

The decision of the Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Education

The University of Tartu

Decision on the initial assessment of the Master's studies in the Medicine study programme group

7.12.2023

The Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Education decided that the Master's studies in the Medicine study programme group of the University of Tartu partially conform to the level required.

Pursuant to subsections 9(3) and 10(1) of the Higher Education Act and clause 32.4 of the document *Guidelines for Initial Assessment and Re-assessment of Study Programme Groups*, established by the Estonian Quality Agency for Education (HAKA), the Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Education (hereinafter referred to as the Council) states the following:

1. On 7.06.2023, the Ministry of Education and Research submitted the information required for the initial assessment of the Master's studies in the Medicine study programme group of the University of Tartu (hereinafter referred to as the higher education institution) to HAKA.
2. On 27.06.2023, the Director of HAKA approved the following composition of the committee for initial assessment (hereinafter referred to as the Committee):

Lilian Azzopardi	Chair of the Committee; Professor and Head of Department of Pharmacy, Faculty of Medicine and Surgery, University of Malta
Kristel Jakobson-Pallo	Member of the Committee who has graduated from the higher education institution less than a year ago. PwC Eesti, Senior Consultant
Marja Airaksinen	Professor of Social Pharmacy, Head of Clinical Pharmacy Group, University of Helsinki
Robert Khachatryan	Member of the Committee from outside the higher education institution; Head of Quality Control Section, Department of Education and Knowledge, Government of Abu Dhabi (ADEK)



3. The Assessment Committee reviewed the information submitted by the higher education institution and the Ministry. Web conversations with the representatives of the higher education institution were held on 12.10.2023 and 17.10.2023.
4. The Committee sent the draft assessment report to the higher education institution on 17.11.2023 to comment.
5. The higher education institution reported having no comments on 20.11.2023.
6. The Committee submitted its final assessment report to the HAKA Bureau on 21.11.2023. The assessment report is an integral part of the decision.
7. The Committee's assessments were as follows:

Quality of instruction	Conforms to the level required
Resources	Conforms to the level required
Sustainability	Partially conforms to the level required

8. The Council with nine members present discussed these received documents in its session on 7.12.2023 and, based on the assessment report and the information submitted by the higher education institution to the Estonian Education Information System, decided to point out the following strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations, and suggestions for further development regarding the higher education institution.

8.1 Quality of instruction:

Strengths:

- 1) Employers and stakeholders in the hospital, community and authorities are in dialogue with the developers of the study programme and ready to support Estonian pharmacists in carrying out the studies, including the research necessary for the Master's theses.
- 2) The applied therapy module is based on weekly interactive online study sessions where students are systematically guided through the assessment of a patient's case and the implementation of pharmacological and therapeutic principles.
- 3) The weekly case analysis that the students have to submit before each webinar ensures the development of the relevant skills.
- 4) The prior experience of the developers of the study programme in organising online courses demonstrates their ability to organise the study programme in the form of online studies.

- 5) Students have broad access to counselling (study and career counselling and psychological counselling, also in English), and measures have been developed to monitor and support students' academic success.

Areas for improvement, and recommendations:

- 1) The learning outcomes of the study programme are aimed at providing theoretical knowledge on how to provide clinical pharmacy services, rather than at the clinical skills themselves or their application in practice. Such differences in learning outcomes and in the development of competences must be clearly demonstrated in the documents of the study programme. The objectives of the study programme must be reviewed so that it is clear to the potential students that the study programme does not include studies on clinical practice competences, but rather, skill development through the adoption of new knowledge and a clinical approach.
- 2) Overall, the study programme is cohesive. It is still recommended that the names of a few modules be adjusted in order to better reflect the internationally recognised philosophy and practices in clinical pharmacy.
- 3) The current objective set for the Master's thesis to meet the requirements of an international peer reviewed article may be too ambitious in the context of the allocated time and the 30 ECTS. It is recommended to develop clear guidelines for the expected outcome of a Master's thesis, which can be in the format of a scientific manuscript but might not necessarily have reached the submission stage.
- 4) There is no clear framework for the contact between the student and the supervisor in writing the Master's thesis, or performance indicators for monitoring a student's progress. It is recommended to prepare a description of the draft of the Master's thesis, and of its implementation, on an online learning platform.
- 5) The diversity of the teaching staff of the study programme in terms of their affiliation with the Institute of Pharmacy and the University of Tartu brings about the need for higher level coordination by the Programme Director. The Programme Director and the developers of the study programme should develop a strategy to overcome the challenges arising from dealing with a very diverse academic staff (including a large number of visiting lecturers).
- 6) The research methodology and theories applied in clinical pharmacy research are significantly different from the methodologies applied in other branches of pharmacy. It must be ensured that teaching staff, particularly Master's theses supervisors, have sufficient competences in clinical pharmacy research methodology.

