



## **Institutional Accreditation**

# **Assessment report on Pallas University of Applied Sciences**

**2026**



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# 1. 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. **Achievements that exceed the level of the standard (not compliance with the standard) are presented as strengths. Areas of concern and recommendations point to shortcomings in meeting the requirements of the institutional accreditation standard** and affect the formation of the final decision of the Council. **Opportunities for further improvement are proposals for improvement that do not contain a reference to noncompliance with the standard** and the inclusion or exclusion of which is at the discretion of the institution of higher education. Proposals for further developments will not affect the final decision of the Council.

Educational institution must undergo institutional accreditation at least once every seven years based on the regulation *Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation* approved by HAKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education as of 7.01.2022.

The institutional accreditation of Pallas University of Applied Sciences took place in October 2025. The Estonian Quality Agency for Education (**HAKA**) composed an international expert panel, which was approved by the higher education institution. The composition of the panel was thereafter approved by the order of HAKA director.

The composition of the expert panel was as follows:

Ieva Skaurone

Chair; Rector, Vilnius Academy of Arts (Lithuania)

<b>Paula Ranne</b>	Secretary; Quality Assurance Officer, European University Institute (Italy)
<b>Helen Link</b>	Student; Viljandi Culture Academy of Tartu University (Estonia)
<b>Taina Erävaara</b>	Head of Education and Research, Turku University of Applied Sciences (Finland)
<b>Marge Monko</b>	Professor, Estonian Academy of Arts; As of 19 August 2025, a freelancer and an external member of the committee (Estonia)
<b>Jørn Mortensen</b>	Dean at the School of Arts, Design, and Media at Høyskolen Kristiania; 2015-2019 Rector at Kunsthøgskolen i Oslo (Norway)

### Assessment process

The assessment process was coordinated by HAKA staff – Mr Hillar Bauman and Ms Aleksandra Dolgopolova.

After an initial preparation phase where the distribution of tasks between the members of the assessment panel was determined, the work of the assessment panel in Estonia started on 15 September 2025, with an introduction to the Higher Education System as well as the assessment procedures by HAKA. Members of the team agreed the overall questions and areas to discuss with each group during the site visit and to a detailed schedule for the site visit.

During three days, from 29 to 31 October 2025, meetings were held with representatives of Pallas University of Applied Sciences as well as external stakeholders.

In November 2025, the findings of the team were compiled in a first draft of the assessment report and evaluation of the 12 accreditation standards.

In finalising the assessment report, the panel took into consideration comments made by the institution. The panel submitted the final report to HAKA on 12.01.2026.

The current report is a public document and made available on HAKA website after HAKA Council has made an accreditation decision.

### Information about Pallas University of Applied Sciences

Pallas University of Applied Sciences (hereinafter Pallas or the University) is a state-owned professional higher education institution governed by the Ministry of Education and Research, which is guided in its actions by the Higher Education Act, Standard of Higher Education and the statutes of Pallas. Pallas University of Applied Sciences is the only higher education institution of applied arts in Estonia.

According to the statutes, Pallas' goal is:

- to provide high-quality and internationally recognized higher education and continuing education in art, design, conservation and restoration,
- to provide opportunities for creative activities in art and design,
- to conduct and supervise applied research and development activities in arts, design, conservation.

The activities listed in the statutes are divided into three main processes: educational activities, research, development and creative activities (RDC), and service to society. In a professional higher education institution, these three main processes are inextricably linked. Students are

taught by recognised field experts and practitioners in their field (as regular teaching staff members and visiting lecturers, supervisors, and members of assessment committees), through whom the university maintains a strong and continuous connection with the professional world.

Pallas' academic staff are active creative individuals who influence the development of the field more broadly through their creative work, exhibitions, and RDC projects, as well as participation in professional associations. Through continuing education and exhibition activities, Pallas conveys professional knowledge of art, design, conservation and restoration, while also developing artistic awareness and visual sensitivity more broadly within society.

Pallas' mission is to promote higher education in the arts, conduct applied and scientific research in the fields of art, design, conservation and restoration, and create conditions for students to develop creativity and a sense of responsibility.

Pallas collaborates with the community and other educational institutions and organisations, supporting the development of a creative and sustainable society and lifelong learning. Pallas' vision is to be a recognised centre for art education, which initiates change in the creative field, values traditions and, in collaboration with partners, leads innovations in the fields of art, design, conservation and restoration.

