



ESTONIAN QUALITY AGENCY
FOR HIGHER AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Institutional Accreditation report Tajik National University

2020

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Introduction

‘Institutional accreditation’ is the process of external evaluation which assesses the conformity of a University or higher education institution’s management, work procedures, study and research activities and environment to both legislation and the goals and development plan of the higher education institution itself. This is feedback-based evaluation in which an international assessment panel analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the institution of higher education based on the self-assessment report of the institution and on information obtained during the assessment visit, providing recommendations for improvement and ways of implementing them.

The goal of institutional accreditation is to support the development of strategic management and quality culture that values learning-centeredness, creativity and innovation in higher education institutions, as well as to increase the societal impact of education, research and development delivered by the HEIs.

Higher Education institutions are assessed according to twelve standards. Assessment focuses on the core processes of the HEI – learning and teaching, research, development and creative activities, and service to society – as well as on strategic management of the organization and resource management. The learning and teaching process is examined in more detail under five standards (study programme, teaching staff, learning and teaching, student assessment, and learning support processes). Throughout the assessment process, there is a focus on academic ethics, quality culture and internationalization.

The institutional accreditation of Tajik National University (TNU hereinafter) took place in November 2020. The Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA hereinafter) compiled an international assessment panel for the accreditation as follows:

Bob Munn(chair)	Former Vice-President for Teaching and Learning Emeritus Professor of Chemical Physics University of Manchester, UK
Tanel Kerikmäe	Director of the Tallinn Law School Tallinn University of Technology, Estonia
Helen Thomas (secretary)	Freelance Education Consultant, the UK
Jacques Lanares	University of Lausanne, Vice Rector, Switzerland
Anca Greere	Professor in English Linguistics and Translation Studies Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Eva Liina Kliiman	Student, Tallinn University, Estonia
Ruth Shimmo	Head of the Institute of Natural Science and Health Tallinn University, Estonia
Tanja Dmitrovic	Vice-Rector for knowledge-transfer Professor in the School of Economics and Business University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

The assessment process was coordinated by EKKA staff – Mr Hillar Bauman, Ms Jekaterina Masenko and Ms Marit Sukk.

After an initial preparation phase which included three panel meetings, the work of the assessment panel was undertaken via Zoom. The panel members agreed the overall questions and areas to discuss with each group during the assessment of TNU. The distribution of tasks between the members of the assessment panel was organised and a detailed schedule of the assessment agreed.

Meetings were held with the representatives of TNU from Monday 9 to Friday 13 November 2020.

On Saturday 14 November, the panel held an all-day meeting, during which the panel's findings from the evidence reviewed were discussed, the panel agreed their preliminary evaluation of the standards, and the process for drafting and finalising the report was agreed.

The following report has two parts: a report on institutional accreditation and a report on quality assessment of three study programmes: 1) Physics, BSc; 2) International Law, BA; and 3) International Relations, MA.

The findings of the study programme assessments are used to inform the full institutional accreditation report, through a form of 'sampling'.

Information about the Tajik National University

The Tajik National University (TNU) was established in 1947; it acquired its current status in 1997 and its current name in 2008. It has 117 departments organised into 19 faculties; in addition there are a number of institutes and centres such as the Confucius Institute, the Russian Centre, the Pakistan Centre and the Centre for the Study of India. The University is based on three campuses in Dushanbe.

At the time of the accreditation visit there were about 24,000 students studying on 105 bachelor's programmes and 82 masters' programmes. There were over 600 postgraduate and doctoral students. The delivery of the programmes is supported by some 1,500 teaching staff, 54% of whom have what TNU terms academic degrees (candidate of science, doctor of science, PhD).

The head of the University is the Rector who is supported by five Vice-Rectors.

Brief main impressions of the institution, the self-evaluation report and the visit

In deciding to seek international accreditation with EKKA, TNU has taken a bold step to open itself to close scrutiny of all spheres of activity: strategy, structure, all aspects of teaching and learning and the policies, processes and procedures that underpin the entire University. Institutional accreditation of this kind is a new experience for TNU and, the Panel understood, within Tajikistan more widely.

TNU has committed itself to aligning with the national strategy, with Tajikistan deciding to sign the Bologna Declaration and join the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). To meet the principles of the Bologna declaration and the expectations of the EHEA, TNU has had to change and develop significantly in recent years, including adopting the ECTS credit system and introducing the educational philosophy of student-centred learning. The status of TNU as the National University and the largest higher education institution in the Republic of Tajikistan means that the developments needed to achieve accreditation are likely to influence developments in higher education more widely in the country.

Moving to align itself with European quality assurance expectations as enshrined in the EKKA framework entails major shifts of culture and organizational behaviour, as well as the development

of new processes and procedures. This is a long-term development for any higher education institution. The Panel found that TNU's practices are still in the early phases of such development.

In preparation for accreditation, TNU produced an institutional self-evaluation report (SER) and SERs for each of the sample programmes (SPSERs), and provided some other documents in advance. The documents, most noticeably the SER and the SPSERs, had been written in Tajik and translated into English. Whether as a result of the translation or not, the SER did not use the wording or follow fully the headings and guidance provided by EKKA and consequently some of the expected content was not there or was difficult to find. There was inconsistent use of terms, use of abbreviations which were not always explained and repetition of text between different sections so that the SER provided a fragmented and at times rather incoherent picture of TNU. The SER did not demonstrate that it had been carefully edited. Whilst the SER contained a lot of information about the University, there were insufficient examples to provide a clear picture of how processes are implemented, how new they are, and how effective they are in achieving what they were intended to do.

One impact of the virtual nature of the visit was that it was not always clear for the Panel who was present at the meetings in TNU. Almost all the meetings were interpreted and at times there was discussion between the interpreter and the TNU representatives, which TNU confirmed was an explanation of what the TNU Panel was being asked or of the interpreter's response. This made the evaluation by the Panel challenging. There were also some significant delays in the Panel receiving documents and other evidence that it had requested; whilst this may have been because they were only available in Tajik, at times the lack of documents hindered the Panel's work.

Summary of the institutional accreditation findings

General Findings:

As the national university, TNU takes its strategic direction from the national strategy, to which it contributes; this appears to preclude TNU developing strategies of its own. The Development Strategy that TNU does have includes many aims, objectives and results but lacks any measures or indicators by which it can track progress. TNU does have written plans, but it uses these more as checklists than as tools for monitoring and driving progress systematically towards its desired goals. TNU's progress would be better directed if it documented its ambitions in areas such as internationalization, staffing and research in its own, TNU strategy documents.

Central to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) are Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs), which underpin the expected approach to much of teaching, learning and assessment. Although TNU programme and course documentation contains ILOs, they are often poorly articulated and it is not clear that they are used to drive the approach to teaching and learning to give students the opportunities to achieve specific ILOs, or that the methods of assessment used are devised to measure that achievement.

ILOs are a fundamental principle of student-centred learning which TNU identifies as one of its major aims. Student-centred learning requires a significant shift from traditional teacher-centric approaches to student-centred approaches to teaching and learning. To fully embed such a significant change is challenging. TNU declares that it is ready for the challenge; it was clear to the Panel from discussions and documents that student-centred learning and what it entails was poorly understood across the University.

The evaluative approach required to demonstrate how standards are maintained and enhanced relies on evidence that relevant policies and procedures are in place, that they are applied appropriately, and that the results are analysed and used to inform enhancements. Whilst TNU has relevant policies and procedures in place, the Panel was unable to establish that there is regular, systematic and evaluative reporting on courses, programmes and services. TNU's quality assurance and enhancement system needs to ensure that the core processes of reporting, analysis and enhancement are rigorously carried out and documented.

TNU has well-motivated students who are satisfied with their programmes and who progress successfully through their studies. They compete well in the job market, with the result that TNU graduates occupy many important positions in Tajikistan. There is evidence that students reach a level of preparation that compares well with those from other institutions in the region and in countries where Russian is a working language. There is significant scope for programmes to contain more specialist content and for students to develop 'soft skills' useful in employment. The resources for study and the support provided for students are generally good, and TNU emphasizes ethical behaviour.

There is evident enthusiasm for internationalization. There is inward and outward mobility between TNU and countries where Russian is widely known or where a language cognate with Tajik is used. One example is the joint Tajik–Belarusian faculty that enables TNU to offer programmes in disciplines for which Belarusian institutions can offer expertise that TNU does not have. To attract a wider range of students, the University has also introduced some programmes taught in English. However, to achieve its ambition of greater international recognition, TNU will need to develop the English language skills of its staff and students.

In the area of research TNU needs to make significant progress for it to achieve its ambitions to be globally recognized as a research institution. TNU should support research with systematic and proactive planning. TNU also needs to engage much more with journals published in English as well as with institutions where English is the working language.

TNU is a big university with programmes spread over a large number of faculties and departments. The organizational structure of very large European universities is usually more streamlined with fewer faculties and departments and this facilitates communication, for instance, supporting interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary studies, among other things. Whilst it is clear that the current structure is approved at State level, there may be merit in considering a review to support the broader developmental aims of TNU.

Main strengths and problems to support the summary of the assessment are indicated in the table below.

	conforms to requirements	partially conforms to requirements	does not conform to requirements	worthy of recognition
Strategic management	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quality culture	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Academic ethics	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Internationalization	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teaching staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Study programme	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learning and teaching	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student assessment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learning support systems	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Research, development and/or other creative activity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>
Service to society	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Recommendations

- The graduate employment rate and the level of the positions graduates fill.
- The overall support systems which enable students to progress through and complete their programmes of study.
- The scope of and values enshrined in the Code of Ethics.

Areas of Concern and Recommendations

- TNU should establish a process to ensure that for any future reviews its SER is clear and complete, and that it is carefully reviewed before submission.
- TNU should develop its strategies at whole institutional level as well as for key areas of activity; these should contain clear objectives with measurements and indicators.
- TNU should ensure that it implements consistently its quality assurance and enhancement framework so that the core processes of reporting, analysis and enhancement are rigorously carried out, documented, managed and monitored.
- TNU should develop and embed its understanding of learning outcomes so that they are expressed in terms that show students what they should achieve; so that ILOs at the course level relate to the ILOs at the programme level; and so that assessments address the ILOs.
- TNU should give much more focus to the understanding and implementation of student-centred learning in order to embed it across the University.
- TNU should review its research policy and develop it so that it supports the University's ambitions to become a globally-recognized research university; TNU should also ensure that the allocation of resources is in line with the policy.

- TNU should develop the English language skills of staff and students to enable them to access the wider international higher education and research community.

Suggestion for further improvement

- TNU could explore the organizational structure of large European universities to see if alternatives for TNU would better serve its aims.

1.1. Strategic management

Standard:

Development planning at the higher education institution is purposeful and systematic, involving various stakeholders. The higher education institution regularly evaluates the achievement of its stated objectives and the impact of its activities.

Guidelines:

The HEI has formulated the objectives and key results for its core activities – learning and teaching; research, development and creative activities, and service to society – taking into account national priorities and the needs of society, focusing on its strengths and reducing unnecessary duplication both within the HEI and throughout higher education in Tajikistan. The HEI is managed in accordance with its mission, vision and core values, as well as objectives set out on the basis of those principles. Achievement of the objectives and effects of the activities are evaluated regularly. Creativity and innovation are supported and given value in both core and support activities. Membership of the HEI (including students), as well as external stakeholders, is involved in developing and implementing the HEI's development plan and action plans. The HEI members share the core values that serve as a basis for the institution's development plan.

Indicator:

The rate of achieving the objectives set in the development/action plan (key results)

conforms to requirements	partially conforms to requirements	does not conform to requirements	worthy of recognition
<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Evidence and Analysis

TNU is guided by its Development Strategy for 2019–29 (the Strategy), approved by the University's Scientific Council and consistent with the requirements of the Ministry of Education and Science. As the National University, TNU is fully committed to following the national strategy.

According to the SER the principal direction of the strategy is to transform TNU into a regional and global research University through internationalization. The Strategy contains five main purposes, such as "*the training of highly qualified specialists speaking in three languages, who are socially responsible and professional in the domestic and foreign labor markets,*" and "*to transform the university into a world-class research university*". The Strategy has 49 objectives which cover the core activities, although service to society is mentioned only implicitly. The objectives relate to different topics including education, research, development of infrastructure, internationalization and cooperation, and financial resources. The Strategy identifies some of the anticipated outcomes or results including the "*improvement of the level and quality of education, integration into the global educational environment, training of scientific and technical personnel with a broad scientific outlook and good organizational and production skills; strengthening of the relations of the*

University with the industrial enterprises, attracting teachers and students in the scientific and technical works, providing technical solutions to the problems of the national economy through the national experts". Specific, measurable outcomes, performance indicators and time scales are not stated for the results of the objectives. It is therefore difficult for TNU to know whether it is achieving or has achieved the desired outcomes. The 48 objectives are not structured, organized or grouped either according to priorities or to the main functions of the University and thus appear more as a wish list than clearly defined priorities for the period covered by the Strategy.

The Panel found no evidence of any operational plans which translated the overall objectives into specific activities. The Panel learned from staff that they work to an annual plan which is derived from the five-year plan and elaborated at all levels. Each year, the Plans are reviewed in the Academic Council and agreement is reached on how the strategy should be taken forward in the coming year. The Panel did not see any of these plans and is unable to evaluate how they are described and used.

The Panel learned that the Strategy is based on inputs from departments and faculties. The Academic Council discusses and votes on the Strategy which is then presented to the Rector for approval. The involvement of stakeholders in the development of the Strategy seems to come predominantly from academic and administrative staff. There is little evidence of a strong student voice in the process; for instance, there was only one student representative in the 46-member group that developed the SER. The needs of society and the labour market are mainly set by the State with contributions from teaching staff some of whom work in government offices or hold other positions outside TNU. More widely TNU provides the opportunity for stakeholders to give input through meetings of the Rector, the Rector's and Vice-Rectors' office hours, and suggestion boxes placed round the premises. However, the Panel did not find that these were systematic or that they ensured that all voices were well heard in the development of strategy.

The SER states that the Strategy is based on a SWOT analysis. The Strategy enumerates a number of concerns and challenges some of which overlap with the SWOT analysis. These include infrastructure, research and staff. The Strategy provides a candid account of concerns and weaknesses. The Strategy and the analysis on which it is based appear to be realistic in assessing TNU's strengths and weaknesses as, for example, a shortage of suitable equipment and textbooks. The opportunities focus principally on internal Tajikistan issues. A few threats are also identified which appear, in part, to be internal to TNU, such as the lack of motivation for teaching staff to use innovation. The SWOT analysis concludes that TNU has competitive advantages, mainly within Tajikistan, as might be expected for a national university, and that obtaining international accreditation is a route to higher standards. The SER notes that TNU is ranked first among universities within Tajikistan by the organization Unirank; however, it does not report any rankings that might serve to calibrate TNU's international prestige. The Panel noted that TNU is not included in Unirank's top 200 universities in Asia.

Analysis of the surveys from the Department of Monitoring and Control of Education Quality showed that the most pressing problems concern religious extremism, terrorism, inter-religious and inter-ethnic issues. The Strategy includes objectives related to the prevention of alienation among young people, to counteract the dangerous influence of extremist organizations, and to research regional security and combating terrorism and extremism. The Panel found that the University's work in this area is evidence of careful exploration and response to its specific environment.

Some objectives relate to some of the strengths identified in the SWOT analysis such as the *“presentation of graduate and masters with the use of modern technology”* or the further development of student and staff exchanges through collaboration with institutions abroad. It is therefore possible to demonstrate the relationship between the SWOT analysis and the objectives of the strategy: however, these links are not made explicit.

The 2019-2029 Strategy does not appear to be based on an evaluation of the previous one (2008-2018); the SER merely states that it has been *“basically implemented”*, with no further elaboration.

The Panel did not find any evidence of individual strategy documents focusing on key areas of TNU including research, internationalization or service to society. The Panel acknowledges that research goals and priorities are set by the State; nevertheless, the Panel suggests there may be room for negotiation or at least elaboration of how those goals and priorities will be addressed at TNU.

TNU has a mission, vision and values that are outlined in the *Policy in Education and Quality Assurance* but do not appear in the Strategic Plan, despite the fact that the SER claims the direction of the Strategy was determined by TNU’s mission, vision and the priorities for the development of Tajik society, science and economy. TNU states that its mission is *“ensuring the needs of the national economy in highly qualified frames of economic and financial profile”*. The Panel considers that it would be helpful to include the mission, vision and values in the Strategy to demonstrate better how they align.

