff, course units and suggestions for future improvements can be made. With regard to supervision, the SER provides details of improvements which have been introduced as a result of the feedback. These include 'mid-term performance appraisal between the PhD student and their supervisor once a year in April; clearly formulated procedures for potential supervisors for offering topics for PhD theses for new admission; strong collaboration with the Doctoral School in Economics and Innovation and methodological support for writing and presenting research papers (summer and winter schools, writing camps with participation of both students and supervisors, lectures and seminars conducted by well qualified quest lectures, etc.)' SER pp20- 21.

As far as research is concerned, the metrics for economics shown in the appendices to the SER are good, especially when it comes to successful research project funding. The publications records of staff also indicate a good level of independent writing activity, with the proviso that the ETIS rankings contain journal titles which are not in internationally recognised citation lists. The evidence in the SER shows good integration of PhD students into the research projects listed.

### Strengths

- Well funded opportunities available to students for international mobility reported by students and detailed in the SER.
- The involvement of doctoral students in externally funded research projects referred to in the SER and by students.

- The use of Joint Doctoral School in Economics and Innovation in developing students' skills and providing a space for interdisciplinary and inter-institutional collaboration.
- The option for students to choose whether or not to supervise Master's students (discussions with students reported).
- The use of open meetings and brainstorming sessions referred to in the SER to develop the curriculum with the students.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- In our meeting with students, they reported that some courses in methodology needed improvement in content. We welcome the new initiatives in this area which should be closely monitored.
- While the situation regarding flexibility had improved, students argued that even greater choice of PhD level course would be appreciated in order to accommodate their particular specialisms.
- There is very little on innovative teaching techniques, interactive learning etc. in the SER narrative. A statement and examples are needed, and a start would be to iterate the contents of the publications referred to (a couple from 2018, p20). The Action Plan (p21-22) is again a series of statements with no timelines, no KPIs, no process. It should be SMARTened up.

### **Teaching staff**

#### Standards

- ✓ Teaching staff participate in research, development and/or creative activity at the level of and to the extent sufficient to conduct doctoral studies in the curriculum group and to supervise doctoral theses.
- ✓ Teaching staff develop their supervisory competences and share best practices with one other.
- ✓ Teaching staff collaborate in fields of teaching, research and creative work within the university and also with stakeholders outside the university (public sector organisations, enterprises, other research and development institutions).
- ✓ Teaching staff further their skills at foreign universities or other research institutions, participate in international research and creative projects, and present papers at high-level conferences.
- ✓ Qualified international and visiting teaching staff are involved in conducting doctoral studies, participating in doctoral thesis defence panels and/or reviewing doctoral theses.
- ✓ When assessing the work of teaching staff (including their evaluations), the effectiveness of their teaching as well as of their research, development and creative works is taken into account; including the effectiveness of their student supervision, development of their teaching and supervisory skills, and their international mobility.

#### Comments

The standards for PhD study programmes in teaching staff are broadly met and the programme is compliant with them. It is evident from the preceding remarks about PhD supervision, that best practices are still not being shared as widely as they might be, but the situation is improving. Similarly, collaboration between staff, departments/institutes, and universities needs further enhancement.

As far as the qualifications and national stature of economics staff are concerned, the SER points out that there are three laureates of the Estonian National Science Prize and a member of the Estonian Academy of Science, and that staff have been successful in bidding for practically focussed research projects. In addition, top business leaders, ministers and the prime-minister and President of Estonia have taken part in the PhD courses by giving feedback to students' course works and questions. These are impressive resources to be able to call on.

As the SER acknowledges, collaboration between researchers and staff from the institute with those elsewhere in the Faculty and the university is weak, and collaboration in supervision needs improvement (we refer to this elsewhere in our report).

The age profile of the full time faculty (as shown in the appendices of the SER but not easy to discern) is at the high end, which makes it even more important that junior faculty should get co-supervision opportunities and staff development to support it as soon as possible. There does not appear to be a co-ordinated staff development programme specifically aimed at these needs. If there is, we did not see it.

### Strengths

- Successful bidding for practically focussed research projects which support PhD studies via e.g. Interreg, the Estonian Research Council Programme, and RITA projects (SER refers).
- High level of formal qualifications for PhD supervision (SER appendix refers).

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The age profile of the full time faculty involved as principal supervisors and grant holders is a concern, and we recommend that opportunities for co-supervision and leadership on grant applications is accelerated. Succession planning for the role of Programme Director should be accelerated by the appointment of a Deputy Director from among younger faculty.
- While we note that 'the problems and ideas for the development of the programme are regularly collected and analysed in several brain-storming events and in events where best supervising practices are discussed; e.g. a seminar *How to improve efficiency of doctoral studies* (31.05.2016) where professor Maaja Vadi shared her experience on successful supervising (etc)' there should nevertheless be a targeted programme of staff development and mentoring to support this bringing together the ad hoc and informal efforts already in place (SER refers to these).

- The Action Plan (SER, p23) for staffing is a series of statements which needs to have performance indicators linked to definite timelines.

## Doctoral students

### Standards

- ✓ When admitting students to doctoral study, their suitability for successful completion of their studies is assessed on the basis of transparent criteria.
- ✓ Doctoral students plan their studies as well as research and development activities in collaboration with their supervisor(s), setting out specific objectives for each year and taking responsibility for achieving these objectives.
- ✓ Evaluation of doctoral students is transparent and impartial. Its purpose is to support development of the doctoral students, provide an opinion regarding the effectiveness of their work to date, and assess their capabilities to complete their studies on time and successfully defend their doctoral theses.
- ✓ Universities offer doctoral students counselling on completing their studies and planning their further careers.
- ✓ Doctoral students' extracurricular teaching, research and/or creative activities or other work-related activities at the university support successful completion of their doctoral studies.
- ✓ Doctoral students participate in international mobility programmes or take advantage of other opportunities for learning or research at foreign universities and/or research and development institutions<sup>1</sup>.
- ✓ Alumni are regularly asked for feedback on the quality of the doctoral study, and employers are asked for feedback on the preparation of the graduates.

### Comments

The standards for PhD study programmes for students are formally met by the UT systems in place, and the programme is compliant with them. There are a few areas where substance does not always match up to the formalities e.g. alumni were not aware of a formal consultative council at the institute level, although there is such a body at the university level.

As for students, the SER notes gaps between students' research interests and chosen PhD topics, a consequence of researching and publishing with their supervisors, related to the latter's funded research projects. The SER concedes that this can undermine the achievement of coherence in a student's final submission, and the Estonian focus of some of projects may lead to difficulties in publishing in international journals.

Supervision standards and practices vary as we have noted already, and while it is generally true that university-related work duties support the development of PhD students, the issue of project focussed research referred to above, and the demands of outside jobs which the vast majority of students continue to pursue, can divert them from their doctoral focus.

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<sup>1</sup> In the context of this document, 'research and development institutions' denote both research institutions and research-intensive companies.

As we have also noted, mobility opportunities for students are numerous and well funded although generally used for short durations. It is perhaps the case that the demands on students referred to in the SER are preventing these being of a longer duration and a potentially richer experience.

### Strengths

- Annual review systems for planning and monitoring the PhD workload (SER refers).
- Opportunities for international mobility (SER and students refer).
- Opportunities to participate in funded projects (SER, students and staff refer).

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- While many informal opportunities for engagement do exist (e.g. the invitation of high level individuals and alumni to give guest lectures – see SER), according to our discussions with alumni, structured alumni feedback systems seem to be lacking at the SEBA level. The SEBA alumni association, HERMES, was not mentioned to us by anyone.
- It is apparent that despite the formal annual assessment process referred to in the SER, this does not always work well as the drop-out figures in the SER attest. A big part of the problem is in students' ongoing non-PhD work commitments getting in the way of achieving progression targets (Dean's 2016 survey refers). The new full time funding system may on its own solve this problem; however, we recommend that more effort is put into matching students' PhD goals with their other commitments, be they within the university, the family or the wider labour market.
- Supervision standards generally need further improvement (earlier remarks refer).
- The SER Action Plan for students is a series of statements with no timelines and no performance indicators. This needs to be rectified.

## 1.3.2. Law

### **Study programme**

#### Standards

- ✓ The launch and development of the study programme are based on the Standard of Higher Education and other legislation, national strategies, university development plans, the effectiveness of research and development, various analyses (including labour market and feasibility analyses); striving for the best overall programme quality.
- ✓ Doctoral programmes contain at least 70% research, development or other creative work by doctoral students, making the results thereof public in international peer-reviewed research journals or in other ways that have

<p>international dimensions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Study programmes incorporate doctoral student participation in conferences and/or other professional activities, and are counted towards completion of the study programme.</li><li>✓ Doctoral programmes enable doctoral students to acquire leadership and teamwork skills, develop coaching and teaching skills as well as a proficiency in foreign languages at the level needed for successful participation in international working environments.</li><li>✓ Different components of a doctoral programme form a coherent whole supporting the personal development of each doctoral student.</li><li>✓ Study programme development takes into account feedback from doctoral students, supervisors, employers, alumni and other stakeholders.</li></ul>
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### Comments

We confirm that standards are broadly met for the study programme in Law. In terms of completions, the SER shows that in the preceding 5 years there was an annual average of five PHD'S awarded; approximately 20% written in English. Our discussions with students and SER data showed that most PHD'S were defended under the scheme of one article + monograph. SER data show that the completion and progress rate was very low even in comparison with other disciplines in social sciences; in recent years intake has been more strict and therefore limited (6 in 2016/17). It remains to be seen whether and how stricter intake ushered in by the new funding regime will influence progress and completion.

In the past, the Law PhD programme admitted many PhD students who were in fact unable to complete the studies. One of the main reasons was the students' need to work (full-time). This is expected to change since the introduction of the additional (university) allowance of 400€ starting with the current academic year. There are first signs of more full-time students. Interrogating the SER figures in detail and discussion with students showed that apart from fulltime PhD students, it appeared that there are also part-time students as well as external students. It was a bit of a puzzle to see if and how these categories sit in the tables provided to us.

The same data also show that the number of foreign PhD students is very limited, if at all. However, it is also the case that whenever possible foreign professors are involved in the committee stage, assessing a PhD.

The appendices in the SER show that in some circumstances the articles / some of the articles that count for the PhD have been co-written with the supervisor. This was confirmed in our discussions with staff and students and we have some doubts as to the publication aspects. In many cases the work is one monograph and one article. The outputs listed in the SER show that even when three articles are pursued they do not always appear in the highest ranking international journals. Monographs are only in rare cases published by international publishers.

We are not convinced that the fourth requirement is met for all PhDs. For the first aspects (leadership and teamwork skills etc.), they are part of the curriculum,

however the foreign languages or international environment is not always/necessarily present because of the strongly Estonian focus of many Law PhDs.

In terms of coursework, the list detailed in the SER does not necessarily guarantee a coherent whole. It may occur on an individual basis, but it is unclear how and when coherence is guaranteed. On the other hand, this flexibility allows for more student choice. One consequence of this could have been more collaboration, but from our discussions with staff and students, the inclusion of Law as a department in a larger faculty does not seem to have resulted in collaboration in research or PhD's between the disciplines that are represented in the school.

The SER details new developments regarding progress review: 1) as of January 2019, the 2nd year review must be based on 1/3 of the draft thesis; 2) recently, for the first time ever, there have also been a couple of negative evaluations of students. Increasingly regulations and rules are put in place to ensure progress rate and supervision (annual progress reports, best practices).

A review of past PhD topics and discussions with alumni, confirmed that this PhD serves a clear purpose: there is a clear demand for more PhD degrees from the side of the alumni/public and private sector employees/academia. The graduates' freedom of choice in terms of employment is also demonstrated by the fact that only 2-3 out of 8 current PhD students intend to pursue an academic career. However, the strong Estonian focus means that internationalization of the programme has been limited although joint supervision with overseas partners is a strength (SER refers).

### Strengths

- A tight and compact law community engaged in the programme and its development. The SER explains that 'Employers (e.g. representatives of the Estonian Bar Association, Supreme Court, Office of Prosecutor General, Chamber of Notaries, Ministry of Justice) mostly give feedback on the curriculum through the Programme Council. The evaluation by doctoral students, teaching staff and employers has been positive and none of the parties has indicated aspects that need considerable change' SER p30.
- Students were generally very happy with course load, choice of courses, the expertise of the teaching staff, and supervision (discussions with students confirms).
- The study programme incorporates doctoral student participation in conferences and/or other professional activities (SER, students confirm).
- The coordinator of the programme showed good leadership and commitment (discussions with staff confirms).
- The legislative foundation of the programme appears to be sufficient (SER, university regulations confirm).

