



ESTONIAN QUALITY AGENCY FOR  
HIGHER AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Report on the  
re-assessment of the study  
programme group of  
Health Care:  
Master's programme of  
Health Sciences  
Tartu Health Care College

2021

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# 1. Introduction

## Re-assessment of study programme group

In the case the right to provide instruction has been granted for a specified term, EKKA shall, within a specified period, conduct a re-assessment of the study programme group and cycle of higher education.

When an institution applies for the right to provide instruction, it is ascertained whether the quality of instruction meets the requirements laid down for the relevant cycle of higher education; and whether resources and sustainability are adequate for the provision of instruction.

EKKA conducts initial assessment and re-assessment using three assessment areas: 1) Quality of instruction, 2) Resources, and 3) Sustainability. The Quality of instruction is divided into three sub-areas: Study programme, Learning and teaching, and Organisation of studies. The area of Resources has also three sub-areas: Academic staff, Learning and teaching environment, and financial resources. When assessing sustainability, assessments for quality of instruction and resources are taken into account in addition to further sustainability criteria.

In the assessment report, the committee shall determine for each assessment area, whether the quality of instruction:

- 1) Conforms to the required standard;
- 2) Partially conforms to the required standard;
- 3) Does not conform to the required standard.

As a result of the re-assessment, EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education makes a proposal to the Minister of Education and Research, whether to grant the higher education institution the right to provide instruction in the relevant study programme group and cycle of higher education; to grant the higher education institution the right to provide instruction in the relevant study programme group and cycle of higher education for one to three years; or not to grant the higher education institution the right to provide instruction in the relevant study programme group and cycle of higher education.

The re-assessment is carried out in accordance with the document *Guidelines for the initial assessment and re-assessment of study programme groups* approved by EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education on 19.05.2020.

The following study programme in the study programme group of Health Care and the second cycle of higher education were submitted for the re-assessment by Tartu Health Care College:

- **Health Sciences (MSc)**

The re-assessment of the study programme group of Health Care at Tartu Health Care College was carried out on **31 March 2021**.

In order to carry out the re-assessment, EKKA formed an expert panel, which includes experts from higher education institutions, outside higher education institutions and student representatives. EKKA coordinated the composition of the expert panel with the higher education institution.

The expert panel consisted of the following members:

Ruud Heijnen ( <i>Chair</i> )	Senior lecturer, Zuyd University of Applied Sciences; Coordinator of international cooperation for the domain Health and Social Work; National and international auditor for health care education (The Netherlands)
Kristina Mikkonen	Professor, Research Unit of Nursing Science and Health Management, University of Oulu (Finland)
Triinu Rõigas	Viljandi Hospital, Chief of Community Services (Estonia)
Kristel Jakobson	Student, Tallinn University; Executive Committee member, European Student Union (Estonia)

### Assessment process

The members of the expert panel completed the re-assessment training organized by EKKA. The members of the panel worked through the documents submitted by the higher education institution. During the preparatory meeting for the assessment visit, the panel prepared a preliminary visit plan, which was coordinated with the institution and EKKA. The members of the panel agreed on the topics to be clarified on the basis of the documents submitted by the higher education institution. The division of labor and tasks were agreed in the panel for the assessment visit.

The assessment visit to Tartu Health Care College took place during a full day by online meetings, using Zoom, on 31 March 2021. The panel conducted the interviews agreed in the schedule. Unfortunately, the panel has not been able to visit the College physically.

EKKA sent the initial report of the panel to the higher education institution for comments on 11.05.2021.

The higher education institution submitted its comments and corrections on the assessment report on 21 May 2021.

When finalizing the report, the panel took into account the comments of the College.

The panel submitted the final report to EKKA on 24 May 2021.

## Statistical data about the Health Sciences MSc programme

Data of 01.10.2020	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
<b>Admitted students</b>	60	60	36
Intensive care nursing	15	15	12
Clinical nursing	15	15	12
Health nursing	15	15	12
Mental health nursing	15	15	-
<b>Competition</b>			
Intensive care nursing	4.4	2.27	2.75
Clinical nursing	2.53	1.5	2.58
Health nursing	2	1.6	1.58
Mental health nursing	2	1.1	
<b>Dicontinuations</b>	5	3	
<b>Academic leave</b>	3	1	1
<b>Graduates</b>	52		
<b>% of graduates from admission</b>	87%		

Source: Self-Evaluation Report

## 2. A brief summary of the results of the assessment and their justifications

### EXPERT PANEL'S DECISION:

ASSESSMENT AREA	CONFORMS TO THE REQUIRED STANDARD	PARTIALLY CONFORMS TO THE REQUIRED STANDARD	DOES NOT CONFORM TO THE REQUIRED STANDARD
<b>QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION</b>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>RESOURCES</b>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>SUSTAINABILITY</b>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Strengths:

- The College places great emphasis on the competency frameworks of nurses, which is visible in the curriculum, the understanding of teachers and the competency levels of students and alumni.
- The College has a strong national and international network and has carried out benchmarking to ensure the quality of the Master of Nursing Practice programme for nurse specialists.
- Students and teachers are highly satisfied with the structured and regular degree programme evaluation and feedback. The results of the evaluations are quickly integrated into the development of the curriculum and study programme.
- During practical training the student is closely linked to labour market, which improves their competence in critical thinking, problem-solving, and advanced patient care.
- College has invested in building strong and various support systems for students. Management, developers and lecturers all are strongly involved to support students' progress and expertise development.
- The College has a well-functioning system of evaluation for staff. The evaluations guide further individual development.
- Facilities are state of the art, including a well-equipped library.
- Online education is well developed and the students have sufficient resources to work online
- The College is aware of the threats facing the financing of the institution and addresses them in its activities and plans and has a long-term financial forecast.
- The College provides the necessary resources to improve the skills of the staff.
- The management is involved in the development of the study programme and supports the future vision of the curriculum.
- The College has a highly motivated team of staff.