The Panel learned that every semester each department submits a report to the Academic Council of the University on the implementation of the plan. The Panel gained the impression from discussions with senior managers that the focus of the reporting is on actions rather than on results or outcomes. Since there are no key performance indicators (KPIs) or specific targets, the evaluation of the Strategy’s implementation is based on verification that the *“planning matrix”* is properly executed. The Panel found no evidence of an evaluation of outcomes. There are, however, indications that the main objective of TNU, *“to train competitive specialists in the labor market”* is being achieved. The SER states that 90% of students are employed after graduation and this was endorsed by employers who stressed their desire to recruit TNU graduates.

The Strategy is supported by a range of policy documents covering academic and research areas, including a set of documents about quality policy and quality management. There is a department of monitoring and quality control of education which is coherent with the strategic aim of *“improving the quality of education.”*

In reaching its conclusions on *Strategic Management* the Panel took the particular context in Tajikistan into consideration. The Panel understood that the directions for higher education are set by the State and that TNU’s strategic objectives and its strategic plans are not only determined by the national priorities but are also approved by the State. This clearly constrains the freedom of the University in striking out in new directions. Nonetheless, in the light of Tajikistan signing up for Bologna, it is important for TNU to explore how much scope and responsibility it has or can have within national strategies. For European expectations there are significant weaknesses in strategic thinking and approach, which the Panel found, at least in part, to be a result of the limitations of the context. Whilst some of the basic elements have been implemented, these tend to be at an operational level rather than strategic in nature. The Strategy lacks indicators related to targets that can be tracked and monitored for impact and progress. Mid- and short-term plans are not strategic plans with annual objectives but rather a simple list of activities for the current year. The impact of this is that the Strategy focuses on processes and activities rather than on outcomes. The absence of

focused strategic plans for the core areas of research, teaching and learning, internationalization, and service to society is a significant weakness in the strategic management of TNU.

Commendation

The SWOT analysis that identified strengths and weaknesses of TNU and was used to inform the Strategic Plan.

Recommendations

- TNU should develop its strategy so that it is clearly based on an in-depth and evidence-based analysis; it should include specific targets to ensure that priorities are clearly identified and that goals are measurable so that their achievement can be clearly demonstrated.
- TNU should develop strategic plans for key areas of activity such as teaching and learning, research, internationalization, and service to society. Implementation plans linked to these should detail those responsible for overseeing the achievement of the objectives.
- TNU should include its Mission, Vision and Values in the Strategic Plan so that the alignment between these and the strategic objectives can be easily seen.

Suggestion for further improvement

- TNU could reflect on its organizational structure and consider how to increase the agility of the University in a time of rapid change, for example, by grouping faculties.

1.2. Resources

Standard:

The higher education institution develops its staff and manages its physical and financial resources in a purposeful, systematic and sustainable manner. Internal and external communications of the higher education institution (including marketing and image-building) are targeted and managed.

Guidelines:

The HEI has an efficient staff development system. The principles and procedures for employee recruitment and development are based on the objectives of the HEI's development plan, and are fair and transparent. The career model of academic staff motivates talented young people to start their academic careers, creates opportunities for progress, and ensures sustainability of the academic staff. The principles for employees' remuneration and motivation are defined, available to all employees, and observed.

Allocation of the HEI's financial resources is based on the objectives of its development plan. The management and development of its infrastructure (buildings, laboratories, classrooms, IT systems, etc.) are economically feasible. Sufficient resources are available for updating the infrastructure for education and research, and/or a strategy exists enabling the HEI to acquire them.

A sufficient number of textbooks and other learning aids are available, they are of uniformly high quality and accessible. Publicly offered information about HEI's activities (including study programmes) and the findings of external evaluations is correct, up to date, easily accessible and understandable. The HEI has a system to popularise its core activities and academic career opportunities. The HEI has a functioning system for internal and external communications, relevant to the target audiences. The HEI members are informed of the decisions relevant to them in a timely manner.

Employee satisfaction with management, working conditions, information flow, etc., at the HEI is surveyed regularly and the survey results are used in quality improvement activities.

Indicators:

- *Distribution of revenues and costs (incl. RDC activities)*
- *The results of the staff satisfaction survey*

conforms to requirements	partially conforms to requirements	does not conform to requirements	worthy of recognition
<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Evidence and Analysis

The rights of staff, the ethical and moral context and the aims of personnel policy are contained in the Regulations of Personnel Policy (RPP). The regulations also include, as a principal objective, the development of a legal framework to support its implementation. It was not clear whether the legal

framework is still under development. The RPP do not address the principles of staff recruitment and the Panel found it difficult to establish whether recruitment is undertaken consistently and transparently. Senior managers informed the Panel that the University advertises when a vacancy arises and that the Academic Council makes the decision whether to appoint or not by secret ballot. Staff from the International Law programme informed the Panel that when there are professorial vacancies, the call is published, the head of chair makes a nomination, the dean agrees who will be appointed, and the Rector gives the final approval. The Panel was not provided with a clear account of the function of the Competition Commission in the recruitment process and whether, for example, it assesses applications to check whether they meet the criteria. It was not possible for the Panel to confirm that recruitment practices are fair and transparent.

The RPP identify the importance of the training, assessment and motivation of staff and the commitment of TNU to support these. The Panel learned that the University Training Centre offers support to personnel but were not provided with detailed information about the training offered. It could not, therefore, ascertain the effectiveness of the training. There are also opportunities for academic staff to undertake further studies which TNU supports, including master's studies and doctoral studies abroad. It was not clear, from meetings with students, how widespread the opportunity was for TNU's doctoral students to contribute to teaching. In other contexts, such opportunities afford both professional and financial reward.

TNU identifies staff salary levels as a challenge. Despite recent increases of 26% with a further 15% planned, these still remain relatively low. Staff indicated that salary levels were the principal source of dissatisfaction. TNU offers bonuses to staff to reward excellent performance across all areas of the University's activities.

There is a financial policy and a plan for its development. The plan covers the main elements of a transparent financial system and includes an account of identified risks. There are no targets for income generation. The processes for initiating and creating the plan are not outlined. Budget setting and allocation are described in the SER. Meetings with senior staff confirmed that the deans of the faculties identify their funding requirements in line with the approved programmes and the resources needed to deliver them. The submissions from the deans are built into a consolidated budget, which the Rector submits to the Academic Council of the University for approval. The budget is held centrally, which ensures close control but affords no flexibility at departmental level. All spending is approved by the Rector. Budgets are subject to State rules and regulation. The process and its implementation were sound, to the extent the Panel could ascertain from the limited documents available in English. However, the Panel could not gain a clear picture of how decisions are made in cases of competing priorities. It was not clear whether this was because there were always sufficient funds or whether there is a lack of transparency in the decision-making process.

The Panel received no written evidence of longer-term planning, but learned from the Deputy Rector for Economic and Social Affairs that there are extensive plans to extend the campus, and concentrate the University in a single area. These developments reflect decisions by the Dushanbe authority, with which planning is coordinated.

Overall, the Panel found that financial planning and resources are largely sufficient and reflect the Development Plan. Close Government monitoring limits financial risk.

To support the strategic objective of student-centred learning, TNU aims to strengthen the material and technical base of the University, modernize IT, and optimize the organizational structure to create a favourable learning environment. The Panel found evidence of investment in the material

and technical base of TNU and in IT provision. Students reported satisfaction with the facilities available including the technical and laboratory provision. The Panel did not have access to sufficient evidence to confirm that this is a consistent picture across the University as a whole. Staff from the Faculty of Physics indicated that the technical equipment was rather old and in need of updating. The Panel could not follow a documentary trail of the process outlined in the SER to establish whether this shortcoming is being addressed through investment plans.

In discussion with staff and students, the Panel learned that not all buildings are adequately accessible for those with special needs.

TNU has two libraries with some 280,000 items of technical literature in various languages. The SWOT analysis identified a shortage of specialist literature in English. Staff and students confirmed that library resources are sufficient in Tajik but not in English. This shortage impacts on both staff and students' ability to access appropriate resources in the language of their study programme. There is access to a limited number of international electronic databases, which, in the Panel's view, are insufficient to support both staff and student research.

TNU has computer labs on campus; according to the SER the ratio is 97 students per computer, which falls well short of the norm of 20 students per computer. In response to the draft report TNU stated that it estimates 15 students per computer without explaining the origin of the figure of 97. Students did not report a shortage of computer provision.

The University press service and the editorial and publishing centre manage communications with the Centre for IT, subject to appropriate regulatory provisions. The Panel did not gain a clear picture of how information flows to ensure that it is effectively disseminated to relevant stakeholders. For example, it seemed that the system relies on faculty deans to report back to the faculties on points arising in the Academic Council. Discussions with staff and students revealed that the current communication channels are not fully effective. For example, students were not well informed about the learning support systems or the student services centre. Staff who met the panel were not well informed about decisions relating to key aspects of teaching and learning, including student-centred learning. The Panel questioned whether the number of organizational units within the University may hinder effective internal communication.

TNU is active in promoting itself externally through the website, through its own newspaper and through senior staff's engagement with the media. The website is in Tajik, Russian and English; both the English and Russian parts are limited, which will impact on TNU's ambitions to establish itself internationally especially beyond the Russian speaking community. It was clear to the Panel that locally TNU exerts considerable influence.

Recommendations

- TNU should continue taking steps to raise staff salaries.
- TNU should develop a formal approach to risk management; this should identify internal and external risks and mitigation measures so that senior management can monitor risk.
- TNU should prioritise making all buildings accessible to ensure inclusive education.
- TNU should increase the numbers of scientific books available in English to ensure it meets students' study needs.

- TNU should expand access to international academic databases to support research of both staff and students.
- TNU should develop its internal and external communications, including the website, to ensure all stakeholders are systematically aware of information relevant to them.

Suggestion for further improvement

- TNU could consider how effective the current organizational structure is in enabling effective communication.

1.3. Quality Culture

Standard:

The higher education institution has defined the quality of its core and support processes, and the principles of quality assurance. In the higher education institution, internal evaluation supports strategic management and is conducted regularly at different levels (institution, unit, study programme), the findings of internal and external evaluations are analysed and quality improvement activities implemented.

Guidelines:

*Members of the HEI have agreed upon definitions for the quality of their core and support processes and are guided by them in their daily work. The HEI develops and publicises its policies and procedures for internal quality assurance (internal evaluation) and conducts regular internal evaluations, which take into account, *inter alia*, the standards set out in this Guide, and incorporates feedback from its members and/or from external experts. In the course of internal evaluations, peer learning, comparisons with other HEIs regarding their results and means for achievement, as well as a sharing of best practices take place, among other things.*

Internal evaluation is based on the following key questions in quality management: What do you want to achieve, and why? How do you want to do it? How do you know that the activities are effective and will have the desired impact? How do you manage the quality improvement activities?

Regular reviews and enhancements of study programmes ensure their relevance, including their compliance with international trends.

conforms to requirements	partially conforms to requirements	does not conform to requirements	worthy of recognition
<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Evidence and Analysis

TNU's policy requirements regarding quality assurance are set out in a number of documents. The *"Policy of education quality assurance"* outlines TNU's quality assurance objectives and the tasks identified to achieve them, including the provision of suitable infrastructure; engaging with stakeholders; improving job satisfaction; adopting international best practice; coordinating across sectors of the University; implementing student-centred learning; interacting with employers on preparing graduates for employment; and ensuring that all members of the University understand the policy. The document *"Education Quality Management Program"* describes some general characteristics of quality in education and its management, with reference to the Tajik national quality assurance system and ten principles of quality management in higher education institutions. It explains how TNU's approach to teaching needs to change in order to develop innovative programmes of study, with an emphasis on how to teach rather than just what to teach, and indicates the contextual factors that need to be taken into account in the development and approval of programmes. It also sets out twelve practical steps towards implementing the quality management programme. A supporting document *"The programme of managing quality of*

education" provides information and instructions on operating quality management. These include tables for gathering quantitative data on quality; explanations on how staff are to be involved; and a definition of marking and grading schemes. "*The Provision of the DMQC*" sets out the scope of the Department of Monitoring and Quality Control of Teaching which is described as the executive body for "*organization and enforcing the policy of University in the direction of educational quality*". The scope and responsibilities are listed and include quality assurance and quality enhancement, teaching methodology and the education of teachers. The "*Internal QA system*" document gives regulatory details of what is to be evaluated and by what criteria.

Scrutiny of the documentation showed that key concepts are elaborated. However, despite several attempts to explore awareness of the procedures in meetings with staff and managers, including rephrasing questions to clarify them further, the Panel was unable to establish that staff understood what the concepts meant for them in practice. The Panel heard no evidence as to how the regulations are implemented and how they serve the purposes of quality assurance and enhancement. The Panel learned in meetings with senior staff that student surveys and employer interactions are used to evaluate quality, but they did not explain how these support quality assurance and enhancement. Staff could not provide examples of improvements made on the basis of the formal mechanisms. The Panel concluded that the implementation of policy is inadequate and that mechanisms are not implemented consistently so as to ensure quality across institutional activities.

The SER states that TNU has adopted the "*concept for monitoring the internal and external environment*". However, the Panel could not establish what this entailed: whether the focus was entirely academic or included administrative functions, nor what monitoring activities it involved. The Panel did not have access to evidence from monitoring or periodic review reports nor to any minutes of committee meetings where such reports might be discussed. The Panel learned that the Methodological Committee was responsible for approving changes to programmes, ensuring that these do not exceed 10% to be acceptable as minor amendments. However, there were no details about the Committee such as its membership or its mode of operation. In particular, it was not clear whether the Committee includes employer representatives. Whilst it was clear that there are many informal interactions between TNU and external stakeholders where constructive advice and feedback are gained, the Panel saw no evidence of systematic input that would ensure that it is captured and discussed in relevant management fora. Some of the employers met by the Panel were aware of the Employers' Council, which appeared only to be an e mail list. Students confirmed that they had a representative who participated in various meetings on a regular basis. The Panel could not assess how active student representatives are in the Academic Council or whether their participation really contributes directly to institutional developments.

The Panel sought to understand how TNU organises continuous professional development to support the understanding and implementation of quality assurance. The Panel could not find evidence of clearly articulated training objectives to guide the development of competences related to quality assurance for key staff and, more broadly, for members of the quality committee structure. The staff time to understand, manage and implement quality systems needs to be clearly recognized and signalled in training.

The Panel explored the approach to benchmarking. Whilst TNU has identified its main competitors, which are in the region, and compares its educational practices with the Eurasian University in Kazakhstan, staff could not evidence actions related to benchmarking nor could staff cite any related documentation. As a result, the Panel was unable to assess the extent to which TNU is able to compare its practices of using benchmarks and whether benchmarking has led to any developments.

The Panel explored the identification and dissemination of good practice across all areas and functions of the University, that is, governance and management as well as educational activities. Senior managers reported that the Methodological Committee has oversight of good practice emerging from teaching and learning; however, it was not clear how the good practice identified is disseminated to staff, students or to the broader stakeholder community, as appropriate. Effective quality management should include mechanisms for the systematic identification and dissemination of good practice in teaching, in the development and implementation of study programmes, in the practices of administrative departments and in management practices.

TNU conducts a number of surveys including those with students and staff. The Panel saw some evidence of survey analysis. However, where the results and the analysis of those results are discussed was not clear; staff could not provide instances of where feedback had resulted in changes, and it was apparent that the feedback loop is weak. Students reported that surveys are not compulsory, and they often prefer to give feedback informally to a member of teaching staff. The Panel found that the understanding of the purpose of surveys and the value of them in quality management was very limited.

The SER included some graphs which presented trend data from surveys. The Panel observed a bias towards positive results, which made it difficult to understand how weaknesses could be identified in a timely manner and addressed at institutional level. The Panel could not see how the data produced is used to inform actions. Further the Panel was not provided with any evaluations of the data or given any information demonstrating when and how it is considered so as to inform management and support any corrective action needed.

It was not clear to the Panel how communication about quality assurance issues allows all stakeholders to engage with quality. The Panel understands that issues discussed in one committee are escalated and reported to a higher-level committee. However, there was no evidence to indicate how any quality-related decisions are communicated to staff and students who are not members of any committee.

