

**Decision Regarding Assessment of the Journalism and
Information Study Programme Group
University of Tartu**

29/09/2017

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 Journalism and Information study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at the University of Tartu in seven years, with a secondary condition

On the basis of subsection 10 (4) of the Universities Act and points 41.1 and 42 of the document, 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education', authorised in points 3.7.3 and 3.7.1 of the Statutes of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (hereinafter referred to as 'EKKA'), the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education (hereinafter referred to as 'the Council') affirms the following:

1. On 1.03.2016 the University of Tartu and EKKA agreed upon a time frame to conduct a quality assessment of the study programme group.
2. The Director of EKKA, by her order on 15.02.2017, approved the following membership of the quality assessment committee for the Journalism and Information study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at the University of Tartu and Tallinn University (hereinafter referred to as 'the Committee'):

Ágústa Pálsdóttir	Chair of the Committee, Professor, University of Iceland, Iceland
Leen d'Haenens	Professor, KU Leuven, Belgium
Väino Koorberg	Member of Estonian Academic Journalism Society, Estonia
Annisa Suliman	Principal Lecturer, Leeds Beckett University, UK
Meelis Süld	Chairman of the Board, Estonian Association of Journalists, Estonia
Marija Vasilevska	Student, University of 'Ss. Cyril and Methodius', Macedonia
Margus Viher	Director General, The Estonian Patent Office, Estonia

3. The University of Tartu submitted the following programmes for evaluation under this study programme group:
Information Management (Prof HE)
Information and Knowledge Management (MA)
Journalism and Communication (BA)
Communication Management (MA)
Journalism (MA)
4. The University of Tartu submitted a self-evaluation report to the EKKA Bureau on 17.01.2017 and the assessment coordinator forwarded it to the Committee on 14.02.2017.
5. An assessment visit was made to the University of Tartu during 20–21.04.2017.
6. The Committee sent its draft assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 5.06.2017, EKKA forwarded it to the University of Tartu for its comments on 7.06.2017 and the University delivered its response on 20.06.2017.
7. The Committee submitted its final assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 21.06.2017. That assessment report is an integral part of the decision, and is available on the EKKA website.
8. The Secretary of the Council forwarded the Committee’s final assessment report along with the University’s self-evaluation report to the Council members on 25.08.2017.
9. The Council with 8 members present discussed these received documents in its session on 29.09.2017 and, based on the assessment report, decided to point out the following strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations regarding the Journalism and Information study programme group at the University of Tartu.

Assessment at the Level of the Study Programme Group

Strengths

- 1) A strength of the study programme group lies in its interdisciplinarity, which creates opportunities for cooperation with other study programme groups.
- 2) Students are capable and motivated, and are satisfied with their study programmes, the teaching staff and their studies.
- 3) Teaching staff are committed to their academic work.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) Due to extensive changes made to the study programmes during the last few years, workloads of the teaching staff have been alarmingly large. It is recommended that young qualified lecturers be recruited soon to ensure new generations of the academic staff.
- 2) In some study programmes, the student dropout rates are quite high. The University should carefully monitor this situation and seek flexible solutions for the problem.
- 3) The international student mobility rate is too low and should be increased.
- 4) The financing model agreed upon after the higher education reform has not been able to compensate for the removal of non-state budget funds to a full extent. As a result, funding for studies in the social sciences has dropped significantly, especially since the 2015/16 academic year. The insufficiency of financial resources is a serious problem, which can have limiting effects, such as preventing the recruitment of young qualified lecturers for the study programme group, and thereby affecting staff members’ workloads as well as the quality of their teaching and research work.
- 5) Procedures should be developed at the University to help improve the response rates for student feedback on the study programme as a whole.

- 6) Problems with the renovation of the University library are affecting the students' learning experience, and getting them resolved should be a priority.

