Report for Institutional Accreditation

Tallinn University

2021

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Introduction

Institutional accreditation

'Institutional accreditation' is the process of external evaluation which assesses the conformity of a University or higher education institution's management, work procedures, study and research activities and environment to both legislation and the goals and development plan of the higher education institution itself. This is feedback-based evaluation in which an international assessment panel analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the institution of higher education based on the self-assessment report of the institution and on information obtained during the assessment visit, providing recommendations for improvement and ways of implementing them.

The goal of institutional accreditation is to support the development of strategic management and quality culture that values learning-centeredness, creativity and innovation in the higher education institutions (**HEIs**), as well as to increase the societal impact of education, research and development delivered by the HEIs.

HEIs are assessed according to twelve standards of institutional accreditation. Assessment focuses on the core processes of the HEI – learning and teaching, research, development and creative activities, and service to society – as well as on strategic management of the organisation and resource management. The learning and teaching process is examined in more detail under five standards (study programme, teaching staff, learning and teaching, student assessment, and learning support processes). Throughout the assessment process, there is a focus on academic ethics, quality culture and internationalisation.

The Institutional Accreditation Report consists of two parts: (1) evaluation of twelve institutional accreditation standards, and (2) a report on quality assessment of a sample of study programmes.

Educational institutions must undergo institutional accreditation at least once every seven years based on the regulation approved by EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education Guide to Institutional Accreditation.

The institutional accreditation of Tallinn University took place in March 2021. The Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (**EKKA**) composed an international panel, which was approved by the higher education institution. The composition of the panel was thereafter approved by the order of EKKA director.

The following persons formed the panel:

Aalt Willem Heringa	Professor; Former Dean of the Law School; Maastricht University, The Netherlands, and of the China-EU School of Law (Beijing)
Anca Greere	Professor in English Linguistics and Translation Studies, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania; (previously) Quality Assurance Manager, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, United Kingdom

Alar Karis	Director of the Estonian National Museum; former Rector of Estonian University of Life Sciences and University of Tartu; Estonia
Anja Oskamp	Head of the assessment committee; Professor (Law); former Rector; Open University of the Netherlands; Heerlen; The Netherlands
Carmen Fenoll	Professor of Plant Biology and formerly Vice Rector for Academic Affairs and the Bologna Process, Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha; Spain
Helen Thomas	Secretary of the assessment committee; Freelance Education Consultant; UK
Liz Bacon	Professor, Deputy Principal and Deputy Vice-Chancellor; Abertay University; UK; President of EQANIE
Marge Vaikjärv	Student member of the committee; University of Tartu, Estonia
Martin Halliwell	Professor; Head of School; University of Leicester; UK
Ole Bækgaard Nielsen	Professor; Head of Department; Aarhus University; Denmark
Oliver Vettori	Dean Accreditations & Quality Management / Director Programme Management & Teaching and Learning Support, WU Vienna; Austria
Rupert Wegerif	Professor; University of Cambridge; UK

Assessment process

The assessment process was coordinated by EKKA staff – Hillar Bauman and Marit Sukk.

The assessment took place online via Zoom. The Panel held two preparatory meetings, the first on 2 February 2021 when the schedule, background and approach to the visit were discussed and agreed, and the second on 10 March, when the Panel agreed the questions and the handling of the meetings. Meetings were held with staff, students, and external stakeholders of Tallinn University from 15 to 19 March. On Saturday 20 March, the Panel met to discuss and agree the findings and the process and timings for preparing the report.

In finalizing the assessment report, the Panel took into consideration comments made by Tallinn University. The committee submitted the final report to EKKA on May 27.

The following report has two parts; the first is a report on institutional accreditation and the second part on the quality assessment of seven study programmes: Bachelor in Law in Estonian and Bachelor in Law in English (handled as one report); Bachelor in European Modern Languages and Cultures; Bachelor in Integrated Natural Sciences; Bachelor in Digital Learning Games; Masters in Educational Innovation and Leadership, and Health Behaviour and Wellbeing doctoral programme.

Information about Tallinn University

Tallinn University (TLU), the third largest public university in Estonia, is also the country's youngest university in legal terms. It was formed as a result of the largest-ever higher education institution consolidation process in Estonia, bringing together numerous educational, research and development

institutions; it was formally established in 2005. The University was restructured in 2015 reducing the number of academic units. At the time of the assessment Tallinn University had seven academic units: Baltic Film, Media and Arts School; the School of Digital Technologies; the School of Educational Sciences; the School of Humanities, the School of Natural Sciences and Health; the School of Governance, Law and Society, and Haapsalu College. The leadership and governance of the University is undertaken by the Council which is responsible for strategic and financial affairs, and the Senate which is responsible for academic affairs. The Rector, supported by a rectorate of four vice-rectors and a head of finance, oversees the day to day operations of the University.

The main campus is located in central Tallinn. There are three other sites in Tallinn, one of which is in the old town, and the College in Haapsalu.

At the time of the assessment there were 7107 students registered at the University across all disciplines and levels of which 801 were international students. There was a total of 813 full time equivalent (FTE) staff, of whom 392 FTE were academic staff.

Main impressions of the self-evaluation report and the visit

The self-evaluation report (SER) was well written and was supported by helpful appendices and links to documents. TLU also submitted additional documents in advance of the assessment event. Together these provided a very sound basis for the Panel's enquiry.

The Panel met with a wide range of students, staff, and other stakeholders throughout the assessment. The Panel found enthusiastic students and dedicated and enthusiastic staff who engaged in an open and constructive way enabling the Panel to address the diversity of questions it wished to explore.

The professional way in which TLU approached the assessment ensured that the Panel was able to work effectively.

Main changes based on recommendations of the previous institutional accreditation

The previous institutional accreditation took place in 2014. There were seven main recommendations which the first section of the SER addresses. It is clear from this that TLU has taken systematic steps to streamline its structure and staffing to support greater consistency and reduce elements of overlap. The structural reform reduced the numbers of units and developed a common organisational structure for the academic units with organising principles for their engagement with the central units. The reforms also supported the development of greater interdisciplinarity both in RDC and in study programmes. The 2019 Tallinn University Act established management and finance models that are consistent with other public universities in Estonia. TLU has developed its systems and processes to promote quality provision and consistency and it has also introduced greater use of risk assessment. Many, but not all, of the changes made in response to the recommendations have become embedded in the institution and its practices and thus constitute parts of the SER presented for this accreditation.

Summary of the institutional accreditation findings

General Findings:

Tallinn University has developed significantly since it was established as a result of multiple mergers. In 2015 it undertook major structural changes which successfully streamlined the University, reducing the number of academic units. Legislative requirements from the Estonian State entailed the development of a new governance structure in 2019. In the process of adopting and adapting to these major changes within a relatively short timescale, TLU succeeded in maintaining a very strong collegial decision-making culture which is impressive.

The Panel learned that the voices of staff, students and other stakeholders are heard and responded to. New initiatives, changes and developments are agreed and taken forward after wide ranging discussions in an atmosphere which is characterised by trust rather than control. This creates a safe environment and is effective when things go well. The agile response to the Covid pandemic, impacting on so many areas of higher education, is illustrative of how TLU's approach can work. At the same time, discussions and negotiations are, by their very nature, time consuming and, in the case of significant obstacles, for example, may hinder decision making or be a major impediment should an unpopular decision need to be made. This can occur in the higher education environment. The challenge for TLU is to retain the real strengths of its culture and continue to adapt, change, and innovate in a fast-moving environment.

TLU demonstrates many successes, including significant strengthening of research, developing inter- and multi-disciplinary programmes, growing its internationalisation, and educating reflective students with strong transferable skills. The University has significant areas of strength in education and digital learning which have international standing. There is an increased focus through the reduction in the number of schools and units, the focus fields, and the concentration of the campus. There is, however, scope for more focus to ensure that TLU concentrates activities in areas of expertise and thus develops a clearer identity and position in the Estonian higher education arena and beyond. The development of the new strategic plan in 2021–2022 provides an excellent opportunity to set the foundations for this.

The new strategic plan will benefit from having very clear aims, underpinned by well-defined goals, and phased implementation steps, which the Panel found were insufficiently clear in the current plan. The lack of specificity which the Panel found during the assessment impacts on the ability of management to measure progress and report on it. In developing the new strategic plan, TLU should also reflect on how it can ensure consistency and equitability of provision in the highly devolved and delegated systems. It was difficult for the Panel to ascertain where main responsibilities lie in the management of programmes, for example, and, more broadly, for the management of quality. The University needs to ensure that it closes loopholes so that it can ensure the consistency of high-quality provision where the written rules and regulations are consistently mirrored in practice. The Panel found scope for greater consistency and systematisation in a number of areas. In particular, there was limited evidence of the systematic gathering of employer and alumni views.

TLU has a relatively high dropout rate which it has gone some way to addressing. The Panel recognises the context and the challenges of increasing retention where the factors affecting this are beyond the

influence of the institution. The Panel encourages TLU to seek innovative and creative ways of addressing this and monitoring the impact of the measures. The Panel also noted that there are several programmes with small student cohorts which raise questions about the long-term sustainability of the programme. The development of English medium programmes has helped maintain student numbers and significantly increased the proportion of international students studying at TLU. Building on its strengths in digital education, TLU is encouraged to further develop programmes and courses that are multi-disciplinary and can be co-facilitated by TLU and international staff, thus supporting both student numbers and internationalisation aspirations.

Commendations:

- TLU has achieved a cohesive and coherent institution with shared values and a very collegial approach in which the voices of staff, students and other stakeholders are heard; it has succeeded in doing this in the context of merger and change, responding well to external views including recommendations from the previous accreditation.

- TLU has established a sound financial position, has formulated realistic plans for securing future revenue and manages its resources well with comprehensive and transparent written procedures and rules.

- There is a strong dialogue orientation in TLU with a focus on incremental problem solving and a robust approach to follow up activities.

- The overall approach to research ethics and the development of the *Tallinn University Good Academic Practice.*

- All study programmes have been through a rigorous review process since 2016, which, in some areas, included a complete redesign to meet the expectations of students and employers.

- The success in developing students as independent learners who embrace a spirit of entrepreneurism.

- TLU has a systematic and strategic approach to reinforce RDC transversally, with notable achievements in the last 5 years.

- Key university wide decisions support and promote RDC including the staff career model, which promotes researchers, PhD students and young staff; the TLU Research Fund, which researchers can access through regular calls; centralized support units for researchers, with successful initiatives such as the Project Farm; the creation of academic structures that give focus to collaboration and that foster multidisciplinary and disciplinary engagement.

- The freedom of units and centres, to secure substantial grants, create successful international networks for collaborative research and develop sound multidisciplinary research.

- The University has increased the volume of cooperation with enterprises and other organisations and established a sound basis for the further expansion of continuing education and education innovation as identified as a priority in the Development Plan.

✦ **Worthy of Recognition**:

The compulsory LIFE course that is effective in introducing all students to interdisciplinary, problem-based learning in a way that supports the development of general competences such as collaboration and innovation. This is an initiative that other higher education institutions in and beyond Estonia could learn from.

Areas of concern and recommendations:

- TLU has outlined focus fields and priorities and KPIs in its Development Plan. However, these are insufficiently clear and precise and are open to different interpretations. TLU is recommended to set clear and consistent priorities that have associated KPIs that can be clearly measured and are monitored.

- The Development Plans of the academic and support units are based on the institutional DP. However, these are not well aligned and do not always address priorities as well as they might. TLU is recommended to secure the alignment of plans so that the priorities are appropriately and relevantly addressed across the institution.

- TLU has a highly devolved approach to management. Whilst this secures engagement by staff at all levels, the Panel found that it led to inconsistencies in practice. TLU is recommended to develop the reporting and monitoring of academic units in a way which ensures that practice across the institution is consistent and reflects the documented rules and regulations. This is particularly important in the context of the increased focus on inter- and multi-disciplinary, and joint study programmes.

- The University takes note of feedback from staff, students, and external stakeholders. However, this is not done systematically, particularly in the case of alumni and employers which results in lost opportunities to enhance provision. TLU is recommended to develop mechanisms which consistently and systematically ensure that feedback is gathered and analysed from all stakeholders across all areas of the University.

- There are rules and regulations determining the management of quality; however, these are not sufficiently integrated to ensure that problems in the quality of provision in all areas of the University are identified and acted on. It is recommended that TLU create an explicit framework that explains and interlinks quality processes beyond bottom-up reporting, and which helps to close actual and potential loopholes in the assurance of quality.

- There are statutes for the development and delivery of study programmes. However, these do not detail the policy, procedure and guidelines concerning the reduction or closure of study programmes. It is recommended that policy and procedures are developed and implemented consistently so that the rationale for closing a programme is clear and transparent.

- The University has demonstrated some success with its internationalisation agenda. However, there is very limited outward mobility from both staff and students. It is recommended that

TLU explores innovative strategies and develops enabling processes to support mobility and ensures that the benefits of mobility are formally recognised.

- TLU is aware of student dropout rates and the percentage of students completing within the nominal study period and has taken some steps to address this. The Panel recommends increased focus on data collection and analysis to gain as full a picture as possible of the reasons for these rates, and that TLU develops support, counselling and learning which impact positively on these rates.

- The new staff contract is a significant achievement. However, the practice that staff have individual negotiations on their remunerations, albeit within some limits, lends itself to inequalities and risks of staff overload. The Panel recommends that TLU address this to ensure transparency and equitability across the institution. This is increasingly important with shared courses.

	conforms to requirements	partially conforms to requirements	does not conform to requirements	worthy of recognition
Strategic management	☐	☒	☐	☐
Resources	☒	☐	☐	☐
Quality culture	☐	☒	☐	☐
Academic ethics	☒	☐	☐	☐
Internationalisation	☒	☐	☐	☐
Teaching staff	☒	☐	☐	☐
Study programme	☒	☐	☐	☐
Learning and teaching	☒	☐	☐	☐
Student assessment	☒	☐	☐	☐
Learning support systems	☒	☐	☐	☐
Research, development and/or other creative activity	☒	☐	☐	☐
Service to society	☒	☐	☐	☐

Key to evidence

E: interviews with employers and other external stakeholders

M: interviews with management staff

S: interviews with students

A: interviews with alumni

T: interviews with teaching staff

SER: Self-Evaluation Report

W: Website

1.1.   Strategic management

Standard:
Development planning at the higher education institution is purposeful and systematic, involving various stakeholders. The higher education institution regularly evaluates the achievement of its stated objectives and the impact of its activities.

Guidelines:
The HEI has formulated the objectives and key results for its core activities – learning and teaching; research, development and creative activities, and service to society – taking into account national priorities and the needs of society, focusing on its strengths and reducing unnecessary duplication both within the HEI and throughout higher education in Estonia. The HEI is managed in accordance with its mission, vision, and core values, as well as objectives set out on the basis of those principles. Achievement of the objectives and effects of the activities are evaluated regularly. Creativity and innovation are supported and given value in both core and support activities. Membership of the HEI (including students), as well as external stakeholders, is involved in developing and implementing the HEI's development plan and action plans. The HEI members share the core values that serve as a basis for the institution's development plan.

Indicator:
The rate of achieving the objectives set in the development/action plan (key results)

Evidence and analysis

The strategic management of the University is extensively described and is supplemented by many procedures and guidelines (SER, W). The procedures and guidelines are clear and well described. They are clearly intended to safeguard transparency, the involvement of employees and of other stakeholders. The structure is predominantly based on national legislation. The inclusiveness of the strategic management enhances the involvement of relevant stakeholders within the organization, like employees, students and the council. From our interviews with employers we also found that they are well-informed and periodically consulted.

TLU's Development Plan (DP) describes the University's strategy. Each unit then elaborates its own development plan, based on the University's DP. All the development plans are published on the website. The DPs contain an implementation plan which indicates the responsibilities entailed in its implementation and is very detailed. Implementation plans are monitored and progress on achievements are published in the annual report, which can be found on the website. From discussions with management and teaching staff it was clear that the strategy is disseminated and well understood and that the DPs are used as a point of reference.

Strategic goals are formulated, but these are at a rather high level. To take one example: TLU's development plan defines 5 focus fields: educational innovation; digital and media culture; cultural competences; healthy and sustainable lifestyle, and society and open governance. The educational innovation focus field is described in the SER: "*We consider it important to enable teachers and education leaders to make evidence-based decisions on new teaching and learning practices, and support them as the leaders of innovation processes in the field of education. We strengthen inclusive*

education and promote the differentiation of education in accordance with the individual needs of students. We lead an evidence-based approach and critical monitoring of digital innovations in education, thereby contributing to the development of the digital competences of teachers and learners. We promote and integrate life-long learning in formal, non-formal and informal education. We create a link between educational research and practice in order to implement educational innovations more efficiently and extensively." This description is rather aspirational. The DP does, however, formulate some performance indicators related to the focus fields. TLU also has the following operating principles: *TLU is interdisciplinary in its activities; international and demands excellence and sustainability*. TLU has formulated indicators for these; however, the Panel found, from discussions with staff and students, that there is still is work to do to make sure that the whole organisation is familiar with the concepts and interprets them consistently. Moreover, it is not apparent how the manifestation of the principles or the achievements of the strategic goals are monitored in the development plans of the schools and units. For example: The Panel did not gain evidence that they are discussed between the different schools and units on a regular base. From the meetings the Panel learned that the concepts were not consistently understood by staff. The Panel was not confident that there is systematic evaluation of activities and their impact within the various standards and were unclear how monitoring led to decisions to change things. It was clear to the Panel that TLU is working hard towards the realisation of its goals. However, the concepts used are rather high level and not as well defined as they could be, thus lending themselves to multiple interpretations. The Panel also considered that there is much that is implicit which contributes to multiple interpretations. felt that a lot is left implicit which enhances the multi-interpretation of concepts. This makes it hard to measure the precise achievements and assess impact. More precise definition and specificity of goals would enhance the alignment between plans and the monitoring of progress towards goals. The Panel considers that the development of the new strategic plan is an excellent opportunity to ensure greater clarity and shape more consistency across the University.

Strategic management in TLU is designed to be inclusive and organized as a flat hierarchy, which the delegation of plans illustrates. For the effective delivery of the strategy and the associated development plans, it is important to have clear alignment between the action plans of academic units and those of the support units. The Panel was not confident that there was sufficient alignment of plans and activities. For example, the administrative contract between TLU and the Ministry of Education and Research (05.02.2019 no 1.1-6.2/19/94) states that one area of TLU responsibility is teacher training and the University should set teacher training as a priority in their study programmes agenda. The SER states that national priorities and goals are integrated into the University's activities by taking into account the objectives of the administrative contract, national and international plans and strategies. However, in the view of the Panel the development plans do not sufficiently demonstrate that the role taken by TLU is fully commensurate with the expectations of the contract.

The University has a commendably strong sense of community with shared values and a very collegial approach. Voices of staff, students and other stakeholders are clearly heard, and the Panel learned that the University is characterised as being '*human friendly' (*E, S, T*)*. This is a strength. It was clear to the Panel that maintaining the collegial decision-making culture during a period of restructuring and refocusing is a very significant achievement. The formulation and introduction of the focus fields has clearly contributed to an improved academic structure and also manifests itself in academic results (SER). Whilst this achievement is significant, particularly within a relatively short time scale, there is still some way to go for TLU to fully establish its identity and position itself clearly in the Estonian

higher education landscape. Addressing these points and creating a new narrative for the University is a key challenge for the future (M, E). The development of the new strategic plan, which is scheduled for 2021–2022, presents an excellent opportunity for this.

The new strategic plan also affords TLU the opportunity to ensure that strategic priorities are focussed and clear and that goals are underpinned by KPIs that will enable progress towards their achievement to be monitored and assessed.

Whilst the collegial approach has clearly contributed to developments over the last few years, it also became clear to the Panel that the approach makes decisions about which activities might need to stop very difficult and may even hamper any decision being taken at all. The systematic collection and analysis of data that is followed up transparently would help to address the potential weaknesses of collegial decision making and further support the monitoring of KPIs.

Conclusion

The Panel was impressed by the developments and improvements TLU has made since the last accreditation to which the collegial approach has clearly contributed. The Panel found, however, that there was room for improvement in the systematic evaluation of achievements and their impact. This finding is reflected in a number of aspects of the University's work and similarly reflected in several of the standards in this assessment, specifically Quality Culture, Internationalisation, Teaching Staff, Study Programmes, Learning and Teaching, Student Assessment and Research and Development and other Creative Activities.

There is also room for TLU to improve the alignment of the strategic goals with the development of activities. Improving this will enable those in positions of leadership to have clear, effective and accurate oversight of the University.

Strengths

- The way TLU followed up on the recommendations of the previous accreditation.

- The strong sense of community with shared values and a very collegial approach. Voices of staff, students and stakeholders are heard.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The tools for monitoring the progress to achieve its strategic goals are not as strong as they could be because they are not always very specific. For TLU to be able to monitor progress towards achieving its goals, it is strongly recommended that strategy and the accompanying KPIs are specific and measurable.

- Although the development plans of the various departments are based on the strategic plans, they are not completely aligned. To ensure that the University's priorities are appropriately and relevantly addressed across the whole institution, TLU is recommended to address the alignment of development plans, both academic and support, so that they align accurately with each other.

- TLU has outlined focus fields and priorities; however, these are insufficiently clear, and are open to different interpretations. TLU is recommended to set clear and consistent priorities that have associated KPIs that can be monitored.

Opportunities for further improvement

- TLU is encouraged to align practices across the different units as much as possible and to share good practice systematically to ensure no opportunities to learn from them and enhance provision are lost.

- TLU is encouraged to use the opportunity of the new strategic plan to address the issues of identity and positioning.

1.2.   Resources

Standard:
The higher education institution develops its staff and manages its physical and financial resources in a purposeful, systematic, and sustainable manner. Internal and external communications of the higher education institution (including marketing and image-building) are targeted and managed.

Guidelines:
The HEI has an efficient staff development system. The principles and procedures for employee recruitment and development are based on the objectives of the HEI's development plan and are fair and transparent. The career model of academic staff motivates talented young people to start their academic careers, creates opportunities for progress, and ensures sustainability of the academic staff. The principles for employees' remuneration and motivation are defined, available to all employees, and observed.

