

**Assessment Report on Study Programme Group of  
Languages and Cultures  
Tallinn University**

**05/02/2016**

**The Quality Assessment council for Higher Education of the Estonian Quality Assurance Organization for Higher and Vocational Education decided to approve the report by the Assessment Committee and to conduct the next quality assessment of the Languages and Cultures study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at Tallinn University in 7 years.**

On the basis of subsection 10 (4) of the Universities Act and point 41.1 of the document, ‘Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education’, authorised in points 3.7.3 and 3.7.1 of the Statutes of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education; the Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education of EKKA (hereinafter referred to as ‘the Council’) affirms the following:

1. On 10.12.2014 Tallinn University and EKKA agreed upon a time frame to conduct a quality assessment of the study programme group.
2. The Director of EKKA, by her order on 27.08.2015, approved the following membership of the quality assessment committee for the Languages and Cultures study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at University of Tartu, Tallinn University and EuroAcademy (hereinafter referred to as ‘the Committee’):

<b>Malcolm Cook (Chair)</b>	<b>Professor Emeritus, Chair of the Modern Humanities Research Association</b>
	(Great Britain)
<b>Olesea Bodean-Vozian</b>	PhD student, Moldova State University (Moldova)
<b>Yves Gambier</b>	Professor Emeritus, University of Turku (Finland)
<b>Andrew Goodspeed</b>	Professor, South East European University (Macedonia)
<b>Jaakko Leino</b>	Professor, University of Helsinki (Finland)
<b>Irina Moore</b>	Docent, University of Wolverhampton (Great Britain)
<b>Raiyashree Pandey</b>	Reader, University of London (Great Britain)

<b>Malcolm Cook (Chair)</b>	Professor Emeritus, Chair of the Modern Humanities Research Association
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3. Tallinn University submitted for evaluation the following study programmes from the Languages and Cultures study programme group:

Estonian Philology (BA)

Estonian as a Second Language and Estonian Culture (BA)

English Language and Culture (BA)

Asian Studies (BA)

Romance Languages and Cultures (BA)

German Language and Culture (BA)

Finnish Philology (BA)

Asian Studies (MA)

Slavonic Languages and Cultures (MA)

Translation (MA)

Conference Interpreting (MA)

4. Tallinn University submitted the self-evaluation report to EKKA Bureau on 08.07.2015 and the assessment coordinator sent the report to the Committee on 13.08.2015.
5. The assessment visit at Tallinn University took place on 7.-8.10.2015.
6. The Committee sent its draft assessment report the EKKA Bureau on 27.11.2015, EKKA forwarded it to Tallinn University for its comments on 30.11.2015, and the University delivered its response on 15.12.2015.
7. The Committee submitted its final assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 23.12.2015. The 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 University's self-evaluation report to the Council members on 26.01.2016.
9. The Council with 10 members present discussed these received documents in its session during 5.02.2016 and, based on the assessment report, decided to point out the following strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations regarding the Languages and Cultures study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at Tallinn University.

### **Study Programme Findings**

#### **English Language and Culture, German Language and Culture, Romance Languages and Cultures (BA)**

##### Strengths:

- Teaching is on a very high level, which is also confirmed by the results of the many satisfaction surveys conducted among students.
- Language and cultural studies are balanced within all study programmes.
- The strength of the English Language and Culture study programme is the broad-based choice of elective courses.
- The English language skills of new students are very high, which creates a good basis for developing strong professional language courses.
- Students are motivated and capable, as well as satisfied with their university and study programmes.
- Language students have better mobility opportunities than students of other fields.

