Decision regarding Tajik National University Institutional Accreditation

The Quality Assessment Council of Higher Education of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education decided to accredit Tajik National University for three years with secondary condition

On the basis of clause 38 (3) of the Higher Education Act, point 3.7.3 of the Statutes of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (hereinafter referred to as 'EKKA') and the points 43.5 and 43.7 of the document 'Guide to Institutional Accreditation' authorised in point 3.7.1 of the above-mentioned EKKA Statutes; the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education (hereinafter referred to as 'the Council') affirms the following:

1. On 28.11.2019 Tajik National University (hereinafter referred to as 'TNU'): and EKKA agreed upon a time frame to conduct institutional accreditation

2. In accordance with point 8 of the document 'Guide to Institutional Accreditation', the following study programmes were assessed during the institutional accreditation:

   Physics (BSc)

   International Law (BA)

   International Relations (MA)

3. The Director of EKKA, on 14.02.2020 by her order, approved the following membership of the committee for the institutional accreditation of the Tajik National University (hereinafter referred to as 'the Committee'):

Bob Munn (chair)   Former Vice-President for Teaching and Learning, Emeritus Professor of

	Chemical Physics, University of Manchester, the UK
Helen Thomas (secretary)	Freelance Education Consultant, the UK
Tanel Kerikmäe	Director of the Tallinn Law School, Tallinn University of Technology, Estonia
Anca Greere	Professor in English Linguistics and Translation Studies, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Jacques Lanares	University of Lausanne, Vice Rector, Switzerland
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

4. TNU submitted a self-evaluation report to the EKKA Bureau on 31.08.2020 and the assessment coordinator forwarded it to the Committee on 7.09.2020.

5. A virtual assessment visit was made to YHU during 9. – 13.11.2020.

6. The Committee sent its draft assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 13.12.2020, EKKA forwarded it to the TNU for its comments on 23.12.2020 and TNU delivered its response on 7.01.2021.

7. The Committee submitted its final assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 12.01.2021. That assessment report is an integral part of the decision, and is available on the EKKA website.

8. The Secretary of the Council forwarded the Committee's final assessment report along with the TNU self-evaluation report to the Council members on 19.01.2021

9. The Committee presented the following assessments of the standards:

Standard	Assessment
Strategic management	Partially conform to requirements
Resources	Partially conforms to requirements
Quality Culture	Partially conforms to requirements
Academic Ethics	Partially conforms to requirements
Internationalisation	Partially conforms to requirements
Teaching Staff	Partially conforms to requirements
Study Programme	Partially conforms to requirements

Learning and Teaching	Partially conforms to requirements
Student Assessment	Does not conform to requirements
Learning Support Systems	Conforms to requirements
Research, Development and/or other Creative Activity	Does not conform to requirements
Service to Society	Partially conforms to requirements

10. The Council with 11 members present discussed these received documents in its session on 27.01.2021 and, based on the assessment report, decided to point out the following strengths, areas of concern and recommendations and suggestions for further improvement regarding the TNU.

10.1. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Strengths

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

Areas of concern and recommendations

1) The Development Strategy that TNU 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. It is therefore difficult for TNU to know whether it is achieving or has achieved the desired outcomes. The Panel found no evidence of any operational plans which translated the overall objectives into specific activities. 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.

2) The Panel did not find any evidence of individual strategy documents focusing on key areas of TNU including research, internationalization or service to society. 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.

3) 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 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.

Suggestions for further development

1) 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 inter-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary studies, among other things. 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.

10.2. RESOURCES

Areas of concern and recommendations

1) 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 should continue taking steps to raise staff salaries.
2) 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.
3) In discussion with staff and students, the Panel learned that not all buildings are adequately accessible for those with special needs. TNU should prioritise making all buildings accessible to ensure inclusive education.
4) 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. TNU should increase the numbers of scientific books available in English to ensure it meets students' study needs.
5) 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 should expand access to international academic databases to support research of both staff and students.
6) 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 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. TNU should develop its internal and external communications, including the website, to ensure all stakeholders are systematically aware of information relevant to them.

Suggestions for further development

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

10.3. QUALITY CULTURE

Areas of concern and recommendations

1) 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.

2) Scrutiny of the documentation showed that key concepts of quality 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. 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.

3) 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. 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.

4) 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.

5) 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. The Panel could not assess how active student representatives are in the Academic Council or whether their participation really contributes directly to institutional developments. TNU should ensure that quality committees include relevant representation from stakeholder groups, especially students and employers.

