

**Decision Regarding Assessment of the Business and
Administration Study Programme Group at the Level of
Doctoral Studies
Estonian Business School**

26/02/2019

The Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education at the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education decided to approve the report by the Assessment Committee and to conduct the next quality assessment of doctoral studies in the Business and Administration study programme group at Estonian Business School in seven years, with a secondary condition.

On the basis of subsection 10 (4) of the Universities Act and points 40.1 and 41 of the 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups at the Level of Doctoral Studies', authorised in points 3.7.3 and 3.7.1 of the Statutes of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (hereinafter referred to as 'EKKA'), the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education (hereinafter referred to as 'the Council') affirms the following:

1. On 11.10.2017 Estonian Business School (EBS) and EKKA agreed upon a time frame to conduct the quality assessment of the study programme group.
2. The Director of EKKA, by her order of 23.08.2018, approved the following membership of the quality assessment committee for the quality assessment of the third cycle of higher education in the Law; Business and Administration (including Economics) study programme groups at Estonian Business School; University of Tartu and Tallinn University of Technology (hereinafter referred to as 'the Committee'):

Roger Levy (chair)	Professor, London School of Economics, United Kingdom
Andrew Clark	Professor, Paris School of Economics, France
Aalt Willem Heringa	Professor, Maastricht University, The Netherlands
Per Lægrend	Professor, University of Bergen, Norway
Maris Moks	PhD student, Hertie School of Governance,

	Germany
Janek Uiboupin	Member of Management Board, Coop Bank, Estonia

3. EBS submitted the following third cycle study programme for assessment in the Business and Administration study programme group:
Management
4. EBS submitted the self-analysis report to EKKA on 16.07.2018, which the assessment coordinator forwarded to the committee on 13.08.2018.
5. Assessment visit to EBS took place on 19.10.2018.
6. The committee submitted the draft assessment report to EKKA on 21.11.2018, which was sent to the university for comments by EKKA on 21.11.2018 and to which EBS delivered its response on 3.12.2018.
7. The Committee submitted its final assessment report to EKKA on 11.12.2018. The assessment report is an integral part of the decision. The report is available on the EKKA website.
8. The Secretary of the Council forwarded the Committee's final assessment report along with the University's self-evaluation report to the Council members on 14.12.2018.
9. The Council with 10 members present discussed these received documents in its session on 26.02.2019 and, based on the assessment report, decided to point out the following strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations regarding the Business and Administration study programme group at the level of doctoral studies at EBS.

The committee listed the following transversal areas for improvement and recommendations concerning the Business and Administration (including Economics) and Law study programme groups at Estonian Business School, University of Tartu and Tallinn University of Technology:

- 1) Collaboration between departments internally and between respective departments across the three institutions is generally weak, not helped by the competitive research funding environment and the small pool of qualified supervisors and eligible candidates for PhD studentships. Good examples of collaboration are few and far between.
- 2) A significant number of students think that outside of pursuing an academic career, the PhD has no real value in the marketplace. The launch of the Industrial PhD appears so far not to have been successful.
- 3) Although full time students appreciate the additional funding, they do not think that the €660 + €400 is enough to live on, which is why many of them work, some even having multiple jobs. The new system for admission and funding of PhD students more or less rules out the possibility of part time doctoral studies. Considering the small number of doctoral students and limited pool of domestic talents, the system would also have to accommodate part time PhD studies. New

research applications should provide for financing opportunities for full time as well as part time students.

