

Decision regarding the quality assessment of the Social Services study programme group at Tallinn University

27.01.2021

The Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education decided to approve the report by the Assessment Committee and to conduct the next quality assessment of the Social Services study programme group in the first and second cycle of higher education at Tallinn University in seven years, with a secondary condition.

Based on subsection 48 (4) of the Higher Education Act, subsection 10 (4) of the Universities Act and point 41 of the document 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education', authorised in point 24 (5) of the Statutes of the Education and Youth Board; the Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (hereinafter Council) affirms the following:

1. On 15.09.2015 the Council decided to conduct the next quality assessment of the first and second cycles of higher education in the Social Services study programme group at Tallinn University in seven years with a secondary condition, on the progress of which Tallinn University was required to submit a report by 15.09.2016. On 10.03.2017 the Council decided to revoke the decision of 15.09.2015 and conduct the next assessment in 5 years as the secondary condition had not been satisfied.
2. Tallinn University and EKKA agreed on the timeframe for the quality assessment of the Social Services study programme group on 12.03.2019.
3. By her decision no 1-19740/2020 of 5.05.2020, the Director of EKKA approved the quality assessment committee (hereinafter Committee) for the Social Services study programme group at Tallinn University, comprising the following members:

Kerstin Svensson (Chair)

Professor in Social Work, Lund
University (Sweden)



Lowis Charfe	Senior Lecturer in Social Work, University of Central Lancashire (United Kingdom)
Gerlin Gil	Student, Tallinn University of Technology; Chairman of Student Body; Project Manager, TalTech Development Fund (Estonia)
Juha Nieminen	University Teacher (Youth research and Youth work), Tampere University (Finland)
Epp Reedik	Education and Youth Authority (Estonia)
Rudi Roose	Associate Professor of social work, Ghent University (Belgium)
Miriam Teuma	Chief Executive Officer, Agenzija Zghazagh, Director General for Youth in Malta; Lecturer at the University of Malta (Malta)
Guido Van Hal	Professor and Research Leader at the Research Group on 'Social Epidemiology and Health Policy' in the Department of Epidemiology and Social Medicine, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, University of Antwerp (Belgium)

4. Tallinn University submitted the following study programmes for assessment in the Social Services study programme group:

Health Promotion Specialist (Professional higher education)

Youth Work (Professional higher education)

Youth Work Management (Master studies)

Social Pedagogy (Bachelor studies)

Social Pedagogy and Child Protection (Master studies)

Social Work (Bachelor studies)

Social Work (Master studies)

Social Entrepreneurship (Master studies)

5. Tallinn University submitted the final version of the Self-Analysis Report to EKKA on 11.02.2020, which the coordinator forwarded to the Committee on 1.03.2020.
6. The hybrid assessment visit to Tallinn University took place 6.–8.10.2020.
7. The Committee submitted the draft assessment report to EKKA on 20.11.2020, which EKKA forwarded to the university for comments on 27.11.2020 and to which EKKA received feedback from the university on 14.12.2020.
8. The Committee submitted the final Assessment Report to EKKA on 21.12.2020. The Assessment Report constitutes an integral part of the decision. The report is available on the EKKA website.
9. The Secretary of the Council forwarded the Committee's final assessment report along with University's Self-Analysis Report to the Council members on 19.01.2021.
10. The Council with 10 members present discussed these received documents in its session on 27.01.2021 and decided to point out the following strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations regarding the Social Services study programme group at Tallinn University.

The Committee listed the following horizontal strengths for the study programmes in the Social Services study programme group:

- 1) The programmes are dynamic and open for continuous development in line with feedback from and dialogue with students, employers, and stakeholders.
- 2) There have been a number of positive developments since the evaluation five years ago and new programmes have also been launched.
- 3) The new career model at the University puts an emphasis on the importance of teaching, includes mentoring and gives support for teachers to do research.
- 4) The teachers are well anchored in their field of teaching.
- 5) There is good access to digital tools and material for studies.
- 6) All programmes are connected to practice through cooperation with teachers from practice, dialogue with future employers, stakeholders and the students' different field practices, projects etc. carried out in practice.
- 7) The teaching and learning environment is supportive and teaching modules are planned for meeting the students' situation in the best way possible, for example as session learning.
- 8) The students are highly motivated, enthusiastic and hard working.