- 7) The study programme has no defined plan for international mobility. There are opportunities for encouraging international mobility, but such opportunities should be strategically implemented as well. It is recommended to thoroughly weigh the options of the students for (virtual) mobility within the framework of this study programme.
- 8) The university has established guidelines for ensuring the quality of study programmes and plans for internal assessment. Students and teaching staff are involved in the development of the study programme. At the same time, it is not clear whether and how alumni and employers are involved in the development of the study programme in the future. The establishment of a study programme council should be considered, which would include the representatives of students, staff, alumni and employers. This would allow the study programme to remain relevant and synchronised with the needs of the market.

Opportunities for development:

- 1) The addition of leadership skills could be considered, which are virtually lacking from the current version of the study programme. Leadership skills are essential for clinical pharmacists in their tasks in any social and healthcare environment and should be integrated into the existing subjects.
- 2) Shifting the topics of Master's theses from traditional pharmaceutical sciences to clinical / applied pharmacotherapy topics could be considered, which would strengthen the students' clinical pharmacy competences and facilitate the development of clinical pharmacy practice (and also compensate for the mandatory practical training that is lacking). The Institute of Pharmacy would have a great opportunity to involve students in the common projects launched with clinics.
- 3) Structured active learning sessions could be developed, during which students would attend the handling of a blind case in small groups in a live session.
- 4) The research done at the institute could be more focused on clinical areas. It is recommended to make better use of the opportunities between specialities in the study programme.

8.2 Resources

Strengths:

- 1) The combination of academic staff and practitioners forms valuable synergy that increases the likelihood of achieving the desired outcomes and can provide students with a versatile educational experience.
- 2) The inclusion of foreign teaching staff and consultants in the implementation of the study programme can bring along diverse knowledge, experience and global best practices, enriching the learning environment and broadening the educational experience of the students.
- 3) The ability of the university to utilise various funding sources, including European and Estonian funding, research funding, cooperation with companies, international agreements. In the first two years, the University of Tartu supports new study programmes with 6 million euros. Such diversity increases the financial stability and sustainability of the study programme, making it more adaptable to the changing circumstances and mitigating potential financial risks.
- 4) The cooperation between the university and companies, the open innovation and the entrepreneurship programmes are major strengths. Being in active cooperation with companies and promoting the spirit of entrepreneurship among students and academic staff, the university supports not only its financial sustainability, but also the commercialisation of research, and economic development. This approach creates opportunities for generating revenue through research partnerships, knowledge transfer and the creation of potential new businesses, and contributes to long-term financial sustainability.

Areas for improvement, and recommendations:

- 1) The University of Tartu has not presented clearly defined and measurable plans for creating opportunities for the in-service training and personal development of academic staff within the study programme group. The university should have clearly defined and measurable plans for creating opportunities for the in-service training and personal development of academic staff within the study programme group, including international mobility options and various research-related activities.
- 2) Given the fact that not all students are based in Estonia, the recommended academic reading list should be supplemented by adding to the descriptions of the subjects recommendations about Estonian, European and other international resources that students can access online.
- 3) The scope of access to drug information databases is unclear. All students, including foreign students, must be guaranteed access to the sources needed, to successfully complete the study programme.

- 4) It is not clear how the risks arising from dependence on external funding sources are planned to be mitigated. Therefore, the university should carefully consider potential scenarios and prepare a thorough financial risk analysis.

Opportunities for development:

- 1) It is important to develop specific requirements for supervisors to supervise research projects, and opportunities to involve students in project-based research.
- 2) It is recommended to develop a clear plan to balance the ratio of part-time and full-time teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study programme.
- 3) It is recommended to develop an integral sustainability plan for academic staff together with the estimated workload. It should also address financial considerations in case there are fewer or more students than expected.
- 4) Clinical pharmacy research often involves patient data, so it is important to include research ethics guidelines and the principles for managing and preserving confidential data in the training on research methods.