Assessment at the Study Programme Level

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT (PROF HE)

Strengths

- 1) The study programme meets the changing needs of the labour market in Estonia.
- 2) The study programme has been compared with similar international programmes during its development process.
- 3) The staff pointed out that the interdisciplinary nature of the Institute of Social Studies was a determining factor when moving the study programme from Viljandi to Tartu. This facilitated increasing the role of transferable skills in the programme, valued by both students and employers.
- 4) Students are able to flexibly combine working and studying.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) The professional profile of graduates could be broader, or better related to the needs of other universities and research institutions. Issues related to big data should also be more clearly addressed in the study programme.
- 2) The content of the study programme could focus more on task-related human information behaviour and practices, as well as work-related information literacy, in order to strengthen the information science component of the programme. The perspective of the information user could also be dealt with in this context.
- 3) Given the nature of the study programme, it is essential to constantly update the digital learning and research environments.
- 4) Consideration should be given to making thesis writing compulsory for completion of the programme, especially in view of a potential continuation of studies in a master degree programme.
- 5) More time and opportunities for research should be given to the academic staff, especially to the younger staff.
- 6) After the study programme had been moved from Viljandi to Tartu, only one staff member with a background in information science remained with the programme. The teaching work remaining is conducted by practitioners who are employed as part-time visiting lecturers. There is therefore a clear shortage of full-time professional staff, and it is urgent that a solution to this problem be found.
- 7) New ways should be sought to guide students towards completion of their studies in a timely manner.

INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT (MA)

Strengths

- 1) There is a great demand for knowledge management competence in the labour market, and therefore graduates of the study programme have good career prospects.
- 2) The study programme has an interdisciplinary orientation. The programme focuses on developing analytical skills and competencies.
- 3) In the teaching and learning process, digital learning environments are used and access to various digital learning materials is provided.
- 4) There is a positive collaboration in the programme with teaching staff from other disciplines such as information science, communication science and sociology, especially in the teaching of research methodology.

- 5) Theoretical and practical components are well interconnected in the teaching and learning process through the participation of practical training partners.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) The content of the study programme could increase the focus on task-related human information behaviour and practices, as well as work-related information literacy, in order to strengthen the information science component of the programme. The perspective of the information user could also be dealt with in this context. In addition, possibilities for professional cooperation with Tallinn University should be investigated, and a closer collaboration with the Chair of Sociology is also recommended.
- 2) More new teaching staff with qualifications in information science should be recruited for the programme.
- 3) Teaching staff should be allowed more time for research.
- 4) As the study programme has been in a state of flux, a period of stability and consistency would be beneficial.
- 5) Teaching methods that enable students to better combine working and studying should be employed.
- 6) 'Mobility windows' should be created in the study programme and flexible solutions should be found to encourage short-term international mobility.
- 7) Financial resources for continuous updating of digital teaching and learning environments and tools must be ensured.
- 8) Students need support during their studies in order to lower dropout rates and shorten the average times for completion of studies.

JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION (BA)

Strengths

- 1) The study programme successfully combines traditional and contemporary approaches, and balances the needs of different stakeholders. The programme is highly regarded in international rankings.
- 2) According to employers, changes made in the curriculum have resulted in noticeable improvements in the students' skills and competencies.
- 3) Students can choose flexibly during almost the entire study period whether they want to focus on journalism or communication.
- 4) Theoretical and practical studies are in good balance in the study programme.
- 5) Student's self-directed learning, self-assessment and meta-cognitive processes of learning are central to the teaching and learning. Students are expected to take responsibility for their own learning. Different solutions are being developed to support independent and flexible digital education, such as high-quality e-lectures and MOOCs.
- 6) Extra modules are offered each semester so that students can choose from a broader range of electives.
- 7) Students are provided with detailed and thorough support when writing their theses. The idea of a Research Fair, which encourages discussions between students and their potential supervisors, is worthy of recognition.
- 8) The feedback mechanisms function effectively.
- 9) Structural changes at the University have given the Institute of Social Studies the opportunity for a more interdisciplinary approach to studies. This collegial approach has been endorsed by the teaching staff and has enhanced the teaching and learning process.
- 10) Staff members involve MA students to conduct BA studies, offering them pedagogical training during the process as well. This provides valuable experiences for the students and also alleviates workloads of the teaching staff.