The Committee listed the following horizontal areas for improvement and recommendations for the study programmes in the Social Services study programme group:

- 1) The borders between the different programmes are not always explicit, nor are the different identities of each programme. These should be better defined.
- 2) More attention should be paid to defining the potential employment opportunities for graduates. For example, the links between the Health Promotion Specialist's programme and the needs of the labour market remain unclear.
- 3) Language is an issue for all programmes. There is good access to digital material, but it is mainly in English and students ask for material in Estonian as well as for having at least some study books that are not digital. In addition to that there is also the need to include Russian as that will be needed in at least some of the students' future work. There is no quick fix or easy solution for this, it has to be constantly taken into consideration in the work and development so that resources in the proper language are used in each situation and that managers, teachers and students are supported in developing relevant language skills.
- 4) The mobility programmes offered for international exchange most often demand longer stays abroad that does not match most students' life situation with family, work, etc. Efforts could be made for finding new, creative ways of international exchange, as short term stays abroad and more online activities.
- 5) Student feedback depends on whether the teacher is based at the University or is an external practitioner. However, when giving instructions to students during their studies and giving them feedback, teachers should preferably use similar principles; therefore, it is important that also part-time and external teachers are guided to do so.
- 6) It is evident that the high dropout rate is connected to the students' work and family obligations and requires attention and support.
- 7) The Master's programmes have difficulties in reaching the standards of profound professional knowledge, especially in Social Pedagogy and Child Protection and Social Work. As there is an open access to Master level, regardless of the disciplinary knowledge base from Bachelor level, valuable time in the Master studies is used for themes that should have been preconditions for admission. The admission criteria for Master programmes should be clarified in order to ensure the achievement of Master level learning outcomes for all students.
- 8) Field practice included in the curricula is in some of them far too short and unstructured. Practical studies should be better integrated in the curricula, more developed for making it possible to actually practice (not only observe) and more thoroughly followed up by the teachers.

- 9) Teaching staff, and especially study programme managers, should have at least a basic proficiency in English, given the internationalization of educational programmes and the wide use of study material in English.

YOUTH WORK (PROFESSIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION), YOUTH WORK MANAGEMENT (MASTER STUDIES)

Strengths

- 1) Compared to the previous assessment, the following positive developments have taken place in the Youth Work professional higher education study programme:
 - The curriculum is further developed to include a balance between theory and practice and the study programme is more coherent.
 - The study programme has been aligned with the youth worker occupational qualification standard.
 - Each course in the study programme now includes the theoretical framework and uses theoretical literature.
 - The role of non-formal education has been strengthened in the study programme. The curriculum now includes among other things self-reflective practice, which the students use not only later on the job, but for life.
 - The practical trainings are in a logical order in terms of content and level of requirements.
 - More lecturers are involved in teaching, and their qualifications are much higher than at the time of the previous assessment.
 - The support to students has been improved significantly. More flexibility has been allowed for (session-based form of studies) and this has helped to achieve positive results in the decrease of dropout rates in 2019.
 - A Master level study programme has been developed, coherent with the professional higher education study programme.
- 2) Digital learning and teaching have been well organised during the Covid-19 outbreak. The learning and teaching methods are appropriate.
- 3) The competence of the teaching staff is high, and the staff gives good and constructive feedback to the students. There is well-functioning cooperation among teaching staff members.
- 4) The students have good contacts with the staff and the students value the staff highly.
- 5) The student feedback system works well, and students participate in the development of the programme's education.

- 6) 2nd year students support 1st years students to reduce dropouts.
- 7) Master level students' research results are used in a very practical way in developing professional higher education courses.
- 8) Involving students in university lectures even outside Tallinn University and encouraging students to publish is good practice.

Suggestions for further developments

- 1) The professional higher education study programme needs a further review of courses to ensure that there is no duplication.
- 2) The importance of youth work should be explained to policy makers. Upon graduation, students should be able to market youth work in society.
- 3) Studies related to economics and administration of youth work can be strengthened in the Master's programme.
- 4) It would be desirable for the teaching staff to agree on the use of a single online environment for teaching and learning. New online environments should be presented to the students before taken into use.
- 5) Students should have the opportunity to participate in language courses, as the wide use of learning materials in English poses problems for some students.
- 6) In order to avoid fragmentation, attention should be paid to the integrity of the learning material. Based on the interviews, it was noted that at the beginning of the studies, a lot of articles and online materials are used. However, the connections of the learning materials are not always clear, and it can be difficult to build an overall picture of youth work and therefore the learning material can be better integrated. Study related guidance should be enhanced and structured better, in particular at the beginning of one's studies. The students would benefit from better guidance on how to structure and plan one's studies and set priorities.
- 7) Long term cooperation with youth work organisations needs to be strengthened.
- 8) Different options could be used to foster mobility: short term mobility, mobility counselling, virtual mobility, MOOCs, a cooperation network with universities from abroad.