### Area of concern and recommendations:

- As the programme is quite new, the expert panel suggests that the programme board should meet more regularly. We recommend that the board meetings should be organized in a more periodic and standardized way, so that all members of the board would be around the same table at the same time discussing developments of the programme. The development process needs to be well documented and transparent by also involving students and alumni participation.

## 3. Analysis of the Health Sciences MSc programme by assessment areas and criteria

### 3.1. QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION

#### 3.1.1. Study programme

*3.1.1.1. Launching and developing of the study programme is based on the Development Plan of the higher education institution, national development plans and analyses (including labour market and advisability analyses) and strives for top quality.*

##### Evidence and analysis:

Programme development is based on the College's development plan. The development plan of the College is adapted to the needs and changes of society. The National Development Plan for Public Health directs these adjustments. The creation and development of the programme is based on the Strategic Plan for Nursing and Midwifery in Estonia 2011-2020 and for the next development period 2021-2030. Further development is supported by the minimum requirements for Advanced Practice Nurses adopted by the Estonian Union of Nurses in August 2020. The programme development is in line with the development needs of health care and related areas, based on the Public Health Development Plan 2009-2020 and 2020-2030, and OSKA's research results in the field of health care.

In the interview, the rector of the College mentioned five short-term as well long-term (2021-25) priorities: strengthening and development of 1) the field of study and quality of the master's degree; 2) research and development; 3) basic service of the College to society and people; 4) internationalization – opportunities and cooperation; 5) organization in relation to quality of leadership. The College focuses on the regional support of healthcare development in the south of Estonia.

In the interview it was emphasized that the uniqueness of the Master's programme at Tartu Health Care College is the emphasis on valuing people-centred healthcare, maintaining the professionalism and high competence of future experts. Much emphasis is placed on the quality of healthcare and development projects. The alumni indicated in the interviews that doing the projects was an important learning experience, especially with regard to project management.

The values of the Master's programme are in line with the strategy of the College. The main focus is research development for health sciences. A special focus is how to develop quality according to evidence-based healthcare standards. The aim of the programme is to involve students in research and international research cooperation. During the discussion, alumni expressed their understanding of the competency framework of nursing experts that are needed for the national and international level of healthcare.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

*3.1.1.2. Employers and other stakeholders of the study programme group are involved in the study programme's development.*

*Evidence and analysis:*

The programme board, consisting of 16 members, participated in the development of the programme. The board consists of representatives of employers at various levels, representatives of the Association of Estonian Nurses, the Association of Estonian Midwives, the Association of Estonian Patient Interests, Tallinn Health Care College, and representatives of students, including Master's students. The programme board meets at least once a year to discuss issues related to the programme and approve changes to the programme as necessary. The College regularly consults with the labour market, including employers, trade unions and nursing associations, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health Care. The College works closely with stakeholders, provides feedback on future needs and discusses their future plans. This evidence was found in the self-evaluation report and in the interviews. According to the interviews, the future competences of clinical practice and nursing specialists are planned together with the stakeholders. Clinical experts are also used as teachers in the master's training programme. Stakeholders are involved in the evaluation and feedback of the curriculum. Regular feedback is collected from alumni and employers on labour market needs and the needs are integrated into the master's programme strategy. Student feedback is collected through the College's feedback system. Students can come up with new ideas and suggestions. In the interviews, students indicated that they could give feedback on the examination process for clinical pharmacology, which was immediately taken into account.

During the interviews, it was clear to all parties (head of the programme and developers, lecturers, students and alumni) that there was an understanding of the competency framework of nurse specialists. The independent work of nurse specialists is appreciated and valued by all. Students feel that the Nurse Specialist Competence Framework teaches them critical thinking, evidence-based health care, prescribing and evidence integration in practice. Alumni were able to apply their new competence in health care in a more specialised way and their expertise was also recognised in salary.

As the programme is quite new, the expert panel suggests that the programme board should meet more regularly. We recommend that the board meetings should be organized in a more periodic and standardized way, so that all members of the board would be around the same table at the same time discussing developments of the programme. The development process needs to be well documented and transparent by also involving students and alumni participation.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

*3.1.1.3. The study programme meets the requirements and trends in international legislation that regulate the professional field, and if an occupational qualification standard exists takes into consideration the acquisition and implementation of the knowledge and skills described therein.*

Evidence and analysis:

The definition of nurse expert competences and the evaluation of the coherence of learning outcomes in the programme are in line with the recommendations of 56 nursing competences at education level 7, adopted as part of the European Tuning project, and with the International Council of Nurses guidelines for Advanced Nurse Practitioners 2020. Moreover, the programme is based on the internationally accepted competence model CanMEDS, which describes six main areas of competences. This model is a valid basis for the content of the programme. (Self-evaluation report).

The College has set up a study to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the Master's programme, with a view to developing and adapting the programme. The preliminary results of the survey show that according to the evaluation of the employer representatives, the results of the Master's programme meet the current needs and expectations of the labour market; the learning outcomes are relevant and realistic. The preparation of the development project at the end of the study and the competences in quality assessment and quality management are considered strengths of the programme, as they provide a basis for the development of quality assurance in the working environment. The feedback based on the employment of the first graduates shows appreciation for their improved conversation skills and courage, their decisiveness, their ability to see the situation beyond the boundaries of their speciality and their more focused search for information. (Self-evaluation report).