- Study programme development does take into account feedback from doctoral students, supervisors, employers, alumni and other stakeholders. An example: a recently graduated alumna reported on the university's interest in her study experience and the respective exchange.
- Alumni, in general, are satisfied with the quality of the programme output, i.e. the defended theses. There is a relatively good/wide variety of topics represented, they say.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- To be more specific and precise through KPIs in formulating targets and goals for the development of the programme. That would also allow for measuring the effectiveness of measures and whether improvement is on track.
- A consequence of the new funding regime, as the SER figures show, is that sustainability of the programme is endangered when intake remains small and completion rates remain less than perfect. Priority must be given to enhance intake, with national and international students, for which the 400 euro top up may indeed help, and to seek more funding for PhD projects from external sources.
- Our discussions, the SER, the Dean's 2016 survey show a need to make supervisors fully and entirely accountable and responsible for the progress of their PhD students and to expect from them to assist, organize regular contacts with and stimulate their students. Instead of setting rules and regulation, we recommend to work with the concept: high confidence, and high penalty (see also general recommendations, co-supervision).
- Implement the university and faculty policy that 50% of the PhD students are divided on the basis of success rate, and also internally within the department when dividing PhD places over professors/supervisors. This would also enhance and facilitate the implementation of the recommendation mentioned *supra* about supervisors' responsibility and accountability.
- Although students were neutral on this issue, reduce the component of course work (presently 60 ECTS). Some of it presently is not real course work (though possibly useful). And also ensure a large component of transferable skills: research method, legal writing, comparative research, empirical research, law and economics, relevant interdisciplinary skills, oral skills.
- To end the possibility for PhDs to consist (largely or mainly) of articles, co-written with the supervisor. The mere existence of such possibility conflicts with the requirement that a PhD is a first proof of the ability to independently conduct academic research. It sits uneasily with the unequal position of PhD student and supervisor; and it basically reduces the scope of the requirement of the 3 articles.

- While we recognise the barriers to student/staff mobility, internationalization in the sense of students structurally and systematically participating in exchange, other than short visits abroad and visits by foreign staff, ought to be furthered and deepened. This is specifically relevant for Estonia, since the legal academic (PhD) community is very small and intensive international exchange will deepen and further the quality of research and its reception of international developments and standards.
- There is greater potential for collaboration within the school and with the other departments. We recommend to improve and intensify collaboration which could also increase the chances of external funding and increase the sustainability of the doctoral programme(s).
- Ensure that articles making up a PhD are published in highly ranked peer reviewed journals. And in the case of monographs that they are also published at a later stage by highly ranked publishers.

## Resources

### Standards

- ✓ In conducting doctoral study programmes, an adequate number of teaching staff and researchers participate, who hold the appropriate qualifications required to carry out doctoral studies and supervise doctoral theses in a given study programme.
- ✓ Universities shall ensure that sufficient funds are available to conduct doctoral studies, to provide development activities associated with doctoral studies and research, and to support the professional development of teaching staff and researchers.
- ✓ Resources (teaching, learning and research environments; libraries; resources required for teaching, learning and research) support the achievement of objectives set out in study programmes as well as the actual teaching, learning and research at the level of doctoral studies. Resource development is sustainable.
- ✓ Trends in the numbers of current learners, admitted learners and graduates (by study programme) in doctoral studies under the study programme group during the last five years indicate sustainability.

### Comments

We confirm that standards for resources are broadly met for the study programme in Law. The SER shows that we have seen a decline in PhD student intake in recent years. If the low completion rate continues and is not remedied, output will dwindle, and therefore the award of new PhD places. Being the only doctoral programme in law in Estonia this is a cause of concern. Also, because a vibrant doctoral programme must have a substantive critical mass, which is also important for the necessary academic climate and coherence.

In this context, the SER notes the lack of external funding for Law coming from research projects: 'many teaching staff members have not succeeded in getting a research grant (in the years 2013– 2017, 23 research grants were awarded to 11 teaching staff members). As a solution, the School of Law needs to focus more on encouraging teaching staff in applying for grants', SER, p32.

The consequence of the 'inadequate involvement' of doctoral students in research projects 'through which it would be possible to pay stipends to doctoral students, compensate their international travel costs, purchase books, etc.' is that 'support provided by belonging to the team... contribut(ing) to research activities, incl. writing publications as a co-author' is absent.

Physical resources are deemed adequate by both staff and students (SER, p32 refers), and this was confirmed in our discussions.

### Strengths

- The recently introduced 400€ extra allowance from the university budget is of considerable help and may serve the purpose of making the program sustainable as well as resolve the problem of students' commitment to full-time studies.
- According to our discussions, UT administration has offered help with writing the grant projects. This is a positive development.
- Despite room for improvement, the SER confirmed that in the years 2013–2017 the research of 23 doctoral students was financed from the research grants of teaching staff.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- International networks and cooperation abroad is essential to be competitive on the EU grant level. That also applies to interdisciplinary collaboration. Similarly, a better and more clearly identified mission and identity and focus of the program would be helpful and enhance visibility of the program and its values. Based upon a clear mission/vision internal and international collaboration must be sought and developed.
- The lack of successful grant applications is clearly a problem. However, the administration claims to have introduced some novel possibilities to get help with grant writing. This possibility should be encouraged and used.
- Grant writing in collaboration with other Estonian and foreign universities should be investigated. This would help tailor the grant projects to the needs of the research calls and pool the required expertise.

### **Teaching, learning, research and/or creative activity**

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### Standards

- ✓ Uniform principles, based on best international practices and agreed upon at the university level, shall be followed while implementing doctoral programmes and assuring the quality of the doctoral studies (including supervision of doctoral theses).
- ✓ Doctoral studies support students' personal and social development, including creating an environment which will prepare them to successfully participate in international working environments at research and development institutions, as well as in the business and public sectors.
- ✓ Supervision of doctoral theses; modern methodology used in teaching and research; organisation of studies; and doctoral students' professional research, development and/or other creative activities all support achievement of the objectives and learning outcomes of doctoral studies.
- ✓ Assessment of outcomes of the learning, research and creative work done by doctoral students is relevant, transparent and objective, and supports the development of doctoral students.
- ✓ Doctoral students are asked for feedback regarding supervision on a regular basis and the results of these surveys are taken into account for quality improvement activities.
- ✓ Effectiveness of the doctoral studies is analysed and such analyses serve as a basis for planning quality improvement activities.

### Comments

We confirm that standards for teaching, learning and research are broadly met for the study programme in Law. Good practices have been developed e.g. in improving supervision, but need to be implemented more thoroughly in practice.

In general the SER shows and students confirmed to us that doctoral studies do support students' personal and social development. However, compared to international standards more activities with and for PhD students must be developed.

The quality of supervision has been criticized inter alia on account of the capacity of supervisors. It was reported that this should no longer be an issue because the supervisors admitted to adhering to the new practice of limiting the number of supervisees to 3-4 per supervisor. However, our discussions with staff confirmed that currently 4 out of 8 professors still supervise more than 4 students at a time.

A successful thesis defense of a supervisee is apparently no longer a requirement for a tenured position.

### Strengths

- The leading expertise in Estonian law with a clear relevance and purpose for the Estonian society resides in the law faculty of the University of Tartu. This could be seen as a comparative advantage if there were competing PhD programs at other Estonian universities. But there are none; being the only law programme, the PhD research should focus also on European and international law (comparative law).

- The SER shows that feedback on teaching and supervision is above average. The aim of the UT is the average of 4.1 (of maximum 5). The average for the School of Law for 2013-2017 was 4.3, that is, it exceeds the UT target', SER, p33.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The current system for PhD planning outlined in the SER should be developed so that at the beginning of a PhD project, there is a time plan of the PhD, the necessary study and research abroad, necessary training adjusted to personal needs, and agreements about supervision.
- The strength of the Estonian law expertise concentrated in one place is only relative and could be improved to a considerable extent by including research beyond Estonian law (i.e. European, international, and interdisciplinary focuses).
- Furthermore, concentrating on the impact of European law on the Estonian legal developments would offer a significant advantage when applying for grants, especially external (EU) ones.
- The supervisors would like to attract more international guest staff. The students confirm the need for more international expertise.

### **Teaching staff**

#### Standards

- ✓ Teaching staff participate in research, development and/or creative activity at the level of and to the extent sufficient to conduct doctoral studies in the curriculum group and to supervise doctoral theses.
- ✓ Teaching staff develop their supervisory competences and share best practices with one other.
- ✓ Teaching staff collaborate in fields of teaching, research and creative work within the university and also with stakeholders outside the university (public sector organisations, enterprises, other research and development institutions).
- ✓ Teaching staff further their skills at foreign universities or other research institutions, participate in international research and creative projects, and present papers at high-level conferences.
- ✓ Qualified international and visiting teaching staff are involved in conducting doctoral studies, participating in doctoral thesis defence panels and/or reviewing doctoral theses.
- ✓ When assessing the work of teaching staff (including their evaluations), the effectiveness of their teaching as well as of their research, development and creative works is taken into account; including the effectiveness of their student supervision, development of their teaching and supervisory skills, and their international mobility.

#### Comments

We confirm that standards for teaching staff are broadly met for the study programme in Law. The supervisors would like to attract more international guest staff and the students confirm the need for more international expertise. The SER details international links and co-operation which are a good start, but this needs deepening particularly for students.

While staff are indeed highly qualified and meet national standards (SER refers), their involvement in externally funded research needs much further development as we have noted. The SER notes that only 'approximately 20% of the supervisors were leaders of research grants during the self-assessment period. This explains why most of the doctoral students were not involved in work on research grants.' and 'The reason for poor involvement of doctoral students is that many teaching staff members have not succeeded in getting a research grant' SER, p35.

Staff are able to participate in UT staff development activities including in-service training seminars and personal counselling for developing their teaching skills. The SER notes that '73% of the teaching staff in our curriculum has participated in in-service training' p33. One may ask why this is not 100%.

#### Strengths

- The law faculty and external guest staff are highly recognized experts in Estonian law field.
- Supervisors see the planned reform/restructuring of PhD program across the department of social sciences (the envisaged consolidation of programmes into the Doctoral School of Social Sciences) as a chance for better cooperation.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- We recommend that the external expert is involved not only in the later stage of the final defence, but already at the stage of the pre-defence (see general recommendations, all programmes).
- In the SER, it was often referred to the Doctoral School of Economics and Innovation which appears to offer the students various opportunities for interdisciplinary exchange. However, the interviews did not confirm that Law students take much advantage of this possibility. Such collaboration should be encouraged.

### **Doctoral students**

#### Standards

- ✓ When admitting students to doctoral study, their suitability for successful completion of their studies is assessed on the basis of transparent criteria.
- ✓ Doctoral students plan their studies as well as research and development activities in collaboration with their supervisor(s), setting out specific objectives for each year and taking responsibility for achieving these objectives.
- ✓ Evaluation of doctoral students is transparent and impartial. Its purpose is to support development of the doctoral students, provide an opinion regarding the

<p>effectiveness of their work to date, and assess their capabilities to complete their studies on time and successfully defend their doctoral theses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Universities offer doctoral students counselling on completing their studies and planning their further careers.</li><li>✓ Doctoral students' extracurricular teaching, research and/or creative activities or other work-related activities at the university support successful completion of their doctoral studies.</li><li>✓ Doctoral students participate in international mobility programmes or take advantage of other opportunities for learning or research at foreign universities and/or research and development institutions<sup>2</sup>.</li><li>✓ Alumni are regularly asked for feedback on the quality of the doctoral study, and employers are asked for feedback on the preparation of the graduates.</li></ul>
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### Comments

We confirm that standards for students are broadly met for the study programme in Law. The SER outlines the department's process and criteria for admission to the PhD programme, and it has recently adjusted its admission criteria in order to improve the candidates' suitability for successful completion of their studies.

As in other cases, most students confirmed that, even when full time PhD, they have another/main job either within or outside the university. They also reported that their employers usually facilitate their employees when they do a PhD; employers are under a legal obligation to provide 20 days off for PhD studies. PhD students may also take longer than the stipulated 4 years for reasons of academic leave and maternal/parental leave.