Allocation of the HEI's financial resources is based on the objectives of its development plan. The management and development of its infrastructure (buildings, laboratories, classrooms, IT systems, etc.) are economically feasible. Sufficient resources are available for updating the infrastructure for education and research, and/or a strategy exists enabling the HEI to acquire them.

A sufficient number of textbooks and other learning aids are available, they are of uniformly high quality and accessible. Publicly offered information about HEI's activities (including study programmes) and the findings of external evaluations is correct, up to date, easily accessible and understandable. The HEI has a system to popularise its core activities and academic career opportunities. The HEI has a functioning system for internal and external communications, relevant to the target audiences. The HEI members are informed of the decisions relevant to them in a timely manner.

Employee satisfaction with management, working conditions, information flow, etc., at the HEI is surveyed regularly and the survey results are used in quality improvement activities.

Indicators:
- *Distribution of revenues and costs (incl. RDC activities)*
- *The results of the staff satisfaction survey*

Evidence and analysis

Since TLU undertook its larger structural reform in 2015, several initiatives have been implemented to improve the University's economic viability (SER, M). This includes a reduction in the number of study programmes and focusing research activities into five interdisciplinary themes. As part of this development, the number of academic units has been reduced from 26 to 7. At the same time, TLU has experienced around a 10% reduction in the number of students, reflecting Estonia's demographic trends (SER, M). The number and proportion of international students has grown.

TLU is in good financial shape. This is based on stable, 3-year contracts with the Ministry of Education and Research that provide the greatest proportion of the University's total revenue. Importantly, the support from the government has been maintained despite the reduction in student enrolments over the last few years, and, at the same time, the number of fee-paying international students has increased. The SER identified concerns over the potential reduction in government support (M). In order to secure a more stable economy and to provide resources for growth in research activities TLU seeks to diversify its revenue. In the light of the management model and the financing principles outlined in *The Tallinn University Act 2019,* there is now a focus on attracting external funding and on increasing the return from low-risk investments in real estate (SER, M). The resources for these investments are in place (M). As a result, the University's total revenue has increased by approximately 20% from 2015 to 2019 while the relative contribution from the government-based revenue has decreased (SER). Academic units do not pay overhead to the University when attracting external funding. Whilst this may stimulate efforts to obtain external funding it may also, eventually, place an unsupported burden on TLU's central administrative units.

Budgeting and monitoring of finances have recently been strengthened by changing from a yearly to an accrual's basis. In addition, the capability for strategic budgeting and planning is being improved by the implementation of an information system for budget drafting and monitoring (SER). To enable academic units to plan their activities and developments, approximately 65% to 75% of the total annual revenue is transferred to them. The transfer is guided by a distribution plan where the core of the annual transfer is based on the average transfer over the last 3 years (SER, M). The Panel learned that the amount of core revenue for each academic unit is historical (M). A small part of the annual revenue is transferred as *special-purpose support* to the schools so they can support strategic initiatives and compensate for variations in resource needs. The Panel recognise that the rules for distributing both core and special-purpose support to academic units are well described and transparent. However, the Panel was not sure to what extent the distribution of revenue between the units is used as a means to further the University's strategic aims.

The composition and duties of employees are based on statutes and well described regulations such as *TLU Employment Relations Rules*. Individual tasks and assignments are negotiated annually and supported by formal development interviews and a remuneration system (SER). The Panel learned that this could result in significant workload and salary variation among employees (SER, M, T). While the Panel acknowledges that TLU has successfully increased staff salaries by 50 % over the last 5 years, it is concerned that individual negotiations to determine annual workload and associated salary can compromise consistency and equality.

TLU introduced a new career model that provides routes to tenureship and aims to standardise more fully the requirements for different positions.

TLU has a clear focus on employee development and satisfaction (SER, M, T). There are several staff development courses and activities which are well attended. This includes courses in academic topics such as digital skills and research ethics. In addition, TLU degree courses are open to employees if considered professionally relevant. Senior management organise seminars of general relevance across the academic units to improve University wide cooperation and there are many activities designed to demonstrate and share the success of employees and schools. There is financial support for longer visits abroad and sabbaticals. Whilst TLU offers much support for employee development and satisfaction, the Panel did not find a clear link between employee development and TLU's overall strategic development (S, E, M, T).

TLU has undertaken extensive renovations of older buildings and erected new ones to create a more interconnected campus. At the same time, the campus area has been redesigned to improve the study environment (SER). New IT-based information and data systems have been introduced, including a data warehouse, where data from various information systems are stored and managed. As part of this, the budget information system will be interfaced with other software programmes that support, for example, the planning of staff costs in both the main and project budgets (SER).

There is an extensive internal communication plan that is largely managed centrally by the Marketing and Communication Office (SER, M). Internal information is comprehensive, well planned, and mostly bilingual. However, information in English is often delayed compared to information in Estonian (M). Apart from management and strategic issues, the many weekly newsletters focus on TLU's the success stories, its employees, and students (M). The information is mostly targeted at specific groups (SER). It was not clear to the Panel how the flow of internal information is related to the University's management structure, which may reach employees from several sources at the same time causing a risk of information overload. TLU's external home page addresses the needs of external stakeholders very well (W). There are communications targeted at potential applicants, including information on the annual education fair Open Doors (SER, W).

Conclusion

Over recent years, TLU has grown its economy by increasing external research funding. At the same time, structural changes and a reduction in study programmes have reduced costs related to administration and teaching. Thus, TLU is in a good financial shape. To secure the economy for the future TLU seeks to diversify its revenue with a greater emphasis on attracting external funding and on investments in real estate.

The management of resources is exemplary, governed by comprehensive and transparent written procedures and rules. While the employment of resources focuses very much on stability, the Panel was concerned whether the model for the distribution of revenue to the academic units takes sufficient account of the University's strategic goals.

TLU places considerable and creditable emphasis on staff development and satisfaction. However, the Panel considers that it would be beneficial to focus these more to support the University's strategic development. The Panel also has reservations about the extensive use of individual negotiations to

determine workload and salary which may compromise consistency and equality, which could undermine staff satisfaction and development.

The renovated campus and new building support the University's activities as do the new information and data systems. There is a comprehensive internal, bilingual communication plan that is well managed. The external home page effectively supports contact to and collaboration with external stakeholders.

Strengths

- Resource management is well governed by comprehensive and transparent written procedures and rules.

- TLU has a considerable and creditable focus on staff development and satisfaction. The achievement of a rise of round 50 % in the average salary of staff is particularly impressive.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- There has been significant increase in staff salaries and the current model provides for individual negotiations. To ensure consistency and equity TLU is recommended to reconsider the use of individual annual negotiations to determine workload and associated remuneration.

Opportunities for further improvement

- TLU is advised to reconsider how the process of core revenue distribution might take better account of the long-term strategy and support institutional priorities more effectively.

- In addition to giving staff the freedom to undertake staff development may prove to be personally motivating, TLU is encouraged to direct staff development in the direction of supporting strategic development and goals.

- TLU could consider implementing transparent financial models that can secure a growth in the capacity for administrative and structural support for research that matches the anticipated increase in externally funded research activities.

1.3.   Quality Culture

Standard:
The higher education institution has defined the quality of its core and support processes, and the principles of quality assurance. In the higher education institution, internal evaluation supports strategic management and is conducted regularly at different levels (institution, unit, study programme), the findings of internal and external evaluations are analysed, and quality improvement activities implemented.

Guidelines:
Members of the HEI have agreed upon definitions for the quality of their core and support processes and are guided by them in their daily work. The HEI develops and publicises its policies and procedures for internal quality assurance (internal evaluation) and conducts regular internal evaluations, which take into account, inter alia, the standards set out in this Guide, and incorporates feedback from its members and/or from external experts. In the course of internal evaluations, peer learning, comparisons with other HEIs regarding their results and means for achievement, as well as a sharing of best practices take place, among other things.

Internal evaluation is based on the following key questions in quality management: What do you want to achieve, and why? How do you want to do it? How do you know that the activities are effective and will have the desired impact? How do you manage the quality improvement activities?

Regular reviews and enhancements of study programmes ensure their relevance, including their compliance with international trends.

Evidence and analysis

The SER states that quality is a value informing all aspects of the University's life and that quality assurance is considered a responsibility shared by all University members. Quality, as an overarching value, is linked to the other values set out in the TLU Academic Charter. Academic freedom is of particular importance, with responsibilities delegated to the academic (sub)units presenting a strong bottom up culture. Neither the SER nor other additional documents presented to the Panel include any information on the actual structure, roles and responsibilities regarding TLU's quality assurance system(s). Nor could the Panel find any statement as to the system's underpinning rationale or philosophy. It is thus difficult for the Panel to conclude unequivocally that members of the University have a shared and agreed understanding of quality. Despite this, TLU demonstrates a strong quality culture, carried by dialogue and collaboration across the organization. The Panel found that pragmatic problem solving takes priority over lengthy documentation, and informal feedback mechanisms on the level of the academic programmes play a particularly important role (S, M). Follow up actions are taken rather seriously (SER, S, M).

The Panel found that at the institutional level, quality assurance is embedded in the annual planning and reporting process. The indicators defined in Annex 2 of the Institutional Development Plan support the institution in its self-monitoring. However, the list contains a large number of input and

throughput indicators, with output, outcome and impact indicators being rather underrepresented. Satisfaction indicators play a big role, but the focus is clearly on internal stakeholders, such as staff and students.

TLU has a variety of different quality assurance instruments and processes, some of them used more regularly than others (SER). It was not apparent that all evaluations contribute to the development of an internal quality culture: The Panel found external research evaluations, in particular, were driven exclusively by the government, with a very limited degree of improvement-orientation (M). The Panel was not presented with any evidence of regular evaluations or research assessments beyond the level of the individual researchers, which could help to identify areas for policy decisions or future investments.

The systematic identification of the needs and views of external stakeholders could be stronger, given the current focus on more informal exchange via projects, collaborations on boards and stakeholder information (E, M). The Panel did not find that the current approach is ineffective, rather that evidence for identifying needs lacks systemacity and is rather ad hoc. This is demonstrated by the fact that respective processes and instruments are not implemented institution-wide, nor regularly for all programmes. This is consistent with the strong focus on staff and student satisfaction as quality indicators; developing quality indicators attached to external stakeholder perspectives would be an important step forward.

Each quality process is owned by a key actor or unit, responsible for developing the instrument, analysing the results, and notifying decision makers of potential problems (S, T). The individual processes are rather loosely coupled and there is no central unit responsible for aligning the various instruments or for developing the overall framework and assessing its effectiveness. While this works well with regard to the satisfaction of those implementing the system, there is the potential for blind spots, with each process owner viewing and interpreting problems from their own perspective, and no process to ensure that the individual parts are connected to give the bigger picture. The Panel reflected that the externally driven quality audits may be the only occasion where such a bigger picture is gained. The Panel also found evidence that the collegial and participative bottom-up approach to quality assurance can create "loopholes" in the quality cycles, as, for example, employment practices demonstrated on the Digital Learning Master's, where practice differs from institutional policies, without decision makers knowing about it (M, Additional Resources). The Panel considers that an effective quality management and assurance system does not rely on reporting from those implementing the system and solving problems locally. This needs to be addressed.

The exchange of effective and good practice demonstrates a similar weakness. TLU has established a vast network of best practice exchange to support mutual learning (SER); however, there is no central collection or processing of information, and exchange is limited to existing networks. For instance, there is no systematic exchange between programme managers across the University (M). Information is collected and disseminated from the bottom up, which makes it difficult to see patterns or unreported problems. This lends itself to a tendency for first order learning rather than second order learning.

The quality assurance of academic programmes is defined in *Principles for Study Programme Development 2016* which clearly outlines the expected impact of the principles which are intended to have a strong impact on quality improvement. The *Statute of Study Programmes* is based on the

principles and regulates programme management and development, including the annual internal evaluation of study programmes. Although the collegial board of studies or council of study programmes have a supervising function, details of responsibilities remain unclear. Internal programme evaluations are conducted regularly, but the approach to ongoing programme monitoring depends very much on individual programme managers. Overall, the programme managers are key to ensuring quality of their academic programmes, while the University centrally has a light touch regarding policies and rules (M). This system has big advantages in terms of flexibility and pragmatism, but it also runs the risk of creating different quality standards, at least between schools. Pragmatic solutions that work on the level of an individual programme might not always be in the interest of the University as a whole or known to the senior decision makers (S, T). In the light of TLU's strategic focus on interdisciplinarity, aligning solutions and standards more closely is important.

Risk assessment and auditing are integrated in the quality assurance system; systematic risk assessment was introduced in 2015. The SER provides several examples of quality improvements derived from the annual risk assessments, most notably an adaptation of the teaching workload model in 2018/2019. Although audits focusing on a specific area of operation have been undertaken each year, the deletion of the internal auditor role removes regular audits (SER).

Conclusions

Overall, the Panel finds that TLU demonstrates strong commitment to quality which is driven by dialogue and collaboration. Quality assurance is not delegated to a specific unit but clearly taken as an individual responsibility. However, the combination of the bottom up identification of quality problems coupled only loosely with quality processes at the institutional level creates loopholes and impedes decision makers' ability to identify areas for improvement and gain a full institutional picture. The lack of systematic external research evaluations mandated by the University itself as well as a corresponding lack of systematic instruments and processes for identifying external stakeholder needs and perspectives are further areas of concern.

Strengths

- There is a strong dialogue orientation and a focus on problem solving as is evidenced by the range of well-documented follow-up actions and the high level of satisfaction of university members regarding how these actions are identified and undertaken.

- The quality system is light on bureaucracy, with comparably few formal documentation requirements.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The panel found evidence (e.g. with regard to the digital games programme, see below) that actual quality problems might not always become known to decision-makers and that pragmatic "on the ground" solutions for such problems are not necessarily in line with institutional policies. It is thus recommended that, in order to close potential loopholes in the quality management of TLU and support greater consistency in the application of quality processes across different units, TLU create an explicit framework that explains and interlinks quality processes beyond bottom up reporting.

- Currently the exchange of best practice is through networks and informal exchange and lacks systematic identification and dissemination. TLU is recommended to systematize best practice exchange and develop the infrastructure for analysing and exchanging quality-relevant information across units beyond the existing networks in order to support second order learning.

- Whilst TLU does take note of external needs and perspectives, this is not yet systematic. TLU is recommended to identify the needs and perspectives of its external stakeholders and alumni more regularly and systematically and attach quality indicators to those perspectives.

Opportunities for further improvement

- TLU is encouraged to develop processes for external research evaluations beyond those initiated by the Ministry.

- It would be valuable for TLU to better align quality standards and strategies across the entire programme portfolio.

- TLU should consider reinstituting regular external audits to support a consistent implementation of quality processes.

1.4 Academic ethics

Standard:
The higher education institution has defined its principles for academic ethics, has a system for disseminating them among its members, and has a code of conduct including guidelines for any cases of non-compliance with these principles. The higher education institution has a functioning system for handling complaints.

Guidelines:
The HEI values its members and ensures that all its employees and students are treated according to the principle of equal treatment.

Employees and students of the HEI are guided by the agreed principles of academic ethics in all their activities.

The HEI respects fundamental values and policies of research set out in the document, 'Research Integrity', issued jointly by Estonian research institutions, the Estonian Academy of Sciences, the Estonian Research Council and the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research.

The HEI supports its students and teaching staff in their understanding and responding to ethical issues. Teaching staff and students do not tolerate academic fraud, including cheating and plagiarism, and they will act immediately upon any such occurrence.

Management of complaints from HEI members (including discrimination cases) is transparent and objective, ensuring fair treatment of all parties.

Indicator:

• Number of academic fraud cases

Evidence and analysis

The principles underpinning TLU's approach to academic ethics are based on the institution's values of openness, quality, professionalism, and unity at the core of which is academic freedom. It was clear from meetings with different categories of staff and with students that there is widespread understanding and adoption of these values which makes for a cohesive community.

TLU has consolidated, documented, and developed the area of academic ethics during the last few years. TLU was active in the development of the Estonian Code of Conduct for Research Integrity Agreement of which it is a signatory (SER). Following the publication of this Code, TLU set up an Ethics Working Group in 2019 to develop greater systematicity and to extend the work to embrace ethics across all institutional activity. The Working Group proposed concrete recommendations which have already resulted in some substantial developments.

The University is developing its *Tallinn University Good Academic Practice*. The first chapter of this is the Code of Conduct for Research Integrity which was agreed and published at the beginning of 2021. The Panel learned that the chapter had been presented and discussed in school council meetings and in some single-issue staff meetings in the schools. This demonstrates good progress.

The good academic practice document chapter on research integrity includes guidance and helpful links to the form's applicants need to complete, links to external sources of information, guidance, and advice. The chapter is comprehensive and well structured.

A second action emerging from the working group is the establishment of an Ethics Committee in late 2019. The Committee's statutes meet statutory regulations including those related to data protection. Its sphere of operation is clearly outlined and included on the website, as is the membership of the Committee. The website page provides guidance on who can submit a research project to the Committee and links to the appropriate documentation. The Committee is working well. There is an appropriate record of applications for approval with reasons for the application stated.

The working group also proposed the appointment of research ethics advisers to support staff and students. TLU agreed to appoint four advisers to be located in four research groups. At the time of the assessment, TLU was in the process of appointing the research ethics advisers.

The School of Educational Sciences has developed training materials for doctoral and master's students to support the practice of research ethics. There is a generic section which can be used across the University and a discipline specific part to be developed by the schools to ensure that the particularities of different disciplines are addressed appropriately. The Panel learned that some materials had been shared with other Schools, but it was not clear whether this had been done consistently.

The Panel learned from students that they were clear about the need to sign a declaration with their thesis submission to demonstrate that they understood and had followed research ethics requirements.

Further chapters of *Tallinn University Good Academic Practice* were still in the development phase at the time of the accreditation. However, the Panel commends TLU for the progress so far and for the direction it is taking.

The Panel learned that TLU's approach to plagiarism and academic misconduct focused more on developing students' understanding of the academic culture rather than stressing the punitive side. This approach is supported by the development of materials for teaching academic writing. The Panel learned that it is a requirement for all study programmes to include an element of academic writing. In some cases, this will occur in courses in every year of study to ensure the embedding of students' awareness of plagiarism and the importance of academic ethics. The Panel found that the Good Learning Practice project through LIFE in which students developed materials published on the website to be commendable practice.

TLU uses the Urkund software for students' final work at all levels and has tracked the instances of plagiarism detected. It was clear from discussions with staff, that TLU recognises the limitations of Urkund for the Estonian language, as a small language, and also recognises the challenges of detecting academic plagiarism, especially in the digital age. TLU also acknowledged that it would be beneficial

to extend the use of Urkund to other student work, whilst recognising that not all cases might be detected and thus reported.

TLU has identified three levels of plagiarism: that which occurs in regular or daily studies; that which occurs in work contributing to the overall programme outcome and the third level which is the thesis. The first level is handled through discussions with the relevant staff member; the second may result in a penalty. There is no centralised system to monitor or collect data on instances of plagiarism. This means that repeat offenders are unlikely to be identified even at study programme level. The risk is even greater in the case of interdisciplinary and joint programmes. At the third level there is centralised data from Urkund, which is, as noted, limited.

The Working Group on academic ethics also recommended the creation of a Commissioner for Equal Treatment; recruitment to the role was being undertaken at the time of the Panel's assessment. This is a promising development which has the potential to ensure equitable treatment of cases of academic misconduct. It was not clear to the Panel whether the role would also provide guidance and support for handling students' final work which consists of an artefact or a project rather than a longer, prose dissertation.

Conclusions

Overall, it is clear that TLU takes the question of academic ethics seriously. There has been significant progress to achieve a comprehensive and systematic framework and support mechanisms. There were a number of initiatives that were still to be agreed and implemented, and promising progress on these was demonstrated. Further work needs to be taken on the detection of plagiarism, which the Panel recognises is challenging, and on ensuring that there is a consistent approach to handling cases of plagiarism across the University to ensure equality of treatment.

Strengths

- The comprehensive and structured approach that TLU has taken to developing research ethics.

- The phased and careful development of the *Tallinn University Good Academic Practice* which sets a robust basis for academic ethics.

- Engaging students in the writing of web-based materials for the Good Learning Practice project on plagiarism.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- TLU should continue to explore more effective and accurate ways of recording and analysing data in cases of academic misconduct.

Opportunities for further improvement

- TLU is advised to ensure that there is consistency in the implementation of how academic misconduct cases are handled particularly in the context of an increase in interdisciplinary and joint study programmes.

- TLU is also encouraged to invest in more pre-emptive work, including staff development, as a means for reducing plagiarism.

1.5 Internationalisation

Standard:

The higher education institution has set objectives for internationalisation and assesses the attainment of these objectives regularly. The higher education institution has created an environment that encourages international mobility of students and teaching staff, supporting the development of learning, teaching and RDC activities, as well as the cultural openness of its members and Estonian society in general.

Guidelines:

The HEI creates opportunities for international student exchanges by offering study programmes and/or modules taught in English. The learning environment at the HEI supports internationalisation and cultural openness.

Recognition of qualifications and recognition of prior learning and work experiences for student admission and programme completion are in accordance with the quality requirements set by the HEI, are systemic and consistent with the expected learning outcomes and support international student mobility.

The organisation of studies at the HEI facilitates student participation in international mobility. The HEI has agreements with foreign higher education institutions and, through international exchange, sends its students abroad to study and undertake practical trainings, providing comprehensive support for this. Members of the teaching staff encourage students to participate in international mobility.

International lecturers participate in the process of teaching, including supervision of doctoral theses.

The HEI supports and recognises the participation of its teaching staff in international teaching, research, or creative projects, as well as their teaching, research or creative work and personal development which are performed at HEIs abroad.

Indicators:
- *Teaching staff mobility (in-out)*
- *Student mobility (in-out)*
- *Number of English-taught study programmes by main units and levels of study*

Evidence and analysis

TLU's internationalisation strategy forms part of the 2015–2020 Development plan. This states that TLU aims to be internationally competitive and move up the rankings table (SER, M). The Panel could not find a clear statement as to the areas TLU aims to be internationally competitive in nor could it find indicators or specific measurements of achievement in the DP or the SER. (M). The Panel learned

from staff that TLU is currently in the 800–1000 ranking bracket and that the target is to be in the top 750 within 5 years. In the context of the new DP, the strategy needs to be clear in scope in its interpretation of internationalisation at TLU, and it should have goals that are specific, time related and linked to specific key indicators that can be monitored and measured. These goals must also be underpinned by the resources needed to achieve them and be well integrated with other strategic areas such as digital education, sustainability, and service to society. This will enable TLU to have a clear route for the realisation of its internationalisation ambitions.