In the discussion with the management and the developers of the programme, it was explained that the programme is involved in the Nordic and Baltic network at the international level, where international standards for nurses are compared. The Estonian competency framework for nursing experts is developed on a national level and is strongly integrated into the curriculum of the Master's programme. Alumni have experienced that the study programme and the results have met their expectations. Students enjoyed the final project and found their future colleagues through the practical trainings at the hospitals.

In the interview, the programme developers and stakeholders emphasised the need for Estonian healthcare and legislation to recognise the competences of nursing experts. Employers are aiming for a higher percentage of nurses with a master's degree, especially when nurses are carrying out more specialised work. The interview revealed that the College's competency framework for nurse specialists and the ICN framework are well aligned with international standards. Clinical specialist expertise is being strengthened more in cooperation with the Estonian Nursing Union. Four specialties of the study programme are being developed in accordance with the needs of the labour market.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

*3.1.1.4. The learning outcomes of the study programme are equivalent and comparable to the learning outcomes of the academic cycles of higher education described in Annex 1 of the Standard of Higher Education.*

*Evidence and analysis:*

The programme consists of modules; the comparative analysis of the learning outcomes of the programme and the modules has been completed; the conformity with the higher education standard has been evaluated. Nurse specialist competences of the graduates are ensured by integrating theory into practice in collaboration with stakeholders. In the panel's view the learning outcomes of the programme are comparable to the standards described above. At the end of their studies, students demonstrate their integrated competences in the two-part Master's degree examination, including an analysis of research study and evidence-based development project. In the interview discussion with lecturers and students it became evident that teaching methods are used to also develop students' nurse specialist competence, for example their collaboration, critical thinking and decision making.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

*3.1.1.5. Different parts of the study programme form a coherent whole. The title of the study programme is consistent with the content and the structure; and content of the study programme supports the acquisition of the objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme.*

*Evidence and analysis:*

Different parts of the study programme form a coherent whole. The curriculum of the Master of Health Sciences (90 ECTS, 1.5 years) includes a specialisation in one of the four fields of nursing: Intensive Care Nursing (90 ECTS); Mental Health Nursing (90 ECTS); Clinical Nursing (90 ECTS) or Health Nursing (90 ECTS). The programme aims to create the conditions for a deepening of knowledge in the field of health sciences and to support the continuing education of the student. The completion of the studies provides the opportunity to acquire competences for evidence-based multidisciplinary management in the provision of health services and for scientific-theoretical knowledge-based research and development in the position of the team leader.

As the name of the programme is Health Sciences, interdisciplinarity should also be visible in the intake of other health professionals to carry out the Master's programme. At the moment, a condition for commencing studies is a professional higher education in nursing or midwifery or equivalent qualification from a foreign country. However, in the panel's view the education at the next level must integrate other professionalisms, more clearly and with more focus. The aim is to set up a new master's programme in the coming years by involving other healthcare professionals; this matter is planned to be discussed in the College.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

## CONCLUSIONS AND ASSESSMENT: STUDY PROGRAMME

**The study programme conforms to the required standard.**

### Strengths

- The College places great emphasis on the competency frameworks of nurses, which is visible in the curriculum, the understanding of teachers and the competency levels of students and alumni.
- The College has a strong national and international network and has carried out benchmarking to ensure the quality of the Master's programme.

### Opportunities for further improvement

- Because the programme is quite new, we recommend that the board meetings should be organized in a more periodic and standardized way discussing developments of the programme.
- At the moment, commencing studies on the programme is restricted to the graduates of professional higher education in nursing or midwifery (or those having an equal degree acquired from a foreign higher education institution). The College should provide opportunities for other health professionals to pursue this master's degree, as the degree represents health sciences.
- The College can develop further new subjects relevant for Estonian labor market, including areas in pediatrics, midwifery, mental health care, and leadership and management.

### 3.1.2. Learning and teaching

*3.1.2.1. Conditions for admission and graduation are clear and transparent; requirements to prospective students stem from prerequisites for the completion of the study programme.*

#### Evidence and analysis:

Admitted students are well informed about the programme, as relevant admission information is provided through various information channels four months before the start of admissions. In addition, information seminars are organised at the College or online to introduce the programme. Participation in the information seminars has been very active in all three years in which admissions have taken place. During the seminars on career planning, the final year nursing and midwifery students at the College showed great interest in continuing their studies at Master's level to deepen their knowledge in one of the four nursing specialties. Satisfaction with the admission procedure is high among admitted students. The admission criteria include the average grade of the previous educational level and the result of the admission test (an essay and a discussion based on the essay); the weight of the admission test is greater to ensure the admission of students who are motivated, self-directed learners who have a clear vision of the specialisation area. The admission tests are assessed by the assessment committee, which consists of two members of the teaching staff of the College and a representative of the employers or the representative of the Union of Estonian Nurses.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

*3.1.2.2. Academic staff members are aware of the objectives of the study programme and their role in achieving these objectives.*

*Evidence and analysis:*

Teachers involved in teaching in the Master's programme have a clear view of the programme as a whole. In the survey conducted in 2019, the lecturers expressed their views on three main goals of the programme, clearly focusing on quality management, development, leadership in the team and advanced competence in the field. In the interviews, the lecturers demonstrated that they are fully aware of the learning outcomes of the study programme and the competence framework integrated into the curriculum.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

*3.1.2.3. Study methods motivate learners to take charge of their studies and achieve learning outcomes.*

*Evidence and analysis:*

According to the self-evaluation report, the motivation to learn is high among the students admitted to the Master's programme and the admission competitions are successful (2018 – 4.47; 2019 – 1.62; 2020 – 2.14). Surveys reveal that the most common motivational factor is the intention to acquire deeper knowledge, to engage in the development of the profession and to improve their knowledge and experience with regard to innovations in the field. Moreover, the results of the teachers' surveys show that they are aware of and appreciate the active involvement in the study process of students who are specialists in their field, with both teachers and fellow students in the role of learners.