Doctoral students reported that they do plan their studies as well as research and development activities in collaboration with their supervisor(s), however, there is room for improvement here. The requirement of annual progress reports is a good development.

The students appear to have sufficient opportunities and possibilities to go abroad both short-term (e.g. conferences) and long-term (e.g. study visit, field work via 'the Dora Plus Programme, Erasmus+ Programme, the mobility programme of the Doctoral School in Economics and Innovation). Some doctoral students have also used the Kristjan Jaak Scholarship for academic mobility. There are several national mobility grants (which have been significantly improved) and the supervisors provide the relevant connections if needed. However, it is up to the students to take the respective initiative, the supervisors do not actively require or nudge them to do so.

In the SER it appeared that PhD students were less happy with supervision or their place in the department. This aspect was not fully confirmed in our meetings.

### Strengths

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<sup>2</sup> In the context of this document, 'research and development institutions' denote both research institutions and research-intensive companies.

- Students, alumni and staff confirmed very good employability of the PhD students and graduates.
- The alumni were very positive about their study experience and their outlook after the graduation.
- Student and alumni feedback is recognized and included in the development of the programme.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The programme could be much more international in terms of attraction among international students. In 2016/2017, only 3 out of 73 PhD students came from abroad (SER refers). This in turn would require a much stronger presence and visibility of international and European law expertise (currently 'hidden' behind the public law domain) as well as interdisciplinary flexibility.

## **2. Assessment report of SPG at Tallinn University of Technology**

### **2.1. Introduction**

TTÜ was established on 17 September, 1918, when the Estonian Engineering Society uniting local technology intellectuals began to provide special engineering courses in German-occupied Estonia. When Estonia gained independence, the need for engineers, architects and technicians kept growing. In 1919, the activities were continued under a private school called Tallinn College of Engineering (TCE). TCE was nationalised in 1920 and it soon achieved the status of a public institution of higher education. In 1936, the government granted TCE the status of a university and TCE was renamed Tallinn Technical Institute. The status of a university in public law was granted on 12 January 1995 by the Universities Act.

The academic structure of TTÜ consists of 4 Schools and Estonian Maritime Academy and 20 Departments, incl. Tartu College, Virumaa College and IT College.

According to the performance agreement between TTÜ and the Ministry of Education and Research, TTÜ is responsible for the teaching and development of programmes in the field of Business and Administration. TTÜ is the only public university who conducts doctoral studies in the field of Business and Administration.

The Business and Administration study programme group consists of two doctoral study programmes and forms the second biggest PhD study programme group in

TTÜ by the number of doctoral students. The PhD study programmes in Business and Administration study programme group are: (i) Economics and Business Administration and (ii) Public Administration, both managed by the School of Business and Governance.

In the academic year 2017/2018 there were 597 doctoral students in TTÜ, of which 116 or 19.43% of the total studied at the Business and Administration study programme group.

The doctoral students in the Business and Administration study programme group of the TTÜ belong to the Doctoral School in Economics and Innovation, led by University of Tartu. The doctoral School in Economics and Innovation is a partnership between the University of Tartu, Tallinn University of Technology, Tallinn University, the Estonian University of Life Sciences, Estonian Business School and Bank of Estonia.

Data on PhD student numbers – Economics and Business Administration:

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Total number of doctoral students	93	93	85	75	68
Incl. those who work in the university	23	23	21	26	30
Number of international students at doctoral level	7	10	13	12	13
Total number of admissions	16	18	14	9	4
Incl. those who enrolled from the 2nd cycle of studies of the same university	10	6	5	3	3
Total number of dropouts	13	16	14	14	7
No of doctoral theses defended	6	5	8	7	1
No of graduates in nominal + 2 years	3	2	5	5	1

Data on PhD student numbers – Public Administration:

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Total number of doctoral	47	45	51	48	48

students					
Incl. those who work in the university	13	9	10	16	22
Number of international students at doctoral level	7	9	15	13	15
Total number of admissions	9	5	12	7	7
Incl. those who enrolled from the 2nd cycle of studies of the same university	3	1	5	2	5
Total number of dropouts	2	6	3	5	6
No of doctoral theses defended	1	1	3	5	4
No of graduates in nominal + 2 years	0	0	2	3	3

## 2.2. General findings and recommendations at study programme group level

The reorganisation of postgraduate studies at TUT (TalTech) is more advanced, and in spring this year (2018), the SER reports that 'a joint advisory board for the PhD programmes at the School of Business and Governance was created. The advisory board includes faculty members, student representatives, and external stakeholders (employers). This board offers advice on changing the PhD programmes, including on how to better address the needs of the employers and society' (SER p31). One of the major aims was to foster greater collaboration within the Faculty, and senior staff told us that while there had been initial reluctance, fears proved to be unjustified and colleagues were working together. Discussions with staff revealed an important proviso, which was that it was working (so far) because departmental autonomy had been retained.

It appears that the main drivers for this were twofold: from the university point of view as articulated by the Vice Rector for Research, it was to better adjust to the new regime of full time funded PhDs, fewer admissions, fewer overall numbers and (hopefully) better progression rates. The view from the Faculty, at least one part of it, was slightly different although not necessarily incompatible, namely the goal of international research excellence.

In terms of measuring the success of the PhD programmes, TalTech uses a range of KPIs which are similar but not identical to those used elsewhere. In regards to

this programme group, SER Table 3, aggregate data, 2013-17, shows that numbers are declining steeply in Business and administration, but are static in Public Administration with international student numbers going up in both over the same period. Graduations are in single figures from a total population of 140 in 2013 and 116 in 2017, but whilst these (low) numbers are static in Business and administration (bar the case of only a single graduation in 2017), they are going up in Public Administration. So while the overall completion rate is improving, it masks differences within the programme group. The dropout rate also shows divergence – falling in Business administration, but static in Public Administration. Overall, dropouts still exceed graduations.

The common factor is however is the very small numbers. The 2014 Institutional Accreditation stated that admissions and completion rates for PhDs were too low, and that they should both be increased. However, the new (2016) fully funded requirement is undermining the goal of more PhD students – unless that is, alternative sources of funding can be secured for more studentships. It was clear from our discussions that staff in both groups are working very hard to secure such funding. The Public Administration group has been very successful at doing this - so much so in fact, that the PhD programme there is essentially project driven, and the department's overall capacity is dependent on funded projects. It was put to us that TalTech was in effect a brand under whose banner Public Administration operated as a self-financing franchise.

We discussed with staff how this subject group fitted into the heavily technological and engineering-led ethos and community at TalTech. A main concern was that rules and practices that were common in those discipline areas (e.g. the prevalence of multiple joint publications), should not be simply applied to Business and administration disciplines to their evident disadvantage.

It appears that staff in the SPG are well-qualified and most are publishing regularly. Overall standards are good or very good judging by the SER submission to Estonian Research Council's 2017 research evaluation exercise. We have some concerns about opportunities for junior staff to become involved in PhD supervision, as a tool to improve completions, TalTech is prioritizing the role of senior supervisors (SER and discussions with staff refer). There is a high number of research groups – 21 about one per 2.5 fulltime members of staff.

As for the supervision process, reforms have been made recently aimed at improving monitoring of performance 'so that there are now clear goals to be achieved at the end of each academic year. According to the new attestation procedure, the supervisors must evaluate completion of research cumulatively at the end of each academic year... (it) should give clear feedback on the progress of doctoral students during their studies and possible problems will be detected earlier' (SER, p10).

Student feedback is collected regularly through well defined systems prescribed in the regulations and operated centrally via the SIS. Satisfaction with the programmes between 2014 and 2017 as measured on the 4 question matrix detailed in the SER have remained fairly constant (4 or 4+ average), although there was a dip in Public Administration in 2017 on the measure of the structure

and coherence of the course schedule. It does not seem to be the case that there has been an in-depth survey of student satisfaction. The SER and students we met reported ample well-funded opportunities for international mobility.

### Strengths

- It is evident from the SER and linked documentation, that TalTech systems are very strong – there's one for everything. Departmental Action Plans have SMART goals and there is multiple evidence in the SER of a culture of continuous improvement. One has the impression of a well-run institution.
- The physical infrastructure is modern and of high quality. We found generous office facilities for PhD students, and excellent library and IT capabilities during our visit. The SER notes that 'All PhD students who work at TTÜ have their own working space, equipped with a computer and software required for work and research. The PhD students are provided access to all materials and equipment necessary for their work.... The library offers access to 705 000 printed collections (receiving annually ca 10 000 new items), 167 000 e-books and 82 000 e-journals. TTÜ provides access to more than 70 databases, including the most popular databases of research publications' p38.
- The reorganisation of graduate studies is well advanced and has delivered benefits in terms of collaboration according to those we met.
- The investment in the E400 top-up for each full time PhD student (SER, staff and students refer).
- While the creation of project driven PhD programmes through externally funded projects poses challenges for student choice and continuity of studies, staff in the SPG (Public Administration) have been very successful in this regard (SER refers) and research activity indicators are very high.
- The PhD student body in both Economics and Business Administration and Public Administration seemed to have produced a lively academic research environment through formal Doctoral School activities and more informal seminars and reading groups. These are to be encouraged, with the potential for the integration of some activities across Economics and Business Administration and Public Administration to be explored.

### Areas for Improvement and Recommendations

- The student satisfaction survey for the programme as detailed in the SER asks few questions and these are very superficial. It is recommended that an in-depth survey of PhD students using the Dean's survey at UT as its template, is carried out at TalTech.
- Improvements in progression and completions are a work in progress, and it is too early to judge the success or otherwise of the full time funding model in this regard. We recommend a permanent review group be established for the first five years to measure progress.
- The new funding model is having a downward impact on total numbers calling into question the sustainability of programmes in individual

institutions. It is thus vital that inter-disciplinary and inter-institutional collaboration be prioritised and expedited.

- The new funding model and the rules, regulations and procedures are aimed at full time students. Given the overwhelming evidence relayed to us by the students themselves that most are *de facto* part time because they have multiple jobs, the role of part-time and external students should be clarified.
- TalTech would seem to be well-positioned to take advantage of the Industrial PhD system, yet there is only a little evidence so far of its use. In particular, better use could be made of the alumni network in this respect.
- An independent review of the 21 research groups should be carried out on the basis of activity and output measures, with a view to rationalisation.

## 2.3. Strengths and areas for improvement of study programmes by assessment areas

### 2.3.1. Economics and Business Administration

#### Study programme

##### Standards

- ✓ The launch and development of the study programme are based on the Standard of Higher Education and other legislation, national strategies, university development plans, the effectiveness of research and development, various analyses (including labour market and feasibility analyses); striving for the best overall programme quality.
- ✓ Doctoral programmes contain at least 70% research, development or other creative work by doctoral students, making the results thereof public in international peer-reviewed research journals or in other ways that have international dimensions.
- ✓ Study programmes incorporate doctoral student participation in conferences and/or other professional activities, and are counted towards completion of the study programme.
- ✓ Doctoral programmes enable doctoral students to acquire leadership and teamwork skills, develop coaching and teaching skills as well as a proficiency in foreign languages at the level needed for successful participation in international working environments.
- ✓ Different components of a doctoral programme form a coherent whole supporting the personal development of each doctoral student.
- ✓ Study programme development takes into account feedback from doctoral students, supervisors, employers, alumni and other stakeholders.

##### Comments

The standards for PhD study programmes are broadly met in economics and business administration at TalTech and the programme is compliant with them. The SER 'Economics and Business Administration' details the taught programme elements, skills development, supporting activities for mobility, foreign languages, the research component (set at 75%). Well developed university systems are in place for staff, student and alumni feedback (SER and links refer), although there is always room for improvement.

The programme faces challenges. A revised taught programme has been launched in autumn 2018 which aims to address both the 'need to provide courses in core topics and advanced topics while at the same taking into account the low number of students in the two specialisations.... (and) the wish to allow students substantial freedom in their studies so that individual preferences regarding research focus and time use can be accommodated', while at the same time ensuring 'continued convergence towards the levels of doctoral programmes in economics and business administration at highly regarded universities in Western Europe' (SER p15). It is not clear what if any metrics are being used to measure the achievement of these ambitious objectives.