TLU prides itself on its English medium bachelor's and master's programmes, on which there are many international students (SER). Furthermore, it stimulates international research and relevant networks, is partner in a number of international exchange networks and recently (co-)established a small international university network with, amongst others, Pisa, and Hamburg. The SER states that these activities have resulted in an increase in the numbers of international staff, a move for Estonian staff returning from abroad, and an increase in the numbers of international students enrolled on study programmes. These activities and developments are commendable.

The Panel learned that the strategy for attracting and exchanging students was to focus on a few selected target countries, that are also target countries for Estonian higher education (M, T). Whilst this is a sound approach, it is important to remember that as a well-defined internationalisation strategy is implemented, it may be necessary to make decisions for additional target countries. In the world of student-university networks, partner universities are important for international recognition, thus partnering-up is a good approach to take. The Panel found that TLU's new university wide network with partners such as Hamburg, Pisa, and Salzburg, is a good initiative which supports the strengthening of ties.

The SER contains tables and figures on internationalisation, including the numbers of incoming foreign students and outgoing Estonian students. The SER states that the numbers of outgoing students as an area for improvement. Overall, the weakest aspect of TLU's internationalisation drive is outward exchange. The outward mobility of both staff and students is very limited (SER, M, T). Although TLU has taken steps to invest in this area by providing, for example, funding for staff mobility, the impact has been negligible. TLU could explore other options such as shorter visits abroad for staff and students, or participation in summer or winter schools abroad. The Panel considers it particularly important for TLU to ensure that doctoral students spend some time abroad during the research and during the writing process.

The Panel learned that there are factors that limit students' outward mobility, particularly personal and financial factors, which it is very difficult for the University to influence. The Panel also learned that TLU requires master's students to take at least one course where the language of instruction is not Estonian and requires all BA study programmes to include at least one course conducted in English. This does provide opportunities for some exposure to internationalisation. The Panel consider it worth exploring further what an '*internationalisation at home*' approach might be. This could include investing in digital partnerships which facilitate digital exchanges for students and staff or offering joint digital courses with co-teaching in joint collaboration with a foreign university. The purpose of such activities would be to give staff and students '*a home abroad experience'* and create an international classroom experience for all students. Greater promotion of courses from the English-medium programmes to programmes delivered in Estonian could be strengthened whilst recognising both any legal limits and the need to ensure a fit with the intended learning outcomes. More broadly,

and in line with the overall impact of an internationalisation strategy, the Panel considers that intended learning outcomes could be reviewed in the light of an '*internationalisation at home*' agenda in order to support the participation of Estonian students alongside international students in English language courses.

The implication of these suggestions is that Internationalisation should be viewed not so much as an aim in itself, but a driver for improvement in research, teaching and education as well as continuous critical reflection on the integration of internationalisation in all TNU's programmes. For example, TLU has proven strengths in digital learning and teaching which it can build on to further strengthen internationalisation in, for example, mixed classes of Estonian and international students. Both TLU and partner staff could deliver courses which would enhance TLU's standing as base for innovative digital learning as well as supporting more environment friendly learning.

TLU states that students can transfer ECTS credits gained abroad for both core and elective courses. However, students from the European Modern Languages and Culture study programme reported that ECTS credits gained abroad could only be recognised against electives and not against core courses (S). To support the greater integration of internationalisation, TLU needs to consider carefully how more formal weight, in terms of ECTS, could be given for courses successfully completed abroad and must ensure that students are fully and consistently informed of the possibilities and the associated processes. This is particularly important for language programmes, where international exchange is a key learning experience for students.

TLU has paid attention to communication with international staff and students and issues various newsletters. Producing a bilingual newsletter would help to integrate Estonian and international staff and students and signal TLU's international intentions.

Conclusions

TLU has made significant progress in internationalisation and has reached a point where it needs to reformulate its internationalisation strategy to provide more focus, to identify specific targets and goals which reflect the University' areas of strength. There is an opportunity to integrate other strategic areas, such as digital education, into the internationalisation strategy to bring greater cohesion and potential.

TLU has English-medium programmes which could be further developed to support an '*internationalisation at home strategy'*. Such a strategy is one way of meeting the challenges of mobility, the causes of which are lie beyond the University's sphere of influence.

Strengths

- The relatively large number of English-medium programmes and the good percentage of incoming students and foreign staff.

- TLU's identification of internationalisation as a major strategic focus.

- The commitment to communications in both Estonian and English and the support for international staff to learn Estonian.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The Panel could not find a clear statement as to what areas TLU aims to be internationally competitive nor could it find indicators or measurements of achievement in the DP or the SER. TLU must define the scope of internationalisation more clearly, elaborate specific goals with key indicators which are underpinned by appropriate resources so that it can meet and demonstrate the achievements of its internationalisation ambitions.

- The Panel learned that, although ECTS credits gained abroad can be recognised against electives and core courses, students were not well and accurately informed of this. It is recommended that TLU ensures that the opportunity to have ECTS credits gained abroad recognised against both core and elective courses is consistently and accurately communicated to students.

Opportunities for further improvement

- TLU is encouraged to build on its areas of strength and expertise and develop the concept and its implementation of '*internationalisation at home*' to overcome the current weakness in the numbers of outward student mobility. This would also provide opportunities for staff in terms of joint teaching.

1.6 Teaching staff

Standard:
Teaching is conducted by a sufficient number of professionally competent members of the teaching staff who support the development of learners and value their own continuous self-development.

Guidelines:
Members of the teaching staff engage systemically in development of their professional and teaching skills, improve their supervision competence, and share best practices with one another. Teaching staff's participation in research, development and/or creative activities supports the teaching process and ensures competence for the supervision of students' theses (including doctoral theses).

Members of the teaching staff collaborate in fields of teaching, research and/or creative work within the HEI and with partners outside the HEI, e.g. with field practitioners, public sector organisations, companies, other research and development institutions, and lecturers from other Estonian or foreign higher education institutions. Qualified visiting lecturers and practitioners participate in the teaching process.

When assessing the work of teaching staff (including their periodical evaluations), the effectiveness of their teaching as well as their research, development and creative work is taken into account, including student feedback, the effectiveness of their student supervision, development of their teaching and supervisory skills, their international mobility, and their entrepreneurial experience or other work experience in their fields of speciality outside the HEI.

Indicators:

- *Competition for elected academic positions*
- *Results of students' feedback about the teaching staff*
- *Teaching staff participating in continuing training or other forms of teaching skills development*

Evidence and analysis

TLU employs approximately 400 full time equivalent (FTE) academic staff. Overall, academic staff are well qualified in their respective teaching and research fields. 60% of academic staff hold a PhD qualification. The SER quotes a steady increase in the staff-student ratios: this is positive.

Employment processes are regulated by the Estonian statutory framework, with academic staff securing various roles through different mechanisms: promotion, public competition, or nomination (M). TLU introduced a new career model that provides routes to tenureship and aims to standardise more fully the requirements for different positions. A PhD is a minimum requirement for roles starting from lecturer, with junior lecturers being required to start their doctoral education to be eligible for appointment to this role. The Panel learned that some lecturers who are currently PhD candidates have been notified of the need to finalise their PhD studies to allow them to retain their academic

position. The career model offers a robust mechanism to ensure staff are working to the same expectations and well informed about what steps are required to enable them to seek promotion. At the time of the accreditation, the Panel was informed that only a few staff had undergone attestation under the new career model. It was therefore too early to assess the effectiveness of the process or reflect on lessons learned. However, human resources staff confirmed that they were monitoring the process to ensure relevant adjustments were considered to increase efficiency and reliability (M). The University aims to appoint more staff with international profiles; the low salaries, Covid-19 restrictions, and broader cultural issues are significant obstacles.

Academic units negotiate salaries with individual staff based on the overall salary scale and on performance. Although basic salaries are higher than the average in Estonia, staff are somewhat dissatisfied. Their concerns are mainly about excessive workload and bureaucracy. Personnel Office role regarding salary levels is limited to the provision of advice and guidance to line managers about limits (M). In addition to the negotiated salary, staff may also be paid a performance bonus for outstanding achievements. The Panel recognises the steps TLU has taken to incentivize and motivate staff for good performance. However, there are risks including inconsistency, unfairness and possible conscious or unconscious bias in relation to gender.

The career model includes staff appraisal which comprises annual development meetings with direct line managers and quinquennial attestation. Annual discussions are developmental, formally recorded and include actions which are voluntary (M). The Panel understood that there was so far no direct link between these discussions and the strategic aims of the unit. Furthermore, the Panel understood that there is no stated aim of aligning individual staff development activities with the broader directions in strategic plans. The Panel could not ascertain how this system ensures that any cases of under-performance, as reported by students, for example, would lead to a plan intended to address the shortcomings. Managers confirmed that the process does not lead to mandatory action on the part of staff who are free to design their own developmental learning (M). TLU highlighted career development discussions as an area for improvement within the SER; however, no concrete planned action was apparent to the panel at the time of the visit.

TLU publishes a weekly list of the many continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities which staff may enrol on (SER). The Panel learned that the move to an online teaching environment in response to the pandemic was challenging for many staff who experienced a steep learning curve to acquire the technological skills and adopt the online pedagogies needed to deliver quality teaching and learning. Some staff reported that the courses they had undertaken provided them with more confidence to meet the challenges. It was difficult for the Panel to understand how the voluntary nature of staff development would ensure that all staff were appropriately skilled for the online environment. Moreover, the Panel learned there is no monitoring of staff development by the University and no data on staff participation in CPD, its alignment with strategic objectives or the contribution it makes to meeting these (M). The Panel considered that this means the University does not know what benefits or impact the resources invested in CPD are yielding, and it also raises the risk of CPD being exclusively a matter of individual preference rather than strategic direction. This means that an important opportunity is lost to serve the stated strategic priorities which the institution sets.

Most academic staff have a varied workload with teaching, research, and community-facing activities, and possibly management tasks. The Panel learned that in the new salary system workload is negotiated in the annual development meetings and adjustments can be made, if necessary, during

the year, if, for example, there is an increase in workload due to unexpected circumstances (M, T). The Panel, however, noted that salaries are negotiable on a yearly basis and staff are monitored for increased workload to ensure that salary negotiations are underpinned by accurate data. The Panel heard of examples where some staff worked twice as much but the salary was only commensurate with a 10% increase. The Panel learned that Estonian labour law imposes a 40 +12-hour weekly cap, so that workload would not exceed these parameters (M). A semester long sabbatical for research was quoted as a viable option to rebalance workload. Staff confirmed that this was an option, but few had taken it up. Sabbaticals are planned in advance to ensure that there is an appropriate replacement; alternatively, courses may be rescheduled so as not to disadvantage students (M).

It was clear that staff are committed to offering a positive, supported learning experience which students from a range of programmes value highly (S). Whilst there is no University protocol to manage the expectations of students in relation to staff availability and response times, staff reported that they are in frequent contact with students and that during the pandemic they offered extended support to students (T).

Although the Panel generally found that the staff base has the relevant expertise to deliver the core elements of the programme, they also heard of instances of students teaching their peers, as for example, on the Digital Learning Games Master's programme. Some staff have industry experience which enables them to support, effectively, the development of workplace competencies, ensures currency of the curriculum and the development of an employable graduate profile. Non-academic guest lecturers, from industry, for example, are also used to offer sessions or whole courses. The Panel recognize the value such contributions make. However, these contributions should not be used as a compensation for lack of core expertise. Moreover, contributions from visiting staff and if applicable from students should be supervised and those undertaking such teaching should participate in training for teaching and, where relevant, assessment to ensure quality standards are maintained.

There are increasing numbers of English-medium programmes and a growing number of multicultural and multilingual classrooms. Staff indicated that they were aware of and relevantly equipped to deliver teaching in a multilingual classroom; however, the Panel was unclear as to whether focused training had been offered in this area.

Conclusions

Overall staff are committed and enthusiastic and generally sufficient for the delivery of the curriculum. The implementation of the new staffing model is still in its early days; however, staff reported positively about it. TLU recognizes that workload calculations would benefit from being more consistent and properly monitored, a view the Panel shares. Consistency and monitoring should also cover CPD activity.

There is good provision of CPD opportunities, including for the upskilling of staff to respond to the challenges of online learning and teaching as a result of the pandemic. However, the voluntary nature of CPD needs to be addressed to ensure that all staff have current skills to deliver the teaching and to support students' learning. The provision and uptake of CPD for industry specialist contribution to the teaching and for students should be implemented.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- To ensure the fairness, transparency, and equitability of the workload allocations, it is recommended that TLU prioritise actions which support workload calculations.

- The Panel considered that the University does not know what benefits or impact the resources invested in CPD are yielding, and it also raises the risk of CPD being exclusively a matter of individual preference rather than strategic direction. This means that an important opportunity is lost to serve the stated strategic priorities which the institution sets. The Panel recommend that TLU should introduce a system for monitoring and recording the CPD activity of staff ensuring that it is aligned to strategic priorities so that the University is aware of the value and impact of the resources invested in it.

Opportunities for further improvement

- TLU should consider making CPD compulsory to ensure all staff have current pedagogic knowledge and skills.

- The Panel advises TLU to continue the systematic implementation of the career model and to monitor progress and consistency across the schools.

- TLU is encouraged to align developmental discussions and related CPD to its strategic development plans.

- TLU should continue to ensure systematic supervision and targeted pedagogical training to industry representatives, professional experts, alumni, or students invited to contribute to teaching modules. This will ensure that quality is maintained, and students are exposed to positive teaching experiences.

1.7 Study programme

Standard:
Study programmes are designed and developed while taking into account the expectations of stakeholders, higher education and professional standards, and trends in the relevant fields. The objectives of study programmes, modules and courses and their planned learning outcomes are specific and coherent. The study programmes support creativity, entrepreneurship, and development of other general competencies.

Guidelines:
In planning study programmes and student places, the HEI pursues its objectives and the needs of the labour market and takes into account national strategies and the expectations of society. The planned learning outcomes are in accord with the requirements for the corresponding level of the Estonian Qualifications Framework.

Expected student workloads defined in the study programmes are realistic and consistent with the calculation that 1 ECTS credit equals 26 student learning hours.

Theoretical learning and practical learning are interconnected. The content and organisation of practical trainings support the achievement of learning outcomes of the study programme and meet the needs of all parties.

Evidence and analysis

TLU aims to develop future-oriented study programmes that have social relevance and include a strong interdisciplinary component which works in tandem with disciplinary learning. Study programmes are designed to develop a student's awareness of a field of knowledge as well as subject-specific and transferable skills. The objective is to ensure all students develop as independent learners and "value entrepreneurship". This is facilitated by the learner-centred ethos and the integration of traineeship opportunities within study programmes.

The University has developed coherent structures across eighteen study programme groups to ensure all students take core and elective modules, as well as interdisciplinary LIFE modules. Programme development at subject level is indexed to the University's overall development plans, which function in dialogue with the expectations of the Ministry of Education and Research. The Panel had confidence that the objective to ensure programmes are cohesive and that learning outcomes meet the national qualifications framework is being met, in alignment with the expectations of students and employers. The Panel saw room to improve horizontal communication between study programmes to ensure that systems, such as mechanisms for plagiarism detection, are harmonized across TLU.

The consultation process for developing a study programme considers the views of students as well as those of the contributing academic units. Surveys sent to graduating students provide data that enable programme managers to adjust elements of the study programme as well as providing an indication of student satisfaction with teaching quality. The University acknowledges that survey response rates are sometimes low and that coordination of information from the surveys needs to be improved. A committee structure of alumni and employers at study programme level, with a rolling membership, might offer more directed advice about programme development.

The Panel found good evidence of support for creativity and innovation in the study programmes reviewed. The development of general competences has been a focus over the last few years and the SER states that there has been an increase in the general satisfaction with their development. The compulsory LIFE course equips students with general competencies experience and knowledge of transdisciplinary problem-based learning and promotes creativity and innovation. This course is a strength of TLU.

Elective modules are set at a consistent percentage of credits of the overall study programme and have been designed to give students a degree of control over their learning pathways. Often, elective modules are informed by an instructor's own research, complementing broader modules that introduce a field of study. This does, however, raise questions about the sustainability of electives should a member of staff be taken ill or leave the University suddenly. The elective structure aims to encourage language-learning, the acquisition of digital skills and study abroad.

The *Statute of Study Programme* is a regulatory framework for shaping "*the structure, conditions and procedures for opening, developing and closing a degree study programme*". The Statute includes general requirements, undergraduate study, taught postgraduate study, doctoral study, and professional study. Quality assurance and expectations about the internal evaluation of study programmes are clearly stated in this document. The Statute sets out the language requirement at bachelor's and master's level and language proficiency expectations at the point of graduation. Details about opening and closing a study programme are clearly articulated, indexed to the sustainability of resources, the language proficiency of instructors in that subject area, and requisite academic expertise and experience at doctoral level. The Statute is also clear in its structures for University-wide courses, with a balance between supportive structures and challenge which is designed to expand a student's horizons through interdisciplinary study.

Governance and the system for developing a programme through systematic analysis are clearly stated in the SER, including the role of the Council of Studies in assessing the relevance of the study programme to the labour market. There is good evidence to show internal evaluation occurs annually, including feedback from students, alumni, and employers, with further feedback given via the Council of Studies. The annual review of study programmes is supplemented by a more wide-ranging subject review every three year, including a report on "the professionalism" of academic staff and an appraisal of students' final theses. Significant changes to a study programme require approval by the Board of Studies, following consultation with the Academic Affairs Office and Senate.

The description for closing a study programme (Statute section VIII) is less detailed than other areas of the Statute. For example, little detail is given about what triggers an institutional review or what criteria informs the Senate's decision to close a programme other than broad statements about enrolment and quality. This lack of detail is echoed in the SER which gives threshold numbers, 22 at bachelor's level and 12 at master's level, and mentions exceptions for subjects of "national/strategic importance". Given that a number of study programmes have relatively few students, and are therefore potentially vulnerable to fluctuations in the admissions cycle, it would be helpful to have a fuller statement about the process of evaluation, levels of consultation with relevant stakeholders, when in an academic year or cycle such a decision is likely to be taken, and when and how this is communicated to staff and students.

TLU aims to index the development of study programmes to future developments of Estonian society and the "Estonia 2035" vision document. At the time of the assessment visit the final action plan related to "Estonia 2035" had only just been published. The University had not, therefore, had time to incorporate the action plan into its vision for its study programmes. TLU has incorporated some elements of the Estonia 2035 strategy into its 2020-2022 DP. The Panel recognizes the constraints of timing and also financial constraints; this does not, however, prevent TLU from being more ambitious in its vision for its programme portfolio.

The SER makes it clear that study programmes are designed to help students develop digital skills within a flexible structure to suit the rising number of students over 25 years of age. A pilot of a web-based study programme with Cyprus University of Technology for the MA Interaction Design may prompt the University to think more broadly about the digital or blended delivery of degree materials which should be evidenced with best-practice models from elsewhere in Europe. This links to the recognition that a coherent and consistent approach needs to be taken to reduce relatively high levels of dropouts and to increase the number of students graduating within the nominal period.

Conclusions

Overall study programmes and the processes for reviewing them meet the expectations. Evidence from discussions with staff, students and external stakeholders support the claims made in the SER. The review, development and implementation process of curriculum redesign takes the views of stakeholders into account. The Panel saw good evidence of ongoing refinements to ensure learning outcomes are clearly articulated to students and meet the expectations of employers.

The Panel found that a clearer systems-led approach to programme review would ensure that departments are provided with enabling structures and appropriate administrative support. Whilst acknowledging financial constraints, TLU would benefit from having a clearer statement about its priorities for developing new study programmes. The SER identified the creation of a university-wide network of study programme administrators is planned: such a network might also feed into a review of how the range of study programmes could be developed through joint and new initiatives.

It was clear that the objective to instil a spirit of independence and entrepreneurship is succeeding, via flexible study modes, interdisciplinary modules, and traineeship opportunities (S). There are opportunities to embed more language learning and digital literacy in study programmes to meet employer needs. The Panel found that there is a need for a more joined-up approach to tackling the drop-out rate and to improve the numbers of students graduating within the nominal study period.

Strengths

- All study programmes have been through a rigorous review process since 2016, which, in some areas, included a complete redesign to meet the expectations of students and employers.

- The success in instilling a sense of students as independent learners and in embracing a spirit of entrepreneurism.

- The LIFE course which helps all students to think about their study both within and beyond disciplinary boundaries.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- It is recommended that TLU clarifies the process of internal evaluation and its implementation to ensure that study programme development is consistent and systematic across the range of programmes.

- TLU is recommended to clarify its policy, procedures and guidelines concerning the reduction or closure of study programmes so that there is a consistency of implementation and that students, staff and other relevant stakeholders are communicated with in a timely fashion.

- The Panel found that there was not yet a clearly articulated view of how future programmes would be developed. The plans seen for future programme development were modest. It is recommended that TLU develop a clearer strategy for developing new areas of the curriculum, including joint study programmes linking cognate subject areas.

Opportunities for further improvement

- TLU is encouraged to develop a more systematic approach to the engagement of stakeholders such as a formal network of alumni and employers or a committee at study programme level.

- TLU could consider building further ways of encouraging students to develop their language skills and their skills is digital literacy during their studies.

- TLU is advised to take coherent and consistent action to reduce dropout rates and increase completion rates within the nominal study period.

1.8 Learning and teaching

Standard:
Admissions requirements and procedures ensure fair access to higher education and the formation of a motivated student body. The higher education institution systemically implements a student-centred approach that guides students to take responsibility for their studies and career planning and supports creativity and innovation. Graduates of the higher education institution, with their professional knowledge and social skills, are competitive both nationally and internationally.

Guidelines:
The teaching process takes into account students' individual abilities and needs and supports their development. Organisation of independent work and classroom teaching motivates students to take responsibility for their studies.