6) 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. TNU should develop a systematic continuous development plan for all staff to promote the understanding and implementation of quality management and assurance.

7) It was not clear how the good practice identified is disseminated to staff, students or to the broader stakeholder community, as appropriate. 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.

8) 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. 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.

9) 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. TNU should ensure that analyses of quantitative and qualitative data are used effectively to inform system-wide approaches and strategic action.

10) 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. TNU should strengthen its communication channels about quality matters so that information is disseminated to relevant stakeholders in a timely manner.

11) 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. 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.

12) 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.

Suggestions for further development

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

10.4. ACADEMIC ETHICS

Strengths

1) 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.

Areas of concern and recommendations

1) 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". 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. TNU should develop a clear complaints procedure and publish criteria for the competencies of the Ethics Commission.
2) 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. TNU should revise the Code and the guidelines for "individual estimation of ethics in actions" according to international standards.
3) 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.
4) 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.

Suggestions for further development

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

10.5. INTERNATIONALISATION

Strengths

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

Areas of concern and recommendations

1) 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 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.

2) 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 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.

3) In 2019, according to the SER, TNU had 283 international contracts and agreements. 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. 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.

4) 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 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.

5) 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. 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.

6) Students reported that study materials in English were not always sufficient to support their academic initiatives. TNU should provide sufficient resources in English at a suitable academic level to support students' learning.

7) 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.

Suggestions for further development

1) 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. 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.

2) 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.

10.6. TEACHING STAFF

Areas of concern and recommendations

1) 56% of staff held academic degrees and titles and 14% held PhD degrees and professor titles. The Panel considered that, compared to international universities, the proportion of TNU staff holding a doctorate and/or a professorship is low. TNU should intensify its efforts to improve the structure of its academic staff by hiring qualified teachers so that it can attain international standards.

2) 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. TNU should establish attestation rules to ensure that the courses and programmes taught correspond to the teacher's area of expertise.

3) 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. TNU should develop a clear and transparent academic hierarchy that includes specifying the competencies required for each level of staff.

4) The Panel learned that teaching competencies are evaluated by class observations. 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. TNU should ensure that the outcomes of teacher assessment are objective and transparently communicated to staff.

5) 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 International Law programme should improve the qualifications of the teaching staff.

6) 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.

Suggestions for further development

1) TNU could explore the recruitment of teaching and research staff internationally to strengthen its teaching base and align with its aims of internationalization.

2) TNU could consider recruiting qualified teachers from the Tajik expatriate community and from those who have gained degrees abroad.

3) 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.

4) TNU could strengthen further the links between research and teaching by offering guidance and support to all teaching staff to achieve greater impact.

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

10.7. STUDY PROGRAMME

Strengths

1) TNU is commended for the way study programmes meet the needs of the Republic of Tajikistan.

2) TNU is commended for its sound programme approval process which includes external experts.

3) TNU is commended for the placement learning that forms part of all programmes.

Areas of concern and recommendations

1) 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. 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.

2) 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. 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.

3) 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. 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.

4) 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. 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.

5) 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. 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.

6) 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.

7) The International Law programme design should enable graduates to pursue a career internationally as well as in Tajikistan's foreign service.

8) The International Law programme should systematically include external partners in programme design and in regular review activities to ensure the programme maintains its currency.

9) 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.

10) The International Relations MA programme should be reviewed to ensure that the programme objectives and the learning outcomes are set clearly at level 7.

10.8. LEARNING AND TEACHING

Areas of concern and recommendations

1) 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. TNU should promote and embed a consistent interpretation of student-centred learning to provide a solid foundation for its implementation across the University.

2) 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. 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.

3) 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. 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.

4) PhD students who met the Panel said there is strong pressure to submit their thesis on time, as otherwise the University loses funding. TNU should be more flexible and supportive to PhD students whose work is delayed by problems beyond their control.

10.9. STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Areas of concern and recommendations

1) 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. TNU should design assessment methods and criteria that address and support the intended learning outcomes.

2) 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. 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. TNU should cease the practice of awarding grade points for non-academic matters of student conduct.

3) 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. 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.

4) 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. 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.

5) It was clear that the use of computerized tests is widespread in TNU. 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. TNU should broaden the variety of assessment methods used and share practice between faculties.

6) 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. TNU should develop and implement a policy to introduce a systematic approach for giving descriptive feedback to students on the results of their assessments.

7) 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. TNU should introduce and communicate a clear process for making an appeal on the grades.