HEALTH PROMOTION SPECIALIST (PROFESSIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION)

Strengths

- 1) Compared to the previous assessment, the following positive developments have taken place in the Health Promotion Manager study programme:

- Laying down the conceptual foundations of the study programme. There is a clear focus on nutrition counselling in the current curriculum and that the focus on elderly people will be one of the future choices for the curriculum development.
 - The internationalisation of the study programme has progressed. Important input into study programme development has come from the international Interreg project.
- 2) Various interest groups, including students and external stakeholders, future employees, teaching staff are involved in study programme development.
 - 3) Due to the session-learning, students are able to study and work at the same time easily. The study programme is a successful example of lifelong learning, because most of the students are adult learners who have already previously graduated some other studies.
 - 4) The learning and teaching environment at the Haapsalu College is good and learning materials appropriate and up to date. Students have access to various databases.
 - 5) Teachers are passionate and specialists in their field, they participate actively in courses, trainings, seminars and conferences.
 - 6) Direct and friendly communication between management, teaching staff and students. Every student receives personal feedback on their assignments.
 - 7) Students have different backgrounds, which brings diversity to the discussions and group works allowing for students to bring added value through their personal professional experiences into the studies.
 - 8) Various e-learning opportunities are used. During Covid-19 lockdown studies were conducted online smoothly, for example virtual group work sessions were organised. Students are satisfied with the way their studies are organised.
 - 9) Student feedback is well organised, and students see the results of their feedback.
 - 10) Teachers are working in other organisations in the related fields, and they keep themselves up to date with the newest trends and latest research.
 - 11) Very motivated and dedicated students.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) Currently, there is still lack of systematic follow-up and feedback from alumni needed in order to have a better overview of their career. A systematic follow-up of and constant feedback from alumni could be advantageous to get a better view on the employment opportunities of alumni. The University should be more proactive in finding solutions to some students not finding jobs in their field of studies. A labour market study should be conducted to that end.

Although job offers are circulated via the students' mailing list, a portal for jobs and practical training opportunities in the field could be created.

- 2) Students do not take part in study mobility, because they have many other responsibilities. Internationalisation should be developed in ways that suit the students' conditions. Short term exchanges and online events could help to further the students' international experiences.
- 3) The English language competence of the lecturers is variable. There were teachers whose English skills should be improved. The limited knowledge of English is also a barrier for staff mobility and could hinder programme development from an international perspective.

Suggestions for further developments

- 1) Study programme should cover equally all parts of society including minorities such as the elderly, people living in poverty, people with disabilities, people with a migration background. Cooperation with organizations working with minorities should be strengthened in the study programmes.
- 2) There is a lack of a comprehensive textbook, preferably in Estonian. It would be nice if a study book could be developed in Estonian by the teaching staff themselves.
- 3) Students would like to have more contact lessons.
- 4) The study programmes would benefit from enhanced cooperation with other study programmes in the Social Services study programme group.

SOCIAL PEDAGOGY (BACHELOR STUDIES), SOCIAL PEDAGOGY AND CHILD PROTECTION (MASTER STUDIES)

Strengths

1) Compared to the previous assessment, the following positive developments have taken place in the Social Pedagogy Bachelor programme:

- The programme is more clearly focussed on social pedagogy and has developed its teaching and learning methods.
- Students and teachers have better access to digital learning tools and databases.
- The workload for both teachers and students is better monitored and more even.
- The international perspectives are better connected to the programme.

2) Compared to the previous assessment, the following positive developments have taken place in the Social Pedagogy and Child Protection Master programme:

- The international connection of the programme has improved by having more international literature, lecturers, etc.
- Teaching staff have better connection to the fields of social pedagogy, child protection and have support through a career program.

3) The study programmes are clearly embedded in a local context and have a direct relevance for the Estonian labour market.