Teaching methods and learning aids used in the teaching process are modern, appropriate, and effective, and support development of a digital culture.

Students are motivated to learn and contribute to improving the quality of their studies by providing meaningful feedback on both the learning process and the organisation of studies.

Doctoral students plan their studies, as well as their research and development activities, in collaboration with their supervisor(s), setting specific objectives for each year and assuming responsibility for achieving those objectives.

Indicators:
- *Student satisfaction with the content and organisation of studies*
- *Alumni satisfaction with the quality of studies*
- *Employer satisfaction with the preparation of the graduates*

Evidence and analysis

TLU regulates admission as stipulated in the *Tallinn University Requirements and Procedures for the Admission to Degree Studies.* Admission requirements and procedures for all study programmes are published on the TLU webpages and updated annually based on admission process analysis. By implementing uniform requirements TLU aims to guarantee equal treatment for all applicants. The Panel found that admissions procedures generally work well. They are transparent, flexible across programmes and are reviewed and revised in the light of student feedback.

Admissions are influenced by demographic changes and growth in the numbers of international students. One of TLU's goals is to increase the proportion of students who graduate within the nominal period of studies and to decrease the drop-out rates which are high. The SER states that TLU has identified the reasons for the high drop-out rate and is looking into possible solutions. One of the actions taken to affect the study time was to increase awareness of specialties and this has had some

impact. However, it did not impact on the drop-out rate. Raising awareness of the challenges of combining studies and work was also identified as one of the main reasons for students suspending their studies. The Panel considers that it would be beneficial to look at data analytics on student activity, success, and drop-out rates in relation to the different admissions criteria used in order to assess if these criteria could benefit from further refinement.

The organisation of studies at TLU is regulated by *Tallinn University Study Regulations*, *and Tallinn University Regulations for Doctoral Studies and Defence of Doctoral Theses*. Information related to studies is recorded in the study information system (SIS). Effective practice of larger Estonian universities is taken into consideration when preparing changes to the regulations. Updates are made twice a year.

One of the stated aims of TLU is student-centred learning and, according to the SER, educational innovation is one of the strategic goals for the new Development Plan. The Statue of Study Programmes gives responsibility for checking that teaching methods meet learning outcomes to programme administrators. The Panel found that much freedom is given to academic units and to academic staff to decide on the delivery of the teaching and learning. The SER claims that this approach enables teaching to meet the needs and specific features of the academic unit and the study programme. The Panel found evidence in all the study programmes under review of students being supported in taking responsibility for their own learning. However, whilst the Panel found no evidence that teaching methods were not appropriate, it was not confident that there were sufficiently transparent mechanisms in place to ensure the systematic use and sharing of good practice related to student centred learning and to ensuring that teaching enabled students to meet the learning outcomes.

Traineeship is mandatory in all first and second level study programmes. The overall satisfaction with traineeship is high. The SER identifies the challenges of finding traineeships and states that academic units are systematically involved in the identification of suitable traineeship opportunities. On the master's programme in Educational Innovation and Leadership, students are able to identify their own traineeships, if preferred, and this may be in their home country which helps to solve the particular challenge of finding English language traineeship places. There is some use of virtual, online internships which is an area for further investigation.

The implementation of digital tools is not obligatory. The University's e-Learning Centre provides support to teaching staff with their use. E-learning webpages offer a quick overview to academic staff on how to build up a Moodle course, which online platforms to use and some good practices for teaching online. It is directed at academic staff. The web pages do not include guidelines for students on how to learn online. Given that feedback from students shows that the use of multiple online platforms is confusing, such guidance would be helpful.

Doctoral studies are well planned with annual assessments and study plans. The effectiveness and satisfaction with them were demonstrated in discussions with staff and students on the Health Behaviour and Wellbeing doctoral studies programme.

The employment figures presented in the SER are good with 97% employed after one year. This indicates that graduates are competitive, and this was confirmed in meetings with alumni and employers (A, E).

Conclusions

Overall admissions procedures work well and are flexible and transparent. The Panel found that analysing the progression and drop-out rates and linking these to admissions would be valuable. It is clear that students develop as independent learners and are exposed to good and effective teaching and learning although there is little evidence to indicate how this is systematically assured across TLU. The development of general competencies, transdisciplinary and problem-based learning is good, and the LIFE course is commended.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- In order to be sure that TLU systemically implements a student-centred approach it needs to develop clear procedures to monitor and control the range of teaching methods used in different academic units. These procedures should include monitoring the coherence of teaching methods with the learning outcomes to ensure the systematic implementation of a student-centred approach.

Opportunities for further improvement

- TLU is encouraged to use data analytics to inform improvements for admissions, and teaching and learning.

- TLU is encouraged to undertake more collective research and development of innovative methods of teaching, learning and assessment and their effective dissemination across the University.

1.9 Student assessment

Standard:

Standard: Assessments of students, including recognition of their prior learning and work experiences, support the process of learning and are consistent with expected learning outcomes. The objectivity and reliability of student assessments are ensured.

Guidelines:

The assessment criteria are understandable to students and students are informed about them in a timely manner. Members of the teaching staff cooperate in defining assessment criteria and apply similar approaches.

Assessment methods are versatile and relevant and assess the degree of achievement of learning outcomes (including general competencies).

If possible, more than one staff member is involved in the development of assessment tasks and student assessments. Along with assessments, students receive feedback that supports their individual development.

The HEI supports development of the teaching staff's assessment competencies.

Evaluation of doctoral students is transparent and impartial. Its purpose is to support the development of doctoral students, to assess the effectiveness of their current work and to evaluate their ability to complete the doctoral studies on time and successfully defend their doctoral theses.

When recognising prior learning and work experience towards the completion of the study programme, results obtained through the studies and work experiences (the achieved learning outcomes) are assessed.

Students are aware of their rights and obligations, including the procedures for challenges regarding assessments.

Indicator:
• *The number of credit points applied for and awarded under the accreditation of prior and experiential learning scheme (APEL); this does not include credit points transferred from a different study programme at the same HEI*

Evidence and analysis

Assessment processes and procedures, including the recognition of previous studies and work experience (RPL), are based on national regulations and *Tallinn University Study Regulation*. Assessment is intended to support learning and assess the achievement of intended learning outcomes (SER, M). The planned assessments and criteria are made available to students on registration on the courses (S, T M). There is a separate guide for traineeship implementation which aims to regulate all aspects of traineeship but does not cover assessment (SER).

The design and type of assessment is delegated to the individual staff member or members who deliver the course (S, M). Although, according to the Statute of Study Programmes, the study

programme administrator is responsible for the oversight of assessment methods used in a particular course and in the overall programme at programme, school, or institutional level, the Panel found no evidence of formal tools to provide such oversight (M). Nor did the Panel see evidence of any guidance or regulation that ensures an appropriate range of assessment types and methods across a programme. This has the potential for students to be assessed by a limited range of assessment methods which may not provide the best support for their learning. The lack of oversight of what assessment methods are used in a study programme makes it difficult to see how the programme management can be confident that the assessment of general competencies is appropriately covered, that the learning outcomes are appropriately assessed or that there is coherence between the intended learning outcomes and the assessment. An overarching assessment plan for study programmes would enable management to have full oversight of the programme which would support both improvement and the sharing of innovative and/or effective practices at school and institutional level.

The SER states that both formative and summative assessment are used. The Panel did not find a clear articulation of how these were understood and deployed in all the study programmes under review. Most of the assessment types described by students and staff and made available to the Panel were both summative and formative.

TLU offers training in assessment methods and assessment criteria to academic staff (SER, M, T). The training is, however, optional. Given the institutional awareness of the need to develop staff's knowledge and ability in the area of assessment, the optional nature of training makes it difficult to see how the development of assessment can be directed strategically. A particular concern to the Panel was the involvement of master's students in the assessment of their peers on the Digital Learning Games study programme. Whilst the early involvement of students in teaching activities is commended, assessment should only be undertaken by academic staff.

There is a system in place for students to contest all assessment decisions. The process is presented on the TLU website which includes helpful examples of contesting and the decisions brought (SER, M). Students are aware that they can contest assessment outcomes and of the procedures in place to do this (S). The Panel learned that students often make use of this (T, M). There is no system for Individual teachers to record instances of assessment contests. Records are only made where the case is escalated to the school level (M). It was not entirely clear to the Panel whether schools consistently recorded cases of contestation and whether this was reported. The Panel learned that in a typical contestation, there are frequently unregulated consultations with the Academic Affairs Office (M). This scenario raises concerns over the transparency and uniformity of the process across schools and units and the degree to which regulations are embedded. Student contestations are seen as a way of providing input for improving and correcting assessment methods and criteria as well as study regulations (SER, M).

Many programmes have a thesis as a graduation requirement (SER). The thesis supervisor is not part of the thesis assessment committee (M) and the Panel learned that this how the University helps to ensure the objectivity of thesis grading. The assessment committee may include external members particularly at master's level and above (M, T).

Doctoral students must pass a yearly attestation where they present progress against their agreed individual study plan (SER, S, M). The Progress Review Committee offers feedback and possible

solutions to difficulties (SER, S, M) that the students find helpful and supportive (S). Students are aware of what is being assessed and how much it counts as progression in ECTS-s.

TLU has implemented an RPL system. The SER identifies and analyses a number of concerns regarding the system including the length of the process, the lack of clear information, limited feedback, and the poor range of assessment methods. The Panel learned that the submission form for RPL has not been revised or updated for a considerable time. The Panel also learned that TLU is working to clarify the recognition of prior work experience (M). The transfer and recognition of credits earned during a period of mobility was described as difficult (S). Not being able to transfer and have credits recognised may lead to prolongation of studies or decreased interest in mobility.

Conclusions

There are regulations and guidance governing assessment which operate at the individual course level. Responsibility for the design and implementation of assessments rests with the individual member of staff. This results in a lack of oversight at programme, school and institutional level which could impact on the quality of the student's learning and mean that opportunities for the sharing and dissemination of good practice in assessment are missed.

Students are satisfied with assessment and are clear about criteria. They are well informed of the processes to contest assessment outcomes.

The assessment of RPL, particularly the transfer of learning from mobility leaves room for improvement.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- To address the lack of oversight in assessment, it is recommended that TLU Develop a system that will give management a full picture of types and methods of assessment used in study programmes. The system should address the question of whether the learning outcomes are assessed and whether general competences are assessed.

- It is recommended that TLU addresses the difficulty of transfer of learning from mobility through more thorough mobility counselling and clearer process.

- A particular concern to the Panel was the involvement of master's students in the assessment of their peers on the Digital Learning Games study programme. Whilst the early involvement of students in teaching activities is commended, assessment should only be undertaken by academic staff.

Opportunities for further improvement

- TLU is encouraged to use project-based learning (LIFE course) and other assessment methods to assess general skills and competences.

- It would be beneficial to develop the contest procedure so that there is greater consistency across the institution. TLU could consider establishing a university level contest committee.

- TLU is encouraged to increase the variety of assessment methods, such as peer-assessment and continuous assessment, to expose students to a greater range of assessments.

1.10 Learning support systems

Standard:
The higher education institution ensures that all students have access to academic, career and psychological counselling. Students' individual development and academic progress are monitored and supported.

Guidelines:
The HEI assists the student in developing an individual study programme based on the student's special needs as well as educational abilities and preferences.

The HEI advises its students (including students with special needs and international students) on finding practical training places as well as jobs. Students are aware of where to get support in the case of psychological problems.

The HEI has a functioning system to support and advise international students (including psychological and career counselling) which, inter alia, helps them integrate smoothly into the membership of the HEI and Estonian society.

The HEI analyses the reasons students withdraw from studies or dropout and takes steps to increase the effectiveness of the studies.

The HEI supports student participation in extra-curricular activities and civil society initiatives. The HEI monitors student satisfaction with the counselling services provided and makes changes as needed.

Indicators:
- *The average duration of the study by levels of study*
- *Dropout/withdrawal rate*

Evidence and analysis

TLU's approach to counselling is in general strong despite feedback from students which indicates there is substantial room for improvement. TLU has a competent range of specialist counsellors (SER), organised to reflect the status of the student, for example, learner, external student, dropout, and study counsellors in the academic units. The study counsellor is the first point of contact who, if appropriate, directs the student to more specialist help and support, and may seek advice from academic programme coordinators, making access to specialist help easy for the student. Student councils and the Student Union are a further source of support. Guides, particularly targeted at first year students, are available on the web. An app offers additional help and contact information (M). All students are alerted to the services at the start of their programme. Counselling support has successfully moved online during the pandemic.

Counsellors are members of support staff and are usually recruited through open competition. Typically, they have been with TLU for a long time or are employees who may recently have been

students who will have a good understanding of students needs / their perspective. (Additional Materials). There is a strong approach to the induction and training for new counsellors which includes specific training offered by the Academic Affairs Office at least once a semester to develop skills and competencies related to the use of different IT systems and the organisation of studies. The academic unit appoints a mentor for study counsellors, typically the Head of Studies to provide additional support for students. Schools arrange regular meetings with advisors to discuss individual cases and plan activities (Additional Materials). A network of study programme counsellors exists, and frequent training and upskilling opportunities are offered, in addition to regular meetings.

TLU has one careers counsellor with whom Students can book an individual consultation online during normal working hours. More than ten slots are available each week, however typically not more than 3 /4 individual counselling sessions are utilised. Demand for services doubled during the early phases of the pandemic but the service was able to manage. The Panel learned that the demand had eased by the time of the assessment visit (M). The careers counsellor organises thematic seminars, traineeship fairs and manages potential work opportunities for students, including traineeship offers. The career counselling services are introduced to both Estonian and international students during the Open Doors Week and the Orientation Week (Additional Materials). Advice aimed specifically at international students includes, for example, tax, visa, and mental health issues to support their unique needs. This kind of advice is also provided by international admissions specialists from the Academic Affairs Office. One of the most frequent questions from international students concerns job and career opportunities in Estonia however the Panel learned that this is challenging given the need to speak Estonian, but there are some options, especially in the IT industry due to skills shortages in Estonia (M). The careers counsellor supports the students by holding regular traineeship or internship fairs to help students find placements which are mandatory in all programmes in the first two years of study. Students may find their own placement, which is typically the case for mature students who are more likely to have contacts local to their home. Students earn credit points for internships.

The counselling service covers a full range of student requirements including a disability advisor to support students with special needs (SER). Processes and procedures are followed to ensure students are fully supported. A personalised support plan is created which enables the student to select those services the student feels they need, there is no obligation to accept all the recommendations. Academic staff are kept informed, as required, of the recommendations for the individual student. For example, materials will be converted into an accessible format if needed (M).

Study counsellors advise students on their individual study programmes by, for example, proposing a sequence for their courses, ensuring students have the pre-requisite knowledge for each course. An approach to be commended is that first semester students are normally encouraged to take courses taught by their programme staff to enable close monitoring and support if needed. Counsellors provide support for recognition of prior learning (RPL) which is discussed with first-year students at the start of their courses. Study programme administrators assess applications which are for credits earned at the same level; where appropriate advice from academic staff is sought or in some cases, if needed, an assessment committee is formed. Other applications are assessed by a committee convened by the Head of Studies (Additional Materials). The fact that students have a much greater awareness of RPL than ten years ago was welcomed. It was, however, noted that the submission form has not changed for many years and would benefit from revision (M).

There is a good range of extra-curricular activities and civil society initiatives for which students can gain a few credit points. Activities include a range of clubs and events such as time management seminars and public speaking practice which are core skills for lifelong employment. A real strength of the approach is that peer student supporters are trained and attend all the induction sessions to help new students adjust to university life. Activities and events are advertised in the monthly newsletter to students.

The currency of materials is monitored through the study programme annual reporting system. Study programme coordinators undertake a self-analysis, which includes reflection on student satisfaction and programmes with low student satisfaction are monitored centrally. Overall student satisfaction has increased which demonstrates initiatives are effective (SER). Students are able to see a summary of the collective feedback from their peers once they have submitted their feedback.

Feedback on specific courses is provided to the teachers who have the opportunity to reply directly to the students if they wish; however, the study programme coordinator takes oversight of student feedback (M). Students are informed of changes made as a result of their feedback through a number of mechanisms, including newsletters and seminars. For the first time this year, academics were obliged to response to student feedback which is published on the website. The Panel noted that there is further work to do in this area to ensure that responses are more systematic across the range of study programmes (M).

A national survey of alumni indicated that international students were less satisfied with the services than Estonian students despite the fact they made greater use of it. Only 16% of international students had not used any of the services compared to 55% of Estonian students. Of those students who had used the service 72% of Estonian students were satisfied compared to only 58% of international students and although it might be that international students expect the university to fix problems such as accommodation and healthcare which are not under their control, TLU should investigate the reasons why in more depth (SER).

Dropout rates are below the national average. Between 2016 and 2020 they dropped from 17.5% to 12.2%, however rates are not even across subject areas. 35% of first years who dropped out did resume their studies within a year; 62% of these changed their speciality (SER). Typically, those students who do not return start by taking academic leave which provides a window of opportunity to offer support to encourage the student to return.

The proportion of students who graduated within the nominal period between 2016 and 2020 increased by 3% from 46.6% to 49.6%. A dropout intervention scheme has been piloted in some academic units which includes ensuring students understand the nature of their chosen studies, providing additional courses to help develop learning skills and more provision of teaching in the evenings for those students who work during the day. This has helped to improve motivation but there is still more work to do and dropout rates remain a challenge (SER, M).

TLU provides three virtual learning environments for IT support, including Moodle. The Panel leaned that the rationale for this is to provide staff with a choice and to enable students to experience several IT systems during their studies. Whilst variety can help develop students' IT skills, students reported that the multiple systems are complex and lack coherence. Technology changes rapidly. As long as students are experienced IT users who understand how to learn and adapt to a variety of technology, there is a balance to be found. Although TLU is aware that it needs to develop an environment by

which the various platforms can be further integrated, minimising the number of systems may reduce the hurdles facing students in their first semester, where the dropout rate is highest, and thus improve student success. Additionally, a single VLE would enable more integrated learning analytics which could help profile individual student's online engagement and provide an early alert that a student may be disengaging with their studies which can be acted upon. This could become critical in a more blended approach to learning. Whilst the costs of supporting three VLEs may not be high, the resource needed for additional staff to support three competing IT systems might be better deployed elsewhere.

Conclusions

TLU offers a wide variety of support to students covering a good range of services including: IT support, financial support for study and scholarships, library and a study centre, accommodation, a range of clubs and societies, and a strong network of academic and support counsellors, which includes support for student and staff mobilities. Student satisfaction in four key areas of timetabling, student information, availability of information, and information about changes have all increased positively between 2017 and 2019. There are clear examples of good practice in addition to areas for improvement.

Strengths

- The improvements achieved in reducing the student dropout rates and the numbers of students graduating within the nominal study period.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- TLU is recommended to take steps to address the reported levels of low satisfaction among international students with the counselling services, this may include splitting the analysis by the problems the counselling service could be expected to solve i.e. those which are the responsibility of the University, and those not within the control of the University such as accommodation and healthcare.

- There is a concern regarding the high dropout rate although progress is being made. In order to further improve the levels of retention, TLU is recommended to offer all students counselling before being removed from the matriculation register to ensure that all possible solutions have been explored to retain a student, before they are removed.

- There is a concern that there is no systematic approach as to how feedback is used and responded to despite the documented requirements. Academics were required for the first time this year to report what they did with student feedback. There needs to be a more systematic approach. TLU is recommended to further review how student feedback is used, and responded to, in order to improve the student experience.

Opportunities for further improvement

- TLU is encouraged to reflect on whether supporting three VLEs provides the best student learning experience and whether it contributes to or hinders the retention rate.

- TLU is encouraged to work with students to find alternative solutions to academic leave which may help address the dropout rates.

- TLU is encouraged to revise the submission form for the recognition of prior learning to ensure that it is user friendly and current.

1.11 Research, development and/or other creative activity

Standard:
The higher education institution has defined its objectives and focus in the fields of RDC based on its mission, as well as on the expectations and future needs of society, and assesses their implementation and the societal impact of its RDC activities. RDC supports the process of teaching and learning at the higher education institution. Support services for RDC are purposeful and support implementation of the objectives of the core process.

Guidelines:
The HEI places a high value on the role and responsibilities of the field of RDC in society and evaluates the results of its RDC activities, their international visibility and societal impact.

The HEI responds flexibly to the current needs of society and the labour market in terms of its research and plans its research in collaboration with enterprises, public sector institutions and organisations of the third sector.

Members of teaching staff introduce students to their research results as well as the latest scientific achievements in their areas of specialisation and involve students in their R&D projects where possible.

The organisation and management of RDC take into account thematic differences and the mission (profile) of the HEI.

Indicators depend on the specificities of the HEI:
• Numerical data: (1) scientific publications by classifiers; (2) public presentations of creative work; recognition from international competitions; reviews in professional publications, etc.; (3) patent applications, patents; (4) textbooks, study aids of various formats, etc.; (5) system development solutions; product development solutions; environmental applications solutions; (6) contracts concluded with enterprises; (7) spin-off companies, etc., in line with the profile and priorities of the HEI; etc.

• Number of scientific publications / creative works per member of academic staff and per employee with the requirement to do research (FTE, by areas)

• Number and volume of externally funded projects of RDC activities

Evidence and analysis

TLU bases its objectives and focus on the field of RDC on its mission, and on the expectations and anticipated needs of society. The SER states that RDC is one of the main goals of the Development Plan and is linked to Goal 1.4: Healthy and sustainable lifestyle. RDC is addressed explicitly in the University's mission. The Development Plan includes a set of general actions on RDC under the

leadership of the Vice-rector of Research. However, research is not specifically signalled in an individualized way in the Development Plan. The SER refers to the *Tallinn University Research and Development Strategy for 2019–2021* (in Estonian and English) as well as the strategic plans for each academic unit and TLU establishes its RDC goals based on the strategies and the results of external evaluations.