During the pandemic situation, students were consulted about their personal situation to study. The College applied flexible adjustments to support students' tasks and workload when studying. Students indicated that the College was flexible with regard to their study plans and that lecturers were supportive and understanding. Lecturers adapted well to digital teaching during the pandemic. For example, lecturers have pre-recorded sessions with notes, which can be used in discussion sessions and self-reflection feedback.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

*3.1.2.4. Appropriate methods are used for the assessment of learning outcomes; assessment is transparent, objective and supports the development of students.*

*Evidence and analysis:*

Teachers deliberately use students' clinical experience in the study process, facilitating the association of clinical experience with current theoretical information. This type of activity develops a lifelong learning attitude and understanding of the knowledge base. Teachers see the positive nature of the situation where the students enrich the learning environment with their experience. The revisions of the programme's assessment methods and criteria in 2020 were based on the principle that assessment should facilitate the achievement of learning outcomes throughout the study period and not only be used to monitor the achievement of learning outcomes. In addition, more online self-tests and case studies have been integrated into the syllabi and the learning diary has been introduced.

Supervision of master's students during clinical practice is functioning well and is carried out by nurses with a master's degree. Collaboration of the College concerning the practical training depends on the situation. Each placement must have a supervisor of the same level of expertise (master's degree or nursing specialisation). Project development is carried out in cooperation with the stakeholders. The topics of the development project are chosen by the students in cooperation with the teachers and the needs of the society. The development project is carried out in a team with assignment of the leadership role. Assessment criteria of the project are written in the curriculum and students are informed about it. Reasons for failure are lack of sufficient evidence-based research. If students fail the first time, they receive feedback and support to improve.

The theoretical part of the teaching is integrated into clinical practice. In theory, students develop cases of patients and take those cases into clinical practice. Assessment of clinical practice takes place in three phases: self-assessment, feedback from the supervisor and final assessment by the teacher. Teachers regularly collect feedback from students and communicate the feedback to the curriculum development team. Since in the interview discussions students reported having high workload in their studies, the workload of students needs to be assessed and reflected to ensure the sustainability of the studies and prevent possible dropout.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

*3.1.2.5. The content and volume of independent work and practical training (in the case of doctoral studies, implementation of professional activities) support the achievement of learning outcomes of the study programme.*

*Evidence and analysis:*

Practical training is organized after the completion of the specialist and general subjects. The planned methods for achieving learning outcomes in practical training, e.g., case study, evaluation of service quality, education of colleagues or patients, support the achievement of learning outcomes when theoretical subjects are combined with practical training, whereby the competences identified in the programme are acquired.

As some students in 2020 considered that not all practical training was meaningful, the criteria for achieving outcomes in practical training were revised to ensure clear links between practical training and learning outcomes and prior theoretical studies (the case study report and quality analysis guidelines were revised, teaching activity was added).

Practical training is already partially integrated into a simulation environment in the first semester, e.g., Intensive care unit clinical training is first practiced in simulation and later in the hospital. In the third semester, clinical practice takes place. The Master's degree project is not linked to practical training. In clinical training, for example, students have to give patient guidance, which is supervised by the clinical supervisor. According to the self-evaluation report and interviews, the theoretical part is integrated into practical training. In interviews it became clear that the practical training prepared alumni for future work as experts and prepared them well for real working life. Healthcare development, innovation and change were seen as important elements of the learning experience.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

**3.1.2.6.** *The academic staff members have adequate teaching competences in order to support the autonomy of students and ensure adequate and professional supervision.*

*Evidence and analysis:*

The staff – both those working full-time at the College as well as practitioners involved in the studies and international guest lecturers – are highly competent in teaching their subjects and are professionals in their own field.

Lecturers have a contract for five years and are assessed every five years for their competence development. The staff evaluation is conducted using clear evaluation and competence criteria. Teachers must engage in self-evaluation and leadership evaluation. Teachers have development meetings, in which their development is discussed and planned. Internal and external training is organized and offered to teachers. Teachers are encouraged to participate in research and development projects.

The lecturers are excellent experts in teaching students. During teaching, there are many seminars and few lectures. Virtual learning is well organized. In the beginning there were a lot of power-point presentations, but the virtual learning has become better in time. Exams have been organized online and functioned well.

The College supports continuing education of teachers in the form of another degree or attending courses and in doing research. The College provides resources for education and development (e.g., payment for courses). Part-time lecturers receive organizational and didactic support.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

**3.1.2.7.** *The level and volume of research, development and creative activities of academic staff is sufficient to provide instruction and supervise academic work by students in the appropriate cycle of higher education.*

Evidence and analysis:

Teachers contribute to research and development activities by participating in national and international projects and networking actions (examples presented in appendix document, Participation in development projects and applied research studies by teachers involved in teaching on the Master's programme in health sciences in 2015–2020). According to the information presented in the self-evaluation report, the number of high-level publications is increasing every year (Annex 3). Teachers have development meetings, in which their development is discussed and planned and they are encouraged to be active in research and development projects. Internal and external training for trainers is organised and offered.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

## CONCLUSIONS AND ASSESSMENT: LEARNING AND TEACHING

**Learning and teaching conforms to the required standard.**

### Strength

- Students and teachers are highly satisfied with the structured and regular degree programme evaluation and feedback. The results of the evaluations are quickly integrated into the development of the curriculum.