Pallas' core values are courage, creativity, openness, liability, and freedom. Pallas' role is to train creative people who are guided by tradition and contribute to innovation, and who in addition to theoretical knowledge also have strong practical skills that allow them to enter the job market or continue their studies in a Master's degree programme. As the first institution in Estonian history to offer higher art education and the only applied arts university in the country, Pallas provides high-quality education in design, fine arts, and conservation and restoration, while significantly enriching the educational opportunities and cultural life of South Estonia.

### **Main impressions of the self-evaluation report and the visit**

The panel considers the self-evaluation report to have provided a strong basis for the accreditation process. The information was presented transparently, and the inclusion of self-critical reflections was appreciated. The SER offered an excellent foundation for the discussions held during the site visit. The panel was welcomed with openness and professional courtesy, and the interviews were constructive, supplying all additional information and clarification needed to complete the evaluation.

### **Main changes on the basis of recommendations of the previous institutional accreditation**

In the previous institutional accreditation, Pallas achieved full conformity with eight standards and partial conformity with four: Resources, Quality Culture, Study Programme, and Research, Development and/or Other Creative Activity. In the current accreditation, the panel finds that Pallas has made substantial progress in all these areas. These standards, previously only partially met, are now considered fully compliant.

As the quality assurance system has matured, new areas have naturally arisen that require further attention, reflecting the higher expectations associated with the institution's current stage of development. In terms of the follow-up to earlier recommendations, the panel notes that Pallas has considered all of them and has taken visible steps forward in most cases, in line with broader institutional developments. It is understandable that, during a period of significant change, some recommendations were not prioritised over the past three years while others received greater focus. One recommendation that has not yet been addressed concerns the

introduction of cultural awareness training for all staff. The panel understands that, after consideration, this was not regarded as a priority, as numerous other training initiatives have been developed that also contribute to strengthening the institution's quality culture.

The main changes arising from the recommendations of the previous accreditation relate to the consolidation of the quality assurance system, the establishment of an ethics framework with the necessary supporting measures, the introduction of regular staff feedback and development activities, and the revision of the curricula into more robust and coherent study programmes with larger ECTS volumes. Together, these developments strengthen strategic management, deepen the institution's quality culture, and contribute to the ongoing professionalisation of Pallas as an institution.

## Summary of the institutional accreditation findings

### General Findings

Pallas University of Applied Sciences demonstrates a coherent, strategic, and well-functioning higher education institution. The strategic management system ensures systematic planning, implementation, and evaluation, with the Development Plan 2021–2025 providing a clear framework aligned with national higher education priorities. The institution demonstrates a strong commitment to evidence-based management, participatory governance, and active stakeholder engagement. The consistent application of the PDCA approach, well-defined responsibilities, and transparent reporting mechanisms contribute to accountability and continuous improvement. Pallas effectively integrates its mission, vision, and core values into management practices and institutional culture.

Human, physical, financial, and communication resources are managed in an increasingly systematic and purposeful way. Staff development has been strengthened through new annual performance reviews, structured training, and clearer recruitment practices. The physical infrastructure is well equipped to support learning and creative work, while communication systems continue to evolve. The ratio between permanent and visiting teaching staff requires attention to balance administrative workloads and ensure quality teaching. Financial stability is ensured through state funding, project-based financing, and own income.

The institution has made significant progress in developing a clear and institution-wide quality culture. Appointment of a dedicated Quality Manager, development of regulatory documents, targeted internal training, and guidance for visiting lecturers have improved coherence, transparency, and consistency across departments.

Pallas' curricula are professionally oriented, well-structured, and aligned with national standards. The comprehensive Curricula Reform, including the introduction of a new Conservation and Restoration programme, module harmonisation, and integration of general competencies, has enhanced coherence, course structure, and alignment with professional practice. Students and alumni respond positively to these reforms, highlighting the balance of theory and practice.

Teaching staff are highly qualified and committed, with many combining professional practice and teaching. Internationalisation is well established through high levels of student and staff mobility, effective Erasmus+ coordination, and membership in international networks.

Research, development, and creative activities have strengthened, with clear objectives, committed staff, and engagement of doctoral students. Pallas actively contributes to society through Gallery Pallas, the library, student-led projects, and continuing education programmes, enhancing cultural visibility, community engagement, and international collaboration.

Students experience a supportive, student-centered learning environment, with access to internships, mental health services, and participation in institutional decision-making. The learning environment promotes creativity, professional growth, and interdisciplinary learning, supported by structured professional development for teaching staff and shared platforms such as Moodle. To further strengthen this matured learning environment, the Student Council could have a stronger role as an active participant in strategic decision-making processes.