Following an external evaluation in 2015, TLU established five interdisciplinary Centres of Excellence: Educational Innovation; Media Innovation and Digital Culture; Intercultural Studies; Behavioural and Neural Sciences, and Interdisciplinary Life-course Studies. These centres are presented on the webpage, although information about their structure, activities and funding is vague. TLU also has RD Centres: The Institute of Ecology; the Centre for Innovation in Education; the Centre for Landscape and Culture; the Estonian Institute for Population Studies; the Institute of History, Archaeology and Art History; the Institute of International Social Studies; the Centre for Health Promotion and Rehabilitation; BFM Production Centre; the Centre for Educational Technology, and the Gender Studies Research Group. These RD centres are integrated into the academic units. Relationships between the units are multiple and the Panel found that they are based on individual initiatives rather than being systematic. When the centres were launched there was an initial call based on a set of staff research performance indicators inviting staff to apply to join the centres. The call remains open, offering researchers the opportunity to apply to join at any point. This infrastructure provides an administrative and financial framework which facilitates applications for grants and supports different activities. Internally the centres offer opportunities for collaboration between researchers, which are increasingly linked to PhD programmes. Externally they function as a focal point to attract grants, particularly European Development Funds and other European funds such as COST actions, focused contracts with different Ministries and the highly competitive national research projects.

Most of the research conducted has a strong emphasis on its social impact. Whilst RDC is most clearly linked to the strategic goal *Healthy and sustainable lifestyle*, it also permeates the other objectives. At the time of the assessment, TLU was undertaking a mapping of all the research groups, particularly in relation to communication strategies. It became clear to the Panel that the University was in an ongoing process of determining the strategic research foci for the coming years. Discussions were taking place in the context of shaping TLU's identity around Education Innovation, Digital Education and Sustainable Development.

TLU was subject to a number of national evaluations in the fields of natural and social sciences and in humanities. The resulting detailed reports included ratings, that were positive, as well as in-depth analyses and recommendations for improvement. TLU states that it has followed these recommendations. One recommendation highlighted the need to further strengthen the disciplines before aiming at interdisciplinary research, which the reports found to be overly strong. However, the Panel's assessment indicated that inter-disciplinary research is a strength of TLU. Targeted evaluations identified a positive trend in educational sciences, outstanding progress in educational technology, and an increase in the relevance of research in law to society. The external evaluations found that research performance has consistently improved over the last few years. TLU is better positioned in international rankings, several TLU researchers are recognized nationally and participate in Estonian high-level expert commissions and councils. TLU has a system for recognizing and rewarding the performance and the achievements of these scholars.

The Panel found that there is a systematic and strategic approach to reinforce RDC activities transversally (SER Development Plan). This approach promotes key initiatives, including the recruitment of researchers from abroad; promoting PhD students and postdocs stays abroad; supplementing PhD salaries; creating junior research posts; support for applying for external funding through the '*Project Farm'*; the creation of a network for research coordinators, and investment in infrastructure. Importantly, the new career model engages all staff in research and teaching. However, the SER indicates that full positions can be downsized to part-time if student numbers fall in study programmes. The Panel heard some evidence of this during the assessment. Whilst research activity is well supported in TLU, the practice of reducing staff positions is not in line with the overall commitment to RDC and indicates a lack of transparency in the management of the teaching and research activities of staff.

There has been a steady increase in research funding, with the majority coming from European projects, including 2 ERC grants. Funding from the hugely competitive and scarce National Research Projects is relatively small. TLU has established its own research fund which is mostly financed from the State's fixed research allowance. A part of the State allowance is distributed to the academic units to manage. Individual researchers can apply to the TLU Research Fund in competitive, regular calls. Unanticipated needs for scientific equipment replacement or repairs are met by the rectorate. Academic units may generate additional, and sometimes substantial, funding through their own projects and contracts. The University levies no overheads for these from the units which have autonomy to organize and execute their research budgets. The Panel learned that researchers, unit heads and senior management are generally satisfied with this mode of operation. The SER states that there is an increase in customer-based, applied research; the Panel heard some examples of this from researchers and management. The Panel found some tension as to how these activities conflict with the basic research that supports international and high-quality publications. A pilot programme to create spin-off is in the planning stage, and a Platform for external cooperation is in place. The University is working on developing industrial doctorates, although the Panel did not find any details about them.

TLU systematically evaluates the overall results of its RDC activities, as well as their international visibility and societal impact. The key indicators for monitoring RDC progress are publications per employee, volume of research funding and the number of PhD theses. Whilst the number of publications per individual per year is good, the quality of the publications is not clearly accounted for. Similarly, the way the performance of each unit or centre is evaluated, and the consequences of the outcome of the evaluation, were not clear. It was clear that RDC activities make an important contribution to the internationalization agenda, through international research networks and collaborations. However, it was not clear to the Panel how consistently the internationalization activities are monitored either at unit or institutional level (M).

The SER emphasises a commitment to research-infused teaching. Through discussions the Panel was unable to gain clarity on how this is understood and practised across TLU (S, T, M). The only activity identified in this context was the compulsory LIFE course. However, it was not clear to what extent the course promotes research informed teaching and learning.

Conclusions

TLU has made significant progress in RDC activity, increasing its visibility and impact. There is a sound infrastructure to support a diversity of initiatives and funding is solid. Staff have good opportunities to engage in research and the new career model is generally supportive of staff research activity. TLU's RDC activities contribute to the overall strategic objectives of *Health and Sustainable Lifestyle* and *Internationalisation*. There are active networks and collaborations with international groups.

Whilst there is monitoring, this is not always consistent or clear. The delegation of decisions about research activity and the management of funds to the individual units provides flexibility and good opportunities for staff. To ensure that these render their full potential, there is a need for consistent, clear and well-communicated systems which enable an institution-wide view for senior management.

Strengths

- TLU has a systematic and strategic approach to reinforce RDC transversally, with notable achievements in the last 5 years.

- Key university wide decisions support and promote RDC especially the staff career model, which promotes researchers, PhD students and young staff; the TLU Research Fund, which researchers can access through regular calls; centralized support units for researchers with successful initiatives such as the Project Farm; the creation of academic structures that focus collaboration and foster multidisciplinary and disciplinary engagement.

- The freedom of units and centres, to secure substantial grants, create successful international networks for collaborative research and develop sound multidisciplinary research.

- The way that research activity makes a significant contribution to TLU's internationalisation agenda.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- TLU should reflect on the establishment of priority research subjects aligned with its identity and communicate them effectively internally and externally. Overarching TLU priorities should be set taking all successful research subjects into consideration so as to strengthen the research ecosystem and remain open to opportunities for new subjects and increased multidisciplinarity.

- TLU is recommended to address the lack of oversight of research performance and implement transparent, efficient, effective, and consistent mechanisms to monitor the research performance and the development of individual units and centres. These mechanisms should be well communicated across the University and to relevant stakeholders.

Opportunities for further improvement

- TLU is encouraged to consider its aspiration for "research-infused" learning and reflect on how it could be developed to shape the TLU graduate, making them unique, through initiatives such as the LIFE course and other project-based learning initiatives.

- TLU could reflect on ways to balance business-oriented and basic research, in order to benefit service to society without impacting negatively on staff achieving high quality international publications.

- TLU is encouraged to consider ways that the new staff career model could be implemented to ensure further and sustained support for researchers.

- In the context of increased research income from projects and contracts, TLU might consider whether there are merits in the University retaining some overheads centrally to support the sustainability of its research strategy in the long-term.

- TLU could explore how it could take advantage of the increasingly strong ties with industry and business-driven research, to develop industrial doctorates as a way to attract more PhD students and reinforce their employability in areas other than academic research.

1.12 Service to society

Standard:
The higher education institution initiates and implements development activities, which enhance prosperity in the community and disseminate recent know-how in the areas of the institution's competence. The higher education institution, as a learning-oriented organisation, promotes lifelong learning in society and creates high-quality opportunities for that.

Guidelines:

The HEI contributes to the development of the community's well-being by sharing its resources (library, museums, sports facilities, etc.), by providing consulting and advisory services, and by organising concerts, exhibitions, shows, conferences, fairs and other events.

The HEI involves alumni in activities aimed at the development of the HEI and the knowledge society.

Employees of the HEI participate in the work of professional associations and in other community councils and decision-making bodies as experts, directing society's development processes as opinion leaders. The impact academic employees have on society is taken into account when evaluating their work.

The HEI has defined the objectives for in-service training and measures their implementation. In-service training is planned in accordance with the needs of target groups.

Indicators:
• *Number of people in continuing training (and other privately financed open forms of study), number of lessons or ECTS per participant*

Evidence and analysis

Objectives aimed at serving society are set out in the University Development Plan 2020–2022, the, the Research and Developments Strategy 2019–2021 and in the development plans for the academic units. Activities related to service to society are taken into account in the annual workload calculation for staff and the contribution and impact on society is taken into account when evaluating the work of academic employees.

TLU has developed strategies which inform regulations and guidance to popularise its core activities. Communication of research results to society is one of the ways TLU increases its society impact and influence. The new cooperation platform between the University and Enterprise (EXU) was developed in 2018 to boost research and development and officially launched in 2019. Since the autumn of 2020 EXU has been part of ASTP and SDN networks, which support the development of business cooperation with universities internationally (SER). TLU organises regular partner events to introduce and promote opportunities for cooperation. These include the business platform between Estonian universities and R&D institutions (ADAPTER), a cooperation network annual festival, a partnership week, and a lecture series for entrepreneurs (SER).

The Panel met a number of industry representatives who all had successful ties with TLU research activity. Examples of successful research and development projects conducted in partnership with both private companies and public sector organisations are listed on the University website (E, A).

The Development Plan identifies the realisation of the applied output of the University's RDC and intellectual property (IP) potential as an objective. The Panel found that measures to support research groups that develop knowledge-based services is still in the early stages of development. Although TLU organises relevant training, there is still limited understanding of intellectual property protection. The Panel learned that TLU has only one registered patent (M). Despite this, the increased volume of research and development activities reflects the knowledge-based services TLU provides and the professional projects it has undertaken. The Panel considers it important for TLU to strengthen the channels that help to take the results of research closer to enterprises.

Continuing education is high on the agenda and is organized in all the University's focus fields. Lifelong learning is promoted and integrated in formal, non-formal and informal education. TLU is the third largest provider of continuing education among Estonian public universities. Although, the student number in continuing education remained stable in 2018–2019, the University's income from continuing education has increased over the years, accounting for 11,4% of the total study revenue in 2019. In addition to adult learners, young people are offered opportunities to study and get to know the university in the Student Academy. For the international public and for continuing education students, TLU has organized the Tallinn Summer School and the Tallinn Winter School since 2006. In order to map the needs for continuing education and to improve the quality, multiple channels are used to collect feedback from different target groups (SER).

According to the Development Plan "*Tallinn University – advocating the intelligent lifestyle*" TLU is a valued cooperation partner for state and local government institutions. It contributes to shaping attitudes which value healthy lifestyles, wellbeing, and a sustainable way of thinking in Estonian society and to science-based policymaking. In these areas it offers novel analysis and research methods as well as inputs based on those for better decision making.

TLU has one college in Haapsalu. The College's principle function is to support regional development projects that are closely related to regional needs. The College operates as an education and competence centre that specializes in research for health promotion and rehabilitation. It also maintains strong ties with the region and, more broadly, to the rest of Estonia. However, without central and additional state funding the College's activities will not be sustainable in the long run (M).

The TLU Academic Library provides online access to most services and resources. It facilitates access to library and information resources regardless of the borrower's location. In 2019, the library had over 21,000 readers; just over half of whom are not members of the University. The University Press publishes high-level academic and intellectual literature aimed at the public as well as a community of dedicated scholars and students. The University Open Academy organizes international examination and training courses and coordinates the work of the network of training managers. TLU also supports the activities of several of its creative and sports collectives (SER).

Conclusions

Overall, it is clear to the Panel that the public-oriented activities are purposeful and make a valuable contribution to the communities. TLU has increased its visibility in recent years and provided a diverse

range of services to the public and University staff believe that TLU's reputation has strengthened. Despite the developments and enhanced reputation, the Panel considers that alumni could be engaged much more actively and systematically inform current and future students about employment opportunities (S, M).

Strengths

- The University has increased the volume of cooperation with enterprises and other organisations and established a sound basis for the further expansion of continuing education and education innovation as identified as a priority in the Development Plan.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- Without central and additional state funding the Haapsalu College's activities will not be sustainable in the long run. The Panel strongly recommends that TLU seek funds to secure the role and sustainability of Haapsalu College as a provider of teaching and additional activities so that it can continue to serve both the local region and Estonia more broadly.

Opportunities for further improvement

- TLU is encouraged to develop a coherent and long-term mechanism to support the emergence and development of knowledge-intensive teams to help them reach markets and investors more quickly.

2. Assessment findings of the sample of the study programmes

2.1. Law (in Estonian and English, Bachelor studies)

General information

TLU offers two bachelor programmes in Law, one in Estonian (AKOB) and one in English (AKLB). The nominal study period is three years. Both programmes consist of a total of 180 ECTS, with 60 ECTS in each full year of study. The programmes are based in the School of Governance, Law and Society (SOGOLAS).

AKOB had a total of 94 students in 2020, a decline from 176 in 2016, with an average of 31 students per year. The 2020 intake was 30. AKLB had a total of 170 students in 2020, down from 237 in 2016 with an average of 57 per year. The 2020 intake was 46. Intake in AKOB has remained more or less stable over the last three years, whereas intake in AKLB has been decreasing. The AKOB programme is taught in Tallinn, and the AKLB programme is taught in Tallinn and in Helsinki.

The dropout rates for AKOB are lower than for AKLB. There is no international mobility on the AKOB; mobility on AKLB in 2020 was 22. There are 16 staff contributing to each of the programmes; many of them teach on both programmes.

2.1.1 Planning and management of studies

- The design and development of study programme(s) take into account the expectations of students and other stakeholders, national strategies, legislation and trends in the particular area as well as labour market needs. The level and volume of RDC activities is sufficient and supports the launching of the study programme(s).

- The objectives of study programme(s), modules (including courses) and their learning outcomes are concrete and coherent. The teaching content and methods and assessment criteria and methods support students in achieving their learning outcomes and developing their key competencies. The study programmes support the development of creativity and entrepreneurship and other general competencies.

- The administration of material and financial resources that ensure the design and implementation of the study programme(s) is purposeful, systematic, and sustainable. The learning environment, including materials, tools and technology support the students in achieving their learning outcomes.

Evidence and analysis

The Panel found that the programmes are well-designed with a structured build-up of compulsory and electives courses which overall meet the needs of the labour market. The compulsory courses include interdisciplinary courses and projects. In particular the Panel found the compulsory LIFE project of significant value for future lawyers in the way that it resonates with the expectations of the labour market and reflects TLU's strategic focus of interdisciplinarity. Although the programmes are well-structured overall, the Panel found that they do not benefit as fully as they might from the digital and educational expertise available in TLU nor do they exploit the potential for greater interdisciplinarity which the Panel considers essential for an academic programme for future lawyers.

The programme and course learning outcomes, teaching and assessment are all detailed in the course cards. The learning outcomes for the Estonian programme are clear but those for the English programme are less so (SER). The learning outcomes for the English course would benefit from being more specific and would thus be helpful both for potential students and for the labour market. Whilst similar, the two programmes have areas of difference. Aligning the programmes more closely could provide greater choice for students and enable students from the Estonian programme to share classes with the English programme. It would also contribute to the internationalisation agenda.

The programmes aim to be student centred; however, the Panel could not find a clear statement about the educational philosophy and pedagogic approaches underpinning the programme. Nor could the Panel find an explicit statement that clearly demonstrated the alignment of the skills in the learning outcomes with the assessment.

There is a strong emphasis on academic freedom which the panel understood to apply to both content and delivery of the programmes. The perspectives on this differed between teaching and management staff (M, T). The Panel learned that teaching staff determine the assessments for the courses they teach (T). It was not clear whether there was any monitoring to ensure that approaches to teaching and to assessment reflected the pedagogic approach or philosophy of the programme. Nor was it clear whether there is an overarching plan which would demonstrate the range of assessments over the whole programme. Developing greater consistency in the pedagogic approach which is well aligned with TLU's emphasis on student-centred learning would strengthen the programmes. This might have the added benefit of differentiating and distinguishing TLU's law programmes from others both nationally and internationally.

The Panel found some evidence of changes made to the programme in the light of feedback. For example, the size of the courses in terms of ECTS reflects recommendations from the last study programme group assessment. However, the Panel did not find evidence of the systematic gathering of feedback from alumni or from the labour market as a whole. The Panel heard that both groups had helpful and strong views that could benefit programme development (E, A) and which could be harnessed through a formal alumnus and or employers' association or network.

The Panel noted the small size of the Estonian programme which raised the question of the sustainability of the two programmes. Whilst the Panel is aware of the constraints of the contractual arrangements with the state, they learned of the strong demand for Estonian lawyers (E) and believe that a more robust programme with a larger intake would secure greater sustainability.

The resources and the administrative support for the programmes are adequate. There are sound systems to underpin support including counselling and Moodle. The Panel found that the shift to digital teaching during the pandemic was effective and provided continuation for students, which they appreciated.

Strengths

- The provision of a law programme delivered in English which gives more weight to legal education.

- The focus on interdisciplinarity in the programmes which reflect the needs of the industry and the strategic direction of TLU.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- Although there are learning outcomes and assessment, these are not currently well aligned, and it is recommended that the alignment between learning outcomes and assessment is made explicit and that an overarching assessment plan is developed.

- Whilst feedback is collected and acted on, it is still rather ad hoc. It is recommended that a systematic approach is taken to gathering stakeholder views, including those of alumni and employers, to inform the development of the programmes.

Opportunities for further improvement

- TLU should make explicit the educational approach and philosophy espoused in the programme.

- To make the programmes more competitive, it is suggested that TLU seeks more collaboration with other universities and law schools to share courses in a hybrid manner both for the Estonian and the English programme.

- TLU is encouraged to explore how it can promote the interdisciplinarity and the digital legal education of the programmes to highlight progression to further study and to the bar and thus strengthen recruitment.

- Further, the Panel considers it would be beneficial to stimulate research related to the focus and mission of the programmes and to TLU's strategic foci of digital learning and education, sustainability, interdisciplinarity and connected to society.

- It would be valuable to align the two programmes to enable interchange between the students and increase the level of choice.

2.1.2 Learning, teaching, and assessment

- Conditions and organisation of admission ensure fair access to education and motivated student body. Students' choice of specialisation is supported.

- A student-centred approach is used in the studies, aiming at the students to assume responsibility for planning their studies and career and supporting the development of key competencies and achieving the learning outcomes of the study programme.

- Student assessment, including taking accreditation of prior and experiential learning into account, supports the students and corresponds to the learning outcomes. Objective and reliable assessment is ensured.

- The organisation of studies including practical work and training is based on the specificities of students and forms of study and supports the student in achieving the learning outcomes. Opportunities have been established for mobility within Estonia and internationally.

- Support services for students are in place and available for students. Individual development and progress of students are monitored and supported.

- Graduates of the study programme are competitive in terms of their knowledge and social skills both nationally and internationally.

Evidence and analysis

The admissions process differs between the two programmes. Admission to the Estonian programme is through an objective entrance exam. Admission to the English programme is by motivation letter and interview for which there are specified criteria. Whilst the processes are fair and transparent, the admissions process for the English programme could be more objective. The drop-out rate in the English programme is rather high, especially compared to the Estonian programme which has a low drop-out rate. The many reasons for dropping out of the programme are documented and the Panel was able to scrutinise these. An additional reason, the Panel surmised, is the difference between the admissions processes and the slightly less stringent ones for the English programme.

The Panel learned that the expectations of students on the English programme were not always fulfilled (S). This may contribute to the drop-out rate. The mismatch between the programme and student expectations could be addressed through improved information about the programme and how it is delivered and more effective pre-enrolment counselling.

The SER states that the programme has a student-centred approach, and this was confirmed by students and staff (T, S). However, the Panel found no explicit statement as to what the student-centred approach entailed and learned that the delivery of the programme is largely left to teachers' preferences (T). The Panel could not gain a clear picture of how this impacted on the coherence and consistency of the programme as a whole, nor how it impacted on the structured development of the skills that the programmes clearly develop.

There is a variety of assessment methods which are appropriate. The Panel did not gain a clear view of how formative and summative assessments, as described in the SER, were used on the programmes and how or whether the two forms of assessment were related. Overall students were satisfied with

the assessments and what was required of them. However, some students expressed the view that it would be beneficial for both programmes to require the writing of a thesis; others suggested that writing a variety of papers throughout the programme was sufficient. The Panel noted that undertaking a thesis at bachelor's level could be valuable as a way of accessing employment or a master's programme.

There are opportunities, which are promoted, for student mobility both in Estonia and internationally. However, the take up of outgoing mobility is very low indeed.

A range of support processes are in place and accessible to the students. Students particularly valued the accessibility and the approachability of the teaching staff (S). Students are aware of the existence of complaint procedures. Complaints, including exam related complaints, are resolved by the head of management of the School. If the student is not satisfied, the complaint can be escalated to court, which, the Panel learned, has been the case.

Employment rates for graduates are good. Employers and alumni confirmed that the skills and knowledge gained on the programme makes graduates competitive.

Strengths

- The accessibility and approachability of teaching staff.
- The employment rates of graduates.

Opportunities for further improvement

- The programme should consider making the admissions processes for the English programme more objective and better aligned with those of the Estonian programme.

- It is suggested that the programme would benefit from having greater consistency of delivery across the courses and from an overarching assessment plan which includes clarification of the use of formative and summative assessment.

2.1.3 Development, cooperation and internationalisation of teaching staff

> – Teaching is conducted by enough professionally competent members of the teaching staff who support the development of the students.
>
> – Teaching staff follows the principles of academic ethics and the codes of conduct in case of non-compliance.
>
> – Members of the teaching staff participate in international mobility programs which encourage the development of their teaching and RDC activities and the cultural openness of the HEI and the Estonian society.
>
> – The effectiveness of both studies and RDC activities, students' feedback, the effectiveness of supervision, development of teaching and supervision skills, international mobility and entrepreneurial or work experience in the specific field outside the HEI is taken into consideration in evaluating the work of the member of the staff.