Suggestions for further development

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

10.10. LEARNING SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Strengths

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

Areas of concern and recommendations

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

Suggestions for further development

1) TNU could monitor student progression to better identify support needs.

10.11. RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND/OR OTHER CREATIVE ACTIVITY

Areas of concern and recommendations

1) Despite the fact that the SER refers to research policy, there is no formally drafted document explaining research strategy and its implementation. Overall, the Panel found that TNU has articulated ambitious aims for research but does not have implementation plans for achieving these aims. TNU should develop its research policy, its implementation and the research results aimed for in order to achieve its ambitions.
2) 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. TNU should have a research budgeting strategy with clear and transparent rules for academic staff on how to obtain funding.
3) 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. TNU should ensure that there is equality of opportunity and treatment for all staff to apply for and be supported in publishing their research.
4) The Panel found a lack of competence and capacity for submitting applications for international grants. 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. TNU should develop a motivation plan and set up related support mechanisms for academic staff to publish externally in journals with high impact factors.

5) 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. 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 development

1) TNU could invest in establishing regular training courses for academic staff and research management offices in research funding and design.
2) 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.
3) TNU could support its students to participate in a wider range of international competitions such as moot courts and essay competitions.

10.12. SERVICE TO SOCIETY

Strengths

1) 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. 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.

Areas of concern and recommendations

1) 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. 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.
2) The Panel saw no evidence of courses being offered to the wider community, either general courses or credit bearing courses. 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. 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.

Suggestions for further development

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

11. If one to two assessments are provided as 'does not conform', the Council shall analyse the strengths and areas for improvement of the HEI and conclude that there are shortcomings in the management, administration, teaching and research activities or in the environments of learning and research at the HEI, provide guidance for their elimination, and decide to accredit the HEI for three years; or shall conclude that the management, administration, teaching and research activities as well as the environments of learning and research at the HEI do not meet the requirements, and decide not to accredit the HEI.

12. The Council weighed the strengths, areas of concern and recommendations presented in point 10 of this document and took into account that:

   1) TNU is commended for the way study programmes meet the needs of the Republic of Tajikistan.
   2) TNU is commended for the placement learning that forms part of all programmes.
   3) TNU is commended for the very good support and the close contact with the teaching staff that both national and international students value.
   4) TNU is commended for addressing the needs of different student groups.
   5) 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.

13. According to the point 43.7 of the document 'Guide to Institutional Accreditation', if the Council weighs between two accreditation decisions and finds that if the HEI were to satisfy certain conditions, a more positive decision would be possible, the Council may make that decision with a secondary condition, as defined in § 53 of the Administrative Procedure Act.

14. The Council found that the management, administration, teaching and research activities as well as the environments of learning and research at the TNU conform partially to the requirements on the condition that the TNU eliminates the following shortcomings as a matter of urgency:

   1) 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.

2) 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. 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. TNU should design assessment methods and criteria that address and support the intended learning outcomes. Assessment outcomes should focus only on the level of academic achievement and should not reflect non-academic matters. TNU should cease the practice of awarding grade points for non-academic matters of student conduct. If it is not within TNU's responsibility to change the student assessment system, proposals should be made to the Tajik Ministry of Education and Research to change it.

DECIDED

To accredit Tajik National University for three years with the following secondary conditions:

1) **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.**

2) **TNU should design assessment methods and criteria that address and support the intended learning outcomes. Assessment outcomes should focus only on the level of academic achievement and should not reflect non-academic matters. TNU should cease the practice of awarding grade points for non-academic matters of student conduct. If it is not within TNU's responsibility to change the student assessment system, proposals should be made to the Tajik Ministry of Education and Research to change it.**

Tajik National University should submit a report in English by 27.01.2022 at the latest about eliminating the shortcomings described in point 14.

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

15. This accreditation will be valid until 27.01.2024. If the Tajik National University does not comply with the secondary condition by the due date, the Council will repeal this accreditation decision or establish a new secondary condition.

16. The Council proposes that Tajik National University submit an action plan in English to EKKA concerning the other areas of concern and recommendations pointed out in the report no later than 27.01.2022.

17. A person who finds that his or her rights have been violated or his or her freedoms restricted by this decision may file a challenge with the EKKA Quality Assessment Council within 30 days after the person filing the challenge became or should have become aware of the contested finding. A judicial challenge to this decision is possible within 30 days after its delivery, by filing an action with the Tallinn courthouse of the Tallinn Administrative Court pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Code of Administrative Court Procedure.

Eve Eisenschmidt
Chair of the Council

Hillar Bauman
Secretary of the Council