

Decision Regarding the Assessment of the Social Services Study Programme Group Tallinn University

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 Tallinn University in seven years with the following secondary condition:

Tallinn University shall submit to the Council an action plan and report on eliminating the shortcomings by 15.09.2016.

Tallinn University submitted the following study programmes for evaluation:

- Youth Work (Diploma of Professional Higher Education)
- Health Promotion Specialist (Diploma of Professional Higher Education)
- Social Pedagogy (BA)
- Social Work (BA)
- Social Work (MA)
- Social Pedagogy and Child Protection (MA)

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

- *Teaching staff are enthusiastic and consistently use modern teaching methods. The University supports staff development in every possible way.*
- *Students are capable and very motivated.*
- *Both alumni and their employers are pleased with the professional preparation and social competencies of graduates of the study programmes.*
- *Both internal and external partners are involved in study programme development.*
- *Teaching and learning facilities as well as the library are very good.*

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- *When planning and implementing improvement activities, issues of identity, internationalisation and interdisciplinarity should be clearly understood, and assimilated into the context of the study programmes.*
- *In the internal quality assurance process, the impacts of feedback from employers and students on study programme development should be more systematically addressed.*

Study Programmes Findings

YOUTH WORK (DIPLOMA OF PROFESSIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION)

Strengths

- *The study programme has been aligned with the Youth Worker professional standard.*
- *Industry practitioners have been involved in teaching.*
- *Prospective students' motivation and interest toward the profession are first identified during the admission process. This has resulted in an increased satisfaction with their studies among first-year students.*
- *Access to child care has improved the attractiveness and accessibility of the study programme for those prospective students who are already working in the field.*

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- *Higher education institutions who offer youth work programmes do not sufficiently collaborate with one another. Communication and cooperation regarding youth work programmes should be enhanced at Estonian, European and international levels.*
- *The study programme needs to be further developed taking into consideration the increasingly diversified employment opportunities in the sector and other developments in the youth field. To provide students with a clear overview of their career opportunities, the diversity of occupational profiles should be reflected at all levels of the programme.*
- *Study programme managers need to ensure that their new programme vision will also be applied to the actual teaching. The efficiency of programme implementation should be improved; currently several courses are taught to small numbers of students and lectures are often cancelled, as reported by students.*
- *A better balance among practical, theoretical and research approaches should be sought when examining youth work practice. Students who are interested in pursuing a master's degree should be supported and encouraged.*
- *It is recommended that the syllabi be revised to ensure that they fully relate to youth field specifics, and to ensure the coherency between their objectives, expected learning outcomes, content and supportive literature. In addition to non-formal education, the study programme should address other thematic areas intrinsically linked with youth work, such as youth policy and youth participation; and it should develop the critical thinking skills of students.*
- *It is recommended that the contents of youth-work-specific introductory courses be strengthened; organisation of practical training be made more flexible; overlaps between courses be eliminated; the support provided to students be improved (including feedback on their written assignments); and the international dimension of the study programme be expanded, including international staff and student mobility. Employers believe that the study programme could have a greater impact both in Estonia and abroad by more effectively integrating the unique strengths of the youth*

field in Estonia, such as youth work quality assessment, professionalisation of the youth field, etc.

- *To avoid unnecessary stress with regard to workload and deadlines piling up, the amounts of ECTS credits should be uniform across semesters; currently it fluctuates considerably.*
- *E-learning environments need to be made more user-friendly. Available teaching materials in English should be better integrated with teaching and learning. Given the recent structural reforms at Tallinn University and the launch of a Youth Work MA programme, it is time to have a critical look at the current teaching methods.*
- *The condition of teaching facilities is unsatisfactory at present, but in autumn 2015 study programme lectures will be accommodated in the University campus where it is absolutely necessary to furnish a lecture hall that enables use of the teaching methods specific for youth work.*
- *Students should be given adequate meaningful feedback on their academic progress and grades.*
- *Most of the courses are conducted by a relatively small number of lecturers who need additional support to improve their professional competencies and motivation, particularly in the light of recent developments in the youth field. Contacts with the youth sector should be used to recruit external lecturers who would provide additional professional expertise.*
- *The University should use the opportunity created by the launch of the master degree programme in Youth Work to motivate and guide the teaching staff by diversifying their roles and professional profiles. The teaching staff should be encouraged to acquire youth worker professions themselves in accordance with current professional standards, and this process should be used to identify needs for staff training, while also promoting international cooperation and mobility.*
- *International student mobility rates are low and student links with the working world are weak. The dropout rate is high.*
- *Students get more support from each other than from management. Organisation of studies make it difficult for students to combine work and studies. Some students seem to be inadequately informed of career opportunities in the youth field. Students should be encouraged to connect with the professional youth work networks. When planning support measures for students, the interests of those students who must work to finance their studies should be better addressed.*