The three sample study programmes—Interior Product Design, Photography, and Painting—demonstrate Pallas' commitment to providing well-structured, student-centred, and professionally oriented education. Each programme has undergone systematic revision, informed by stakeholder feedback, labour market needs, and contemporary developments in the arts. Curricula are generally coherent, balancing theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and RDC activities. Students benefit from a supportive learning environment, personalised guidance, international exposure, and engagement with external partners, ensuring professional readiness and adaptability in creative fields. Across the programmes, there is a strong focus on fostering creativity, independence, and career development.

## **Commendations**

Pallas University of Applied Sciences is commended for its strong, transparent, and participatory strategic management; systematic staff development and professional support; clear commitment to quality culture; well-structured and professionally oriented curricula; student-centered learning environment with comprehensive support services; highly qualified and committed teaching staff combining professional practice with teaching; high levels of international mobility and effective engagement in international networks; strengthened RDC; and sustained engagement with society through cultural, educational, and community initiatives.

## **Worthy of Recognition**

**Service to society:** Pallas is worthy of recognition for its sustained and multifaceted engagement with society, demonstrating a clear commitment to extending the impact of higher art education beyond the academic community. Through its gallery, library, student-led projects, continuing education programmes, and active collaboration with cultural, professional, and policy-making bodies, the institution effectively fosters public engagement, cultural development, and lifelong learning.

## **Areas of concern and recommendations**

Overall, the panel notes that while Pallas demonstrates strong institutional performance, the main areas of concern relate to staffing, the quality assurance of teaching and learning, and some aspects internationalisation: The significant reliance on visiting lecturers place pressure on permanent staff and affect continuity and quality of teaching. Some variation in feedback analysis, course design and the communication of learning outcomes and assessment methods suggests opportunities for greater consistency. Finally, limited English-taught provision constrains internationalisation-at-home and inbound mobility. Addressing these areas would

further enhance the sustainability, quality, and international profile of the institution. List of recommendations:

### **Strategic Management**

- It is proposed that the integration of the RDC Council into Pallas's broader governance framework be reinforced to ensure stronger strategic alignment and clearer communication across governing bodies.
- It is encouraged that the Student Council's role be strengthened by fostering a more proactive, engaged approach to representing student interests and contributing to institutional decision-making.

### **Quality Culture**

- Limited response rates of course-level surveys weaken the reliability of data used for quality enhancement. The panel recommends that Pallas make efforts to increase student participation especially in course-level feedback surveys, harmonising departmental practices for feedback, analysis and follow-up, and refining mechanisms for recording and monitoring improvement actions to ensure consistent implementation and review.
- The panel notes that aspects of the institution's quality assurance of teaching and learning—particularly the consistency of course design and the clarity of learning outcomes and assessment—require further development, and that curriculum development should be considered an ongoing responsibility. It therefore recommends that the institution continue strengthening these areas by clearly planning, documenting, and communicating learning outcomes and assessment methods to students.

### **Teaching Staff**

- The panel considers it important for Pallas to establish a clear institutional policy on the balance between permanent staff and visiting lecturers, ensuring long-term development, academic continuity, and consistent support for the professional development of all teaching staff.

### **Student Assessment**

- The timing and clarity of assessment information vary between departments. It is recommended assessment criteria are published in TAHVEL, and this should be supported by monitoring mechanisms, to ensure compliance.
- The competences among teaching staff regarding assessment are uneven. It is recommended to introduce training addressing assessment criteria, learning outcome alignment, grading rubric development, and constructive feedback methods.

### **Internationalisation**

- The panel recommends further expansion of English-taught provision to strengthen internationalisation-at-home and increase inbound mobility. Implementing the planned cross-curriculum English-taught module will be essential for achieving this.

### **Study programme: Interior Product Design**

- The ratio between permanent academic staff and visiting lecturers should be monitored closely to secure institutional memory and reduce the managerial constraints for the head of the programme.

### **Study programme: Photography**

- The panel recommends reducing the number of specialty courses per semester. Despite an increase in credit points per course, students continue to face challenges due to overlapping specialty courses and a significant number of individual assignments, which increases their workload.

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

Key to evidence

**SER:** Self-Evaluation Report

## 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. Responsibility for implementation of the goals and action plans of the development plan are clearly specified. Achievement of the objectives and effects of the activities are evaluated regularly.