The solution has been less choice of specialised taught courses. As the SER explains, 'the share of elective courses on special study module has been reduced. In the economic/finance specialisation there are no elective courses while in the business specialisation the choice has been reduced as well.... The new version of the Doctoral Programme in Economics and Business Administration offers a selection of general courses provided at the general university level from which the doctoral students can choose based on their needs and career objectives. These courses include managerial and leadership psychology, writing for publication, organisation of education and research, innovation studies, the philosophy of science, and didactics of higher education'.(SER, p15-16)

The feedback from students to the taught programme (old version) has been mixed (SER refers). While students have appreciated the opportunities to take courses abroad, there were some negative comments regarding the limited possibilities of transferring credits from these courses to TalTech. In response, the new programme allows greater flexibility (SER refers), although it is unclear what this means precisely.

As yet there is no formal process for alumni review and engagement, but informal review is positive (SER, p16). The SER Action Plan promises to introduce formal review in Autumn 2018.

### Strengths

- The focus in the revised programme on student choice and of offering taught courses which will enhance their transferable skills.
- The competition between supervisors in terms of research topics is useful, and the evaluation of these projects by international reviewers is a good feature. The potential exclusion of junior staff members via the number of

citations and number of defences criteria should continue to be addressed via possibilities for co-supervision.

- There was considerable demand for students from the Economics and Business Administration programme in the marketplace according to alumni we met.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Our discussions with staff and students indicated that there seems to be at present only limited collaboration between Economics and Business Administration.
- There was only limited contact with employers regarding the placement of PhD students, or the potential funding of PhD positions. Although a number of PhD students will be known to potential employers as this is a small labour market, this is less true for students coming from abroad.
- Clear metrics need to be established to measure the degree to which the objectives of new programme are being achieved. The present student survey is inadequate for this purpose.

### **Resources**

#### Standards

- ✓ In conducting doctoral study programmes, an adequate number of teaching staff and researchers participate, who hold the appropriate qualifications required to carry out doctoral studies and supervise doctoral theses in a given study programme.
- ✓ Universities shall ensure that sufficient funds are available to conduct doctoral studies, to provide development activities associated with doctoral studies and research, and to support the professional development of teaching staff and researchers.
- ✓ Resources (teaching, learning and research environments; libraries; resources required for teaching, learning and research) support the achievement of objectives set out in study programmes as well as the actual teaching, learning and research at the level of doctoral studies. Resource development is sustainable.
- ✓ Trends in the numbers of current learners, admitted learners and graduates (by study programme) in doctoral studies under the study programme group during the last five years indicate sustainability.

#### Comments

The standards for resources for PhD study programmes are broadly met in economics and business administration at TalTech and the programme is compliant with them. Infrastructure standards etc are good as we have already stated, and resources are readily available for student mobility internationally.

There are concerns nevertheless with the long term sustainability of the fully funded PhD model, as the salary element is usually financed from research grants (SER refers) which cannot necessarily be relied on in the long term.

The SER gives examples of research grants held by faculty members from which doctoral students are financed including ‘ “Institutions for Knowledge Intensive Development: Economic and Regulatory Aspects in South-East Asian Transition Economies” (1.01.2017–31.12.2020) led by Prof. Aaro Hazak and “Environmental Impact of Low Emission Shipping: Measurements and Modelling Strategies”, EnviSuM (1.03.2016–28.02.2019) led by Prof. Gunnar Prause’ (SER). There is scope for more.

However as the SER also acknowledges ‘the upshot is that the current project-based funding may lead to the doctoral students pursuing non-core topics and this may over time erode the academic profile of the doctoral programme. Moreover, the departments are participating in several public sector procurements and the doctoral students are involved in fulfilling them together with other research staff’ (SER, p18).

### Strengths

- General comments on Taltech (above) refer

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The sustainability of the PhD programme relies on both attracting funding for PhD positions and finding adequate students for the subjects proposed. The relative lack of project funding for Economics and Business Administration is a concern if PhD positions are to be funded in this way. The funding of PhD positions directly by the School is an alternative. Any insufficiency in the number of good-quality applications to the Doctoral programme can be addressed via the systematic advertisement of these positions abroad.

## **Teaching, learning, research and/or creative activity**

### Standards

- ✓ Uniform principles, based on best international practices and agreed upon at the university level, shall be followed while implementing doctoral programmes and assuring the quality of the doctoral studies (including supervision of doctoral theses).
- ✓ Doctoral studies support students' personal and social development, including creating an environment which will prepare them to successfully participate in international working environments at research and development institutions, as well as in the business and public sectors.
- ✓ Supervision of doctoral theses; modern methodology used in teaching and research; organisation of studies; and doctoral students' professional research, development and/or other creative activities all support achievement of the objectives and learning outcomes of doctoral studies.
- ✓ Assessment of outcomes of the learning, research and creative work done by doctoral students is relevant, transparent and objective, and supports the development of doctoral students.

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Doctoral students are asked for feedback regarding supervision on a regular basis and the results of these surveys are taken into account for quality improvement activities.</li><li>✓ Effectiveness of the doctoral studies is analysed and such analyses serve as a basis for planning quality improvement activities.</li></ul> |
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### Comments

The standards for teaching, learning and research for PhD study programmes are broadly met in economics and business administration at TalTech and the programme is compliant with them. In regards to supervision processes, student feedback and annual review, the programme is very systems driven in an institution which excels at systems (SER refers, p20). The annual attestation is very process and target driven for example. We have already commented on the weakness of the student feedback questionnaire at programme level, and it is not a surprise that actual feedback from students tends to be very low (SER p12).

It is difficult to get a sense of what is going on in teaching and learning because the evaluation and monitoring culture does not seem to apply to teaching staff when it comes to their own methods: 'Formal evaluation of the teaching staff's choices of teaching and assessment methods is deemed superfluous' (SER p20). It is difficult to square this statement with the impositions upon students for feedback about the programme.

Research activities are a crucial part of the support structure for a doctoral programme and we have alluded to some aspects already. Within the Faculty, there are 21 separate research groups and we have difficulty understanding the logic of this in three comparatively small departments.

In terms of opportunities for student participation and development, the SER identifies the monthly doctoral seminar as an important forum, plus participation in the Joint Doctoral School programme, and international mobility opportunities.

### Strengths

- Strong formal systems

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Teaching and assessment by staff should be subject to the same level and regularity of evaluation as is the progress of PhD student work
- The SER reports that the 'supervision of doctoral theses entails several challenges. The students' first paper is typically co-authored with the supervisor and this requires close cooperation between them. Such cooperation often works out smoothly but may in some cases be prone to misperceptions and disagreements' (SER p21). We recommend that co-authorship with PhD supervisors be limited to no more than one paper and be subject to strict rules (see General recommendations).

- We encourage the systematic presence of two external (to the university) reviewers at the pre-defence in addition to the formal defence. These can of course be the same reviewers at both defences. The crucial element is a written evaluation of the quality of the research in the PhD theses at the pre-defence stage by reviewers who are external to the institution.

## Teaching staff

### Standards

- ✓ Teaching staff participate in research, development and/or creative activity at the level of and to the extent sufficient to conduct doctoral studies in the curriculum group and to supervise doctoral theses.
- ✓ Teaching staff develop their supervisory competences and share best practices with one other.
- ✓ Teaching staff collaborate in fields of teaching, research and creative work within the university and also with stakeholders outside the university (public sector organisations, enterprises, other research and development institutions).
- ✓ Teaching staff further their skills at foreign universities or other research institutions, participate in international research and creative projects, and present papers at high-level conferences.
- ✓ Qualified international and visiting teaching staff are involved in conducting doctoral studies, participating in doctoral thesis defence panels and/or reviewing doctoral theses.
- ✓ When assessing the work of teaching staff (including their evaluations), the effectiveness of their teaching as well as of their research, development and creative works is taken into account; including the effectiveness of their student supervision, development of their teaching and supervisory skills, and their international mobility.

### Comments

The standards for teaching staff for PhD study programmes are broadly met in economics and business administration at TalTech and the programme is compliant with them.

A high bar is set for eligibility as a research supervisor. They 'are expected to be active researchers who publish regularly in international peer-reviewed journals. This requirement is easy to check since all publications of persons employed by Estonian research institutions must be entered into the Estonian Research Information System (ETIS). Moreover, the funding scheme introduced by the university in 2016 implies that the main supervisor must have access to research funding and this evidently reduces the number of persons that can function as the main supervisor' (SER, p22).

However, it is evident from the SER that as most students are co-supervised, there are opportunities for more junior members of staff to become involved – so long as they are also active researchers.

### Strengths

- Supervisors are experienced researchers, some have work experience from the private or public sector (SER refers).
- Supervisors participate in international research networks opening better possibilities for taking International courses, finding good supervisors and opponents abroad (SER refers).

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Notwithstanding the formal processes of student evaluation of courses, it is difficult to get a sense of systematic development of staff teaching skills because the evaluation and monitoring culture does not seem to apply to teaching staff. This needs to be changed.
- With regard to junior staff, active mentoring should be a normal part of the staff development process to ensure there is adequate succession planning for the senior supervisors of the future.

### **Doctoral students**

#### Standards

- ✓ When admitting students to doctoral study, their suitability for successful completion of their studies is assessed on the basis of transparent criteria.
- ✓ Doctoral students plan their studies as well as research and development activities in collaboration with their supervisor(s), setting out specific objectives for each year and taking responsibility for achieving these objectives.
- ✓ Evaluation of doctoral students is transparent and impartial. Its purpose is to support development of the doctoral students, provide an opinion regarding the effectiveness of their work to date, and assess their capabilities to complete their studies on time and successfully defend their doctoral theses.
- ✓ Universities offer doctoral students counselling on completing their studies and planning their further careers.
- ✓ Doctoral students' extracurricular teaching, research and/or creative activities or other work-related activities at the university support successful completion of their doctoral studies.
- ✓ Doctoral students participate in international mobility programmes or take advantage of other opportunities for learning or research at foreign universities and/or research and development institutions<sup>3</sup>.
- ✓ Alumni are regularly asked for feedback on the quality of the doctoral study, and employers are asked for feedback on the preparation of the graduates.

#### Comments

The standards for doctoral students for PhD study programmes are broadly met in economics and business administration at TalTech and the programme is compliant with them. As in other areas of activity, clear and comprehensive

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<sup>3</sup> In the context of this document, 'research and development institutions' denote both research institutions and research-intensive companies.

formal systems and standards are in place regarding admission criteria, thesis planning, progression, evaluation, counselling/supervision (SER and links refer).

Irrespective of these formalities, there are real world problems. The SER notes that in practice, there is a difficulty in finding suitable PhD candidates: 'The competition for the topics of Economics and Business Administration is noticeable but unfortunately many of the candidates are not at the acceptable level. Therefore, there are difficulties in filling some of the topics.' (p23).

And, once there, despite the many well-funded opportunities for mobility, there is also an unwillingness of PhD students to take study-abroad opportunities. Because of family and work commitments, most go for 3-5 day sojourns only (SER p23).

As the figures for the Faculty show, the drop-out rate is a problem. According to the SER, 'the main reasons for students to drop out are the lack of time and motivation. For students admitted before 2016 without full funding (and who therefore work outside of the university) several do not commit fully to their doctoral studies. The stricter attestation rules also contribute to students leaving before graduation due to insufficient progress' (p23).

The SER notes that the 'new fully funded system introduced in the university from 2016 is supposed to lower the dropout rate. These students work on topics closely related to those of their supervisors and the supervisors are intended to interact regularly with these students' (p23). As elsewhere, it is too early to tell whether this policy will be a success. Whatever the official university view, it was the case that most students we talked to continued to work at other jobs (see earlier, general comments to all).

### Strengths

- The programme feeds into career enhancement: 'The students from the Doctoral Programme in Economics and Business have generally done well in the labour market and the broader community in Estonia '(SER p23).

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Recruitment of suitable candidates is a problem. In order to cast the recruitment net more widely, the SER Action Plan intends to improve advertising of positions.
- The uptake of medium and long term international mobilities is still a problem, so new pathways need to be explored to enable greater access. This may involve deeper profiling of potential students and the commitment of extra resources to cope with students' domestic responsibilities.

