

Decision of the quality assessment of the Health Care Study Programme Group of the University of Tartu

16.09.2021

The Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education decided to approve the report of the Assessment Committee and to carry out the next quality assessment of the first and second levels of higher education of the Health Care Study Programme Group of the University of Tartu in seven years with secondary conditions.

Pursuant to clause 41 of the document "Quality Assessment of the Study Programme Group at the First and Second Levels of Higher Education" established on the basis of the authorization contained in § 48 (4) of the Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act, § 10 (4) of the University Act and clauses 24 and 5 of the Statutes of the Education and Youth Board, the Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (hereinafter the Council) states the following:

1. On 11.01.2016, the Council decided to carry out the next quality assessment of the first and second levels of higher education of the HealthCare Study Programme Group of the University of Tartu after five years.
2. The University of Tartu coordinated the quality assessment period of the HealthCare Study Programme Group with EKKA on 09.02.2021.
3. On 02.03.2021, the Director of EKKA approved the Quality Assessment Committee of the Health Care Study Programme Group of the University of Tartu (hereinafter the Committee) in the following composition:

Joke Denekens (Chairman)

MD, Ph.D., general practitioner. Full professor in General Practice and Head of the Department of General Practice at the University of Antwerp; former Vice-Rector of the University of Antwerp; Belgium.

Lenne-Liisa Heinoja	student; TalTech. TalTech Student Council, board member in the field of education; Estonia
Kjersti Grønning	Professor, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Department of Public Health and Nursing; Norway
Linzette Deidre Morris	Assistant professor in Physical Therapy, Qatar University; Qatar
Tuovi Hannele Elisabet Turunen	Professor in Nursing Science; Nursing Leadership and Management; Head of the Department of Nursing Science, University of Eastern Finland. Nurse Manager (part-time), Kuopio University Hospital. Docent/Adjunct Professor University of Turku; Finland
Reio Vilipuu	non-university member/employer; physiotherapist, member of the board of Tursekeskus OÜ (Reio Vilipuu Rehabilitation Center); Estonia

4. The University of Tartu submitted the following study programmes for assessment in the Health Care Study Programme Group:

Physiotherapy (Bachelor's study)

Physiotherapy (Master's study)

Public Health (Master's study)

Nursing Science (Master's study)

5. The University of Tartu submitted the final self-analysis report to the EKKA office on 29.12.2020, which was sent to the Committee by the assessment coordinator on 22.02.2021.

6. The virtual assessment visit to the University of Tartu took place on 23.04.2021 and 03.-04.05.2021.

7. The Committee sent the draft assessment report to the EKKA office on 6.07.2021, which EKKA forwarded to the institution of higher education for comment on 6.07.2021 and to which the University of Tartu submitted a reply on 21.07.2021.

8. The Committee submitted the final assessment report to the EKKA office on 23.08.2021. The assessment report is an integral part of the decision. The report is available on the EKKA website.

9. The Secretary of the Assessment Council forwarded the final assessment report and self-analysis report to the members of the Assessment Council on 10.09.2021.
10. The Council discussed the received documents at the meeting on 16.09.2021 with the participation of 8 members and decided to point out the following strengths of the University of Tartu Health Care Study Programme Group, areas for improvement, and recommendations as well as proposals for further developments.

The Committee identified the following cross-cutting strengths in the study programmes of the University of Tartu Health Care Study Programme Group:

- 1) The study programmes are based on national standards. International comparisons have also been performed in the study programmes of Physiotherapy and Public Health.
- 2) The implementation of flexible learning (hybrid learning) deserves recognition. These developments took place before the Covid-19 crisis.
- 3) The infrastructure and learning environment are of high quality.
- 4) The study programme quality assurance mechanism is systematic, regular, and inclusive of all stakeholder groups. Internal evaluation of study programmes now takes place every year.
- 5) The University's efforts for cooperation between study programmes in teaching and research, in the organization of internships, in the supervision of Master's theses, in the development of study programmes, and in the mutual sharing of resources are commendable.
- 6) Cooperation with the world of work, including the organization of internships, is strong and takes into account changes in society and the health care system.
- 7) The study information system fully supports the study process, including preventively also those students who have difficulties in completing the study programme. Students and lecturers are satisfied with the study information system.
- 8) Study programmes are very flexible and allow students to study according to individual study plans. Students in the Nursing Study Programme are very satisfied with the period study.
- 9) Students value the quality of the learning process (including internships) and the coherence of theory and internship.

The Committee highlighted the following areas for improvement and recommendations for the Health Care Study Programme of the University of Tartu:

- 1) The Committee considers that learning outcomes do not yet sufficiently guide the learning of the students. The links between learning outcomes, learning and teaching, and assessment have not yet been widely mapped at the study programme level.