Sustainable development, creativity and innovation are supported and given value in both core and support activities.

The HEI is mindful of the opportunities provided by digital technologies in planning for development 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.

### Indicators

- The rate of achieving the objectives set in the development/action plan (key results)
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

### Evidence and analysis

Pallas University of Applied Sciences (hereinafter Pallas) operates under the Development Plan 2021–2025, which defines its mission, vision, core values, strategic objectives, and measurable results (SER, Annex 9). The Development Plan was prepared through a participatory process involving employees, teaching staff, students, alumni, and partners, coordinated by the Pallas management team. The draft was reviewed by the Pallas Council and Advisory Board and subsequently approved by the Ministry of Education and Research.

The Development Plan articulates Pallas's vision as being a recognised centre of art education, initiating changes in the creative sector, valuing traditions and leading innovation in the fields of art, design, conservation, and restoration in cooperation with its partners. Pallas's core values, Courage, Creativity, Openness, Responsibility, and Freedom, underpin the institutional culture and management approach. To ensure integration of these principles into daily activities, one value is highlighted each academic year (2021–2025) as a thematic focus. This systematic approach ensures that the HEI's operational practices, governance, and community interactions consistently reflect its guiding values.

The Development Plan 2021–2025 establishes three strategic objectives covering the core activities of the institution: 1) Internationally Competitive Higher Education in the Arts – focusing on high-quality teaching and learning, student engagement, internationalization, and lifelong learning; 2) Open and Developing Pallas – enhancing institutional efficiency, employee development, and sustainable operations; 3) Shaping a Creative Society – strengthening

societal engagement, research and development, and cultural impact. For each of the key objectives Pallas has developed actions, activities and activity indicators with target values.

The panel learnt from the SER and on-site interviews that the implementation of the Development Plan occurs through annual action plans, which include measurable performance indicators, specify activities, responsible persons, and timelines. The quality manager coordinates data collection and analysis, while progress is monitored by the senior management: the Rector oversees the general implementation, while evaluation involves the Council and Advisory Board.

Quantitative and qualitative indicators are compiled in the annual report and shared institution-wide, supporting transparency and accountability. Each year, institutional performance results are discussed in the open Council meeting, where all staff can attend, and results are published online. This ensures institutional learning and feedback integration into next-year planning cycles.

The Development Plan aligns Pallas's objectives with the national strategic framework, including the Estonian Education Strategy 2021–2035, the Research, Development, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Strategy 2021–2035, and the Estonian Design Development Plan 2023. This alignment ensures coherence between institutional goals and national higher education and innovation priorities.

The inclusion of measurable key performance indicators across academic, organisational, and societal dimensions provides transparency and accountability. The involvement of multiple stakeholders (Council, Advisory Board, staff, students, and partners) in both the formulation and evaluation of the plan ensures shared ownership and relevance of objectives.

The SER (p. 8) and interviews on-site made the governance structures of Pallas clear to the panel: The Rector holds overall responsibility for institutional performance, supported by the Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs, heads of departments, and functional units. The Council acts as the highest internal decision-making body, approving curricula, budgets, and major strategic decisions. Students and staff are represented in the Council, ensuring participatory governance. The Advisory Board connects Pallas with the professional and cultural sectors, providing external insights on curriculum relevance and institutional development. Both the Council and Advisory Board play meaningful and complementary roles. The panel noted that there is room for a stronger integration of the RDC Council within the overall governance structure of Pallas. Furthermore, while the Student Council is formally represented in Pallas governance, it could play a more active role in addressing and advocating for students' issues and concerns.

Interviews on-site and SER (p. 17) provided evidence that the Plan–Do–Check–Act (PDCA) approach has been systematically embedded in Pallas management and quality assurance routines, aligning with the recommendations from the previous institutional accreditation. The PDCA logic is visible in the preparation and evaluation of annual plans and systematic performance reviews. The establishment of new managerial and advisory positions (e.g., quality manager, project manager), significant personnel changes in department management positions further strengthens Pallas' institutional capacity for monitoring, evaluation, and evidence-based management.

During the last couple of years, Pallas renewed all of its curricula, introduced three new ones, and launched a completely new study programme (SER, p. 16, interviews). Annual performance and development reviews, introduced in recent years, have been well-received by staff, contributing to systematic professional growth, and aligning individual objectives with

institutional priorities. Employee well-being is now monitored annually, and Pallas provides psychological support and professional development opportunities- staff training information has been systematised, and an internal training plan has been prepared (SER, p. 17, interview with teaching staff).