Evidence and analysis

Overall, there is a sufficient number of professionally competent staff to deliver the two programmes. However, the number holding a PhD is relatively low. Given that it is in many universities in customary for a PhD to be a requirement for tenured position, the Panel encourage TLU to support PhD studies for staff who do not yet hold one. This, along with the relatively good salaries for the teachers of law, would help to attract and retain good staff. The staffing ratio of the two programmes differs: the ratio on the English programme is lower, due to the smaller number of students. Despite the difference the staff student ratios are good.

International mobility for staff is low as it is for students. This does not reflect the international orientation of the programmes. International dimensions could be promoted through virtual exchanges for staff and students. Such initiatives would create international classrooms and provide the opportunity for TLU staff to work jointly with international staff, in a co-teaching role, for example.

Staff expressed satisfaction with the opportunities and support for research.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- There is low mobility of staff and students which does not reflect the international orientation of the programmes. It is recommended that wider options are explored to create international exchange and experience to support staff development, awareness of developments in international law and contribute to TLU's internationalisation agenda.

Opportunities for further improvement

- TLU is encouraged to increase the numbers of staff holding a PhD.

- TLU is encouraged to stimulate research in those areas that relate to the aims of the programmes and to TLU's strategic aims of digital learning, sustainability and interdisciplinarity.

2.2. Integrated Natural Sciences (in Estonian, Bachelor studies)

General information

The bachelor's degree in integrated Natural Sciences is based in the School of Natural Sciences and Health which was established in 2015. The programme was first delivered in 2015 and is, thus, relatively new. In 2016, the programme incorporated all the TLU-wide requirements, including the course module LIFE; a speciality in a foreign language and a compulsory traineeship. The programme is relatively small with circa 50 students in total. There was a small increase to 59 in 2020. New cohort size ranges from 15-20. There has been a decrease in the number of staff involved in the programme from 50 in 2016 to 30 in the last two years.

The programme was designed to have three branches so as to address both TLU's and national strategic goals related to sustainable development and digital competences. Due to low student numbers, however, only the Integrated Natural Sciences branch is being delivered. This programme provides a broad education in natural sciences as well as the prerequisites for graduates to enrol in the master's programme for high school science teachers.

2.2.1 Planning and management of studies

- The design and development of study programme(s) take into account the expectations of students and other stakeholders, national strategies, legislation and trends in the particular area as well as labour market needs. The level and volume of RDC activities is sufficient and supports the launching of the study programme(s).

- The objectives of study programme(s), modules (including courses) and their learning outcomes are concrete and coherent. The teaching content and methods and assessment criteria and methods support students in achieving their learning outcomes and developing their key competencies. The study programmes support the development of creativity and entrepreneurship and other general competencies.

- The administration of material and financial resources that ensure the design and implementation of the study programme(s) is purposeful, systematic, and sustainable. The learning environment, including materials, tools and technology support the students in achieving their learning outcomes.

Evidence and analysis

The SER states that the Integrated Natural Sciences programme (INTNAT) is the most complex study programme (SP) in TLU and that it develops under the constraints of a very low number of students, which is similar to science programmes nationally and internationally.

When the SP was launched it was structured in three main branches: classical natural sciences; sustainable development and natural sciences; and information communication technology (ICT) in

natural sciences. The programme includes courses in biology, chemistry, geography, and physics, as the basis for secondary school teacher education. The rationale behind the structure was to counteract the low demand for sciences and offer a programme that differentiated TLU from other Estonian universities. The design stemmed from the Estonian National Strategy on Sustainable Development and the fact that applications of ICT in educational areas had been declared a major specialisation for Estonia. The low number of applicants and low graduation rates, less that 20 new students per year, rendered the programme unsustainable. Consequently since 2019 only the classical natural sciences branch has been offered. In planning the changes, the progression for graduates to the master's programme and to become secondary school science teachers were taken into consideration. There is also the opportunity to progress as a researcher through the School's PhD programme.

The Panel found that the SP administrator, module managers, head of the school and academic staff worked systematically to ensure that the programme met the needs of society and the interests of potential students. The Panel also learned from the alumni that they were consulted on the programme design through the students' council or through staff. There was, however, no evidence to demonstrate how the employers were involved in the development of the bachelor's programme, although employers did confirm their participation in the design of related master's programmes.

The SER includes links to some key documents with useful and comprehensive information about the programme. These give a clear description of the general structure, which is modular and flexible; an outline of the objectives, learning outcomes and context both of the SP and of the individual courses, as well as the ways in which these can be combined; and the syllabus or course programmes along with learning outcomes, learning activities and assessment procedures. From the assessment of these documents the Panel found that the learning outcomes are coherent, the content and assessments for the courses are adequate and that the programme contributes to the development of both general and specific competences in the field. Students and alumni reported their satisfaction with the modular and flexible structure which allows them to specialize in one field or to combine more than one field, graduating with a major and a minor. Students and alumni also praised the common first semester, which allows students to postpone a decision about their main fields of study until they can make an informed decision. Some students and alumni suggested that the offer of more specialized courses by TLU or through agreements with other universities, would enhance the programme.

The programme is managed by the School. The Rector signs a contract with the School which specifies the funds for the programmes and includes specific and measurable goals. Research is supported from central research funding as well as from variable research projects and contracts obtained by individual researchers. The laboratory infrastructure is described as good and up to date (SER). Lectures are held in new and well-resourced buildings (VT). The TLU Research Fund has calls twice a year, and staff often apply. The Panel could not find details of the level and quantity of ITC equipment and software for students and teachers. It was reported that unexpected needs, such as equipment repair, are taken care of by the rectorate. Staff expressed general satisfaction with the support for research.

The School holds a human resources budget. The Head of school negotiates salaries, above the minimum TLU standards, as well as workload with the academic staff. The Panel did not find a clear account of how research time is accounted for in the academic workload or how salaries are decided.

Academic staff were, however, positive about the benefits of the new career structure, and how it encourages research, particularly among the younger staff.

Strengths

- The modular design of the SP and the flexibility it offers to students to individualize their pathways.
- The way students and alumni are consulted on the development of the programme.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- Whilst there is evidence of input from external stakeholders this is not consistent. The Panel recommends employers be systematically involved in programme development and monitoring.

- The very low number of students is a threat to the sustainability of the programme and the Panel recommends that the programme managers address this to secure the programme for the long term.

Opportunities for further improvement

- The programme would benefit from providing structured opportunities for further specialization by, for example, offering in-house courses or courses through external collaborations with other universities as well as schemes for national mobility.

2.2.2 Learning, teaching, and assessment

- Conditions and organisation of admission ensure fair access to education and motivated student body. Students' choice of specialisation is supported.

- A student-centred approach is used in the studies, aiming at the students to assume responsibility for planning their studies and career and supporting the development of key competencies and achieving the learning outcomes of the study programme.

- Student assessment, including taking accreditation of prior and experiential learning into account, supports the students and corresponds to the learning outcomes. Objective and reliable assessment is ensured.

- The organisation of studies including practical work and training is based on the specificities of students and forms of study and supports the student in achieving the learning outcomes. Opportunities have been established for mobility within Estonia and internationally.

- Support services for students are in place and available for students. Individual development and progress of students are monitored and supported.

- Graduates of the study programme are competitive in terms of their knowledge and social skills both nationally and internationally.

Evidence and analysis

Admission is through a comprehensive entry exam which assesses competencies, motivation, and knowledge. Students need to gain 65 points to be admitted. The SP is organized so that prior skills and knowledge are recognized so that students may be exempt from more general courses and able to proceed to the specialized modules. Flexible paths allow re-orientation of student choices as they progress. Students may repeat courses they find particularly challenging. The Panel found that these practices demonstrated a remarkably strong student-centred approach. Students and alumni valued highly the modular structure and flexibility of the programme.

Students and alumni reported that they were satisfied with the competence and commitment of the teaching staff and their friendly attitude. Overall, they were satisfied with the practical work and the learning approaches and methodologies used. However, they reported that some staff who were specialists in their field did not demonstrate adequate pedagogical approaches. Neither students nor staff were familiar with the concept of research-based learning and reported only that teachers are also researchers.

Students were clear that they received full details of the courses at enrolment. They also reported that there are opportunities to provide feedback through questionnaires. However, this feedback was not always responded to (S).

There is a good range of assessment methods which are appropriate for assessing the competences and the learning outcomes. Students who are dissatisfied with their grades can ask the teacher to review the result. If there is still disagreement, the case is escalated to the head of studies. If there is still no resolution, the student may use the formal appeals procedure. However, there were no cases of appeal reported.

Students appreciate the good support from personal counselling, from the student council and through the peer-tutors system which offers support to first year students. Students and staff shared the view that the small cohort facilitates a student-centred approach and minimises complaints. Despite the range and level of support, the committed staff and the good programme design, dropout rates remain very high at 35-38%. According to the SER, analysis showed that drop out mainly occurs during the two first semesters. The percentage of students not graduating in the nominal study period is also high.

The School holds Erasmus agreements and students are informed of the mobility opportunities available. However, take up is low, due mainly, to personal constraints. The Panel did not see any evidence of opportunities for mobility within Estonia which students and alumni demonstrated an interest in. Students and alumni offered some suggestions such as taking some specialized courses at other Estonian universities, organizing research visits to other Estonian universities or developing joint degrees. Students and alumni also suggested that a programme addressed at high school students such as laboratory practices or short projects by programme staff might stimulate recruitment to the programme.

Employers and alumni expressed the view that graduates from the SP are competitive in terms of employability especially compared to graduates from other universities. Employers praised the transferable competences and skills, with specific mention made of open minds, wider views, self-motivation, interest in social sciences, capacity for multidisciplinary work and team building skills. The

Panel noted that, although TLU conceives the programme as a training programme for teachers, both employers and alumni thought that the competences gained made them good candidates for many science-related jobs.

Strengths

- The excellent general competences gained which makes graduates good team workers, entrepreneurs and capable of multidisciplinary approaches to problem solving and thus competitive for work in many science-related jobs.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The Panel recommends, given the high dropout rate on the programme and the low numbers of students graduating within the nominal study period, that a thorough analysis of the causes is undertaken to establish actions which could address the problem.

- It is recommended that the concept of research-informed teaching is elaborated and implemented to reflect TLU's strategic goals.

Opportunities for further improvement

- The Panel encourages the programme to develop new communication strategies designed to attract more students interested in the natural sciences.

2.2.3 Development, cooperation and internationalisation of teaching staff

- Teaching is conducted by a sufficient number of professionally competent members of the teaching staff who support the development of the students.

- Teaching staff follows the principles of academic ethics and the codes of conduct in case of non-compliance.

- Members of the teaching staff participate in international mobility programs which encourage the development of their teaching and RDC activities and the cultural openness of the HEI and the Estonian society.

- The effectiveness of both studies and RDC activities, students' feedback, the effectiveness of supervision, development of teaching and supervision skills, international mobility and entrepreneurial or work experience in the specific field outside the HEI is taken into consideration in evaluating the work of the member of the staff.

Evidence and analysis

At the time of the assessment there were 30 academic staff contributing to the programme, most of whom held a PhD and were active researchers. The Panel learned that the low student numbers resulted in some staff going part-time at TLU and taking other work elsewhere. Detailed staff CVs show

the range of specialism, the links to the courses they teach on and show that teachers publish regularly in English and in Estonian. The staff reported that the small student numbers facilitate the rearrangement of teaching schedules to allow for research, although this was very dependent on the status of the teacher. Students reported that they were very satisfied with their teachers who are readily available to offer support and advice to the students. The competence and dedication of the academic staff are high.

Electronic software is used to detect plagiarism in student work. For serious cases of plagiarism, the TLU statute of the study programme stipulates ex-matriculation. Between 2016-2019, six students were ex-matriculated in connection with thesis plagiarism (W). The Ethics Committee oversees good practice in research supervision and learning. The students were well aware of plagiarism and understood the University's commitment to academic ethics (S). Students mentioned how staff exploited a case of plagiarism by a national-level politician to discuss the issue with them, and reinforce good practice in citations.

Staff praised the new academic careers model and considered it particularly positive for young staff and those willing to strengthen their research activities. The SER stated that the School provides help for short-term staff mobility, and this was confirmed during the assessment. The low takes up of mobility is predominantly related to personal and family constraints rather than to lack of TLU support.

Salary and workload negotiations take place on an individual basis with the Head of the School. The Panel could not establish clearly what the rules for these negotiations are nor how teaching and research are weighted. However, staff were clear that the rules are transparent for the regular staff evaluations, and rewards for research, teaching and service activities and achievements are quite specific, as described in the SER. All members of staff have access to counselling and advice in preparation for the 5-yearly mandatory review. The review can result in promotion and also demotion. Some staff members reported that the standards are not always so easy to achieve (M). However, staff are satisfied with the support and opportunities for research, including two calls per year to apply for the Research Fund and special funds for unanticipated needs such as repairs of scientific equipment.

Strengths

- The new career model which is multi layered, transparent and supports staff in research.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The Panel recommends that TLU ensures that all aspects of salary level and workload distribution of academic staff are be based on fully transparent criteria and that individual negotiations on salary do not determine remuneration.

Opportunities for further improvement

- Given the very low take up of staff mobility due in a large part to personal and family constraints, TLU is encouraged to explore creative alternatives to travelling abroad which could offer the much-needed internationalization opportunities.

2.3. Educational Innovation and Leadership (in English, Master studies)

General information

The master's in Educational Innovation and Leadership is based in the School of Educational Sciences. The nominal study period for the programme is two years. The programme was registered in December 2017 and the first cohort started in 2018. A decision was taken in the light of the pandemic not to recruit for the 2020/2021 academic year.

The programme is delivered in English and is intended primarily for international students, though it is open to Estonian students. The cohort size is small: 11 students were recruited in 2018 and 15 in 2019. The retention rate for the first two cohorts is good with one student withdrawing in the first cohort and one in the second. Students come from a wide range of countries.

The programme is supported by 17 academic staff, not all of whom are based in the School of Educational Sciences.

The programme consists of 120 ECTS. The main field of study, educational innovation and leadership, accounts for 108 ECTS credits. There are three thematic modules. All courses have 6 ECTS credits and the final thesis has 24 ECTS.

2.3.1 Planning and management of studies

- The design and development of study programme(s) take into account the expectations of students and other stakeholders, national strategies, legislation and trends in the particular area as well as labour market needs. The level and volume of RDC activities is sufficient and supports the launching of the study programme(s).

- The objectives of study programme(s), modules (including courses) and their learning outcomes are concrete and coherent. The teaching content and methods and assessment criteria and methods support students in achieving their learning outcomes and developing their key competencies. The study programmes support the development of creativity and entrepreneurship and other general competencies.

- The administration of material and financial resources that ensure the design and implementation of the study programme(s) is purposeful, systematic, and sustainable. The learning environment, including materials, tools and technology support the students in achieving their learning outcomes.

Evidence and analysis

The programme was developed taking international trends, laws, and regulations into account (SER). Mapping was undertaken against master's programmes in Nordic countries and in the UK and Benelux so as to develop a programme which was distinctive and thus more competitive (T). The idea to develop the programme emerged from two research groups and was developed together by the research groups, the School of Educational Sciences and the School of Digital Technologies. The interdisciplinary and international profile of the programme reflects University priorities. The study programme is closely connected with the Centre of Excellence in Education Innovation (SER) which contributes substantial research, development, and creative activities to support the programme. The Panel found little evidence of other systematic stakeholder involvement in the development of the programme. For example, there was no formal mechanism for stakeholder feedback about employability or about the design of the study programme (E).

The overall study programme objectives focus on acquiring knowledge, analysing, and comparing which are relatively weak for programme level objectives. The programme objectives could be articulated more clearly to cover the complex competencies such as creativity, leadership, collaborative problem-solving and the other future education complex competences which students confirmed they did develop during the course of the programme (S). The LIFE course also contributes to the achievement of these learning objectives. The programme includes site visits and collaborative projects which were much valued by the students.

The course is resourced with adequate technology. The team-teaching approach and the range of courses within the programme is resource heavy and particularly so for the numbers of staff involved. This raises the question of the long-term economic sustainability of the programme. The programme management, however, was not concerned and stated that the strategy was for good quality students capped at a maximum of 15 per cohort (M).

The formal cooperation with other schools in the University and input from research groups offers some opportunities for students to engage in their supervisor's research projects. There is a strong interdisciplinary element which reflects the strategic direction of TLU. There is also strong international collaboration in the programme which includes visiting lecturers; this too reflects TLU's strategic direction.

All materials are shared online using Google Docs. A range of other resources are used flexibly in a way that the students commented upon favourably.

Strengths

- The curriculum is informed by a particularly strong research base from within TLU's Centre of Excellence in Education and internationally enabling the students to benefit from participation in research networks.
- The team-teaching approach enriches the curriculum by providing a variety of views.
- The development of complex competences through a focus on action research projects developed by the students is an innovative and successful approach to teaching and learning.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- It is recommended that a formal mechanism is developed for consulting employers and other stakeholders, both in Estonia and internationally, to elicit their feedback and enable them to contribute systematically and consistently to the development of the programme.

Opportunities for further improvement

- The team is encouraged to explore the potential of virtual traineeships and virtual site visits to make the study programme more resilient and to extend the range of sites for visits.

- The programme team is encouraged to reflect on whether the numbers of staff and courses could be reduced or the number of students per cohort increased to ensure the longer-term financial stability of the programme.

2.3.2 Learning, teaching, and assessment

- Conditions and organisation of admission ensure fair access to education and motivated student body. Students' choice of specialisation is supported.

- A student-centred approach is used in the studies, aiming at the students to assume responsibility for planning their studies and career and supporting the development of key competencies and achieving the learning outcomes of the study programme.

- Student assessment, including taking accreditation of prior and experiential learning into account, supports the students and corresponds to the learning outcomes. Objective and reliable assessment is ensured.

- The organisation of studies including practical work and training is based on the specificities of students and forms of study and supports the student in achieving the learning outcomes. Opportunities have been established for mobility within Estonia and internationally.

- Support services for students are in place and available for students. Individual development and progress of students are monitored and supported.

- Graduates of the study programme are competitive in terms of their knowledge and social skills both nationally and internationally.

Evidence and analysis

Admission is based on an exam with three components. There is no requirement for applicants to have a background in the field of education. The Panel found this to be effective, meeting the interdisciplinary focus of the study programme and the wider TLU commitments to promote access to students who do not have an initial degree in education. The students praised the admissions approach, and some claimed it was a reason for doing the course (S).

The SER states that the programme enables students to design their own programme. The students reported that, whilst they can design their project and dissertation, there is, in practice, not a great deal of choice of course. There are electives which provide an element of free choice. However, some of those that students might be interested in, are not accessible to them as they are delivered in Estonian.

There is some evidence of student involvement in developing the study programme through their feedback. For example, some questions had been raised by students about the correlation between the assessment criteria and the grades awarded on the course (S). These questions had been handled largely to the students' satisfaction and, as a result, the criteria had been made clearer.

The SER states that the "modern teaching and learning environment" established by the Centre for Innovation in Education is a major resource for the programme together with the EDUSPACE research lab. Students confirmed the value of these (S). The SER identifies areas of improvement and planned activities for the programme which the Panel considered to be well thought through. The target dates for these are all in the future, reflecting, so some extent the suspension of admissions during the pandemic.

The development of critical thinking and argumentation are clear aims of the programme. Given the diverse cultural backgrounds of the students this can be challenging. The Panel noted that in this context it seemed odd that the issue of what might count as 'modern' or 'innovative' or 'student centred' education was rather assumed in the course content guides and by staff and students. There were no obvious opportunities on the study programme for debate as to the range of theories of education which might shed light on different ways of constructing the 'modern' in education. It might be relevant to look at the claim from connectivism, for example, that new technologies require new theories.

All students undertake a project which forms the basis of their thesis and is also related to their particular area of interest. The majority of students choose a topic that is relevant to their home context and culture which contributes to the overall international profile of the programme and of the students' learning experience.

Support services are in place and known to the students. Employers, alumni, and current students expressed the view that the course produces internationally competitive graduates in terms of knowledge and skills.

Strengths

- The admissions system is innovative and effective.

- The course is responsive to student feedback.

Opportunities for further improvement

- Consider expanding the provision of electives in English to offer more real choice to students designing their own pathways.

- TLU should consider instituting a network of alumni who could talk to current students and contribute to the development of the course.

- The programme team is encouraged to explore providing more space for debate between alternative perspectives on the nature of 'modern' education as a way to address the need to teach critical thinking.

- While student assessment appears appropriate, it was mostly quite familiar. A programme of this nature could be, with caution, an opportunity to try out more use of more experimental methods of assessment in a way that might contribute to knowledge of assessment in the rest of the University.

2.3.3 Development, cooperation and internationalisation of teaching staff

– Teaching is conducted by a sufficient number of professionally competent members of the teaching staff who support the development of the students.

– Teaching staff follows the principles of academic ethics and the codes of conduct in case of non-compliance.

– Members of the teaching staff participate in international mobility programs which encourage the development of their teaching and RDC activities and the cultural openness of the HEI and the Estonian society.

– The effectiveness of both studies and RDC activities, students' feedback, the effectiveness of supervision, development of teaching and supervision skills, international mobility and entrepreneurial or work experience in the specific field outside the HEI is taken into consideration in evaluating the work of the member of the staff.

Evidence and analysis

The SER states that there are 17 members of staff contributing to the programme delivery. This is more than the number of students and is certainly sufficient. Students praised staff for their accessibility, dedication, and responsiveness (S).

Academic ethics is appropriately supportive and, initially, takes the different backgrounds of students into account. The area is revisited throughout the programme and both staff and students are clear about research ethics and plagiarism. The programme has developed academic writing materials to support the development of good practice and these materials are also shared with other schools in TLU.

The staff and students are engaged in many international networks. In addition, there are visiting lecturers who bring international perspectives which are much valued by the students. Courses are jointly taught with Finland and staff are engaged in multiple joint research activities with universities in other countries. This activity is valued by the students who get a wide range of support for their individual projects and benefit from the staff involvement in RDC activities.

The small team teaching offers good mentoring opportunities for new staff (T). Established staff reported favourably on the new academic career model and two staff members noted that they had undergone the assessment after four years and gained promotion. Staff expressed satisfaction with the assessment and promotion system which they described as transparent, collegial, and fair (T).

Strengths

- The jointly organised summer school with the University of Helsinki for the purpose of developing research topics is a good initiative that adds value for the staff and the students.