Overall, TNU has policy documentation which has the potential to support a quality system. However, the application of this policy lacks rigour and does not demonstrate how policy supports strategic institutional development. Although some elements of a quality system are present, it is not operating effectively. The Panel concluded that quality at TNU is mainly focused on compliance and control with little focus on the enhancement and development which are essential to meet the expectations of the European approach to quality management.

Recommendations

- TNU should ensure that the documented quality policy requirements are implemented robustly and consistently, and should use information and feedback resulting from implementing the processes to inform strategic developments.
- TNU should introduce and document monitoring and periodic review processes for all its activities that will ensure that activities are reviewed regularly and support the identification and implementation of improvements.
- TNU should ensure that all committees have clearly-documented terms of reference, including membership, scope and frequency of meetings, and that meetings are formally recorded, so that actions can be followed through and their impact assessed.

- TNU should ensure that quality committees include relevant representation from stakeholder groups, especially students and employers.
- TNU should develop a systematic continuous development plan for all staff to promote the understanding and implementation of quality management and assurance.
- TNU should develop a systematic approach to capturing and disseminating good practice across all areas of activity. This will strengthen the focus on quality and ensure that good practice is considered and shared appropriately across all institutional structures.
- TNU should ensure that internal evaluation mechanisms, such as surveys, are appropriately designed to serve strategic purposes, adequately analysed and comprehensively discussed, in order to enable actions and developments to be identified that can bring about increased institutional effectiveness.
- TNU should ensure that analyses of quantitative and qualitative data are used effectively to inform system-wide approaches and strategic action.
- TNU should strengthen its communication channels about quality matters so that information is disseminated to relevant stakeholders in a timely manner.

Suggestions for further improvement

- TNU could consider developing its approach to benchmarking so that it clearly promotes the effectiveness of quality assurance systems.

1.4 Academic ethics

Standard:

The higher education institution has defined its principles for academic ethics, has a system for disseminating them among its members, and has a code of conduct including guidelines for any cases of non-compliance with these principles. The higher education institution has a functioning system for handling complaints.

Guidelines:

The HEI values its members and ensures that all its employees and students are treated according to the principle of equal treatment.

Employees and students of the HEI are guided by the agreed principles of academic ethics in all their activities.

The HEI respects fundamental values and policies of research.

The HEI supports its students and teaching staff in their understanding and responding to ethical issues. Teaching staff and students do not tolerate academic fraud, including cheating and plagiarism, and they will act immediately upon any such occurrence.

Management of complaints from HEI members (including discrimination cases) is transparent and objective, ensuring fair treatment of all parties.

Indicator:

- Number of academic fraud cases

conforms to requirements	partially conforms to requirements	does not conform to requirements	worthy of recognition
<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Evidence and Analysis

The SER outlines how the development of a student's personality with moral and ethical standards is part of the University's mission. The SER notes that there are external factors that currently make this hard to achieve, including the low status of teachers, a general decline in culture, and the prevalence of corruption. It explains that academic ethics is not limited to the narrow issue of plagiarism, and describes a wider concept of academic ethics as a "set of rules of human behaviour in the academic environment". It suggests that ethical considerations arise in interactions between students, staff, within academic space, educational process and administration. These considerations were central in developing the University's Code of Ethics. The Code of Ethics defines key terms, explains its purpose, and relates it to the University's mission and values, as well as addressing questions for self-reflection. The implementation of the Code is overseen by the University's Ethics Commission, which has wide-ranging membership. The Commission meets at least twice a year and considers complaints, of which there were three in 2019. A separate procedure covers complaints relating to assessment.

The text of the Code and the competences of the Ethics Commission remain abstract, and would benefit from being developed to be both better structured and more specific. The Panel learned

from meetings with senior staff of TNU that members of top management cannot be the subject of a complaint, despite the fact that the Code states that it is for “every member of TNU community”.

While the SER reproduces the whole Code, it does not address guidelines, nor did the Panel see separate guidelines. Hence it was not possible for the Panel to ascertain how the Code actually operates, with the exception of some specific instances about plagiarism.

The Code of Ethics is lengthy, ambitious, wide-ranging in scope and includes several relevant principles. The positioning of the Code is also explained: it does not replace policies and regulations but provides the context within which they operate. The Panel found that, despite the University’s significant efforts to communicate the Code to the TNU community, greater clarity is needed to ensure that the TNU community fully understands the Code and how it relates to policies and regulation, given the impact of the Code and the remit of the Commission.

The first principle in the Code states that members of the University should respect all others in all settings. The SER states that the University leadership provides equal opportunities to students, regardless of the language of instruction. Students confirmed that these principles are respected and that they felt they were treated equitably.

The Code also includes a section for researchers on respect, honesty, responsibility, professionalism, courtesy and proactivity. The student contract specifies rights and responsibilities, and explains how disputes can be resolved.

It was clear to the Panel that the academic community as a whole and representatives of TNU administration value the principles of academic ethics. The Panel found evidence of general awareness about the Code and the Commission of Ethics. Members of the University community are required to sign a declaration that they have read the Code and agree to follow it.

The Panel found that, although there is good awareness of the Code, there were conflicting views about its application, the competencies of the Ethics Commission, the roadmap for complaints, and the nature of sanctions that could be applied in the case of a breach of the code. The Panel did not find clear and consistent evidence of the impact of the Commission’s findings or the existence of any standards related to the sanctions given. For example, the Panel learned that, where plagiarism is detected in a thesis, the student can submit a revised version. It appeared from another example that a student may be punished by the Rector.

TNU has introduced electronic anti-plagiarism software which screens assessed work and work for publication for plagiarism. A seminar has been provided for staff and students to make them aware of the software. Staff who met the Panel reported that plagiarism occurs infrequently and that penalties are primarily a requirement to resubmit the offending work, even when it was found that a dissertation was almost completely plagiarized. Staff reported that dismissal would occur on a third offence. In many other jurisdictions, serious or repeated plagiarism offences lead to full failure for that element of assessment, with no second chance to retake the assessment.

Although the Code of Ethics is sufficiently ambitious in aspiration the Panel found that in practice only very obvious violations were addressed; when questioned about academic ethics, TNU staff mentioned only plagiarism and problems related to conflicts of interest. The Panel was not confident that the implementation of the Code reflects the aim for it to apply to all areas of the University’s activities and to every member of staff, whether related to study, research or management.

Commendation

- TNU is commended for its management of ethics supported by a wide-ranging Code that presents a clear analysis of the need for ethical approaches in different academic situations.

Recommendations

- TNU should develop a clear complaints procedure and publish criteria for the competencies of the Ethics Commission.
- TNU should revise the Code and the guidelines for “individual estimation of ethics in actions” according to international standards.
- TNU should ensure that its strategies are transparently related to academic ethics so that principles of academic ethics can be better integrated into the decision-making process in student affairs, research management and administration.
- TNU should disseminate accessible information to the University community about how it safeguards academic ethics; it should also promote the principles the Code enshrines in every field of TNU activity.

Suggestion for further improvement

- TNU could review regularly its practice on the potential threats to academic ethics and disseminate these to all stakeholders.

1.5 Internationalization

Standard:

The higher education institution has set objectives for internationalization and assesses the attainment of these objectives regularly. The higher education institution has created an environment that encourages international mobility of students and teaching staff, supporting the development of learning, teaching and RDC activities, as well as the cultural openness of its members and Tajikistan's society in general.

Guidelines:

The HEI creates opportunities for international student exchanges by offering study programmes and/or modules taught in English. The learning environment at the HEI supports internationalization and cultural openness.

Recognition of qualifications and recognition of prior learning and work experiences for student admission and programme completion are in accordance with the quality requirements set by the HEI, are systemic and consistent with the expected learning outcomes and support international student mobility.

The organisation of studies at the HEI facilitates student participation in international mobility. The HEI has agreements with foreign higher education institutions and, through international exchange, sends its students abroad to study and undertake practical trainings, providing comprehensive support for this. Members of the teaching staff encourage students to participate in international mobility.

International lecturers participate in the process of teaching, including supervision of doctoral theses.

The HEI supports and recognises the participation of its teaching staff in international teaching, research or creative projects, as well as their teaching, research or creative work and personal development which are performed at HEIs abroad.

Indicators:

- *Teaching staff mobility (in-out)*
- *Student mobility (in-out)*
- *Number of English-taught study programmes by main units and levels of study*

conforms to requirements	partially conforms to requirements	does not conform to requirements	worthy of recognition
<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Evidence and Analysis

TNU's internationalization agenda derives principally from directions set by the Tajik government. Senior staff members articulated their priorities for internationalization to the Panel, placing a strong emphasis on increased international student numbers and intensified collaborations with international partners.

The Panel repeatedly asked to see TNU's internationalization policy documentation and any underpinning strategic action planning as evidence to support the internationalization priorities mentioned in the SER and in meetings with the Panel. Senior staff confirmed that there is no discrete policy document that outlines the internationalization strategy, but they maintained that all internationalization initiatives are captured in the overarching Development Strategy. The Panel found the lack of focus in the interpretation of internationalization resulted in inconsistencies in the way priority objectives were described and actions were taken. The impression created is that actions are the result of individual interpretation rather than of a coordinated approach. TNU stated that the monitoring of internationalization activities happens qualitatively and quantitatively. The Panel did not see sound evidence of the impact of this monitoring in internationalization objectives and could not gain any clarity as to how international activities are assessed for their achievement and institutional impact, or are adjusted, as part of a systematic institutional approach.

The Development Strategy notes the need "to introduce international standards across management and educational activities, and to enhance the prestige of the University." The Panel understood that Bologna requirements as adopted by the Tajik government should be implemented by TNU. However, in meetings, University senior management did not clearly articulate what international standards they were specifically focusing on and which regional or global partners TNU considered its direct reference for international standards. Through further exploration it became clear that the main geographical focus for internationalization is concentrated in the region, with reference made to Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Iran and also to China. Kazakhstan was cited as the major competitor and the Eurasian National University as the principal benchmarking institution. The Panel learned that there is no documentation relating explicitly to benchmarking objectives; rather these objectives are inherent in institutional level strategic documentation. The Panel found that a greater awareness of benchmarking would benefit the setting of attainable, internationalization objectives which, in turn, could guide the operational level and assist in the monitoring and achievement of the objectives.

TNU achieved significant growth in foreign student numbers from 126 in 2017 to 888 in 2019. The University set a target of 2000 for 2020 but the Covid-19 pandemic caused many international students to defer and TNU enrolled only 963 international students in 2020. The target of 2000 is now set for 2022. The Panel heard that the rapid increase in international student numbers had presented problems that the University managed as they arose. These included problems relating to travel arrangements, accommodation and cultural/linguistic adaptations. Whilst the challenges were responded to, the Panel found no evidence of a coordinated and systematic approach, which leaves students vulnerable to falling through the net. The TNU International Department, under supervision of the Vice-Rector for International Relations, organises support tutorials and various projects designed to help students from different backgrounds participate. These support tutorials introduce international students to Tajik life and culture and facilitate the development of tolerance and integration.

In 2019, according to the SER, TNU had 283 international contracts and agreements. In the same year it hosted 289 foreign participants at conferences and related activities. TNU has joint programmes developed in accordance with the Bologna process with foreign universities, some of which enjoy international recognition and high rankings. The Panel gained the view that the majority of contracts are functional and, whilst they indicate beneficial activities, the Panel could not find evidence of how contracts are monitored for their impact and whether there are any performance indicators. It was thus difficult to understand how strategic decisions about forming or ceasing partnerships are made, and how decisions at the institutional level are informed.

The home departments for the three sample programmes confirmed that they seek bilateral relations with national and international organizations and foreign universities, especially in the former Soviet Republics and in the countries stretching from Russia through central and south Asia to China in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. These departments also cooperate with international organizations in order to access grant funding and to be included in international research projects. However, it was not clear to the Panel that internationalization has a direct impact on the content and structure of the programmes, or how this is evaluated at institutional level.

Foreign lecturers contribute to the teaching and learning at TNU, mostly in the context of bilateral cooperation agreements. The Panel saw examples of master's dissertations that had foreign co-supervisors, although the extent of their input was not clear. TNU staff also study teaching methods and technologies at universities in Asia and Europe as well as learning about new teaching approaches from foreign teachers.

There are opportunities for students to undertake mobility, for which there is a strict selection process. The Internationalization Department regularly informs students about the opportunities available. Students participate in the Erasmus+ international mobility scheme and TNU also offers a variety of international practice opportunities, internships and placement learning. There is a systematic framework for the training, to which a growing number of organizations contribute. In the SER, the University states that it has regulations and a mechanism for recognizing learning outcomes from academic mobility, and from additional formal and non-formal learning, in particular in TNU's *Regulation on Academic Mobility*. The Registrar's Office is responsible for implementing the procedure on receipt of a transcript from the partner institution; the procedures are known to students and faculty.

TNU supports international exchange by offering programmes in management, economics, law and international relations in English as well as in Russian and Tajik. There is a clear rationale for the choice of programmes which TNU sees as providing a competitive advantage. Students from these programmes reported that one benefit of studying specialized content in English is that it helps their communication with international employers.

Students indicated that they were satisfied with the level of English of their teachers, who sometimes revert to Tajik to confirm concepts in English. This could, however, disadvantage students who are not Tajik speakers. Students reported that they had not been tested for English language competence on admission and that they were offered some English-language support alongside their programme. Students reported that study materials in English were not always sufficient to support their academic initiatives.

The Panel learned that staff teaching in English must reach level C1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Some staff said that they felt competent to teach in English. However, not all staff the Panel met who were teaching in English were highly competent. The Panel learned that the University offers only limited support for the development of language skills, and found no evidence of training designed to support the management of a multicultural classroom in the medium of English.

TNU has a joint Tajik–Belarusian faculty with its own Dean. This involves collaboration with several higher education institutions in Belarus. The institutions, together with the programmes they offer, are listed on the TNU website. Students spend the first two years at TNU and the third and fourth years at the partner institution; they graduate with a degree certified by both institutions. This enables TNU to offer programmes for which there is market demand (cybersecurity, for example),

but where TNU lacks the necessary expertise. The Panel applauded TNU for this model which circumvents the inevitable limitations posed by a small country, which cannot have sufficient expertise in every required discipline.

Overall, the Panel found that TNU is investing in growing its international community and promoting an environment of cultural openness. However, TNU needs to have clear and measurable objectives for internationalization and devote strategic attention to their implementation.

Commendation

- TNU is commended for the joint Tajik–Belarusian initiative that allows it to offer programmes on topics where it lacks sufficient local expertise.

Recommendations

- TNU should develop an internationalization policy document with clearly articulated objectives; this should be communicated to all stakeholders and appropriately referenced to those areas of TNU that share the internationalization agenda, and it should support the systematic implementation and monitoring of internationalization objectives.
- TNU should develop benchmarking as a way to better understand how higher education operates internationally and to help it to be more effective in enhancing its international standing.
- TNU should articulate criteria for assessing potential partnerships and for evaluating their effectiveness so as to inform strategic decisions on their continuation and/or closure.
- TNU should clearly state and consistently implement its minimum English language requirements for staff, and should offer appropriate opportunities to staff to enable them to develop their competence beyond the minimum.
- TNU should assess students' language level on entry to programmes delivered in English and should ensure that the support it provides enables students to achieve a high level of competence before they graduate.
- TNU should provide sufficient resources in English at a suitable academic level to support students' learning.

Suggestions for further improvement

- TNU could develop a more systematic way of managing challenges arising from the significant increase in international student numbers to ensure that support for these students is comprehensive and consistently implemented.
- TNU could develop a system for monitoring the impact of internationalization activities on its educational programmes and for disseminating the good practice that the monitoring processes reveal.

1.6 Teaching staff

Standard:

Teaching is conducted by a sufficient number of professionally competent members of the teaching staff who support the development of learners and value their own continuous self-development.

Guidelines:

Members of the teaching staff engage systemically in development of their professional and teaching skills, improve their supervision competence, and share best practices with one another.

Teaching staff's participation in research, development and/or creative activities supports the teaching process and ensures competence for the supervision of students' theses (including doctoral theses).

Members of the teaching staff collaborate in fields of teaching, research and/or creative work within the HEI and with partners outside the HEI, e.g. with field practitioners, public sector organisations, companies, other research and development institutions, and lecturers from other Tajik or foreign higher education institutions. Qualified visiting lecturers and practitioners participate in the teaching process.

