

**Decision Regarding the Assessment of the  
Life Sciences Study Programme Group  
Estonian University of Life Sciences**

**15/03/2016**

**The Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education of the  
Estonian Quality Agency for Higher Education and VET  
decided to approve the report by the Assessment Committee  
and to conduct the next quality assessment of the Life  
Sciences study programme group in the first and second  
cycles of higher education at the Estonian University of Life  
Sciences in seven years,  
with a secondary condition**

On the basis of subsections 12<sup>2</sup> (1) and 10 (4) of the Universities Act, point 3.7.3 of the Statutes of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher Education and VET (hereinafter referred to as 'EKKA') and point 41 of the document, 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education', authorised in point 3.7.1 of the above-mentioned EKKA Statutes; the Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education of EKKA (hereinafter referred to as 'the Council') affirms the following:

1. On 3.12.2014 the Estonian University of Life Sciences and EKKA agreed upon a time frame to conduct the quality assessment of the study programme group.
2. The Director of EKKA, by her order on 25.09.2015, approved the following membership of the quality assessment committee for the Life Sciences and Environmental Protection study programme groups in the first and second cycles of higher education at the University of Tartu and the Estonian University of Life Sciences (hereinafter referred to as 'the Committee'):

<b>Laurent Counillon – Chair</b>	Professor, University of Nice-Sophia Antipolis (France)
<b>Olav Aarna</b>	Advisor, Estonian Qualifications Authority (Estonia)
<b>Dietwald Gruehn</b>	Professor, TU Dortmund University (Germany)
<b>Kari Keinänen</b>	Professor, University of Helsinki (Finland)
<b>Henricus Balthasar Joseph Leemans</b>	Professor, Wageningen University (Netherlands)
<b>Ana Maria Pelacho Aja</b>	Professor, University of Lleida (Spain)
<b>Adrian Stan</b>	Student, The Victor Babes University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Timisoara (Romania)

3. The Estonian University of Life Sciences submitted the following programmes for evaluation under this study programme group:

**Applied Biology of Aquatic and Terrestrial Ecosystems (BSc)**

### **Applied Biology of Aquatic and Terrestrial Ecosystems (MSc)**

4. The Estonian University of Life Sciences submitted a self-evaluation report to the EKKA Bureau on 25.09.2015 and the assessment coordinator forwarded it to the Committee on 30.09.2015.
5. An assessment visit was made to the Estonian University of Life Sciences during 1-2.12.2015.
6. The Committee sent its draft assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 4.02.2016, EKKA forwarded it to the Estonian University of Life Sciences for its comments on 5.02.2016, and the University delivered its response on 22.02.2016.
7. The Committee submitted its final assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 7.03.2016. That assessment report is an integral part of the decision, and is available on the EKKA website.
8. The Secretary of the Council forwarded the Committee's final assessment report along with the University's self-evaluation report to the Council members on 7.03.2016.
9. The Council with 8 members present discussed these received documents in its session on 15.03.2016 and, based on the assessment report, decided to point out the following strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations regarding the Life Sciences study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at the Estonian University of Life Sciences.

### **Applied Biology of Aquatic and Terrestrial Ecosystems (BSc, MSc)**

#### Strengths

- Having benefitted from European Union structural funds, the buildings and other infrastructures are of high quality and provide access to students with disabilities as well. In addition, the Estonian University of Life Sciences has a large number of external facilities for conducting summertime practical classes.
- Competent teaching staff from different departments and educational institutions conduct the teaching.
- Feedback from students, employers, alumni and other stakeholders is taken into consideration in the process of study programme development.
- In the summer, students complete several practical trainings at different facilities, under supervision of the teaching staff.
- Supervision of students' independent work in the BSc programme is of good quality.

#### Areas for improvement and recommendations

- The study programmes should include more basic courses.
- ECTS credits are not balanced by semester (especially in the BSc programme). Distribution of ECTS credits should be reviewed for both programmes to make it uniform throughout the semesters. Only during the last semester students should be provided with extra time to write their theses.
- Coherence between subjects is weak. In order to achieve better interaction between subjects, the number of courses should be reduced and integrated courses with larger credit ratings should be offered instead.
- It should be clearly indicated how the expected learning outcomes of individual courses are linked to the learning outcomes of the entire study programme. It remains unclear how generic competences (teamwork skills, communication skills, etc.) are achieved through the courses mentioned in the self-evaluation report ('Estonian Birds', 'Estonian insects', etc.).