- 2) Although the e-portfolio is a good tool for competency-based assessment, it is not yet fully implemented in all study programmes. According to the students, the feedback needs to be improved. The Committee recommends further development of the feedback system so that it would systematically support the learning process and create an "educational alliance" between lecturers and students to stimulate self-reflection and self-directed learning of students.
- 3) Study programmes should pay more attention to the development of general skills.
- 4) As part of the state study financing fee is allocated at the University for a specific purpose, e.g., for the development of transferable skills in study programmes, it would be desirable for the study programme group to also use this opportunity to stimulate didactic innovation in study programmes.
- 5) The dropout rate is quite high, especially in the Nursing Science Programme. More action is needed to reduce dropout rate.
- 6) Although students are generally satisfied with the internship, its quality depends on the competence of the supervisor, and in some cases (especially in nursing and physiotherapy programmes), these competencies are lacking. Special attention must be paid to the training of internship supervisors.
- 7) Better use should be made of existing international contacts to enable more students to spend a semester abroad and to increase mobility in both directions.

As regards the study programmes of the University of Tartu Health Care Study Programme Group, the Committee outlined the following cross-cutting proposals for further development activities:

- 1) Applying for research funding should be made more professional. To this end, an interdisciplinary research group could be set up at the field level.
- 2) It is recommended to add more interdisciplinary subjects to the study programme and to implement team-based teaching.

NURSING SCIENCE (MASTER'S STUDY)

Strengths

- 1) The integration of the basic and specialty modules from the 2018/19 academic year has made it possible to make the study programme more in line with the needs of society.
- 2) The merging of three different structural units into the Institute of Family Medicine and Public Health will make it possible to share revenues and costs.
- 3) The number of lecturers obtaining doctoral degrees has increased.
- 4) A visiting foreign professor is developing the research and development activities of the Chair of Nursing in cooperation with other academic staff.
- 5) Employers are satisfied with the competencies of graduates.
- 6) Writing camps are held for the Master's thesis.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) An international benchmarking of learning outcomes is needed. This was already recommended in the 2016 assessment. The main focus of the study programme should remain in line with Estonia's needs, but an international component should be added to the subject courses.
- 2) The volume of 8 ECTS of the clinical internship is insufficient, according to both the students and the Committee. It needs to be increased.
- 3) Interdisciplinarity should be more represented in subjects, Master's theses, research, and internship. Representatives of other disciplines should be involved in study programme development.
- 4) The study programme funding system is not suitable for study programmes with a small number of students, such as nursing. The sustainability of the study programme needs more support from the University in order to be able to recruit more lecturers and increase the number of students.
- 5) As very few subjects are taught in English, there are no international students. To increase the level of internationalization, for example, consideration should be given to teaching one semester or module in English.
- 6) The level of the Master's thesis depends on the scientific ability of the supervisor, and therefore not all students are on an equal footing. Supervisors should have a doctoral degree. An analysis is needed to assess and ensure the scientific quality of the supervisors.
- 7) Newly recruited lecturers should have a doctoral degree. This is important in order to increase the research-based nature of teaching and to ensure the necessary number of specialists with a Master's degree in the Estonian labor market. University (including financial) support must be provided for lecturers obtaining a doctoral degree.

Proposals for further developments

- 1) Cooperation with the Public Health Study Programme should be strengthened, not only in terms of the use of human and technical resources but also in order to implement greater interdisciplinarity in teaching.
- 2) The use of a personalized study programme needs to be further developed to take into account the fact that full-time students are not sufficiently challenged on the one hand and that working students are overburdened on the other.

PUBLIC HEALTH (MASTER'S STUDY)

Strengths

- 1) The links between teaching, research, and serving society are strong. Students are involved in public health policy and service activities.
- 2) The level of Master's theses is high, and they are accompanied by publications in international peer-reviewed journals.
- 3) The main lecturers are highly qualified, and they are active in research. 60% of them have a doctoral degree.

- 4) Thanks to good contacts in society at large, lectures are given by specialists from ministries, research institutes, and other institutions.
- 5) Students are very competitive in the labor market.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) Although the publication of research articles of Master's students and their supervision is commendable, it must be ensured that the research work of academic staff does not focus too much on the supervision of the research work of Master's students.

Proposals for further developments

- 1) Cooperation with the Nursing Study Programme should be strengthened, not only in terms of the use of human and technical resources but also in order to implement greater interdisciplinarity in teaching.
- 2) Consideration should be given to introducing a system that allows for a systematic assessment of the workload of both lecturers and students. Especially during the pandemic, it can sometimes be too high.
- 3) According to the students, the feedback on their independent work is insufficient. Feedback must be provided equally to all students.

PHYSIOTHERAPY (BACHELOR'S STUDY), PHYSIOTHERAPY (MASTER'S STUDY)

Strengths

- 1) An optional subject, "internship in a work environment," has been added to the Master's program to encourage students to take part in summer internships and thus gain additional practical experience.
- 2) The subject of the Bachelor's program "geriatric physiotherapy" is paying more and more attention to mental health physiotherapy. A new course, "Physiotherapy in Psychiatry," has been developed.
- 3) In the Bachelor's program, functional anatomy is more strongly integrated into every subject taught by lecturers.
- 4) Twenty-six lecturers who teach in the Study Programme have a doctoral degree.
- 5) The dropout rate due to lack of progress in the Master's program is very low.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) The study programmes contain little global content in healthcare, which may have a negative impact on their internationalization.
- 2) Study programmes should increase the role of functional anatomy, include a course on the Estonian healthcare system and its financing, and pay more attention to the development of clinical skills, internship, analytical thinking, and reflective writing.