When assessing the work of teaching staff (including their periodical evaluations), the effectiveness of their teaching as well as their research, development and creative work is taken into account, including student feedback, the effectiveness of their student supervision, development of their teaching and supervisory skills, their international mobility, and their entrepreneurial experience or other work experience in their fields of speciality outside the HEI.

Indicators:

- *Competition for elected academic positions*
- *Results of students' feedback about the teaching staff*
- *Teaching staff participating in continuing training or other forms of teaching skills development*

conforms to requirements	partially conforms to requirements	does not conform to requirements	worthy of recognition
<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Evidence and Analysis

The SER asserts that teaching staff are the most important resource for teaching and learning. Teaching staff include honorary and visiting lecturers. Between 2016 and 2019, TNU had a full complement of full-time teaching staff, which is determined by student numbers and the hours of teaching required. The number of teaching staff rose by 2% or by 30 individuals to 1272 in the 2018-2019 academic year. Of these staff, 56% held academic degrees and titles and 14% held PhD degrees and professor titles. The average age of teaching staff with academic degrees has decreased to 48. The Panel considered that, compared to international universities, the proportion of TNU staff holding a doctorate and/or a professorship is low.

TNU recognizes that there is shortage of qualified teachers in the domestic market. The Panel noted that many of the full professors are retired teachers. The Panel also noted that those teaching on bachelor's programmes included current master's students. The evaluation of sample programmes showed that the allocation of staff to teaching areas did not always correspond to their qualifications or specialized educational background. The Panel expressed concern that attestation rules may not be sufficient to ensure that students are being taught by appropriately qualified and experienced teaching staff.

In the *Strategy 2019-2029*, TNU states that master's and PhD graduates are prospective young faculty. The practice of training future staff at the "home" university is not uncommon in less mature education markets, and is a practical solution to staff shortages. However, this in-breeding can be an obstacle to innovation and to the sharing of good practice. The Panel recognised the challenges within the relatively small context of Tajikistan and encourages TNU to explore possible sources of qualified teachers in the expatriate community, for example, or to identify faculty who have obtained degrees and/or teaching qualifications abroad.

Overarching employment rules are covered by relevant national laws. TNU further applies its strategy, quality policy, the TNU personnel policy, its Code of Conduct for Employees and the Code of Ethics. The Code of Conduct covers the rights and responsibilities of employees, including ethical norms. The *Regulations on Personnel Policy* covers the personnel management system, defines the main goals, objectives and mechanisms for the development of the University's human resources capacity and establishes rules for the selection, training and development of staff, but remains a purely normative document. Staff confirmed that there is a competitive process for applicants for academic positions, but it was not clear whether there are formal rules of attestation. The Panel was unable to establish whether there are qualitative or quantitative rules and criteria for progression (for example, from assistant to assistant professor and ultimately to full professor), despite the fact that the SER states that appointments and promotions are made by the Competition Commission. Discussions with academic staff revealed a lack of clarity about the academic career model; staff could not list the requirements for elected positions in their faculty, and indicated these may vary from case to case.

Staff turnover and TNU's development plans determine the need for new appointments. Decisions to establish a new position are based on recommendations from Chairs and Deans and made by TNU management, which also secures the finances. It was not clear whether the need for a new position is planned strategically and transparently at the faculty level. By way of transparency, applicants, heads of department and deans can attend meetings of the Competition Commission, the results of which are immediately made public.

The SER notes that an increasing proportion of faculty members are young teachers who have graduated with a master's degree. TNU offers courses on contemporary approaches to teaching and makes videos of experienced teachers available to new teaching staff. The courses are designed to reflect a student-centred approach to teaching and learning in which lecturing staff are facilitators of learning rather than transmitters of knowledge and information. There are opportunities for staff to gain experience of teaching and to undertake master's and doctoral studies abroad including in Europe, Asia and Russia. English and Russian language courses are provided in TNU to support staff to take up these opportunities. The Centre for Advanced Studies offers courses on using technology and on distance learning as well as courses aimed at those in management roles. These courses contribute to the personal and professional development of staff.

Academic staff are expected to conduct research and scholarly activities alongside teaching and to incorporate their work in the development of teaching materials. Staff involved in the Physics programme gave some examples of research feeding into their courses. Staff on the Master's in International Relations reported that they bring examples from their own current practice into their teaching. The Panel did not have sufficient evidence to ascertain how widespread this is across the University as a whole.

Teaching staff cooperate with visiting staff from abroad. This typically happens within the framework of bilateral agreements. The benefits of this were appreciated by students and employers who also emphasised that international or internationally educated teaching staff could contribute more to the enhancement of study programmes. Visiting practitioners who contribute to teaching and supervising students are selected for their practical experience and for the organization they come from, as exemplified by staff on the International Relations programme.

The assessment of teaching staff is overseen by a special Commission that uses a range of criteria to evaluate information gathered from experts, students and colleagues. The Panel learned that teaching competencies are evaluated by class observations. This includes the peer observation of teaching by colleagues in the same faculty and department, and unannounced observation by members of the Commission, as well as input from student questionnaires. The Panel found that the process outlined in the SER was implemented as described. However, the consequences of the assessment findings were not clear, and the Panel could find no evidence of a feedback loop. Thus, the system lacks transparency and objectivity.

Recommendations

- TNU should intensify its efforts to improve the structure of its academic staff by hiring qualified teachers so that it can attain international standards.
- TNU should establish attestation rules to ensure that the courses and programmes taught correspond to the teacher's area of expertise.
- TNU should develop a clear and transparent academic hierarchy that includes specifying the competencies required for each level of staff.
- TNU should ensure that the outcomes of teacher assessment are objective and transparently communicated to staff.

Suggestions for further improvement

- TNU could explore the recruitment of teaching and research staff internationally to strengthen its teaching base and align with its aims of internationalization.
- TNU could consider recruiting qualified teachers from the Tajik expatriate community and from those who have gained degrees abroad.
- TNU could develop further opportunities to support young faculty in the development of their teaching competencies so that they could undertake leading roles in programme development and delivery.
- TNU could strengthen further the links between research and teaching by offering guidance and support to all teaching staff to achieve greater impact.

1.7 Study programmes

Standard:

Study programmes are designed and developed while taking into account the expectations of stakeholders, higher education and professional standards, and trends in the relevant fields. The objectives of study programmes, modules and courses and their planned learning outcomes are specific and coherent. The study programmes support creativity, entrepreneurship and development of other general competencies.

Guidelines:

In planning study programmes and student places, the HEI pursues its objectives and the needs of the labour market, and takes into account national strategies and the expectations of society.

Expected student workloads defined in the study programmes are realistic and consistent with the calculation that 1 ECTS credit is 25-30 student learning hours.

Theoretical learning and practical learning are interconnected. The content and organisation of practical trainings support the achievement of learning outcomes of the study programme and meet the needs of all parties.

conforms to requirements	partially conforms to requirements	does not conform to requirements	worthy of recognition
<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Evidence and Analysis

The process for the development and approval of study programmes is set out in the *Regulation on the formation of educational programmes* dated May 2020. According to the Regulation, the process implements the state standards of higher professional education and meets other relevant legislative requirements as documented by the State.

New programmes are proposed at department level and may be initiated by members of staff. The Panel learned that academic staff have contacts with practitioners and industry which may stimulate the initiative. Staff also keep abreast of national priorities and are alert to new areas. The example of tourism was given as a relatively recent programme development which reflected market needs. The Panel also learned of new courses in military diplomacy which responded to needs identified within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. New courses within programmes may also be proposed by staff or by external experts with links to TNU: for example, a course on cosmic rays was proposed and partly developed by a staff member at a national observatory. Overall, programmes take national priorities into account and meet the needs of stakeholders.

An outline curriculum is developed and discussed at department and faculty level. In-principle agreement for the programme is agreed by the Scientific Council and the detailed curriculum is developed at departmental level. Input is elicited from internal and external experts. External

experts include employers and representatives from other academic institutions, including those from outside the Republic of Tajikistan. This is sound practice.

The developed programme is discussed at departmental and faculty levels and then in the Scientific Council, which has the authority to sign the programme off for the University. The programme is presented to the Ministry of Education for final approval and registration. The process is robust. Discussions with senior managers, deans and staff confirmed that the process was well implemented. A time scale of three to six months was quoted as the normal period for a programme from initiation to approval. In the view of the Panel this shows unusual and welcome agility in the development and approval of new programmes in the higher education context.

Study programmes are intended to be designed to align with the Bologna process, as required by the Ministry, and thus to conform with requirements of ECTS and the attendant student workloads. The Panel was not provided with any university-wide policy, regulatory or other guidance or specification that outlined the requirements for bachelor's or master's programmes with indications of numbers of ECTS credits required for a programme, student workloads and the level of the individual courses. The Panel could not, therefore, gain insight into how staff were aware of the general requirements of the Bologna process and how they would know what they needed to do to ensure these were met when designing a programme.

The Panel reviewed three programmes in detail, together with their individual courses. Each of the three documents describing the programmes contained a substantial amount of generic information which applied equally, but not always appropriately, to each of the three programmes. The descriptions contained general statements about the purposes of the programme and included programme-level learning outcomes. There was no statement of educational approach espoused by the programme and, in particular, no mention of the approach to teaching and learning or any indication that it is student-centred. The programme-level learning outcomes were expressed in terms of students acquiring knowledge ('knowing'), skills ('being able to') and 'having' which in some cases seemed to equate to competencies. The programme descriptions indicated different components or blocks. At both bachelor's and master's level these blocks included general courses on natural sciences, humanities, and extra-curricular activities. From the documentation provided, the Panel confirmed that each programme comprises 60 ECTS credits per year of study, with one credit requiring 24 hours of study, plus an additional 9 credits for the final state certification. The number of credits allocated to the discipline varies between two thirds and half of the overall programme. This is relatively few credits to ensure the acquisition of discipline-specific knowledge and skills for bachelor's or master's level degrees.

The programme descriptions reviewed by the Panel did not include full details of the courses offered on the programme, in which semester they are delivered, which courses are required/mandatory and which elective or optional. These descriptions, therefore, are not adequate to inform students about the structure and progression on the programme or to inform teaching staff about how their courses fit into the overall programme. The SER stated that students have electronic access to programme information and choose electives with guidance from an adviser. Some of the students met confirmed that they access programme information in this way.

The Panel reviewed the information provided about individual courses on both bachelor's and master's programmes. Some of those reviewed included in which semester a course is delivered, how many ECTS credits the course has, what a student is expected to learn, often labelled the '*purpose*' or '*results of learning*', the class hours and whether these are lecture or practical, and the student workload. The Panel found considerable variation in the details given and in the

presentation of the course description. There was little evidence of course specific learning outcomes, and none of how these relate to the learning outcomes of the overall programme. There was much variation in the number of credits ascribed to different courses and the Panel could find no rationale for the credit weighting given to different courses.

In discussion with staff and senior managers, the Panel did not gain a convincing view that the concept of learning outcomes was well understood. Nor did the Panel gain the view that staff understood how competencies and learning outcomes were related. Moreover, the Panel did not find any evidence of an understanding that learning outcomes are what drive assessment. In particular, the University confirmed in discussion that it considers student attendance to be a learning outcome. The Panel concluded that the understanding of learning outcomes, how they should be formulated and their purpose in driving student learning is weak.

The study programmes contain both theoretical and practical elements. Applied subjects such as physics and computer science offer, as is expected, both theoretical aspects and practical laboratory-based learning at the University. All programmes include the requirement for work-based placements. These are a key element in enabling students to gain employment-related skills and other work-related competencies.

TNU offers a number of programmes through distance learning. The Panel learned that this operates through a carefully specified structure. Students attend an initial face-to-face orientation week and further attendance is required periodically for some teaching, including practical work, and assessment. The mode of study is currently asynchronous. TNU is progressing the development of live classes online. Distance learning also uses case studies with the help of the Moodle virtual learning environment, subject to national regulations. Students are supported in accessing distance learning by a TNU manual, and staff are provided with guidance on developing online courses. TNU's approach to study programmes through distance learning is sound.

Recommendations

- TNU is commended for the way study programmes meet the needs of the Republic of Tajikistan.
- TNU is commended for its sound programme approval process which includes external experts.
- TNU is commended for the placement learning that forms part of all programmes.

Recommendations

- TNU should develop and embed a clear understanding of learning outcomes across the University to ensure a sound and consistent basis for study programmes and their implementation.
- TNU should develop a guidance or policy document that outlines the requirements of study programmes in terms of number of ECTS credits, higher education level, student workload, intended learning outcomes and general progression requirements from one year of study to the next, to provide staff with support and to promote consistency in the presentation of programme documentation.
- TNU should review the credit allocations for discipline-specific and general elements of the curriculum to ensure that those allocated to the discipline enable students to gain an appropriate breadth and depth of discipline-specific knowledge and skills.

- TNU should develop standard templates, possibly in tabular form, for both programme and course specifications (descriptions). These should provide students with clear and complete information about their study and provide an informed and accessible source of information to staff and external sources about the study programmes offered by TNU.
- TNU should make explicit the rationale for the numbers of ECTS credits awarded to different courses so that this is clear to both students and other stakeholders.

1.8 Learning and teaching

Standard:

Admissions requirements and procedures ensure fair access to higher education and the formation of a motivated student body. The higher education institution systemically implements a student-centred approach that guides students to take responsibility for their studies and career planning, and supports creativity and innovation. Graduates of the higher education institution, with their professional knowledge and social skills, are competitive both nationally and internationally.

Guidelines:

The teaching process takes into account students' individual abilities and needs, and supports their development. Organisation of independent work and classroom teaching motivates students to take responsibility for their studies.

Teaching methods and learning aids used in the teaching process are modern, appropriate and effective, and support development of a digital culture.

Students are motivated to learn and contribute to improving the quality of their studies by providing meaningful feedback on both the learning process and the organisation of studies.

Doctoral students plan their studies, as well as their research and development activities, in collaboration with their supervisor(s), setting specific objectives for each year and assuming responsibility for achieving those objectives.

Indicators:

- *Student satisfaction with the content and organisation of studies*
- *Alumni satisfaction with the quality of studies*
- *Employer satisfaction with the preparation of the graduates*

conforms to requirements	partially conforms to requirements	does not conform to requirements	worthy of recognition
<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Evidence and Analysis

Admissions to TNU programmes are based on the regulations of the TNU Admissions Committee. The documents that have to be submitted are specified on the TNU website and on information boards, in both Tajik and Russian. The process is governed by the results of national tests, with grades that qualify for admission determined nationally. An orientation week of conventional format is held for new students. Departments conduct a variety of external recruitment activities that emphasize career guidance, so that applicants are well prepared for admission to their programmes. In 2018 TNU admitted 22% of all first-year students in Tajikistan, up from 15% in 2011.

The emphasis TNU places on careers is consistent with the importance given to practice learning in study programmes. Employers met by the Panel reported that TNU graduates were more valued as recruits to high-level appointments than graduates from other universities in Tajikistan. Employers

also found that graduates were of comparable level to graduates they had encountered from foreign universities.

The SER states that students choose electives with guidance from an adviser and develop their own individual curriculum and timetable. All students, including distance learners, can choose from the University's catalogue of electives and options. Which courses are actually delivered depends on the number of students who opt for those courses, but the regulations provided to the Panel did not specify a minimum cohort size for a course to run. A group of students can request a new course for an elective, subject to the standard approval process. TNU aims to offer provision tailored to students with different learning styles, background and needs. For example, students with disabilities can choose electives that are accessible to them; when they cannot physically access the electives, they may be provided with electronic materials instead. International students are offered additional induction and support by the International Department, by their faculty and by their department. More broadly TNU aims to offer group work that is tailored to students with different learning styles. Apart from these, the Panel found no evidence that the individual curriculum, claimed in the SER, amounts to any more than the choice of electives within the programme.

The Strategic Plan (2019–2029) identifies the use of modern and innovative teaching methods as one of its objectives and the "*organisation of student-centred learning through the introduction of a personality-oriented approach to ensure individualization of student learning*" is named as one of the tasks in the *Policy of Education Quality Assurance*. The SER argues that student-centred learning helps to motivate and involve students in their studies. The Panel found no further evidence of how TNU understands student-centred learning and no consistent understanding of how to realize this educational approach. Discussions with teaching staff provided some examples of activities that they undertake to make their classes student-centred. These included the use of mock trials in International Law, student presentations, student analysis of documents and greater percentages of classes led by student discussion. The reported use of electronic media was limited to using projectors for presentations, with the Moodle VLE used primarily for document management rather than active learning and teaching processes.