HEALTH PROMOTION SPECIALIST (DIPLOMA OF PROFESSIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION, TU HAAPSALU COLLEGE)

Strengths

- *The small size of the College allows it to implement necessary changes in a fast and flexible manner.*
- *The study programme is unique. It is the only programme in the health promotion field that is not a part of medicine studies and therefore it is possible to involve students from different backgrounds.*
- *Graduate employment rates are high. Alumni and their employers are pleased with the professional preparation and social competencies of graduates.*
- *The study programme includes a large number of practical tasks. The College closely collaborates with employers ensuring the students find necessary internships and joint projects.*
- *Leading specialists of the field are involved in teaching. Teaching staff participates in professional organisations and projects.*
- *Students are motivated and capable. Dropout rates are relatively low and the proportion of students graduating in a timely manner is above average. Students participate in mobility programmes.*

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- *Representatives of different groups have different and often conflicting views with regard to the need for this study programme. The general concept of the programme must be clearly defined and potential career fields for graduates specified. Labour market requirements need to be studied to better define the objectives of the programme.*
- *It is not clear how a health promotion specialist's practice relates to social work and rehabilitation either in concept or in actual practice on the job. Students representing the 'Nutrition Counselling' specialisation seemed to be clearer about their employment potentials than those from the 'Health Promotion' specialisation.*
- *Although the programme is classified as a professional higher education programme, the specific skills related to service provision are not clearly defined nor reflected in the expected learning outcomes. Relations between modules and their objectives/learning outcomes are not always clear. The wording of objectives and learning outcomes is too broad and general.*
- *Better availability of learning materials in Estonian must be provided because some students have difficulty learning from materials offered in foreign languages.*
- *Teaching staff's international mobility must be increased. The teaching staff should participate more actively in research projects.*
- *Students' foreign language skills are inadequate – most of them are not able to read materials in English or to participate in international mobility. More foreign language courses, especially English courses should be offered to students.*

- *According to students, they are not interested in jobs in the health promotion field, they just wish to widen their knowledge and increase their professionalism in their current positions. If this is the case, in-service training courses should be offered instead of a full-time study programme.*
- *Greater attention should be given to developing students' entrepreneurial skills.*

SOCIAL PEDAGOGY (BA, TU RAKVERE COLLEGE)

Strengths

- *The objectives of the study programme are based on legislation and the labour market needs. The study programme is important to society because there is a great need for social pedagogues in Estonia, and its relevance has been emphasised by different stakeholders as well. Industry experts give their input to the study programme, particularly with regard to practical trainings.*
- *Due to reform of higher education funding in Estonia, the number of students is increasing, indicating the sustainability and viability of the study programme. The relevance and appeal of the study programme is demonstrated by the number of applicants from different backgrounds throughout Estonia. Despite the fact that the majority of students are working, their motivation to study is very high.*
- *Classrooms are well equipped for teaching and learning.*
- *A counselling system is in place and effectively targets the relevant groups.*
- *Teaching staff are well supported, being provided with in-service trainings and are encouraged to participate in conferences and seminars. Individual support is offered to the staff in the use of electronic devices and modern methodologies.*
- *Surveys have been conducted among students, employers and alumni to improve the relevance and quality of the programme.*
- *Graduates of this study programme, when compared with graduates of other pedagogy study programmes, possess superior skills and competences that enable them to work more effectively with children that have special needs and to provide counselling in schools.*

