

## **Assessment Report**

# Personal Services

Tallinn University

2019

## Contents

INTRODUCTION .....	2
1. ASSESSMENT REPORT OF THE STUDY PROGRAMMES AT TALLINN UNIVERSITY .....	5
1.1. INTRODUCTION .....	5
1.2. STRENGTHS AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME BY ASSESSMENT AREAS .....	7
1.2 RECREATION ADMINISTRATION (BA) AND RECREATION MANAGEMENT (MA) .....	8

## Introduction

In the Estonian system, 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 to support the internal evaluation and self-development of the institution of higher education and the programmes. Quality assessment of study programme groups is not followed by sanctions: expert assessments should be considered as recommendations.

Quality assessment of a study programme group takes place at least once every seven years based on the regulation approved by the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education - [\*Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education\*](#).

The aim of the assessment team was the assessment of the Study Programme Group (SPG) of Personal Services at Tallinn University. Two programmes were assessed – BA Recreation Administration and MA Recreation Management.

The team was asked to assess the conformity of the two study programmes 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:

<b>Chris Cooper (chair)</b>	Professor, Leeds Beckett University, United Kingdom
<b>Eva Werner</b>	Rector and Professor, IMC University of Applied Sciences, Krems, Austria
<b>Berit Skirstad</b>	Associate Professor, Norwegian School of Sport Sciences, Norway
<b>Mariann Lugus</b>	Estonian Travel and Tourism Association, Estonia
<b>Lembi Anepaio</b>	Student, University of Tartu, Estonia

The assessment process was coordinated by Karin Laansoo from EKKA - the Estonian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher and Vocational Education. The assessment team are very grateful for Karin's immaculate organisation of the assessment process and for her professional advice to the team.

Before arriving in Estonia, the assessment team drafted sets of questions to ask the study programme leader, school management team, teachers, students, employers and alumni. These questions were based upon the Estonian Assessment Standards for Study Programmes. On arrival in Estonia, the work of the assessment team in Estonia started on Tuesday, 11 December 2018, with an introduction to the Estonian Higher Education System as well as the assessment procedure by EKKA. The members of the team agreed the overall questions and areas to discuss with each group from the two programmes. The distribution of tasks between the members of the assessment team was organised and the detailed schedule of the site visits agreed.

During Wednesday 12 December and Thursday 13 December 2018, meetings were held with the programme leader and representatives of the school management team, programme teachers, students, alumni and employers. In all cases, the schedule for discussion on site for each of the study programmes was strictly adhered to and allowed for short but sufficient time slots to be available for team members to exchange information and to discuss conclusions and implications for further questions.

On Friday, 14 December, 2018 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 informed by the members of the team exchanging insights gleaned from the site visits.

In the following sections of this report, the assessment team summarise their findings, conclusions and recommendations. In so doing, the team provides an external and objective international perspective on the programmes and the contexts within which they are delivered. Ultimately, the intention is to provide constructive comment and critique to form the basis upon which improvements in the quality and sustainability of the programmes may be achieved. In formulating its recommendations however, the assessment team has not evaluated the financial or other resource implications associated with their implementation.

# 1. Assessment report of the study programmes at Tallinn University

## 1.1. Introduction

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

According to the University's Development Plan for 2015–2020, the vision of the University is to play a leading role in promoting and developing an intelligent lifestyle in Estonia, thereby supporting both Estonian sustainability and the self-actualisation of individuals. Tallinn University sees its mission as supporting the sustainable development of Estonia through high-quality research and study, the education of intellectuals, public discussions, and the promotion of academic partnerships. In its activities, TU adheres to the following basic values: openness, quality, professionalism, and unity. The strategic objective of TU for 2015–2020 is to consolidate its activities into five focus fields:

- 1) Educational innovation;
- 2) Digital and media culture;
- 3) Cultural competences;
- 4) Healthy and sustainable lifestyles; and
- 5) Society and open governance.

In the academic year 2017/2018, Tallinn University had more than 7,500 students (of which 9.15% were international) and over 800 employees, including over 400 researchers and lecturers. Tallinn University is managed within the context of Estonian laws and charters of European universities. It is an organization with a three-level management structure: university level, academic unit level, and the sub-unit level.

In 2015, a significant structural and management reform took place in which the 26 existing academic units were merged into nine. These included:

- Six academic units (School of Digital Technologies; School of Educational Sciences; School of Governance, Law and Society; School of Humanities; School of Natural Sciences and Health; and the Baltic Film, Media, Arts and Communication School);
- Two regional colleges in Haapsalu and Rakvere; and
- The Academic Library.

In addition, five Centres of Excellence, 15 support units and nine research centres within the schools were formed.

Tallinn University's study programmes cover 15 fields of education and training: Education; Arts; Humanities; Languages; Social and Behavioural Sciences; Journalism and Information; Business and Administration; Law; Biological and Related Sciences; Environment; Physical Sciences; Mathematics and Statistics; Information and Communication Technologies; Welfare; and Personal Services.

It is the Study Programmes on Personal Services that form the basis of this assessment report. There are two study programmes with active admissions:

1. BA Recreation Administration - RA (BA); and
2. MA Recreation Management – RM (MA).

The programmes are offered by one academic unit of TU – the School of Natural Sciences and Health.