The SER states that independent study is an integral part of programmes and identifies four levels of demand on student learning that are developed through a range of activities targeting different skills, including ethical thinking. Students are helped to develop independent study through training in gathering and processing information. The results of student surveys show that students are largely positive about the independent study they undertake. However, the information provided for the Panel about programmes and their constituent courses contains little about the teaching and learning methods used and offers no evidence to demonstrate the consistent understanding and implementation of a student-centred approach to teaching and learning.

Questionnaires are used to survey students' views on the effectiveness of lectures, practical classes and independent study; the survey results show a generally high level of satisfaction that has increased over the years. Students reportedly take part in meetings to discuss the quality of their programme and can use a variety of methods to raise questions with the University leadership. However, none of the students met by the Panel reported experience or knowledge of either of these. The University needs to ensure that the methods it uses to gather student feedback on the quality of their programme are fully and consistently implemented and are known to students. The completion rate of over 90% indicates that students remain well motivated throughout their programmes, and the students who met the Panel were very positive about their experience and committed to their studies.

PhD studies are relatively new in TNU and there are around 20 graduates from the three-year PhD programme. The first year is devoted to a detailed programme of study across ten subjects. The dissertation topic, developed by the student with the supervisor, is subject to approval by the department, the faculty and the University. Progress is checked each year by the TNU Certification Commission. PhD students who met the Panel said there is strong pressure to submit their thesis on time, as otherwise the University loses funding. As a PhD is awarded on the basis of a significant contribution to knowledge and not on the basis of time served, the Panel concluded that the University should be more flexible and supportive to students whose work is delayed by problems beyond their control, such as equipment failure or personal circumstances, so that they are able to complete their work.

Recommendations

- TNU should promote and embed a consistent interpretation of student-centred learning to provide a solid foundation for its implementation across the University.
- TNU should include in the standard programme specification and in each course specification information on the methods of teaching and learning used, showing clearly that they are student-centred.
- TNU should ensure that the methods it uses to gather student feedback on the quality of their programme are fully implemented and known to students.
- TNU should be more flexible and supportive to PhD students whose work is delayed by problems beyond their control.

1.9 Student assessment

Standard:

Standard: Assessments of students, including recognition of their prior learning and work experiences, support the process of learning and are consistent with expected learning outcomes. The objectivity and reliability of student assessments are ensured.

Guidelines:

The assessment criteria are understandable to students and students are informed about them in a timely manner. Members of the teaching staff cooperate in defining assessment criteria and apply similar approaches.

Assessment methods are versatile and relevant, and assess the degree of achievement of learning outcomes (including general competencies).

If possible, more than one staff member is involved in the development of assessment tasks and student assessments. Along with assessments, students receive feedback that supports their individual development.

The HEI supports development of the teaching staff's assessment competencies.

Evaluation of doctoral students is transparent and impartial. Its purpose is to support the development of doctoral students, to assess the effectiveness of their current work and to evaluate their ability to complete the doctoral studies on time and successfully defend their doctoral theses.

When recognising prior learning and work experience towards the completion of the study programme, results obtained through the studies and work experiences (the achieved learning outcomes) are assessed.

Students are aware of their rights and obligations, including the procedures for challenges regarding assessments.

Indicator:

- The number of credit points applied for and awarded under the accreditation of prior and experiential learning scheme (APEL); this does not include credit points transferred from a different study programme at the same HEI.*

conforms to requirements	partially conforms to requirements	does not conform to requirements	worthy of recognition
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>

Evidence and Analysis

Each semester students receive information on their programmes, which includes information about assessment. Students reported that they know what they are assessed against, as this is explained to them clearly in class as well as informally on request. However, the syllabuses scrutinized by the Panel had only very generic information about assessment and did not give a clear sense as to how marks are awarded, particularly when other than computerized test methods are used.

The Panel learned that multiple-choice is the dominant approach used for summative assessment, although there was some evidence of other forms being used, particularly for formative assessment.

It was clear that the use of computerized tests is widespread in TNU. Although such tests seem to ensure objectivity and security, the Panel note that in trusting the objectiveness of the automated process there are also significant risks that should be considered, and minimized where possible. Depending on how the assessments are set, staff validation may prove helpful in allowing students to obtain the grades they deserve. From the Panel's scrutiny of the available evidence, the diet of assessments is rather limited, and does not reflect the student-centred approach to teaching and learning that TNU is adopting.

A fundamental principle of assessment is that assessment methods should address the learning outcomes, and only the learning outcomes, and that this alignment should be clear. The SER outlines how the ILOs are formulated and describes different types of assessment; it does not, however, demonstrate how assessment methods and assessment criteria are related to the ILOs. From the meetings with staff members it was clear to the Panel that there was poor and inconsistent understanding of learning outcomes and no understanding that the learning outcomes, assessment types and criteria should be aligned. The ILOs and the related assessment should reflect not only knowledge but also skills and general competencies that students are expected to develop through their studies.

In the documentation reviewed, it was apparent that elements of student conduct, including attendance, impact on assessment. For example, in the programme of International Law, points are deducted for disrespectful behaviour; in the Electrodynamic syllabus in the Physics programme there is a detailed breakdown of how points for attendance are assigned and weighted into the final grade. The impact of attendance on points in master's level courses is also apparent, for example, in the syllabus for Republic of Tajikistan and Russian Relations, it is stated that the "*necessary points are deducted for students skipping classes*". Elements of student conduct and behaviour are not academic; they should not be addressed in learning outcomes, nor should they be assessed and graded. Assessment outcomes should focus only on the level of academic achievement and should not reflect non-academic matters.

The Panel found two different accounts as to how the approval and consistency of assessment are achieved. One is the methodological training offered to the staff, the other the oversight given by the Methodological Board for confirmation and advice concerning assessment criteria. From the discussions between the Panel and programme staff and from the perusal of programme-related documentation, it was clear that there is no consistent approach to assessment across the different faculties. It is difficult to see how senior faculty and academic committee members can be confident that the results of assessment in one area are consistent in level with those in another.

The Panel learned that feedback to students on their performance in assessment is given in a grading scale; descriptive feedback is given only when a student requests it, informally, from the teacher. The Panel saw no requirements or guidance that specified the timeline within which feedback should be given, nor any guidance as to the nature and quantity of feedback. Detailed feedback to students on their assessment is considered part of the learning process within a student-centred approach, where it should be constructive and enable students to improve their performance for future assessments. As far as the Panel could establish, the Methodological Board has no role in monitoring the effectiveness of feedback to students on their assignments.

The Panel heard that, whilst some students had experience of appealing against their grade, most students were not aware what avenues they could pursue in the case of a disagreement on a grade, if it could not be settled between the student and the teacher. An example was outlined to the Panel; however, it was not clear whether any formal published criteria were applied or whether approaches made for an appeal would be considered and decided on a case-by-case basis.

The Panel learned from the doctoral students that there is an annual monitoring/attestation process although the requirements for this vary depending on the research area and the interaction between the student and supervisor. There is a great deal of pressure for the doctoral students to complete within three years. The Panel could find no evidence of flexibility for students to get an extension. The Panel notes that the pressure to finish might have negative consequences on the quality of the student's work or may compromise the assessment criteria.

The Panel learned that when students participate in an exchange programme abroad and gain credits from the foreign university in their discipline area, they can have these credits assessed and recognized at TNU. The Panel did not see evidence that learning or work experience outside the programme can be assessed as achieving any of the learning outcomes, or that they can be considered in admissions. At bachelor's level the admissions process is determined and organised nationally. However, this is not the case for master's or doctoral studies where there is an opportunity for TNU to develop the recognition of prior learning in admissions.

Overall, there are significant shortcomings at TNU with the processes of assessment where there is a lack of alignment between assessment and the learning outcomes, a limited range of assessment types which are not clearly in line with a student-centred approach to teaching and learning, limited means of assuring consistency of practice across the University, and a lack of guidance in the provision of feedback on assessment to students.

Recommendations

- TNU should design assessment methods and criteria that address and support the intended learning outcomes.
- TNU should cease the practice of awarding grade points for non-academic matters of student conduct.
- TNU should include in the standard course specifications information on the assessment methods and show how those assessments are valid for the learning outcomes of that course.
- TNU should introduce systematic recognition of students' prior learning and work experience in addition to that granted for foreign exchanges, and extend this to postgraduate admissions.
- TNU should broaden the variety of assessment methods used and share practice between faculties.
- TNU should develop and implement a policy to introduce a systematic approach for giving descriptive feedback to students on the results of their assessments.
- TNU should introduce and communicate a clear process for making an appeal on the grades.

Suggestions for further improvement

- TNU could consider developing ways of monitoring how well feedback on the results of assessments promotes student learning.

1.10 Learning support systems

Standard:

The higher education institution ensures that all students have access to academic, career and psychological counselling. Students' individual development and academic progress are monitored and supported.

Guidelines:

The HEI assists the student in developing an individual study programme based on the student's special needs as well as educational abilities and preferences.

The HEI advises its students (including students with special needs and international students) on finding practical training places as well as jobs. Students are aware of where to get support in the case of psychological problems.

*The HEI has a functioning system to support and advise international students (including psychological and career counselling) which, *inter alia*, helps them integrate smoothly into the membership of the HEI and Tajikistan's society. The HEI analyses the reasons students withdraw from studies or drop out, and takes steps to increase the effectiveness of the studies.*

The HEI supports student participation in extra-curricular activities and civil society initiatives.

The HEI monitors student satisfaction with the counselling services provided and makes changes as needed.

Indicators:

- *The average duration of the study by levels of study*
- *Dropout/withdrawal rate*

Conforms to requirements	partially conforms to requirements	does not conform to requirements	worthy of recognition
X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Evidence and Analysis

The SER states that on admission, students are supported in adjusting to their new status, with particular attention given to students from rural areas and from other countries as well as to students with disabilities. The SER states that accommodation and financial support are available for students. Senior management reported that the dormitory provision meets 80% of the current needs. There are plans for a new dormitory to be ready in September 2021 which will provide accommodation for about 500 students. The Deputy Rector for Economic and Social Affairs reported that students are satisfied with the accommodation in dormitories, for which they pay only about 20% of the total cost.

The SER states that a range of support measures is put in place for students with special needs. These include additional counselling and accessible learning technology. The SER also states that the provision of ramps in buildings ensures physical inclusion. The Panel learned from meetings, however, that the provision of classrooms and toilets accessible to wheelchair users was far from adequate and there is a need for these to be prioritized.

The SER asserts that counselling and individual assistance for students are essential for a student-centred approach, and claims that the services provided are sufficient for student needs. Students are alerted to the services through the student handbook. Despite this, students that the Panel met were not fully aware of the different support mechanisms available to them and reported that they mainly rely on the teaching staff when they need support. Despite their lack of awareness of the services available, the students, including international students, reported that they felt adequately supported.

Additional classes and consultations are offered to students who are not making sufficient progress. This includes students who have been affected by illness or other domestic issues. Optional additional classes, from which credits may be gained, are offered to students who wish to follow special interests. A notable feature of the support services is a separate unit for women and girls. The provision of this unit responds to government initiatives concerning the social and cultural place of women in society; activities include celebrations for the national Women's Day.

The SER explains that students develop their individual study programme. From the meetings with students the Panel learned that the opportunities to do this vary between programmes. In some cases, there appeared to be no choice at all; in other cases it was reported that a student group had to opt for the same course. This does not appear to be an individual student curriculum but rather a group approach. However, students were clear about their study path and were generally satisfied.

Students acknowledge that they benefit from strong ties between the University and employers. There is an annual Career Day which affords opportunities to meet with employers. The work-based placements, which are a required part of programmes, provide students with good opportunities for practical training.

The SER outlines the provision of psychological support from a centre in the pedagogical faculty, which also provides support for students with disabilities. In addition, there is a health centre and a Student Service Centre, which opened in 2018. Together the SER claims these services provide a good level of support and capacity to monitor student satisfaction. From meetings with students, it became clear that the existence of the Student Services Centre and the provision of other support mechanisms such as those for mental health are not well known across the student body.

The SER demonstrated that the provision of support and advice for international students is well thought through. Meetings with students supported this claim with international students reporting that they feel well-supported. The main challenge for international students, as reported by the staff, is the Tajik language, for which the University does offer some language classes. TNU also takes deliberate steps to ensure that international students do not stay in national groups but mix with home students to help them to integrate into the life of the University.

The completion rate for students is very high, ranging from 92% to 98% according to TNU documents. TNU did not cite reasons to account for this high completion rate, but staff reported that it reflects the high reputation that TNU enjoys within Tajikistan and the fact that it attracts the highest-achieving entrants.

The development of the “socio-cultural competence” of the students is an important aspect of TNU’s values. Students are encouraged to organize and take part in extra-curricular activities supported by the Youth Affairs Committee. Students participate in a wide range of activities both in- and outside TNU. Meetings with students and staff confirmed that there was a high participation rate among students in these extra-curricular activities, with the exception of the doctoral students.

Overall, the Panel found that TNU has a well-developed system for student support, including for international students and those with special needs. There is, however, little monitoring of the use of these support services to guarantee that those students who need the support do get it; additionally, student awareness of the different support mechanisms is poor.

Recommendations

- TNU is commended for the high completion rate.
- TNU is commended for the very good support and the close contact with the teaching staff that both national and international students value.
- TNU is commended for addressing the needs of different student groups.

Recommendation

- TNU should raise the awareness of student support systems to ensure that all students consistently know what is available.

Suggestion for further improvement

- TNU could monitor student progression to better identify support needs.

1.11 Research, development and/or other creative activity

Standard:

The higher education institution has defined its objectives and focus in the fields of RDC based on its mission, as well as on the expectations and future needs of society, and assesses their implementation and the societal impact of its RDC activities. RDC supports the process of teaching and learning at the higher education institution. Support services for RDC are purposeful and support implementation of the objectives of the core process.

Guidelines:

The HEI places a high value on the role and responsibilities of the field of RDC in society and evaluates the results of its RDC activities, their international visibility and societal impact.

The HEI responds flexibly to the current needs of society and the labour market in terms of its research and plans its research in collaboration with enterprises, public sector institutions and organisations of the third sector.

Members of teaching staff introduce students to their research results as well as the latest scientific achievements in their areas of specialisation, and involve students in their R&D projects where possible.

The organisation and management of RDC take into account thematic differences and the mission (profile) of the HEI.

Indicators depend on the specificities of the HEI:

- Numerical data: (1) scientific publications by classifiers; (2) public presentations of creative work; recognition from international competitions; reviews in professional publications, etc.; (3) patent applications, patents; (4) textbooks, study aids of various formats, etc.; (5) system development solutions; product development solutions; environmental applications solutions; (6) contracts concluded with enterprises; (7) spin-off companies, etc., in line with the profile and priorities of the HEI; etc.
- Number of scientific publications / creative works per member of academic staff and per employee with the requirement to do research (FTE, by areas)
- Number and volume of externally funded projects of RDC activities

conforms to requirements	partially conforms to requirements	does not conform to requirements	worthy of recognition
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>

Evidence and Analysis

The Development Strategy for 2019–2029 identifies the aim for TNU to transform itself into a “*regional and global research University*” or indeed a “*world-class research university*”. TNU also has the ambition to conduct research and related activities across the range of its disciplines. Within the Development Plan the Panel could not discern any specialization apart from focusing on the national

research themes. Objectives specified for research include more involvement of staff and students in research, more funded projects, more international cooperation, more commercialization of research, more and higher-level publications, and more income arising from research.

The Panel found that current research aligns with the national priorities and strategies as laid out in government policy documents. The Panel noted that some TNU staff contribute to these policies in an advisory capacity. The Panel learned that TNU is dependent on state funding for research and that academic staff do not have the capacity to seek internationally competitive funding. The very close relationship with the government, its policies and priorities does raise some questions about the level of academic freedom, which is so essential for world-class research. Moreover, the capacity to apply and receive international research funding would increase the academic prestige and establish the culture of the independence of research groups.

Research management is led by the Vice-Rector for Scientific Work and the Department of Science and Innovation and is overseen by the Academic Councils at faculty and University level. Despite the fact that the SER refers to research policy, there is no formally drafted document explaining research strategy and its implementation. Such a document would show how TNU plans to respond to the national research strategy. The Panel learned from meetings and documentation that TNU publishes a Five-year Research Plan, which enumerates research projects and publications by TNU staff. Research outcomes are reviewed on an annual basis. Each faculty prepares an annual report for review by the Academic Council. The Academic Council decides the future direction of research development, an example of which is the establishment of the Research Institute.