Opportunities for further improvement

- The staff of the programme practice internationalisation as joint working on international research and teaching projects rather than physical periods of visiting universities abroad. This could be an approach to TLU's aims for internationalisation that could be developed and offered in other schools at TLU.

2.4. Digital Learning Games (in English, Master studies)

General information

Digital Learning Games (DG), a two-year programme launched in 2015, is a multi-disciplinary programme involving three teams, and is designed for teachers, software developers and artists. The number of students who complete in the nominal study period has risen in the last three years from 39% in 2018 to 82% in 2020. There was growth from 2016–2019 from 12 admissions in 2016 to 27 in 2019; however, the number admitted in 2020 dropped to 11 (SER). The optimal number of students is 30 which was close to being achieved in 2019, 10 for each elective module (SER). Students are expected to have their own laptop when joining the programme.

2.4.1 Planning and management of studies

- The design and development of study programme(s) take into account the expectations of students and other stakeholders, national strategies, legislation and trends in the particular area as well as labour market needs. The level and volume of RDC activities is sufficient and supports the launching of the study programme(s).

- The objectives of study programme(s), modules (including courses) and their learning outcomes are concrete and coherent. The teaching content and methods and assessment criteria and methods support students in achieving their learning outcomes and developing their key competencies. The study programmes support the development of creativity and entrepreneurship and other general competencies.

- The administration of material and financial resources that ensure the design and implementation of the study programme(s) is purposeful, systematic, and sustainable. The learning environment, including materials, tools and technology support the students in achieving their learning outcomes.

Evidence and analysis

The Panel learned that the programme has its origins in a research project which was then further developed (T, M). The SER states that TLU's management board had championed DG to strengthen cooperation between three different schools and to create an interdisciplinary programme. TLU conducted a market study during the early development of the programme, and various external experts (e.g. IGDA Estonia, game founders) were involved in developing the initial curriculum (SER). Experience and input were also sought in the form of joint seminars in cooperation with other European universities in Europe, predominantly from Sweden, which had similar study programmes

(SER). The Panel found that since the initiation of the programme, market monitoring was rather ad hoc.

Employers and programme managers are cautiously optimistic about the programme's future potential, although it was clear that the pandemic might have negatively impacted prospects (A, E, M). A regular alumni survey is planned but has not yet been conducted due to the programme's relative youth (M). There are close relationships with Estonian companies focusing on (learning) games and informal input from them informs the programme (A, E). For example, a module on games development was included in the programme following feedback from industry (M). National legislation and University frameworks were taken into account during the development of the programme.

Core staff competencies met the needs of the programme when first approved. However, the monitoring of these in a fast-evolving field has been poor. As stated in documents: "*When the program was initially approved and started in 2015, the curriculum was closely monitored by the University, including the correspondence between the courses being offered and the lecturers' qualifications. However, as the programme evolved, it became evident to the head of the study programme that there was a need to adjust the content and provide new courses based on student feedback and industry needs; this necessitated a search for instructors who could provide such courses.*" (Additional Material). Solutions were found including hiring alumni, industry experts and, in some cases, even students to deliver courses that are crucial to the programme's goals and key learning outcomes. The Panel found that this impacts significantly on the programme in a number of ways (as detailed in 2.4.3 below). It also relates to questions of the programme's sustainability and to the relationship between institutional policies and pragmatic solutions at the programme level.

Programme development, including initial programme development, is largely driven by the faculty, and directed by the programme manager. Given the relative newness of the programme, the first systematic programme evaluation has yet to take place. Similarly, systematic feedback from alumni has not been gathered. Students are surveyed regularly and praised the opportunities to provide feedback, either via the comprehensive course evaluations or directly to the programme managers (S). Students provided examples of improvements based on previous feedback. (S)

Student numbers have not yet reached the target of 30 students per cohort. According to TLU's rules, a programme should have at least 10 students per cohort to be allowed to continue. Discussions with staff and managers established that there is some flexibility, at least in the short term, if the programme managers make a convincing case to the dean of studies/heads of the academic units (M). Overall TLU is light on formal rules for the programmes, providing considerable leeway for programme managers and faculty. Whilst this aligns well with TLU's cultural norms and values of collaboration and dialogue, it also raises questions of equitable treatment, risk mitigation and quality assurance.

Overall, the programme is well planned and managed, with responsibilities shared by the academic programme manager and the student support liaison manager who were praised for their engagement and openness to ideas. It was clear to the Panel that programme managers hold a key role in how the programmes are managed and in quality assurance (M) and the Panel formed the view that the management oversight of the programme is rather light. Moreover, the Panel found that as staff contributing to the programme are from three different schools, they are subject to different

management standards. Students reported considerable differences, for example, in terms of requirements and workload, between the different elective options (see 2.4.2).

There are sufficient resources on campus to support students, although students expressed their wishes for a larger working space and for an expanded Game Lab which is one of the planned improvements identified in the SER. Resources are reviewed annually and include a reflection on student feedback. An example of an upgrade is the purchase of "*a cutting-edge computer lab with 16 gaming computers and an assortment of VR headsets was equipped in September 2020*" (SER).

As the programme is heavily reliant on tuition fees and student numbers have not reached target, changes to the courses offered have had to be made, including reducing, temporarily, elective and other courses so that they only run every other year (T). Whilst the financial stability and sustainability of the programme are not certain, there is some leeway to negotiate its continuation, even if student numbers fall below the stated minimum of 10 (M).

The programme structure is sound, as are programme objectives and learning outcomes. Responsibility for the alignment of the learning outcomes, teaching methods and student assessment lies with individual staff members. Whilst student feedback is collected on this (S) and staff members regularly exchange views and experiences (T), the Panel could not establish how this alignment is systematically ensured.

Strengths

- Game design is inherently interdisciplinary, and the programme reflects this.

- The programme managers are clearly engaged and much valued by students and alumni.

- The involvement of international experts and practitioners from the field is a clear asset. Connections with industry are generally strong.

- The programme is continually updated reflecting student feedback and developments in the field.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- Programme development, including core courses, does not correspond with the core faculty competences which is a significant risk to the quality of the programme. TLU is strongly recommended to ensure that programme development is clearly aligned with staff resources and this is subject to ongoing monitoring.

- Student numbers are not stable and fall below the minimum requirements. This has the potential to impact on the courses offered and their quality. It is recommended that the impact of low numbers is monitored, and steps taken to mitigate the risks.

- There is a concern that although the game society was only formed in 2019 and halted due to the pandemic, there is a need for space and facilities to help the students bond as a community of learners outside of class. The team should therefore investigate additional resources needed to support the society.

- Although there is some awareness of the needs of the labour market and some feedback is elicited from employers and alumni, much of this is ad hoc. It is recommended that a more comprehensive, rigorous, and systematic approach is taken to collect and analyse feedback and views from the labour market and alumni.

Opportunities for further improvement

- The programme is encouraged to explore, systematically, all options to secure a steady and stable student intake in the coming years.

- Now that the programme has produced four sets of graduates, the University should understand if they are being successful in employment.

2.4.2 Learning, teaching, and assessment

- Conditions and organisation of admission ensure fair access to education and motivated student body. Students' choice of specialisation is supported.

- A student-centred approach is used in the studies, aiming at the students to assume responsibility for planning their studies and career and supporting the development of key competencies and achieving the learning outcomes of the study programme.

- Student assessment, including taking accreditation of prior and experiential learning into account, supports the students and corresponds to the learning outcomes. Objective and reliable assessment is ensured.

- The organisation of studies including practical work and training is based on the specificities of students and forms of study and supports the student in achieving the learning outcomes. Opportunities have been established for mobility within Estonia and internationally.

- Support services for students are in place and available for students. Individual development and progress of students are monitored and supported.

- Graduates of the study programme are competitive in terms of their knowledge and social skills both nationally and internationally.

Evidence and analysis

Academic units set programme specific admissions criteria in addition to those required by TLU, such as the English language requirements for international students. Entrance criteria may include exams and other requirements such as portfolios. This approach works well (M). Applicants for the DG programme received guidance on the motivation letter in order to streamline the process (SER). The guidelines helped to raise the quality of applications. There are rules which govern RPL. Students reported that the submission form had not changed for many years and would benefit from improvement.

The design of the courses promotes student-centred learning by gradually developing knowledge, skills and competencies (T). Students' profiles and interests on entry vary considerably and the programme takes account of this by supporting the development of individual skills first to ensure they have the core skills and then moving from small to larger groups to learn how to work together to develop a full game. Students are thus facilitated in choosing a team role that fits their interests most, for example, game designer, artist, or sound programmer (T). Individual counselling is offered during the internship phase to support students and hopefully guide their future work ambitions. Currently internships are being undertaken online (T). The career counsellors support students in planning their studies and advise on course choice to match their future ambitions whether further study or a particular career. Advice on finding additional traineeships is also offered (M).

Staff create a vibrant and varied approach to learning utilising a range of teaching methods, the focus being on active teaching approaches. These include flipped classrooms, and feedback from fellow students and the teacher on class presentations. Regular seminars are organised for staff to exchange best practice (SER). Evaluation methods are quite innovative using techniques such as game fests, elevator pitches, peer reviews, discussions, exhibitions, public presentations and learning by teaching" (SER). An example of good practice is the application of student peer review of work that contributes to a student's individual grade. The programme has experimented with both single- and double-blind peer review. This can be challenging students may know each other's work and be able to guess the author or students may accidentally leave their name on their work (SER). One example was a games course where five students blind-marked each piece of work. Outlier student marks were eliminated, and the remaining marks were averaged to form 50% of the student grade, the mark from the teacher forming the other 50% (T). Marking the accuracy and providing reasoned logic for student awarded grades would be an additional learning step for the students and provide extra motivation for students to mark accurately.

Programme staff meet regularly to discuss the programme and share best practice. The delivery of a course is left to the discretion of the individual teacher. Some courses have weekly assignments providing students with regular feedback; however, this is more challenging with increased student numbers (T). For the thesis students approach the supervisor they would like (S). Students' choice of supervisor is not necessarily aligned with their expertise and some staff have more requests than others. This raises two issues: one of expertise and the other of staff overload. The SER recognised the shortage of staff available for thesis supervision. Supervisors seek relevant support from industry specialists who, as is appropriate, can support but not supervise. An information system to track student supervision would be useful (M).

From assessing the course descriptions, the Panel formed the view that the programme delivers the learning outcomes. Students reported that they felt some of the courses could be better integrated whilst others were a little repetitive. Students greatly appreciated the game jams and live projects (S). The SER acknowledges concerns that "*the clear presentation of assessment criteria, including their relation to learning outcomes, needs on-going attention, as well as assessment that is sometimes too strict or too loose.*" Students perceived that the level and challenge of courses was not always well balanced across the different pathways. Students did, however, note that usually the concerns they raise are acknowledged by the programme team and changes are made (S).

The Digital Learning Games degree includes a range of practical work aimed at individuals and groups, which reflects industry needs. The student cohort is quite international and there are also some

international teaching staff. Students are encouraged to experience more internationality through mobility and are made aware of the opportunities offered by the Erasmus programme in their first year. Students who have undertaken mobility reported that it was enriching. Mobility has been restricted to online exchange during the pandemic; one student, undertaking this option reported that it was working well (S).

The programme has an open-door policy and students reported that staff were easy to contact and very helpful (S, T, M). Student feedback is collected annually and reported on formally. Issues raised are discussed with individual teachers, and, if needed, a group is formed to solve problems (M). Student support services are well used, and students are aware of this support.

Employers and alumni reported positively on updates to the programme made in response to their feedback. For example, there were ongoing discussions on developing a course on narration, suggested by an employer. The Panel met representatives from two organisations, one of which had taken interns from the programme. They rated the fresh ideas and knowledge of e-learning brought and also recognised the need to ensure a match between student interests and area of work during the internship. Overall graduates were valued by employers, although many graduates return to their home countries (A and E).

Strengths

- Students from different countries create a culturally diverse environment, which helps attract and engage Erasmus exchange students.

- The programme includes a range of innovative teaching strategies such as project-based learning, flipped classroom, learning through teaching.

- There is good integration of formal and informal learning utilising game fests, game jams, and a variety of game playing events.

- Results of project-based activities are tested and evaluated by the stakeholders.

- The seminars where academic staff exchange best teaching practices and discuss study-related issues.

- Continued engagement by alumni and employers in the programme.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- In light of the overlaps between courses and variations in level of challenge, it is recommended that all courses contributing to the programme are reviewed to ensure good integration and consistency in the level of challenge for the same number of credits.

- There is an insufficient number of thesis supervisors with the required expertise to supervise students and it is recommended that the pool of appropriate supervisors should be increased.

Opportunities for further improvement

- Consider marking students' peer assessment of each other's work to enhance student learning.

- Develop an information system to track student supervision.

- Review the RPL student submission form.

2.4.3 Development, cooperation and internationalisation of teaching staff

– Teaching is conducted by a sufficient number of professionally competent members of the teaching staff who support the development of the students.

– Teaching staff follows the principles of academic ethics and the codes of conduct in case of non-compliance.

– Members of the teaching staff participate in international mobility programs which encourage the development of their teaching and RDC activities and the cultural openness of the HEI and the Estonian society.

– The effectiveness of both studies and RDC activities, students' feedback, the effectiveness of supervision, development of teaching and supervision skills, international mobility and entrepreneurial or work experience in the specific field outside the HEI is taken into consideration in evaluating the work of the member of the staff.

Evidence and analysis

Teaching is supported by input from a total of 21 staff (SER), 10 of whom teach the games related courses. The teaching team includes alumni and employers who bring a practical and real-world dimension to the programme. External input from industry and alumni is considered valuable and welcome. External input is only sought from those known to TLU; at the time of the assessment this included individuals based abroad who would typically block teach a course. During the pandemic, however, all teaching has been online.

The SER states that *"The most advanced students are asked to (co)teach a class or an entire course."* Further clarification states: "*Students don't teach their classmates but the year below*." Thus, second year master's students teach first year masters students. However, since some courses are only delivered every other year, this does not preclude the potential for students to be grading their peers who they might be studying with in another course. The reason given for this practice is that TLU does not "*have enough experts who are competent in this field and who are able to teach*" (Additional Materials). The Panel learned that "*in most of the cases courses are first designed by permanent DLG academic staff members*" and the students will first "*take this course as regular students.*" Furthermore, when the course is "*handed over their activity was supported and supervised by permanent academic staff members."* The Panel had significant concerns about the reliance on students to deliver the programme on the grounds that the core academic staff lack the expertise. The Panel further learned that the use of existing second year students as teachers was a deliberate

strategy to address the lack of expertise in the academic staff team and to avoid forcing "*existing faculty to teach subjects that are not directly in their area of expertise*". At the time of the assessment three second year students were employed, one of whom taught five courses, another two courses as well as two summer school courses and the third teaching summer school courses only. The technical expertise of the students is adequate, and the monitoring, mentoring and access to systems sufficiently controlled. However, the Panel was concerned that, where there is little core academic expertise for a new course design, industry input has to be sought to advise the staff member who is taking oversight of a course. In such cases it was not clear that there is sufficient expertise within the core staff to moderate the standard.

The Panel understands the pragmatism of a strategy which grows student expertise with a view to hiring them when they graduate. However, this does not counteract the fact that the delivery of a programme is reliant on existing students due to a lack of expertise in the core academic staff base. It was not clear to the Panel what would have happened to the programme should student expertise not been available. The Panel also noted that neither middle, nor senior management (M) were aware that second year students were teaching first year students, or that a programme was being offered where the core staff were unable to deliver the programme without the support of second year students.

Students reported that they were generally happy with the teaching, although they reported some variation of teaching competence (S).

Staff generally follow the principles of academic ethics and codes of conduct. Cases of plagiarism are very low on the programme and TLU recognises that copying is harder in a creative subject like DG (SER). Commissioned work, however, is still possible. TLU uses the Urkund plagiarism detection software which is mainly used for students' final theses. The Panel found the process for thesis submission via Urkund rather inefficient and commented that electronic submission of all assessments would be simpler enabling automatic submission to Urkund (M). Students are made aware of academic ethics at the start of the programme.

There is limited take up of the available mobility opportunities. The programme management are of the view that the programme has sufficient international input from the high proportion of international students, the contributions from international staff, international events, and projects. (M). The programme team are confident that if staff want to undertake a mobility opportunity, this will be supported.

Strengths

- There is a good range of staff involved in teaching the programme, including international staff and practitioners.

- Academic staff members and students are members of several international research or design and study projects, as well as scholarly communities.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- To ensure that the quality of teaching is maintained and that staff expertise is sustained, it is strongly recommended that must be sufficient teachers in the core staff with the required level of expertise to deliver the courses.

- It is strongly recommended that all teaching staff should have some formal pedagogy training, preferably formally certified.

Opportunities for further improvement

- TLU Could consider providing a system to allow electronic submission of all electronic assessments, enabling those that are relevant to be automatically submitted to Urkund.

- The programme would benefit from increasing the number of international presentations, seminars and workshops offered by DLG academic staff members.

- It is suggested that the engagement with employers and the games industry is increased.

- Increase the number of long-term internships for staff.

2.5.   European Modern Languages and Cultures (in Estonian, Bachelor studies)

General information

The European Languages and Cultures programme began in 2016, following a broad programme review in the School of Humanities. The study programme spans five European language and culture majors in English, Spanish, Italian, French and German, which replace three BA degrees in English, German and Romance language, and culture.

The study programme has grown from an initial intake of 105 undergraduates in 2016 to 248 students overall in 2020. Admissions vary between 111 first years in 2017 to 86 first years in 2018, with an average intake of 98. Applications to the programme have been fairly consistent over the five-year period 2016–20. The programme experiences a number of student dropouts annually: an average of 42 drop-out each year; this represents 15 percent of the student body in 2020.

Undergraduates on the European Languages and Cultures study programme undertake study abroad at a partner institution via the Erasmus programme, corresponding with their language major. An average of 23 undertook study abroad per year in the period 2018–20.

There are currently 44 academic employees on the study programme, a number that has been fairly consistent over this five-year period varying from 47 in 2016 to 41 in 2019.

2.5.1 Planning and management of studies

- The design and development of study programme(s) take into account the expectations of students and other stakeholders, national strategies, legislation and trends in the particular area as well as labour market needs. The level and volume of RDC activities is sufficient and supports the launching of the study programme(s).

- The objectives of study programme(s), modules (including courses) and their learning outcomes are concrete and coherent. The teaching content and methods and assessment criteria and methods support students in achieving their learning outcomes and developing their key competencies. The study programmes support the development of creativity and entrepreneurship and other general competencies.

- The administration of material and financial resources that ensure the design and implementation of the study programme(s) is purposeful, systematic, and sustainable. The learning environment, including materials, tools and technology support the students in achieving their learning outcomes.

Evidence and analysis

The design and goals of the European Modern Languages and Cultures programme are well articulated in the SER. There is a clear intention to balance "liberal arts-style practice and more traditional speciality-led study programme practices" and to integrate language and cultural learning in both subject specific and interdisciplinary ways. The Panel is assured that the "conceptual overhaul" of this relatively new programme is sound and that it prepares students for more specialized studies at master's level. The programme combines both general and specialized knowledge within an area studies framework, alongside the practical skills of writing, listening and speaking needed to demonstrate at least a B2 level in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages by the end of the degree.

The major/minor combination of two languages is a distinctive feature of the study programme, designed to build both linguistic and cultural competencies. The major/minor structure helps to ensure the five language groups are integrated within a European Languages and Cultures framework, rather than existing in parallel. The coherence of the programme is aided by the integration of introductory and specialist courses across the span of the degree, with a strong emphasis on independent learning and a good balance of subject-specific and transferable skills. This balance gives the study programme a robust level of coherence, whilst offering students a variety of courses as well as the option of study abroad in Year 2.

The Panel reviewed the learning outcomes which, overall, are appropriate. The Panel felt, however, that learning outcomes could be more clearly articulated and that programme managers could develop a digital strategy that would articulate the benefits of blended learning and also ensure that all graduates are digitally literate.

The balance between cultural knowledge and the practical skills of language learning ensures theoretical and practical dimensions are equally emphasized on the programme. Effective emphasis is placed on autonomous learning, which is appreciated by students and employers. The credit system is coherent, and the programme is flexible, enabling students to adapt the intensity of their study to their personal needs. However, the programme could more clearly articulate the relationship between the different years of the degree to ensure that the undergraduates' student journey has clear staging posts. This might help address completion rates within the nominal period, whilst reducing drop-out rates.

It was clear to the Panel from the SER and discussions that mechanisms are in place to share best practice across the language areas, whilst allowing languages to focus on their own specialist needs, such as writing skills. The learning environment is appropriate for the study programme, though the Panel recommends further investment in language labs to aid students in their self-study.

The design of the programme and the variety of assessments meet the expectations of students across the range of languages, as well as the needs of employers. Although employers place more emphasis on language learning than cultural competence, they are keen to emphasize the value of transferable skills (such as presentation skills) that students learn on the study programme, as well as the confidence-building and expanded horizons that this study programme seeks to develop, especially when linked to study abroad.

The SER states that the study programme and methods of teaching and assessment seek to instil an enterprising attitude. This is borne out in the views of students and alumni, all of whom spoke positively about changes to the study programme, the major/minor structure, and student engagement. However, the Panel recommends the programme managers to engage more systematically with alumni and employers to shape developments, as well as seeking to ensure parity of experience across the five language areas by eliciting the views of current students.

The Panel noted that programme managers are aware of the needs to reduce the number of student dropouts and to increase the percentage of students who complete their studies within the nominal period. It was clear to the Panel that the managers and teachers are aware of these issues and have plans to address them. However, the Panel recommends that the University should articulate more clearly how it is supporting programme managers to improve these metrics.

The Panel understands the reasons why the major in Finnish was closed, whilst preserving a Finnish minor and Finnish at postgraduate level within the Education curriculum. However, the Panel recommends the decisions about Finnish are more clearly articulated and that there remains a clear pathway between the Finnish minor at bachelor's level and Masters' study in this language area.

Strengths

- The integration of language learning and cultural competence in each year of the degree.