#### Areas of Improvement and Recommendations:

- English language and culture study programme focuses very much on the linguistic and cultural models of Great Britain and Northern America. It is recommended to cover the English languages of other areas (India, Pakistan, South Africa, Australia etc.), as well as those of non-native speakers. The programme also allows the study of applying English as a world language from linguistic and cultural aspects.
- German language and culture study program focuses mostly on German/Austrian historical axis and blots out the very rich cultural inheritance of Baltic Germans. It is recommended to develop elective courses or modules that would cover the Baltic German culture, in order to diversify the study programme and increase incoming mobility.
- Considering the insufficient number of teachers in the Romance languages and cultures study programme, the institute should consider offering it as a minor subject for students of English and German language.
- The university should develop profitability models that would determine the minimum number of students necessary for opening a course for beginners or advanced language learners.
- When possible, the diversity and depth of offered elective courses should be maintained.
- Providing good access to professional databases should be considered a priority.
- One of the main problems is the dropping out of students. The university should tackle the issue and make sure students are motivated to complete their studies.
- The opportunities of online learning are used very little.
- Digital resources should be used better in international co-operation and joint learning activities (video lectures, Skype-conferences from foreign universities, joint language courses etc.).
- The non-differentiated assessment of practical work does not reflect the content-related outcomes and needs to be developed further. In the current system, “pass” is the only viable option and failing is practically impossible.
- Concrete steps need to be taken in order to intensify teachers’ mobility.

- Teachers are mainly recruited among alumni. Staff politics should be developed with the aim of increasing the amount of teachers coming from the outside. This would allow the university to bring in new approaches, experiences and practices.

### **Translation, Conference Interpretation (MA)**

#### Strengths:

- The need for qualified translators and interpreters is big.
- The supervision and topic selection of Master's thesis is well-organized.
- Internships are relevant and purposeful.
- The learning infrastructure is very good.
- The study programme is taught by teachers and translators/interpreters who speak English as their first language.

#### Areas of Improvement and Recommendations:

- The two fields of translation (written translation and oral/conference interpretation) should be more interconnected.
- The programme for written translation currently contains two elective modules: professional language translation and literary translation. Instead of focusing on topics about general language and text issues as literary translation does, professional language translation module should provide students with more specific skills and knowledge.
- The need for translators and interpreters in the local labour market needs to be analysed and used in planning future activities.
- The written translation programme should cover newer translation practices like the translation of websites, advertisements and online games.
- The students should be introduced to translation technology and digital resources (translation memory software, terminology tools) in the early phases of their studies.
- The big fluidity of staff makes it difficult to develop teaching methods and research. Currently, the amount and scope of teachers' research is limited and innovative methods are not sufficiently used in teaching. Teachers should be provided with more opportunities to develop their pedagogical skills.
- It is recommended to organize regular meetings for teachers to discuss curricula, cross-subject connections, teaching methods and assessment criteria and to create better connections between subjects and modules. Regular meetings between teachers and students would allow for the establishment of a proactive and dynamic atmosphere.
- Subject curricula should clearly describe and interconnect planned learning outcomes, developed competences and assessment methods.
- Students should be more meticulously observed and guided in interpretation courses, in order to assure the development of their interpretation techniques.
- Students felt a need for interpretation simulation lessons.

- It is recommended to focus more on staff development. The university is offering many professional development opportunities, but these are not used enough.
- Teachers' mobility must increase. There is currently a lack of finances to support taking part of international conferences.
- It is necessary to increase the students' knowledge about curriculum development and include them in the process more than before.

### **Asian Studies (BA, MA)**

#### Strengths:

- The study programmes of Asian studies are led by a team of highly motivated and dedicated teachers.
- The Bachelor's programme has established a balance between intensive language learning and regional studies.
- The inclusion of elective courses from other fields in the curriculum allows the students to approach their own subjects with a more critical mindset.
- The academic writing course that was integrated into the programme is very welcomed, as it develops students' skills for writing their final thesis.
- The Asian studies programme has focused on their key strengths and eliminated courses with an insufficient number of students or lacking qualifications of teachers.
- The teachers are very committed to introducing Asian studies to the general public. A good example of that is the translation series published by the department.
- Students have a chance to spend an academic year in China or Japan.
- The organization of admission exams is innovative. Candidates are invited to discuss about previously read texts and justify their choice of field.