The numbers of admitted students, terminating studies and graduates of the study programmes are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Numbers of admitted students, terminating studies and graduates of the two study programmes 2014-2018**

	<b>2014/2015</b>	<b>2015/2016</b>	<b>2016/2017</b>	<b>2017/2018</b>
<b>Total No of Students, RA</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>107</b>
Matriculation, RA*	35	27	30	27
Graduation, RA	25	25	26	21
Dropout, RA	25**	30**	14	7
Outgoing students (mobility), RA	2	4	5	6
Incoming students (mobility), RA	2	6	8	10
<b>Total No of Students, RM</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>51</b>
Matriculation, RM*	12	15	17	20
Graduation, RM	4	6	3	8
Dropout, RM	5**	2**	6	1
Outgoing students (mobility), RM	1	-	-	-
Incoming students (mobility), RM	-	-	-	-

\* Admissions in 2018: Recreation Administration-25, Recreation Management- 16.

\*\* In 2015, the dropout number was significantly larger than in previous years. This is due to changes in the TU Study Regulations; also, many students (matriculated before the academic year 2013/2014) were deleted from the matriculation register due to unsatisfactory academic progress.

## 1.2. Strengths and areas for improvement of the study programme by assessment areas

### **Introduction**

For the purpose of this report, the assessment of the two study programmes has been taken together as a group, with distinctions between individual study programmes indicated where appropriate.

The assessment of the study programmes follows the Assessment Standards for Study Programmes, which are established by the regulation, 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education'.

At the beginning of each assessment area the standards are tabulated. Where an aspect extends to both study programmes, it is indicated separately under 'General Findings' and not mentioned again under 'Study Programmes'. Under each assessment area, information is provided regarding the compliance with the requirements and/or the degree of achievement of objectives.

### **General Findings and Recommendations**

Throughout the assessment visit the team were impressed by the strong identification of the staff, students, alumni and employers with the two programmes. The assessment team came away from the interviews with the impression of a dedicated, enthusiastic and focused programme team who were delivering two programmes that satisfied their end users - students, alumni and employers. Everyone involved in the programmes should be congratulated on this achievement.

However, from the interviews, the assessment team had three major concerns which apply to both programmes and two observations that relate to the BA.

Firstly, both programmes, and indeed the University, are ambitious to internationalise. The BA students in particular told the assessment team that there should be more international lecturers and more courses taught in English. However, the assessment team could not find any overt plans to do this, aside from the ERASMUS scheme and ad hoc, occasional sessions by guest lecturers from other universities. We therefore recommend that the School develops a full internationalisation plan, including Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), monitoring to address internationalisation of the curriculum, sourcing international partners/lecturers, and increasing the number of courses taught in English, including the opportunity to present the dissertation in English.

Secondly, we note that one person manages both programmes. The team does not doubt the dedication and excellent management of the programmes under the stewardship of the programme manager; indeed this person came in for considerable praise from the students for her responsiveness. However, it was clear that, due to time constraints, the programme manager manages on a day-to-day basis, leaving a gap in terms of the future direction and vision for the

programmes – and therefore a potential vulnerability of the programmes. We therefore recommend that the School appoints a small strategic steering group of senior academics to provide this level of strategic oversight for the programmes. Consideration to some devolved budget to the programmes should also be given.

Thirdly, it was clear from the interviews that staff are very busy and the team was unable to discern a clear workload planning framework on the programmes, although we understand that there is one at University level. This has led to staff struggling to find time for research and other scholarly activity. We therefore recommend that the School develop a clear research strategy which includes transparent support for staff in terms of conference, teaching relief for research and travel funding. In turn this will ensure that teaching on the programmes is 'research informed'.

The team therefore recommend to EKKA that a five year approval period be granted, conditional upon implementation within two years of the three recommendations above and their approval by EKKA.

The assessment team also have two observations that relate to the BA:

1. Both programmes have the same name in Estonian, but not in English and this is confusing from an international perspective. We therefore recommend that the name of the BA Recreation Administration is changed to BA Recreation Management.
2. The team heard that one option for the BA is to reform it to a Professional Higher Education programme. However, the analysis and observations carried out over the site visits led the team to conclude that the BA programme should remain as an academic qualification and not move to a Professional Higher Education programme. The assessment team felt that this is important for the reputation and sustainability of the subject area. Also, whilst employers did not see this as an issue, the students were keen to retain the academic qualification of BA.

## 1.2 Recreation Administration (BA) and Recreation Management (MA)

### **Study Programme and Study Programme Development**

#### Standards

- ✓ The launch or development of the study programme is based on the Standard of Higher Education and other legislation, development plans, analyses (including labour market and feasibility analyses), and professional standards; and the best quality is being sought.
- ✓ The structure and content of modules and courses in a study programme support achievement of the objectives and designed learning outcomes of the study programme.
- ✓ Different parts of the study programme form a coherent whole.
- ✓ The study programme includes practical training, the content and scope of which are based on the planned learning outcomes of the study programme.