- 3) The timeliness of subject courses must be ensured, and the use of contradictory terms, which no longer have a place in physiotherapy education in general, must be avoided.
- 4) The reasons why employers consider internships and theoretical courses to be incoherent need to be identified.
- 5) Students must be informed about mobility opportunities. The number of courses in English-language should be increased to recruit more international students and internationalize study programmes.

Proposals for further developments

- 1) In both study programmes, interdisciplinarity in teaching should be enhanced, and research should be strengthened.
- 2) It is necessary to make the existing tutoring system more visible to students.

11. Clause 41 of the document "Quality Assessment of the Study Programme Group at the First and Second Level of Higher Education" stipulates that the Assessment Council shall approve the assessment report within three (3) months after its receipt. The Council will consider the strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations identified by the Assessment Committee and decide to carry out the next quality assessment of the Study Programme Group in seven, five, or three years.

12. The Committee considered the strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations set out in clause 10 and found that the study programme, the studies provided in it, and the development activities related to it meet the requirements, provided that the University eliminates the following **shortcomings related to the Nursing Study Programme:**

- 1) Section 5.4.1 of the document entitled "Quality Assessment of the Study Programme Group at the First and Second Levels of Higher Education" states: "*There are sufficiently qualified lecturers to achieve the goals and learning outcomes of the study programme and to ensure the quality and sustainability of study activities.*" The study programme financing system of the University of Tartu does not guarantee the sustainability of study programmes with a small number of students, such as Nursing. The sustainability of the study programme needs more support from the University in order to be able to recruit more lecturers and increase the number of students. Currently, there is only one visiting professor with a Doctoral degree working with a 0.25 workload in the Chair of Nursing. The level of a Master's thesis depends on the scientific ability of the supervisor, which is why both supervisors and newly recruited lecturers should have a doctoral degree. This is important in order to increase the research-based nature of teaching and to ensure the necessary number of specialists with a Master's degree in the Estonian labor market.
- 2) Section 5.3.6 of the document entitled "Quality Assessment of the Study Programme Group at the First and Second Levels of Higher Education"

states: *"The learning process supports academic mobility."* Section 5.5.4 of the same document states: *" During their studies, students study as foreign or visiting students in other Estonian and/or foreign higher education institutions."* The level of internationalization in the Nursing Study Programme is low. It is necessary to conduct an international comparative analysis of the learning outcomes of the Nursing Study Programme. This was already recommended in the 2016 assessment. The main focus of the study programme should remain in line with Estonia's needs, but an international component should be added to the subject courses. As very few subjects are taught in English, there are no international students. To increase the level of internationalization, for example, consideration should be given to teaching one semester or module in English. Better use should be made of existing international contacts to enable more students to spend a semester abroad and to increase mobility in both directions.

13. Pursuant to § 53 (1) 2) of the Administrative Procedure Act (APA), a secondary condition to an administrative act is an additional obligation related to the basic regulation of the administrative act and pursuant to clause 3 also an additional condition for the right arising from the basic regulation of the administrative act. § 53 (2) 2) and 3) of the APA provide that a *secondary condition may be imposed on an administrative act: if the administrative act cannot be issued without the secondary condition or if the issue of the administrative act must be decided on the basis of the administrative right of discretion.* The Council considered that, without the secondary conditions, the next quality assessment of the study programme group should be carried out in five years and on the basis of clauses 41 and 42 of the document "Quality assessment of the study programme group at the first and second level of higher education."

DECIDED

To approve the assessment report and to carry out the next quality assessment of the HealthCare Study Programme Group of the University of Tartu after seven years with the following secondary condition:

The University of Tartu shall submit a report in English on the elimination of the deficiencies described in clause 12 no later than 16.09.2023. The members of the Assessment Committee are involved in assessing the fulfillment of the secondary condition.

The decision was adopted by eight votes in favor, and none opposed.

14. The Council proposes to the University of Tartu to submit to EKKA an action plan in English no later than 16.09.2023 regarding the consideration of other areas for improvement and recommendations provided in the report.

15. A person who considers that the decision has violated his or her rights or restricted his or her freedoms may file a challenge with the Assessment Council of EKKA within thirty (30) days after the appellant became aware of or should have become aware of the contested act. The Assessment Council shall send the challenge to the challenge committee of the Assessment Council of EKKA, which shall submit a written, impartial opinion to the Assessment Council on the reasoning of the challenge within five (5) days of receipt of the challenge. The Assessment Council shall resolve the challenge within ten (10) days of receipt, taking into account the reasoned position of the appeal committee. If the challenge needs to be further investigated, the Assessment Council may extend the term for reviewing the challenge by up to thirty (30) days. Contestation of a decision in court is possible within thirty (30) days as of its service by submitting an appeal to the Tallinn Courthouse of the Tallinn Administrative Court pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Administrative Court Procedure Act.

Eve Eisenschmidt
Chair of the Council

Hillar Bauman
Secretary of the Council