

**Assessment Report**

**Performing Arts**

University of Tartu

Tallinn University

Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre

2017

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## Introduction

Quality assessment of a study programme group involves the assessment of the conformity of study programmes and the studies and development activities that take place on their basis to legislation, national and international standards and developmental directions with the purpose of providing recommendations to improve the quality of studies.

The goal of quality assessment of a study programme group is supporting the internal evaluation and self-development of the institution of higher education. Quality assessment of study programme groups is not followed by sanctions: expert assessments should be considered recommendations.

Quality assessment of a study programme group takes place at least once every 7 years based on the regulation approved by EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education and.

The aim of the assessment team was the evaluation of the Study Programme Group (SPG) of Performing Arts in three higher education institutions: University of Tartu, Tallinn University and Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre.

The team was asked to assess the conformity of the study programmes belonging to the study programme group and the instruction provided on the basis thereof to legislation and to national and international standards and/or recommendations, including the assessment of the level of the corresponding theoretical and practical instruction, the research and pedagogical qualification of the teaching staff and research staff, and the sufficiency of resources for the provision of instruction.

The following persons formed the assessment team:

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The assessment process was coordinated by Reet Taimsoo (EKKA).

After the preparation phase, the work of the assessment team in Estonia started on Monday, 30 October 2017, with an introduction to the Higher Education System as well as the assessment procedure by EKKA, the Estonian quality agency for higher and vocational education. The members of the team agreed the overall questions and areas to discuss with each group at the two institutions, who were part of the assessment process. The distribution of tasks between the members of the assessment team was

organised and the detailed schedule of the site visits agreed.

During the following days, meetings were held with the representatives of the University of Tartu (Tuesday 31 October and Wednesday 1 November), the Tallinn University (Thursday 2 November) and Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre (Friday 3 November). In all cases, the schedule for discussion on site for each of the various study programmes only allowed for short time slots to be available for team members to exchange information, discuss conclusions and implications for further questions.

On Saturday, November 4, the team held an all-day meeting, during which both the structure of the final report was agreed and findings of team meetings were compiled in a first draft of the assessment report. This work was executed in a cooperative way and the members of the team intensively discussed their individual views on the relevant topics.

In the following two sections, the assessment team shall summarise their general findings, conclusions and recommendations which are relevant across the whole SPG. In so doing, the team provides an external and objective perspective on the programmes and the contexts within which they are delivered. Ultimately, the intention is to provide constructive comment and critique which may form the basis upon which improvements in the quality of the programmes may be achieved. In formulating its recommendations, however, the assessment team has not evaluated the financial feasibility associated with their implementation.

## General findings and recommendations

The professional performing arts landscape within Estonia is evolving, while the traditional repertoire system that requires the maintenance of building-based ensembles of actors, dancers or musicians is still the dominant model, a broader ecology of performing arts practices is emerging. The universities responsible for training and education in the Performing Arts field, which have developed their roles over many decades in relation to traditional models, are now beginning to recognise the need to take more account of the future perspectives of a new generation of students who will emerge, as graduates, into a more diverse and challenging Performing Arts sector.

The Estonian Higher Education sector is also in a process of evolution and this has led to recent structural developments such as the merger of HEI's, an increased emphasis on employer engagement with curriculum development, and a more delineated emphasis on regional needs. A key recent development within the national Higher Education landscape has been the organisation of subject disciplines into Study Programme Groups (SPG) and the distribution of responsibilities for particular subjects within each study discipline to specific HE providers. While this approach has merit in terms of the organisation of HE study on a national level it was evident to the team that in order to achieve the best possible study environment for, and future development of, the Performing Arts and artistic research at all three levels of Higher Education, further consideration of institutional structures and the division of work between HEIs on a national level needs to be undertaken.

Any such future consideration should also take into account the opportunities afforded by a recently founded cooperation network for performing arts between higher education institutions in Estonia. The explicit purpose of this network is to strengthen cooperation in the field of arts education. Established in the framework of the EMASTRA project (financed from the European Regional Development Fund) for development of the quality and efficiency of education and research, its members include the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre, Tallinn University, University of Tartu (including the Viljandi Culture Academy), and the Estonian Academy of Arts. The stated goal of this network is *“to identify avenues of sustainable cooperation, which would result in better education and more competitive graduates”*.

While the Performing Arts, and the related higher education study routes into this field of professional practice, are highly valued in Estonian society the subject faces a range of challenges. This includes relatively low levels of funding invested in up-to-date physical resources to support the subject in HEI's, a comparatively low salary level for university teachers and, in some cases, a relatively low ratio of applications for student places provided by study programmes.

It became evident for the team during the assessment process that while the performing arts benefit from the strong support and appreciation of the Estonian public, new co-operative activities at the national-level (such as the network mentioned above) are needed to successfully meet current and future challenges in both arts education and in the field of professional performing arts practice. The team hopes that the new network will take the initiative to clarify the purposes and aims of each of the performing arts programmes in Estonia, and ensure that the overall provision is comprehensive in terms of the study and progression routes available.

The team was also convinced that there is need for a nation-wide discussion between different subject fields (e.g. contemporary and traditional Estonian dance, traditional music, contemporary theatre, etc.), the relevant cultural institutions and associations, government ministries, and other organizations involved in art education on all levels. It was evident to the team that such an initiative, suggested by both students and employers that were met during interviews with these groups, would make a positive contribution to the future development of Estonian culture.

Each of the three universities that the team visited as part of its evaluation process is currently offering studies in either traditional music or traditional dance (folk dance), or programmes in both of these subjects. Given the strategic importance of these subjects within Estonian culture there may be significant benefits to students, employers and cultural organisations in undertaking a holistic review of this provision to determine how best to ensure that it can continue to flourish. Such a review may wish to consider the regrouping of this provision together in one institution or the facilitation of a coordinated cross-institutional approach to the curriculum content and pedagogic emphasis of each programme. For example; such a review may wish to give consideration to which dance programme is concentrating on teacher education and community work with 'different national bodies', which programme would foster traditional Estonian dance/choreography/music in the best possible way, which is concentrating on contemporary dance education and which specifically on contemporary choreography, while still taking into account the needs of the labour market and employment.

### Strengths

- The Performing Arts and the related entry routes through Higher Education are highly valued in Estonian society.

- A new network for higher arts education institutions in Estonia has been established in order to strengthen cooperation between the providers of Performing Arts training and education.

#### Recommendations

- Based on the interviews the team carried out with staff, students, graduates and employers during the evaluation process, the team recommends that a nation-wide discussion be held regarding the purposes and aims of individual performing arts programmes within the HE structure of Estonia.
- The team believes that the network for higher Estonian arts education institutions should initiate discussions with theatre and dance institutions, and professionals in the field, to clarify the role of performing arts programmes in the Estonian cultural landscape, and thereby to strengthen the individual programmes and the professional fields.

# 1. Assessment report of SPG at the University of Tartu

## 1.1. Introduction

The University of Tartu that was established in 1632 as Academia Gustaviana has been reborn a number of times throughout its history.

According to the University of Tartu Act adopted on 16 February 1995, the University of Tartu is the national university of the Republic of Estonia. Its mission is to advance science and culture, provide the possibilities for the acquisition of higher education based on the development of science and technology on the three levels of higher education in the field of humanities, social, medical and natural sciences and to provide public services based on teaching, research and other creative activities.

All the curricula in the Performing Arts study programme group are led by the University of Tartu Viljandi Culture Academy (UT VCA), and one curriculum is conducted together with Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre (coordinated by the University of Tartu). All the professional higher education curricula in the study programme group are 240 ECTS with nominal duration of 4 years. The master's level curricula are 120 ECTS with nominal duration of 2 years.

UT VCA is a regional college that belongs to the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at UT. The faculty was formed following the structural reform that came into effect on 01. January 2016.

UT VCA has offered specialized culture education since 1952. In 1991 the former Viljandi Culture School was reorganized into college providing applied higher education in different areas of culture. After reconstruction of Estonian higher education system, the Academy joined the University of Tartu in 2005.

UT VCA has four academic departments. The curricula in the Performing Arts programme group belong to Performing Arts Department (Theatrical Studies, Theatre Technical Arts, and Dance Art curricula) and Music Department (Music and Traditional Music curricula). The two other departments in Viljandi Culture Academy are Culture Education Department and Estonian Native Crafts Department. From 2017, also the Centre of Arts (located in Tartu) was merged with UT VCA.

**Table 1.** Curricula of the Performing Arts study programme group

Study programme	Level of study	Year of opening	ECTS	Nominal duration (years)	Language of instruction	Year of closing	Institution
Jazz Music	Prof. HE	2002	240	4	Estonian	2019	UT VCA

Traditional Music	Prof. HE	2002	240	4	Estonian	2019	UT VCA
Music	Prof. HE	2014	240	4	Estonian		UT VCA
School Music	BA	2003	180	3	Estonian	2020	UT VCA
Dance Art	Prof. HE	2002	240	4	Estonian		UT VCA
Theatrical Studies	Prof. HE	2003	240	4	Estonian		UT VCA
Theatre Technical Arts	Prof. HE	2003	240	4	Estonian		UT VCA
Sound Engineering Arts	Master's	2011	120	2	English	2020	UT VCA / TU
Traditional Music	Master's	2010	120	2	Estonian		UT VCA / EMTA

**Table 2.** Number of students and graduates in Performing Arts study programme group, 2012-2016

Study programme	No of students					No of graduates				
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Jazz music (Prof. HE)	44	38	26	20	12	2	4	9	4	6
Traditional Music (Prof. HE)	22	24	18	13	10	3		3	3	1
Music (Prof. HE)			25	62	105					
School Music (BA)	56	61	53	42	25	8	4	11	8	7
Dance Art (Prof. HE)	57	55	52	47	45	9	10	8	9	7
Theatrical Studies (Prof. HE)	34	40	37	40	39		14	1	16	
Theatre Technical Arts (Prof. HE)	40	37	42	38	52	7	1	16	2	6
Sound Engineering Arts (MA)	9	11	14	14	6			2	2	6
Traditional Music (MA)	7	11	9	10		8	1	2	4	2

Source: UT Office of Academic Affairs (2017)

## 1.2. General findings and recommendations at the study programme group level

### Study programmes and study programme development

In the meeting with the UT VCA Management Team, managers outlined an energetic and strategic approach to the integration of curricula and the encouragement of horizontal structures for communication and programme development. The Team also affirmed the strong commitment of the Academy to the preservation, development and promotion of Estonian cultural traditions balanced with contemporary and leading-edge practice. Discussion with the managers revealed that the Academy is

strategic in the development of its programmes, deliberately seeking to offer complementary study routes to those available in other Estonian HEI's, thereby increasing choice for applicants in the study fields of the programme group. This energy and sense of purpose springs from the foundation of support from the University of Tartu which has taken the academy under its wing whilst allowing it a strong element of independence.

As a result, the management of the academy whilst still maintaining a traditional hierarchical structure has been emboldened to develop and change management practices to encourage horizontal communication between all strata of the academy. This has led to a blossoming of student-led initiatives which the management then support and help to develop. The decision to include a course in entrepreneurship for all students of Professional Higher Education Programmes recognises that these student-led initiatives foretell a future change in working practices where the students may choose to develop their own work individually or in groups rather than join existing companies.

Alongside this support there has been an integration of the curricula that has been designed with the intention of deepening and extending the students' access to a wider range of teaching expertise and physical resources. This also encourages collaboration between students from different disciplines as they are often working alongside each other. As a further response to the growing independence of student work there is a developing strategy for student international mobility which enriches the student environment and enhances future career possibilities.

The study programme group regularly gathers formal feedback from students, graduates and employers through a variety of means, including written questionnaires. Students have opportunity to provide formal feedback on their experience throughout their programme of study, this includes anonymised feedback on teaching and study modules through the University's Study Information System (SIS). Employers also contribute to the development of curriculum through their participation in Programme Councils, Assessment Committees and in providing feedback on students who have undertaken a period of work-based learning in their organisations. However, the SER states students do not fully engage with the electronic feedback system provided (via SIS), leading to a poor return of data and, that over recent years, no formal survey of alumni has taken place. These gaps in the formal feedback system risk an over-reliance on unevaluated anecdotal feedback from students and graduates to guide strategic decisions.

Discussions held with employers confirmed that VCA works closely with the professional field and that the range of knowledge and skills possessed by graduates of the programmes are both current and highly valued. Employers also commented positively on the integrated nature of the curriculum and the interaction between programmes and departments that is actively encouraged by the Academy.

### Strengths

- The Academy's clear-sighted, visionary, pro-active and dynamic leadership and management provides an environment in which programmes can continue to flourish.
- VCA has an energetic and enthusiastic management team committed to encouraging an integrated approach to curriculum design, and a collaborative

approach to learning and teaching while actively examining the way that the recently re-structured study programme group is running and seeking to implement improvements and enhancements as it unfolds.

- The revised structure of the study programme group offers a broad base of learning in the academic and theoretical content that supports the specialised learning and practical work undertaken within each study discipline.
- The VCA strategy to develop provision that offers alternative study routes and modes of study to those available in other Estonian HEI's, thus increasing choice for applicants in the study field.
- The integrated nature of all the study programmes, which also offers a number of study disciplines that are unique in Estonia.
- The opportunities for students to engage directly with the related field of professional practice and to undertake learning in professional contexts.
- The variety of ways in which employers are able to contribute to the development of curriculum.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The complex nature of the curriculum structure and the degree of challenge this offers to both programme managers and teachers. The SER identifies a number of planned actions aimed at achieving a more measured approach to managing integrated curricula, these need to be implemented as soon as possible so as to secure the full benefits of integration while also ensuring that the planning and timetabling of curriculum delivery is sustainable.
- The management should ensure that all the formal means of eliciting feedback from students and graduates are functioning fully so as to complement and balance informal feedback.

### **Resources of UT VCA**

The VCA buildings offer a pleasant study environment and some adaptation has been undertaken so as to provide for wheelchair access, through the retrofitting of ramps and lifts. There is sufficient classroom and office space, and areas for student recreation and a canteen providing good quality food. The resources available to the study programme group are sufficient to enable students to meet the learning outcomes of their programme.

In addition to classrooms and lecture halls, students of the acting and directing specialisms have access to a small black box studio for developing individual projects and a larger and more flexible black box theatre that is adequately equipped with the associated technical resources for lighting and sound. However, the lack of proper dance studios with professional spring floors is a problem for the dance programme. There are already plans for solving this problem.

The students also have access to a well-equipped multimedia facility that also houses a TV studio facility with green screen. There is also a gallery where technical students can display their work, and acting and directing students can stage both curriculum-related

and self-generated projects.

VCA actively encourages the cross-disciplinary use of all its practical resources, which broadens both the formal and informal learning opportunities offered to students. The VCA management team outlined its plans to convert part of one its buildings into a new dance studio in the future, this will help to ease pressure on other resources and offer a new space for movement study. In addition to the resources housed within VCA, students are also able to access a range of professional facilities when they are undertaking practical projects hosted by external organisations, including professional theatres.

Discussion with VCA managers revealed that while there is currently a sufficiency of technical equipment to support student learning in the theatre space, the University does not appear to have a depreciation policy in place that ensures that the necessary technical equipment can be replaced when it comes to the end of its useful life or can be maintained and repaired as necessary. While the technical equipment in the theatre space is currently adequate for the day-to-day learning needs of the students, the on-going maintenance, repair and up-dating of these resources is not securely underpinned by a ring-fenced budget for this purposes. Given the importance of the performance space to student learning on the Theatre studies programme, this is a matter that needs to be addressed by VCA, in partnership with the University, to ensure that a secure long-term position is achieved.

Students have access to the VCA library as well as to all the learning resources available at the University of Tartu and via a common database (ESTER) have access to all libraries of Estonian higher education institutions. In addition students can access learning material through an inter-library loan system and also have access to international publications through a range of digital databases. Students and staff expressed their satisfaction with the resources available to them, while they would appreciate having access to an increased number and range of physical resources within VCA both groups confirmed that the current level of resource was sufficient to meet the required learning outcomes.

### Strengths

- A well-situated campus, offering a pleasant learning environment that facilitates social interaction between students and both reflects and promotes the integrated and collaborative approach to teaching and learning that is encouraged by the Academy.
- The supportive attitude of the professional theatres and other cultural facilities within the local area and across the region.
- The strategic and flexible approach of the Academy to the cross-disciplinary use of practical resources.