- |  |
|--|
| ✓ The study programme development takes into account feedback from students, employers, alumni and other stakeholders. |
|--|

### ***Findings and Comments***

The assessment team confirm that the two programmes meet the study programme and study programme development standards outlined above.

### **Programme development and programme learning outcomes**

In developing the two programmes, the assessment team received evidence in the interviews with School management that the objectives of the Standard of Higher Education and the development plans of both the TU and the School for 2016–2020 are being taken into account. The team also heard from the interviewees that the views of a range of relevant stakeholders had been included in the preparation of the Self Evaluation Report. These included the study programme administrator and relevant academics, feedback from students, and information gained from an alumni questionnaire as well as from TU databases.

In terms of the direction of travel of the two programmes, and thus of the programme learning outcomes, the assessment team gained evidence in the interviews that the programme leader and programme teachers were conscious of the need to keep the programmes current and consistent with developments in society, and to give a clear indication of the goals of the programmes. This view was confirmed by both students and alumni who clearly expressed their satisfaction with the programme structure.

However, based on the comments from both alumni and employers, the assessment team felt that, to keep the programmes current and up-to-date, and the programme learning outcomes in line with the demands from the labour market, more content could be included on digital technologies and literacy, and its application to the field. This seems even more important given that the two programmes were developed based on the fact that the proportion of tourism in all economic activities is steadily growing in Estonia, and the choice of destinations points to a preference for the natural environment and immediate experiences. In addition, increasing dependence on technology by the recreation and tourism sectors underlines the need for content which focuses upon technological competencies, e-services, and experiences that utilise augmented and virtual reality. To quote one member of the alumni, who has hired a graduate,

“The communication and psychology skills work and are really important since half of the things on the market have changed already within 6 months”.

Notwithstanding the points mentioned above, the assessment team were impressed by the close 'fit' of the programmes within the Estonian economy, it

was clear from the interviews that they meet the needs of the employers and the recreation sector more generally, to quote one employer,

“The Tallinn programme delivers work ready graduates and we maintain a close relationship with the programmes for this reason”.

The team also understood that the volume of recreation and tourism services in Estonia is small, but the demand for new services and experiences is growing as noted above. It was clear from the interviews with both employers and alumni that the programmes meet the base education considered essential across all the recreation and tourism professions within the field of activity in Estonia. The alumni valued the theoretical context they got from the studies for their working-life.

The assessment team recognize the difficulty of finding employment statistics for cross-cutting economic sectors such as recreation and tourism. They therefore welcome the government of Estonia’s creation of the OSKA coordination system for labour market monitoring. This will assist the two programmes in monitoring their penetration in the Estonian labour market.

### **Coherence of the study programmes**

The assessment team were told in the interviews that the coherence of the study programme is ensured through regular meetings of the programme leader and teachers. These meetings are held at the beginning and end of each term. The meetings assess the need for any substantial changes in courses – based on students’ or teachers’ feedback - and the appropriateness of teaching and grading methods, as well as discussion of thesis subjects, the principles of supervision, and external events relevant to the work of the faculty. This has ensured logical sequencing and coherence of the courses and substantial overlaps between courses are avoided.

### **Practical training**

The practical training parts of the BA Programme offer sufficient opportunities to the students to get field experience that fosters the intended learning outcomes of the programme. Students and employers confirmed in the interviews the appropriateness of the practical training options to meet the needs of the sector. As MA students are mostly working, the practical training option is of less importance, however it is still valued if they use the opportunity to go abroad.

### **Feedback**

A particular feature of the two programmes which featured in most of the interview sessions was the fact that students have to provide compulsory feedback upon the courses they undertake, but that they also give informal feedback when deemed appropriate and necessary. The assessment team felt that it is quite unusual in the international context to request mandatory feedback and feel that this gives both courses a potential competitive advantage.

Furthermore, the openness of staff and students to use personally given feedback (after every contact lecture) was an essential quality enhancement tool, as it included closing the quality loops so delivering distinct benefits to the programmes. Students are also exposed to feedback from teaching staff (on assessments), supervisors (on projects) and fellow students (on group work). The assessment team recognize that TU is moving towards a culture of learner-centeredness and the development of high-level teaching competencies which are aided by the feedback mechanisms. Nonetheless, the feedback system is not perfect and thus recommendations are made on this point later in the report.

### **Internationalisation**

The assessment team heard that internationalisation of the two programmes remains an ambition of the programme leader and teachers. The Programme leader reassured the assessment team of the wish of the programmes to include a more international mindset, including cooperation with Finland and also with countries in Asia. However, the lack of a substantial number of courses taught in English is frustrating this ambition and limits the number of partnerships, incoming students and visiting staff, as well as impeding students' ambition to study abroad. The assessment team were pleased that the teaching staff were willing to teach courses in English and thus recommends that this is included in an internationalisation plan. A further point here is the lack of benchmarking of the programmes internationally.