- 4) In most cases, mobility is for short periods only and in the case of part time students, mobility opportunities are often non-existent. Given how many Estonian PhD students are de facto part time and have family responsibilities, this is a problem.
New opportunities for longer-term international mobility of doctoral students should be sought. This could be achieved for example by strengthening the relevant requirements and monetary incentives.
- 5) There are varied practices within the supervision and assessment process. Thus, not all students are co-supervised for example. Some supervisors meet with their students once per week, others once a month, others twice per year. There are no common standards for supervision, bar the absolute minimum of an annual Progress Review to prepare for the annual attestation/evaluation. The co-supervision requirement should apply to all students. Universities should be more active in enhancing the skills of supervisors. Involving active researchers as supervisors should be given more priority.
- 6) As to the 3 publications vs. monograph routes of study, the committee recommends that future doctoral students be given an equal choice between the two alternatives. Doctoral students that choose the 3 articles route would need to be the sole authors of at least one article and the supervisor should not be among co-authors of more than one publication. The publications/monograph should comply with the requirements set for peer reviewed research publications, however according to the committee need not necessarily be published before the submittal of the thesis.
- 7) PhD programme specific KPIs need to be developed, articulated, shared, and monitored regularly. At the least, recruitment, progression and graduation targets, student satisfaction indicators, and international mobility targets should be included, as well as research excellence indicators, supervision standards. Supervisor workload and supervisor training goals need to be clearly defined. Universities' Action Plans need to be linked to these KPIs and objectives. In order to reach the targets, SMART goals need to be set and linked to the Action Plans.
- 8) As achieving critical mass is a challenge in most discipline areas, the role of the Doctoral School for Economics and Innovation (MIDOK) should be enhanced to include research groups in the institutions in order to foster greater departmental and institutional collaboration.
- 9) Given the importance of the pre-defence, the presence of two external (to the university) reviewers at the pre-defence is recommended. The same reviewers can also be used at the formal defence.

The committee listed the following strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations for the Business and Administration study programme group at EBS:

Strengths

- 1) The university has created paid junior researcher positions for doctoral students.
- 2) Student satisfaction with the study programme is high, their feedback is taken into account in curriculum development. Students are highly motivated to organize seminars themselves to enhance various skills.
- 3) EBS doctoral students are able to pursue their studies in a very flexible manner, which fits in with their professional and demographic profiles.
- 4) Participation in international research networks merits recognition, 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, Nordplus Network, E-World research group etc.,

- 5) The programme has been successful in recruiting international students, in 2018, 21 out of the 54 doctoral students were from abroad.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) 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. In 2013-17 the completion rate was very low compared to admissions. 2018 saw the lowest recruitment in recent years and a high dropout rate (7), most completions exceed the 4+2 year target.
- 2) 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. It is an aim to increase this participation. Greater pro-activity by supervisors and setting mandatory quantitative performance indicators are needed to improve the situation.
- 3) 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.
- 4) Resource availability is a serious problem because as a private specialised university (EBS) has no access to research resources including electronic databases, etc., which are available to public universities (e.g. Web-of- Science, JStor, Scopus etc.). According to the EBS Action plan the issue was to have been resolved by the end of 2018, but as of February 2019 the solution is yet to be found.
- 5) 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, however, there does not seem to be a common understanding of when and how a solution is to be found. 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.
- 6) Given the importance of strengthening research for the survival of doctoral studies at EBS, investing into research groups, extra staff, collaboration with University of Tartu and junior researcher doctoral students is essential. The number of PhD students working as junior researchers should be increased.
- 7) Only 8 of the 54 PhD candidates listed in the SER have second supervisors and this requires immediate action. Furthermore, finding a competent co-supervisor should not be left entirely to the student, but should be the responsibility of the principal supervisor and R&D council.
- 8) As was mentioned in the self-analysis report, the age structure of supervisors is of concern. New faculty members should quickly be integrated into the supervision process. The proportion of full-time teaching staff is dangerously low. Immediate action is needed in order to recruit new qualified faculty members.
- 9) The PhD student community at EBS is to a large extent virtual. Foreign students spend the majority of their time in their home country and come to Estonia for a few days twice per semester. Local doctoral students have other work and family related commitments. Given the diversity in the current cohort of doctoral students, it is important for EBS to continue investing into distance learning capabilities. External students should be able to obtain the status of a part time doctoral student.