#### Areas of Improvement and Recommendations:

- The Master's programme should be restructured in order to differentiate between degrees that either are or are not based on language skills.
- The amount of credits received for courses in hieroglyph languages do not align with the complexity and big work load of the courses.
- It is recommended to focus strictly on developing a few narrow fields. The department should continue to focus on its strengths – Chinese and Japanese languages – and in a long term perspective to also think about creating professorships in the fields.
- Considering the strategic importance of Middle Eastern studies, it is important to hire a native Arabic-speaking teacher who would offer students contemporary classes in written and oral Arabic and would introduce them to the language's regional, socio-cultural and political context.
- Considering the development needs of the three main studies (Chinese, Japanese and Middle Eastern studies), the library is not sufficiently equipped with relevant resources. The existing collections need supplementing (also from the budget of European Union).

- If the main teaching language of Chinese, Japanese and Arabic languages will be Estonian, the department should consider investing in the creation of learning materials in Estonian.
- It is very clear that early drop-out is a big problem in both study levels. In order to understand the reasons for dropping out, the expectations of students need to be understood.
- The university should establish a strategy for encouraging high school students, who are currently learning Chinese or Japanese, to continue in the Asian studies programme. One option would be to organize information fairs to high school students, introduce the curricula to them and figure out their expectations towards higher education.
- Considering the possible increase of students in the long perspective, it would be useful to formalize the procedures of filing complaints and solving issues, as well as implement anonymous evaluation in the programmes.
- The department needs to find resources for supporting teachers' professional development and participation in international conferences.
- In order to support younger teachers in completing their doctoral studies, their work load needs to be reduced.
- The number of teaching staff needs to increase for the teachers to focus more on research activities.
- It is recommended to include visiting lecturers from Estonia and abroad in the teaching activities. This would make the learning more eventful and would promote international co-operation in the field of research.
- Students should get a clear overview of their future career prospects and support in entering the labour market. The structure of the study programmes needs to focus on developing the practical skills necessary in the labour market. It is also important to gather information about alumni entering the working force.

### **Russian Philology (BA), Slavonic Languages and Cultures (MA)**

#### Strengths:

- The university library is very well equipped with relevant resources and students and teachers have good access to digital learning materials and databases. Many important contemporary pieces related to Russian language and culture are available. The central library is complemented by the library of the Institute of Slavonic Languages and Cultures that consists of field-specific materials donated by different organizations and individuals.
- The active and internationally respected research of the teachers is reflected in their teaching. Students are included in research projects. The teachers of the institute have won the prizes for best monograph and best textbook prize in Tallinn University's publication competition twice in the last three years.
- A variety of teaching methods is used. The structure of lectures supports students' active participation in discussions.
- Students find that the devoted, motivated and inspiring teachers in the department have created an open and friendly atmosphere and are always ready to give written and oral feedback.
- The internships within the Master's programme are well organized.

- Teachers participate actively in mobility programmes and international conferences, which is why the department is included into the IUT project for years 2014-19.
- The university provides central support for teachers' professional development and many teachers from the institute have used these opportunities (i.e. workshop about using Moodle).
- The students are highly motivated and satisfied with the study programme, learning environment and learning resources.
- Students take part in mobility programmes and have excellent command of Russian and English languages.