The national targeted RDC grant (2023) has been a major catalyst in enhancing Pallas' research and development capacity. The establishment of new positions (scientific advisor, junior researcher, senior specialist) demonstrates a strategic strengthening of research infrastructure. These developments expand the institution's creative capabilities and encourage interdisciplinary exploration and innovation. Additionally, the expansion of digital production processes and material research laboratories reinforces Pallas' role as a hub for artistic experimentation, linking traditional craftsmanship with new technologies.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the SER and various interviews on-site visit, the panel concludes that Pallas has established a coherent and effective strategic management system that ensures systematic planning, implementation, and evaluation. The Development Plan 2021–2025 provides a clear strategic framework, aligning institutional goals with national higher education priorities. The institution demonstrates a strong commitment to evidence-based management and participatory governance. The consistent application of the PDCA approach, well-defined responsibilities, and transparent reporting mechanisms contribute to accountability and continuous improvement. Pallas effectively integrates its mission, vision, and core values into its management practices and institutional culture, ensuring active stakeholder engagement. Pallas' strategic objectives are operationalised through measurable indicators and annual action plans, ensuring alignment between institutional priorities and daily practices. Pallas' recent structural and curricular developments, strengthened management, learning and teaching, research capacity, and attention to staff well-being reflect its strategic maturity and adaptability. While small-scale operations and informal communication remain characteristic features in Pallas, there is a growing balance to this by an increased number of formalised processes that enhance efficiency and sustainability.

**The panel concludes that Pallas fully conforms to Standard 1 'Strategic Management'.**

## **Strengths**

- The institution demonstrates a strong and inclusive management culture built on transparency, trust and engagement.
- Its systematic approach to development planning ensures clear objectives and measurable outcomes, fostering accountability and progress.
- There is active participation of stakeholders in planning, evaluation, and governance processes that reinforce a sense of shared responsibility and collaboration.
- A well-established PDCA cycle and commitment to quality support are present, to support evidence-based management and continuous improvement.
- The institution's adaptability and resilience enable it to respond effectively to change and leadership transitions, ensuring long-term stability.
- A strengthened research and development structure enhances coordination, innovation, and academic excellence, positioning the institution as a forward-looking and robust organisation.

## **Opportunities for further improvement**

- It is proposed that the integration of the RDC Council into Pallas's broader governance framework be reinforced to ensure stronger strategic alignment and clearer communication across governing bodies.
- It is encouraged that the Student Council's role be strengthened by fostering a more proactive, engaged approach to representing student interests and contributing to institutional decision-making.

## 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 in terms of both academic and support staff. 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 principles for employees' remuneration and motivation are defined, available to all employees, and followed.

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, digital infrastructure, etc.) are fit-for-purpose and economically sound. The infrastructure is regularly analysed (including the network, digital equipment, software and services, IT systems, user support, digital security, etc.), taking into consideration among others the needs of students, teaching staff and other members of the HEI personnel.

Sufficient resources are available for updating the infrastructure for education and research, and/or a strategy exists enabling the HEI to acquire them.

The HEI has defined information protection rules (including on data protection and the protection of user privacy) and these are implemented. The development and security of the online learning and teaching environment are ensured. The online learning and teaching environment allows to identify the authorship of student work.

The HEI has a functioning system for internal and external communications, relevant to the target audiences. The information made public 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 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
- The results of the staff satisfaction survey
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

## Evidence and analysis

Pallas University of Applied Sciences has strengthened its approach to staff development and renewal through systematic processes and targeted recruitment. Interviews with the administration highlighted measures such as hiring junior researchers to support RDC activities and curriculum development, and appointing new Heads of Department. To enhance recruitment and retention, Pallas has proposed revisions to its salary structure. At the same time, RDC funding falls outside the state's core funding of Pallas, which introduces some uncertainty, as key roles—such as the Scientific Advisor and external RDC Council members—remain dependent on external funding, as discussed in interviews with the administration.

A structural challenge remains the high proportion of visiting lecturers, which—while necessary to cover the curricula's broad range of competences—adds to the administrative workload of Heads of Department and creates disparities with permanent staff. This issue is discussed in more detail under the standard Teaching Staff.