All academic staff are expected to conduct research as a contractual requirement. The Panel could find no clarity about these expectations either in terms of quality or quantity. Nor could the Panel establish whether there is clear guidance on the consequences of staff having little research or no publications over a longer period, or whether a major publication in one year compensates for no publications in subsequent years. The Panel concluded that the lack of clarity may act as a barrier to the equitable treatment of academic staff and may negatively affect their motivation.

It was not clear to the Panel how the research budget is formed and disbursed. Although staff and doctoral students reported that they were satisfied with the resources, the Panel found no evidence of formal rules that would give them equitable opportunities to apply for funding, despite the fact that TNU management stated that research-funding mechanisms exist. Researchers from the Faculty of Law, for example, were not aware of funds available.

The University's research policy seeks to increase publications in international journals with an impact factor that feature in international databases. The Panel learned that there are financial incentives for staff to produce research outputs such as patents and papers that are referenced in Scopus and Web of Science. However, very few scientific journal databases are available to researchers and students.

Over the period 2016-18 TNU produced, on average, across all disciplines, 3 to 4 articles and abstracts per employee per annum, amounting to about 10,000 in all. In some disciplines, abstracts represent more than half the output, but overall, articles predominate. The SER also reports that in the same period, students produced about 9000 publications, mostly master's dissertations. The tabulated data supplied do not indicate what proportion of publications are in the calibre of journals that the research policy targets. The Panel could not identify criteria for assessing the research outputs, for instance whether indexed publications are expected or whether it was sufficient to publish in Tajik, Russian and VAK journals. There was some evidence that peer-review practices are

not always rigorously applied for TNU supported journals. The Panel found a lack of competence and capacity for submitting applications for international grants. Overall, the competitive element that forms a basis for research excellence is absent.

TNU's Bulletin publishes staff and student research, and a majority of the recent publications published there or in the Reports of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tajikistan are written by scholars from the Physics Department. At the Panel's request the list of publications in the period 2018–2020 was provided. The list confirms a significant imbalance in number and quality of publications across disciplines. While some Faculties (most notably Mechanics and Mathematics, and Physics) can show a substantial list of publications in Scopus and Web of Science indexed journals, the faculties of Economics and Management, Law and Economic Theory include one or two publications each. Apart from those faculties, only the Faculty of Medicine is represented with six publications. Overall, the Panel gained the impression that the publication output of academic staff is largely limited to producing teaching materials that TNU recognises as research deliverables.

The TNU Bulletin offers valuable experience for the first steps in publication skills; however, the Panel could not see evidence of any systematic support that would help academic staff to publish externally in journals with a high impact factor. The Panel notes that rejections by peer-reviewed journals can be used constructively as opportunities to learn about international standards in research and publication.

Staff who met the Panel explained that the majority of international publications are written in Russian and indexed in Russian databases. This appeared to reflect the fact that academic staff are confident writing in Russian, with only a minority confident writing in English. The Panel notes that journals in Russian have only limited readership outside the CIS and thus have low impact factors. Whilst there is a translation service available, this only goes some way to address the problem. Academic staff need to be able to write articles in English to establish themselves in internationally circulated journals, an endeavour that can be supported by collaboration with research groups in countries where the language of research is predominantly English.

Whilst the SER was not informative about how TNU relates its research to the needs of society and the labour market, employers from different public bodies claimed that they interact regularly with relevant departments in TNU, offering placements to students and working with them and academic staff on matters of mutual interest.

PhD students are not visibly included in the research projects of their respective supervisors. The SER notes that there are number of councils for the defence of theses and dissertations under Tajik and Russian authorities. Regulations require doctoral dissertations to be examined by a panel of at least 15 highly qualified experts, and these joint councils can thus draw on additional expertise to reach the required standard. Despite these councils, there was a perception from the PhD students that there is a shortfall in research quality as measured against international benchmarks.

Student involvement in research is fostered through student scientific societies and laboratories. Students are encouraged to take part in internal and external competitive events such as Olympiads, which have resulted in numerous successes and are recognized by various certificates and awards.

Overall, the Panel found that TNU has articulated ambitious aims for research but does not have implementation plans for achieving these aims. The achievement of the aims will require strengthening the research capacity and developing a robust institutional infrastructure to train and support staff in their research work.

Recommendations

- TNU should develop its research policy, its implementation and the research results aimed for in order to achieve its ambitions.
- TNU should have a research budgeting strategy with clear and transparent rules for academic staff on how to obtain funding.
- TNU should ensure that there is equality of opportunity and treatment for all staff to apply for and be supported in publishing their research.
- TNU should develop a motivation plan and set up related support mechanisms for academic staff to publish externally in journals with high impact factors.
- TNU should systematically strengthen the ability of its academic staff to write in English so that they can publish more easily in journals and other media with a high impact factor that are published internationally.

Suggestions for further improvement

- TNU could invest in establishing regular training courses for academic staff and research management offices in research funding and design.
- TNU could contract skilled experts to assist in the preparation of applications for international grants, thereby increasing the capacity of TNU to participate in consortia capable of producing high quality and competitive research proposals.
- TNU could support its students to participate in a wider range of international competitions such as moot courts and essay competitions.

1.12 Service to society

Standard:

The higher education institution initiates and implements development activities, which enhance prosperity in the community and disseminate recent know-how in the areas of the institution's competence. The higher education institution, as a learning-oriented organisation, promotes lifelong learning in society and creates high-quality opportunities for that.

Guidelines:

The HEI contributes to the development of the community's well-being by sharing its resources (library, museums, sports facilities, etc.), by providing consulting and advisory services, and by organising concerts, exhibitions, shows, conferences, fairs and other events.

The HEI involves alumni in activities aimed at the development of the HEI and the knowledge society.

Employees of the HEI participate in the work of professional associations and in other community councils and decision-making bodies as experts, directing society's development processes as opinion leaders. The impact academic employees have on society is taken into account when evaluating their work.

The HEI has defined the objectives for in-service training and measures their implementation. In-service training is planned in accordance with the needs of target groups.

Indicators:

- *Number of people in continuing training (and other privately financed open forms of study), number of lessons or ECTS per participant*

conforms to requirements	partially conforms to requirements	does not conform to requirements	worthy of recognition
<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Evidence and Analysis

The SER offers an interpretation of how TNU understands service to society as the “*willingness of a person to work selflessly for the benefit of society.*” The SER also indicates that the provision of education programmes that are aligned to national priorities and provide specialists for the local economy is a service to society. Additionally, the programmes are designed to develop graduates who are responsible citizens who can participate fully in society and its development. Service to society forms part of the responsibilities of the Vice-Rector for Educational Work, a role that focuses on social rather than academic education and thus reinforces the overall aim to develop responsible citizens. Service to Society represents a third mission of higher education alongside education/teaching and research and should have prominence in the overall institutional strategy. Whilst there is solid evidence of TNU’s commitment to service to society and a focus on that in the senior leadership team, the Panel found no evidence of a strategy or operational plan that drives the

area forward. The Panel also learned that the majority of activity is directed from the State, with TNU responding rather than initiating its own activities.

The SER identifies different kinds of service that TNU engages in. There is *direct service* which affects and involves the beneficiaries. This activity includes, for example, staff or students visiting social settings, such as orphanages and veterans, to provide gifts and entertainment. *Indirect service* contributes to society more broadly and includes activity such as litter-picking drives. TNU plays a role in *advocacy* by raising awareness of matters of public interest, for example healthy lifestyles. The SER also indicates that *research* benefits the broader community, for example, showing how foreign language teaching in schools can be combined with social awareness. TNU co-operates with state bodies by, for example, celebrating national days such as celebrations for Nowruz and the new year. The panel learned that about 60% of students participate in community focused activities, which is commendable. A similar percentage of staff also participate, which is similarly to be applauded. Evidence from meetings with students and staff suggested that participation was not evenly distributed across the student body and different faculties. PhD students, for instance, reported that they did not participate in these activities. Overall, engagement in the range of activities offered contributes to the development of students as responsible citizens, and is also beneficial to the wider community.

TNU is active in promoting its expertise through the media, where staff and senior leaders comment on areas of its activity and developments within discipline areas. This includes the Techno Park and the practical work such as in pharmaceuticals, geology and biology. These activities promote TNU as an engaged and well-informed higher education institution and provides a focus for the dissemination of TNU expertise to the wider community.

The University has close links with local associations and decision-making bodies. This is demonstrated by the dual roles played by some teaching staff who have primary employment in local state bodies and a second job teaching at TNU. For example, there are members of staff in the Faculty of International Relations who work in the Centre for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, in the Ministry of Defence and in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This close relationship provides benefits both to the University and to the state organizations. Whilst some of these staff are also TNU alumni, the Panel found no evidence of an alumni association either in the structural organisation of the University or from meetings with staff and students.

The SER states that teaching staff are actively engaged in community events and social activity including creative exhibitions and regional competitions. The Panel learned that the participation level in these activities is high. This kind of activity is taken into account in determining an element of academic staff remuneration, but not in promotion.

The Panel explored the concept of life-long learning but could not gain clarity as to how TNU realises this. The provision of in-service courses for staff of the University appeared to be considered as an important aspect of life-long learning. Staff mentioned the teaching of languages and participation in in-service courses on teaching methodology as life-long learning. The Panel saw no evidence of courses being offered to the wider community, either general courses or credit bearing courses. However, the Panel was told that various foreign language classes are available to the wider community including classes in Mandarin offered by the Confucius Institute. There was no evidence of any targets for community participation, no indication of whether the general public could gain credits through life-long learning, and no articulated direction. Moreover, it was not clear whether there is any formal monitoring of life-long learning across TNU.

Commendation

- TNU is commended for the range of activities it undertakes by way of service to society and for the high participation levels by both students and staff in those activities.

Recommendations

- TNU should develop a strategy and a related operational plan for Service to Society that drives the area forward with a clear definition of terms and identified priorities.
- TNU should develop a definition and approach to life-long learning that focuses on learners in the community outside TNU and identifies performance targets that can be monitored.

Suggestion for further improvement

- TNU could set up a formal alumni association to ensure that it systematically reaps the benefits of alumni views and engagement.

2. Assessment findings of the sample of the study programmes

2.1. Study Programme of Physics (BSc)

General information:

The programme for the Bachelor of Physics is offered in the Faculty of Physics. The Faculty has 94 staff: 14 professors, 25 docents, 27 assistants and 28 technical workers. The Bachelor of Physics is one of a number of physics-related bachelor programmes offered by the faculty which also offers master's programmes in physics-based disciplines.

The Bachelor of Physics lasts four years and comprises 240 credits. It is offered for full-time or distance study and is run in two parallel groups one for Tajik and the other for Russian speakers. The focus of the programme is twofold: it prepares graduates to be teachers of physics and computer science and also prepares them to continue their education on a master's degree.

The Panel reviewed the self-assessment document for the Bachelor in Physics, the State Educational Standard (SES) Bachelor of Physics, individual course descriptions and some basic data provided. The Panel also met with the Dean of Physics, teaching staff, students and employers.

The Panel found the self-assessment lacking in a number of respects. It could have helpfully included information on how the programme was developed and when it was last revised; contextual information about the programme such as how it is set in the context of national, University or faculty strategies; a description of the context of research and development in the faculty; and included basic facts such as student numbers and the resources available for the programme. The self-assessment document for the Bachelor in Physics also lacked evaluation of the provision. This could have included, for instance, an analysis of student admission, progression and completion rates and trends; an analysis of student performance on individual courses and on the programme as a whole; shown the results of student surveys with a comparison with those of other programmes and how these results might be used to evaluate how far the programmes meets its aims. The Panel noted that information in the self-assessment for the Bachelor in Physics was largely generic and shared entirely with the self-assessment documents for both the bachelor degree in International Law and the master's degree in International Relations. This demonstrates a lack of quality assurance in practice. Overall, the programme SER provided a poor presentation and evaluation of the programme.

2.1.1 Planning and management of studies

- The design and development of study programme(s) take into account the expectations of students and other stakeholders, national strategies, legislation and trends in the particular area as well as labour market needs. The level and volume of RDC activities is sufficient and supports the launching of the study programme(s).
- The objectives of study programme(s), modules (including courses) and their learning outcomes are concrete and coherent. The teaching content and methods and assessment criteria and methods support students in achieving their learning outcomes and developing their key competencies. The study programmes support the development of creativity and entrepreneurship and other general competencies.
- The administration of material and financial resources that ensure the design and implementation of the study programme(s) is purposeful, systematic and sustainable. The learning environment, including materials, tools and technology support the students in achieving their learning outcomes.

Evidence and Analysis

Although the degree awarded is Bachelor of Physics, the SES says the qualification for the graduate is “a teacher of physics and computer science”. Recognition of the programme as an exit award for trained teachers of physics and computer science is valuable, but given how much these subjects contribute to modern life, the Faculty also has an opportunity to market it as an exit award suitable for less specialized areas of employment.

The general objectives of the programme are identified as: *“to train critically thinking physics and computer science teachers in professional skills and broad general educational knowledge who have an integrated scientific and humanistic worldview and are able to create a favourable atmosphere for the training, education and development of students.”* There are 16 intended learning outcomes set at programme level, which cover a reasonable range of knowledge, understanding and abilities. The curriculum falls into a number of blocks: humanities and social disciplines (48 ECTS); natural science and mathematical disciplines (27 ECTS); general professional disciplines including electives (104 ECTS); more specialized professional disciplines and electives (40 ECTS); extracurricular activities (21 ECTS) and extracurricular work (21 ECTS), each including industrial and teaching practice; optional disciplines (6 ECTS); and final state certification (9 ECTS). This is a total of 276 ECTS rather than the 240 originally specified. However, the Panel could find no explanation to account for this discrepancy.

The panel found significant discrepancies in the description of the programme between the curriculum document and the self-assessment document. Where the curriculum has two blocks each of 21 ECTS concerned with extracurricular work, the table has only one such block, labelled ‘Out-of-class work; where the curriculum has a block of 6 ECTS for optional disciplines, the table has none. Thus the credits for the blocks in the table total 249 ECTS, 9 ECTS of which are for the final state certification. This discrepancy needs to be addressed in order to specify the programme clearly and accurately. Following the review, TNU explained that in the curriculum document the extracurricular

figures are mistakenly doubled, while the optional disciplines and final certification are not counted in the 240.

The Panel reviewed twelve course syllabuses from seven semesters, all of which were from the specialism. These syllabuses are similar in structure, with course aims, content and learning objectives, literature references and a common grading scheme that references the ECTS. However, they differ in their level of detail, from a general account of the content to a weekly list of lectures and practical work. In particular, the Nuclear Physics syllabus mentions nuclear physics only once in a generic way before the final section on grading and references. The Panel noted that the courses appear to be rated at 1 credit for 24 hours, consistent with the ECTS, and to be set at the appropriate level. Most syllabuses contain a section entitled '*Final results*', which correspond to the course ILOs. Some syllabuses express these as 'master' and 'understand', while others use something broadly equivalent to 'be able to...' followed by an active verb that could be used directly in assessment tasks. The latter is an appropriate formulation, where the choice of verb should be tailored to the level of the course, i.e. to the intellectual demand on the student.

The Panel learned from the meeting with staff that they are engaged in an annual review of the courses they teach and a review of their personal achievements against the current year's targets in the Faculty's five-year development plan. This engagement in quality review is surprising given the disconnects between the statements about quality at institutional level and the inconsistencies in practice at the programme level. The Panel came to the view that these discrepancies might indicate that the Bachelor of Physics programme staff do not share the understanding of quality that can be discerned at the University level.

The Panel was not provided with any written information on resources for the Bachelor of Physics programme and how they are managed. Staff, students and employers who met the Panel reported that basic equipment and facilities are generally satisfactory, but that more advanced equipment needs to be updated and added to. Videos of laboratory tours taken by EKKA staff on-site confirm that the laboratories contain a reasonable level of standard equipment, but are quite crowded for students to work in. Students who met the Panel explained that they worked in twos, threes or larger groups, depending on the laboratory.

Staff reported that they did not have access on site to major English language journals that they recognized as among the most important in physics. Students reported they have sufficient Tajik and Russian texts but some had previously studied physics in English and would value more English texts, which they currently try to find online.