- 11) Students appreciate the opportunity to receive personal feedback from staff members. Students also mentioned the support from programme coordinators in a very positive way.
- 12) Practitioners are also present at student admission interviews.
- 13) Learning aids in classrooms and news studios are of very good quality.
- 14) Teachers try to be as flexible as possible so that students may combine working and studying.
- 15) Teaching staff of Journalism have strong academic and research backgrounds as well as a good understanding of what competencies and skills students should have acquired by the end of their studies. They have close connections with practitioners as well.
- 16) The Institute encourages younger lecturers to develop their teaching skills by offering them a broad range of in-service training courses and the needed support systems.
- 17) Staff members share best teaching practices with one another, both formally and informally.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) There have been a number of rapid changes over the last four to five years. A period of stability would be beneficial.
- 2) More courses taught in a foreign language should be offered to make the study programme more attractive to international students and to promote 'internationalisation at home'.
- 3) The number of electives and student contact hours has been reduced due to budget cuts. It must be monitored in order that it would not harm the interests of students.
- 4) More attention should be paid to the development of audiovisual skills. Opportunities to use e-learning should be better introduced to the teaching staff. It should be ensured that all modules include e-learning options. Also, adequate feedback should be provided to students who have completed web-based assignments.
- 5) According to employers, the professional identity of students should be strengthened.
- 6) Relations with employers should be further enhanced – for example, by organising compulsory periods of practical trainings at different enterprises. Also, practitioners should be involved in the teaching in a more systematic manner.
- 7) The student graduation rate at the BA level is low, which calls into question the effectiveness of teaching and learning. The organisation of studies should enable students to better combine working and studying, while at the same time setting concrete limits for the flexibility.
- 8) The stability of a quality management system as well as a good balance between open and closed questions in satisfaction surveys should be ensured, to allow for longer-term comparisons.
- 9) Communication students have fewer opportunities to develop their practical skills during their first years of study compared to Journalism students.
- 10) Given that assessment methods used by the teaching staff vary considerably, meetings of staff members once per semester to discuss issues related to assessments of learning outcomes are recommended.
- 11) Low salary levels and heavy workloads affect the health and morale of teaching staff members, and do not allow for the recruitment of research-active practitioners for the University. The majority of lecturers have to supplement their salary by working elsewhere as well.
- 12) There is a lack of financial resources to systematically support staff development. This can have a negative impact on teaching methods and thus reduce students' satisfaction.
- 13) The possibilities for lecturers to have semesters abroad are limited due to the lack of funds.
- 14) Only 3% of students participate in international mobility, which is clearly insufficient. Students participating in learning mobility should not be sanctioned with longer periods of study. It will require more flexibility in the study programme and more confidence in the partner institutions.
- 15) As international student mobility is limited, more international lecturers should be included in the teaching process ('internationalisation at home').

- 16) The best student works could be 'sold' to the nationwide media channels.
- 17) Students attach higher value to working in smaller groups. It should be closely monitored that study groups would not become too large because of limited resources.

COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT (MA), JOURNALISM (MA)

Strengths

- 1) The head of the Chair of Journalism deserves recognition for the plan to establish a sociopolitical agreement on the role of professional journalism in Estonia. Various stakeholders (including Tallinn University) should be involved in this process.
- 2) The Communication Management programme is being continuously enhanced by collecting feedback from staff members, employers and students. Regular meetings are held with all staff members, to discuss the content of the study programme and the issues of the teaching and learning process. Students are offered the opportunity in a special course to reflect on the process of teaching and learning, and on the learning outcomes to be achieved.
- 3) The Journalism MA programme is working towards providing in-service trainings for practicing journalists in the framework of lifelong learning.
- 4) There is a good balance between skills development and academic studies in the study programmes.
- 5) Extra modules are offered each semester in order that students may choose from a broader range of electives.
- 6) Students are satisfied with the counselling services and the opportunity to study at weekends.
- 7) Students are expected to take responsibility for their own learning. Modern teaching methods are used.
- 8) Students are provided with detailed and thorough support when writing their theses. The idea of the Research Fair, which encourages discussions between students and their potential supervisors, is worthy of recognition.
- 9) A learner-centred approach to learning is used – making all of the lecture materials available at the beginning of a semester enables students to prepare properly for their studies and to use their time efficiently.
- 10) Flexible organisation of studies enables students to combine working and studying.
- 11) Journalism students now have the option to present creative projects in place of MA theses, resulting in an increase in the number of graduates.
- 12) Supervision of practical trainings is efficient and effective.
- 13) Students are encouraged to think critically and to keep self-reflection diaries.
- 14) MA students are encouraged to share their experiences and knowledge with BA students, which inspires the latter and helps reduce the workloads of teaching staff.
- 15) Members of the teaching staff are actively engaged in research.
- 16) Members of the teaching staff are committed to enhancing cultural and professional life in Estonia. They are passionate professionals and want to implement a research-based study programme which has a clear social impact.
- 17) In Journalism, a new generation of young enthusiastic lecturers are emerging, who add a fresh perspective to teaching and research. Students highly value the professional backgrounds and experiences of their teachers.
- 18) In the Journalism MA programme, the teaching staff has a good ratio of academics to practitioners.
- 19) Members of the teaching staff participate in international research projects and networks.
- 20) Staff members of the Chair of Media and Communication have a highly developed organisational culture. Nine staff members have doctoral degrees, and four members will defend their doctoral theses in the near future. Three young researchers with international

academic backgrounds have also joined the staff. The Institute provides an in-service training programme for lecturers, in which they participate actively.

