

Decision Regarding the Assessment of the Social Services Study Programme Group

Lääne-Viru College

15/09/2015

The Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education decided to approve the report by the Assessment Committee and to conduct the next quality assessment of the Social Services study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at Lääne-Viru College in three years.

Lääne-Viru College submitted the following study programme for evaluation:

- Social Work Diploma of Professional Higher Education

Assessment Committee

Andy Gibbs (Chair)	Leader, Centre for Wellbeing and Health, Edinburgh Napier University; European Higher Education Expert at the British Council (UK)
Ruta Butkeviciene	Associate Professor, Researcher; Department of Philosophy and Social Sciences, Lithuanian University of Health Sciences (Lithuania)
Ülly Enn	Archimedes Foundation, Youth Agency, Expert in Youth Work (Estonia)
Heikki Hiilamo	Professor of Social Policy, Department of Social Research, Head of Discipline for Social and Public Policy, University of Helsinki (Finland)
Andreas Karsten	Youth Policy Labs at Demokratie & Dialog; Expert in Youth Work (Germany)
Rudi Roose	Associate Professor, Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy, Ghent University (Belgium)
Johans Tveit Sandvin	Professor of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Nordland (Norway)
Inguna Zarina	Student, University of Latvia; Academic Affairs

Officer, National Student Union of Latvia; National Accreditation Board for Higher Education in Ministry of Education and Science (Latvia)

Miriam Teuma

Chief Executive Officer, Agenzija Zghazagh; Expert in Youth Work (Malta)

The Committee's Comments on the Study Programme Group

Strengths

- *The study programme clearly focuses on the practical side of social work with strong emphasis on internships, practical methods and a client-centred approach.*
- *The College has excellent teaching and learning facilities equipped with modern technical resources, and an excellent library.*
- *Teaching staff are committed to their work and act as a unified team. They collaborate actively with the local community, participating in various projects and organising seminars and other events.*
- *Teaching is conducted in small groups of students, and the lecturers use modern participative teaching methods (role play, case studies, etc.). The Moodle system is widely used in teaching.*
- *The study programme is popular, student numbers have fallen only slightly over recent years. Students are committed and motivated, and highly value the study programme as well as the internship opportunities that come with it. Student feedback on the teaching staff and their teaching skills is very positive.*
- *The overall professional employment rate of graduates is high and employers are very satisfied with the professional preparation and practical competencies of graduates.*

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- *The College should more clearly define the conceptual and theoretical bases of the Social Work programme and integrate them into the content of different courses.*
- *The study programme has been developed based on needs of the working life rather than on modern theories and research findings. This orientation along with the emphasis on practical competencies does not establish preconditions for students to become agents of change in local and national fields of social work.*
- *It is necessary to find a better balance between the theoretical and practical elements of the study programme to ensure that students would always be able to theoretically justify their practical actions and choices.*

- *Students do not have a clear understanding of the nature of social work, its role in society or the difference between social work and social care. The College must focus much more on developing the critical and analytical thinking skills of students and explain the need for such skills to employers.*
- *The College should shift the focus of teaching to the meaning of 'social' in social work. The broader nature of social work is not adequately acknowledged.*
- *No ordinary teaching staff holds a PhD in social work, and only a few are engaged in research. Very few teaching staff members are involved in international or Estonian research networks. This inhibits development of the theoretical orientation in the programme. It is necessary to seek international partners among universities that belong to leading research communities in the field; as well as to seek funds allowing the teaching staff to participate in these networks and the College to involve international scientists in supervising the doctoral theses of its teaching staff.*
- *When meeting with the committee, the College lacked analytical self-reflection essential for any institution of higher education, particularly with regard to study programme development and the programme's conformity to the Standard of Higher Education.*
- *The small size of the College may be a threat to the sustainability of the Social Work programme, therefore the College should be open to developing the programme and offering it in collaboration with another higher education institution.*

The Council weighed the strengths, areas for development and recommendations provided by the Assessment Committee and decided that:

- Although the subject of this discipline is important to the region, the study programme lacks clear theoretical and conceptual bases for social work and therefore is not fully in accordance with section 6 (3) of the Standard of Higher Education. The students did not have a clear understanding of the nature of social work, its role in society or the difference between social work and social care. According to point 2.1 of Annex 1 to the Standard of Higher Education, *in order to be awarded a diploma of studies in professional higher education, a student shall have a systematic overview of the basic concepts, theoretical principles and research methods of the field of study.*
- The study programme has been developed based on needs of the working life rather than on modern theories and research findings. This orientation along with the emphasis on practical competencies does not establish preconditions for students to become agents of change in local and national fields of social work, and therefore the study programme does

not allow students to achieve the learning outcomes described in point 2.1 of Annex 1 to the Standard of Higher Education, according to which the graduates of professional higher education studies shall: *be able to formulate problems relating to the field of study and to analyse and evaluate different solutions; be able to collect information independently by using appropriate methods and means and to interpret it critically and creatively; and show initiative in initiating projects as well as responsibility, leadership and team work skills in the implementation thereof.* It is necessary to find a better balance between the theoretical and practical elements of the study programme to ensure that students would always be able to theoretically justify their practical actions and choices. The College must focus much more on developing the critical and analytical thinking skills of students.

- No ordinary teaching staff holds a PhD in social work, and only a few are engaged in research. In order to ensure that the teaching staff have adequate professional teaching competencies and qualifications as described in subsection 6 (7) 2) of the Standard of Higher Education, it is necessary to seek funds allowing the teaching staff to participate in international research networks and the College to involve international scientists in supervising the doctoral theses of its teaching staff.
- The College does not have partnerships with international universities, and cooperation with other higher education institutions in Estonia is also not sufficient. In order to align the study programme with national and international quality requirements and agreements as described in section 6 (2) of the Standard of Higher Education, more effective collaboration with other institutions of higher education is inevitably needed.

Further information:

[Assessment Report](#)