Recommendations

- TNU should train Faculty of Physics staff to write programme self-evaluation reports that conform to a standard structure without simply copying other reports. Self-evaluation reports should be informative and evaluative, and should lead to recommendations for improvement.
- The Bachelor of Physics programme should seek to correct its State Educational Standard document to (i) reconcile the total ECTS figures given in the brief description with that in the blocks and (ii) to remove the duplicated Section 4.
- The Bachelor of Physics programme should demonstrate (by a mapping or otherwise) how the course ILOs for the courses that make up the programme between them deliver the programme ILOs at the level expected of a graduate.

- The Bachelor of Physics course syllabuses should use a common template to ensure comparable coverage for each course at an adequate level of detail.
- TNU should take steps to provide Physics staff with on-site access to major international physics journals published in English.

Suggestions for further improvement

- The Faculty of Physics could promote the Bachelor of Physics programme as an award suitable for entry to areas of employment in addition to teaching or further study.
- The Faculty of Physics could provide access to textbooks in English for those students who prefer it to Tajik or Russian.

2.1.2 Learning, teaching and assessment

- Conditions and organisation of admission ensure fair access to education and motivated student body. Students' choice of specialisation is supported.
- A student-centred approach is used in the studies, aiming at the students to assume responsibility for planning their studies and career and supporting the development of key competencies and achieving the learning outcomes of the study programme.
- Student assessment, including taking accreditation of prior and experiential learning into account, supports the students and corresponds to the learning outcomes. Objective and reliable assessment is ensured.
- The organisation of studies including practical work and training is based on the specificities of students and forms of study and supports the student in achieving the learning outcomes. Opportunities have been established for mobility within Tajikistan and internationally.
- Support services for students are in place and available for students. Individual development and progress of students are monitored and supported.
- Graduates of the study programme are competitive in terms of their knowledge and social skills both nationally and internationally.

Evidence and Analysis

The Panel saw no admissions information that applied specifically to the Bachelor of Physics programme; however, the general conditions for admission to TNU apply, which are in line with the national requirements. Students who met the Panel were happy with admission procedures, which they reported to be straightforward for those applicants who meet TNU's high admission standards.

The Panel reviewed the curriculum document dated March 2019, which provides an account of teaching, learning and assessment that is detailed but not always complete. The characteristics of the programme graduates are set out in detail; these include a list of general state requirements for qualified teachers. However, physics and computer science are only mentioned twice: once when naming the qualification and once when stating that the graduate must know relevant methods of

teaching these subjects. It is clear how many weeks each component of the curriculum requires across each of the four years including time for examinations and vacations. Workload is also specified, including minimum requirements for distance learning students.

From the documentation provided the Panel could not see any indication of how the ILOs for each block are delivered nor how these relate to the ILOs for the individual courses that contribute to that block. This alignment could be achieved by a mapping document.

The Panel found nothing in the programme documentation that provided information or guidance about methods of teaching or support for learning. The Panel explored this with staff and were informed that the shift to student-centred learning was being undertaken. However, staff could not articulate what progress had been made so far nor what kinds of changes were being made. The Panel established that students are given a course in pedagogy in preparation for their teaching practice; this illustrates how an essential feature of the programme is not explicit in the programme documentation.

The Panel gained information on assessment from the course syllabuses and from staff and students. From these it was clear that students accumulate marks weekly from attendance, work in class and homework, and there is a 'big exam' online at the end of the course. Any problems seemed to be handled well, and the online exam means that results are available immediately. Students who met the Panel were satisfied with these arrangements. The curriculum document contains a table which shows how assessment in terms of letter grades on a 12-point scale maps on to grade points on a scale from 0 to 4; on to the % of correct answers; and on to what it calls 'traditional' grades from 'excellent' downwards. There is some provision for students to be admitted to a shortened programme on the basis of prior learning. There is no link between assessment and the ILOs of the courses.

Detailed review of the course syllabus revealed information about personal conduct, attendance and participation. For example, the Atomic Physics syllabus contains class rules indicating that students are expected to attend classes on time, catch up on classes they miss, participate in class activities, not leave without permission and generally behave appropriately. It became clear to the Panel that the assessment of the students is influenced not only by their academic performance, but also by absenteeism and inappropriate behaviour, despite the fact that these are not mentioned in the course ILOs. All the syllabuses provided, except those for Electricity & Magnetism and Molecular Physics, contain much the same information, and the Electrodynamics syllabus gives a detailed breakdown of how points for attendance are assigned and weighted into the final grade.

In many jurisdictions, matters of personal conduct and academic achievement are regarded as separate. The underlying principle is that grading should be based solely on assessment of the achievement of all the ILOs and not on anything else, including attendance. The behaviour of students is then covered by a code of personal conduct, breaches of which may attract penalties, but do not affect grades, while different provisions cover academic misconduct such as plagiarism, where penalties commonly include annulling grades.

Information about or assessment of student mobility, within Tajikistan or abroad, was not given to the Panel. There was also no information on student support services and progress monitoring. Students who met the Panel were content that lecturing staff provide advice on most matters, while female students have a dedicated adviser. No evidence was provided on the characteristics and careers of graduates from the programme.

Recommendations

- The Bachelor of Physics programme staff should all be trained to ensure that they can show how the methods of teaching and learning they adopt for each course (i) are student-centred and (ii) provide students with the opportunities necessary to achieve the ILOs.
- The Bachelor of Physics programme staff should all be able to show that the intended learning outcomes for each course use verbs suitable to its level and can be turned directly into appropriate assessment tasks.
- TNU should cease the practice of awarding or deducting course marks for any aspect of personal conduct that is not an explicit and justifiable intended learning outcome for that course.

Suggestion for further improvement

- The Bachelor of Physics programme could give all its courses an informative course code.

2.1.3 Development, cooperation and internationalization of teaching staff

- Teaching is conducted by a sufficient number of professionally competent members of the teaching staff who support the development of the students.
- Teaching staff follows the principles of academic ethics and the codes of conduct in case of non-compliance.
- Members of the teaching staff participate in international mobility programs which encourage the development of their teaching and RDC activities and the cultural openness of the HEI and the Tajik society.
- The effectiveness of both studies and RDC activities, students' feedback, the effectiveness of supervision, development of teaching and supervision skills, international mobility and entrepreneurial or work experience in the specific field outside the HEI is taken into consideration in evaluating the work of the member of the staff.

Evidence and Analysis

The Panel reviewed the CVs for the teaching staff on the Bachelor of Physics programme. All are Tajik nationals, ranging in age from their mid-twenties to over eighty. They are suitably qualified and experienced in physics, and, in some cases, in teaching. Most have recent publications; a significant number of which are multi-author papers that appeared to be produced from the same few research groups. The majority of publications are in the TNU Bulletin or the Reports of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tajikistan; most of the others are in journals or conference proceedings in CIS countries with little visibility outside the region. There are a very few in western journals with significant impact factors. The Panel found that some of this research influences the teaching on the programme. For example, the Optics course covers not only basic topics that might be expected in a conventional course, but also focuses on methods of optical analysis and their application to drugs; this reflects the activities of one research group. Research on liquid-crystal polymers informs another course.

Staff gave numerous examples of collaboration, predominantly on research, with foreign universities where Russian is the language of communication. The historically high quality of Russian research in physics clearly makes these collaborations beneficial to staff.

Staff research is evaluated centrally by outputs and engagement in conferences; their teaching is evaluated by open classes and by peer observation by members of the Faculty Methodological Committee, as well as by student surveys. Each year the academic staff must report on how they have contributed to that year's annual research plan.

Staff who met the Panel were aware of academic ethics and were comfortable with TNU's approach to plagiarism and research ethics.

Recommendation

- The Bachelor of Physics programme should expand its collaborations beyond Russian-speaking countries to ensure that the staff are better informed by a wider range of international research and practice.

Suggestion for further improvement

- The Bachelor of Physics programme could develop succession planning for when older staff retire.

2.2 Study programme of International Law (BA)

General information:

The programme is titled "Bachelor of Law in International Relations with knowledge of a foreign language" and the nominal studies last 4 years. The overall aim of the programme is for graduates to become international lawyers with knowledge of a foreign language. The programme is run in multiple parallel language tracks: Tajik, English and Russian.

The total number of staff teaching on the programme is 48. This includes teaching staff who deliver general and language courses as well as the specialist lawyers.

2.2.1 Planning and management of studies

- The design and development of study programme(s) take into account the expectations of students and other stakeholders, national strategies, legislation and trends in the particular area as well as labour market needs. The level and volume of RDC activities is sufficient and supports the launching of the study programme(s).
- The objectives of study programme(s), modules (including courses) and their learning outcomes are concrete and coherent. The teaching content and methods and assessment criteria and methods support students in achieving their learning outcomes and developing their key competencies. The study programmes support the development of creativity and

entrepreneurship and other general competencies.

- The administration of material and financial resources that ensure the design and implementation of the study programme(s) is purposeful, systematic and sustainable. The learning environment, including materials, tools and technology support the students in achieving their learning outcomes.

Evidence and Analysis

Programmes of study at TNU must comply with the National Qualification Framework (NQF) and a range of laws and regulations governing areas that include credits, admissions, curricula and standards. The SER states that they are developed with external feedback from employers, external experts and external peer review. The design and development of the International Law study programme takes account of the Tajik labour market needs as reported by the main partners and employers of TNU. The Panel heard from various employers that they are broadly satisfied with the graduates. However, the employers were not aware of the existence of a Council of Employers, nor did they have experience of contributing to the programme's design. Some employers emphasised that the programme would benefit from including the development of 21st century skills such as communication, negotiation and leadership. The current focus is predominantly on knowledge transfer. Employers voiced their concern in relation to the capacity of graduates to embark on an international/foreign career owing to insufficient emphasis on such skills. However, they did note that graduates are very well prepared for those national contexts where international relations and law are applicable.

Students indicated that they would value more flexibility in the programme structure; that is, they would welcome more module/course choices so that the individual student's pathway through the programme reflects their individual academic interests. The Panel did not see any evidence of systematic or formal avenues where TNU takes such suggestions to develop the programme into account. Feedback from the students is rather informal and focuses on the student's opinions of lectures and of the teaching staff. National strategies are fully taken into account in the programme content and design. The objectives of the study programme are clear. The programme and its content indicate that the graduates are expected to focus on the "essence and content of the foreign policy of the state" and the national interests of the state rather than on international lawyering.

The learning outcomes of the programme are not always well formulated. For example, the learning outcome "*the opportunity to work as a lawyer*" is not a learning outcome and is thus confusing. Some of the learning outcomes such as those which focus on skills such as *law-editing, translation* and *law-making capacity* should be replaced with the skills of interpreting and analysing legal text and international jurisprudence which would better reflect the profile of the programme.

The rationale for the balance between disciplines such as language studies, international relations, and law needs to be clarified. The programme structure includes a block of 18 ECTS on the natural science and mathematics disciplines. This is not covered by the overarching programme learning outcomes and the status of this block was not clear to the Panel.

The Panel found a lack of coherence in the teaching content and the methods throughout the programme. The curriculum does not make explicit the student-centred approach. This lack of

coherence was clearly demonstrated during discussions with the academic staff and with the students.

The study programme promotes entrepreneurship through its sustainable relations with the principal existing employers in the field. Professional practice forms a compulsory part of the programme. This practice is varied and deployed in a systematic way which enables all students to have access to future employers. Professional practice is assessed by a variety of methods with the help of employers and external experts. TNU also supports employers in conducting mentoring activities with students.

There are material and financial resources to support the programme and the syllabuses make references to the relevant sources. The Panel could not gain a clear or consistent view of the accessibility and availability of international databases for research purposes. Nor could the Panel ascertain the process for the supervision of the student's final thesis.

The Panel had access to an untitled document with the file name "International Law SPG SER.doc." The document appeared to be an ambitious strategy document but there was no evidence that it was being implemented.

Recommendations

- The International Law programme design should enable graduates to pursue a career internationally as well as in Tajikistan's foreign service.
- The International Law programme should systematically include external partners in programme design and in regular review activities to ensure the programme maintains its currency.
- The International Law programme learning outcomes should be revised to include 21st century skills thus better supporting a stronger international profile for graduates.
- The International Law course learning outcomes should be revised to ensure they are coherent and are balanced with the programme objectives.
- The International Law programme should offer more choice of electives so that it meets the desire of students to tailor their study to their particular academic and professional interests.
- The International Law programme should provide access to international databases dedicated to international law for the academic staff and students.

2.2.2 Learning, teaching and assessment

- Conditions and organisation of admission ensure fair access to education and motivated student body. Students' choice of specialisation is supported.
- A student-centred approach is used in the studies, aiming at the students to assume responsibility for planning their studies and career and supporting the development of key competencies and achieving the learning outcomes of the study programme.
- Student assessment, including taking accreditation of prior and experiential learning into account, supports the students and corresponds to the learning outcomes. Objective and reliable assessment is ensured.
- The organisation of studies including practical work and training is based on the specificities of students and forms of study and supports the student in achieving the learning outcomes. Opportunities have been established for mobility within Tajikistan and internationally.
- Support services for students are in place and available for students. Individual development and progress of students are monitored and supported.
- Graduates of the study programme are competitive in terms of their knowledge and social skills both nationally and internationally.

Evidence and Analysis

The admission process is governed by the results of national tests, with grades that qualify for admission determined nationally. Students confirmed that their first choice is TNU and this is based on its national reputation and its close relationships with relevant employers. The conditions and the organisation of admission ensure fair access; the students are motivated and loyal to their programme and to the University. However, students reported that there are insufficient opportunities to specialize within the programme.

The Panel learned that some teaching staff use interactive exercises such as mock trials and debate competitions which contribute to a more modern approach to teaching, rather than exclusively lecture-based, traditional delivery. However, the Panel did not see evidence of a strategically implemented teaching and learning policy for student-centred learning.

The assessments described by the students are predominantly multiple-choice with 700–800 questions presented to students to prepare in advance. There are some oral examinations, but during the review the Panel could not gain any clarity as to when these were held and whether they supplemented the multiple-choice assessments or had a separate place in the assessment diet of the programme. The Panel was of the view that graduates are able to achieve key specialised competences in the 71 ECTS devoted to professional disciplines in the curriculum.

Students reported that they were generally satisfied with the assessment methods used in the programme. However, the practices of giving 'penalty points for disrespectful reasons' as outlined in the syllabus for International Contract Law, such as smoking and loudness, or the use of incentive points for the early submission of homework are not in accordance with international standards. Review of the syllabuses showed that the list of disrespectful behaviours varied and included, in some instances, having a mobile phone in class or chewing gum. Awarding points for assessment

based partly on attending classes, as included, for example, in the syllabus for European Law, is not in line with international standards.

The Panel found significant variation in the reading resources in the different syllabuses. The resources outlined were predominantly by Tajik and Russian authors which the Panel considered to provide an inadequate overview of the schools of thought internationally. Students reported a shortage of books in English. This represents a weakness for a programme that is geared to foreign relations and international law. This shortage is also a particular challenge for foreign students. The Panel learned that teaching staff in the English track occasionally revert to using the Tajik language to better explain concepts to Tajik students with an inadequate knowledge of English; this is difficult for foreign students who are not competent in Tajik but who have better English language skills.

Student mobility is rather limited. There are some foreign students on the programme and these students feel welcomed and well supported.

The Faculty has support services for the students and there are further services in the University as a whole. Each student group has an advisor allocated to it. If an adviser is unable to help a student with a particular issue, the student can approach the vice dean. Students are well aware of their right to approach the teaching staff, the Dean or the University management as well as being able to approach the Ethics Commission.

Recommendations

- The International Law programme should introduce a more student-centred approach to teaching and apply it systematically across all courses on the programme.
- The International Law programme should introduce a greater variety of assessment types to prepare students better for future work situations.
- The International Law programme should clearly separate the assessment of academic achievements from the management of student behaviour in general, in conformity with international norms.
- The International Law programme should increase the opportunities for student mobility.
- The International Law programme should increase access to books and other academic resources in English.