4) Course materials and learning are constantly reviewed and amended in the light of social changes and the development of teaching around children's rights is an important development in the course.

5) Good collaboration on developing the content of the courses is ongoing between the university and organisations such as the Union of Social Pedagogues.

6) Teaching staff with high competence and clear links to social pedagogy networks, mainly in the Nordic region at this moment.

7) Students are encouraged to support one-another and this links well to social pedagogy theories.

8) Students feel supported, their feedback is used in the development and that they have good connections to the department and their lecturers.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1) The 6 ECTS of internship in the programmes remain very limited, which raises the concern of the competences of people getting into the labour market. Around half of the students are employed as social pedagogues or child protection workers, however there is concern for the students who are not. For the latter group, the limited internship does not ensure that the learning outcomes are achieved. A stronger commitment to internship should be developed in the study programmes in order to develop the students' practical skills and better integrate theory with field practice.

2) Because of not having prior education in the field as a requirement for admission, the Master level programmes have difficulties in reaching the standards of profound professional knowledge. Although the students have a 6 ECTS course that is aimed at compensating the lack of basic knowledge and they are also being motivated by the lecturers to take special electives, this remains very limited and leaves it up to the students themselves to deal with this. Access to Master's level ought to be built on relevant disciplinary knowledge in order to fulfil the standards of profound professional knowledge and specialisation.

3) The Committee found it difficult to grasp what is meant by social pedagogy (which was at a point also called "social work in schools") at the University and

what the link is between social pedagogy and child protection. The identity of the Master's programme is clearly linked to Estonian occupational qualification standards, yet from an academic perspective they are not clearly linked to international standards in a broader sense, as the combination of social pedagogy and child protection is not recognised in an international context. It is recommended that the identity of the study programmes be clearly defined along with the theoretical reasoning and perspective underpinned by international trends and standards.

Suggestions for further developments

- 1) It is recommended that international cooperation be broadened, which would lead to better defining one's identity in the international context.
- 2) The students would like to use hard copies of books alongside online materials.
- 3) The Massive Open On-line Course "Social Pedagogy Across Europe" could be a helpful resource with regards to looking at social pedagogy in a wider European context in the context of the issue of student mobility.
- 4) It was identified by staff that there has been little opportunity for them to discuss the theoretical opinions of social pedagogy. It is therefore suggested that space is made for teaching staff to critically discuss their theoretical opinions of social pedagogy and how these can be embedded into teaching across the programmes.
- 5) Digital forms of international mobility should be developed.

SOCIAL WORK (BACHELOR AND MASTER STUDIES), SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP (MASTER STUDIES)

Strengths

- 1) Compared to the previous assessment, the following positive developments have taken place in the Social Work Bachelor and Master's study programmes:
 - Teaching staff do now have international perspectives and career support that enhances their theoretical knowledge as well as teaching skills.
 - The process of development of the curriculum is well connected to both feedback from students and dialogue with stakeholders, which more evidently connects the education to the needs of the labour market.
 - Teaching and learning are well organised, and the workload appears to be more even for the students now.
- 2) The new programme of Social Entrepreneurship is an asset for the university and the study programme group. Although only recently started and still in transition, the program is well designed and shows a lot of potential, also

from an international perspective. The integration into international networks has gone well, which facilitates the development of learning and teaching as well as supporting the students in designing their own projects. The study programme benefits from international and interdisciplinary teaching staff.

- 3) Teaching is organised in a way that makes it possible for students to work in parallel with studies.
- 4) Teaching staff is connected both to research and practice.
- 5) The students feel supported by teaching staff, the communication works well. Social media is also used for disseminating information.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) The study programmes should increase placement volumes in curricula to support students in the acquisition of experience and expertise necessary for taking up employment in the field. Different forms of practical training should also be better integrated into the study programmes.

Suggestions for further developments

- 1) The links between the Social Work programmes and collaboration with other study programmes in the field, such as Social Pedagogy and Child Protection programmes, should be clearly defined.
- 2) The lecture rooms are not furnished so that they would support project-based learning. Instead of constantly changing the layout of rooms, some lecture halls could be redesigned to meet the requirements of project-based learning.
- 3) There are not enough resources in Estonian and these should be developed.
- 4) Teachers who also are PhD students would benefit from a not so heavy workload, so that they can finish their PhD.
- 5) New ways could be developed to measure the outcomes of Social Entrepreneurship Master's programme as its achievements cannot be measured in traditional academic ways.