### **Strengths**

The programmes are to be congratulated on the following areas of strength that were identified by the assessment team:

- The compulsory systems for student feedback to the programme leader and teachers and the feedback loops in place to ensure issues are addressed. Whilst the system itself is not perfect, the compulsory nature of the feedback system (which is unusual internationally and difficult to implement in many national systems) and the openness of both students and staff to address issues of concern do benefit the programmes.
- The assessment team were impressed by the clear positioning of the programmes within the Estonian recreation landscape and the strong reputation that the programmes have established within Estonia. It is clear that the target group for the programmes in Estonia fully understood the mission and vision of the programmes and thus justify all efforts to keep the programmes in the academic programme portfolio of TU.
- The assessment team were impressed by the very positive employer and alumni feedback on the quality of the graduates of both programmes and the way that the programmes had prepared them for the working environment – to quote one employer,

“Tallinn produces superb graduates who are outgoing and with drive. They are great communicators”.

This was evident in their comments on both the academic/industry balance of the programme and also way that the classes are blended to integrate the theory and practice. This clearly reflects the fact that the programmes have been designed to meet the educational needs of employers.

- The assessment team were impressed by the way that the practical elements of both programmes (but particularly the BA) were integrated into the programme design as a whole. The organisation, features and outcomes of the internship and practical elements of both programmes are clearly highly valued by both the students and employers and have led to positive outcomes, particularly in terms of future employment for the students.

### **Areas of Improvement and Recommendations**

The assessment team offer the following background analysis and associated recommendations with a view to supporting the future development of the programmes and ensuring their sustainability in a competitive higher education landscape.

- The assessment team was introduced to the demographics of the 18-year plus cohort in Estonia and the negative impact that this is having on student numbers on the programmes. The team was also conscious of the vulnerability of the programmes to an overseas provider entering the Estonian higher education market. We strongly recommend that the programme leader and teachers benchmark their programmes against leading international competition and make any necessary adjustment to ensure that they are resilient to any future 'shocks' in the system.
- The assessment team was struck by the very comprehensive range of electives on offer for both programmes. Whilst this could be considered a strength, it can also lead to a lack of discrimination in terms of relevance to the programmes' core mission. We therefore recommend that the programmes streamline the electives available to students and develop clearly legible pathways.
- The previous assessment of the programme in 2015 recommended that the students should be able to take courses on general management, including HR, management and marketing. Whilst this has been addressed in part, we recommend that a core of business and management courses is added to the BA programme to ensure that graduates are work ready. This should include marketing (including digital marketing), HR and organisational behaviour. Employers also felt there was a need for more project management content in the programmes. We were particularly struck by the absence of any quantitative or financial elements in the programmes even though "Entrepreneurship" is explicitly addressed.
- In the interviews with students, alumni, the industry and teaching staff, the topic of event management was ever present and clearly features strongly in student ambitions. This suggests that there has been some

mission drift since the programmes were first established and staff have left and been replaced. We recommend that the programme leader and teachers consider including this in the programme title and address this topic more comprehensively in the BA Programme,

- We note that students provide compulsory feedback on the programmes, but they are not further consulted once they have graduated from the programmes. This should be considered for the future, particularly as alumni expressed their willingness to provide feedback to the programmes.

## Resources

### Standards

- ✓ Resources (teaching and learning environments, teaching materials, teaching aids and equipment, premises, financial resources) support the achievement of objectives in the study programme.
- ✓ There is a sufficient supply of textbooks and other teaching aids and they are available.
- ✓ Adequacy of resources is ensured for changing circumstances (change in student numbers, etc.).
- ✓ Resource development is sustainable.

### **Findings and Comments**

The assessment team confirm that the two programmes generally meet the resources development standards outlined above.

### **Resource support**

The assessment team are of the view that resources for the two programmes are adequate and that the future development of the programmes is not resource constrained. However, the team's comment on the programme management under *General Findings and Recommendations* (page 6) is also to be considered under this standard.

### **Location**

The learning environment for the two study programmes is in two locations: the main campus in Narva maantee, Tallinn; and in TU's Räägu unit. As a result of real estate development and structural changes in TU, the programmes underwent relocation to the Räägu unit of TU in 2013. The learning environment has now been developed into a uniform entity that provides high-quality teaching facilities. The assessment team were told that the Räägu learning environment has been accepted and both the degree courses and continuing training operate successfully in the new location. Attempts have been made to organise studies smoothly between the two locations by considering the interests of both students and lecturers. The assessment team noted from the interviews with the teachers and the programme manager that the location of the programmes away from the main campus can be demotivating.

## **Facilities**

For practical lessons, there are rental spaces with contemporary equipment: a swimming pool at TOP, Tehvandi Ski Resort, Taivalkoski Ski Resort in Finland, Kõrvemaa Hike Resort, Nõmme and Pirita Adventure Park and Kallaste Holiday Farm.

The assessment team viewed the supply of teaching materials and equipment (including teaching rooms, lecture theatres and specialist laboratories) and concluded that the range of facilities is impressive and of good quality and assist the programmes in achieving their objectives. From 2010–2015, the majority of the laboratory equipment necessary for the programmes was obtained. There are motion analysis laboratory resources, a kinesiology research center, biochemistry and molecular biology laboratories, analytical chemistry laboratories, and equipment for research in the fields of paleoecology and sedimentology, bryology, plant physiology, and hydroecology.