### Opportunities for further improvement

- Profiling of research areas by the College is highly recommended to strengthen future collaboration with international partners.
- Make students' development during practical training more transparent, including the learner's organization and documentation of the practice (e.g., by using a portfolio).

## 3.1.3. Organisation of studies

**3.1.3.1.** *The organisation of studies is unambiguously regulated and information thereof publicly available; it allows to cater for the needs of different learners as well as specificities of the study programme group.*

Evidence and analysis:

The organisation of the study is regulated by the study regulations, which set out the rights, duties and responsibilities of the students and the teachers. The organisation of the study takes into account adult students working full-time in the health sector; the study is scheduled in cycles of three contact study days every other week. The students know the timetable well in advance.

Feedback from students and graduates shows that they are generally not interested in part-time studies; because they have to plan time for work, study and family, so the time that can be used for studies is very limited. However, students can ask for an extension of their studies at the end, which has been used in some cases. Although the previous panel (initial assessment) recommended delivery of part-time studies, this topic was not further discussed – the panel finds it reasonable to not offer a part-time option.

The group size for students has been reduced to a maximum of 12 students per group since 2020. This was to regulate the workload of the teachers.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

*3.1.3.2. Practical training (in doctoral studies applied professional activities) is regulated, requirements for the completion of practical training have been laid down and preliminary agreements concluded with organisations offering opportunities for practical training.*

Evidence and analysis:

The organization of practical training is regulated in the Study Regulations and the Procedure for Practical Training. Quality agreements have been concluded with all institutions for practical training, which regulate the training courses offered by the College to supervisors of practical training in order to guarantee the quality of the supervision of practical training.

Lecturers in charge of specialization modules negotiate with institutions for practical training to find institutions and departments suitable for practical training and specify the objectives of the practical training in detail.

The practice placement is chosen on the basis of the contracts with health care institutions. The internship supervisor can be a nurse with a master's degree or a specialization diploma. The internships are easy to find, even in the final year. The challenges are related to finding a supervisor with a master's degree, due to the lack of nurses with this level of qualification.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

*3.1.3.3. The higher education institution has in place rules for academic recognition as well as for recognizing prior studies and work experience; these are implemented in the study programme group under assessment.*

Evidence and analysis:

Prior learning experiences are recognised in accordance with the procedure for recognition of prior learning and professional experience (RPL), as regulated in the study regulations.

RPL can be applied for the completion of the curriculum but cannot be applied for the final examination. Electives and optional courses are taken into account as part of the completion of the curriculum in the maximum amount stipulated in the curriculum.

The applications are assessed and evaluated by the committee in which the head of the study department concerned and the teacher responsible for the subject in question are members. The committee has the right to involve other experts in the evaluation.

Certain subjects have been recognised. For example, in the academic year 2019/20 there were 17 application sets of prior learning experience, all of which were accepted; in 2018/19 42 application sets, out of which 4 were not accepted. So far, work experience and continuing education experience have not been applied for.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

*3.1.3.4. Students enrolled in the study programme group have access to counselling (study; career and preferably psychological counselling); there are effective measures in place for supporting academic progress of students and preventing premature leaving.*

Evidence and analysis:

Counselling is provided to Master's students on the same basis as students at other educational levels. One study specialist is responsible for the guidance of Master's students with regard to study organization and RPL issues. Psychological counselling is also available. The following specialists are available at the College: 6 Study Specialists (total of 6.0 positions), who are responsible for providing advice to students on issues concerning the organization of studies; psychological counselling is provided to College students by the Katriito Counselling and Psychotherapy Centre.

Augmentations are described on the College's website and they are easy to find.

Students can use library services free of charge. Each specialization group has its own tutor who takes care of the organizational part. Students follow the ready-made curriculum. The module leader is the person responsible for ensuring that students' progress well in their studies. There is no digital system to support students' progress.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

*3.1.3.5. Students enrolled in the study programme group participate in international mobility programmes.*

Evidence and analysis:

Students have the opportunity to apply for student mobility, usually under the Erasmus+ programme. One student has used this opportunity in two academic years. Three students have participated in a short-term mobility programme at a partner institution of higher education, the Turku University of Applied Sciences, where they took part in the International Master School. As the Master's students have full-time jobs, long-term mobility programmes may not be suitable for them. In the future, short-term mobility opportunities will be available through the Baltic-Nordic Educational Network (NordPlus), as one of the network's objectives is to offer short-term mobility for teachers and students. One of the students surveyed the panel talked to, had participated in an international

exchange programme; the others confirmed that they would like to have the opportunity to have short international exchanges or online courses. College has strong collaboration with Finnish higher education institutions, where students have an opportunity to network and build international collaboration with other students. However, in the interview, students mentioned having busy study schedules, which causes them challenges to take such type of international activities.

One of the alumni has participated in international mobility twice, which was very rewarding and a great learning experience. This is a positive example, as it also strengthens the competences of alumni.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

**3.1.3.6.** *Fair and transparent rules for dealing with complaints are used in the study programme group.*

*Evidence and analysis:*

Clear description and explanation of dealing with complaints in the College is not reported in the self-evaluation report. However, the organization of studies is regulated by the Study Regulations, setting the rights, obligations and responsibilities of the students and teachers. The College also provides counselling to their students in all matters.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

**3.1.3.7.** *Regular internal assessment is conducted in the study programme group, including the analysis and taking into account of feedback from various stakeholders (students, alumni, employers, academic staff).*

*Evidence and analysis:*

The rules and procedure for internal programme evaluation are described in the Statutes for Curricula of Tartu Health Care College, according to which internal evaluation takes place every three years. In the Master's programme of Health Sciences, feedback is collected more frequently and the study process is evaluated. The feedback collected from students and graduates is a valuable input for programme development and quality assurance of the study process. For this reason, regular feedback collection will continue in order to evaluate the data collected during the three years, which serve as important input for the further development of the programme.