8.3 Sustainability

Areas for improvement, and recommendations:

- 1) There is no risk analysis with a risk mitigation approach for the study programme. Risk analysis must be carried out to address the risks associated with part-time staff, the number of students required to ensure the sustainability of the study programme, and the maximum number of students the infrastructure can handle, as well as possible fluctuations in the number of students.
- 2) A long-term financial forecast should also be prepared in addition to considering other risks.

9. If the assessment in one field of assessment is “partially conforms to the level required” and the remaining assessments are “conforms to the level required”, the Assessment Council weighs the strengths and areas for improvement of the study programme group and adopts one of the following decisions:

- a) adopts a decision that the studies conform to the level required, and makes a proposal to the Minister of Education and Research that the higher education

institution be granted the right to organise studies in the respective study programme group and studies, or

b) adopts a decision that the studies partially conform to the level required, and makes a proposal to the Minister of Education and Research that the higher education institution be granted the right to organise studies in the respective study programme group and studies for one to three years.

10. The Council weighed the strengths and areas for improvement of the higher education institution in organising Master's studies in the Medicine study programme group and, considering the areas for improvement specified in clause 8 of the decision:

- Pursuant to subsection 3(7)7) of the Standard of Higher Education, *financing sources for conducting studies and for research, development and creative activities related to Doctoral study and a strategy supporting their obtainment are in place.* Pursuant to subitem 7.2 of clause 9 of HAKA's guidelines *Guidelines for Initial Assessment and Re-assessment of Study Programme Groups: when planning studies in the study programme group, the higher education institution has conducted a risk analysis and devised a long-term financial projection, which among other things includes the calculation of a student place, an analysis of risks stemming from the operating environment and planned mitigating measures thereof.* It is not clear how the risks arising from dependence on external funding sources are planned to be mitigated. There is no risk analysis with a risk mitigation approach for the study programme. Risk analysis must be carried out to address the risks associated with part-time staff, the number of students required to ensure the sustainability of the study programme, and the maximum number of students the infrastructure can handle, as well as possible fluctuations in the number of students. A long-term financial forecast should also be prepared in addition to considering other risks.
- Pursuant to subsection 3(5) of the Standard of Higher Education, *the structure and content of a study programme support the objectives of the study programme and the achievement of its learning outcomes.* Subitem 1.5 of clause 9 of HAKA's guidelines *Guidelines for Initial Assessment and Re-assessment of Study Programme Groups* provides that *different parts of the study programme form a coherent whole. The title of the study programme is consistent with the content and the structure; and content of the study programme supports the acquisition of the objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme.* The learning outcomes of the study programme are aimed at providing theoretical knowledge on how to

provide clinical pharmacy services, rather than at the clinical skills themselves or their application in practice. Such differences in learning outcomes and in the development of competences must be clearly demonstrated in the documents of the study programme. The objectives of the study programme must be reviewed so that it is clear to the potential students that the study programme does not include studies on clinical practice competences, but rather, skill development through the adoption of new knowledge and a clinical approach. The names of a few modules should be adjusted in order to better reflect the internationally recognised philosophy and practices in clinical pharmacy.

DECIDED THE FOLLOWING:

- 1) The studies partially conform to the level required;**
- 2) To make a proposal to the Minister of Education and Research to grant the University of Tartu the right to organise Master's studies in the Medicine study programme group for three years.**

The decision was adopted with 9 votes in favour. 0 were against.

11. A person who finds that his or her rights are violated or his or her freedoms are restricted by this decision may file a challenge with the HAKA Assessment Council within 30 days after he or she became or should have become aware of the decision. The Assessment Council shall send the challenge to the HAKA Appeals Committee, which shall, within five days of receipt of the challenge, provide a written unbiased opinion to the Assessment Council on the validity of the challenge. The Council shall resolve the challenge within 10 days of its receipt, taking into account the reasoned opinion of the Appeals Committee. If further examination of the challenge is necessary, the Assessment Council may extend the deadline for examining the challenge by up to 30 days. Judicial contestation of a decision is possible within 30 days from the date of service of the decision by filing an appeal with the Tallinn Administrative Court pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Administrative Court Procedure Act.

Hillar Bauman

Secretary of the Council