### Recommendations

- The projected new dance studio should be confirmed and implemented as soon as possible so as to ease pressure on current resources and offer a new facility in the future.

- The ongoing maintenance, repair and up-dating of technical resources that are critical to student learning should not be reliant on the devolved budget received by VCA from the University that may fluctuate from year-to-year. The ongoing provision of these resources needs to be secured with ring-fenced funding which needs to take full account of the depreciation of such equipment.

## Teaching and learning in UT VCA

The academic structures developed by the VCA management team promote an energetic and conducive learning environment that supports and encourages the development of the student from trainee professional into a professional artist in the workplace. The Academy is also very active in developing both informal and formal project opportunities that enable and encourage students from the disciplines of theatre studies, music, dance, technical theatre arts to learn together when they are studying at a general level and to learn across disciplines at an elective level whilst also specialising in their own field. There is also an encouragement of student-led initiatives as part of the learning process which coheres with the objective of producing trained and skilled professional actors and directors who can both fit into the workplace and also make work of their own, through developing both individual or group projects.

Some aspects of social development are embedded within the curriculum common to all VCA students in Professional Higher Education Programmes, for example entrepreneurial skills are developed through two modules (*Basic Course for Creative Entrepreneur, Practical Training for Entrepreneur*) and communication and teamwork skills are formally developed through a *Personality and Social Psychology* module. Other social skills, such as digital literacy, foreign language skills and presentation skills are developed through other aspects of the curriculum, the range of elective modules available, the demands of creative project work and (staff and student) international exchange.

The staff, students and employers all confirmed, in their respective meetings, that the integrated nature of the curricula, with the opportunities that it provides for undertaking collaborative projects that closely replicate the working environment of professional performing arts was a distinctive feature of VCA programmes and helped the students to make a smooth transition into professional practice. Over recent years a significant number of graduates have gone on to further study at MA level at EAMT, University of Tartu and University of Tallinn in closely related study areas.

Student mobility is strongly encouraged by VCA and it has established an administrative support structure to enable students to engage with the Erasmus scheme. Students can take foreign language courses (English and German) as part of their elective programme and student feedback on language courses is positive. However, because all the programmes are taught in the Estonian language, there are virtually no foreign degree students.

### Strengths

- The interdisciplinary nature of the provision offers a distinctive approach to education and training that plays a unique role in the Estonian performing arts landscape.
- The integrated nature of the curricula that provides opportunities for collaborative projects and helps students to make a smooth transition into professional practice.
- The broad academic choices afforded students locally, nationally and internationally contribute to enriching professional performing arts practice and professional training in the performing arts in Estonia.

### Recommendations

- The team recommends the UT VCA to encourage pursuit of comprehensive international development to enhance programmes and provide increased mobility opportunities and support to Academy staff and students.
- While recognition of prior learning (RPL) is integrated into the University statutes, at present its technological implementation is problematic: ongoing communication with IT and a new electronic environment to process these should help.
- UT VCA may wish to consider its language policy in order to improve the internationalization of the Performing Arts Study Programme Group.

### **Teaching staff in UT VCA**

The University of Tartu requires that teaching staff continue to develop their subject expertise and maintain an up-to-date knowledge of pedagogical practices and teaching staff's performance is periodically evaluated in relation to these aspects. Evaluation is based on student feedback and on the basis of public output, as well as on the ongoing development of teaching skills. UT provides a range of training courses for staff that enable both new and experienced teaching staff members to continually develop their teaching expertise. In the meeting with teaching staff it was confirmed that teaching staff based at VCA are making use of these formal staff development opportunities. The outcome of the feedback collated from student questionnaires indicates that student assessment of the teaching skills of their teaching staff is broadly positive.

The strategic objectives of both UT and VCA embrace an international perspective. At the meeting with managers it was confirmed that VCA both supports and strongly encourages the international engagement and mobility of its academic staff. There is mobility between professional work and teaching, but international mobility is restricted due to problems of language and finance.

According to the SER, the salaries of the teaching staff are in accordance with the University of Tartu minimum standards, but they do not guarantee sustainability in the long run. Relatively low salary levels present an institutional challenge in competing for

the best available teaching staff.

### Strengths

- The mutual respect that has been established between Academy's staff, students, alumni and stakeholders provides a secure basis for the ongoing development of its programmes.
- The university offers ongoing support for the teaching staff to develop their teaching expertise.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Teachers' salary levels are currently set at UT's minimum level. This weakens the institution scope to attract best available teachers and artists.

## **Students**

The overall number of students in University of Tartu has decreased over the past five years mainly due to demographic situation in Estonia. However the overall student numbers at UT VCA has remained quite stable. At the beginning of the 2017 year, there were 674 students studying at UT VCA.

The applications for study places is varying from 1:1 to 4,8:1. There is virtually no competition for study places in Traditional Music (MA). The highest competition for places is in Theatrical Studies (which is typical in this study subject) which has an application ratio of over four applicants per one study place.

The average dropout rate for the five curricula in the study programme group was in 2015/16 9,5%. This is below the average of all the curricula in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities (17%) at UT. Highest dropout rates are in Traditional Music MA and Dance ART (Prof. HE). UT VCA may consider establishing a mentoring scheme between alumni and present students in order to help support their studies and prevent interruptions.

According to interviews, in terms of health and wellbeing, Tartu has a consultant and psychologist. However, in difficult cases, regarding assessment, bullying, or any other form of harassment, there is a need for formal confidential system that enables students to seek confidential help and advice or to make formal complaint. It is the responsibility of the University and all its staff members to inform students from whom, and how, they can seek help and advice in difficult situations.

Given that all the programmes within Study Programme Group are taught in the Estonian language, there are virtually no international degree students. The number of international exchange students has varied from 3 to 9 in the period 2012-2016. The number of outgoing students has been approximately twice the number of the incoming students.

Strengths

- In support of the health and wellbeing, the University of Tartu employs a consultant and psychologist.

Areas of improvement/recommendations

- UT VCA should consider ways to open access to students with disabilities and special needs.
- UT VCA may consider establishing an active mentoring scheme between alumni and present students.
- The confidential systems that facilitate complaints regarding assessment, bullying, or any form of harassment could be more structured. Students and staff should be fully informed of what is available and how students can access these systems.

## 1.3. Strengths and areas for improvement of study programmes by assessment areas

### 1.3.1. Music (Prof HE)

#### **Study programme and study programme development**

The new Professional Higher Music Education programme was initiated three years ago following discussions on a national level integrating all stakeholders. Today, it integrates four specialties: sound engineering, school music, rhythm music and traditional music. This single curriculum provides a core Music module and unified learning outcomes. The decision to develop a "rhythm" specialty expands the music provision beyond jazz to also encompass popular music. Feedback from employers, professional organisations, students and alumni as well as institutional and national guidelines is taken into account when developing the curricula on an ongoing basis. In the case of students, feedback is gathered at the end of the first and second to last semester of the fourth year. Procedures used are in accordance with the UT regulations.

The programme is also open to part-time students. Giving feedback is encouraged and the small size of the cohort and hands-on organization facilitate student teacher exchange.

The course provision is large, and students can benefit from many courses offered at UT and other Estonian universities in the Master's programme.

General competencies included are the development of compulsory entrepreneurship education, foreign language proficiency through delivery of certain courses and invitations made to foreign professors to conduct masterclasses and workshops. Digital competencies are part of all specialties, as is knowledge of sound technology. Collaborative concert projects are led by students.

According to the SER and interviews, students have indicated that there are too many general course requirements. Students do not always seem to understand how these relate to their learning objectives. The SER indicates the Department is looking to better inform them as to the way in which such courses help to achieve the overall learning outcomes. The team agrees that perhaps there either needs to be a better connection between the course requirements and the learning objectives or fewer course requirements that adhere to the objectives.

In general, the Music Programme meets the standards of programme development and delivery. The labour market and feasibility analysis have been carried out. The majority of graduates have found jobs in the field and clearly, graduates are largely present in school music teaching (kindergartens, preschool music, hobby schools) regionally and throughout Estonia.

According to the SER and interviews UT VCA has an important role in teacher training in music and dance. Many high school as well as hobby school teachers trained in Tallinn decide to stay in the capital after graduation and are not willing to relocate to work in

other regions. Because many of the UT VCA graduates will stay to teach outside of the main cities, UT VCA has an important regional role in ensuring music and dance education for the country as a whole.

The new curriculum requires rhythm music students to complete the sound engineering and teaching of musical instrument pedagogy course module. "Practical Training for Entrepreneurs" was introduced as a result of student feedback relevant to reform of the cross-institutional module of general courses. Both of these can be seen as strengthening the foundations of the specialist teaching.

### Strengths

- The combination of four strands into one curriculum and the integration of school music and sound engineering modules into the rhythm music module constitute a strength.
- The programme is flexible and is open to part-time students.
- Feedback is compulsory at the end of the semester and the small size of the cohort and hands-on organization facilitate student teacher exchange. This feedback is discussed with the students once all the feedback is gathered.
- The course provision is large, and students can benefit from many courses offered at UT and other Estonian universities in the Master's programme.

### Areas of improvement

- Students do not always seem to understand how general course requirements relate to their learning objectives. The SER indicates the Department is looking to better inform them as to the way in which such courses help to achieve the overall learning outcomes. There either needs to be a better connection between the course requirements and the learning objectives or fewer course requirements that adhere to the objectives.
- Students should be encouraged to read the learning outcomes and the course descriptor on the SIS at the start of the course. These outcomes should also be discussed with their respective course leaders and/or teachers.

## **Resources**

(See also *Resources of UT VCA* in Chapter 1.2.)

The Music Programme is housed in a purpose-built building whose intimacy fosters both collaboration and easy feedback among students and teachers and between sectors.

The Team noted a lack of storage facilities for instruments in the Music Building – many of these had been stored in a classroom due to a recent fire inspection. The Team recommends that the Music Division look for solutions to this problem.

As noted in the SER, the Music Building is not handicapped accessible, and at present there are no specific plans for ensuring this. The Team suggests that VCA envision

possible future options allowing the Music Building to welcome students or teachers with special needs.

Also, and as noted in the SER, pianos in the Music Building are not sufficiently tuned – a plan to implement a regular tuning schedule will be implemented.

The new sound engineering course appears to be very successful, and it is possible that within coming years the amount of this studio space will need to be enlarged. While this is not an immediate problem, the Team believes it will be helpful to envision possible options for the future.

### Recommendations

- The maintenance and tuning of the pianos should be carried out systematically.
- UT VCA may wish to consider the longer-term need to provide additional studio resources.

## **Teaching and learning**

(See also *Teaching and learning in UT VCA* in chapter 1.2.)

The Team was impressed by the comprehensive analysis of problems in teaching and learning presented in the SER. Student cohorts in UT VCA are small and the strategic decision to create one single Music strand with four specialties reflects both the role UT VCA plays in the Estonian musical landscape and evolutions in the music profession. The on-site visit confirmed the collaborative nature of these strands.

The Music Building is purpose-built and clearly fosters interchange among students and teachers – questions can be dealt with simply and directly. A number of recent alumni are now teachers, and this also contributes to the ease with which students and teachers work together.

The emphasis placed on integrating both the knowledge of sound technology as well as entrepreneurial skills respond to prior feedback and to the reality of portfolio careers, well-detailed in conversations with recent alumni.

The Music Department learning process is transparent, integrating different specialties, supporting students' creative development, providing a framework that is adapted to student expectations, while at the same time developing teamwork, communication skills and discipline. The Department offers unique collaborative opportunities with the Performing Arts Programme, and this can be seen as a strength.

Studies take place in the form of individual lessons, group work and creative groups. For those having a job, it is possible to study in the "open university" study form. According to UT VCA's educational philosophy, communication and teamwork skills in the performing arts are an essential part of the learning process.

Staff have developed two MOOCs (massive open online courses) and many courses

benefit from full or partial e-support; however a number of teachers do not use e-learning tools: the plan to develop e-training for staff should address this issue.

All main instrument and ensemble courses conclude with public performances, and thus there is a consistent correspondence between theory and practice. Practical training activities are extensive (individual, group lessons, seminars, practicums, etc. with teaching staff and foreign teachers) and take place initially within the institution and then within a broad range of professional organisations (educational, cultural, media-related). Traineeships are offered in local schools; as for performance practice, these take place throughout the country, via Estonian Public Broadcasting, and through weekly concerts at the café Fellin.

Theoretical courses have been adjusted to take into account varying levels at entrance and the curriculum has been harmonized.

Group supervision of research papers has been instituted to respond to excessive workload of supervisors. Student workload and independent work is regulated by UT Study Regulations.

The system of pre-requisite courses is used to make the development of skills and knowledge transparent and move from the simple to the more complex. According to the SER, student feedback indicates that, although they understand the integration of the study programmes generally well, counseling in this area still requires regular attention and improvement on the part of programme managers, teaching staff and support staff. For this purpose, all programme managers meet with students on regular basis.

Dropout rates are approximately 10%, and while there is generally a high satisfaction rate, students have indicated too many general course requirements and don't always seem to understand how these relate to their learning objectives.

Differentiated assessment has been instituted, based on student feedback. Procedures are in place to address academic fraud. Feedback on support services is positive though the excessive changes in timetable have been pinpointed.

As a result of the in-service training "Assessment for Student Learning Support" in 2016, the system for feedback and evaluation of student creative work was reconsidered. This should support the learning process in the *Main Instrument* and *Ensemble* courses. As many teaching staff members as possible give feedback in the *Main Instrument* and *Ensemble* courses in order to guarantee the objectivity and comprehensiveness of assessment. UT has developed a handbook on outcome-based assessment, which can be used by the teaching staff as an aid.

The recognition of prior learning and professional experience is governed by the Study Regulations of UT. It takes place on the basis of an application from the student. The programme manager or a member of the specialty teaching staff can, when made aware of students' situation, evaluate the recognition of prior studies. The basis for recognition of courses completed in foreign higher education institutions is established in learning agreements before the exchange.

While the intimate size of the building facilitates internal communication, the structure of the teaching staff in UT VCA, with many only teaching a small number of teaching hours and in some cases commuting from Tallinn, can constitute a challenge. Monthly meetings as well as staff training opportunities are crucial to maintaining a healthy and

ongoing dialogue. Full-time staff members also have access to the staff development training opportunities such as curriculum development and assessment training courses at the University of Tartu.

In order to facilitate the recruitment of foreign students, the Department has compiled two sample study modules both in rhythm music and traditional music specialities. There are currently no sample study modules in sound engineering and school music specialities, but there are plans to implement them as well.

### Strengths

- The comprehensive approach integrating four strands and supported by development of digital competences, knowledge of sound technology, and entrepreneurial skills. The largely practice-based learning equips students well for their future professional life.
- The staff's active engagement in the profession and the large number of international staff.
- Institutional support and in-service training for the teachers in developing assessment practices for instrumental and ensemble studies.
- Peer feedback amongst staff is a healthy practice.
- Many alumni - even recent ones - with active creative careers - teach at the Academy, thereby providing an important link with the profession and maintaining an important institutional link with former students.

### Areas of improvement

- As indicated in the SER, some staff members are unfamiliar with e-learning tools; training staff in the use of these tools is an important priority.
- While there is significant foreign staff, "ordinary" teachers appear to have few international exchange opportunities.
- Students have indicated too many general course requirements and don't always seem to understand how these relate to their learning objectives. The Department is looking to better inform them as to the way in which such courses fulfill overall learning outcomes.
- While recognition of prior learning (RPL) is integrated into the University statutes, at present its technological implementation is problematic: ongoing communication with IT and a new electronic environment to process these should help.
- Regular written feedback regarding student learning should be given from the teacher to the students.
- The SER and students met during the site visit indicated difficulties with frequent changes in timetable. The development of month-long schedules should alleviate this problem. Students' difficulties in efficiently managing their time indicated in the SER and workload should also be addressed by developing time-management training.

## Teaching staff

See also *Teaching staff of UT VCA* in chapter 1.2.

Most of the teaching staff members of the professional higher education curriculum work as practitioners in the fields related to music and engaged in creative work, which is based on the objectives for teaching staff set out in the Academy's strategic plan.

The Department can boast staff from Spain, Portugal, Latvia, Germany, and students participate in numerous Erasmus exchanges. The Department's participation in European networks relating to research (EPARM), conservatoires (AEC) and jazz (IASJ) is significant; the decision to host the next IASJ international meeting in Viljandi (summer 2018) will doubtless contribute to enhancing the Department's international profile. Research engagement by staff is low.