There is also a central feedback system from students (learning, subject, satisfaction, module) and additional data by surveys is collected to get more feedback and evaluation for curriculum development. The College also offers open discussions with students to improve quality. All feedback is also received by the head of the department to make further changes and implementation plans.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND ASSESSMENT: ORGANISATION OF STUDIES**

**Organisation of studies conforms to the required standard.**

### Strengths

- During practical training the student is closely linked to labour market, which improves their competence in critical thinking, problem-solving, and advanced patient care.
- The College has invested in building strong and various support systems for students. The College management, developers and lecturers all are strongly involved to support students' progress and expertise development.

### Opportunities for further improvement

- Since the long-term mobility is challenging for students, other international mobility opportunities for students needs to be further developed and enhanced according to their working and personal life situations.
- The curriculum is planned in learning cycles and students do not receive personal study plans. However, personal study plans for students would be highly recommend providing more individual support and motivation in students' learning.

## CONCLUSIONS AND AGGREGATED ASSESSMENT: QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION

### Aggregated assessment of the quality of instruction: conforms to the required standard.

#### Strengths

- The College places great emphasis on the competency frameworks of nurses, which is visible in the curriculum, the understanding of teachers and the competency levels of students and alumni.
- The College has a strong national and international network and has carried out benchmarking to ensure the quality of the Masters programme.
- Students and teachers are highly satisfied with the structured and regular degree programme evaluation and feedback. The results of the evaluations are quickly integrated into the development of the curriculum.
- The practical part of the studies is integrated according to nursing expert international standards, where students practice their clinical skills with patient care.
- During practical training the student is closely linked to labour market, which improves their competence in critical thinking, problem-solving, and advanced patient care.
- The College has invested in building strong and various support systems for students. The College management, developers and lecturers all are strongly involved to support students' progress and expertise development.

#### Opportunities for further improvement

- The programme is quite new, the expert panel suggests that the programme board should meet more regularly. We recommend that the board meetings should be organized in a more periodic and standardized way, so that all members of the board would be around the same table at the same time discussing developments of the programme. The development process needs to be well documented and transparent by also involving students and alumni participation.

- At the moment, commencing studies on the programme is restricted to the graduates of professional higher education in nursing or midwifery (or those having an equal degree acquired from a foreign higher education institution). The College should provide opportunities for other health professionals to pursue this master's degree, as the degree represents health sciences.
- The College can develop further new subjects relevant for Estonian labour market, including areas in pediatrics, midwifery, mental health care, and leadership and management.
- Profiling of research areas by the College is highly recommended to strengthen future collaboration with international partners.
- Make practical training progress more transparent including the learner's organization and documentation of the practice.
- Since the long-term mobility is challenging for students, other international mobility opportunities for students needs to be further developed and enhanced according to their working and personal life situations.
- The curriculum is planned in learning cycles and students do not receive personal study plans. However, personal study plans for students would be highly recommend providing more individual support and motivation in students' learning.

## 3.2. RESOURCES

### 3.2.1. Academic staff

*3.2.1.1. Requirements for academic staff are based on the Higher Education Standard and further rules put in place by the higher education institution, procedures for the selection and recruitment of staff are fair and transparent.*

#### Evidence and analysis:

The self-evaluation report clarifies that teaching vacancies are filled in accordance with the Procedure for Filling Positions at Tartu Health Care College. The qualification requirements for teaching staff are included in the document Qualification Requirements for Ordinary and Visiting Teaching Staff at Tartu Health Care College (titles of teaching positions, qualification requirements, expected personal characteristics and skills to be taken into account in the election or assessment for the position). In addition to the qualification requirements, there is a job description for each position that is followed in the application process, in the appointment or in the assessment for the position. Election criteria and employment are regulated by the Procedure for Elections of Teaching Staff at Tartu Health Care College.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

*3.2.1.2. The qualifications of academic staff members meet the requirements laid down in legislation as well as those stemming from the specificities of the study programme group and academic cycle.*

Evidence and analysis:

The qualification requirements for teaching staff are included in the Qualification Requirements for Regular and Visiting Teaching Staff at Tartu Health Care College (titles of teaching positions, qualification requirements, expected personal characteristics and skills that are assumed when electing for the position). In addition to the qualification requirements, there is a job description for each position that is followed in the application process, in the appointment or in the assessment for the position. Guest lecturers are also involved in the implementation of the programme; international teachers are integrated to improve interdisciplinary approach, leadership and research.

According to the overview of the academic staff, 19 lecturers are involved as staff teachers in the degree programme. Next to them, a big group of non-staff teachers is involved as experts. All academic staff teachers hold at least a Master's degree. Three of them have a PhD degree and another 7 are registered as PhD students. According to the panel this is sufficient for implementing the programme.

The previous panel (initial assessment) suggested that more consideration should be given to additional support (extra staff, at least 2 FTE with PhD degree) to guarantee sufficient supervisors for the developmental plans and the Master examination/Master thesis. The actual development in the team shows sufficient increase in qualifications.

This criterion conforms to the requirements.

