

Decision Regarding Assessment of the Social Services Study Programme Group Lääne-Viru College

21/08/2018

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 the Social Services study programme group in the first cycle of higher education at Lääne-Viru College in seven years

On the basis of subsection 21¹ (2) of the Institution of Professional Higher Education Act, subsection 10 (4) of the Universities Act, point 3.7.3 of the Statutes of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (hereinafter referred to as 'EKKA') and point 41.1 of the document, 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education', authorised in point 3.7.1 of the above-mentioned EKKA Statutes, the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education (hereinafter referred to as 'the Council') affirms the following:

1. On 15.09.2015 the Council decided to conduct the next quality assessment of the Social Services study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at Lääne-Viru College in three years.
2. On 14.12.2017 Lääne-Viru College and EKKA agreed upon a time frame to conduct a quality assessment of the Social Services study programme group.
3. The Director of EKKA, by her order on 07.05.2018, approved the following membership of the committee for the institutional accreditation as well as for the quality assessment of the Business and Administration and Social Services study programme groups at Lääne-Viru College (hereinafter referred to as 'the Committee'):

Paul Mitchell	Chair of the Committee – Non-university member of the Committee, higher education expert, Director, Mega Mitchell Consulting Ltd. (United Kingdom)
Ben Bierings	Previously lecturer in Social Work at Zuyd University of Applied Sciences, Sittard/Maastricht (Holland)
Ari Björkqvist	Project Director, Haaga-Helia Baltic Hotel Management School, Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences (Finland)
Johanna-Kaisa Heikkilä	Senior Advisor, JAMK University of Applied Sciences (Finland)

Britt Järvet	Student, Tallinn University; Chairperson of the Estonian Federation of Student Unions (Estonia)
Enn Listra	Professor, Dean of the School of Business and Governance, Tallinn University of Technology (Estonia)
Danute Remeikiene	Director, Alytus College (Lithuania)

4. Lääne-Viru College submitted the following programme for evaluation under the Social Services study programme group:
Social Work (Prof HE)
5. Lääne-Viru College submitted a self-evaluation report to the EKKA Bureau on 27.02.2018 and the assessment coordinator forwarded it to the Committee on 5.04.2018.
6. An assessment visit was made to Lääne-Viru College during 15–17.05.2018.
7. The Committee sent its draft assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 4.07.2018, EKKA forwarded it to Lääne-Viru College for its comments on 5.07.2018 and the College delivered its response on 11.07.2018.
8. The Committee submitted its final assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 18.07.2018. That assessment report is an integral part of the decision, and is available on the EKKA website.
9. The Secretary of the Council forwarded the Committee's final assessment report along with the College's self-evaluation report to the Council members on 2.08.2018.
10. The Council with 11 members present discussed these received documents in its session on 21.08.2018 and, based on the assessment report, decided to point out the following strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations regarding the Social Services study programme group in the first cycle of higher education at Lääne Viru College.

Strengths

- 1) Lääne-Viru College has taken the recommendations made during the 2015 quality assessment very seriously and has embarked on immediate implementation of improvement activities. The Committee recognised the progress made over three years in all areas of the assessment.
- 2) The study programme comprises strong core modules that ensure the training of social workers at a high professional level.
- 3) The programme is coherent, and theory and practice are well interconnected throughout the programme.
- 4) Students' practical training is carried out in the form of a 'Connective Internship Model', in which the responsibilities of the students as well as of the supervisors from both the College and the practical training institution are clearly defined. Module content is closely linked to internships.
- 5) The College adjusts the content of the programme in accordance with changes in society.
- 6) The College has a clearly structured policy for taking into account the feedback from different stakeholders.
- 7) The e-learning environment at the College allows for consideration of the specific training needs of social workers (e.g. client registration, e-health tools and methods).
- 8) Students believe that the unique atmosphere at the College being located in the countryside supports their focusing on studies.
- 9) The library contains the most important current literature on social work. Access to important online journals is also ensured (e.g. the European Journal of Social Work).
- 10) The College has strategically invested in development of the e-learning platform (Moodle) in order to facilitate distance learning. The opportunity to combine work with studies has also made the programme attractive for adult students and students from other regions in Estonia. Students' study pathways can be individually planned.

- 11) Members of the teaching staff are highly motivated and qualified professionals, and are easily available to students. Students highly appreciate the personal feedback they receive from their lecturers.
- 12) Staff members enhance their pedagogical and professional skills by participating in (international) seminars and practical internships. The College supports and facilitates staff's self-development initiatives.
- 13) Due to the good reputation of the College and its unique atmosphere, the Social Work study programme is a conscious choice for many highly motivated students. Students feel a strong relationship with the College and are satisfied with the content of the programme as well as with the personalised approach of the teaching staff.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) In addition to fulfilling the Estonian professional standard, it is recommended that the College also integrate the newest international competence areas into its Social Work programme. For example, possible areas for development could be identified in cooperation with the three international partners of the College.
- 2) The English language skills of students should be improved, because currently they are somewhat hesitant to speak the language. The English module 'Insight into Social Work with Children', primarily developed for international students, could be offered more generally in order to provide all students with an opportunity to practice the English language and to support 'internationalisation at home'. Creating a virtual international classroom through videoconferencing would allow students who cannot participate in exchange programmes to still gain international experiences.
- 3) In order to expand its development opportunities, the College is also advised to seek international partners who apply different approaches to social work, especially with regard to integration of applied research skills into the study programme.
- 4) The unique position of the College in the region, the qualifications of the teaching staff and the strong support from stakeholders show that the College has all the prerequisites to pursue the status of a regional competence centre in the field of community work, especially relating to the needs of those people living in rural areas.
- 5) It was somewhat unclear to the Committee why differentiated assessments are being used in certain modules, while non-differentiated assessments are used in others. For the sake of transparency, it is advisable to clarify the reasons for such differences.
- 6) Some external stakeholders expressed their concern about the workloads of the teaching staff. College management should identify this possible problem and discuss the issue with its stakeholders.
- 7) Specific reasons for dropping out by second and third year students should be carefully investigated.
- 8) It is recommended that the College consult its external stakeholders regarding how to eliminate the reasons which make it difficult for graduates of daytime studies to become employed, compared to the students who are already working at the time of their studies.
11. Point 41 of the document, 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education', 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 for improvement, and recommendations pointed out in the assessment report, and then shall decide whether to conduct the next quality assessment of that study programme group in seven, five or three years.
12. The Council weighed the strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations referred to in point 10 of this document and found that the study programmes, the teaching conducted under

these programmes, and development activities regarding teaching and learning conform to the requirements, and

DECIDED

to approve the assessment report and to conduct the next quality assessment of the Social Services study programme group in the first cycle of higher education at Lääne-Viru College in seven years.

The decision was adopted by 11 votes in favour and 0 against.

The Council decided to commend Lääne-Viru College for taking seriously the recommendations made during the 2015 quality assessment, for embarking on immediate implementation of improvement activities, and for its progress in all assessment areas.

13. The Bureau of EKKA will coordinate a date for the next quality assessment of the study programme group with Lääne-Viru College no later than 21.11.2024.
14. The Council proposes that Lääne-Viru College submit an action plan to EKKA with regard to the areas for improvement and recommendations pointed out in the report no later than 21.08.2019.
15. 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 judicial 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 pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Code of Administrative Court Procedure.

Eve Eisenschmidt
Chair of the Council

Hillar Bauman
Secretary of the Council