The number of foreign lecturers has been increasing year by year. Teaching staff and musicians from foreign higher education institutions frequently give workshops and teach classes in the Music curriculum.

Staff is clearly very dedicated, and as is the case with other subject areas in UT VCA, their careers are multi-faceted. According to the SER the Department of Music has recently experienced a moderate generational change in academic staff. Several experienced faculty members are retiring and it is challenging for UT VCA to recruit younger teachers qualified enough in some fields of study. For example, the new and highly successful sound engineering course may in future require additional staff, and given the paucity of potential teachers in this area, could be a cause for concern.

### Strengths

- Teaching staff are active practitioners in the field.
- Teaching staff benefit from international networks.

### Areas of improvement

- Teachers skills in e-learning methods and tools needs improvement.

## Students

According to the admission statistics, since the new Professional HE Programme was opened for applications in 2014, the number of applicants for the Music Programme has increased from 73 to 139 from 2014 to 2016. The new curriculum was created by using Jazz Music and Traditional Music (Prof. HE) curricula as its basis. These two will be closed in 2019. The old School Music BA study programme will be closed in 2020 as well, because UT VCA concentrates now mainly on professional higher education and according to the SER, the three-year BA programme did not prepare graduates through sufficient

practical work experience. In 2015/2016 academic year, School Music specialization was incorporated into newly formed Music Prof. HE curriculum. This enlargement partly explains the increase of applications. There were 105 students in total studying in the Music Programme in academic year 2016/17. According to the SER and interviews, all students have good work opportunities after graduation.

The demand of the programme has been increased. There were 3.2 applications per place in 2016. However, since there are four different specializations (sound engineering, traditional music, rhythm music, and school music), there is also an uneven distribution of interests among applicants. According to interviews the Sound engineering courses, for example, have been very popular. In general, the students show a strong passion towards the performing arts and teaching fields.

According to the SER, the uneven preparation of student candidates is a problem. To improve this, UT VCA has been offering pre-courses (e.g. Young Musician's School, twice a year; School jazz, once a year). The share of different marketing activities aimed at students of secondary schools providing music education (e.g. Georg Ots Tallinn Music School, Heino Eller Tartu Music School) has also been increased in order to increase the proportion of students who are already experienced in active music studies. UT VCA has also developed a system where the teaching of music theory takes place in four different levels of class, which allows individuals to learn in accordance with their level. Ensembles in some specialties (for example, rhythm music) are also composed according to students' level.

Students have the opportunity to provide formal feedback on their experience throughout their programme of study, this includes anonymous feedback on teaching and study modules through the University's Study Information System (SIS). However, the SER states that students do not fully engage with the electronic feedback system provided, leading to a poor return of data, as noted in chapter 1.2. These gaps in the formal feedback system risk an over-reliance on unevaluated anecdotal feedback from students.

In the interviews, students showed that they enjoy their studies and appreciate the open atmosphere of UT VCA. Concerning feedback, students revealed that they prefer to give direct oral feedback to their teachers and management. Direct feedback is something that should be considered as self-evidently necessary and it demonstrates open relations between students and staff. It is a common and effective way of giving general feedback especially in small university communities where teachers are receptive and when feedback concerns working methods, repertoire and the like. However, for the development of the study programme and the academy and its processes, it is hardly sufficient.

### Strengths

- The students show a strong passion towards the performing arts and teaching fields.
- The alumni are all employed even before they graduate.
- The student panel made it evident that some aspects of the course had surpassed their expectations.
- Students are able to communicate with staff members with ease due to their

- small numbers. A community feeling is shared amongst the students and staff.
- Students are actively encouraged to apply for ERASMUS and exchanges. Students on ERASMUS report weekly and write a report at the end of the exchange.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Feedback to the students is not always provided in written form. Perhaps there could be one unified method of giving course feedback. (Please see chapter 1.2.)
- The school could perhaps encourage students to have an experience of working in the rental companies or the commercial studios.
- Even though student collaborative projects are encouraged, the school could more actively take a lead on this.

### 1.3.2. Traditional Music (MA)

#### **Study programme and study programme development**

(See also *Study programme development* in chapter 1.2.)

The MA Study Programme in Traditional Music is arranged as a joint curriculum together with the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre. The programme is based on Viljandi's long history in traditional music education. It grows naturally up from the Music Programme (Prof. HE) of UT VCA, in which traditional music is one of the areas of specialization. The Traditional Music MA is in line with the University of Tartu Strategic Plan for 2015-2020, which highlights the preservation, research and development of Estonian language and culture.

Like other curricula of UT VCA, the curriculum of Traditional Music is outcome-based and its description contains information on the knowledge, skills and competencies the student should have acquired upon course completion. The study programme meets the standards relative to structure and content. The curriculum supports achievement of the objectives and designed learning outcomes of the programme. As a whole, the study programme is coherent.

The programme has three specializations: researcher, composer, and performer, all of which relate to professional musicianship in traditional music. The structure and content of the modules and courses form a coherent whole. The coherence of the courses is monitored by the programme manager and speciality managers.

Practical training is integrated into the curriculum through working practitioners' profiles and through different subject courses.

Traditional Music master's curriculum includes courses from different UT and EAMT master's programmes. Feedback is collected systematically and regularly. According to the SER, alumni of the programme have been pleased with the curriculum and the courses it contains. In particular, they cite the curriculum flexibility and the opportunities to shape their own course trajectories. Apart from their interest in curricular features, they understand how it is supporting the development of their knowledge and skills.

Traditional music holds a strong place within the Estonian cultural context and graduates enjoy numerous job opportunities. Collaborations and excellent relations between the professional field and the programme are evident as the programme works closely with the Estonian Traditional Music Centre, the Estonian Folklore Archives, and the Estonian National Museum. The programme also has a strong international network, especially within Nordplus area. According to the SER and interviews, however, the MA in Traditional Music has significant language-centered content which partly explains why the percentage of foreign teachers and students is not significant.

The MA programme has three areas of specializations, but few enrolled students (from 7 to 10 in 2013-17), most of whom were on leave during the time of assessment, and no MA student participated in the interviews. According to the SER and interviews, most of the problems in Traditional Music MA programme are connected to the low number of applicants and students and rather high drop-out/interruption rate (8% in 2013/14, and 22% in 2014/15). The admission statistics in SER show that the competition over study places has decreased from 3 in 2012 to 1 in 2015. There were 7 admitted students in 2015.

The only solution for the lack of attractiveness offered by UT VCA seem to be to popularize the programme through more extensive marketing, indicated in the SER as planned improvement activities. However, there may be reasons to scrutinize the objectives and general demand of the programme itself as well.

The orientation of Traditional Music MA is primarily to explore Estonian traditional music. The course is by its very nature not international, and the percentage of foreign teachers is low. There are no foreign students, and only one student studied abroad in 2012-2016.

The team recommends that due to low student numbers and lack of applicants, the profile and the rationale behind the joint curriculum of the MA programme in Traditional Music be reconsidered. There is a need for a forum within the field for discussions as to the best way to profile and organize the MA programme in traditional music (perhaps referring to different solutions offered within the Nordtrad network) in the twenty-first century.

### Strengths

- Traditional music has a strong place in the Estonian context and the graduates have many job opportunities.
- The programme has good connections with the professional field and a strong international network.

### Recommendations

- The profile and the rationale behind the joint curriculum of the MA programme in Traditional Music should be reconsidered. There is a need for a forum within the field for discussions about how to profile and organize the MA programme in traditional music in the twenty first century.
- Students and alumni need to be consulted regarding the lack of attractiveness of the programme and significant drop in student numbers.
- UT could provide support in developing further the programme's international

strategy.

## Resources

(See also *Resources of UT VCA* in Chapter 1.2.)

Because Traditional Music MA is a joint programme together with Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre, the studies take place both in Tallinn at the EAMT as well as in Viljandi and Tartu. Resources - like libraries - can thus be used in all three locations. This is certainly a strength.

Because of the lack of financial resources, there are limited opportunities for process-based learning (study visits, trips), to supplement teaching resources or to attract more guest teachers (including those from abroad). There are project-based trips, such as Kaika campus for traditional music students, but they depend on the availability of funding and are not sustainable in their current form. For the programme to become more internationally orientated additional resources will need to be required.

### Strengths

- As a joint programme Traditional Music MA benefits resources of two universities.

### Areas of improvement

- Limited opportunities exist to support funding for process-based learning and visits by foreign teachers and artists.

## Teaching and learning

(See also *Teaching and learning in UT VCA* in Chapter 1.2.)

The Students of Traditional Music MA are studying in three different places – Viljandi, Tallinn, and Tartu. MA students prefer to study in Tallinn. There is a focus on interdisciplinary education and collaborations are encouraged.

The curriculum consists of speciality theory module (24 ECTS), performer module I (24 ECTS), performer module II (16 ECTS), researcher module (24 ECTS) composer module (24 ECTS), optional courses 6 ECTS, Master's Thesis or Master's exam (30 ECTS). Practical and theoretical subjects are interconnected. There are many electives offered. Students can plan their own curriculum to a large extent, thus supporting their individual and social development. Student and alumni feedback has been positive in this regard.

Practical training is divided in two parts. The first part is compulsory for all three specializations; the second one only for performers. The essence of the practice is (co-)organisation of various concerts or musical projects related to traditional music and performance as a soloist, ensemble, orchestra and choir.

Practical training II is compulsory in the field of performing, and is elective for others. During practical training, there is an opportunity to explore the issues of interpretation of traditional music and topics in various practical situations (organisation of concerts and musical projects, exploring the playing techniques and style of some acting traditional musician, acquiring it directly from the master, performing in dance clubs, conducting workshops, etc.).

Seminars and, if necessary, individual counselling are conducted during practical training. Students keep a practical training journal and prepare a final report.

There are two options for graduation from the Traditional MA programme, master's thesis and master's examination. The master's examination consists of a concert programme and a written part. Supervision of the master's thesis is individual. Student may have two supervisors, one each for different parts of the examination. Master's thesis and Master's examination committees always include representatives from both universities that deliver the joint Master's programme.

According to the SER, student involvement in research and creative activities is carried out through individual development interviews. Those students in the musician-performer specialization are generally involved in creative activities, and they participate in ensembles, organise concerts, workshops and the like.

According to the SER, plagiarism is clearly defined in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities and this information is available to all students. Issues related to plagiarism are explained to students, especially in academic writing and research basics courses, as well as in Master's thesis or Master's exam requirements and during the immediate cooperation with the thesis supervisor.

According to the SER, students are generally satisfied with the timetable and organisation of studies. However, it is inevitable, as stated in the SER, that such a joint curriculum would involve commuting between three cities (Tallinn, Viljandi, Tartu). This organisation of studies is costly and time-consuming for students. It may diminish the attractiveness of the programme as well.

### Strengths

- There are significant opportunities to take electives and optional courses from other structural units of UT and other Estonian universities, which would better support the programme.
- The flexibility of studies is appreciated by students and alumni.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- According to the SER, there are some issues with recognition of prior learning

and professional experience. There is no technical implementation of RPL suitable for the needs of the programme.

- The institution could actively exploit the possibilities offered through a wide international network could offer teachers and students' greater learning and teaching opportunities.

## Teaching staff

(See also *Teaching staff in UT VCA* in chapter 1.2.)

As a joint programme, the MA in Traditional Music benefits from the highly qualified teaching staff both in EAMT and TU VCA, especially in terms of research. The different fields of expertise typically needed in versatile folk music education are well covered. Because traditional music in Estonia has good networks both nationally and internationally (especially in Nordplus area), there are also plenty of possibilities available for teacher exchanges and artistic visits. As traditional music in UT VCA is also part of the Music Prof HE as one of its specializations, there is always an opportunity to benefit from pooling visiting artists and teachers.

According to the SER due to the language-centered nature of the MA programme, the percentage of foreign teachers is not significant.

### Strengths

- The Traditional Music Programme benefits from the qualified teaching staff of two universities who are also active professional practitioners in their fields.
- The teaching staff have good national and international networks.
- The research and theoretical elements are well covered in teaching staff.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The quite language-centered curriculum may prevent the program from rounded exploitation of the international folk music environment and its human resources.

## Students

From 2014, the Traditional Music MA has biennial recruitment pattern. As mentioned above, constant lack of student candidates is a problem for the programme. Drop-out/interruption rate is high. In addition to that, most of the enrolled students are currently on leave. No students from the MA programme participated in the interviews. Interruptions may, of course, be a "positive" problem, since master students and graduates have many job opportunities. This may decrease their motivation to engage in higher academic studies.

The admissions committee of the joint Master's programme is composed of representatives of both universities. According to the SER, until 2017 there was a prerequisite of 45 ECTS in traditional music courses upon admission to the programme. The Programme Council decided to abolish this requirement. This decision was based on low number of applicants. This change in requirements may be a risk for the quality of students and the core studies. It may even raise questions of the reliability and rationale of the MA programme as a whole. The learning outcomes of the MA programme are ambitious both in terms of artistic levels and research and the artistic side may suffer from a loosening of admission criteria.

The students' initial expectations concerning their MA studies may be erroneous which could sometimes explain the high rate of interruptions. It may also be vice versa: The recruitment process of the university may sometimes include efforts which as such cause false expectations among those recruited.

### Strengths

- The employability of the graduates is good and often they are employed even before they graduate from the MA.
- Viljandi graduates are valued by employers.
- Collaboration is encouraged within the various disciplines.
- Students find it easy to communicate with teachers.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- There is no competition for admission. Reasons for this should be scrutinized with great care.
- The wide ranging and heavy language-centered curricular workload should be considered together with students and alumni, especially if there is a desire to include foreign students on the course.
- The possibility of providing credit points to projects led outside the university should be considered.
- There should be a platform for the alumni and current students to collaborate on projects.

## 1.3.3. Dance Art (Prof HE)

### **Study programme and study programme development**

(See also *Study programme development* in chapter 1.2.)

In general, the programme of Dance Art meets the standards of programme development and delivery. The labour market and feasibility analysis have been carried out. The majority of graduates have found jobs in the field. Recognition of prior learning and professional experience is governed by the Study Regulations and RPL procedure.

Important curriculum revision took place in 2013 after discussions with Tallinn University

and based on a comprehensive analysis of curricula in both institutions as well as labour market needs. Specializations deemed too strict were abandoned and didactics of dance teaching was created. The Bachelor level education for teachers is considered particularly significant as often traditional dance teachers in Estonia do not have formal training. As such, the Viljandi program is seeking to professionalise the sector and gain recognition for the importance of higher education training for dance teachers.

The learning objectives of the Dance Art Study Programme are to provide comprehensive pedagogical, dance technical and performing skills. Integrated into the overall UT VCA performing arts study programme group, the approach is contemporary, collaborative and interdisciplinary. The programme leaders want the curriculum to integrate current trends through ongoing dialogue with the contemporary dance field.

Nevertheless, the role of traditional Estonian dance in this programme remains unclear, as do the technical core of dance training and of dance teacher training. The curriculum encompasses a wide range of dance areas, from ballet to modern dance to contemporary and somatic approaches, which may prove confusing to the student should the core technical approach be missing. If such is the case, it might explain the number of dropouts.

Programme leaders and employers speak of Viljandi as a "community-based city" and of the programme as a "creative lab." Largely pragmatic, the Dance Art Study Programme seeks principally to educate dance teachers for the comprehensive schools, local communities and private dance schools. However as the SER notes, the programme also aims to educate teachers who are creative artists - able to work as freelance artists in theatres and festivals or as artist-entrepreneurs. Profiling the dance teacher as a creative artist is relevant given the fact that the dance sector is small in Estonia and that dance specialists need a broad working profile.

Graduates are also prepared to pursue a MA degree, though most graduates find employment immediately upon graduation. Alumni met during the site visit had careers involving teaching, multi-disciplinary arts performance, and cultural management. Some of the alumni met during the Team's visit pursued additional studies several years after completing their first degree so as to develop specific areas they felt had been underserved in initial training.

### Strengths

- Dance Art as part of the larger Performing Arts Study Group of the TU VCA benefits from the surrounding programmes. Together with music and theatre studies (including technical arts), VCA offers a variety of study opportunities supporting organic and built-in cooperation across disciplines in a creative lab, which can be seen as a strength.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Based on the interviews held at UT VCA and Tallinn University, the team recommends a nation-wide discussion within the performing arts sector network to evaluate the profiles and titles of performing arts programmes within Estonia's HE structures.