## 2.3.2. Public Administration

## Study programme

### Standards

- ✓ The launch and development of the study programme are based on the Standard of Higher Education and other legislation, national strategies, university development plans, the effectiveness of research and development, various analyses (including labour market and feasibility analyses); striving for the best overall programme quality.
- ✓ Doctoral programmes contain at least 70% research, development or other creative work by doctoral students, making the results thereof public in international peer-reviewed research journals or in other ways that have international dimensions.
- ✓ Study programmes incorporate doctoral student participation in conferences and/or other professional activities, and are counted towards completion of the study programme.
- ✓ Doctoral programmes enable doctoral students to acquire leadership and teamwork skills, develop coaching and teaching skills as well as a proficiency in foreign languages at the level needed for successful participation in international working environments.
- ✓ Different components of a doctoral programme form a coherent whole supporting the personal development of each doctoral student.
- ✓ Study programme development takes into account feedback from doctoral students, supervisors, employers, alumni and other stakeholders.

### Comments

The standards for PhD study programmes are fully met in Public Administration at TalTech and the programme is compliant with them. In the SER and in our discussions with staff and students, we were impressed by the approach to develop the next generation of researchers in the Public Administration PhD programme, with its overriding goal of achieving research excellence. A number of indicators referred to in the SER confirm that high international standards have been achieved (see below, Strengths).

Curriculum feedback and development is complex, involving 'a) The Strategy Board of the Department (which includes 8 senior faculty members), which meets at least 2-3 times a year; b) The annual strategy meeting of the Department, which includes all of its employees; c) The annual outing seminar of the HAAD PhD programme, which includes all faculty members, PhD students and some alumni' (SER p32), and is supplemented by 'frequent visits of the senior faculty to different (often leading) universities in the world (in Europe, but also in the US and Asia), ...to compare the coursework requirements, research opportunities and internationalization... to undertake continuous improvement to ensure the high quality and competitiveness of the programme. The programme director also conducts regular visits to different universities in Europe and the US and participates in the conferences of the European University Association Council for Doctoral Education (EUA-CDE)... to compare the programmes and to engage in lesson-drawing' (SER p32). While it is unclear how this all fits together, it shows an inclusive, outward facing, international perspective and good networking opportunities.

In terms of the balance between taught elements and research, the new curriculum (2018), has raised the taught element from 45 to 60 ECTS points, and decreased the research part from 195 to 180 ECTS points. The SER judges the change to be justified 'in light of the developments in the peer programmes' (p32), although no examples are given. All the students we spoke to had been 'grandfathered' in under the old regime, and thus we were not able to get their views on the new arrangements. We did ascertain however, that the specialist taught courses in Public Administration which had been available to them were actually Master's courses, and that all PhD specific courses offered at TalTech were general ones available to all PhD students in the institution. There was a general feeling among the Public Administration students we met that the courses offered were not of PhD standard, and that some were too didactic in style.

It has been put to us that 'The statement that there are no courses that are specifically for the PhD students is not correct. We do have a number of courses offered by the programme – including methods courses and the PhD seminars – which are targeted only to the PhD students'. From the discussions we had, we found that these are in fact seminars and not formal taught courses. We think it is important to make this distinction

But there was great flexibility with opportunities to take courses abroad and bring the credits back and to count seminars and conference participation for credit. Many students had taken advantage of these well funded and available options for study abroad, they told us, although usually short term.

We explored the ethos and philosophy of the programme at some length with staff, and it was clear that the success in obtaining externally funded research projects was driving the content and direction of the research programme, the choice of research topics of the students and the mode they chose to fulfil their requirements (the 3 publications route). Nevertheless, it is also evident from the SER that the programme supports the professional development of candidates in terms of mentored teaching and supervision practice with experienced staff, writing and presentation skills etc., in order to prepare them for future praca/aca/demic careers.

The downside to the project driven model from the students' perspective is the lack of theoretical perspectives because of the empirical focus of the projects, the focus on outputs and on Estonia (in the case of ERC funded projects), and the priority of project deadlines over e.g. mobility opportunities (SER refers, p32). There is a perceived deficit in methods courses and in the development of skills to manage research projects, both of which the school is addressing (SER and discussions with students refer).

### Strengths

- Excellent research culture and a high quality international research profile with involvement of PhDs as junior research fellows in externally funded research projects. The SER notes that Ragnar Nurkse Department (RND) exceeds faculty targets for this (see 'Resources' below for details).

- Excellent quality of the PhD theses of the graduates. The SER notes that 'HAAD doctoral students have won 4 out of 6 best PhD thesis awards of the NISPACEE during the past six years.... In the Estonian context, the theses have also received several awards: the thesis by Merit Tatar received the first place in the competition of PhD theses in social sciences (in 2017) and the thesis by Riin Savi received a diploma (2015)'.
- Deep internationalisation in all activities. The programme is taught in English, and about 30% of the PhD students are from overseas (SER figures). There is a strong element of international staff of high repute on faculty and as visiting staff (SER gives examples pp33, 35, 46), there are many international partnerships and networks for research, student and faculty exchange, there is a requirement for external opponents on PhD defence committees (SER refers, pp pp46-7), there is strong involvement in internationally funded research programmes, and high participation levels in international conferences and workshops.
- The feedback system is robust and comprehensive (see comments) taking into account the views of all stakeholders. It is very responsive to students, the SER noting that new elements in research project management, the doctoral seminars, and quantitative methods have been introduced and changes have been made to the General Studies module, with more adjustments on the way elsewhere. This was also confirmed in our meetings with students.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- In discussions with the students and in the SER, it was apparent that while many PhD students took advantage of short term international mobility opportunities, longer sojourns were rare, not least because of the demands of research projects (SER, p32). This may change with the new funding model, and it is a general problem we found in all programmes. In the context of RND's international profile, we are confident solutions will be found.
- As we have noted, the success of gaining externally funded research projects has consequences in terms of the choice of student research topics, the scheduling of their work, and the content of their overall programme. There is a risk that the imperatives of grant funding take over as the *raison d'être* of the Department. This might favour non-core topics in the discipline and turn the department into a franchise (as it was described to us by some staff). We recommend that a series of events be scheduled within the framework of the curriculum development system to consider the future direction of the programme in this context.
- Another consequence of the grant funded model is that many of the PhD topics seem to revolve around 'the case of Estonia' (review of PhD theses titles refers). While this fulfils the need to serve Estonian society, this could also be achieved with a comparative perspective going beyond Estonia.

- Evidence from the students suggest that the portfolio of taught courses could do with further improvement and uplift of standards to PhD level. In particular, there is scope for more in-depth methods training.
- As in all other cases we have reviewed, there is room for more collaboration and interdisciplinarity between the research programmes within the faculty, within the university and across universities in Estonia. The relationships are between the two specializations in the programme, Public Administration and Technology Governance, is even a bit unclear. The events (above) we recommend could also help clarify this
- Refer to TalTech General and General for other recommendations.

## Resources

### Standards

- ✓ In conducting doctoral study programmes, an adequate number of teaching staff and researchers participate, who hold the appropriate qualifications required to carry out doctoral studies and supervise doctoral theses in a given study programme.
- ✓ Universities shall ensure that sufficient funds are available to conduct doctoral studies, to provide development activities associated with doctoral studies and research, and to support the professional development of teaching staff and researchers.
- ✓ Resources (teaching, learning and research environments; libraries; resources required for teaching, learning and research) support the achievement of objectives set out in study programmes as well as the actual teaching, learning and research at the level of doctoral studies. Resource development is sustainable.
- ✓ Trends in the numbers of current learners, admitted learners and graduates (by study programme) in doctoral studies under the study programme group during the last five years indicate sustainability.

### Comments

The standards for resources for the PhD study programmes are fully met in Public Administration at TalTech and the programme is compliant with them. The SER shows that staff are well qualified and present in sufficient numbers for PhD teaching and supervision. The physical infrastructure, libraries, IT, dedicated study spaces are all very good (see TalTech General strengths).

RND has met all TalTech and Faculty research funding goals. For the Faculty, these included: 'a) More active application for domestic and foreign competitive research funding; b) Share of research funding should reach 40% in each department's budget; c) Each tenured professor should lead at least one research project; d) Each department should have at least one H2020 or equivalent international research project', SER p37.

As for the sustainability of the programme, Public Administration has fared better than most. As the data tables in the SER show, PhD numbers, progression etc

have remained steady for this programme, and the Department has been successful in getting an increased allocation of studentships this year due to its good past performance. This is due to the successes in obtaining external funding, rather than a commitment from the university of central funds.

### Strengths

- For externally generated funding, the position is very strong. The SER notes that 'competitive research funding has typically constituted above 60% of the budget. During the past five years, RND has had an institutional grant and several personal research grants from the Estonian Research Council, grants from Norway Grants and INET (Institute of New Economic Thinking); it has received funding from the TIPS and RITA programmes, which entail collaboration with Estonian ministries; it has participated in 5 different FP7 or Horizon 2020 projects, including the leading role in the ongoing TOOP project ([www.toop.eu](http://www.toop.eu)), which is the largest Horizon2020 project in Estonia (with the budget of 8 MEUR)' SER, p37.
- Equipment, Library etc. are all very strong for Public Administration. In addition to the general resources (see TalTech General Strengths), PhD students 'have access to all the most important databases in the field of Public Administration and Government, Economics and Law (e.g. EBSCO, JSTOR, Westlaw)' (p38).

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The heavy dependence on external funding might be a concern regarding its future sustainability and the consequent impact on student financing and student numbers. The record so far suggests that this is unlikely to be a problem. We recommend that if it is not being done already, that a plan be drawn up to identify likely grant opportunities over the next 3-5 years, and groundwork be started to prepare for applications.

## **Teaching, learning, research and/or creative activity**

### Standards

- ✓ Uniform principles, based on best international practices and agreed upon at the university level, shall be followed while implementing doctoral programmes and assuring the quality of the doctoral studies (including supervision of doctoral theses).
- ✓ Doctoral studies support students' personal and social development, including creating an environment which will prepare them to successfully participate in international working environments at research and development institutions, as well as in the business and public sectors.
- ✓ Supervision of doctoral theses; modern methodology used in teaching and research; organisation of studies; and doctoral students' professional research, development and/or other creative activities all support achievement of the objectives and learning outcomes of doctoral studies.
- ✓ Assessment of outcomes of the learning, research and creative work done by doctoral students is relevant, transparent and objective, and supports the development of doctoral students.
- ✓ Doctoral students are asked for feedback regarding supervision on a regular basis

and the results of these surveys are taken into account for quality improvement activities.
✓ Effectiveness of the doctoral studies is analysed and such analyses serve as a basis for planning quality improvement activities.

### Comments

The standards for teaching, learning and research for PhD study programmes are fully met in Public Administration at TalTech and the programme is compliant with them. We have already alluded to the high intensity and high standards of research activity in the programme (above).

Regarding teaching methods, the SER notes that the pedagogical philosophy is to encourage diversity and innovation: 'Teaching staff are systematically encouraged – by the Programme director and the head of the Department – to make use of innovative and diverse teaching methods, which also support independent learning by the students. The goal is to complement the traditional lectures with interactive teaching methods, including group exercises and assignments, case studies, site visits, and e-studies' (p41).

In this context, the feedback system is robust with multiple opportunities for students. Our discussions with students indicated a very positive view of the feedback process, and only a few concerns with overly didactic styles of teaching. Interactive dialogue is, for example, facilitated via seminars and mock defence process (SER refers).

The personal development of students is enhanced by a discussion between supervisor and student in choice of taught courses: 'At the beginning of his or her studies and also at the beginning of each academic year, before compiling an annual action plan, each doctoral student discusses with the supervisor(s) and the programme manager which portfolio of courses would best with the research agenda and personal development needs' (SER p40).

The SER notes that in the past few years, 'issues related to supervision have emerged: 1) diverging styles of supervisors; 2) conflicting demands of co-supervisors; 3) shift in the direction of the student's research topic beyond the originally planned, which may lie beyond the competencies of the supervisor; 4) the learning curve of the first-time supervisors'. Solutions have included a 'more active style of supervision... with clearer deliverables and milestones emerging from the project logic', the broadening of the remit of the weekly doctoral seminar where 'the student can receive feedback from a wider range of faculty members', co-supervision or changing the supervisor if necessary, and the voluntary teaming up of novice supervisors with more senior supervisors.