*3.2.1.3. The number of regular academic staff in the study programme group is adequate and enables achieving the objectives of the study programmes as well as the learning outcomes.*

Evidence and analysis:

According to the programme leader, the team of teaching staff involves seven principal lecturers who have full-time job positions at the College. According to the management and staff, this is sufficient to achieve the objectives. As mentioned before many more lectures are involved in the degree program, with the support of a part-time visiting professor and a visiting lecturer. The panel is convinced that the number of academic staff is enough to run the program, even with respect to the concern of the previous panel that the number should be increased.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

*3.2.1.4. Academic staff members regularly engage in continuing education at institutions of higher education or research from abroad, take part in international research projects and deliver presentations at high level conferences.*

*Evidence and analysis:*

Teachers continue their education at partner educational institutions, usually through the Erasmus+ or Dora programmes. For example, The Nordic network is used to compare and check required teachers' competences in a degree program for nurse specialists.

Staff members contribute to research and development activities by participating in national and international projects and network actions; the number of high-level publications is increasing every year. Lecturers have a strong national and international network, which is used to recruit future lecturers.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

*3.2.1.5. Regular academic staff members have undergone required attestation and/or received regular feedback on their performance; and have been topping up their professional and pedagogical skills.*

*Evidence and analysis:*

Teachers are assessed for their competence development every five years. They are evaluated on their competences according to clear competence and evaluation criteria. Next to these formal evaluations, teachers are required to undertake self-evaluation and leadership evaluation. Teachers receive feedback on their performance at least once a year during a development interview. These development interviews are based on the teacher competency model. The head of department and the teacher together discuss the individual goals of the teacher for the next academic year, the relationship between the goals and the development plan and the College action plan, the self-evaluation with regard to the current academic year, the job description and the content of the workload. The teacher explains his or her goals for the next five years. As a result of the interview, training needs are identified, e.g., training in the subject, pedagogical training (including the activity concerning teaching and learning methods), training in management, as well as research and development activities. According to the teachers, there are sufficient opportunities to participate in various national and international training courses in order to improve their knowledge and skills in practice settings.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

## CONCLUSIONS AND ASSESSMENT: ACADEMIC STAFF

The academic staff conforms to the required standard.

### Strengths

- The College has a well-functioning system of evaluation for staff. The evaluations guide further development.
- Staff members contribute to research and development activities by participating in national and international projects and network actions.

### Opportunity for further improvement

- It is evident that the staff employed is homogeneous. It is advised to further consider more cultural (not necessarily more international but probably more different cultural background) and gender diversity in the staff.

## 3.2.2. Learning and teaching environment

*3.2.2.1. There are facilities (lecture rooms, labs, seminar rooms, rooms for independent work by students etc.) available for studies and study-related research, development and creative activities; these are adequately furnished and equipped with up-to-date equipment needed for achieving the objectives of the study programmes.*

### Evidence and analysis:

The College's practical work rooms and laboratories are modern and have high-level equipment. Master's level students use the simulation centre to acquire the skills needed in complex clinical situations and to take OSCEs and assessments. The facilities are equipped with up-to-date equipment according to the need for running a contemporary degree program in health sciences.

According to the students, as reported during the interviews, they are very satisfied with the facilities.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

*3.2.2.2. Research, development and creative activities in the study programme group are supported by adequate amount of up-to-date and pertinent textbooks, research publications and other study materials, access to research databases is ensured.*

### Evidence and analysis:

The introduction of online learning and teaching provides a good opportunity to record the study process and revise it afterwards if necessary; it also allows students to plan their learning time according to their individual needs and abilities.

In the self-evaluation report it is stated that the College's library gives access to all contemporary standard catalogues and scientific databases. Instruction on the use of databases is integrated into learning and teaching. Students can also use the services of the University of Tartu Library. Teachers

have the possibility to apply for the purchase of new literature sources in the subject area in justified cases.

The students report that they have sufficient resources to work online. The library is well equipped, functions well, electronic databases are accessible. Students can also access the library from their dormitories or at home.

The availability and accessibility of textbooks, research publications, other study materials and research databases conforms to the requirements for a degree programme in Health Sciences.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

*3.2.2.3. State of the art and fit for purpose information and communication technological solutions, including study information system, document management system, online learning environment support learning and teaching.*

Evidence and analysis:

As stated in the self-evaluation, "the learning management system Moodle is most commonly used as an online learning environment. For each subject the support is designed on Moodle, including all study information of the subject (e.g., study materials, guidelines for independent learning assignments, e-learning objects - all available in one and the same environment). Information technology support for students and teachers is provided by the educational technologist and by IT specialists".

To carry out online contact studies, the Zoom environment is used in addition to BigBlueButton, which is available on Moodle. Students report positive experiences with the use of online teaching methods, including lessons via Zoom.

Teachers receive sufficient support with (online) educational materials. The adaptation to online teaching during COVID was evaluated very positively.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

## CONCLUSIONS AND ASSESSMENT: LEARNING AND TEACHING ENVIRONMENT

**The learning and teaching environment conforms to the required standard.**

### Strengths

- Facilities are state of the art which includes a well-equipped library.
- Online education is well developed and the students have sufficient resources to work online.

### 3.2.3. Financial resources

*3.2.3.1. The educational institution has adequate funds necessary for conducting high quality studies as well as for the provision of adequate and up-to-date support services, for implementing learning and teaching related developments and for supporting the development of academic staff.*

Evidence and analysis:

The College has sufficient resources to carry out high-quality studies and to provide adequate and up-to-date support services. The College's budgetary process is described in detail in the Procedure for the Use of State Budgetary Resources and the Income from Economic Activities of Tartu Health Care College.