- The Team suggests that the dance field and universities discuss and clarify which programmes are focusing on teacher education and/or community work, which would best foster traditional Estonian dance/choreography/music, which concentrate on contemporary dance education or on contemporary choreography. In all instances, this conversation needs to take into account the needs of the labour market in Estonia and employment possibilities within the European landscape.
- The placement of the different study programmes involving traditional Estonian music and dance ("ethnic" dance) might be reconsidered, since four programmes in the Performing Arts Study Group assessed in this report are now placed in three separate universities.
- The presence of a Traditional Music course at UT VCA might suggest a regrouping of traditional Estonian music and dance in one location.
- Consideration might be given to calling dancer-teacher-creators-entrepreneurs "dancemakers", a concept used in some European countries for these artists.
- The Dance Art programme would benefit from a clearer title. While the stated aim is to focus on developing dance teachers as well as entrepreneurial "dance makers," VCA is educating dancers and choreographers for the Estonian contemporary dance field. Because Tallinn University is also educating dance teachers and choreographers, both contemporary and traditional, the profiles and aims of dance programmes in Estonia need further discussion and clarification.
- The Dance Art programme might benefit from a title integrating pedagogical competencies and community work with a holistic and interdisciplinary nature.
- The programme would benefit from better supporting core techniques and ensuring a stronger interconnection among dance technique/s, creative, theoretical and pedagogical courses.

## Resources

In the Academy there are four specific rooms for the performing arts, but only two for the dance art programme. The other room is a small one and suits best for individual work or small group work. The lack of proper dance studios with professional sprung floors is a major problem in the programme. It means that some rooms have to be rented outside the VCA. The shortage of rooms is affecting the quality of education and is addressed in the feedback from both students and teaching staff.

The situation should improve markedly when, as indicated as a priority in the VCA strategic plan, the new Dance House is completed. The first phase of construction ended in October 2014, however the date for beginning the second phase of construction is currently unknown.

Otherwise, resources are largely adequate. The library has specialised literature and service is very good. There are several computers in the library and a computer lab freely accessible to students. There is a café on the basement floor of the Academy for students, teaching staff and personnel. There is also a recreational area in the Department office and a lounge room for staff.

### Strengths

- There is a multimedia centre equipped with multifunctional studio rooms equipped with modern video and presentation equipment. These facilities can be used by dance students involved in e.g. media art collaborations.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The team recommends that the second phase of Dance House and studios with spring floors be constructed as soon as possible.

## **Teaching and learning**

The Team was impressed by the comprehensive analysis of problems in teaching and learning presented in the SER. Student cohorts in UT VCA are small and the strategic decision to integrate performing arts programmes involving different specialties is a good example of making a virtue out of necessity. According to the SER the Department of Performing Arts has a goal of setting up a learning process that is transparent, integrating different specialties, supporting students' creative development, providing a framework flexibly adapted to student expectations, while at the same time developing teamwork, communication skills and discipline. The programme provides students with a basic grounding for a career in the field of performing arts.

Most of the studies take place in the form of group work and in creative groups. During the semesters there are four intensive weeks which focus more on practical training. As there are no theoretical courses during the intensive weeks, they offer possibilities for joint projects.

According to UT VCA's educational philosophy, communication and teamwork skills in the performing arts are an essential component of the learning process. The acquisition of these competences is supported by the course Personality and Social Psychology as well as various pedagogical courses.

According to the SER (based e.g. on feedback from students and teaching staff) and interviews, the integration of studies works at least in principle, but needs to be developed, improved and planned well ahead.

The combination of different specialties in VCA provides creative opportunities. However, planning of joint studies is often problematic due to varied curricula as well as complex timetables. According to the SER, VCA is willing to further develop cross-disciplinary collaborations, but a viable, functioning system to enable this still needs to be developed.

The recognition of prior learning and professional experience is governed by the Study Regulations of the UT. This takes place via an application from the student. The

programme manager or a member of the specialty teaching staff can, when made aware of students' situation, evaluate the recognition of prior studies. The basis for recognition of courses completed in foreign higher education institutions is established in learning agreements before the exchange. The management of the process on line is suggested in the SER, and would doubtless streamline and enhance this.

The system of prerequisite courses is used to make the development of skills and knowledge transparent and move from the simple to the more complex. According to the SER, student feedback indicates that, although they understand the integration of the study programmes fairly well, counselling in this area still requires regular attention and improvement. To this end, all programme managers meet with students on a regular basis.

In the Dance art programme, there are a lot of practical contact hours. Theoretical subjects are adapted specifically to the given creative environment and integrated to fit arts studies. In the Dance art programme the students' independent work is an integral part of the creative study process both in the phase of idea development and rehearsals. The supervisors give immediate feedback during the process.

The curriculum consists of a base module (30 ECTS), a field module (30 ECTS), speciality modules I-III (30 ECTS each), specialization (dance art or teacher) modules I-II (30 ECTS each), and a scientific research and creative work module (30 ECTS, including a graduation thesis 15 ECTS). The curricular modules include 36 ECTS for on-the-job training. It is possible to choose 6 ECTS within optional courses.

The curriculum consists of learning outcomes such as understanding basic concepts of dance art, understanding the anatomical and kinesiological aspects of the body, developing physical awareness and skills in dance techniques, and understanding the historical context of contemporary dance. The programme aims also to teach students to understand the mechanisms of their creativity and ability to create choreographies. Teacher specialisation aims to provide basic knowledge and understanding of modern pedagogy in accordance with the specifics of the teaching practice. Overall the curriculum appears to be relevant.

However, the somewhat fragmentary nature of the curriculum poses fundamental philosophical and pedagogical questions. As it stands, the student may not have time to deeply assimilate different techniques/styles, and while awareness of different areas of dance is essential, this needs to be approached pedagogically so as to guarantee students understanding of pedagogically "embodied learning."

The curriculum offers on-the-job practical training involving teaching and practice, and this takes place either in the university environment, in hobby education schools in Viljandi or theatres. In the third and fourth academic year, students have more freedom to choose the content of their practical creative work, including performances on stage. The pedagogical internships for the teacher specialisation has taken place in Viljandi general education schools within the physical education classes.

Practical training may include development of entrepreneurial projects. During the interviews, it became clear that students were not satisfied with the state of the entrepreneurship studies they have been offered so far. However, they admitted that their critical feedback has been taken into account by the university, and the delivery of such courses has been improved.

The Dance Art Speciality Practice occurs in the 5th semester in a work environment. The choice of traineeship institutions is decided by the student and traineeship supervisor. During the traineeship, the student cooperates with the traineeship coordinator, university traineeship supervisor and traineeship mentor; a placement contract is also concluded between the traineeship institution and the university.

Students can more or less determine both the content and place of their diploma stage productions. Stage performance periods are based on an individual schedule and take place outside the university in theatres or independent venues.

Presentation and performing skills are developed by public presentations of practical training reports and creative work as well as public defence of seminar papers and a graduation thesis. Through these practices the programme develops communication and social skills.

The implementation of the research and creative work module is carried out in combination with general and foundation courses and performing arts field module courses. These include courses that provide theoretical knowledge and research methodology. The artistic-creative portion of the research is supported by the specialty courses. Courses supporting research work are scheduled in the study plan take into account students' with advanced theoretical knowledge and skills.

The creative-practical thesis in the Dance Art curriculum incorporates a written analysis providing a methodological basis for analyzing information and experience of the creative component. The latter can be a project, a methodological tool, invention or a work of art. These include practical implementation and/or testing. The defense of the thesis is public.

Ongoing collaboration with networks, cultural and educational institutions in Latvia and Finland, notably, has provided excellent learning opportunities for students.

### Strengths

- The collaboration possibilities in the VCA creative lab;
- The practical training and collaboration possibilities with local schools, communities and institutions.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The curriculum could be developed more coherently to enhance embodied learning. The curriculum integrates a wide variety of small courses like film analysis and fitness training, the relevance of which are not clear in the context of basic Bachelor-level dance art education. Courses such as rhythm and co-ordination could be integrated into dance technical training.
- Academic subjects could be better integrated both into the creative environment and thus compliment practice-based subjects.

## Teaching staff

Most of the teaching staff members in the Department of Performing Arts cross-teach in all three curricula. There are 15 regular teachers, but most of them are part time. In the last three years, the number of non-academic staff has decreased a little. This however has not affected the quality of teaching thanks to a coherent rearrangement of resources and duties. UT VCA also has many teachers on short-term contracts. This enables the programme to include professionals to teach. There are altogether 8,3 full-time equivalent teachers. The team found that there is only 1 full-time (100% workload) teacher allocated to the dance programme. Most full time academic staff in UT VCA are at the lecturer level.

Overall the teaching staff and dance programme leader are enthusiastic and want to keep their skills and knowledge current. The curriculum is somewhat fragmented that this necessarily has an impact on teaching staff, translating into a small number of hours for teachers.

The team found that the Department is fully aware of the fact that it is important for the staff members to collaborate. A coherent programme requires good internal communication, which is a challenge due to the structure of the teaching staff at VCA. Many teachers have a small number of hours and in some cases commute from Tallinn. Monthly meetings as well as staff training opportunities mitigate this somewhat.

According to the SER and interviews, international cooperation in the Dance Art programme involves some foreign teaching staff and freelance choreographers, stage directors and student exchanges. In Didactics of Dance Teaching, involvement of foreign teaching staff has become regular. Some student performances are also created by foreign freelance choreographers. The involvement of foreign lecturers, freelance choreographers and directors is based on negotiations with partner institutions and communication with local cooperation partners like Kanuti Gildi Saal in Tallinn.

### Strengths

- A dedicated teaching staff.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The assessment team strongly recommends the pursuit of comprehensive international development both to enhance programme and to provide increased mobility opportunities and support to staff.
- More visiting international teachers in the core areas of the dance programme.
- The team recommends that the programme continues to recruit younger generation, pedagogically competent creative practitioners in the future.

## Students

The number of students has diminished from 57 to 45 between 2012 and 2016. The number of graduates per year has varied from 7 to 10. In recent years, interruptions of studies have been quite common: seven students in the academic year 2014-15 and six students in 2015-16. When asked about the reasons for the relatively low number of graduates in the Dance Art programme, UT VCA indicated that this was principally due to the fact that some entering students probably had not anticipated the intensive training schedule (five times a week) and find themselves unable to cope with both training and course-work. According to the SER, the reasons for the termination of studies also include changes in students' priorities, inability to adapt to the intensive nature of the study programme, or students' simply realising that they are not suited to the field.

The competition per study place remains stable (from two to three applicants per place). According to the SER, typically there are fewer "random testers" among those who wish to study in Dance programme than among the candidates for theatrical studies. This is due to preparatory organized pre-university education in Estonia, although clearly this could be strengthened.

Management and programme heads did indicate during the visit the development of open days and opportunities for candidates to shadow students, as well as promotion of the programme to potential candidates by students themselves, notably through the use of social media.

According to the SER, the prerequisite for admission to the study programmes is successful completion of secondary education, in which average grades are taken into account. Intensive specialty tests conducted over 3-4 days also play a considerable role. In the Dance Art programme, specialty tests consist of a written essay on dance art, a practice based component including a prepared dance performance, and an interview. The practical part of the test includes fitness training, learning a contemporary dance combination, physical fitness test, rhythm and coordination exercises and elements of Estonian dance, a creative assignment, and teaching assignment. The team finds the content of entrance exams appropriate and well balanced.

According to the SER and interviews, the employment rate of the alumni is high. Some of the graduates have also continued with their Master's degree studies at the Choreography programme of Tallinn University, in the Theatre and Pedagogy programme of the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre (Physical Theatre specialisation), in the Literature and Theatre Research programme of the University of Tartu, or in the Art Programme of the Estonian Academy of Arts (new media specialisation). Some alumni have continued or continue their education at foreign higher education institutions. UT Viljandi Culture Academy's Master's programme Teacher of Arts and Technology, opened in 2016, creates additional opportunities, as one of the specialisations which will be opened in the future will be that of a dance teacher.

According to the SER, within the Performing Arts Study Group, international mobility works best in the Dance Art programme. Between 2 and 10 dance students per year have studied abroad or participated in international activities.

Student feedback is based on three different sources: Study Information System feedback (collected regularly), oral feedback and written feedback given to lecturers and programme managers (collected from time to time, when necessary). The intimate nature of the school creates possibilities for students and teachers to engage in informal feedback on a regular basis. According to the SER, constant oral feedback in the form of regular meetings and individual counselling is most effective.

In the case of SIS feedback, the number of respondents in the feedback survey is insufficient to provide an objective assessment of the study programme courses. Sometimes student opinions are also controversial and can fluctuate widely, which makes such feedback difficult to analyze. On the other hand, students' criticism during interviews suggests that the formal feedback system doesn't really support programme enhancement.

Employers met believe that graduates of the Dance Art programme have a solid foundation and are well equipped for a career as both teachers and creative contemporary artists.

Alumni are engaged in "portfolio careers" involving teaching, directing, choreography, cultural management and are active both in lobbying politicians as well as developing a solid professional network for dance and theatre through the Dance Union, Youth Dance, and the Estonian Dance Agency. Several students interviewed in Tallinn were graduates of UT VCA and often appeared to be taking a leadership role locally and nationally. This generation of graduates is clearly doing all it can to create a more dynamic and well-supported national dance field.

### Strengths

- The intimate setting allows students to focus on their studies in VCA and get ongoing feedback from their teachers.
- The VCA environment enhances students self leadership and management skills.
- The collaborative creative training received in UT VCA clearly has contributed to an ability to use leadership and entrepreneurial capacities to enhance and grow the dance profession in all its forms throughout Estonia.
- Training combining dance technique with creative and pedagogical courses enables collaboration with a wide range of foreign higher education institutions.

### Areas for improvement and recommendations

- Even though student collaborative projects are encouraged, the school actively could take a more proactive lead on this.
- Student feedback should be further developed to enhance curriculum development.
- Taking into account the relatively high number of interruptions, the team recommends that the reasons for these interruptions be analysed in greater detail.

The team recommends that UT VCA further enhance communication with potential applicants so as to provide them with more realistic expectations relative to the content of UT VCA dance art studies.

### 1.3.4. Theatrical Studies (Prof HE)

#### **Study programme and study programme development**

The most similar provision is to be found in the Performing Arts curriculum at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre (EAMT) to which the VCA provision differs in two significant ways; the Theatre Studies degree is delivered by a staff team led by a programme manager and advised by a Programme Council, rather than a single academic leader who supervises all aspects of student learning. Secondly, the integrated nature of the Theatre Studies curriculum enables students to combine specialisms (for example theatre director and actor specialities). There is a close relationship with EAMT, both through students (who progress on to MA study at EMTA) and a crossover of part-time teaching staff balanced by a strong sense of the difference in the VCA approach to the teaching of acting and directing, so that the two programmes complement each other, at times collaborate, but do not significantly overlap.

The curriculum is organised according to the demands of both national (the Universities Act and Standards of higher Education) and institutional (Study Regulations and Statutes of Curriculum) legislation. The structure for the delivery of teaching in the Theatrical Studies programme, revised in 2011/12 as part of a general move towards the greater integration of study programmes across VCA, was created to both enhance and broaden the student learning experience. The demands of the labour market have been given a high priority in this new development and in the meeting with Employers the integrated nature of the curriculum, along with the opportunities that it affords to work with students of related programmes (for example Technical Theatre Arts) is viewed as a specific strength of the programme.

The place of Theatrical Studies within the overall programme group (Music, Dance Art and Theatre Technical Studies, etc.) allows for a broad programme of teaching that supports the specialisations of acting and directing and encourages collaborations across the specialisations. The specialisation modules are supported by more general subjects, for example Theatre History supports the learning undertaken through the more practical training aspects of the curriculum and the Entrepreneurial Studies modules encourage the future actor/director to prepare for the professional world. From the evidence of the programme descriptor and module outlines provided by VCA, the curriculum structure and module logically support the achievement of the programme aims and learning outcomes.

Aside from the ongoing informal feedback that staff receive from their interactions with students and alumni, the programme gathers both informal and formal feedback from employers. In the meeting with the employers who work with both students and

graduates of the Theatrical Studies programme, a number of examples were given of how they contribute to the development of curriculum through participation in Programme Councils and Assessment Committees. It was clear that the staff of the programme work in close co-operation with representatives of the professional field and that graduates of the programme are highly valued by employers.