Regarding routes for the PhD, the vast majority of students and alumni we spoke to had chosen the 3 publications option for largely instrumental reasons of career development and enhancement they thought it offered, and they said it was easy to get published because of the low ranking of journals.

Co-authorship with supervisors is the norm for at least one article, the view of the department being that there is 'master-apprentice' process at work as supervisors impart 'tacit knowledge' of the ins and outs of academic writing and publishing to students (SER, p40). When asked about whether they preferred co-authoring with fellow students or their supervisors, the students we met overwhelmingly favoured co-authoring with other students; and, asked about the share of the work they contributed to articles they had co-authored with their supervisors, estimates ranged from a low of 50% to a high of 95%.

### Strengths

- The high intensity and high standards of research activity in the programme and the Department (see earlier comments).
- International mobility opportunities are excellent. 'For international mobility, networking and conference participation, the PhD students have abundant sources of funding, including DORA, the Estonian Doctoral School in Economics and Innovation, Kristjan Jaak programme and various COST-Action projects' p38. See also pp46-7 for an extensive list of international partners and networks.
- A strong quality assessment regime throughout the period of study with 'annual evaluation procedure (which is governed by the Academic Policies of TTÜ); 2) weekly doctoral seminar; 3) annual outing seminar; 4) continuous feedback from the supervisors' (p41). The annual evaluation includes a 5 person evaluation committee including an international external which 'attests' positively or negatively for continuation, based on the achievement of strictly defined PIs for each year of enrolment (see detail SER p42).
- Regular ongoing evaluation of the progress of PhD students, for example 'to ensure the quality of the articles included in the theses, the students of the Programme are expected to present all their papers in the weekly doctoral seminars in order to get feedback from other faculty members (besides the supervisor) and international conferences' (SER p39).
- The weekly PhD seminar is a strength indicating a collective responsibility for the individual PhD projects (SER and discussions with students refer).

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- There are issues with the 3 publications route. Students choose it because it is convenient and expedient, and not because it is academically superior. Despite the Department's 'zero tolerance' policy on junk journals and paid publishing' (SER, p40), some students consider that in order to get published within the time frames set, they need to go for the low ranked outlets which are available to them. This is not academically sound (see General recommendations).
- Co-authorship with supervisors is problematic and the Master-apprentice analogy is simply inappropriate for reasons we have already outlined (see General comments and recommendations). It seems to us that the

guidance referred to is simply part of the supervisor's job (as it is for anonymised journal referees), and should not lead to a claim to co-authorship.

- Changes are needed in the context of the issues with the 3 publication route - see General recommendations for all programmes.

## Teaching staff

### Standards

- ✓ Teaching staff participate in research, development and/or creative activity at the level of and to the extent sufficient to conduct doctoral studies in the curriculum group and to supervise doctoral theses.
- ✓ Teaching staff develop their supervisory competences and share best practices with one other.
- ✓ Teaching staff collaborate in fields of teaching, research and creative work within the university and also with stakeholders outside the university (public sector organisations, enterprises, other research and development institutions).
- ✓ Teaching staff further their skills at foreign universities or other research institutions, participate in international research and creative projects, and present papers at high-level conferences.
- ✓ Qualified international and visiting teaching staff are involved in conducting doctoral studies, participating in doctoral thesis defence panels and/or reviewing doctoral theses.
- ✓ When assessing the work of teaching staff (including their evaluations), the effectiveness of their teaching as well as of their research, development and creative works is taken into account; including the effectiveness of their student supervision, development of their teaching and supervisory skills, and their international mobility.

### Comments

The standards for teaching staff for PhD study programmes are fully met in Public Administration at TalTech and the programme is compliant with them. Overall the teaching staff are very qualified and competent, are active researchers able to conduct doctoral studies in the curriculum group and to supervise doctoral theses. The SER shows high research excellence rankings, national and international awards, visiting professorships, experience in civil service and international organisation, consultancy activities (EU, World Bank, OECD), and claims age and gender balances are 'excellent' (SER p45 – not defined).

As of 2016, 'all supervisors who want to supervise PhD students are evaluated by a committee consisting of the representatives of all PhD programmes and the research department of the university', who review hard data (publications, citations etc) and decide on that basis (SER p44). Those new supervisors drawn from junior staff who are successful 'are teamed up with more senior supervisors when they supervise for the first time' (SER p45).

This approach also applies to student teaching staff from among PhD students. They are required to take teaching skills course (6 ECTS): 'as all PhD students

since the 2016 admissions are junior research fellows, their contracts foresee 1-4 contact hours of teaching per week for them. As a first step in gaining the teaching experience, students are encouraged to co-teach a course together with their supervisor (or another senior faculty member)' (SER p42). However, there is still room for improvement (see below).

Teaching staff also strengthen their skills at foreign universities, through participation in international research projects and by presenting their work at international conferences. Qualified international and visiting teaching staff are also involved in conducting doctoral courses, participating in doctoral defenses and reviewing doctoral theses. The SER notes that at RND 50% of the professors are foreign (Germany, Austria, Finland) and several courses in the PhD programme are taught by visiting professors from foreign universities' (pp35, 46).

### Strengths

- Quality assurance criteria for supervisors and student teachers are rigorous and have well managed systems (SER refers).
- Supervisors are successful researchers of international repute involving PhD students in externally funded projects, and have strong academic profiles, outputs and networks.
- The Department has a genuine capacity for self-criticism and self-improvement of its practice and does not rest on its laurels. This is shown for example, in the comprehensive development opportunities available to junior staff and student teachers, and in the plans for further improvements (see below).

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- While the system has advantages, one might ask if it is a good idea to outsource the decision of who should be allowed to supervise Public Administration PhD students to a university committee which is external to the Faculty.
- The threshold for obtaining the opportunity for supervising PhD students might be too high. The ability for junior faculty to supervise PhD students could be improved through compulsory co-supervision of all candidates.
- Further co-operation with national and international partners, such as joint degrees, joint doctoral schools, joint training programmes, joint modules might be considered.
- The SR notes that 'feedback gathered from the PhD students, (shows) they would like to have more supervision and guidance when they are teaching a course for the first time. In order to address that request, starting from fall 2018, the programme manager will coordinate the attendance of senior faculty members at the lectures/courses taught by the PhD students in order to provide them with direct feedback about how to improve their teaching skills. Also, co-supervision of MA theses (i.e. the PhD student together with a senior faculty member) will be systematically

encouraged in the future' (p33). These initiatives are very much to be welcomed.

- In this context, the SER notes that teaching staff supervisory skills would benefit from further enhancement. While 'the students' feedback about the teaching skills (including proficiency in English) of the teaching staff of RND during the past years has been positive.... given that all supervisors could potentially benefit from acquiring up-to-date skills in supervising PhD students, more systematic coordination of supervisors' attendance at trainings, workshops, visits to foreign universities, would benefit the programme' (p45). This is another welcome initiative.

## Doctoral students

### Standards

- ✓ When admitting students to doctoral study, their suitability for successful completion of their studies is assessed on the basis of transparent criteria.
- ✓ Doctoral students plan their studies as well as research and development activities in collaboration with their supervisor(s), setting out specific objectives for each year and taking responsibility for achieving these objectives.
- ✓ Evaluation of doctoral students is transparent and impartial. Its purpose is to support development of the doctoral students, provide an opinion regarding the effectiveness of their work to date, and assess their capabilities to complete their studies on time and successfully defend their doctoral theses.
- ✓ Universities offer doctoral students counselling on completing their studies and planning their further careers.
- ✓ Doctoral students' extracurricular teaching, research and/or creative activities or other work-related activities at the university support successful completion of their doctoral studies.
- ✓ Doctoral students participate in international mobility programmes or take advantage of other opportunities for learning or research at foreign universities and/or research and development institutions<sup>4</sup>.
- ✓ Alumni are regularly asked for feedback on the quality of the doctoral study, and employers are asked for feedback on the preparation of the graduates.

### Comments

The standards for doctoral students for PhD study programmes are fully met in Public Administration at TalTech and the programme is compliant with them. The SER states that 'there have been some challenges in filling all the positions that have been advertised (i.e. more positions have been available than have been filled)'. The reason, it asserts, is that 'the expected contribution of the admitted doctoral students to the research projects and resources invested in them, (means that) all supervisors have incentives to admit only candidates who have excellent qualifications' p49. Thus, admissions criteria allow for non-PA specialists (presumably of excellent quality), and the number of international students 'has increased over the past five years, reaching 30% by 2018 (the TTÜ average is

<sup>4</sup> In the context of this document, 'research and development institutions' denote both research institutions and research-intensive companies.

20%). For the 2017 cohort of admissions, we reached 60% (i.e. 4 out of 7)' SER, p49.

There are coherent annual processes and procedures at the departmental and Taltech levels regarding how the doctoral students plan their studies and research, which set specific objectives and assess the achievement of these objectives (SER and links refer). The annual evaluation of PhD students has safeguards for transparency and impartiality, aiming at supporting the development of the student, their effectiveness, ability to complete their studies on time and successfully defend their thesis (see earlier remarks for details). Students we spoke to had no quibbles with these systems.

Regarding the management of teaching practice of the PhD students, this is 'coordinated between the director of the PhD programme, the head of Department, and the directors of the different undergraduate and graduate programmes in the department'. (SER p42). The academic development of the student is also supported by Joint Doctoral School of Economics and Innovation': 'The implementation of the study programme entails extensive cooperation with partners from Estonian and foreign universities. The doctoral programme in Public Administration is part of the Doctoral School in Economics and Innovation'. (SER p46)

The drop-out rate of pre-2016 students (i.e. those who were self funded and working fulltime) is high, and a solution is 'the so-called 'Industrial Phd' format (regulated by the Statute on Industrial PhDs of TTÜ), which entails a trilateral contract between the PhD student, his or her employer and the university should provide a better framework for combining work and doctoral studies' (SER p50). However, the principal means to lower the dropout rate is the fully funded model. On this, students remarked that they were indeed employed full time – but considered that they were only paid part time!

### Strengths

- The graduates of the programme have all found jobs either in academia or as high-level officials in various Estonian and international organizations (e.g. OECD). According to the survey conducted by the university in 2018, the graduates of the HAAD programme earn the highest salary of all the alumni of TTÜ (SER p35).
- The high international reputation of the supervisors and teaching staff 'has contributed strongly to the attractiveness of the programme to highly talented students. The opportunity to work as part of research groups in the framework of research projects, the funding opportunities provided by the Doctoral School and other mobility schemes have also helped to increase the attractiveness of the programme to the applicants' (SER p49).
- Student mobility opportunities are excellent: 'The mobility of the students has been considerably supported by the successful acquisition of research grants by the supervisors, the funds available from DORA, the Doctoral School in Economics and Innovation, and the Kristjan Jaak programme. According to the feedback gathered from the students in the spring of

2018, they have had sufficient funds to engage in all forms of international mobility necessary for their research and studies' (SER p51).

- There has been a highly successful and growing recruitment of international students (SER figures refer).

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- In order to obtain the right quality of applicants, the SER argues that 'continuous marketing efforts are needed at all levels (the programme, School and TTÜ) to advertise the positions in pertinent and visible venues' However, it may be that these positions would be more attractive if post doctoral positions were opened up, not only for candidates going abroad but also within the institution.
- The 'industrial PhD format' is a bit ambiguous and so far does not seem to be a success in the marketplace. It should be re-titled and reactivated to strengthen the relationship between the programme and the society and to attract more PhD students.
- Our discussion revealed that home students have more teaching obligations than overseas ones because of the language. We suggest the extension to PhD students of the same workload model that is applied to professors.
- There might be room for improvement regarding the procedure of selecting PhD topics for new PhD positions, which seems to be decided by a university wide committee consisting of representatives of PhD programmes, on a competitive basis, according to the qualifications criteria for doctoral supervisors.
- Difficulties of filling the PhD positions with qualified candidates is a concern. The PhD students have a varied disciplinary background, not only coming from the Master's programme in PA, but from non-social science backgrounds (SER p32 refers). In such a case, the transition from being a Master's student to a PhD student in PA might be a challenge. The SER argues that in such a case, a tailored programme of coursework can be designed. However, it is an open question whether candidates should be admitted to a PhD programme who lack the basics of the discipline. One idea to consider is to establish a research based Master's degree making them better prepared for PhD study.
- It is a concern that the PhD students are *de facto* working full time as research assistants but only have a part-time contract. They should be fully compensated for their work. It is simply unacceptable to argue that because the students get the state income, they can be deployed as full time research assistants.