The assessment team visited the library on the main TU site and were satisfied that all necessary library resources - books, journals, e-books and journal databases - were available. Although the books were divided between two buildings, the staff and students can access e-library resources remotely. None of the interviewees mentioned the split site as a problem. The assessment team noted that the majority of learning materials were in English.

Tallinn University Support Units provide all necessary assistance to the programmes, including access to research publications and technical/administrative support.

## **Strengths**

The programmes are to be congratulated on the following areas of strengths that were identified by the assessment team:

- The two programmes are adequately supported by both University and school resources and their future development is not resource constrained.

## **Areas of Improvement and Recommendations**

The assessment team offer the following background analysis and associated recommendations with a view to supporting the future development of the programmes and ensuring their sustainability in a competitive higher education landscape.

- The assessment team note (see also page 6) that one person manages both programmes. The team does not doubt the dedication and excellent management of the programmes under the stewardship of the programme manager; indeed this person came in for considerable praise from the students for her responsiveness. However, it was clear that, due to time constraints, the programme manager manages on a day-to-day basis, leaving a gap in terms of the future direction and vision for the

- programmes – and therefore a potential vulnerability of the programmes. We therefore recommend that the School appoints a small strategic steering group of senior academics to provide this level of strategic oversight for the programmes. Consideration to some devolved budget to the programmes should also be given.
- We visited both the main University campus and the location of the programmes at the University's Räägu unit; 45 minutes drive from the main site. We recommend that the School consider relocating the programmes back to the main campus as and when new building developments allow as the separation from the main campus does have a demotivating effect on students and staff as could be heard in the interviews. By attending the main campus the students will benefit by mixing with more international students and international lecturers who are involved in other studies.
  - The team heard from the students that there are different technological solutions and platforms used in parallel to pass information to students. The University has a working Study Information System, but students do not value it highly. Using parallel channels causes confusion and distracts information flows. The team recommends the use of a more systematic/horizontal approach when making use of technology assisting both students and teachers.

## **Teaching and Learning**

### Standards

- ✓ The process of teaching and learning supports learners' individual and social development.
- ✓ The process of teaching and learning is flexible, takes into account the specifics of the form of study and facilitates the achievement of planned learning outcomes.
- ✓ Teaching methods and tools used in teaching are modern, effective and support the development of digital culture.
- ✓ Practical and theoretical studies are interconnected.
- ✓ The organisation and the content of practical training support achievement of planned learning outcomes and meet the needs of the stakeholders.
- ✓ The process of teaching and learning supports learning mobility.
- ✓ Assessment of learning outcomes is appropriate, transparent and objective, and supports the development of learners.

### **Findings and Comments**

The assessment team confirm that the two programmes meet the teaching and learning development standards outlined above.

### **Curriculum content**

The assessment team reviewed the content of the curriculum of both programmes particularly with a view to the recommendations of previous

programme reviews and in the light of the changes undertaken. Even though these changes led to a stronger focus on the development of students' general competencies the team got the impression that there is still room for improvement, above all with regards to digital skills and digital literacy as part of general competencies, as noted above. As to the development of social and self-competencies, both BA and RA students confirmed in the interviews that adequate support is provided in these areas. This view was also shared by alumni from both programmes.

### **Pedagogy - teaching methods and tools**

The assessment team were told that staff are encouraged to use innovative teaching methods and to utilise the diverse learning environments and learning aids that support learning. The team was impressed by the enthusiasm of the staff for the use of innovation and variety in teaching. This includes digital tools and so-called e-learning options. However, the assessment team felt that these e-learning options were interpreted very narrowly (for example simply to upload course documents to the internal course ware) and viewed as a way to gain resource efficiencies rather than offer more flexibility in learning. This should however not be the case.

The assessment team also learned in the interviews that not only teaching methods, but also assessment methods are varied, innovative and distinct on the courses on both programmes. A wide range of assessment modes, depending on the course content, the intended learning outcomes and the students' level is used. This variety is highly appreciated by students from both programmes as it targets different types of learners. Students however, did state that the level of feedback on their assessments does vary by staff member, and sometimes explicit requests for feedback have to be made. As far as the assessment team could discern, individuals external to TU are not involved in assessment.

The assessment team heard that there is sometimes an imbalance in demand for supervision projects and that finding supervisors for dissertations and theses is sometimes challenging due to lack of a sufficient number of competent staff (particularly in the event management field). Aside from this, generally, the assessment team found that the supervision of student research papers was well organised, an opinion which was strongly supported by students' comments.

Both students and staff told the assessment team that the balance and role of independent work in the learning process was about right. Group work did not appear to be an issue or a burden but was seen as a valued way of peer-to-peer interaction and to get to know different opinions and perspectives. Masters students pointed out that the research-oriented didactics of their courses using journals, discussions, cases and projects etc. was helpful to develop both their personal and scientific skills.