### Strengths

- The programme is distinctive in the context of similar provision within the Study Programme Group due to the way that it is delivered by a staff team rather than being led by a single academic leader.
- The number of students who progress with confidence to study at MA level in other institutions.
- The opportunity that the programme affords students to combine study subjects in ways that reflect their individual approaches towards professional practice, for example, the specialties of directing and acting.
- The significant role that employers are invited to play in helping to shape the content, delivery and learning outcomes of the curriculum to ensure that the programme meets their needs, including the Co-operation Agreements made between the programme and a range of theatre and other cultural organisations to the benefit of student learning.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- To ensure that the informal feedback that the programme gathers from employers and other external stakeholders is logged and communicated across the programme team.

## **Resources**

(See also *Resources of UT VCA* in Chapter 1.1.)

The resources available to the programme are sufficient to enable students to meet the required learning outcomes. These include a black-box studio theatre (fully equipped with lighting and sound equipment), a multi-media centre (with modern video and presentation equipment) and a multi-media computer lab (with a range of specialist software installed).

VCA has a compact campus, and is located near the centre of Viljandi which has a highly respected professional theatre with a resident acting company. This theatre, along with other theatres and cultural organisations across the region, provides practical working contexts for third and fourth year students as well as being viable sources of future employment.

### Strengths

- The extended access to theatre resources that students are provided with access to through the co-operation agreements forged between the programme and professional theatres and other cultural facilities across the region.

## **Teaching and learning**

The Theatre Studies programme offers a broad base of academic and theoretical studies that support the specialised learning and practical work undertaken within each study discipline. Theoretical modules, which often take the form of seminars and colloquiums to develop students' self-expression and analytical skills are normally shared with students studying in other specialized fields within their programme or those on other professional HE programmes (such as Technical Theatre Arts and Dance Art). Within practical modules the academic and theoretical subjects are adapted specifically to the given creative environment in which the learning is taking place. A particular feature of the Theatre Studies curriculum is that the practical aspects of the study process are re-designed each year, within the framework of the curriculum, in close co-operation with a specific employer and with the aim of preparing potential actors and directors for a particular theatre. This is underpinned by a formal Cooperation Agreement between the University of Tartu and the professional organization and includes the facility to agree individual student apprenticeships, each of which is formally agreed in a separate document which sets out the objectives and aims of the apprenticeship and the responsibilities of both partners. This approach ensures that students are undertaking a significant proportion of their practical studies in a professional environment which may directly lead to employment opportunities.

At the meeting with students, they confirmed that the learning outcomes of their programme and the individual modules were both clear to them and were readily accessible in written form, and they are aware of the criteria and process by which they are assessed. The learning outcomes are appropriate to the overall aims of the programme and reflect the strategic mission of the Academy where appropriate. There are monthly meetings with students and with teachers to brainstorm ideas and to ensure an openness of channels of communication. At the meeting with Employers, they confirmed that the graduates of the programme were well prepared to enter the field of professional practice and that the knowledge and skills that they had developed through the programme were appropriate to their needs.

The students are encouraged to use digital facilities in both the academic and practical modules and the staff use a Moodle-based Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) in support of their teaching in the theoretical courses. In the coming academic year, students will have opportunity to engage with open access video lectures from specialists in the field from all over Nordic and Baltic countries as part of the project Sustainable Theatre Artist of the Nordic and Baltic Network of Theatre and Dance Institutions of Higher Education, Nortecas.

Student mobility is strongly encouraged by VCA and it has established an administrative

support structure to enable students to engage with the Erasmus scheme. Student can take foreign language courses (English and German) as part of their elective programme and student feedback on language courses is positive. All VCA students have access to opportunities for mobility. In addition to opportunities to study abroad, students are also encouraged to engage in International events such as the annual exchange week Nordic Common Studies, and Nordic-Baltic Express. The students normally study in Estonian but the delivery of master-classes given by visiting international teachers or practitioners is normally in English. The Academy is currently planning to develop new masters programmes, delivered in English that will also be attractive to international students and thereby increase the level of inward mobility.

### Strengths

- The integrated approach to study that is offered by the programme and the opportunity that this affords students in enabling them to tailor their own learning experience according to their individual professional aspirations.
- The strong encouragement of student-led initiatives as part of the overall programme of learning.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- To build a stronger and clearer alignment of both traditional and contemporary approaches to the performing arts that will dynamically link both established and experimental practices in order to forge a position as leading provider of this approach that will enhance Estonian culture and help to build an international profile.
- Explore possibilities for building an international profile through developing courses where English is the language used.

## **Teaching staff**

The teaching staff, employed on permanent contracts, who deliver the Theatre Studies programme are appropriately qualified and have sufficient experience in the relevant professional fields to fully support the students in meeting the expected learning outcomes.

The teaching staff team for the Theatre Studies programme is comparatively new and is dedicated to developing the programme as both robust and forward looking. Teaching staff are recognised both for their professional work within theatre and for their commitment to teaching and the practice of the teachers as working artists is closely intertwined with their teaching methodology. The leader of the acting specialism is a respected actress who has previously taught at EAMT. At the meeting with Teachers,

they expressed their enthusiasm for the collaborations that take place between the programmes and their encouragement of students to explore non-traditional performing arts and arts practices, such as performance art and installation art alongside the more traditional performance practices.

The teaching staff has a close relationship with the profession and alumni are encouraged to return as part-time and hourly paid teachers. There is a friendly but respectful relationship with the student body which provides opportunity for gathering informal feedback and the exchange of ideas, both student to teacher and vice versa.

There is a coherent and progressive methodology taught in the skills of acting and directing and the teachers are giving thought to how to strengthen the study of teaching and the theory of teaching. The teachers are proud of their role in guiding and assessing student-led initiatives that the open management approach of the institution encourages. They are also concerned to continue the special emphasis on young people's' and children's' theatre that the college has developed and maintains.

### Strengths

- The programme is delivered by a close-knit group of teaching staff that share both a passion for their subject and a coherent methodological and philosophical approach to teaching that is seeded through the four years of the programme and is manifest in the planning of modules and the determining of learning outcomes.
- The staff team maintains a positive and productive relationship with students that actively encourages and supports student-led initiatives.
- The staff team operates with clear understanding of the links between the teaching of theory and its relationship to practice in the student learning experience.
- The programme both fosters and maintains good relationships with employers and the professional field of performing arts practice in Estonia and is actively engaged in the building of international connections.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- VCA should extend the effective administrative systems that it has established to support international mobility to better enable the international activity of teaching staff.

## **Students**

The Theatre Studies programme has a biennial recruitments pattern. The number of applications to places has fluctuated between 4:1 and 5:1 over recent years, demonstrating that there is a healthy demand for the programme. The selection process

for applicants seeking to enter the course is rigorous and is careful to ensure that the applicant is making the right choice and that the Academy is finding the best possible fit between the students and the programme.

The students and recent graduates of the Academy, who were met with during the site visit, were highly motivated, with many of them committed to their region and all of them committed to their professions. For students of acting and directing the dropout rate is low, and the students expressed the view that they would have a good chance of finding employment in one of the many regional theatres, or in Tallinn, when they complete their programme. The students also had confidence in their own agency in creating companies and making work for themselves that had clearly been fostered by their experience at VCA. The employers in turn expressed their approval of the levels of skill and preparation that the students demonstrated when working on student projects in their theatres and/or when they joined them as young professional artists.

It is evident that students have a positive and productive relationship with the teaching staff and they reported that they felt empowered within the Academy as full partners in the development of the learning experience. They also confirmed that they are encouraged to provide feedback and stated that that when they do so this is taken seriously and responded to. It was clear from meeting with a range of graduates of the programme that they could, aside from making teaching contributions within the programme, also contribute to the student learning experience in other ways, such as through a student-graduate mentoring scheme. This would enable them to share their experiences of establishing themselves in the field of professional practice with students who are planning similar career pathways.

In the meeting with students, they reported that they were fully aware of the opportunities available to them to engage in international mobility. The students experience international mobility especially through contact with the Nordic-Baltic organisations but there is currently little take up of Erasmus opportunities because of the difficulties they perceive a semester away from VCA would make in maintaining the flow and development of the training offered by their programme.

The Academy did not supply specific data on the employment rate of graduates but claim in the SER that *"the number of alumni working in the area of specialisation or a field close to their specialisation is approaching a maximum"*. Although VCA claims that programmes maintain close contacts with alumni this does not appear to be systematic, but is over-reliant on a patchwork of anecdotal information to build up a general picture of graduate employment.

### Strengths

- The relatively strong and consistent demand from applicants to the programme which helps to ensure that cohorts of able and highly motivated student can be recruited.
- The positive and productive relationship forged between students and the teaching staff of the programme, that empowers the student as full partners in the development of their learning experience.
- The level of satisfaction expressed by the students with regard to their learning

experience on the programme and the level of confidence that it had provided them with to enter the field of professional performing arts field.

- The level of commitment expressed by the students towards working in the theatres within that region as well as creating new companies based there.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Consideration should be given to the creation of an active mentoring scheme between the alumni and current students.
- Students should be encouraged to explore all opportunities for international mobility and the institution should consider ways they can support those students who want to develop an international profile as artists.
- The work of the Programme Manager, Teachers and Programme Council would benefit from having regular access to comprehensive and accurate data on graduate employment.

*or vice versa you will come over to factory in order to negotiate on tendering process?*

### 1.3.5. Theatre Technical Arts (Prof HE)

#### **Study programme and study programme development**

The Technical Theatre Arts (Prof. HE) is offered at the Viljandi Culture Academy (VCA), a constituent division of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Tartu. At VCA the provision sits within the Department of Performing Arts. The programme came into being in 2003 when a number of individual specialist study programmes were integrated into a single professional higher education degree, a similar process of integration has also taken place across other provision within the Department of Performing arts. Students were first admitted to the new programme in 2004 and a new specialist pathway in multimedia was introduced in 2008. The curriculum is organised according to the demands of both national (the Universities Act and Standards of higher Education) and institutional (Study Regulations and Statutes of Curriculum) legislation. The programme is unique within the Estonian HE sector and the particular mix of specialist pathways, through which students can acquire the specialist skills and knowledge that equip them for entry to professional practice as a lighting designer, prop and stage designer, stage manager or performing arts multimedia specialist, is probably unique across Europe. Discussion with the managers of VCA revealed that the Academy is strategic in the development of its programmes, deliberately seeking to offer alternative study routes to those available in other Estonian HEI's. Therefore, it is not possible to make direct comparisons with like provision nationally (or indeed internationally), but the structure of the programme – though somewhat complex given the need to support a relatively diverse range of specialisms – and its content appear to be carefully designed so as to enable students to meet the stated objectives and learning outcomes.

The complex nature of the curriculum structure presents a degree of challenge to both

teachers and programme managers in ensuring that each student is presented with a coherent learning experience. Both staff and students expressed the view that the learning benefits offered by this integrated approach to curriculum delivery significantly outweigh any structural and logistical challenges. The facility to tailor learning to the individual needs of student, adapt the curriculum to changes in the professional field and accommodate small cohorts of students in specific disciplines were given as examples of such benefits. Staff confirmed that a framework of tutorial advice was available to guide students in their individual choices of elective and specialist modules. However, the digest of the module summaries available within the degree suggests that depth of study may be at risk given the breadth of study offered by the integrated curriculum. Students reported that this was the case within the Prop and Stage Design pathway of the programme, where the curriculum was seen as being too broad with not enough depth in each area

The programme includes a range of modules that have a practical focus and, from the first semester onwards, offers a range of opportunities for students to engage directly with the related field of professional practice. Both practical and work-based learning are formally assessed, this includes a practical creative or design project as an element of the graduation thesis and a digital portfolio that provides an overview of the student's practical professional work. Technical Theatre Arts graduates are much in demand in the professional performing arts field and it is common for students to be offered professional employment before they have formally completed their studies. In some instances, this leads to students not completing their degree within the standard study period and this has an impact on the progression statistics of the programme.

### Strengths

- The value placed on graduates of Technical Theatre Arts programme within the professional performing arts field.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The integrated curriculum brings together a range of study disciplines that have different degrees of overlap in terms of the knowledge and skills required within the professional field. This approach carries the risk that the breadth of study offered by the programme as a whole may impact on the depth of study that it is possible to achieve in any one pathway. The curriculum of the Prop and Stage Design pathway should be reviewed to ensure that it offers a coherent and focused learning experience that is professionally relevant.

## **Resources**

(See also *Resources of UT VCA* in Chapter 1.2.)

The resources available to the programme are sufficient to enable students to meet the

required learning outcomes. These include a black-box studio theatre (fully equipped with lighting and sound equipment), a multi-media centre (with modern video and presentation equipment) and a multi-media computer lab (with a range of specialist software installed). The integration of the various individual specialist study programmes within the Department has opened up a range of technical resources and dedicated workshop facilities – previously dedicated to specific programmes – to the wider use of the student body, this has been of direct benefit to the Technical Theatre Arts students, particularly those following the Prop and Stage Design pathway.

VCA has a compact campus, and is located near the centre of Viljandi which has a highly respected professional theatre with a resident acting company. This theatre, along with other theatres and cultural organisations across the region, provides practical working contexts for third and fourth year students as well as being viable sources of future employment.

The technical and physical resources related to performing arts available to the Technical Theatre Arts students within VCA are significantly augmented by the range of professional facilities that the students have access to when undertaking practical projects hosted by external organisations, including professional theatres, and when they undertake periods of learning situated in the professional field.

A programme of this nature, for which the ready availability of technical equipment is a significant learning resource, is more directly dependent on – for example - lighting and sound equipment of a good professional standard than other programmes in the Programme Subject Group are. While the wider range of technical resources available to students of the Technical Theatre Arts programme through their study placements in the professional theatres within the region (through co-operation agreements with the programme) usefully extend the access that students have to professional-standard equipment, they should also be assured of ready access to a standard range of serviceable equipment within the University. The apparent lack of a clear institutional depreciation policy that covers the maintenance and replacement of technical theatre equipment – as discussed in the general UT VCA resources section above – is a particularly significant issue for the Technical Theatre Arts programme and it is, therefore, appropriate to re-emphasise this particular matter here.

### Strengths

- The increased access to a range of technical resources and dedicated workshop facilities made available to students following the process of curriculum integration within the Department.
- The extended access to technical theatre resources and equipment that students are provided with access to through the co-operation agreements forged between the programme and professional theatres and other cultural facilities across the region.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- To recognise the particular importance of the ongoing maintenance, repair and updating of technical theatre resources (*as set out in the Resources at UT VCA in*

*chapter 1.2*) to the learning experience offered by the Technical Theatre Arts programme.

## Teaching and learning

(See also *Teaching and learning in UT VCA* in chapter 1.2.)

The full integration of the separate subject specialisms that formed the Technical Theatre Arts programme was, in part, designed to offer students opportunity to develop a more versatile set of competences with which to enter the field of professional practice. This integrated approach to teaching and learning is amplified further through both formal and informal interaction between students across all VCA programmes. In the meeting with students, they expressed a clear appreciation of this integrated approach to study and the opportunity that it offered to them to tailor their own learning experience according to their individual professional aspirations. This is supported through their close contact with teaching staff and ongoing tutorial advice and guidance that respects the individual professional aspirations of each student. In the meeting with employers, they commented very positively on the strong student-focus of the teaching staff.

The study process is based on a study plan prepared by the programme manager in co-operation and consultation with the teaching staff, the Programme Council and the student cohort. The study programme has a flexible structure to enable prompt responses to any significant changes in the labour market and/or the needs of employers. Further curricula integration between programmes is planned in the future, with the purpose to offer even more flexible integration and selection opportunities for students. The SER states that the Department of Performing Arts seeks to provide a secure teaching and learning framework that is can be flexibly adapted to the individual needs and expectations of students. In the meeting with Employers, this aspect of flexible integration within the programme and between programmes was singled out as a key feature of the provision.

The combination of theoretical and practical studies takes place according to the academic calendar; each semester has a four-week period of specialized study, during which there is a particular focus on practical training tailored to the specific learning needs of students according to their specialism. Theoretical modules, which often take the form of seminars and colloquiums to develop students' self-expression and analytical skills are normally shared with students studying in other specialized fields within their programme or those on other Prof HE programmes (such as Theatre Arts and Dance Art). Within practical modules theoretical subjects are adapted specifically to the given creative environment in which the learning is taking place. The Programme Council, which advises the Programme Manager on curriculum matters, has employers among its membership and a number of the practical modules take place outside the Academy in professional environments. The key role that employers are invited to play in helping shape the content, delivery and learning outcomes of the curriculum ensures that the programme is designed to meet their stated needs.