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

12. The Council weighed the strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations listed in point 10, and decided that the study programme, teaching and learning

conducted on the study programme and development activities thereof complies with the requirements on the condition that the University shall eliminate the following shortcomings:

- 1) Point 5.1.2 of the document 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education' stipulates that *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*. It is difficult to achieve in depth knowledge of the field on the Master level study programmes in the Social Services study programme group at Tallinn University, in particular on the Social Pedagogy and Child Protection as well as Social Work programmes, because there is no eligibility criterion requiring previous education in a similar field, graduates of whatever Bachelor programmes are admitted. Therefore, a significant amount of time is spent on covering topics during the Master studies that should rather be the pre-condition for admission to the study programmes. Admission criteria for Master's programmes should be clarified in order to ensure the achievement of learning outcomes corresponding to the Master's level for all students.
- 2) Point 5.3.4 of the document 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education' stipulates that *practical and theoretical studies are interconnected*. Point 5.3.5 stipulates that *the organisation and the content of practical training support achievement of planned learning outcomes and meet the needs of the stakeholders*. The practical training included in the curricula of the Social Services study programme group is often too short, unstructured and raises questions about the competency of graduates. Practical training should be better integrated into the curricula and should allow for actual practice, not mere observation. Practical training should likewise be more thoroughly supervised by teaching staff.
- 3) Point 5.2.2 of the document 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education' stipulates that *there is a sufficient supply of textbooks and other teaching aids, and they are available*. There is good access to electronic literature in English available in the Social Services study programme group at Tallinn University, but students would also like to use materials in Estonian and hard copies of textbooks. Many students will also need to know the terminology in Russian in their future work. The University should take a consistent approach to using materials in appropriate languages in teaching and learning.
- 4) Point 5.1.1 of the document 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education' stipulates that *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. Neither the identities of the study programmes nor the boundaries between them are clear for the study programmes in the Social Services study programme group at Tallinn University. The links between the Social Work study programmes and cooperation with other study programmes in the study programme group, i.e., with the Social Pedagogy and Child Protection study programmes, should be clearly defined. More attention should be paid to defining the potential employment opportunities for graduates. For example, the links between the Health Promotion Specialist's study programme and the labour market needs remain unclear.

13. According to clause 53 (1) 2) of the Administrative Procedure Act, a secondary condition of an administrative act is an additional duty related to the principal regulation of the administrative act, and 3) states that a supplementary condition for the creation of a right arising from the principal regulation of the administrative act. Clauses 53 (2) 2) and 3) establish that a secondary condition may be imposed on an administrative act if the administrative act cannot be issued without the secondary condition, or if issue of the administrative act must be resolved on the basis of an administrative right of discretion. The Council decided that without a secondary condition, a new assessment of the study programme group would have to take place in 5 years and on the basis of points 40.1 and 41 of the document 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education'

DECIDED

to approve the assessment report and conduct the next quality assessment in the Social Services study programme group at Tallinn University in seven years, with the following secondary condition:

Tallinn University shall submit by 27.01.2023 in English a report on the elimination of the shortcomings described in point 12. Members of the Assessment Committee shall be involved in the review of progress made on the secondary condition.

The decision was adopted with 10 votes in favour. Against 0.

14. The Council suggests that Tallinn University submit an action plan to EKKA concerning also the remaining areas for improvement and recommendations pointed out in the report by 27.01.2023.

15. A person who finds that his or her rights have been violated or his or her freedoms restricted by this decision may file a challenge with the EKKA Quality Assessment Council within 30 days after the person filing the challenge became or should have become aware of the contested finding.

The Council shall forward the challenge to its Appeals Committee who shall provide an unbiased opinion in writing regarding the validity of the challenge to the Council, within five days after receipt of the challenge. The Council shall resolve the challenge within ten days of its receipt, taking into account the reasoned opinion of the Appeals Committee. If the challenge needs to be investigated further, the deadline for its review by the Council may be extended by a maximum of thirty days.

A legal challenge to this decision is possible within 30 days after its delivery, by filing an action with the Tallinn courthouse of the Tallinn Administrative Court under the procedure provided for in the Code of Administrative Court Procedure.

Eve Eisenschmidt
Chair of the Council

Hillar Bauman
Secretary of the Council