2.2.3 Development, cooperation and internationalization of teaching staff

- Teaching is conducted by a sufficient number of professionally competent members of the teaching staff who support the development of the students.
- Teaching staff follows the principles of academic ethics and the codes of conduct in case of non-compliance.
- Members of the teaching staff participate in international mobility programs which encourage the development of their teaching and RDC activities and the cultural openness of the HEI and the Tajik society.
- The effectiveness of both studies and RDC activities, students' feedback, the effectiveness of supervision, development of teaching and supervision skills, international mobility and entrepreneurial or work experience in the specific field outside the HEI is taken into consideration in evaluating the work of the member of the staff.

Evidence and Analysis

There is a sufficient number of teaching staff to deliver the programme, including the general and languages courses and the electives. The qualifications of the teaching staff cover a wide range. At least three of the lecturers graduated from the programme in International Law in the previous year and had no teaching experience before starting to contribute to the teaching on the programme. Five of the assistant lecturers are master's students at TNU. The CVs of the teaching staff did not provide a clear picture of the experience and skills of individual staff and it was not possible to discern which CVs were for employed staff and which for visiting lecturers. Overall, the Panel found that the teaching staff is rather inexperienced with very limited research and practical experience.

The Panel could not find evidence of a well-established academic community able to teach according to the stated aims of high standards. The Panel found a discrepancy between this and the management plan that states that "*the main resource of the educational process is the faculty, which consists of scientists, highly qualified specialists, honorary educators, honoured cultural and sports workers*". However, employers and students who the Panel met are of the view that the professors in the Faculty of Law are among the best in Tajikistan, although students demonstrated no sense as to whether the teaching staff are opinion leaders or recognised scholars outside the institution. The employers reported that both the public and private sector often use the staff expertise for consultancy purpose. However, the Panel was of the view that the level and volume of RDC activities need to be improved to ensure that the learning environment is in line with the excellence of the academic level aspired to.

The teaching staff are aware of the Academic Ethics Code and the existence of the Ethics Committee's complaints system. It was clear to the Panel that ethical behaviour in the academic environment is respected.

Despite the fact that the programme management and planning document states that relatively new forms of integration between TNU and foreign institutions have been developed in recent years, there is still very limited mobility of teaching staff; RDC activities are also limited. Overall, the Panel

formed the view from documentation and from the meetings with staff and students that the academic culture underpinning the programme is underdeveloped.

Although some feedback is collected from students, it is informal and not systematic.

Recommendations

- The International Law programme should improve the qualifications of the teaching staff.
- The Faculty of Law should develop a strategic plan for the development of the academic staff that systematically addresses cooperation between senior and early-stage teaching staff, and issues of sustainability and competitiveness.
- The Faculty of Law should plan RDC activities strategically to meet the aims of the programme.
- The International Law programme should increase the opportunities for international mobility of teaching staff.
- The International Law programme should develop a reliable and systematic student feedback system.

2.3. Study programme of International Relations (MA)

General information

The master's in International Relations is based in the Faculty of International Relations. The Faculty was established in 2011 and is the youngest faculty of TNU. There are five departments in the faculty: the Department of International Relations; the Department of Foreign Regional Studies, the Department of Diplomacy and Foreign Policy of the Republic of Tajikistan; the Department of European Studies, and the Department of Oriental Studies. The aim of the Faculty is to prepare well-trained and educated professionals who are competent in two world languages.

The master's in International Relations is based in the Department of International Relations. The programme is delivered in three languages: Tajik, Russian and English. The numbers of students admitted to the master's over the last three years, as quoted by TNU are:

Year of entry	Admitted to masters in the faculty	Admitted to Master's International Relations
2018	27	14
2019	45	22
2020	24	5

The programme consists of 120 ECTS credits and is delivered over two academic years. The Panel understood that there were six members of faculty engaged in teaching the master's programme.

The Panel reviewed the SPSER (1-23010100 Master in Foreign Policy and Diplomacy) and held meetings with the dean, teaching staff, students and employers. The contents of the SPSER are non-specific and do not differ from the parallel SPSERs for the two other study programmes reviewed by the Panel. The SPSER provides no information on programme structure, content, level or modes of delivery nor any evaluation of the successes or weaknesses of any aspects of the programme and its delivery.

2.3.1 Planning and management of studies

- The design and development of study programme(s) take into account the expectations of students and other stakeholders, national strategies, legislation and trends in the particular area as well as labour market needs. The level and volume of RDC activities is sufficient and supports the launching of the study programme(s).
- The objectives of study programme(s), modules (including courses) and their learning outcomes are concrete and coherent. The teaching content and methods and assessment criteria and methods support students in achieving their learning outcomes and developing their key competencies. The study programmes support the development of creativity and entrepreneurship and other general competencies.
- The administration of material and financial resources that ensure the design and implementation of the study programme(s) is purposeful, systematic and sustainable. The learning environment, including materials, tools and technology support the students in achieving their learning outcomes.

Evidence and Analysis

The Panel reviewed the document titled *“State Educational Standard Higher Professional Education Direction: 1-230101 -International relations for the degree of Master in International Relations”* (Dushanbe 2019). This indicates that the general objectives of the master’s programme are to provide training in professional skills and in broad general educational knowledge to enable graduates to understand and protect the national interests of the state. There are seventeen stated learning outcomes for the programme. These vary in their preciseness and the degree to which they can be considered outcomes for the programme. For example, to have the opportunity to engage in research is not a learning outcome. Some of the learning outcomes are focussed on knowledge. For example “knows the basics of” or “have an idea of the integration process.” Some indicate what the graduate should be able to do with the knowledge: for example, “is able to professionally analyse socio-political, economic and legal events and facts” or “knows how to take into account the achievements of information technologies and skilfully use them in solving the tasks facing the country.” Some of the content indicated by the course syllabuses does not seem appropriate for level 7. For example, the course content for *“Diplomatic and Consular Service”* which is identified as a semester 3 course, includes some basic concepts and procedures such as the definition of *diplomacy, consular institute and its functions in the Middle Ages, or the procedure for issuing certifications for return to Russia (...)*. Overall, the programme level learning outcomes are insufficiently focussed on the intended outcome and not clearly pitched at level 7.

The curriculum for the programme has three blocks: humanities and social disciplines (24 ECTS); general professional disciplines (36 ECTS) and extra-curricular activities which the information provided quotes as 15 ECTS but actually adds up to 60 ECTS. The focus of the extra-curricular activities is research, practice and assessment (state exam and thesis preparation). There is no rationale, other than the programme aligning with the State Educational Standards, for the numbers of credits awarded to different elements of the curriculum. Whilst the Panel appreciated that there are limits as to how much TNU can vary the shape and blocks of the curriculum, it is difficult to see how the number of credits allocated to the professional disciplines enable students to achieve master’s level.

The Panel reviewed five modules. Of these, three were semester 1 modules, one a semester 3 and one a semester 6 module, though it is hard to comprehend why there is a semester 6 module in a two-year master’s programme. There was no rationale for the sequencing of the modules and no clear progression between them. One semester 3 module appeared to be based on one textbook with teaching sessions focusing on specific pages of the book. The modules include some learning outcomes, though they are not consistently called such, and it is not possible to see how these learning outcomes reflect master’s level nor how they are related to the overall programme learning outcomes. Overall, the Panel could not discern a coherent structure that provides stakeholders with clear information about the programme.

The programme includes a practice component which lasts between one and three months. Students and placement providers reported very positively on the value of the placements to learning and to developing appropriate professional skills and behaviours. In particular, the students reported that the placement provided them with real understanding of the theoretical components of the curriculum. The inclusion of placements within the programme is a strength.

The employers met by the Panel reported that the graduates had the skills and knowledge needed for professional work which is predominantly in government departments and state organizations. The Dean of the Faculty reported that they have no regular mechanism for employers to give

feedback on the programme and they are not members of a formal committee or body. However, the employers met, who all teach on the programme, confirmed that their views on the curriculum content are taken into consideration. In particular, the course on Tajik Collaboration with the European Union, and a course on Military Diplomacy were introduced in response to the views of external stakeholders. As both employers and teachers on the programme, they enhance the currency of the programme by including examples and documents from their realm of work. Students clearly value this aspect of the teaching and are keen for more input from external experts, international ones in particular, which they felt would enhance the relevance of the programme for their future needs.

Recommendations

- The International Relations MA programme should be reviewed to ensure that the programme objectives and the learning outcomes are set clearly at level 7.
- The International Relations MA programme should clearly identify the learning objectives of the constituent courses, which should be consistently and clearly aligned with the programme learning outcomes.
- The International Relations MA programme should develop a coherent programme specification that provides all stakeholders with details of the programme including its rationale and philosophy, the learning outcomes, the sequencing of courses, the approach to teaching, and learning and assessment methods.
- The International Relations MA programme should revise the syllabuses for the individual courses so that they consistently present when the course is delivered, how many ECTS credits it is worth, the student workload, whether there are prerequisites and if so what these are, and the assessment methods.

2.3.2 Learning, teaching and assessment

- Conditions and organisation of admission ensure fair access to education and motivated student body. Students' choice of specialisation is supported.
- A student-centred approach is used in the studies, aiming at the students to assume responsibility for planning their studies and career and supporting the development of key competencies and achieving the learning outcomes of the study programme.
- Student assessment, including taking accreditation of prior and experiential learning into account, supports the students and corresponds to the learning outcomes. Objective and reliable assessment is ensured.
- The organisation of studies including practical work and training is based on the specificities of students and forms of study and supports the student in achieving the learning outcomes. Opportunities have been established for mobility within Tajikistan and internationally.
- Support services for students are in place and available for students. Individual development and progress of students are monitored and supported.
- Graduates of the study programme are competitive in terms of their knowledge and social skills both nationally and internationally.

Evidence and Analysis

The SPSER for the master's in International Relations states that, although admission to the programme is carried out by the central state authorities, TNU does undertake some activities to promote the programme to potential students. From the meeting with students the Panel learned that the students' choice of TNU was based on their particular academic interests, on their view of the quality of the education compared to the other institutions in Tajikistan, and on the opportunities to travel and learn new languages.

Both teaching staff and students regarded the teaching and learning process to be student-centred. The teaching staff mentioned different teaching methods, including, for example, using PowerPoint presentations, student-led seminars, creating portfolios, giving essays, presentations and other research assignments and using peer-to-peer assessment. Not all the examples quoted, for instance the use of PowerPoint presentations and giving essays, are characteristic of student-centred learning. However, students were able to articulate a difference in the expectations of them at master's level compared to their experience at bachelor's level, reporting that they are required to be more active and take more responsibility for their own studies. The Panel encourages teaching staff to broaden their teaching methods in line with international developments in pedagogy and thus embrace a wider range of student-centred learning.

The Panel learned from the teaching staff and the students that there is some variety in assessment methods. However, neither the documentation nor the interviews demonstrated how the assessment tasks and the intended learning outcomes are aligned. Moreover, there are a number of learning outcomes relating to the general competencies expected of the graduate, which is appropriate, but the Panel found no indication as to how these learning outcomes are assessed, and these more general outcomes are not articulated in any of the syllabuses the Panel scrutinised.

Although the students were confident that they understood the assessment criteria, the syllabuses had only very general assessment criteria, if any. Students reported some experience of appealing against their grade to the teacher informally, but were not aware of what they could do if no agreement could be reached in the informal discussion about the grade with the teacher. The Panel reviewed some master's dissertations to gain an insight into the level of student achievement. The Panel found the dissertations were of variable standard and not all demonstrated the level of achievement expected of a master's in the European context. The Panel also noted in the course syllabuses that points are deducted for behaviour, wearing the right uniform, for example, and attendance. The practice of behaviour and/or attendance influencing grades is inappropriate and not in line with European expectations.

The SPSER for the master's in International Relations stated that '*the activity of students includes participation in determining the content of educational programs, the independent formation of an educational path [...]*'. The programme-specific documents supplied were insufficiently coherent to enable the Panel to assess how much choice there really is. From the meetings with staff and students, however, the Panel concluded that there is very little or no opportunity within the programme for the student to individualize the curriculum. The students described how it was possible to get a course changed when a group of students all have the same wish, but could not provide an example to illustrate this. The Panel appreciated that for small student cohorts, providing parallel courses to meet student interests is challenging. There may, however, be ways to achieve some level of individualization of the student pathway by, for example, students taking more responsibility for their paths, or by adopting a blended learning approach.

The students reported that their preferences are taken into account in the process of allocating students to practical training. TNU guarantees a university-organized placement. A contract is signed between TNU and the placement provider, and there is a guidance document which also includes the assessment procedure.

The SPSER states that there are some opportunities for students to participate in mobility programmes; students confirmed that this is the case and some of them had participated. However, the students also reported the need for more mobility opportunities so that they could gain international experience, benefitting academically and also developing their language skills.

Although the SPSER outlined many student support mechanisms, the students met had no knowledge of the Student Service Centre. However, they did report that they were supported, relying mostly on the teaching staff for support. There are mechanisms through the tutor system to ensure that students are making adequate progress. The Panel did not find evidence of a formal monitoring system. The small cohort size does facilitate informal contact and support and may make a more systematic approach seem unnecessary.

Employers met by the Panel were very positive about the competitiveness of the graduates, stating that they are the best in the country in terms of their general knowledge, their language skills, experience of the state agencies and interactions with the foreign companies.

Commendation

- The International Relations MA programme is commended for the strong links with employers within the programme.

Recommendations

- The International Relations MA programme should ensure that there is a clear link between the assessment criteria and the intended learning outcomes.
- The International Relations MA programme should stop the practice whereby attendance and behaviour affect academic grades.
- The International Relations MA programme should foster and implement student centred learning more actively, to cover both teaching methods and assessment.
- The International Relations MA programme should empower students by making sure that they understand fully their rights and opportunities, including how to appeal against their grades and what measures are available for student support

Suggestion for further improvement

- The International Relations MA programme could develop some individual choices within the programme.
- The International Relations MA programme could consider formalising student support.

2.3.3 Development, cooperation and internationalization of teaching staff

- Teaching is conducted by a sufficient number of professionally competent members of the teaching staff who support the development of the students.
- Teaching staff follows the principles of academic ethics and the codes of conduct in case of non-compliance.
- Members of the teaching staff participate in international mobility programs which encourage the development of their teaching and RDC activities and the cultural openness of the HEI and the Tajik society.
- The effectiveness of both studies and RDC activities, students' feedback, the effectiveness of supervision, development of teaching and supervision skills, international mobility and entrepreneurial or work experience in the specific field outside the HEI is taken into consideration in evaluating the work of the member of the staff.

Evidence and Analysis

It was difficult for the Panel to establish information about the teaching staff involved in the International Relations study programme. Almost all the data provided was at faculty level. However, according to the CV's provided, the Panel reached a view that there are 2 professors and 4 senior lecturers teaching on the programme. Teaching staff are recruited and selected according to national regulations. Their diplomas and their ability to train specialists are checked by the University. The Panel learned from the Dean of the Faculty that the requirement for teaching staff to teach in English is level C1. However, from the meeting with staff, which was conducted in English, the competence demonstrated suggested that not all staff meet this requirement.

Teaching staff report to the head of department who plays an important role in the selection and in the evaluation of the performance of teaching staff. Student evaluation and feedback on the teaching is discussed with the head of department who may ask the teaching staff to attend training courses at the national centre, if performance is below expectations.

The number of scientific publications in international, peer-reviewed journals in the field of international relations is extremely limited. The Panel could not find evidence of the impact of scientific publication by staff in the evaluation of their work despite the fact that the Panel understood that each academic member of staff has an individual plan which contributes to the departmental annual *planning matrix*. The Panel also learned that the faculty recognizes the need to improve the scientific level of staff.

Staff sign the Code Conduct, which forms part of their contract of employment with TNU. In the case of misconduct, the Dean will, in the first instance, have an individual conversation with the member of staff involved. The Dean could not remember any examples of such misconduct as far as the teaching staff of the faculty was concerned.

The Dean reported that about 60% of the teaching staff has been able to go abroad for scientific purposes. Such visits last a minimum of 2 weeks and may be up to 3 months long. The international experience of teaching staff is also supported by exchanges with partner universities, such as in

Azerbaijan and Belarus, and through visiting foreign experts. The Panel learned that one of the objectives of the Faculty is to achieve an increase in collaboration and exchange with European countries in line with the aim of integrating into the Bologna Framework.

Recommendations

- The International Relations MA programme should support the development of research at international level.
- The International Relations MA programme should increase exchange with European universities in line with national and TNU strategies.
- The International Relations MA programme should enhance the English language competence of teaching staff to ensure that they all reach a level suitable for advanced academic discourse.