Given the nature of the studies and the relatively small numbers of students studying in

each of the four discipline areas, much of the teaching in the practical aspects of the programme is through traditional student/tutor contact. UT provides VCA with a moodle-based virtual Learning Environment (VLE). However, the documentation provided by the Academy records that relatively few of the modules have resources associated with them available to students on the VLE though a number of them use various social media platforms as a proxy for this means of delivery. When questioned about this a member of staff explained that the capabilities of UT VLE system was not well suited to the needs of the staff or students of the Technical Theatre Arts programme. However, developing the digital literacy of students is a key element of the VCA's educational strategy and there is a strong digital component associated with areas of specialism within the programme, such as Lighting Design and Performing Arts Multimedia, as well as a requirement to submit a digital portfolio as part of the graduation thesis.

All VCA students have access to opportunities for mobility although some students expressed a reluctance to be away from their own programme for extended periods of time. The Theatre Technical Arts programme has focused particularly on the development of international traineeships in the professional field and mobility and it is planned that such opportunities will be available to students in the future.

At the meeting with students, they confirmed that the learning outcomes of their programme and the individual modules were both clear to them and were readily accessible in written form. The learning outcomes are appropriate to the overall aims of the programme and reflect the strategic mission of the Academy where appropriate. In the large and complex modules within the programme, which are often comprised of a number of distinct study components, these modules have been subdivided further for assessment purposes as this allows for a greater specificity of learning outcomes, assessment criteria and assessment methods more appropriate where students following particular specialisations (such as Prop and Stage Design or Lighting Design) are also being accredited with an occupational qualification. The meeting with students confirmed that students were content with the assessment processes within their programme.

### Strengths

- The integrated approach to study offered by the programme and the opportunity that it affords students to tailor their own learning experience according to their individual professional aspirations.
- The emphasis placed by VCA on the development of entrepreneurial skills across its provision.
- The key role that employers are invited to play in helping to shape the content, delivery and learning outcomes of the curriculum to ensure that the programme meets their needs.
- The decision to ensure that students successfully completing the programme will also gain accreditation of an occupational qualification where these are available.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The University should ensure that the capabilities of its VLE system meets the

needs of all the programmes at VCA and thereby encourage a greater level of engagement by the staff teaching into the Technical Theatre Arts programme.

## Teaching staff

The teaching staff, employed on permanent contracts, who deliver the Technical Theatre Arts programme are appropriately qualified and have sufficient experience in the relevant professional fields to fully support the students in meeting the expected learning outcomes. The outcome of the feedback collated from student questionnaires indicates that student assessment of teaching skills of their teaching staff is broadly positive.

The University of Tartu has set an ambitious strategic objective that all academic staff must have attained a doctoral degree by the beginning of 2018 as a means of ensuring that a high level of university teaching and research is maintained. This approach could have a particular impact on practical professional programmes such as the Technical Theatre Arts degree. The programme states in the SER that it is likely to have problems in the future with finding qualified teaching staff as it is currently a challenge to find teaching staff who are successful in their field who also have an appropriate academic degree as well as pedagogical skills. In implementing its strategic policy in regard to the academic qualifications of teaching staff, UT needs to consider a means of ensuring that students will continue to be taught by staff possessing significant levels professional expertise and experience within the framework of this policy.

The strategic objectives of both UT and VCA embrace an international perspective. At the meeting with managers it was confirmed that VCA both supports and strongly encourages the international engagement and mobility of its academic staff. In relation to the Theatre Technical Arts programme a continuum of international cooperation is maintained through the exchange of teaching staff and involvement in an array of international projects. Teaching staff are also regularly involved in visits to international fairs, such as ABTT in London, the Prolight + Sound fair in Frankfurt and the Prague Quadrennial in the Czech Republic. Longer-term teaching staff exchanges take place through the Fulbright programme. At the meeting with teaching staff they confirmed that their development of international contacts and mobility opportunities was strongly encouraged. However, they identified that, in comparison to the administrative and practical support offered in respect of student mobility, there was a relative lack of a similar level of support for the international activity of staff.

The majority of the teaching staff members in the Department of Performing Arts cross-teach in all of the three curricula. Teaching staff who teach the practical modules are also well-known and recognised creative practitioners in the Estonian performing arts landscape. There is also a significant level of integration between the curricula, for example, students of theatre technical arts programme take a number of subjects together with Theatre Studies students and work together in mounting performances and plays. VCA also organises a range of large-scale projects that bring together staff and students of different disciplines and departments, for example Students' Theatre Days

and an Entrepreneurship Studies Ideas Lab. VCA also collaborates with School of Economics and Business Administration from the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Tartu in the delivery of the entrepreneurship studies module. Teaching staff from other higher education institutions (Tartu Art College, Estonian Academy of Arts, Tallinn University and its Baltic Film and Media School and the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre) are also involved in teaching. Visiting teaching staff from foreign higher education institutions or top-practitioners (for example; film directors, scenographers and lighting designers) make regular teaching contribution to the programme. VCA has over 50 partner universities in Europe and each year international visiting staff give lectures and practical workshops as part of the Erasmus programme.

### Strengths

- The positive student feedback on their assessment of the teaching skills of staff.
- The range of large-scale projects organized by VCA that bring together staff and students of different disciplines and departments.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- In achieving its strategic goal with regard to the level of academic qualifications it requires to be achieved by teaching staff, the University needs to consider a means of ensuring that students on Professional Degrees will continue to be taught by staff that also possesses the necessary level of professional experience and expertise sufficient to prepare students adequately for direct entry to professional performing arts practice on graduation. The University should look to practices that operate within other HE systems where such professional experience is calibrated against qualification levels to establish an appropriate equivalency with academic degrees.
- VCA should extend the effective administrative systems that it has established to support student mobility to also promote and support for the international activity of staff.

## **Students**

The Technical Theatre Arts programme has a biennial recruitments pattern; applications to the programme are broadly aligned with the number of places available, though this has risen slightly in the last two years of entry. Due to the integrated nature of the curriculum, which offers several study specialisms, it is not readily clear as to how students are distributed between the four study pathways offered. However, the programme offers study specialisms that are not available elsewhere in Estonia and in the meeting with current students they were enthusiastic about their learning experiences on the programme, the scale and friendly nature of the Academy, and the opportunities it afforded them to collaborate with students studying related disciplines

(on other programmes), which they felt prepared them to enter the field of professional performing arts practice with confidence. The students who were met with expressed a general satisfaction with the content, form and methods of study – stating that the programme had exceeded their expectations.

The selection process for applicants seeking to enter the course is rigorous and careful to ensure that the applicant is making the right choice and that the Academy is finding the best possible fit between the students and the programme. However, the numbers of successful completions achieved within the standard study period are significantly lower for the Theatre Technical Arts programme than for other programmes within the Department. The reasons provided by the Academy for this is due these students being in high demand in the job market, with many students being offered employment before they have completed their programme. This can lead to students either extending their period of study or concentrating less on their studies and failing their assessments as a result.

In the meeting with students, they reported that they were fully aware of the opportunities available to them to engage in international mobility. A number of the students present at the meeting were able to report positively on their experiences of either undertaking short-term visits as international students or their involvement in international student projects. However, the students expressed some reluctance to engage with longer periods of study abroad for fear of missing too much of their own programme.

The Academy did not supply specific data on the employment rate of graduates but claim in the SER that *“the number of alumni working in the area of specialisation or a field close to their specialisation is approaching a maximum”*. Although VCA claims that programmes maintain close contacts with alumni, this does not appear to be systematic, but is over-reliant on a patchwork of anecdotal information to build up a general picture of graduate employment. Given the very specific nature of the study specialisms offered within the programme, the work of the Programme Council would be significantly enhanced through having access to accurate data on graduate employment. The comments made in the respective meetings with both Alumni and Employers confirmed that the programme is held in high regard within the professional performing arts field.

### Strengths

- The level of satisfaction expressed by the student with regard to their learning experience on the programme and the level of confidence that it had provided them with to enter the field of professional performing arts field.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The Programme Manager, Teachers and Programme Council should have ready access to granulated data as to how students are distributed between the four study pathways offered by the programme.
- Due to the demand within the professional performing arts field for graduates with

the competences offered within the programme, students are being offered full-time employment before they have completed their degree. While this would normally be regarded as a strength, however, in this instance it has led to a relatively significant number of students either failing or not being able to complete the degree within the standard study period, due to them focusing on professional work at the expense of completing their studies. To address this, the programme might explore the possibilities of developing a formal framework in which such students can complete their studies, in part, through the accreditation of work-based learning in their final year.

## **2. Assessment report of SPG at Tallinn University**

### **2.1. Introduction**

Tallinn University (TU) is the third largest public university in Estonia, focusing primarily on the fields of humanities and the social and natural sciences. TU is a result of the merger of several higher education institutions (HEI) (Tallinn Pedagogical University, Academy Nord, Estonian Institute of Humanities, Institute of History of Estonian Academy of Sciences, Academic Library of Estonia) of Tallinn into a single institution, which resulted in the founding of TU as a public university on 18 March 2005.

In 2015, structural and management reform resulted in the merger of 26 existing units into nine units: six schools (Baltic Film, Media, Arts and Communication School; School of Digital Technologies; School of Educational Sciences; School of Governance, Law and Society; School of Humanities and School of Natural Sciences and Health), two regional colleges (in Rakvere and in Haapsalu) and the library.

Today, the university sees its mission as supporting sustainable development in Estonia through high quality research and study, education of intellectuals, public discussions and promotion of academic partnership. In its activities, the university adheres to such values as openness, quality, professionalism and unity.

The Tallinn University and BFM strategic plan aims to provide education that meets the demands of the labour market and raises the number of students graduating within the nominal period of studies – and that has also been the basis for the Choreography (CHOR) BA and MA study programmes.

**Table 1.** Number of students in 2014-2016

	Admitted			Graduated			Competition per place		
	2014	2015	2016	2014	2015	2016	2014	2015	2016
<b>CHOR BA</b>	12	11	13	12	11	12	3.8	3.05	3.3
<b>CHOR MA</b>	0	6	0	0	5	0	0	1.2	0

## 2.2. General findings and recommendations at study programme group level

In general, the SER contains a good analysis of the strengths and areas of improvement. Staff members and students are well aware of the self-evaluation process. Students are very active and committed, and full of ideas for development. The general atmosphere among teachers and students is very positive and cooperative. The passion and dedication of the teaching staff and the programme curator in particular are to be highly commended.

The choreography BA and MA programmes were integrated into Tallinn University's School of Baltic Film, Media, Arts and Communication following the 2015 the structural reform.

In Tallinn University, choreography programme/s have been evolving and have today greater emphasis on contemporary dance as an art form, as well as on choreography for Estonian folk dance. The need for a shift in content towards contemporary dance is due to the lack of contemporary dance education during Soviet times. As the team learned during its visit, contemporary dance has only been developing in Estonia for the last 20 years.

Performing arts (theatre) schools in Estonia have traditionally provided education for performers, actors and directors, principally for established theatres. For contemporary dance, there are no such established venues. This means that most dance professionals are working as freelance dancers, choreographers, and teachers. On the other hand, there is the longstanding tradition of Estonian Song and Dance Festival and there is a need for educated folk dance specialists and choreographers.

The choreography programmes are relatively isolated within the BFM School, and have few close links with other performing arts areas. During their visit, the team found the existing performing arts environment minimal in TU – unable at present to sustain and indeed strengthen the development of contemporary dance and choreography programmes. The study programmes have not achieved or been given the status and

resources required to be fully successful within BFM. That said, major future opportunities for collaboration within BFM's film and media programmes and through innovative partnering with other sectors of Tallinn University constitute a potential strength.

It is evident that in a small country, dancers and performing artists need to master a variety of skills in a professional field which is necessarily fragmented. However, a clearer profile of each performing arts programme (including theatre) is needed to enhance contemporary dancer/mover education, dance maker/teacher education, choreographer education, and folk dance/music education in Estonia.

### Strengths

- A range of collaborative possibilities with BFM programmes.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Based on the team's interviews, the team recommends that a nation-wide discussion regarding the profile of dance programmes within the HE structures of Estonia. The team recommends that the performing arts network take the initiative to start discussions with dance educators and professionals to clarify the Estonian dance programme profiles and thus to create a healthy performing arts environment.
- The team recommends the development of a mechanism for gathering and recording formal feedback from the profession and stakeholders regarding the challenges and opportunities within present and future practice – so as to maintain and develop a forward-looking and relevant curriculum.

## 2.3. Strengths and areas for improvement of study programmes by assessment areas

### 2.3.1. Choreography (BA, MA)

In general, the study group meets the standards of programme development and delivery. The labour market and feasibility analysis have been carried out. The majority of BA and MA alumni have found jobs in their domain. Recognition of previous learning and working experience is regulated by TU Study Regulations.

During the visit and interviews, the team found that the dance programmes at TU are very much connected to Estonian dance traditions (e.g. orientation both to folk dance and partly ballet). The dance/choreography programmes are crucial to the preservation and development of the Estonian Song and Dance Festival and the folk dance (and music) tradition as a whole.

The strong national folk dance tradition in Estonia deserves nurturing. On the other hand, without proper higher education in contemporary dance, the rise of professional, contemporary Estonian dance as an art form would be impossible. The national folk dance and ballet traditions have strengths (strong domestic labour market connections) and weaknesses (an as yet young contemporary and international orientation).

Until 2010, the choreography BA curriculum was very fragmented. Currently it is more concentrated on two specializations only – folk (“ethnic”) dance and contemporary dance, which have alternative admission cycles every other year. Because of its history, the BA programme now has two goals: nurturing folk dance traditions and contemporary dance under the overall title “choreography”. It seems that “choreography” is understood principally as “composition”. At the same time, it seems that both programmes also provide training for dance pedagogues. According to the interviews, some students were unclear as to their specialty.

The construction of the BA curriculum encompasses general principles and field- specific skills. General principles include knowledge of anatomy and kinesiology, technical dance skills, skills in composition construction, experience of the production process, and basic academic studies. Specialty traineeships are offered in folk or contemporary dance. The BA/MA curricula integrate didactic modules. The former, very diverse structure has been transformed into a more coherent whole, and the goals are generally more realistic. However, the BA curriculum remains fragmented, including as it does a broad mixture of modules and courses: ballet, character dance, yoga, Pilates, folk dance, contemporary dance and composition. The course credit allotments are generally very small.

Some crucial parts of the programme group appear weak, and there may be some imbalance between different aspects of studies. Folk dance and ballet appear to be relatively strong, but choreography in the sense of full-fledged creation (stage creation), creative and improvisational work and contemporary dance are not sufficiently emphasized. In that sense, the name of the programme is somewhat misleading. In the contemporary European dance context, choreography refers to independent creations on stage or using other platforms.

The Estonian labour market for the performing arts is becoming increasingly project-based. This means that one has to understand what it means to work as an independent creative artist. This explains the presence of courses designed to enhance general and entrepreneurial skills in both study programmes, thus allowing future graduates to find funding to their projects, rehearsal and performance space, and to exploit contemporary information technologies in their performance activities. However, the curricula includes content that appears less relevant to the contemporary field (e.g. character dance). The MA-curriculum has courses which include research methodology, didactics, anatomy, and production traineeships in the field. The coherence and the core of the MA-programme could be developed still further by determining what constitutes the core of dance technical studies and by removing courses that don't contribute to building up skills logically, such as the above-mentioned character dance.

In the SER, it is considered a strength that the study programme supports the achievement of general competences. The team understands that the programmes take into account the demands of a labour market requiring teachers, dancers and

choreographers both in folk and contemporary dance. However during the interviews, the general competences were considered a weakness and the actual goal of the programmes appeared somewhat unclear. It is also stated in the SER that students are eager to have more opportunities to perform in a variety of productions.

In 2016, a new teaching and course feedback system was launched (ÕIS). According to on-site interviews, students are able to give feedback through this. The programme takes student feedback into account in curriculum design.