### **Practical and theoretical studies**

The assessment team were told in some detail by students, staff and alumni, about the organisation of the internship and importance of practical training on

both programmes in achieving the programmes' objectives. For the BA programme, the professional placement is worth 6 ECTS credits, and the options are limited to the main recreational activities - recreation in nature, event organisation, and recreational activity management. The instructions for professional placement are adapted for the practical professional experience in the corresponding field. The majority (80%) of the professional placements concern the event management stream. Placement hosts are frequently found through graduates and alumni active in the field and the collaboration network of the teaching staff. In the interviews the assessment team were told that the options given correspond to the needs of the industry and employers, but also to the life circumstances of the students. Finding adequate placements did not appear to be problematic. On the contrary, students, alumni and employers confirmed the good inter-linkage of practical and theoretical learning phases, as well as the adequacy of the placement options with respect to the achievement of the programme learning outcomes.

In the interviews BA students underlined their enthusiasm for any sort of practical work, but that theory often seems to be burdensome, although they did understand the reason why they have to face "this challenge". This view was supported by the alumni who advocated a more elaborate linkage between the practical and theoretical parts of the programme.

The MA students pointed out that the clear research orientation of their programme was appreciated as it gives room for critical thinking with regards to their own work and peer-to-peer discussions.

### **Ethics**

The assessment team were told that ethical questions related to research and scientific working are high on the agenda of both programmes. There are two plagiarism-detecting systems in use at TU - KRATT and URKUND. Since 2014, questions of intellectual property and copyright have been regulated in TU. In 2017 a working group was created in order to find a fresh and more systematic approach at university level while dealing with the questions of plagiarism. In the same year, TU signed the Estonian Code of Conduct for Research Integrity. Students are made aware of the importance of these questions and the Code of Conduct right at the beginning of their studies as was confirmed in the interviews during the site visit.

### **Student information system**

The assessment team was told that information on organisational aspects of the programmes and their lectures was communicated in a variety of ways, including formal and informal channels. According to the interviews with students and alumni this leads to more confusion than straight-forward information.

### **Strengths**

The programmes are to be congratulated on the following areas of strengths that were identified by the assessment team:

- The organisation of the internship and practical elements of the programmes as they explicitly and rightly address the needs of the industry and fit well into the life circumstances of the students, although the assessment team heard more about event management in this respect than any other themes.
- The broad range of teaching and assessment methods applied according to programme levels and purposes: students highly value the various teaching and assessment modes as they help achieve the programme objectives and learning outcomes.

### **Areas of Improvement and Recommendations**

The assessment team offer the following background analysis and associated recommendations with a view to supporting the future development of the programmes and ensuring their sustainability in a competitive higher education landscape.

- We felt that for the BA, but especially the MA, the learning outcomes are formulated in a way that does not reflect the different levels of cognitive learning (from knowledge to analysis, evaluation and creation) nor EHEA level descriptors. The programme leader and teachers should reformulate the learning outcomes to reflect more clearly all levels of cognitive learning, the key competences of the level (Dublin) descriptors as well as the skills of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (communication, cooperation, critical thinking and creation). This seems of particular importance with a view to the programmes' internationalisation aspirations.
- The assessment team was confronted with reports of e-learning initiatives but a lack of clarity as to how they contributed to the programmes. Nonetheless, students (particularly those working whilst taking the programmes) found the e-learning options helpful. We recommend that the programme leader and teachers make a strategic decision as to whether to support, or not, a blended learning approach to the programmes. If the decision is positive, then resources will need to be dedicated to the initiative. Furthermore, considering the aforementioned skills of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the programmes' goal to further a culture of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning, a clear distinction between e-learning as an explicit method and just uploading course material to an internal system should be elaborated for the entire institution.
- The alumni stated that although the practical skills are well-taught, the links between the theory and practice should be more strongly elaborated so that students can understand the importance of the theoretical part of the studies. This is a particular issue for the BA programme, as students paid much more attention to the practice element of the programme.
- The assessment team recommend involving teaching staff from other universities and alumni from the field for co-supervising dissertations in order to address the shortage of local supervisors and to offer a different perspective and new ideas and topics.

## Teaching Staff

### Standards

- ✓ There is teaching staff with adequate qualifications to achieve the objectives and planned learning outcomes of the study programme, and to ensure quality and sustainability of the teaching and learning.
- ✓ Overall student assessment on teaching skills of the teaching staff is positive.
- ✓ The teaching staff collaborate in the fields of teaching and research within the higher education institution and with partners outside of the higher education institution (practitioners in their fields, employers, and staff members at other Estonian or foreign higher education institutions).
- ✓ Recognised foreign and visiting members of the teaching staff and practitioners participate in teaching the study programme.
- ✓ The teaching staff is routinely engaged in professional and teaching-skills development.
- ✓ Assessment of the work by members of the teaching staff (including staff evaluation) takes into account the quality of their teaching as well as of their research, development and creative work, including development of their teaching skills, and their international mobility.

### ***Findings and Comments***

The assessment team finds that the two programmes only partially meet the teaching staff standards outlined above.

### **Staff qualifications**

Concerning the adequate qualifications for the two programmes, the team notes that more teaching staff with a PhD in relevant topics are needed, especially for teaching on the MA programme as the lecturers' own research should ensure quality and critical thinking in the study and research-informed teaching. In 2017, TU began developing a new career model, which was debated by the academic staff and by the Senate and will be approved in the near future according to the interviewees. It can be expected that this will help to strengthen the qualifications of the teachers.