### 3. Assessment report of SPG at Estonian Business School

#### 3.1. Introduction

Estonian Business School (EBS) is a private business school of university standing owned by SA Estonian Business School, a foundation. It was founded in 1988, when the first steps to restore the country's independence were taken in an effort to build a democratic society and open market economy. Over the last 30 years, EBS has grown into a research institution with over 50 doctoral students and with a total student body of about 1500. In 2011, EBS became the first university in Estonia to establish a subsidiary in Finland.

Doctoral programme in Management, focusing on the research of business, public and civil society organisations, is the only PhD program in management in Estonia offering a comprehensive perspective on management knowledge and practices. The programme was fully accredited in June 2009. It is also the only doctoral programme offered by EBS.

During the period 2010-2015, EBS was a member of the Doctoral School of Economics and Innovation together with the University of Tartu and Tallinn University of Technology. EBS is represented in the management board of the new Doctoral School of Economics and Innovation (MIDOK), established in 2016. Unfortunately, due to the imposed constraints to receive state funding on equal basis with the public universities, EBS as a private university has limited possibilities to participate in this collaborative network. EBS can only participate in non-financial activities of the doctoral school as the state has not allocated EBS the necessary funds. Alternatively, EBS must fund these activities on its own.

#### Data on PhD student numbers:

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total number of doctoral students	41	41	44	54	59	54
Incl. those who work in the university	8	9	8	9	10	14
Number of international students at doctoral level	6	8	11	16	22	21
Total number of admissions	10	8	12	18	11	7
Incl. those who (directly) enrolled from the 2nd cycle of	1	2	2	4(3)	1	1

studies of the same university						
Total number of dropouts	2	6	5	4	5	7
No of doctoral theses defended	3	2	4	2	1	5
No of graduates in nominal + 2 years	2	1	2	1	1	4

## 3.2. Strengths and areas for improvement of study programmes by assessment areas

### 3.2.1. Management

#### Study programme

##### Standards

- ✓ The launch and development of the study programme are based on the Standard of Higher Education and other legislation, national strategies, university development plans, the effectiveness of research and development, various analyses (including labour market and feasibility analyses); striving for the best overall programme quality.
- ✓ Doctoral programmes contain at least 70% research, development or other creative work by doctoral students, making the results thereof public in international peer-reviewed research journals or in other ways that have international dimensions.
- ✓ Study programmes incorporate doctoral student participation in conferences and/or other professional activities, and are counted towards completion of the study programme.
- ✓ Doctoral programmes enable doctoral students to acquire leadership and teamwork skills, develop coaching and teaching skills as well as a proficiency in foreign languages at the level needed for successful participation in international working environments.
- ✓ Different components of a doctoral programme form a coherent whole supporting the personal development of each doctoral student.
- ✓ Study programme development takes into account feedback from doctoral students, supervisors, employers, alumni and other stakeholders.

##### Comments

The study programme for PhD at EBS formally complies with the requirement that a minimum of 70% is comprised of the research element. It is set at 180 ECTS for research and 60 ECTS for taught courses, as is the case at UT and TalTech, and the same 3 publications/monograph routes are offered to students. English is the language of instruction, for which there is specific support via the

EBS language centre. The programme is set within the context of EBS's mission 'to create and transfer new management knowledge and provide entrepreneurial people with skills and values for its successful implementation.... to serve both the wider community and the corporate world', SER p6. Specifically, the 'doctoral programme relies on the premise that management is an interdisciplinary and often pre-paradigmatic field of research' SER p14. This means that it takes students from all discipline backgrounds. It claims to be the only PhD programme in Management in Estonia.

Outside of the admissions, progression and completions figures (set against targets SER p19 refers), there are other specific KPIs for the programme including student participation in international conferences and other mobilities, value of the PhD in the marketplace, and evidence of publication. There are other lists of PIs for supervision standards and desired R&D activities, although it is unclear how these are monitored.

In terms of admissions, progression and completions, from the SER Table A3 2013-18, completions are very low compared to admissions (except 2018), but 2018 looks very bad for recruitment (lowest) and dropouts (highest) (both 7), most completions are slow and are not meeting the 4+2 formula. There have been 17 PhD defences over the past six years, and the stated goal is to have 3 graduates from the programme per year. Even if students remain in the programme for six years (if they also work), this implies a PhD student body of only around 20 in the long-run, some of whom will work and some of whom will be abroad. This will not allow for the establishment an academic PhD culture in the institution, for which there is currently insufficient evidence.

The programme is supported by 7 very recently formed research groups (SER, pp4-5) described as 'emerging teams' (SER p15), after the failure of the bottom-up approach to create research groups (discussions with staff). There is support from internal funds and externally funded projects, 'several' of which students are involved with, a total of 11 students (SER p25). There is frequent reference in the SER to the problem of matching up staff research interests with those of students. Our discussions with staff and students revealed a problem-driven model of academic orientation where students initiated the topics and the School reacted to them by trying to find suitable supervision among the staff. The research groups are essentially a by-product of the configuration of current PhD topics.

As students are admitted for varying academic and industrial backgrounds, 'the programme offers a number of courses on research design and methodology that also develop transferable skills.... field specific knowledge and theoretical background are built on interdisciplinary courses in Institutional Economics, Organisational Studies, and Strategic Management. Several elective courses have been provided with a specific focus on research skills and applications of specific techniques, such as Structural Equation Modelling, Fuzzy Set Qualitative Comparative Analysis, and Cost and Benefit Analysis' (SER p14). We were not able to ascertain whether all these courses were specific to PhD students or were also shared with Master's students.

Formal feedback by students for the all parts of the course takes place twice annually via the SIS, and response rates are now at the 70-80% level as a result of the efforts of the Office of Academic Administration. There is also the annual evaluation of progress of the students carried out by a 3 person committee appointed by the R&D Council of EBS. As for alumni, the School makes considerable efforts to engage with them via newsletters, emails etc., but formal feedback on the programme and its design was not apparent. It was both disappointing and surprising that no representatives from local business were present at the review event.

### Strengths

- The programme provides specifically non-academic support to students via the Study Consultant and will be reinforced by a second hiring in this position.
- USP as the only PhD programme in Management in Estonia.
- Formal collaboration in international research networks e.g. 'in May 2018 EBS signed a cooperation agreement with Laurea University of Applied Sciences from Finland with the aim of accepting doctoral students from Laurea and engaging in research collaboration. Academic staff and doctoral students of EBS are actively involved in the following international research networks: Globe Society, Cranet Network, IMSS Network, EBEN Network, EABIS Network on Business and Society and Nordplus Network, E-World research group, and Network around the European Knowledge Management Conference' SER p12.
- The programme has been successful in recruiting international students recently

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- While KPIs are formally present, other than figures for admission, progression and graduation, and the student satisfaction numbers, there is little evidence that they are measured and less still of their input to decision making. This is symptomatic of the management structures of the programme which are not fit for purpose (see below).
- Given the small overall student numbers and the consequent difficulty in developing a critical mass of expertise in a few areas, the sustainability of the PhD programme is a concern. It is recommended that existing links with UT be extended and deepened to improve long term viability.
- The SER notes that there is a shortfall in 'the number of doctoral students who submit and are accepted to international academic peer-reviewed conferences within the community of management and organisation studies (BAM, AOM, EURAM, EGOS, SMS etc.)' p16. . It is an aim to increase this participation, 'through intense and systematic promotion during doctoral seminars and through continuous collaboration with the different academic networks which regularly meet at or organize these conferences and where EBS is participating in', but no quantitative targets have been set nor incentives identified. Making it conditional on further progression or greater pro-activity by supervisors are two possibilities.

- The SER says that 'in teaching and research, EBS relies on a network of contacts and partnerships with business schools, the business community and the public sector in Estonia as well as abroad'. From the evidence of our meetings, these can be greatly improved e.g. EBS would seem to be well-positioned to take advantage of the Industrial PhD system, yet there is only little evidence so far of its use. In particular, little or no use was made of the alumni network in this respect. This source of funding would seem to be useful in competitive research environment.
- Processes and decision making for curriculum development, evaluation of students, and research development are focussed on the R&D Council, of which all faculty members of the PhD programme including the Programme Director are members. This imposes a lot of responsibilities on those people, and conflicts of interest are endemic. In comparison with arrangements found elsewhere (e.g. TalTech, UT) it is not a sustainable model for managing or developing a PhD programme.

## Resources

### Standards

- ✓ In conducting doctoral study programmes, an adequate number of teaching staff and researchers participate, who hold the appropriate qualifications required to carry out doctoral studies and supervise doctoral theses in a given study programme.
- ✓ Universities shall ensure that sufficient funds are available to conduct doctoral studies, to provide development activities associated with doctoral studies and research, and to support the professional development of teaching staff and researchers.
- ✓ Resources (teaching, learning and research environments; libraries; resources required for teaching, learning and research) support the achievement of objectives set out in study programmes as well as the actual teaching, learning and research at the level of doctoral studies. Resource development is sustainable.
- ✓ Trends in the numbers of current learners, admitted learners and graduates (by study programme) in doctoral studies under the study programme group during the last five years indicate sustainability.

### Comments

For the size of the programme, standards for resources are broadly met in terms of staffing and support infrastructure. Funding for the programme comes from direct student fees, externally funded projects, internal subsidies and the State payment made to 12 full time PhD students.

In terms of the sustainability of this model, the SER claims that recruitment of students is not a problem (essentially because of the international student numbers), students tend to stay on the books and thus pay fees, there is an unspecified rise in the amount of external funding, and cross subsidization is feasible from this source and income from other courses (such as the MBA).

The physical infrastructure is in need of renewal and extension, and the School plans to build a new facility linked to the existing building some time in the next three years. On the library and IT side, there are some serious problems because 'as a private specialised university (EBS) has no access to research resources (incl. electronic databases, etc.) available to public universities (e.g. Web-of-Science, JStor, Scopus etc.). EBS therefore receives unequal legal and financial treatment by Estonian public authorities.' (p17), which 'strongly disadvantages doctoral students' (p18).

### Strengths

- There is flexibility in the budget because of the employment of a large proportion of part time and visiting faculty.
- The investment of E440 per month in junior research fellowships for PhD students (staff and students refer).

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- On the library and IT side, there are some serious problems because 'as a private specialised university (EBS) has no access to research resources (incl. electronic databases, etc.) available to public universities (e.g. Web-of-Science, JStor, Scopus etc.). The EBS action plan schedules this issue for resolution by the end of 2018, and this is to be welcomed.
- The SER states that the new campus will be ready in June 2019, yet discussions with senior staff suggested that this timetable has slipped by 3 years since the SER was written. As a matter of urgency, financial and construction planning should be firmed up.

## **Teaching, learning, research and/or creative activity**

### Standards

- ✓ Uniform principles, based on best international practices and agreed upon at the university level, shall be followed while implementing doctoral programmes and assuring the quality of the doctoral studies (including supervision of doctoral theses).
- ✓ Doctoral studies support students' personal and social development, including creating an environment which will prepare them to successfully participate in international working environments at research and development institutions, as well as in the business and public sectors.
- ✓ Supervision of doctoral theses; modern methodology used in teaching and research; organisation of studies; and doctoral students' professional research, development and/or other creative activities all support achievement of the objectives and learning outcomes of doctoral studies.
- ✓ Assessment of outcomes of the learning, research and creative work done by doctoral students is relevant, transparent and objective, and supports the development of doctoral students.
- ✓ Doctoral students are asked for feedback regarding supervision on a regular basis and the results of these surveys are taken into account for quality improvement activities.
- ✓ Effectiveness of the doctoral studies is analysed and such analyses serve as a

basis for planning quality improvement activities.
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### Comments

Standards are broadly met for student feedback, the design of courses incorporating learning outcomes, personal development activities and modifying course elements in the light of student feedback (SER refers). Good use has been made of the Joint Doctoral School in Economics and Innovation and students report getting benefit from writing camps and seminars, although they are unhappy about having to contribute financially when students elsewhere do not. Generally, students reported good flexibility in programme delivery so allowing them to balance work commitments (all those we spoke to had full time jobs), with study requirements.