#### Areas of Improvement and Recommendations:

- In developing the study programmes, labour market need analysis and employers' feedback has not been taken into account.
- The university doesn't have a formal system for informing the students about feedback results or changes implemented based on it. It is recommended to formalize the process of acting upon feedback.
- The BA programme modules should include elements with a practical aim (i.e. short-term internships in editorials, data collection, work shadowing, museum visits etc.) that would also interest the students. Among other things, this would also help to decrease the number of drop-outs, collect regular feedback from employers and analyse the needs of the labour market.
- The lists of compulsory literature are rather outdated. The university should assure the existence of a required amount of copies in the library and analyse systematically the relevance of the used resources.
- The Master's programme does not include modules related to language politics and multilingual issues. It is recommended to integrate socio-political elements into subjects when possible and to analyse the position of Russian language in today's globalized world and its changing functions in the post-Soviet space.
- Considering the growth of interdisciplinary teaching in the new institute of humanities, the university should develop a general strategy to promote the uniform and transparent use of online learning platforms (such as Moodle) by all teachers.
- Dropping out is a big problem in the Bachelor's programme. To minimize it, tutoring system should be introduced to freshmen and thesis topics should be connected to practical work experiences when possible.

#### **Estonian Philology, Estonian as a Second Language and Estonian Culture, Finnish Philology (BA)**

##### Strengths:

- The graduates have very good prospects in finding relevant jobs.
- Both, students and teachers are very satisfied with the learning environment, information systems and library services (including access to electronic databases).
- Students value the flexibility of the teachers and the study programme, as well as the opportunities to join studies and work together.

- Teachers have a lot of experience and are committed to teach. Some teachers take active part in international research.
- The recent structure reform has reinforced the co-operation of teachers across different fields.
- Teachers are satisfied with internal and external communication and consider the university a good work place.

#### Areas of Improvement and Recommendations:

- The graduates of Finnish Philology do not have a suitable option to continue their studies in the next level. The university should help the students in finding options to continue their studies in University of Tartu or Finland.
- The main target group of the Estonian as a Second Language and Estonian Culture study programme are native speakers of Russian, who wish to improve their Estonian language skills. At the same time, one of the main goals of the programme is to train teachers of Estonian as a second language. Therefore, the programme seems to join two different contents. It is recommended to differentiate more between the studies of Estonian as a foreign language and the studies of teaching Estonian as a foreign language.
- The study programmes are facing a small reputation problem: regardless of good employability options, many students opt for fields with higher salary prospects.
- Both, students and teachers wish they had better mobility opportunities.
- The language skills of freshmen in the Finnish Philology programme are very uneven. The university should find a way to solve this problem.
- The students should be offered close contact with potential employers who could also give useful feedback to the teachers.
- The teaching skills of students who opt for the language teaching specialization should be developed over a longer period of time, which is why the pedagogical studies should be divided equally between BA and MA studies.
- The existing online learning resources should be used more.
- The teachers should use more the opportunities for professional development (pedagogical skills, online learning methods etc.). This should be taken into consideration in evaluating the teachers.
- To prevent student drop-out in the beginning of the studies, new students should be given a better overview of the contents of the curriculum and supported better in planning their studies.

- 10.** Point 41 of the document, 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education', establishes that the Quality Assessment Council shall approve an assessment report within three months after receipt of the report. The Council shall weigh the strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations pointed out in the assessment report, and then shall decide whether to conduct the next quality assessment of that study programme group in seven, five or three years.

11. The Council weighed the strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations referred to in point 9 of this document and found that the study programmes, the teaching conducted under these programmes, and development activities regarding teaching and learning conform to the requirements.

12. The Council

**DECIDED**

**To approve the report by the Assessment Committee and to conduct the next quality assessment of the Languages and Cultures study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at Tallinn University in 7 years.**

The decision was made with 10 yea votes and 0 nay votes.

13. Higher Education of the Estonian Quality Assurance Organization for Higher and Vocational Education will agree the next study group quality assessment time with Tallinn University by 5.05.2022.
14. The council suggests Tallinn University to present Higher Education of the Estonian Quality Assurance Organization for Higher and Vocational Education their development plan considering the areas of improvement and suggestions by 5.02.2018.
15. 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 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 the decision may be submitted within 30 days after its delivery, 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.

**Tõnu Meidla**  
**Chair of the Council**

**Hillar Bauman**  
**Secretary of the Council**