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- *The contents and workloads of compulsory, elective and optional blocks should be revised. The majority of electives seem to be important courses and could be mandatory for all students in the Social Pedagogy programme despite differences in their professional interests. Workloads of some courses and related practical trainings (e.g. 'Structure and Methods of Research') should be revised to ensure that ECTS credits correspond to the objectives and expected learning outcomes of courses.*

- *The College should ensure that students have better access to digital learning tools and databases. The library could be better supplied with professional literature.*
- *A more frequent use of creative and flexible teaching methods supporting students' professional development is recommended. A broader use of digital teaching methods is needed. The College should offer additional trainings in the use of digital learning systems for both students and teaching staff.*
- *The College should encourage teaching staff to participate in international conferences and to increase their international mobility.*
- *Workloads of the teaching staff need to be revised to ensure that they are equitable and manageable. At present workloads are too heavy and this may suppress lecturers' motivation and hamper their professional development.*
- *According to stakeholders, more attention should be given in both the teaching and expected learning outcomes regarding how to work with people who have special needs as well as the socially and economically disadvantaged.*

SOCIAL WORK (BA, MA)

Strengths

- *The learning environment is modern and aesthetically appealing. The library is well equipped and students also have access to electronic databases. The use of Moodle is well integrated into the teaching and learning process.*
- *Students assess teaching skills of the teaching staff positively. Recognised visiting lecturers and industry practitioners are involved in teaching. The teaching and learning process is consistently evaluated and reviewed using various forms of evaluation. Industry practitioners are involved in the evaluation of learning outcomes, practical trainings and theses.*
- *The teaching staff is engaged in the development of professional and teaching skills. There is a good balance between the experienced and new lecturers who enrich teaching with newer methods, as well as with international approaches to social innovation. The teaching staff use innovative and interactive approaches to teaching and the University supports their development. The teaching staff are highly committed to teaching.*
- *The BA programme includes a wide and rich variety of modules and courses, offering many options to students. The objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme are relevant and clearly formulated.*
- *The MA programme tries to adjust to society's changing needs, including to national and international requirements within the field of social work.*

- *A strong emphasis is placed on international collaboration, and both students and teaching staff have close contacts within a number of European countries.*
- *In the master degree studies the student dropout rate is low.*

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- *Teaching staff lack adequate funding to attend international conferences. They also need more support to develop their teaching skills.*
- *More teaching staff with PhDs are needed to strengthen the theoretical base of the programmes, but the tremendous workload of the current lecturers without PhDs does not allow them to pursue doctoral degrees. The University must also ensure that the lecturers have enough time for research, by optimising the teaching process, for example.*
- *Feedback needs to be systematically collected from all stakeholders. A clear plan for collecting and using student feedback should be developed.*
- *The structure of the BA programme and principles for choosing the courses should be clearly formulated. Students need more guidance regarding the different choices within study programmes. Practical training should be clearly linked to the specialisation chosen by a student.*
- *In the BA programme the student dropout rate is high.*
- *Admission requirements for the MA programme should be reviewed and more effectively differentiated in order to take into account applicants' prior professional studies or work experiences, and to better estimate their ability to achieve the learning outcomes of the study programme.*
- *There are several overlaps between the BA and MA programmes regarding their objectives, modules and courses. The differences between these programmes should be more clearly identified.*
- *The contents of some modules should be better linked to the topics of the modules. Different courses could be better related to one another.*
- *The relationships between study programme development, student feedback and labour market needs should be clearly identified.*
- *Students' workload could be distributed more evenly within study periods and examination sessions.*
- *A common teaching and learning strategy should be developed to more systematically apply modern student-centred teaching methods. Certain courses and examinations could be at least partially conducted in a digital environment.*
- *Teaching staff should establish a balance between professional and research skills that students under their supervision need to acquire.*

SOCIAL PEDAGOGY AND CHILD PROTECTION (MA)

Strengths

- *Development of the study programme is based on legislation, development plans, various analyses (including labour market analyses) and professional standards. The study programme has been developed in*

close collaboration with employers, and feedback from various stakeholders is also taken into account.