The SER outlines various changes made as a result of student feedback to enhance generic skills. These have included 'a lot of attention has been paid to transferrable skills, such as organisation and independent planning of research, group-work, participating in writing research proposals, presentation and formatting of the research results.' (p21), the introduction of the Methods Lab to 'support the teaching and implementation of various methods... (plus) monthly seminars for supervision and methods training. The main focus of Methods Lab in 2017 was on quantitative methods and impact evaluation tools' (p20), and 'from 2017/18, EBS Language Centre will provide student counselling on academic writing as an integral part of the studies' (p20). As from 2017, a new initiative (Canvas) was introduced to support distance and blended learning.

Regarding supervision, monitoring and assessment, students are generally satisfied with the standards of supervision and with the annual evaluation process, although they were dissatisfied with the amount of time it took to get their results (4-6 weeks was common). The SER notes that 'most of the students have indicated in their feedback that the supervision procedure remains somewhat vague to them but claim that in general not only supervisors, but the entire faculty shows a great deal of support and flexibility, thereby contributing to their study process' (p22). The percentage of students who are dissatisfied with the quality of their supervision is low (5.3%) according to SER figures (p22).

In terms of the choice of supervisor, the SER refers on a number of occasions to the difficulty in matching up student topics and supervisor interests. Where students had previously been on the Master's programme, they report that they 'inherit' their Master's supervisor as their PhD supervisor, and they are expected to find their own co-supervisors. Table 2 in the SER appendices, shows that only 8 of the 54 doctoral students listed have a second supervisor.

The SER notes that each supervisor has his/her own style, and while encouraging supervisors to attend supervision seminars, is vague on detail. We do not know what 'encouragement' means, and there is no indication how standards of supervision are dealt with in the annual appraisal of staff with his/her Head of Department.

The process of PhD evaluation was not well-described in the SER and the unification of procedures with Tartu unclear. It was not stated who is on the R&D Council nor why. This Council appoints a committee of three (all internal) for each PhD student: it is this committee that evaluates the annual progress of the student, together with the supervisor(s) and the consultant.

Research activity is acknowledged to be a weakness, and so to kick start the research groups and generate incentives for collaborative research teams within EBS or research networks with partner institutions, the Academic Capital Development Fund (AKAF) functioning under EBS R&D Council funds short-term (1-2 years) applied research projects' SER p20. This is in its early stages, so there are no outcomes as yet to judge success by.

### Strengths

- High levels of student satisfaction with the programme
- Responsiveness of the programme to student feedback
- Self-starting motivation of students in organising focussed workshops for skills development (from discussions with students)

### Areas of Improvement and Recommendations

- Research capacities and capabilities are a real concern and in need of major improvement. The SER acknowledges that 'so far, supervisors' research projects are a weakness of EBS research. Lack of externally funded research projects is the issue which EBS is currently focusing and working on systematically to improve the situation'(p25). While the SER says that this 'is increasing' (p17), it is not clear by how much or at what rate. The decision by EBS AKAF to commit seed corn funding to the research groups is welcome but more precision, with timelines and milestones are needed.
- Given the seriousness of the situation, the research group system needs rapid consolidation, with groups closed down if they do not meet defined targets within 18 months.
- We encourage the systematic presence of two external (to the university) reviewers at both the pre-defence and at the formal defence. These can of course be the same reviewers at both defences. The crucial element is a written evaluation of the quality of the research in the PhD theses at the pre-defence stage by reviewers who are external to the institution.
- There is some concern around the supervision process and the lack of consistency and direction of supervisors. We suggest that one early fruit of co-operation with UT in the doctoral programme is the sharing of good practice and problem areas with regard to supervision.
- Only 8 of the 54 PhD candidates listed in the SER have second supervisors.
- PhD students should wait no longer than two working days for the results of their annual evaluations.

## Teaching staff

### Standards

- ✓ Teaching staff participate in research, development and/or creative activity at the level of and to the extent sufficient to conduct doctoral studies in the curriculum group and to supervise doctoral theses.
- ✓ Teaching staff develop their supervisory competences and share best practices with one other.
- ✓ Teaching staff collaborate in fields of teaching, research and creative work within the university and also with stakeholders outside the university (public sector organisations, enterprises, other research and development institutions).
- ✓ Teaching staff further their skills at foreign universities or other research institutions, participate in international research and creative projects, and present papers at high-level conferences.
- ✓ Qualified international and visiting teaching staff are involved in conducting doctoral studies, participating in doctoral thesis defence panels and/or reviewing doctoral theses.
- ✓ When assessing the work of teaching staff (including their evaluations), the effectiveness of their teaching as well as of their research, development and creative works is taken into account; including the effectiveness of their student supervision, development of their teaching and supervisory skills, and their international mobility.

### Comments

Standards for teaching staff are generally met, but there are a number of serious concerns. We have already alluded to the deficits in the quantity and quality of research activity. The Research Evaluation Report (2017) notes that only 11 out of 37 staff with research degrees are involved in PhD supervision although EBS now claims that it is 17 out of 24. Clearly, there is a discrepancy which needs to be resolved.. This means that others who are may have more than the 5 PhD students, the School's prescribed maximum. Discussions with staff confirmed this to be the case.

In terms of academic staffing numbers, we understand from the SER and discussions with senior staff that there were 15 posts vacant earlier this year, and that 5 have been filled. This has to be set in the context of an ageing core staff profile which is described as 'a major risk' SER p18. The SER also points out that the supervisory cohort has been diminished by 2 long term illnesses which is given as one reason for the drop in completions. Given the staffing deficit, it is no coincidence that only 8 out of 54 PhD candidates listed in the SER have second supervisors.

One solution to 'enhance international expertise in teaching, supervising and research, ...(is a plan) to establish five joint positions' (p24). EBS is 'considering' creating joint faculty positions with Tartu. It is unclear how far this has

progressed beyond an idea. It does have partnerships elsewhere (read below, para after next).

As far as developing a novice supervisors is concerned, 'a more experienced co-supervisor is assigned to the doctoral student (and) it is the task of the Head of Doctoral Studies, the EBS R&D Council and more experienced peers to familiarize a novice supervisor with the aims and intended learning outcomes of the doctoral programme. Systematically organized faculty seminars serve as events where novice supervisors can acquire deeper knowledge and understanding of the doctoral programme, its expected learning outcomes and supervision process'. SER p25

There is general evidence of involvement of foreign faculty in the programme: 'EBS has not only foreign doctoral students, but also has established a steady cooperation with foreign faculty from the University of Helsinki, Université de Strasbourg Louis Pasteur, ETH Zurich, Copenhagen Business School (and) as Table B7 shows, an average of 40% of the courses are delivered by foreign faculty'. Furthermore, 'If possible, foreign faculty are invited to contribute to doctoral seminars. For example, faculty from Aalto University, University of Cambridge and New Mexico State University have shared their experiences and knowledge in doctoral seminars'. SER p26.

There is an annual appraisal process which supports 'the professional development of the faculty by defining and redefining the need for personal training in the field of research, supervision and teaching methods, participation in academic conferences, etc.' (SER p26), although the SER has little detail beyond this statement.

It is clear that the programme relies heavily on part time staff – 8 out of 17 of the teaching staff on the PhD taught programme are part time SER Table 1, p35). The SER notes that 'Opponents to EBS doctoral theses are frequently invited from University of Tartu (see Table 3 in Appendix). External lectures from Tallinn University and Tallinn University of Technology are involved in covering elective courses in the programme (e.g. Fuzzy-set Analysis, Management Psychology, and Logic)'. SER p26.

The SER (page 26) stated that supervision was compensated to the tune of 36 academic hours p.a. per student. While it was not clear from the document whether this figure referred to a teaching buy-out, or rather was added to the supervisor's salary apparently it can work either way.

### Strengths

- There is a great residue of experience amongst senior staff members.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- As the SER itself admits, the age profile of the PhD supervisors is a concern. The new faculty members need to be swiftly integrated into the supervision process.
- The full time staffing levels are dangerously low. Urgent and immediate action is needed to recruit suitably qualified staff to bolster numbers.
- The degree of second supervision is shockingly low if the SER figures are accurate, and needs immediate remedy. Moreover, the identification of viable co-supervisors should not be left to the PhD student, but should be the responsibility of the main supervisor and the R&D Council.

## Doctoral students

### Standards

- ✓ When admitting students to doctoral study, their suitability for successful completion of their studies is assessed on the basis of transparent criteria.
- ✓ Doctoral students plan their studies as well as research and development activities in collaboration with their supervisor(s), setting out specific objectives for each year and taking responsibility for achieving these objectives.
- ✓ Evaluation of doctoral students is transparent and impartial. Its purpose is to support development of the doctoral students, provide an opinion regarding the effectiveness of their work to date, and assess their capabilities to complete their studies on time and successfully defend their doctoral theses.
- ✓ Universities offer doctoral students counselling on completing their studies and planning their further careers.
- ✓ Doctoral students' extracurricular teaching, research and/or creative activities or other work-related activities at the university support successful completion of their doctoral studies.
- ✓ Doctoral students participate in international mobility programmes or take advantage of other opportunities for learning or research at foreign universities and/or research and development institutions<sup>5</sup>.
- ✓ Alumni are regularly asked for feedback on the quality of the doctoral study, and employers are asked for feedback on the preparation of the graduates.

### Comments

Standards for doctoral students are broadly met in terms of formal systems for admissions, evaluation of student progress, counselling, academic and personal development opportunities, feedback, and international mobility opportunities.

Despite similar arrangements for the fully funded mode, the student body at EBS is slightly different from those at UT and TalTech. The problem for the School is that the fully funded model with its imperatives to speed up progression rates does not really suit the type of PhD student it has attracted hitherto.

Although there are not any 'thick' data in the SER bar the bare minimum, from our discussions with staff, students and alumni, we can deduce the following:

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<sup>5</sup> In the context of this document, 'research and development institutions' denote both research institutions and research-intensive companies.

many students pay their own fees, all are working often holding down multiple jobs, the majority are not destined for an academic career, there is a high proportion of overseas students most of whom are based in their own countries rather than Estonia, and we can surmise that EBS students tend to be older on average than PhD students elsewhere. They are attracted to EBS for various reasons including relatively easy admission requirements, the practical problem based focus of the programme addressing particular concerns of theirs, the flexibility to be a *de facto* part time student or absent student.

As the SER notes: 'As the majority of EBS doctoral students have paid work either in the academy, business or the public sector, career planning is not our top priority. Still, all doctoral students are encouraged to participate in teaching activities (lecturing, supervising and reviewing theses) and in research and development projects to foster their teaching, public presentation, and teamwork skills.' (p29).

This has consequences for the meaning of a doctoral community at EBS. When we asked where the foreign students were for example, and if we could meet them, it was explained that they were in their home countries, would fly in twice a term for a few days and then leave again. Similarly, home students' work and family commitments precluded them from being on campus on a regular basis. In the tour of facilities, we visited the single office space set aside for doctoral students. It contained three desks, none of which were occupied. This was in complete contrast to TalTech for example, which had multiple office spaces for PhD students, many of whom were in those offices when we visited.

In this context, the patterns of student international mobility we witnessed elsewhere – of relatively short term experiences as opposed to semester or year long sojourns – is even more of a problem at EBS. Students simply do not prioritise these opportunities against their other commitments although – like elsewhere there are plenty of resources available for them via the usual EU funded programmes (SER refers).

Thus, the doctoral community at EBS exists as one in virtual reality only. When we spoke to students they confirmed that contact by various forms of social media was how they kept in touch with their fellow students. In this context, the School is to be praised for recognising the situation, making programme delivery flexible and investing in distance learning technologies (the Canvas initiative referred to earlier). This may change with the rolling out of the fully funded model and the employment of more students as junior research fellows at the School to support the research effort (as elsewhere we visited). It is just too soon to tell.

### Strengths

- EBS doctoral students are able to pursue their studies in a very flexible manner which fits in with their professional and demographic profiles.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- As the strengthening of research activity is fundamental to the survival of the EBS doctoral programme, investment in the research groups, in additional staff, in collaboration with UT and other partners is vital in harnessing PhD students to the School with meaningful roles as junior research fellows (JRFs). We welcome the employment of 3 PhD students as JRFs and recommend a targeted and rapid expansion in numbers.
- Recognising that the existing cohort of PhD students were recruited in different circumstances, the School should continue to invest in distance learning capabilities, and seek to improve the status of external candidates to that of part time students.