Staff development has become more structured with the internal training calendar introduced in 2024 (SER, p. 18; annex 7), along with mobility opportunities, conference participation, and 'study bites' seminars that foster professional growth and strengthen the sense of community. The new annual Performance and Development Review Procedure (SER, p. 18; annex 6) ensures regular assessment of staff performance and development needs, with outcomes tracked and discussed in the Rectorate to promote alignment and follow-up.

Recruitment follows legislation and Pallas' Academic Staff Selection Regulations (SER, p. 18), with clear criteria and a mix of open competitions and targeted searches. Calls are primarily national due to C1 Estonian language requirements, though international competitions are possible. To support retention and integration, Pallas is developing a comprehensive onboarding system to help new staff adapt to the institution's culture and procedures.

The institution operates across three state-owned academic buildings and a gallery space provided by the City of Tartu (SER, p. 19). These buildings accommodate the specialty departments, classrooms for general courses, support staff offices, a library, and a café, creating a comprehensive and supportive environment for learning. The tour in the facilities of Pallas convinced the panel members that study spaces, including ateliers, studios, workshops, and computer labs, are equipped with the necessary tools for each discipline and are available to both students and staff during weekdays, with extended access via key cards in the evenings and weekends (SER, p. 19). During the site visit in the campus, the panel also noted an outdoor area next to the Department of Sculpture, where larger-scale and material-heavy projects can be realised.

During the interviews with staff, it became apparent that accessibility for people with physical disabilities remains a challenge due to the historical nature of the buildings, which were originally constructed as a factory. Access to the first and second floors can be difficult; however, accessibility platforms have been installed to improve mobility within the buildings on the ground floor level. The institution has demonstrated flexibility in accommodating individual needs, and to date, no student or staff member has been unable to study or teach at Pallas due to limited accessibility.

Located in Tartu city center, Gallery Pallas serves as a public exhibition venue with free access for all. It is open five days a week. The gallery has a main exhibition space on the ground floor and additional spaces in the basement and on the first floor. The annual Pallas graduation show occupies all levels of the gallery.

According to the SER (p. 19), an open call for the gallery's exhibition programme is held annually. The typical exhibition duration has been four weeks, however, the panel interview revealed that this has recently been extended to five weeks to meet the sustainability and accessibility standards set by the Estonian Cultural Endowment, one of the gallery's primary funding bodies. The gallery maintains a solid technical infrastructure, including lighting, pedestals, and other essential equipment, which has been in use for several years. These materials are not discarded but rather repaired and reused, reflecting a commitment to sustainability. Moreover, art institutions in Tartu actively share resources and technology, fostering collaboration within the local art community. In addition to providing a platform for exhibiting the work of students, lecturers, and affiliated professionals, the gallery collaborates with other exhibition institutions and professional associations. Through its exhibitions, the

gallery plays a key role in supporting teaching and RDC, while also fulfilling Pallas' broader societal mission.

Pallas maintains a library dedicated to the institution's fields of study. The facility provides workstations, a printer, a scanner, and equipment suitable for meetings and lectures (SER, p. 19). In addition to serving Pallas students and staff, the library is also open to the Tartu Art School community and a wider audience of art enthusiasts. The publications available in the library are listed in Estonia's largest e-catalogue, ESTER. The acquisition of new materials is carried out in cooperation with specialty departments and experts, while both lecturers and students are encouraged to suggest new purchases through the library's website. The library provides access to a wide range of international academic databases as well as several Estonian-language databases relevant to the institution's disciplines. Collaboration is also maintained with the libraries of the University of Tartu and the Estonian Academy of Arts to ensure access to broader academic resources and expertise.

As stated in the SER (p. 21), Pallas' communication strategy aims supporting its strategic objectives, enhancing its public image, and ensuring efficient information exchange. External communication focuses on marketing Pallas as a distinctive higher education institution in art and design, increasing visibility, promoting degree and continuing education programmes, and showcasing RDC activities. Key channels include the website, social media platforms, press releases, and a bi-monthly newsletter, all supported by a consistent visual identity.

Communication around RDC activities at Pallas is multilayered and inclusive. Internal RDC seminars on best practices, including teaching methods and course development, are organised with participation from both guest lecturers and students (SER, p. 21).

According to the SER, internal communication at Pallas aims to ensure timely and relevant information exchange that supports daily operations, strengthens organisational culture, and fosters a sense of belonging. Information is primarily shared through regular meetings, email, and digital systems: the DMS for official documents, the SIS for academic information, and Outlook for scheduling. A weekly newsletter, Weekly Notice, provides updates on current events and operational matters. According to the 2024 employee survey, information related to teaching and daily work organisation is generally well accessible, and direct communication among colleagues remains an important complement to formal channels (SER, p. 21). However, as the institution continues to evolve, systematic and transparent communication about strategic developments and management decisions should be further strengthened to support staff engagement and clarity.