- Sharing best practice between the language areas, whilst enabling individual language areas the freedom to emphasize skills and types of knowledge.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The number of dropouts is high and the number of students completing their degree within the nominal study period is not satisfactory. It is recommended that TLU develops strategies aimed at increasing retention and those completing within the nominal study period and the University should clearly articulate how it is supporting the study programme to achieve these ends.

- Whilst feedback is collected from students and alumni it is not yet consistent or sufficiently systematic. The Panel recommends that feedback is elicited from students and alumni more systematically in every language area to ensure parity of experience across the five areas.

- The Panel recommends that TLU makes a more coherent statement on the future status of Finnish at undergraduate level to ensure that students have the opportunity to study this important regional language, especially those that wish to study Finnish at postgraduate level.

- The numbers of students undertaking a year abroad falls below international norms for this kind of programme. TLU is recommended to set ambitious targets for study abroad in Year 2 and to develop strategies to achieve them.

- It is recommended that TLU invest further in language laboratories to support students' self-study and to ensure they have access to appropriate resources as language students.

Opportunities for further improvement

- Intended learning outcomes could be presented more clearly in the documentation and the relationship between the different years of the degree.

- The programme may wish to consider broadening the student's skills portfolio (for example, digital skills) to prepare them for changing working practices, ensuring parity between the different language combinations.

- The Panel recommends the development of a digital strategy to articulate the advantages of blended learning and to ensure that all its graduates are digitally literate.

- TLU should explore establishing an employers' committee that meets regularly, has representatives from key employers on a rolling basis and who can advise on further refinements to the study programme.

2.5.2 Learning, teaching, and assessment

- Conditions and organisation of admission ensure fair access to education and motivated student body. Students' choice of specialisation is supported.

- A student-centred approach is used in the studies, aiming at the students to assume responsibility for planning their studies and career and supporting the development of key competencies and achieving the learning outcomes of the study programme.

- Student assessment, including taking accreditation of prior and experiential learning into account, supports the students and corresponds to the learning outcomes. Objective and reliable assessment is ensured.

- The organisation of studies including practical work and training is based on the specificities of students and forms of study and supports the student in achieving the learning outcomes. Opportunities have been established for mobility within Estonia and internationally.

- Support services for students are in place and available for students. Individual development and progress of students are monitored and supported.

- Graduates of the study programme are competitive in terms of their knowledge and social skills both nationally and internationally.

Evidence and analysis

The SER clearly states the parameters and processes of learning, teaching and assessment within the study programme. Evidence from discussions with programme staff and students support the statement made.

The admissions system is fair. It is underpinned by University regulations and involves staff with appropriate subject and language specialisms. The programme emphasizes the value of applicants participating in Student Academy courses and takes into account the diversity of language learning

levels. For example, there are applicants who have a higher competence in English than in the other European languages who are, justifiably, admitted at a higher level of language learning than their peers in the other languages.

The teaching staff are extremely dedicated in planning appropriate knowledge content in the syllabus, language learning requirements, and in ensuring that the students receive high level pastoral care. There is a clear emphasis on a learner-centred pedagogy, and this is a strength of the programme. Teaching staff are given the option of training to develop their pedagogic skills in specific areas.

The Language Lab of the School of Humanities is equipped with video and audio recording techniques, as well as video processing facilities. Some courses rely on the lab to roll out special tasks with students. These may be in the form of self-directed study, making a language learning video or creating and implementing an experiment. Where this happens, the lab needs to be booked in advance. Other freeware platforms are also recommended to students for language-learning.

Assessments are varied to best suit the needs of the language area, at both formative and summative levels and designed so that students encounter a variety of assessment types during the course of their degree. Students are aware of the nature of the assessment when choosing elective courses. Students reported that they are satisfied with the feedback received on their assessments which helps them reflect on how they can improve their grades and performance. The types of material in which students engage and are assessed are appropriately aligned with the taught content: these are mainly of a literary and cultural nature, including visual material. The Panel recommends that the range of cultural material could be supplemented with more technical texts, such as legal and business texts, especially for students thinking about professional career paths.

Students are well aware of academic integrity requirements and have indicated that they are adequately trained and fully supported in a "preventive" approach to plagiarism. Instances identified as problematic are discussed with teachers and recommendations are communicated to students and monitored in subsequent meetings. This helps students understand and better implement academic requirements. Cases where there is evidence of repeated and intentional plagiarism are penalised according to regulations; students are informed of the consequences of such actions.

The Panel was informed that only around 10 percent of students participate in a period of study abroad via the Erasmus programme, and there are major difficulties with the formal recognition of courses taken abroad. It was confirmed that there is less monitoring of a student's course choice during a period of study abroad in the second year. However, the Panel learned that students felt well prepared and supported for their study abroad (S). The Panel was informed that on return to TLU, the study undertaken abroad is only recognised for elective courses and that core courses have to be made up (S T). Although students reported that the benefits of the period of study abroad clearly outweighed the drawbacks of having to return and make up courses taught whilst they were away, the Panel considers this a major hindrance to Erasmus mobility. It is important that TLU pay particular attention to the translation of marks for courses taken abroad and to provide further guidance to ensure parity of experience between students who go abroad and those who do not.

Students spoke positively about the trainee opportunities available, with support coming from both the programme and the group of affiliated employers. This is a compulsory element of the programme and one that might be developed further, particularly to standardise the length of the internship, the

level of supervision and support, and the formalization of the assessment criteria to ensure parity across different placements and language areas.

The Panel is satisfied that the study programme is designed and delivered with the aim of producing high-quality graduates who have the knowledge, skills, language learning and aptitudes to continue to postgraduate course or to employment in a variety of professions. There are mechanisms for gathering employer and alumni feedback; however, these do not seem to be consistently and systematically applied. A closer affiliation with alumni and employers, via a committee structure, will help shorten the gap between the specific elements of the course and the needs of the marketplace, particularly of international employers in and beyond the Baltic region.

Strengths

- Students are very well supported by teaching staff, who are readily available to provide extensive feedback on their assessed work.

- Teaching staff and programme managers are dedicated to the continuous refinement of the study programme and to the sharing of best practice between the language areas.

- Assessments are varied within the courses of the degree, which students find enjoyable and which instill both subject-specific and transferable skills and aptitudes.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The Panel found that there was poor provision to enable students to gain ECTS credits against core courses during their period of study abroad. To help address this, TLU is recommended to develop a higher level of compatibility between TLU's core curriculum and Erasmus activity, to develop a consistent method to enable the full recognition of credits and grades gained abroad. This will ensure parity of experience between students who go abroad and those taking their full studies in Tallinn.

Opportunities for further improvement

- TLU could consider the further use of language lab programmes to help emphasize the autonomous study aspects of the programme.

- It would be beneficial to explore more exposure to relevant professional practices to guide career choices and to sharpen articulation with the master's programme.

2.5.3 Development, cooperation and internationalisation of teaching staff

- Teaching is conducted by enough professionally competent members of the teaching staff who support the development of the students.

- Teaching staff follows the principles of academic ethics and the codes of conduct in case of non-compliance.

- Members of the teaching staff participate in international mobility programs which encourage the development of their teaching and RDC activities and the cultural openness of the HEI and the Estonian society.

- The effectiveness of both studies and RDC activities, students' feedback, the effectiveness of supervision, development of teaching and supervision skills, international mobility and entrepreneurial or work experience in the specific field outside the HEI is taken into consideration in evaluating the work of the member of the staff.

Evidence and analysis

The programme employs staff members with relevant qualifications, knowledge, and experience in the teaching areas for which they are responsible. The majority of staff members have a teaching load, as well as research responsibilities, and in some cases also community engagement. There are seven foreign lecturers currently teaching across the programme, which represents 27% of the entire staff body; some staff focus on teaching language classes.

Students appreciate that they can approach staff at any time and be confident that they will receive response which helps them to progress. Students spoke highly of the classroom experience and the teaching methodologies used.

Staff confirmed their understanding that their continuous development was voluntary beyond basic requirements. Some staff members reported taking high numbers of courses offered by TLU for the development of technology-related skills, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, but it was clear that staff engagement in CPD is determined by the individual. While TLU organize regular training seminars, the Panel could not discern an overarching approach which directly correlated CPD training take-up with the strategic directions of the staff member's unit.

Workload is negotiated with individual staff members within parameters set by the University. It was unclear to the Panel, how, beyond yearly meetings, workload is monitored so that overload is avoided and staff's work-life balance is properly considered. The Panel gained the impression that staff are encouraged to take on as much as they possibly can and will be remunerated accordingly. The workload model does not consider the extra time spent with students in out-of-class interactions, nor does it take account of the extensive CPD some staff eagerly engage with. The Panel found there is the risk of creating unsustainable student expectations of staff's out-of-class availability and of overloading staff which can impact negatively on mental health and on the quality of teaching and support offered by any given member of staff.

Staff engage with a number of external organisations and/or enterprises which use the languages taught on the programme which gives students more exposure to the marketplace. The level of engagement varies across languages with Italian and Spanish presenting higher levels of involvement. There are links with a range of different organisations including the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Spain, Finnish National Agency for Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Italy and the Camoes Institute. These may, for example, fund lectureships to support programme implementation or provide opportunities for interactions with native speakers to be built into the curriculum.

Some staff have a strong professional background from working as professional translators, for example. The programme might capitalise on this experience in the design of content and the selection of practical activities. The Panel found that in some of the languages only literary translations were tackled, and that no exposure to other domains was planned. Internationally, translation of specialised fields supported by computer-assisted technology is in great demand. Any such exposure to the students would give them a clearer and more informed perspective on what such work entails and enable them to make better career choices and/or to choose to continue to study at master's level. Increasing curriculum content with an already diverse content would be difficult. Nevertheless, creating a basis for discussion around specialised translations at undergraduate level could be helpful to students, and would create stronger pathways to master's programmes.

There is some international mobility via Erasmus and, more recently, e-mobilities, which allow staff to keep abreast of cultural and language developments in the relevant countries. However, staff feel they are only able to take up limited opportunities for travel, though they recognize that they would benefit from more to ensure the currency of their knowledge and to support their continuous development. This could be achieved were staff mobility to be supported beyond the current sabbatical system.

The Panel learned that there are activities at TLU for *internationalisation-at-home*, particularly for Italian, German and Spanish. These activities support both staff and students to engage in the global dimension of their specialist area of language and culture. Whilst this is not a direct substitute to in-country immersion, it is still relevant to intensify internationalisation-at-home activities to provide some international experience to those who cannot travel.

Strengths

- Teachers are highly committed to ensure students get the best possible educational experience, both in the classroom and via pastoral support.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- Whilst TLU offers many CPD activities it is not clear how they related to the strategic directions of the academic unit. It is recommended that the range of CPD activities is aligned to the strategic needs of the unit and that consideration be given to introducing some compulsory training/refreshers where these support the development of competencies at programme level.

- International mobilities should be better promoted and intensified to allow for continuous professional development and to enable staff to engage in the global dimension of their specialist area of language and culture.

- The programme should intensify internationalisation-at-home activities to compensate as much as possible for the low level of international mobilities by both staff and students.

Opportunities for further improvement

- TLU could consider more support at institutional level to encourage staff mobility beyond the sabbatical system.

- TLU is encouraged to develop a clearer workload model to ensure good work-life balance for staff and to ensure that the quality of education is not compromised.

2.6. Health Behaviour and Wellbeing (in Estonian and English, PhD)

General information

The Health Behaviour and Wellbeing study programme is a doctoral programme that was created in 2016. It has been operating stably and adjusting to the needs and expectations of various stakeholders by having a stable admission numbers, research groups and staff involved in development of the programme. The study programme changes frequently, adapting to feedback received on it.

Statistics provided in the SER show that the number of applicants and students enrolled was exceptionally low in 2020. Before that 3–4 students were admitted each year, corresponding to approximately 1/3 of the applicants. Mobility numbers of outgoing staff and students were on the rise until 2020. There have been no incoming students.

2.6.1 Planning and management of studies

- The design and development of study programme(s) take into account the expectations of students and other stakeholders, national strategies, legislation and trends in the particular area as well as labour market needs. The level and volume of RDC activities is sufficient and supports the launching of the study programme(s).

- The objectives of study programme(s), modules (including courses) and their learning outcomes are concrete and coherent. The teaching content and methods and assessment criteria and methods support students in achieving their learning outcomes and developing their key competencies. The study programmes support the development of creativity and entrepreneurship and other general competencies.

- The administration of material and financial resources that ensure the design and implementation of the study programme(s) is purposeful, systematic, and sustainable. The learning environment, including materials, tools and technology support the students in achieving their learning outcomes.

Evidence and analysis

The PhD study programme Health Behaviour and Wellbeing was created by the School of Natural Sciences and Health (SNSH) to support and strengthen natural sciences and health research at TLU. In this way, it supports the main objectives of SNSH and tallies with the Estonian National Health Plan 2009–2020 and the Welfare Development Plan 2016–2023 where a need for research and evidence-based interventions in health behaviour and wellbeing is clearly stated. Discussions with stakeholders provided confirmation of the good alignment between the focus of the study programme and the needs of stakeholders. Stakeholders agreed about the uniqueness of the programme and the demand for PhD level specialists in the field of Health Behaviour and Wellbeing in the labour market (E, A). Due

to the growing importance of public health and the challenges created by an ageing population, the programme has a clear niche as a possible knowledge and solution provider.

The objective for SNSH is to create stronger research and increase scientific capacity in the field. Given that some of the regular lecturers from the School are enrolled on the programme, there is also an expectation by the management that the programme will help meet the School's need to increase the qualifications of lecturers in SNSH.

Students and staff are regularly involved in the development of the programme which is outlined in the yearly report produced by the study programme administrator. The SER claims that external stakeholders influence developments in the programme. However, the Panel found that contact with external stakeholders is rather ad hoc and is based on personal relations (E).

Student admission is based on fellowships and the capacity of the SNSH research groups to supervise the student. Students may apply with their own project in which case they have to find a supervisor within the School. However, students may have co-supervisors from outside SNSH. Before enrolment, the student and supervisor together develop a study plan that is consistent with the topic of the doctoral thesis. Although the SER provides examples of collaboration with relevant partners like hospitals, the study programme does not build formal collaborations through partnership agreements for specific research topics or projects, making collaborations mentioned in SER unstable.

The SER states that 75% of the study time is for research work and work associated with the writing of the thesis. These activities are based in the research group to which the student was assigned on enrolment. During their study, students are offered interdisciplinary seminars with topics aimed at the study programme alongside several courses aimed at developing more general, but still very relevant, competencies. This includes subjects such as ethics in human studies, academic writing and teaching and supervisory skills. Some of these courses are compulsory. Courses from other universities can be included in the curriculum. Together, these arrangements provide flexibility in the programme and enables the School to take on research projects across a good range of subjects related to the focus of SNSH.

Students are encouraged to communicate their results to the community and to participate in international conferences. The Panel learned that students are very satisfied with the study programme. Despite being dispersed into research groups with very different research profiles, they expressed a sense of belonging to the same programme (S).

Both student and staff numbers for the programme are small (SER), leading the panel to concerns over the sustainability of a rather complex area of research. The economic sustainability is supported by linking research subjects to financed research projects in the SHSH's research groups thus providing both structural and academic research environments for the students. The SER documents the presence of relevant laboratory resources and both students and supervisors reported that the resources available, including laboratories, are sufficient (T, S). Many of the courses offered are general courses shared with other study programmes.

Since 2019 Tallinn University has provided extra scholarships to doctoral students to enable them to focus better on their studies (SER). Students and supervisors reported that this was extremely helpful and has enabled them to reduce workload not connected with their research. Supervisors are aware of the ministry's reform that will change the status of doctoral students to junior researchers with a

concomitant increase in their salary. Support for student participation in international conferences and study intervals abroad is available and students find them accessible and sufficient.

Strengths

- High demand for PhD level specialists of Health Behaviour and Wellbeing field in the labour market.

- Uniqueness of the programme in the region with very good potential to attract domestic and foreign candidates.

- There is a strong link between the PhD projects and the research activity of the School's research groups.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- Whilst there is good co-operation with external partners, this tends to be on the basis of individual relationships. To ensure the full benefit of such cooperation, the Panel recommends that cooperation with external partners is formalised.

- To create a stronger pool of suitable applicants, it is recommended that a marketing strategy is developed for the programme to ensure that the potential to attract both national and international students is not missed.

2.6.2 Learning, teaching, and assessment

- Conditions and organisation of admission ensure fair access to education and motivated student body. Students' choice of specialisation is supported.

- A student-centred approach is used in the studies, aiming at the students to assume responsibility for planning their studies and career and supporting the development of key competencies and achieving the learning outcomes of the study programme.

- Student assessment, including taking accreditation of prior and experiential learning into account, supports the students and corresponds to the learning outcomes. Objective and reliable assessment is ensured.

- The organisation of studies including practical work and training is based on the specificities of students and forms of study and supports the student in achieving the learning outcomes. Opportunities have been established for mobility within Estonia and internationally.

- Support services for students are in place and available for students. Individual development and progress of students are monitored and supported.

- Graduates of the study programme are competitive in terms of their knowledge and social skills both nationally and internationally.

Evidence and analysis

Admissions information is available on the University webpage. Interested candidates must first contact a potential supervisor and find a suitable research project that is related to an ongoing project in the research group (SER, W). There is no guidance on how to find possible supervisors and no information about ongoing or funded projects on the admissions webpage. Currently the admissions process favours candidates who have previous collaboration with possible supervisors (S, M). However, the University is working on implementing a project-based admissions system that would make it easier for foreign candidates to apply (M).

SNSH offers flexibility to support students who are working alongside their studies. Of the current 13 doctoral students, 5 are academics in SNSH (SER). Students, and supervisors confirmed that it was possible to change students' workload to accommodate research and personal circumstances.

The programme has a broad scope and offers an extensive range of research in the area of Health Behaviour and Wellbeing. There is a versatile range of courses (SER) which students reported as being rather general (S). Interdisciplinarity is supported with structured seminars and participation is mandatory. Students were satisfied with methodological support which is offered through the courses and by supervisors. The level and variety of general skills developed in the SP is sufficient for research and employment. Students feel sufficiently supported by supervisors to ensure academic success and graduation within the nominal study period.

According to the SER, students must regularly submit an individual study plan. This usually includes a schedule for passing mandatory courses and the research phases in a semester or study year. The Panel learned that students often turn to support staff with questions related to their study plans rather than taking them to their supervisors. This suggests that students may lack information and skills to plan their own studies and career.

There are formal processes for students to receive regular feedback and reviews from their supervisors (SER). Students must pass attestations yearly. Individual study plans are reviewed and assessed by a Progress Review Committee which offers feedback and possible solutions to difficulties.

The requirements for doctoral studies are clearly stated in the "*TLU Regulations for Doctoral Studies and Defence of Doctoral Theses*", including requirements for the defence. In addition, dedicated counsellors based in TLU support units help with the compilation of the report so that it meets University rules and requirements (SER).

Student feedback is collected and analysed (SER, M). The Research Administration Office conducted a satisfaction survey among the doctoral students in 2017. The participation rate was 25% and satisfaction with various doctoral studies-related matters was covered (SER).

Strengths

- The high satisfaction of students with the support provided by supervisors and the courses.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The current admission process gives preference to local students who already have contact with potential supervisors and are previously (e.g. during master studies) involved in their research groups. The implementation of a project-based admissions process is recommended

to help to increase the numbers of foreign applicants and promote both the long-term sustainability and the internationalisation of the programme.

Opportunities for further improvement

- The programme is encouraged to ensure that PhD students have the necessary information and support for the development of individual study plans.

- The programme team is encouraged to expand the variety of courses offered to provide the best possible methodological support to the doctoral students.

2.6.3 Development, cooperation and internationalisation of teaching staff

– Teaching is conducted by a sufficient number of professionally competent members of the teaching staff who support the development of the students.

– Teaching staff follows the principles of academic ethics and the codes of conduct in case of non-compliance.

– Members of the teaching staff participate in international mobility programs which encourage the development of their teaching and RDC activities and the cultural openness of the HEI and the Estonian society.

– The effectiveness of both studies and RDC activities, students' feedback, the effectiveness of supervision, development of teaching and supervision skills, international mobility and entrepreneurial or work experience in the specific field outside the HEI is taken into consideration in evaluating the work of the member of the staff.

Evidence and analysis

While the high level of multi-disciplinarity is a strength of the programme, it is challenging to support the programme with sufficient well-qualified teachers and supervisors. The challenge is addressed by engaging several external experts to supplement the eleven members of TLU staff. From discussions with employers, the Panel formed the view that the external contributors were highly qualified and well-integrated in the management and development of the programme. PhD projects are closely linked to ongoing research and students have ready access to their supervisors. The Panel concluded that there is a sufficient number of staff involved in teaching speciality courses and in supervising to ensure that students are receive the necessary support for their development.

Both staff and students were well aware of University-driven activities aimed at supporting and maintaining good principles of academic ethics and the codes of conduct. The topic is addressed in courses and often discussed in seminars.

There is limited long-term mobility of staff which is mainly due to personal reasons (SER). Some staff expressed the view that sufficient international collaboration could and does take place without

having to travel. This is unfortunate since TLU offers sabbaticals, which is rather rare among European universities. Teaching staff and supervisors were in favour of sabbaticals in principle but found the reality difficult to realize and preferred short-term mobility such as participation in conferences. During the pandemic online participation has replaced almost all mobility. The Panel found that this has a negative impact on the development of internationalisation. Whilst TLU is aware of the difficulties for doctoral students to undertake long-term mobility due to personal circumstances, the Panel did not see evidence of a clear strategy to address the problem.

There are seminars aimed at the development of supervisory skills. Examples of professional development activities are described in the SER. At the same time, courses directed at improving teaching capabilities are optional (SER); staff reported that they feel little need to participate.

Although activities to improve supervision and mobility are presented in the SER, these activities are formulated in rather general terms, "to support" for example, and provide no clear actions that will be taken. Interviews with teaching staff and management offered no clarification.

Strengths

- Motivated and competent staff and well-integrated visiting staff who contribute to the development of the study programme.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- Mobility is low and compromises the experience of staff and students. It is strongly recommended that TLU develop a clear strategy to increase the mobility of students and staff.

- PhD students should be exposed to a change in research environment during their study at another research organisation or company in Estonia or abroad.