- *The learning environment is modern and aesthetically appealing. The library is well equipped and students also have access to electronic databases.*
- *New and interactive teaching methods are applied. The use of Moodle is well integrated into teaching and learning.*
- *New trends in social work are also included in the study programme. The programme is flexible and the interests of working students are taken into account when using distance learning.*
- *Students assess positively the teaching skills of the teaching staff. The staff often utilise mobility opportunities under the Erasmus programme to visit and teach at other European universities.*
- *Students are highly motivated. Their motivation is tested during the admission procedure. Graduate employment rates are high. Alumni and their employers are pleased with the professional preparation and social competencies of graduates.*

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- *Since students with bachelor's degrees in fields unrelated to social pedagogy or social sciences are also enrolled in the programme, it is not clear how the University ensures that all students acquire a basic knowledge of the speciality and then deepen it during their master degree studies. It is necessary to specify what prior knowledge is required for master degree studies and what to require from the students who have completed other bachelor degree programmes.*
- *Combining the fields of social pedagogy and child protection in one programme needs a clear theoretical rationale. The current programme does not form a coherent whole and it is not clear whether it is possible to acquire the competencies needed for both areas under a single MA programme. All required competencies for working as a child protection specialist should be defined in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Affairs and incorporated in the study programme.*
- *The students who met with the committee had poor theoretical understanding of social pedagogy. It is necessary to ensure that students are provided with the required theoretical preparation.*
- *Although there is a close interaction with foreign universities, there is a lack of stable international partnerships regarding the two main areas of the study programme. Teaching staff lack adequate funding to attend international conferences.*
- *Assessment of students should be uniform and transparent.*
- *An internationalisation of the study programme is needed. Since it is complicated to improve the mobility of working students, the University should focus on internationalisation at the home site.*

- *Although the teaching staff is highly qualified in general, there is a lack of lecturers with competencies in the fields of social pedagogy and child protection.*
- *Only a small number of students complete their studies in a timely manner and the dropout rate is high. International student mobility is insufficient and it should be encouraged.*

The Council weighed the strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations and found that the study programmes, the teaching conducted under these programmes and development activities regarding teaching and learning conform to the requirements if the University eliminates the following shortcomings related to the Youth Work, Health Promotion Specialist, as well as to Social Pedagogy and Child Protection programmes:

a) Youth Work

- *Higher education institutions offering youth work programmes do not sufficiently collaborate with one another.*
- *The new programme vision is not sufficiently applied in practical teaching or learning.*
- *Several courses are taught with very small numbers of students and lectures are often cancelled.*
- *Theoretical aspects of the speciality are not given sufficient attention while examining the youth work practice.*
- *There are overlaps between the courses; consistency between syllabi and the specifics of the youth field needs to be improved.*
- *Most courses are conducted by a relatively small number of lecturers, who need additional support to further develop their professional competencies and motivation, particularly in the light of recent developments in the field.*
- *International student mobility rates are low and student links with the working world are weak. The dropout rate is high.*

b) Health Promotion Specialist

- *Representatives of different groups have different and often conflicting views with regard to the need for this study programme. The correlation of objectives of the programme with labour market needs is not clearly defined.*
- *It is not clear how health promotion practice relates to social work and rehabilitation either in concept or in actual practice on the job.*
- *Although it is classified as a professional higher education programme, the specific skills related to service provision are not clearly defined or*

reflected in the expected learning outcomes. Relationships between modules and their objectives/learning outcomes are not always clear. The wording of objectives and learning outcomes is too broad and general.

- *Students' foreign language skills are inadequate – most of them are not able to read materials in English or to participate in international mobility.*

c) Social Pedagogy and Child Protection

- *It is not clear how the University ensures that the students who lack a basic education in social sciences acquire that basic knowledge of the field. As such, the content and structure of the study programme are not in accordance with its objectives and learning outcomes.*
- *There is no clear theoretical rationale for combining the fields of social pedagogy and child protection in one programme. The current programme does not form a coherent whole and it is not clear whether it is possible to acquire the competencies needed for both areas under a single MA programme.*
- *Students have poor theoretical understanding of social pedagogy.*
- *There is a lack of teaching staff with competencies in the fields of social pedagogy and child protection.*
- *Only a small number of students complete their studies in a timely manner and the dropout rate is high. International student mobility is insufficient.*

Further information:

Assessment Report