- The proportion of laboratory work and practical courses should be increased in the study programmes.
  - Given the small number of Master's students and the number of ECTS credits required, the elective courses offered within the programme, along with their credit ratings, are too large. Not all elective courses are equally available to students.
  - Organisation of the teaching and learning is mostly based upon personal communications between lecturers and students and therefore it lacks sufficient transparency. It is necessary to establish a system for routinely solving problems as they occur.
  - An increased use of modern teaching methods and e-learning options is needed in the teaching and learning process.
  - Not all laboratories are fully utilised and this limits students' opportunities for laboratory work. The potential of laboratories should be better exploited.
  - Finding suitable external practical training facilities for students is a concern.
  - Organisation of studies should take into consideration the students' commutes between different buildings.
  - International student mobility is low. To promote both inward and outward mobility, the number of courses taught in English should be increased.
  - Enrolment to the MSc programme is not sufficient (4 students were enrolled in 2015). The University should find ways to promote the programme.
  - A large number of the teaching staff in the MSc programme do not hold doctorates. The proportion of teachers with doctoral degrees should be increased.
  - The quality of Master's thesis supervision should be improved.
  - Teaching staff replenishment from among young prospects should be ensured for the BSc programme.
  - A larger number of international lecturers should be involved in teaching.
  - Development of the pedagogical skills of ordinary teaching staff should be more valued.
  - Student participation rates in feedback surveys are low. Students should be encouraged to participate more actively in the process of study programme development.
  - Results of feedback surveys among students are not publicly available.
  - The study programmes should systematically collect information on the employment rates of graduates.
  - The annual numbers of dropouts in both study programmes exceed the numbers of graduates.
- 10.** Point 41 of the document, 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education', establishes that the Quality Assessment Council shall approve an assessment report within three months after receipt of the report. The Council shall weigh the strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations pointed out in the assessment report, and then shall decide whether to conduct the next quality assessment of that study programme group in seven years, or in less than seven years.
- 11.** The Council weighed the strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations referred to in point 9 of this document and found that the study programmes, the teaching conducted under these programmes, and development activities regarding teaching and learning conform to the requirements if the University eliminates the following shortcomings:
- The small number of students in the MSc programme does not currently ensure the sustainability of the programme.
  - According to subsection 6 (1) of the Government of the Republic Regulation, 'Standard of Higher Education', study programmes must correspond to the areas of activity of the educational institution, which are based on the development plan or the statutes of the institution. One of the goals set out by the Development Plan for 2025 of the Estonian

- University of Life Sciences aims to reduce the number of students who discontinue their studies after the first academic year. At present the annual numbers of dropouts for both study programmes exceed the numbers of graduates.
- A large number of the teaching staff in the MSc programme does not hold doctorates. In order to ensure that the programme comply with clauses 6 (7) 1) and 2) of the Standard of Higher Education, it is necessary to include in the teaching a sufficient number of both ordinary and visiting teaching staff who have doctoral degrees, and to ensure sufficient recruitment and career progression of young teaching staff.
  - There are shortcomings with the quality of Master's thesis supervision. It is necessary to ensure that teaching staff's teaching competences conform to the requirements in clause 6 (7) 2) of the Standard of Higher Education.

- 12.** According to clause 53 (1) 2) of the Administrative Procedure Act, a secondary condition of an administrative act is an additional duty related to the principal regulation of the administrative act, and according to clause 53 (1) 3) it is also a supplementary condition for the creation of a right arising from the principal regulation of the administrative act. Clauses 53 (2) 2) and 3) establish that a secondary condition may be imposed on an administrative act if the administrative act cannot be issued without the secondary condition, or if issue of the administrative act must be resolved on the basis of an administrative right of discretion. The Council found that, without a secondary condition, the next quality assessment of the study programme group should be conducted in less than seven years, and

#### **DECIDED**

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

No later than 15.03.2017, the Estonian University of Life Sciences shall submit an action plan and a progress report to the Council on eliminating the shortcomings referred to in point 11 of this document.

The decision was adopted by 8 votes in favour. Against 0.

- 13.** In case the Estonian University of Life Sciences does not comply with the secondary condition by the due date, the Council will repeal this assessment decision and set a new date for a quality assessment of the study programme group, or establish a new secondary condition.
- 14.** A person who finds that his or her rights are violated or his or her freedoms are restricted by this decision may file a challenge with the EKKA Quality Assessment Council within 30 days after the person filing the challenge became or should have become aware of the contested finding. A judicial challenge to the decision may be submitted within 30 days after its delivery, filing an action with the Tallinn courthouse of the Tallinn Administrative Court pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Code of Administrative Court Procedure.

**Tõnu Meidla**  
**Chair of the Council**

**Hillar Bauman**  
**Secretary of the Council**