- 21) The renovated building with modern equipment in the centre of Tartu provides a good working environment for students.
- 22) Students with other academic backgrounds can also enrol in the Journalism programme, and lecturers offer remedial courses to them if needed.
- 23) Exit interviews are conducted with those who drop out.
- 24) Seventy-one percent (71%) of Communications graduates and 75–90% of Journalism graduates work in jobs related to their areas of study.
- 25) There is an upward trend in enrolment in the Journalism programme. The dropout rate is low.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) Due to changes in the Journalism programme, the number of modules taught in English has decreased, which may have an adverse effect on internationalisation. Also, according to the staff, the programmes are too local, and international cooperation is weak.
 - 2) There are overlaps between courses which can be eliminated by restructuring the programmes.
 - 3) The Communication Management programme should be marketed in a more effective manner.
 - 4) Lack of language proficiency (Russian, Finnish) and lack of tolerance for stress by graduates are seen as problematic by employers. According to employers, graduates also lack online media skills, fast and adequate source finding abilities, as well as the skills to budget for projects.
 - 5) Given the different professional backgrounds of students admitted to the MA programmes, a variety of learning options should be offered in the programme (including remedial modules).
 - 6) The e-learning system should be enhanced to provide distance learning opportunities for students.
 - 7) The goal and the planned learning outcomes of the Journalism MA programme (theoretical and practical preparation of students for their successful work as editors in different media channels) should be carefully reviewed and discussed with employer representatives. General learning outcomes of the programme should be compared with the learning outcomes of different courses and the employer needs.
 - 8) Employers could contribute more to the content development of the Journalism programme. Staff members should keep themselves up to date with recent developments in the field. Individual and group collaborations could also be organised among teaching staff, employers and students within the framework of practical trainings.
 - 9) More lecturers should be recruited for the study programmes (including international lecturers, by taking advantage of the Erasmus Plus options) – currently workloads of the existing lecturers are too large. The use of MA students in BA studies instead of qualified teaching staff may result in a decline in the quality of the teaching and learning process.
 - 10) The issue of low salary levels of the teaching staff should be raised at the University management level.
 - 11) Learning aids should be updated continuously.
 - 12) There have been cases of plagiarism in theses. Steps taken to prevent plagiarism must be carefully monitored.
 - 13) The international student mobility rate is low. Staff members should emphasise to students the importance of international mobility.
- 10.** Point 41 of the document, ‘Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education’, establishes that the Quality Assessment Council shall approve an assessment report within three months after receipt of the report. The Council shall weigh the strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations pointed out in the

assessment report, and then shall decide whether to conduct the next quality assessment of that study programme group in seven, five or three years.

11. The Council weighed the strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations referred to in point 9 of this document and found that the study programmes, the teaching conducted under these programmes, and development activities regarding teaching and learning conform to the requirements if the University eliminates the following shortcoming:

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.

12. 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, according to clause 53 (1) 3), it is also *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 found that, without a secondary condition, the next quality assessment of the study programme group should be conducted in less than seven years, and therefore, on the basis of points 41.1 and 42 of the document, 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education', the Council

DECIDED

to approve the assessment report and to conduct the next quality assessment of the Journalism and Information study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at the University of Tartu in seven years with the following secondary condition:

No later than 29.09.2019, the University of Tartu shall submit a progress report in English to the Council on eliminating the shortcomings referred to in point 11 of this document. Members of the assessment committee shall be involved in assessing compliance with the secondary condition.

The decision was adopted by 8 votes in favour and 0 against.

13. If the University of Tartu does not comply with the secondary condition by the due date, the Council will repeal this assessment decision and set a new date for a quality assessment of the study programme group, or establish a new secondary condition.
14. The Council proposes that the University of Tartu will submit an action plan to EKKA with regard to the other areas for improvement and recommendations pointed out in the report no later than 29.09.2019.
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. A

judicial 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 pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Code of Administrative Court Procedure.

Maaja-Katrin Kerem
Vice-Chair of the Council

Hillar Bauman
Secretary of the Council