### Strengths

- The greater integration of practical and analytical/theoretical teaching constitute a strength.
- Both study programmes promote development of entrepreneurial skills.
- The MA programme includes independent work and network building.
- Communication between teachers and students is simple and informal.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The team recommends that in the future, employers, alumni and other stakeholders be given a greater voice in designing the curriculum and in providing clearer programmes guidelines.
- The programme name should better reflect its overall content.
- There should be greater collaboration between performing arts study programmes in HE institutions in Estonia.
- Curricula should be made more coherent to enhance the overall learning process.
- The admissions system (folk and contemporary dance in alternative years) causes gap years for students and difficulties in understanding the overall core study structure.

## **Resources**

Resources in general are satisfactory, but there are some shortcomings, notably in terms of sufficient purpose built rehearsal spaces for dance studies. Currently, choreography/contemporary dance is housed in a well-designed building which allows for theoretical studies and research as well as student socialising but which is not purpose-built for the dance programmes. At the moment, dance studios are small and separate without proper floors or ventilation. A new building will be completed by the autumn of 2019. The new building should solve the need for better equipped dance studios and a performance space.

Tallinn University has a good library with sufficient books and e-materials. The learning

environment is basically in good shape.

Otherwise, the study programmes do not yet enjoy adequate resources needed to function successfully within the BFM. As indicated in SER, one major problem for both BA and MA programmes is the shortage of training internships in the field of contemporary dance, since theatres are not ready to accept the trainees and independent groups work irregularly. It is essential that choreography studies be able to include opportunities for creating fostering creation. During the interviews the team found that there are virtually no production funds available (for clothing, props etc.) nor are there professional producers available to help.

### Strengths

- The University provides basic programme services and infrastructure.
- There is good access to books and e-materials.
- A new building with dance-specific premises will be built in 2019.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The team recommends the guarantee of a sustained allocation of resources sufficient to ensure that students are able to achieve the full range of required learning outcomes in each programme without reliance on external funding.
- The team recommends developing sufficient resources for supporting international student traineeships as well as inviting of international choreographers and teachers.
- The team recommends the allocation of funding for production and updated technology and equipment for the future building (light and sound technology, IT-technology).
- The team recommends in-house physiotherapy services in case of injuries.
- The team recommends that the new dance studios integrate proper dance spring floors, essential for student and teacher health and well-being, as well as proper technical infrastructure for performance of new works.

## **Teaching and learning**

The learning philosophy and teaching aims and methods are basically up to date. The coordinator is aware of contemporary dance teaching methods and strives to continue to enhance them. The teaching philosophy is individually focused and anatomical safety is a priority. The team got the impression that classical ballet is used as the major technical base in both folk and contemporary dance specialties. This may be relevant at the moment in Estonia but may not be ideal for the learning of individual movement patterns or creativity.

Teaching aims to broaden students' individual vision of dance beyond dancing to include the place of dance in society. According to interviews with teachers, in some theoretical courses the practical studies are well connected. For example, there is no longer a

separate dance analysis course, but it is integrated with practice and in the case of folk dance choreographer/teacher studies, some research (field work) methods are connected with student practice for the Song and Dance Festival.

The collaboration with BFM programmes has provided the possibility of creating dance films. Digital technologies have been introduced and the seminar "Dancing Technologies: New Media and Dance Education" was initiated in 2017. These are positive collaborations.

Study programmes can accept foreign students for short term practical studies as all teachers have some knowledge of English. The students have good opportunities to attend international courses, but Erasmus exchanges have been sporadic at best. There is nevertheless significant collaboration with different universities, networks, and festivals such as the European Cooperative Arts Network (ECA) or Nordplus, with its seven partner universities.

### Strengths

- Students are satisfied with the clarity and objectivity of course assessment.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The students wish more personal feedback on their creative work and throughout their study process;
- Further integration between practical and theoretical courses is recommended.

## **Teaching staff**

The size of regular academic staff for the study programmes is sufficient, though it maybe not completely balanced. The full-time teaching staff consists of the programme coordinator/teacher, a composition teacher, two performing arts theory teachers and part time ballet teachers. These teachers are passionate and dedicated, and thus work well together. Teachers are also aware of each other's teaching methods.

Qualification requirements for members of teaching staff are set out in the TU Employment Relation Rules. Overall, the programme teaching staff is well-qualified. The theoretical teaching staff is qualified, understands contemporary methods and is in a very good position to offer thesis supervision. The lecturers' work is assessed during annual performance interviews, and every five years during the attestation process. According to the SER, all academic staff members have gone through the attestation process. They have participated in creative projects and networks during the last two years. Also, according to interviews, teachers' working plans include time for creative work.

Teaching resources are not necessarily always appropriately allocated. During the visit, the team found that contemporary/composition dance classes are regularly taught only by two teachers, the other two being ballet teachers. This may not be sufficient to support specific aspects of contemporary dance training. To supplement the needs in contemporary dance, it is essential to integrate visiting teachers with new ideas and movement genres. Priority should be given to developing resources to support longer term visiting teachers/choreographers working with students, as was pointed out by regular teachers. The team was particularly surprised to learn that teachers sometimes provide the funds to invite guest teachers. The team understands the problems of resource allocation within the TU, the BFM and at the programme level.

In order to improve the competencies of education leaders and teachers, the Teachers' Academy Centre for Innovation in Education at TU offers a variety of training opportunities. The courses focus on the analysis and improvement of course design, application of the principle of constructive alignment, application of appropriate teaching and learning methods and assessment types. According to interviews, the teachers have attended these courses, but there is still a need for further education in their core dance specialisations.

### Strengths

- A small, passionate, dedicated group of teachers who are well coordinated and work and teach together as a team;
- A qualified teaching staff, with a clear desire to stay current and develop the study programme internationally;
- The large age diversity among teachers.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- There is a need for further, in-depth ongoing education in the field for academic staff.
- The team recommends that the teacher/dance genre balance be discussed within programme development;
- There is a need to envision hiring of teachers from abroad for longer term projects.
- Academic staff should be provided with more opportunities to participate in conferences and festivals abroad.

## **Students**

The reduction in the size of the age cohort entering higher education in Estonia has not affected the competitiveness of the BA choreography programme. Applicants are well prepared and motivated and admission numbers are considered to be sufficient by Estonian standards. However, in the MA choreography programme the applicant/intake is virtually 100%.

The student motivation is very good as basically all students graduate on time. Students

are also aware of the Estonian and international professional environment. While students aspire to be full-time professional dancers, the lack of contemporary dance theatres obliges them to develop a broader array of skills, thus enabling them to embrace portfolio careers which may integrate pedagogy, production, and administration in addition to choreography and performance.

Students are able to give feedback through the new student-centered OIS, allowing for self-assessment, feedback on teaching, teachers and the study environment. Given the intimate nature of these programmes, feedback is often given face to face between students and teachers. Interviews suggest students feedback is taken into account. For example, when students requested hip hop classes, these were instituted.

### Strengths

- A dynamic cohort of graduates who are active in the profession and who are designing Estonia's future dance landscape;
- Most students graduate on time;
- Student satisfaction with the content, form and methods of studies is generally high;
- As part of their studies, students attend other Estonian and/or foreign higher education institution workshops;
- Graduates enjoy high rates of employment;
- Students are very committed to their studies and are active in giving feedback;
- Student feedback is taken seriously, is formally consulted and is integral to the development of the curriculum;
- A psychologist is available through the career and counselling services unit at TU.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Students expect more in-depth exploration of contemporary dance styles;
- Support for student career planning should be developed;
- Greater resources for study abroad are needed.

## 3. Assessment report of SPG at Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre

### 3.1. Introduction

Tallinn Higher Music School, the present Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre, was founded in 1919 during the first year of the Republic of Estonia. It is the leading educational institution in Estonia in the fields of music and theatre. During its almost

100 years of history, EAMT has gone through many changes. Currently there are 17 academic departments, the staff of EAMT numbers 242 employees, and there are approximately 650 students studying at EAMT. In addition to formal academic education, EAMT also offers in-service training for music teachers and musicians in Estonia. EAMT is the Estonian centre of academic and artistic research in music, but its research areas also include music education, theatre and cultural management.

As stated in the Development Plan of EAMT, the Academy as an organisation should function in an efficient manner, with motivated employees and a modern working environment.

The higher theatre education has been offered from 1938 to 1942 and from 1957, when the Drama Faculty was opened, till now. In 1999, the Estonian Academy of Music was granted its own building in the centre of Tallinn. However, the Drama School remains housed in its building on Toompea.

In the beginning, the Drama School only trained actors. Directing education became available in 1996 and dramaturgy in 2004. So far, the school has given 27 groups of BA graduates, who work in Estonian theatres, but also in television, radio and cinema. MA studies were introduced in 1995 and the first PhD degree for a practice based study in the field of theatre was awarded in 2011.

Table 1. Admission statistics/ BA

	Applications	Accepted	Graduated/Studying
<b>2012-2016</b>			
Acting	374	15	11
Directing	23	0	0
Dramaturgy	26	3	3
<b>2014-2018</b>			
Acting	299	15	15
Directing	31	1	1
Dramaturgy	61	3	3

## 3.2. General findings and recommendations at study programme group level

One of the main assets of the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre and its Drama School is certainly the prime place it holds in the long tradition of theatre training in Estonia. The name of the school itself serves as a brand in Estonian cultural life both for professionals and for audiences. The methods of training employed at the school and the personnel who work there are based on or come from that tradition. This foundation in tradition serves as insurance for the quality of the training for the students and for their future professional lives. The tradition is also embedded in a deep attachment to the building in which the school resides.

As part of the EAMT, the principles of the management of the Drama School are stated in EAMT's Statute of Academic Departments. However, the Drama School has a somewhat more autonomous position than other departments. It has its own small supporting staff, its own timetable, and its own library which is a branch of the EAMT Library. It is also located in a separate building. According to interviews, there is not very much personal communication between the Drama School and the other departments of the EAMT. Students mentioned during the interview that mostly due to practical reasons they have little, if any, contacts with other students of the EAMT, and that they normally do not participate in any social events together with other students.

The EAMT is one of the founders of the new network for higher education institutions of the arts in Estonia. The network was established in the framework of the EMTASTRA project for development of the quality and efficiency of education and research. The participants include EAMT, Tallinn University, the Estonian Academy of Arts, and the University of Tartu (including Viljandi Culture Academy). The team was convinced that this kind of cooperation is crucial for theatre and related studies in Estonia.

According to SER and interviews, the Drama School is remarkable in emphasizing the role of strong individuals as vanguards – starting with highly regarded Voldemar Panso, a distinguished authority in Estonian theatre history, who was the first headmaster in 1957 when the Drama Faculty was opened as part of the Tallinn Conservatoire.

The Drama School is managed by a Head of School who is usually a practicing theatre expert. The general meeting of the teaching staff advises the Head of School in making important decisions. The Assistant to the Head of School is responsible for daily administration of studies.

According to SER and interviews, the self-evaluation process in the Drama School was carried out mostly by a small management group and the report was written mainly by the Assistant to the Head of School. During the interviews, it became obvious that students in general were not aware of quality enhancement processes. They didn't participate in any systematic way in the self-evaluation process or compiling of the SER. Teaching staff were able to read the SER on its completion and to approve it. The team recommends that the management should give consideration to a continued, searching and inclusive self-evaluation aimed at improving the interaction between all strata of the membership of the Academy, exploring ways of developing and enhancing all aspects of

the training in the light of modern developments both in theatre and recorded media and helping them to articulate a clear vision of the Academy's future.

### Strengths

- The long tradition embedded within the ethos of the school which gives authority both educationally and professionally to the training.
- Strong connections with the professional theatres in the city and the country.

### Recommendations

- The Assessment Team recommends that the management and teaching staff together give time to articulating a future vision for the development of the training and a strategy for producing this.

## **Study programme development**

Curriculum development in the Drama School is the responsibility of a curriculum council. The curricula are then approved by the EAMT Council. According to the SER, there have been no significant changes in the BA programme in the past five years. A new curriculum council, including teaching staff members, theatre directors, theatre researchers, scholars, and students was appointed in the spring 2016.

According to interviews there are plans in the EAMT for a more internationally oriented MA theatre programme in the near future. The assessment team considers this to be a very positive development.

(See also chapters 3.3.1. and 3.3.2.)

## **Resources**

Overall the resources of the Drama School are sufficient. The old and beautiful building is a warm and cosy study environment. The building is idiosyncratic and challenging to make use of especially for the demands of physical training. However, every part of it is used with great ingenuity and resourcefulness and it is obvious that the deep love felt for the building provides an inestimable value to the depth and the quality of the teaching. There is very little possibility for any adaptation for wheelchair usage (ramps and lifts). Although the building is much-loved and revered, it is probably not the best possible building neither for the movement classes nor for performing.

The solution to the shortage of appropriate space will be the annex to the main building of the EAMT which will be completed in 2019. The new building will include a concert hall and a black box, which should be a significant improvement to the current lack of space. The current study environment is also quite separate from the other arts education specialisms. With the addition of the new building, collaboration with other programmes may enhance the educational environment.

Because the BA and MA courses together only have an intake of approximately 30 students every two years, there is just sufficient classroom and office space and areas for student recreation including a small basement cooking area where the students can prepare their own food. There is a well-stocked library where the students can pursue their individual studies. The two main studios (white and black) are only just adequate for group physical work and although they provide the opportunity for in-house presentations they are not suitable for public presentation.

The School is well-staffed with teachers and course-leaders from the professional theatre, but the management of the school relies disproportionately on efforts of the Assistant to the Head of School, as administrator, facilitator, counsellor etc.

There is access to the facilities of the Baltic Film School for training in film acting and the students engage in work with professional companies and theatres in Tallinn.

New lightning equipment was installed in the Drama School in 2016. The Drama School also hired a technician whose responsibilities include assisting teaching staff members and students in technical matters.

### Strengths

- A building redolent with history and exploited with ingenuity to its full capacities.
- A high level of financial support per acting student.
- Involvement in the planning for the new building under construction.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Urgent thought should be given to adaptations to the building needed to allow for the inclusion of students with disabilities and special needs in the training.
- Consideration should be given to further support for the administration of the Drama School.
- There should be forward planning for a future which includes new training and performance spaces. What opportunities will this provide for more cooperation and collaboration with the outside world and other institutions and what impact will it have on the nature of the training?
- The management needs to explore ways of using space other than the school, especially in encouraging the students to look outwards for collaboration initiatives and in considering how to encourage students with disabilities and special needs to engage in the training.
- A psychological support system should be constructed and implemented.

## **Teaching and learning**

Studies are organised in a study group system and each one has a named group instructor. Student admission takes place every other year, and consequently there are only two study groups in the four-year BA programme and one in the MA programme at

the same time.

Teachers have very close relationships with and knowledge of the students. This allows for individual guidance and support for the students. Group instructors have significant authority in arranging teaching and learning. They also have the right to make proposals for inviting specialty instructors to teach their group. Student groups are tightly bound together and BA students even travel on international exchange together as a group. Study groups have “dedicated instructors” – as they are called in the SER – who are responsible for the academic progress of their students.

Feedback is usually direct and teachers and students are generally not used to giving and taking formal or written feedback. This may be natural and often effective in a small institution but informal feedback is not always sufficient. Written and more formal feedback is needed, for example, for overall quality enhancement and development of the programs and their delivery. According to interviews with students and teachers, they are not always aware of assessment criteria of the courses, which may cause many kinds of misunderstandings. The management could seek to improve the formal means of collecting and responding to student feedback to complement, strengthen and perhaps challenge the informal means which at the moment is the main source of information in a close and tight-knit community.

### Strengths

- A close relationship with teachers and students which allows for personalised guidance.
- A strong understanding of the links between the training and the requirements of the profession.

### Recommendations

- Because of the intensity of the training and the close nature of the relationships that exist between staff and students, there is a need to create formal structures to take into consideration feedback or any complaints.
- The management should explore mechanisms for embedding transparency and fairness both in assessment processes and in future work relationships because of the inherent danger of unintended prejudice arising when teachers and employers are often one and the same and working within a very closed circle of connections.

## **Teaching staff**

The teaching staffs for the BA in Dramatic Art and the MA in Theatre Arts and Theatre Pedagogics are experienced practitioners and dedicated to the traditions of the Academy. They are recognised for their work within professional theatre and for their commitment to teaching. They know each other well and there is much informal opportunity for discussing the courses and the development of the students. There are also formal meetings to further these opportunities and for brainstorming about future developments. There is no doubting the passionate dedication of the staff to this Academy and its students.

Consideration is given to their professional development and they can apply for money to help support this. They are also allowed flexibility to continue their outside work and maintain their relationship with the Academy. The present MA in physical theatre opens the opportunity for them to experience the work of practitioners from around the world.