Pallas utilises multiple digital platforms to support academic and administrative activities, including the study information system TAHVEL, the document management system DMS, and e-learning platform Moodle. While these platforms provide essential resources, staff interviews highlighted the need for a unified intranet that would consolidate all relevant documents, guidelines, and procedures for everyday administrative tasks. Implementing such a system could streamline internal processes, reduce administrative burden, and enhance overall efficiency and accessibility of institutional information.

The SER mentions that marketing activities are organised into three main areas: advertising campaigns for admissions, events, and exhibitions; outreach to prospective students through fairs, tours, and information days; and public presentation of study and RDC outcomes via events such as the Mood-Performance-Tants fashion show, KarlovARTS community activities, and participation in local and national cultural events (SER, p. 21). This comprehensive

approach strengthens Pallas' visibility, engagement with stakeholders, and recognition in Estonia's higher education and cultural landscape.

Pallas' budget is primarily funded by state, and complemented by targeted funding, own income, as well as project-based financing (SER, p. 20). Funding by Ministry of Education and Research covers core activities and infrastructure and is supplemented by increased state support and additional allocations for research and development. Own revenues, averaging around 15% of the budget, come from continuing education, cooperation projects, and tuition fees. Project-based funding further supports RDC activities.

Budget planning follows the institution's Development Plan, and involves all units through the Budget Committee, with final approval from the Rector. Financial operations are managed by the State Shared Service Centre, ensuring compliance and transparency. The total budget ranged from €2.2 to €3.5 million, with salaries accounting for 76-81% of expenses. During the interviews, the panel learned that the budget for departmental development activities, learning materials, infrastructure and study trips is largely decentralised across departments, with Heads of Department typically responsible for all purchases related to their study programmes. The panel suggests considering whether a greater degree of budget centralisation could help streamline administrative processes and reduce the workload of the Heads of Department.

### **Conclusions**

Pallas manages its human, physical, financial, and communication resources in an increasingly systematic and purposeful way. Significant progress has been made in staff development through new annual performance reviews, structured training opportunities, and clearer recruitment practices. While salary competitiveness, and the high number of visiting lecturers remain challenges, the institution demonstrates strong commitment to supporting its staff.

The physical infrastructure is well equipped and supportive of learning and creative work, though accessibility limitations persist due to historical buildings. Pallas has an evolving communication strategy, which includes transparent dissemination of RDC activities and a multi-platform approach to internal and external communication. Despite improvements, there are still areas for development, particularly in streamlining communication systems.

The ratio between permanent and external teaching staff requires continued attention to ensure good employment practices and to balance the administrative workload among academic staff.

The university's budget is stable, primarily funded by state allocations, complemented by targeted funding, and supported by own income and project-based financing.

**The panel concludes that Pallas fully conforms to Standard 2 'Resources'.**

### **Strengths**

- Pallas has established structured Performance and Development Reviews, annual training calendar, and is developing a comprehensive onboarding system to new staff that support continuous professional development.
- The income from the state and diverse funding sources (such as own income, project-based financing and other) ensure institution's financial stability and support ongoing RDC activities.

## **Opportunities for further improvement**

- As the institution continues to develop, strengthening systematic and transparent internal communication about strategic developments and management decisions represents an opportunity for further enhancement.
- The panel suggests that Pallas consider a higher degree of budget centralisation (for departmental development activities, learning materials, infrastructure and study trips) to streamline administrative processes and reduce the workload of Heads of Department.

## 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, units, study programmes).

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 has established its policies and procedures for internal quality assurance (internal evaluation). The regular internal quality assurance both at the institutional and study programme level takes into account, *inter alia*, the standards set out in these Guidelines. All members of the HEI, including students and external stakeholders, participate in internal evaluations.

Internal evaluation of study programmes results in feedback from experts within the HEI and/or from outside it. Regular reviews and enhancements of study programmes ensure their relevance, including their compliance with international trends. 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? Is there an equilibrium between the desired outcomes and the resources used for their achievement (including technological solutions)? How do you manage the quality improvement activities?

