



ESTONIAN QUALITY AGENCY
FOR HIGHER AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Assessment Report on Meeting the Requirements of the Secondary Condition

Tallinn University

Study programme group of
Performing Arts

2020

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Introduction

Background. Aim of the assessment

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 *Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education*.

In 2017, international expert panel assessed the quality of the study programme group of Performing Arts at the Tallinn University. As a result, EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education decided at its meeting on February 2, 2018, that the next assessment is to take place in seven years if the university meets certain requirements set by the Council.

The aim of the current assessment was to evaluate whether the requirements (secondary condition) set by the Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education have been met by the Tallinn University (TLU).

Assessors

1. Professor Anthony Dean, University of Winchester, UK
2. Director Paula Tuovinen, Arts Promotion Centre, Finland

Assessment process

TLU sent their report on fulfilment of the secondary conditions to EKKA on February 3, 2020.

The report is written based on the written materials presented by the TLU.

The current report is a public document and made available on [EKKA website](#) after EKKA quality assessment Council has made its decision.

Report on meeting the requirements of the secondary condition, Tallinn University

1.1 General background

At its meeting on February 2, 2018, EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education decided that the next assessment of the study programme group of Performing Arts at the Tallinn University will take place in 7 years (maximum term) but set a secondary condition that the TLU should meet in 2 years.

Based on the Assessment Report of the international panel and the Decision of EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education, the TLU submitted the following document to EKKA:

- 1) Report on fulfilling the recommendations made as secondary conditions

1.2 Meeting the requirements of secondary condition

The following are the requirements set by the Quality Assessment Council to be met by the TLU, and the committee's assessment on the developments TLU has made in this regard.

Pursuant to Article 6 (5) of the Government Decree "Standard of Higher Education" (SoHE) the title and structure of the study programme must be consistent and the study methods used and conducting of studies, including the load of independent work and work practice, shall support achievement of the objectives of the study programme. The study programmes/curricula do not place enough emphasis on stage choreography, creative and improvisational work and contemporary dance. In this sense, the name of the study programmes/curricula (choreography) is somewhat misleading and should be better aligned with the content. Coherence of curricula should also be improved. In the case of a master's programme, it is advisable to define what constitutes the dance-technical core of the curriculum and to remove the courses that do not help students to logically construct their skills and are not sufficiently relevant in today's context.

Assessment of the committee: the secondary condition is substantially met

Comments

The School has decided to create a new programme through which it has taken the opportunity to respond constructively to the recommendations made as secondary conditions. In summary, the conditions made relate to a lack of emphasis placed upon a range of aspects of contemporary choreography within the previous BA programme and the overall coherence of the curriculum. In

relation to MA provision the recommendation was concerned with a greater focusing of the curriculum, to align it more closely with contemporary choreographic practices.

From the description of the new BA programme, contained within the report provided, it would appear that the School has responded to each of the key points made in the first of the three recommendations. In choosing to develop an entirely new programme, rather than to revise the previously existing programme, the School has been able to ensure that the design of the new curricula is both more coherent and now has a greater emphasis on contemporary choreographic and creative practices.

The curricula still includes a variety of different dance genres; including ballet, traditional Estonian dance, and modern to contemporary dance, and it also has pedagogical content. The agreement with University of Tartu Viljandi Culture Academy and the profiling of the dance programmes in Estonia has been a clarifying step.

The definition of what constitutes the dance-technical core of the curriculum has been solved by keeping the multidisciplinary approach to dance techniques. The curricula indicates that the programme gives a student an overall view and basics in both dance techniques and dance pedagogy. The contemporary part has now been given more emphasis within the curriculum. The broad scale of the studies makes the four year bachelor justified.

However, in an international context, the title BA choreography is not a totally accurate description of programme, as the curricula includes basic multi-disciplinary dance training and basics for a dance teacher and a dancer. We understand the tradition and, therefore, the name of the programme in an Estonian context, but the University may wish to reconsider the title of the programme in due course.

In responding to the recommendation regarding the MA programme, the Schools response suggests that there has been a re-focussing of the curriculum on “*the creative methods of contemporary choreography*”. In part, this appears to have been achieved through exposing students to the work of a wider range of professional practitioners via their employment as visiting lecturers, including more improvisation and through a number of internal and external collaborative projects – including a collaboration with film students on a screen dance project.

In summary, it appears to us that the response of the School to this recommendation has been substantially met.