According to the SER, most teaching staff members have much teaching experience but in some cases, they have limited pedagogical training. This is a recognized area for improvement. They do have the opportunity to follow the work of visiting instructors, but it is not always possible for the teachers to take up these opportunities.

Teaching staff members receive feedback on the teaching process from other teachers and the Head of School in the post-examination meetings, as well as participating in appraisal meetings with the Head of School. According to the SER, teaching performance has no effect on remuneration, but it is taken into consideration when it comes to re-election of teaching staff members.

### Strengths

- A close-knit teaching staff who shares a common passion for their subject and a recognised philosophy supporting their teaching practice.
- A close relationship with employers and the profession in Estonia.
- A passionate attachment to the Academy and its traditions.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- EAMT may find more and coherent ways to support the professional development of the staff both as artists and teachers. This could be practical as well as financial support.
- Consideration should be given to the support of the teaching staff through the organization of lectures on the principles of pedagogy and adult education. This is to especially support those with extensive practical experience of teaching but who have not had the time to combine this with the study of theory.

## 3.3. Strengths and areas for improvement of study programmes by assessment areas

### 3.3.1. Dramatic Art (BA)

#### **Study programme and study programme development**

The BA programme in Dramatic Art as recorded in the SER responds to the required standards and regulations in its structure and content. It is a long-established and highly regarded programme for the training of actors, directors and dramaturgs. It complements the development plans for the teaching of theatre (acting, directing and amateur directing) at the Viljandi College, although it appears that the efforts for cooperation and the running of complementary courses proceeds more from Viljandi towards the Estonian Academy than the other way around. This makes sense as Viljandi has recently restructured its curriculum whilst the Estonian Academy is running its courses from a long tradition and is only beginning to embark on thinking about restructuring some of its courses. The demands of the labour market, especially the established theatres and companies, are consulted in the recruitment of students and teachers. There is some consultation on the content of the courses but there has been little change in the Dramatic Arts BA for many years although it is acknowledged that there need to be some adjustments to the teaching of Directing and Dramaturgy. The new curricula for Directing and Dramaturgy has been drafted in November 2017 for formal approval, but at the moment, there is little information available. There is a desire to include specific syllabi for the two disciplines (directing and dramaturgy) and to recruit specialist teachers for them so that there is a curator for each discipline and these three curators will be responsible to the overall Head of the Full Programme. The management should progress with its objective to strengthen, change and clarify the programmes for directors and dramaturgs to ensure they meet the demands for the training of these disciplines in the twenty first century.

Because most of the communication between staff and students is personal and informal, learning outcomes and especially assessments can sometimes be unclear. This is especially true for the dramaturgical students who are uncertain of the aims of their course.

The programme of study for the BA is very full and demands many hours of group and individual study from the students. There is a desire to cooperate with other institutions and to incorporate new skills. The best example of this is the cooperation with the Baltic Film School where the head of the Academy also teaches. This facilitates collaboration between film directors and acting students to the benefit of both.

In terms of International connections, the Academy is rebuilding its relationship with the Gitis School in Moscow and co-operates with the Theatre Academy in Madrid. They are also expanding foreign exchange opportunities for the students. There is a regular fixed exchange with Rose Bruford College in the UK. Every two years students from the Estonian Academy spend half a term working in Sidcup and RB students spend the equivalent time at the EAMT. The facilities for including students with special needs or learning disabilities are hard to discern although thought is given to the requirements of students with Russian as a first language.

There are formal and informal structures for sourcing feedback from both teachers and students although the Academy is more assured of the informal methods rather than the formal.

### Strengths

- The Dramatic Art BA is a long-standing programme which is supported by a history of successful employment for its graduates and has the enthusiastic backing of theatre employers.
- The management has a close relationship with the professional Estonian theatre.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The managements should ensure that learning outcomes are clear and that assessment is formally recorded and is clear to the students so that they can assess areas for improvement in their development.
- The management should actively explore ways to open access to students with disabilities and special needs.
- The management should progress with its objective to strengthen, change and clarify the programmes for directors and dramaturgs to ensure they meet the demands for the training of these disciplines in the twenty first century.

### **Teaching and learning**

The EAMT has a long-established method of teaching for its students through their four years. Each cohort of students is allocated a course leader generally a professional and established theatre practitioner who is responsible for guiding that cohort through the entirety of their studies. So that although the philosophy of the school is grounded in the tradition of psychological realism this will be adapted and built on by the ideas and methods of the individual leader guiding the students. This work is supported by the contributions of the regular teachers of movement, voice and acting.

The general objectives of the training of actors within the School are clear but they can become less clear when combined with the input of a particular course leader. The criteria for assessment are dependent on the individual demands of the leader. This means that at times the feedback to the students about their work can be expressed in quite individual and sometimes confusing ways for the students.

The nature of the feedback is very personal which can be an advantage for individual teacher/student relationships but there is not a coherent policy of formal feedback which is needed to underpin the less formal feedback and also to serve as a protection for both teacher and student, if misunderstandings arise in the progress of the teaching or the development of the student.

The students are encouraged to use digital facilities especially when preparing their final projects. The hours of group work are extremely demanding and there is difficulty in allowing time for individual development and projects.

Some consideration is given to the students whose first language is Russian. They are offered instruction in the Estonian language and there are collaborations available with Russian Academies and theatres for them to spend some of their time studying there.

There is one course offered to the students in the management of their career and some training with film directors in their fourth year. There is an exchange visit with Rose Bruford college in their second year although it is uncertain what opportunities for close

outside collaboration that offers or what dynamic input it makes to the development of the students' learning. Because the work at the Academy is of necessity extremely intense there is a difficulty in exploring outside collaborations both nationally and internationally.

The Academy has acknowledged that it needs to re-think and re-structure the teaching of dramaturgy and directing. These two disciplines benefit greatly from participating in the acting training but there is an admitted lack of a clear-sighted objective supporting the training in the two different disciplines.

### Strengths

- Teaching staff are all established practitioners with skills both as artists and teachers and with connections to the professional world of theatre.
- There is strong commitment to the preservation, maintenance and development of the tradition of psychological realism in the Estonian Theatre.
- The students are exposed to the individual pedagogy of one leader throughout their training.
- The Theatre Companies and future employers are closely involved with the recruitment of students and the running of the courses.
- It is an asset of the undergraduate course that the students have access to some of the MA programme master classes and also have before them the possibility of further higher-level study on the MA course at the Academy.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The management should consider strengthening the organisational character of the teaching process to help balance the strong individual input. There should be clearer, more transparent frames and channels of evaluation and there should be a formal framework developed and implemented for feedback between teachers and students.
- The management should explore ways to maintain the strength of the intensive training and yet encourage more individual student initiatives, openness to collaboration with outside training institutions, and developing more of an international profile for the school.
- If possible training in acting for the recorded media should be extended through a greater part of the four year programme.
- Consideration should be given to the development and integration of physical training in the overall training of the actor.

## **Teaching staff**

There are some long standing members of staff who have dedicated themselves to the teaching of acting and voice (for example) at this particular institution and

supporting this particular methodology. They also practice outside the institution and are familiar with the theatre artists who enter the establishment on a shorter-term basis as group leaders or guest lecturers. They are highly regarded for their expertise in their area of specialism. They know each other well and communicate informally and regularly with the other members of staff about the progress of the students. As already noted there are also formal meetings to further these opportunities and for brainstorming about future developments. Both long-serving members of staff and the visiting group leaders are passionately dedicated to the Academy.

There is the opportunity for support for their professional development but it seems that because of workload they have little chance to take up this support.

### Strengths

- The Teaching staff are well qualified, experienced and have high profiles in the world of professional theatre as well as teachers. They are dedicated to the School and the students.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Consider the impact of the input of the MA course to the development of the teaching staff especially in facilitating contact with different ideas and practitioners and helping them to develop their own practice and pedagogy.

## **Students**

The students and recent alumni of the academy are hardworking and dedicated to their profession. Their professional identity is tightly linked to the Academy. The BA students were a little constrained in talking about what they were gaining from the training and found it difficult to articulate a vision for their future careers and lives. They are appreciative of the intensity of their training and for the work opportunities provided by the close interaction with the employers. There was concern about the nature of the feedback they received which they felt was expressed in informal and idiosyncratic terms from which they found it difficult to extrapolate guidance for their development.

The dramaturgical students were very dissatisfied with the course which they felt was unclear in its definition of what dramaturgy was and therefore there was a lack of clarity in the courses that should be taught for that programme. There was a similar if less intense feeling from the directors; they felt that there was great clarity in the training of the actors but much less so in their course and that they would appreciate more opportunities for working as directors with the acting students as well as working in the outside theatres.

The students have a close relationship with the staff and appreciate the way that their work can be constantly and personally reviewed. However, this does leave them unsure about how their progress is recorded clearly in a way that helps them to understand their

own learning process.

The selection process for these students entering the course is rigorous and careful to ensure that the student is making the right choice and that the academy is finding the best possible students for their programme.

The students experience some international mobility especially through the exchange programme with Rose Bruford College. Although, apart from the opportunity to see different shows in London, they were unsure of its other benefits. There is also the opportunity for them to participate in some of the master classes on the present MA course which is one of their few opportunities for contact with new and innovative ideas about making theatre from around the world.

The students are conscious of being overworked but understand that that is one of the demands of the training. They seemed to be a little daunted and constrained by this and had little sense of a possible future beyond that offered by the traditional openings in the different Estonian theatres.

### Strengths

- A secure institution which offers the students a strong and fixed tradition of theatre training.
- Students are very committed to this tradition and to working in the theatres that are connected to the institution.
- A close relationship with the teaching staff which allows for immediate and personal feedback and comment on their progress.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Assessment criteria should be clearly and formally set out so that the students can understand their assessments and use these formal records to contribute to their progress.
- Thought should be given to means of extending the possibilities for the students' creative development across international borders and into areas of innovative theatre developments and also to enlarging the possibilities of student led initiatives and individual work.
- The time should be found for student representatives to attend and contribute to the student council of the EAMT.
- There should be formal means for students to contribute to the development of the curriculum alongside the management and the staff.
- Careful thought needs to be given to the tutoring of minority students (Russian speaking future actors), international students (English language teaching and support) and to the inclusion of students with special needs and disabilities.
- Due to the stressfulness of the heavy workload and the competitive environment within which the students work they would benefit greatly from the recruitment of a psychological counsellor at the school. The team recommends that the management respond to this expressed need.

### 3.3.2. Theatre Arts and Theatre Pedagogics (MA)

The goal of the Theatre Arts and Theatre Pedagogics MA curriculum is to train highly qualified specialists in the fields associated with theatre and theatre education. The direction of recent years has been to engage top-level professionals from Estonia and numerous visitors from abroad to provide internationally recognized theatre education. The MA program has been designed to accommodate professionals who are already employed by theatres. The entire concept of the MA program and the format of studies, which enables professionals to obtain a Master's degree while in employment.

The prominent feature of the MA programme is that each admitted group of students has a different dominant direction and focus. Thus, the content of the studies has been changing with each group. It means that, while the overall structure of the curriculum has remained roughly the same, the content of specialty subjects has been variable for each admitted student cohort. Stage speech was in the focus of the curriculum in the admission year 2010. In 2012, there began a joint programme for theatre and film directors in cooperation with the Baltic Film and Media School of Tallinn University. The focus of the curriculum was theatre and psychology in 2014. At the time of assessment, the dominant direction was physical theatre which began 2016.

The regular change of orientation in MA is undoubtedly good policy, because it prevents one-sidedness of the education and supports many kinds of specialities necessary for the professional field. As stated also in the SER, Estonia's theatre landscape has changed and diversified a great deal in the last two decades. This must be taken into account in developing theatre education as well.

The structure of current MA is innovative and makes it possible to invite to Estonia high-level international teachers with diverse specialities, which is undoubtedly a strength. The team warmly recommends that the international dimension would be integral part of the education in the future as well. According to interviews, the future steps to be taken in the near future, are still somewhat unclear. According to the management of the EAMT, one possible choice may be an international study programme.

#### Strength

- Change of focus for each admission and strong international dimension benefit the diversity and innovative nature of the education.

#### Recommendation

- The EAMT is considering opening a new MA programme with an increased international profile, which would benefit the Drama School, its students and the staff. The team recommends that this idea be given serious consideration and

further development.

## Resources

In addition to resources common with the BA programme, the MA programme benefits especially from its international orientation which is manifested in contacts, visitors and master classes of various and versatile special areas of study. As a result of good cooperation with several professional theatres, the students' stage productions are included in the repertoire of professional theatres, which is an asset.

## Teaching and learning

The MA curriculum is divided into a specialty module (37 ECTS credits), a theatre education module (30 ECTS credits), a general studies module (8 ECTS credits), and a creative/research graduation module, consisting of 2 creative projects and a written paper for a total of 45 ECTS credits. Group work is the main educational method. The study group works as an ensemble, because teamwork is crucial in theatrical art.

The curriculum of the MA programme has a strong emphasis on practice. Over the course of the two-year programme, students have to create two professional stage productions, which will be included in the repertoire of professional theatres. The strong connection and cooperation with the local theatre field is an evident strength. As the field has been changing during the last years, it has become more important that the curriculum includes 3 ECTS credits of entrepreneurship studies. The team was convinced that theoretical knowledge is well integrated into practical work.

The cohesion of the studies is good, as the whole idea of the programme is of an in-depth training of the professional. Studies are divided into one-week courses, once a month that make it possible for the students to work intensively with a particular teacher. These weeks seem to be extremely intense and students require support for a training that can run for three sessions a day for a whole week. After the training weeks, there are theoretical studies each month. All subjects studied by the current student cohort are linked together by an umbrella subject "Physical Theatre", which is taught over the course of two years. The philosophical base for this is the idea that theoretical subjects always assist to place practical studies in a broader context.

All creative examinations and assessments are open for viewing to other students, teaching staff members, and basically anyone from outside the school who is interested. In the MA programme, all lessons are open to other teaching staff members to observe. According to the SER, teaching staff members rarely use this opportunity.

There is a significant pedagogical emphasis in the current MA programme. According to the SER, in the first two semesters, the MA students observed the teaching process in

the Drama School and other Estonian schools of performing arts (TU BFM and UT VCA).

In the second year, the MA students start teaching and assisting senior instructors. While preparing and conducting their lessons, they will receive comprehensive support from the teaching staff of the MA program, which includes practicing experts, education researchers and theatre critics.

In their graduation papers, MA students are exploring various issues associated with the theatre profession. They are written in an essay format and serve also as a reading resource for the BA students.

### Strengths

- Strong emphasis on practice;
- Cohesion of the studies;
- The strong connection and cooperation with the professional theatre field;
- A varied and highly qualified international cohort of teachers/practitioners for the intensive practical weeks.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The workload of students during intensive courses may be too heavy.
- The Academy should exploit the strong international content of the MA to support those teaching the BA and to attract international students to the programme.

## **Teaching staff**

In addition to the teaching staff shared with BA studies, foreign instructors are used in conducting shorter workshops. According to the SER from 2016-2017, the first academic year of the current MA group, the eight MA students have been taught by 27 instructors, including twelve instructors from abroad. The effective use of short-term instructors both domestic and international is definitely a strength.

## **Students**

New students are taken into the MA programme every second year. Students are admitted in a competitive selection procedure, they already have professional experience in the field, and they are highly motivated.

Because the orientation and content of the MA curriculum is different for every student cohort, students are coming from different specialities and hence there are graduates from other institutions than EAMT as well. Thus, the MA programme has the great

advantage of strengthening the ties between VCA University of Tartu and EAMT as a sizeable number of VCA graduates apply for and are accepted on this MA.

The number of admitted students has been between 8 and 10 students 2014-2016. According to the statistical data of the Drama School, the number of graduating students has been from 3 to 4 in 2010-2016.

The team discovered in its interviews with the students that they were, in the main, satisfied with the arrangements of their studies and the structure of the classes over several intensive periods of work, However, this makes for a very heavy workload, especially during these intensive periods. Students are very active in giving feedback concerning their studies, they have plenty of ideas for future development of the content of this programme. They have a feeling that their voice is heard by staff members and the Course Leader.

#### Strengths

- Due to changes in programme content for each admission, student profiles are versatile.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The Academy should explore ways to develop student support for those studying the MA to counter the low graduation rate and facilitate a higher graduation rate.