### Indicators

- Improvement activities implemented based on the analyses of internal evaluations in the HEI's core and support processes (examples from different areas)
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

## Evidence and analysis

Pallas has invested significant effort into consolidating and formalising its understanding of quality across the institution (SER, pp. 23-25). Both the SER and interviews show that quality culture has become a strategic focus, particularly under the new leadership team formed in 2022 and with the hiring of a dedicated Quality Manager in January 2024, a step unanimously described by staff and leadership as transformative. In interviews, it was emphasised that this appointment has created clarity of direction and enhanced transparency. It was similarly highlighted that the quality structures had previously existed but were difficult to understand or access, and the Quality Manager's work has made processes visible, coherent, and consistently interpreted.

As reported in the SER (p. 25), more than 30 regulatory documents have been organised or newly created, including key instruments such as the code of ethics, guidelines for meetings, performance and development review procedures, process maps (e.g. visiting lecturers' journey), timelines for mobility and RDC projects, and templates for internal reporting. These developments reflect an institution-wide effort to standardise understanding and reduce variability between units. Interviews confirm that definitions and expectations have become clearer, especially for new managers. At the same time, this shared understanding is still developing and, expectedly, accompanied by some resistance.

The SER (p. 23) mentions that Pallas is preparing both an internal evaluation procedure and a quality manual. Early drafts of both documents were shared with the panel. It is recommended that these documents be finalised with close attention to their alignment with Pallas' actual operational procedures, the clarity and practicality of the described processes, and the needs of their intended audience. The panel further suggests considering whether these documents could be consolidated into a single quality manual. It is also recommended that the finalised manual serve as an onboarding resource for all new staff, including visiting lecturers, and that it be reviewed and updated regularly to ensure continued relevance and accuracy.

Several recent initiatives aim to strengthen teaching practices. Internal training programmes have been introduced based on issues highlighted in student feedback, particularly regarding assessment practices and course structure. Opportunities for staff to share examples of effective teaching have also been expanded. Visiting lecturers receive more systematic information and support through dedicated communication channels (SER, p. 32), and further onboarding materials are being developed. Staff noted that these measures have helped create a more consistent understanding of expectations across programmes.

At the same time, the institution recognises that some aspects of the quality assurance of teaching and learning require further development. Student participation in feedback surveys is currently low, limiting the reliability of some data, and Pallas is considering adjustments to survey design and procedures to address this. Differences remain in how departments approach feedback analysis, documentation, and follow-up, reflecting variation in experience and workload. There is also a need for ongoing refinement of how improvements to teaching and learning are recorded and monitored to ensure that actions taken in response to feedback are consistently implemented and reviewed. Interviews reported some inconsistency in the clarity of expected learning outcomes and their assessment. Regarding the quality assurance of teaching and learning overall, the panel recommends that continued efforts are made to ensure course design is consistent, and that learning outcomes and assessment methods are clearly planned, documented, and communicated to students.

The panel notes that the sustainability of curriculum development and the consistency of teaching practices depend on having a sufficiently strong core team of academic staff. While visiting lecturers contribute valuable professional expertise, their varying degrees of engagement mean that long-term curriculum development, alignment of learning outcomes, and continuity in assessment cannot rely solely on temporary staff. The panel therefore considers it important that future planning address the balance between core teaching staff and visiting lecturers to ensure the stable development of curricula and the realisation of the educational vision of the programmes.

Overall, Pallas demonstrates a maturing and increasingly shared conceptualisation of quality, though its full institutional internalisation will require time and continued efforts. Importantly, full consolidation will require active ownership across departments, so that procedures are not perceived as centrally driven but integrated into the routine functioning of academic and support units. Strengthening departmental engagement, ensuring clarity of expectations, and aligning workloads with these new responsibilities will be important for establishing a stable and durable quality culture. Continued capacity-building activities will be an effective mechanism for advancing this aim.

## Conclusions

Pallas demonstrates clear and significant progress in developing an institution-wide quality culture. Especially with the appointment of a dedicated Quality Manager, quality assurance structures have become more transparent, coherent, and consistently interpreted across units. The institution has invested in systematising procedures, developing regulatory documents, and strengthening teaching practices through targeted training and clearer communication with both permanent and visiting staff.

At the same time, Pallas is still in a transitional phase. The full internalisation of quality processes varies between departments, and certain quality assurance mechanisms require further refinement. Clearly shared responsibilities with a sense of ownership, and continued capacity-building activities will be essential for embedding a stable, durable quality culture.

**The panel concludes that Pallas fully conforms to Standard 3 'Quality Culture'.**

### