

**Assessment Report on Meeting the  
Requirements of the Secondary Condition**

Study programme group of  
Journalism and Information

**University of Tartu**

2019

## Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	3
1. GENERAL PROGRESS REPORT SINCE LAST ASSESSMENT OF STUDY PROGRAMME GROUP .....	5
1.1. GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF THE ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE EAA WITH REGARD TO IMPROVEMENT AREAS PRESENTED IN THE EKKA COUNCIL 29.09.2017 DECISION.....	5
2. REPORT ON MEETING THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE SECONDARY CONDITION .....	7
2.1. GENERAL BACKGROUND.....	7
2.2. MEETING THE REQUIREMENTS OF SECONDARY CONDITION .....	7

## Introduction

### Background and 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 their quality.

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 as a recommendation.

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 at the Level of Doctoral Studies*.

In 2017, international expert panel assessed the quality of the study programme group of Journalism and Information at the University of Tartu (UT). As a result, EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education decided at its meeting on September 29, 2017, that the next assessment is to take place in seven years if the university meet certain requirements set by the Council.

**The aim of the current assessment committee's work** was to evaluate whether the requirements (secondary condition) set by the Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education have been met by the UT.

### Assessment committee

The following members formed the assessment committee:

Agusta Palsdottir	Professor, University of Iceland, Island
Margus Viher	Director General, The Estonian Patent Office, Estonia

### Assessment process

The assessment process was coordinated by Hillar Bauman (EKKA).

UT sent on September 30, 2019 the following documents:

- 1) Action plan for considering the improvement proposals and recommendations specified in the evaluation decision on the curriculum group Journalism and Information
- 2) Information about teaching staff of 3 programmes

## Assessment Report on Fulfilment of the Secondary Condition

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

In the following sections, the assessment committee summarizes its findings regarding the fulfillment of the secondary condition, and also provides feedback on the progress the university has made in connection with experts' recommendations made in their report in 2017.

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

# 1. General progress report since last assessment of study programme group

## 1.1. General assessment of the actions taken by the UT with regard to improvement areas presented in the EKK Council 29.09.2017 decision.

### Comments

The structure of the curricula in "Information Management" has been simplified by discontinuing the daytime study form and continuing only the Open University study form. Together with rearrangement in the teachers work, this should ease some of their high teaching workload. The changes will hopefully also allow them time, particularly younger staff, to become more engaged in research work, as the need for that was emphasized in the evaluation report.

In addition, the evaluation report suggested that the options for completing the studies with either a final exam or a thesis should be reconsidered. Writing a graduation paper and conducting a related empirical study would provide a stronger foundation for those students who will continue their studies at a master's degree programme and possibly further at a doctoral degree programme (p. 15).

In the action plan (p. 6), this is being rejected by referring to the practical orientation of the curriculum. The Assessment Committee finds the point raised, that less than one fifth of the students continue their studies on the MA-level, to be of a particular concern. The team underscores the need for the study to aim at building a strong profession of Information Scientists who are capable of dealing with, not only the situation in the current job market, but also development and changes in the future. The fact that such a low rate of graduates chooses to continue their study on a MA-level is likely to cause a problem for the profession, who needs to have both the theoretical and the practical strength in Information Science to take a leadership when coping with future development in the field.

According to the Action Plan, the University confirms and believes that a right balance between Information Science theoretical approaches and practice is reached. The Assessment Committee appreciates the positive changes and developments in curricula. The Assessment committee still believes that needs for further improvements of the Information Science component should be monitored on a regular basis. At the same time we completely agree that changes in the job market should be monitored and taken into account when developing curricula. Comments about the BA-programme Information Management are e.g. on p. 11 and 18.

The evaluation report (p. 14) also mentioned that due to the nature of the study programme it is recommended to ensure that the digital study and research environment is constantly kept up-to-date.

The action plan states that software, hardware and databases are updated, and e-study materials developed (p. 6). Although we agree that it is necessary to update the infrastructure, we stress the importance of considering other features of digital learning as

well. It is imperative to integrate also new knowledge about digital teaching and to develop the teaching methods so that they support e-learning. This is particularly important because the contact time for lectures have been limited instead of e-learning. The summer schools in the digital humanities and digital methods held in 2018 and 2019, as well as getting support from the Information Technology Foundation for Education for digital updating of curricula, are good steps in that direction and important for promoting this.

In the evaluation report the team assessed the BA-programme "Information Management" and the MA-programme "Information and Knowledge Management". The action plan reports that the daytime study form of "Information Management" has now been integrated with a new bachelor's programme and "Information and Knowledge Management" has been discontinued. The team is not in a position to respond to the comments and explanations in the action plan about the new bachelor's curriculum "Information Society and Social Well-Being" (p. 2) and the master's curriculum "Analysis of Society and Information Processes" (p. 7).

### Commendations

- Attempts to ease the workload of the teachers and support their research activity.
- Summer schools in the digital humanities and digital methods and seeking support for digital updating of curricula are positive steps.
- Application for EU Twinning project grant (Digital literacy for and from e-Estonia) is furthermore in progress.

### Further considerations

- Further actions of encouraging students to prepare to continue their studies on MA level are highly recommended.
- Focusing the content of the study programme more towards task-related human information behaviour and practices, and work-related information literacy. Both of these would strengthen the Information Science component of the programme and match well with the overall information environment in this context, that is, organisations and networks formed by their activities. Also the information users' perspective could be embedded into these (p. 18 evaluation report).
- The professional profile of graduates could possibly be wider, or have other related profiles e.g. related to the needs of open science and universities and other research institutions. Also the other issues related to big data could be more clearly indicated in the profile (p. 11 evaluation report).

## 2. Report on meeting the requirements of the secondary condition

### 2.1. General background

At its meeting on September 29, 2017, EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education decided that the next assessment of the study programme group of Journalism and Information at the University of Tartu will take place in 7 years (maximum term) but set a secondary condition that the UT should meet in 2 years.

### 2.2. Meeting the requirements of secondary condition

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

According to clause 6 (7) 1) of the Government of the Republic Regulation, 'Standard of Higher Education', the conduct of studies conforms to the requirements if the teaching is performed by ordinary teaching and research staff who meet the qualification requirements established in legal instruments and whose number, based on their responsibilities, teaching and research loads, and numbers of students supervised, is sufficient to achieve the objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme. There is a clear shortage of ordinary teaching staff with backgrounds in information science in both the Information Management BA programme and the Information and Knowledge Management MA programme. It is urgent to find a solution to this problem. Teaching staff must be allowed more time for research.

**Assessment of the committee: the secondary condition is partly met**

#### Comments

Page 16 of the Assessment report states that: "Following the structural change in 2013, the move from Viljandi affected the teaching staff with a major change. Currently there is only one staff member remaining of 10 previous teachers from Viljandi. In our opinion this is a gap in the academic teaching staff, who are qualified in information science. This gap has been filled with practitioners from the field, who are graduates from the programmes, and they are employed as part-time teachers. Therefore, we can only conclude that the academic profile of Information Science needs to be strengthened and that it is urgent to find a solution to this problem in the near future."

In the action plan (p. 6), the respond to this is: "five different teaching staff members with an information science background (at a PhD or MA level) were teaching in the curriculum at

the time of the visit of the evaluation committee (Lepik, Kannukene, Palu, Männiste, Vaaro).”

However, the Assessment Committee points out that three of those were in a position as assistants and only two were lecturers. Furthermore, Krista Lepik, who was a lecturer at the time of the report, is currently in a position as a post-doctorate at Lund University in Sweden. The Assessment Committee is stressing the point that for an Information Science programme, it is necessary to have academic staff with qualification in Information Science. The Assessment Committee does not consider the number of ordinary teaching staff with background in Information Science to be enough.

### Commendations

- It is positive that Männiste is completing her doctoral studies and the Assessment Committee believes that it will strengthen the group of teaching staff.
- In addition, Kannukene has entered a PhD study, which is also a positive development.
- Attempts have been made to ease the workload of the teachers and support their research activity.

### Further considerations

The Assessment Committee highly appreciates the positive development of simplifying the structure of the curricula and other efforts that the University has made to rearrange the high teaching workload, as well as supporting time for research. We still recommend that actions should be planned to carefully follow the academic profile of Information Science and strengthen it with further activities. The Assessment Committee does not consider the number of ordinary teaching staff with background in Information Science to be enough.