The College's budget has remained stable over the past five years, with an average annual amount of EUR 4.2 million, of which an average of EUR 3.1 million is for activity support. According to the College's annual reports, income and expenditure have been in balance.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

*3.2.3.2. The higher education institution has sufficient funds for research and development activities related to the study programme.*

Evidence and analysis:

The panel is convinced that the College is making the best possible use of the resources allocated to it. These include many research and development activities. The development of R&D activities is one of the priorities in the College's development plan 2021-2025.

On average, the costs associated with the College's research and development activities amount to 100,000 Euros per year, including about 10% of the working hours planned for research and development activities of teaching staff in all curricula. This was confirmed by the staff and also by the College management.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

*3.2.3.3. The higher education institution has a long-term strategy for ensuring the sustainability of financial resources, including a risk analysis and financial projections. The strategy describes, among others, risks stemming from the operating environment and planned mitigating measures thereof.*

Evidence and analysis:

The strategy for securing financial resources and the risk analysis of the College's financial resources is described in the Strategy for Securing Financial Resources, Potential Risks and Risk Management Activities of the Tartu Health Care College and approved by a decision of the Rector's Office.

In addition, the College has a strong teaching staff and supporting their development is high on its list of priorities. Internationalisation is an important part of the study programme, especially in terms of international mobility. The political situation is essential for securing government funding for the College.

The expert panel is convinced that the College has a well-developed strategy for its finances.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

*3.2.3.4. Financial reports for the higher education institution or keeper thereof are publicly available. Annual reports for the higher education institution or keeper thereof have undergone financial auditing unless stipulated otherwise in legislation.*

Evidence and analysis:

The economic activities of the College are described in annual reports that are publicly available on the College's website. The annual report and the report on the implementation of the budget are approved by the College Council and submitted to the Ministry of Education and Research.

The economic activities of the College, as well as the institution's use and maintenance of public funds, are audited by the Ministry of Education and Research and the National Audit Office.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

## CONCLUSIONS AND ASSESSMENT: FINANCIAL RESOURCES

**The financial resources conform to the required standard.**

### Strength

- The College is aware of the threats facing the financing of the institution and addresses them in its activities and plans.

## CONCLUSIONS AND AGGREGATED ASSESSMENT: RESOURCES

**Aggregated assessment of the resources: conforms to the required standard.**

### Strengths

- The College has a well-functioning system of evaluation for staff. The evaluations guide further development.
- Staff members contribute to research and development activities by participating in national and international projects and network actions.
- Facilities are state of the art which includes a well-equipped library.
- Online education is well developed and the students have sufficient resources to work online.

- The College is aware of the threats facing the financing of the institution and addresses them in its activities and plans.

#### Opportunity for further improvement

- It is evident that the staff employed is homogeneous. It is advised to further consider more cultural (not necessarily more international but probably more different cultural background) and gender diversity in the staff.

### 3.3. SUSTAINABILITY

**Aggregated assessment of the quality of instruction: conforms to the required standard.**  
**Aggregated assessment of the resources: conforms to the required standard.**

#### 3.3.1. Further sustainability criteria

*3.3.1.1. Regular development planning and risk management are on-going in the higher education institution, aimed at ensuring the sustainability of high-quality studies in the higher education institution as a whole as well as in the study programme group.*

##### Evidence and analysis:

It is clear to the evaluation committee that the management of the College takes risk management seriously and ensures the sustainability of high-quality studies.

In the autumn of 2020, the new development plan for the period 2021-2025 was prepared at the College, which sets strategic goals in five areas (learning and teaching, research and development, development of services, internationalisation, organisation and management) for the next five years. In the new development plan, the College sets the priorities and development trends for the area of learning and teaching for the next five years, emphasising not only the development and quality assurance of learning and teaching, but also the management quality of the study process, the competence development of managers and the efficiency of research and development activities.

The fact that students are highly motivated to learn is reflected in the small number of students who drop out of their studies. In six cases, the removal from the enrolment register was carried out at the student's initiative (for economic or family reasons), one student dropped out due to insufficient academic progress and one student for non-attendance to classes and study.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

*3.3.1.2. Development trends for student admissions, graduations and budgetary resources indicate sustainability of the higher education institution as a whole and the study programme group under assessment.*

Evidence and analysis:

The financial situation is currently stable in accordance with the requirements of the organization's situation. The study programme has sufficient resources and financial support.

In order to be able to implement high-quality learning and teaching in the training group, the College has described a long-term financial forecast in the development plan 2021-2025, taking into account the risks in the operational environment. The strategy requires additional funding for research and development. The College is active in raising additional funds for research.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

*3.3.1.3. The higher education institution has a long-term financial projection of financial resources needed for conducting high quality studies in the study programme group and sources for the provision thereof, which takes into account risks stemming from the operating environment.*

Evidence and analysis:

The financial situation is currently stable in accordance with the requirements of the organization's situation. The study programme has sufficient resources and financial support.

In order to be able to implement high-quality learning and teaching in the training group, the College has described a long-term financial forecast in the development plan 2021-2025, taking into account the risks in the operational environment. The strategy requires additional funding for research and development. The College is active in raising additional funds for research.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

*3.3.1.4. The age structure of academic staff as well as share of young teachers ensures sustainability of instruction provision in the study programme group.*

Evidence and analysis:

Currently it can be deduced from the self-evaluation report of the College that the age average age of the employed staff is roughly 49, which indicates the need for further development regarding the evaluation criteria. This is noted and seen as an ongoing process. The College wants to ensure that academic staff of different ages is appointed.

The criterion conforms to the requirements.

## CONCLUSIONS AND AGGREGATED ASSESSMENT: SUSTAINABILITY

**Aggregated assessment of sustainability: conforms to the required standard.**

### Strengths

- The management is involved in the development of the study programme and supports the future vision of the curriculum.
- The College has a highly motivated team of staff.