### **Student assessment of teaching**

The overall student assessment on teaching skills of the teaching staff is positive according to the comments from the students that the assessment team talked to - the evaluation average stands consistently at very good or outstanding. The students informed the assessment team that they felt like friends with their teachers. They also found that the lecturers are really good practitioners and know how to get their knowledge to the students – they usually have an actual example to relate to the theory. The inclusion of professional experts in the seminars earns consistently positive feedback.

### **Networking**

The assessment team were informed that the teaching staff collaborated and discussed matters in connection with the programmes. Some of the teachers

also had good contacts with the employers, but other Estonian or foreign higher education institutions seem to be missing. The assessment team heard about a few ERASMUS exchange possibilities. One of the teachers explained how much they travelled around internationally, and another had connections with practitioners in another country, but there is no systematic network relationship management for the programmes.

The assessment team did not get any information about recognized foreign and visiting members of the teaching staff, except that many of the teachers had good relations with practitioners, and they were “used” in teaching in the programmes.

### **Promotion and progression**

It is more difficult for the assessment team to comment upon assessment of teaching staff, since the team do not have a full insight into who does the annual development interviews and why the evaluation only take place every five years. We have no information about when this was done last time. We agree to the following factors, which are considered: teaching feedback (including supervision); research feedback; actions taken toward personal and professional development; and international mobility.

In the interviews, staff did not mention that they had a financial reward incentive system to encourage them to publish papers. When the assessment team asked about this, no information about how many articles staff published in international peer reviewed journals was provided. From the CV's provided, few such papers were mentioned.

### **Workload planning**

The assessment team asked questions about the balance between teaching load and time for research, and we did not get a clear picture. For some, the teaching load was 95%, whilst others said it was balanced. There did not seem to be an openly stated policy on this balance. Our impression was that this was negotiated privately without transparency.

The self assessment report states that the workloads of the teaching staff at TU are set with the decision of the Senate from September 2015 and the order of the director of the SNSH from January 2016. The new basis for calculating workload enables teaching staff to better balance teaching, research, development, and administrative work if necessary. However, no-one referred to this when asked, not even the head of institute or other members of School management.

### **Job satisfaction**

According to the feedback survey of TU personnel (2017), teaching staff are satisfied with their jobs, working environment and colleagues. The staff mentioned low salaries, high workloads, bureaucracy and less cooperation between institutes as areas for improvement. This survey includes all staff at the University so we do not know if also relates to the teaching staff working on

these two programmes. The teachers interviewed by the assessment team liked their jobs, and they were enthusiastic about the two programmes.

### **Role of centres of excellence**

The teaching staff from the two programmes did not mention any help from the “the Centre of Excellence in Behavioural and Neural Sciences” (CEBNS) which was created under the SNSH in 2015. The purpose of the CEBNS is to facilitate high-level interdisciplinary research projects.

### **Strengths**

The programme is to be congratulated on the following areas of strength that were identified by the assessment team:

- The assessment team was impressed with the dedication and enthusiasm of the teaching staff on both programmes.
- The programme teachers are to be congratulated on their dedication to the programmes, their clear focus on the students and the varied teaching and assessment modes employed on the programmes.

### **Areas and improvement and recommendations**

The assessment team offer the following background analysis and associated recommendations with a view to supporting the future development of the programmes and ensuring their sustainability in a competitive higher education landscape.

- It was clear from the interviews that staff are very busy and the team was unable to discern a clear workload planning framework on the programmes, although we understand that there is one at University level. This has led to staff struggling to find time for research and other scholarly activity, particularly as they are also active in the practical side of the subjects. The assessment team were also aware that new members of staff are not given teaching relief to establish their research. We recommend that a clear workload planning framework is developed for both programmes and applied in a transparent manner. In the first iteration of such a framework it would be useful to ‘zero’ workloads and start again to ensure that the historic development of fragmentation in teaching across courses is addressed. We note the management’s ambition to reduce staff/student ratios and this is to be applauded.
- Linked to the point above, we recommend that the School develop a clear research strategy which includes transparent support for staff in terms of conference and travel funding. In turn this will ensure that teaching on the programmes is ‘research informed’. Equally, it will also help to increase the participation of staff in international research projects and networks.
- The employer representatives that we interviewed were interested in becoming more involved in the programmes as advisors, guest lecturers or ‘professor for a day’. Given the small industry networks in Estonia, this

is currently possible on an ad hoc, informal basis, however, there does not appear to be any formal engagement mechanism for this. We therefore recommend that an employer's advisory group be established for each programme to act as a formal conduit to involve industry systematically and sustainably in the programmes.

- The alumni representatives that we interviewed were also interested in becoming more involved in the programmes as advisors, guest lecturers or mentors. However, whilst this is currently possible on an ad hoc, informal basis, there does not appear to be any formal engagement mechanism for this. We therefore recommend that an official programme-based alumni group be established to act as a formal conduit to involve alumni in the programmes and thus help alleviate teaching loads. The group should have annual meetings so that the alumni would be and feel more involved and have the chance to meet each other and also the current students.
- Both programmes are ambitious to internationalise. However, the assessment team could not discern any overt plans to do this, aside from the ERASMUS scheme. We recommend that the two programmes develop a full internationalisation plan, including KPIs and monitoring to address internationalisation of the curriculum, sourcing international partners/lecturers and increasing the number of courses taught in English, including the opportunity to present the dissertation in English. Perhaps a visiting English native professor staying for two weeks per semester, teaching, tutoring and helping staff to write papers in English for international publication could help as a start.