Commendations:

- The decision of the School to develop a new programme as, in part, a means of responding constructively to the recommendations.
- The increase in the opportunities for students to engage with professional choreographers and to participate in joint projects.

Further considerations:

- We would recommend that the title of the BA programme is kept under regular review to ensure that it continues to be both indicative of the curriculum content whilst also accurately conveying the distinctive nature of the programme to potential students and employers, as well as within an international context.
- While the School’s response to the recommendation states that the “*new curriculum places more emphasis on contemporary choreography*”, this is not reflected within the wording of the learning outcomes of the new programme or in the wording of the learning outcomes of its constituent modules (as presented in appendix 1). We would urge the School to ensure – when opportunity allows – that the

vocabulary used in the description of the new programme provided in the report is more fully embodied in its learning outcomes so that both applicants and current students are clear about the ambition and the nature of the intended outcomes of the programme.

Pursuant to article 6 (7) (4) of the SoHE, necessary premises must be provided for teaching, which are sufficiently modern to achieve the objectives of the study programmes and whose condition meets the health and safety requirements established in legal instruments. Regarding the health of students and teachers, it is essential to install special flooring and a proper technical infrastructure (lighting, sound and IT technology) in dance halls.

Assessment of the committee: the secondary condition is fully met

Comments

The School's response to this recommendation is rather brief. However the mentioned VITA building can be seen in the video. It addresses the main concern expressed in the recommendation with regard to the provision of premises "*which are sufficiently modern*" in order to enable students "*to achieve the objectives of the study programme*". Our reading of the response suggests that three new practical spaces have been made available to the programme, two dance studios and a 'black box' performance space that is technically equipped. The response mentions that the new floors are "*resilient*", which probably means at least semi-sprung – but it is difficult to be certain from the description provided. Based on the video of the VITA building the premises appear to be very up-to-date and include a fitness centre.

In summary, it appears to us that the response of the School to this recommendation has been met.

Commendations

- The University/School has demonstrated its support for this subject area through its investment in a new, purpose designed suite of physical resources.

Further considerations

- Practical performing arts programmes are normally very demanding in terms of access to practical spaces, both for formal curriculum teaching as well as spaces in which students can rehearse outside the formal teaching schedule. Therefore, it is important that an effective timetabling and room booking system is in place to ensure that both the BA and MA Choreography programmes have sufficient access to these spaces in order to enable students to meet the learning outcomes of their programmes.

Section 6 (7) (1) of the SoHE stipulates that ordinary teaching staff must be available for the studies, in view of their tasks, the volume of studies and research carried out and the number of students supervised, to achieve the objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme/curriculum. The resource of the teaching staff is not always adequately secured - for example, only two teachers teach contemporary/composition dance on a regular basis, which is not sufficient for specific student training. It is necessary to involve guest lecturers with new ideas and competences for longer periods of time by allocating necessary financial resources. The number of teachers teaching different dance genres could be better balanced.

Assessment of the committee: the secondary condition is substantially met

Comments

The Recommendation refers to the need to achieve a sufficiency of staff, both those with ongoing employment at the University and visiting staff (guest lecturers), to support students in their meeting of the study objectives and learning outcomes of the programme. While the response from the programme focusses on the increased involvement of guest lecturers in relation to the provision of teaching contemporary dance and composition, it appears (from the information provided in annex 2) that there has been no increase in this area of teaching expertise within the compliment of full-time staff. However, the programme does detail how such input is being managed through the use of visiting staff and professional practitioners. The response also suggest that the design of the new curriculum allows greater opportunity for the students to engage in collaborative projects, both with professional practitioners and other education providers, that also expose students to a wider field of contemporary approaches and practices. The Programme is able to list an impressive array of partner universities that, through joint activities, both broaden the students learning opportunities and help to foster international perspectives on their subject.

In summary, it appears that the response of the School to this recommendation has been substantially met.

Commendations

- The welcome increase in, and careful selection of, a range of visiting staff and professional practitioners (guest lecturers) who offer contemporary approaches to choreography.
- The range of partnerships that the programme has established as a means of providing additional opportunities for students to develop their own approaches to choreography.
- Planned future joint presentations and/or performances with University of Tartu Viljandi Culture Academy students to enlarge the scope of chorographical thinking in the performing arts context.

Further considerations

- The School/Programme should ensure that the profile of full-time staff teaching on the programme maintains and, where circumstances allow, increases the level of expertise and experience in contemporary choreographic practices as appropriate.