10. Point 40 of the 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups at the Level of Doctoral Studies' establishes that the Quality Assessment Council shall approve an assessment report within three months after receipt of the report. The Council shall weigh the strengths, areas of improvement, and recommendations outlined in the assessment report, and decide whether to conduct the next quality assessment of that study programme group in seven, five or three years.
11. The Council weighed the strengths, areas of improvement, and recommendations presented in point 9 of this document and found that the study programme, the teaching conducted under these programmes, and development activities regarding teaching and learning conform to the requirements, provided that the following conditions are met:
- According to the Regulation of the Government of the Republic 'Standard of Higher Education' subsection 6 clause 7 (1) *The conduct of studies conforms to the requirements if: Ordinary teaching staff and research staff are available for the studies, who meet the qualification requirements established in legal instruments and whose number is, based on their responsibilities, the volume of conducted studies and research and the number of supervised students, adequate for achieving the objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme.* The proportion of full-time teaching staff at the University is alarmingly low. Immediate action is needed in order to recruit new, qualified teaching staff members. The age structure of PhD supervisors is also of concern. New teaching staff members would need to be integrated into the supervision process as quickly as possible.
 - According to (2) of the same clause of the Standard of Higher Education *a member of the teaching staff or research staff who conducts studies in a given subject has the necessary teaching competence* (which according to clause 2 (6) of the Standard includes supervision) *and his or her qualification supports achievement of the objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme.*
 Clause 6 (7) 7) of SHE prescribes that *financing sources for conducting studies and for research and development activities related to Doctoral study and a strategy supporting their obtainment are in place.* Point 5.4.1 of the document 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups at the Level of Doctoral Studies' states that *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.* Supervisors are engaged in very few research projects and there is no clear consensus on how or when a solution shall be found. Given the seriousness of the situation the research groups are in urgent need of consolidation. Investing into research groups, staff reinforcement, collaboration with other universities and junior researchers among doctoral students is of critical importance.
12. According to clause 53 (1) 2) of the Administrative Procedure Act, a secondary condition of an administrative act is an additional duty related to the principal regulation of the administrative act, and 3) states that a supplementary condition for the creation of a right arising from the principal regulation of the administrative act. Clauses 53 (2) 2) and 3) establish that a secondary condition may be imposed on an administrative act if the administrative act cannot be issued without the secondary condition, or if issue of the administrative act must be resolved on the basis of an administrative right of discretion. The Council decided that without a secondary condition, a new assessment of the study programme group would have to take place in 5 years and on the basis of points 40.1 and 41 of the document 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups at the Level of Doctoral Studies'

DECIDED

To approve the assessment report and conduct the next quality assessment of the third cycle of studies in the Business and Administration study programme group at Estonian Business School in seven years with the following secondary condition:

Estonian Business School shall submit by 26.02.2021 at the latest in English a report on the elimination of shortcomings listed under point 11. Members of the assessment committee shall be invited to assess progress made on the secondary condition.

Decision was adopted by 10 votes in favour. Against 0.

13. The Council proposes that Estonian Business School also submit an action plan in English to EKKA concerning other areas for improvement and recommendations pointed out in the report no later than 26.02.2021.

14. A person who finds that his or her rights have been violated or his or her freedoms restricted by this decision may file a challenge with the EKKA Quality Assessment Council within 30 days after the person filing the challenge became or should have become aware of the contested finding.

The Council shall forward the challenge to its Appeals Committee who shall provide an unbiased opinion in writing regarding the validity of the challenge to the Council, within five days after receipt of the challenge. The Council shall resolve the challenge within ten days of its receipt, taking into account the reasoned opinion of the Appeals Committee. If the challenge needs to be investigated further, the deadline for its review by the Council may be extended by a maximum of thirty days.

A legal challenge to this decision is possible within 30 days after its delivery, by filing an action with the Tallinn courthouse of the Tallinn Administrative Court under the procedure provided for in the Code of Administrative Court Procedure.

Eve Eisenschmidt
Chair of the Council

Hillar Bauman
Secretary of the Council