## **Students**

### Standards

- ✓ Student places are filled with motivated and capable students.
- ✓ The dropout rate is low; the proportion of students graduating within the standard period of study is large.
- ✓ Students are motivated to learn and their satisfaction with the content, form and methods of their studies is high.
- ✓ As part of their studies, students attend other Estonian and/or foreign higher education institutions as visiting or international students.
- ✓ Employment rate of alumni is high.
- ✓ Alumni and their employers are pleased with their professional preparation and social competencies.

### **Findings and Comments**

The assessment team confirm that the two programmes meet the students standards outlined above.

### **Drop out rates**

The self evaluation report states that in 2015, the dropout number was significantly larger than in previous years. This is due to changes in the TU Study

Regulations; also, many students (matriculated before the academic year 2013/2014) were deleted from the matriculation register due to unsatisfactory academic progress. For the MA this was commonly due to the students failing to complete the dissertation element of the programme (Table 1). The relative ease of finding (often relevant) employment in the Estonian labour market tends to impact the numbers of graduations after the nominal period of studies. On the other hand, it leads to a good contact with the labour market, offering better opportunities after the end of the studies. In many cases, studies, work, and research efforts are skilfully integrated.

### **Admission**

Admission to Bachelor's studies is threshold-based. It takes into account the high school Estonian language exam (25%) as well as the results of the admission exams and an admission interview. Previous volunteer work is also taken into account. Competition has stayed steady for the last 3 years with an average of 3 students per place; the 26 places in the regular learning programme are consistently filled.

Admissions for the Master's study programme are open: applications are accepted regardless of the field of the Bachelor's degree. A condition for admission is an essay on a predetermined topic discussing the role and connections of the field of recreation to the applicant's professional life and the topics they see as their potential research topics. An interview is done to discuss the motivation, opportunities, and prospects regarding the studies and the thesis. The competition has decreased over the last three years, but the average competition is 2.3 applicants per place. The number of Master's degree level students has risen slightly, which is also supported by the statistics showing that the number of learners over 35 has risen in the higher education study programme.

### **Mobility**

At the BA level, students can also study in other Estonian and/or foreign universities as foreign or visiting students. On average, 4 students visit foreign universities per year. There are 5 incoming international students per year on average (see Table 1).

For the MA, long-term international visits are quite hard for students with families and/or small children. And as most of MA students are employed throughout their studies, visiting other institutions can be complicated by their inability to take time off from work (see Table 1).

### **Feedback**

Student feedback is discussed regularly and analysed once per year with teaching staff and students. The usability of the Study Information System (SIS) received the lowest score and this forms the basis of a recommendation. Student criticism was mostly oriented at shortcomings in the compatibility of different databases, and using databases via mobile devices was recommended. Issues are mostly addressed to the study counsellor (70%), head of studies (47%) or Study

Programme Administrator (36%). Problems most frequently related to the availability of open elective courses and elective courses. Study programmes could be shorter and block mode studies, on-the-job training, and short training courses would be suitable. Specialisations may also be taught as separate, additional courses.

### **Employment**

The employment numbers in the Master's degree level are high: the form of block mode studies supports employment during studies. These students frequently consider the field of recreation to support the availability to work and use the knowledge on recreation and leisure management to improve the existing work processes and organisation of work. Graduates usually continue working at their previous employers.

### **Strengths**

The programmes are to be congratulated on the following areas of strength that were identified by the assessment team:

- The assessment team were impressed by the very positive employer and alumni feedback on the quality of the graduates of both programmes and the way that the programmes had prepared them for the working environment – to quote one alumni,

“I would definitely hire the graduates. They know practical things – how to dress, be more prepared”.

“They (the graduates) are hard-working. They will do the thing what they have to do”.

This was evident in their comments on both the academic/industry balance of the programme and also the blend of class based on theory and practical work.

- The assessment team were struck by the high quality of the student groups interviewed. In both the BA and MA groups the students were very motivated, articulate, thoughtful and aware of the key issues.
- The students were very satisfied with the support they could get from the teaching staff and felt their problems were addressed and adequate solutions and options recommended (such as choosing the right courses, or finding a place for the internship).

### **Areas of Improvement and Recommendations**

The assessment team offer the following background analysis and associated recommendations with a view to supporting the future development of the programmes and ensuring their sustainability in a competitive higher education landscape.

- We note that for the BA there is a physical attribute test that has to be passed to allow entrance to the programme. We feel this is both discriminatory and somewhat anachronistic, keeping the programme out of line with a contemporary educational environment that is inclusive. We recommend that the programme leader and teachers re-asses the need for this requirement.
- The assessment team suggests that means for students with special needs should be developed as the field of recreation could benefit from graduates with special needs. The assessment team did not hear any consideration of students with special needs and felt that the physical aptitude test overtly discriminates against such students on the BA.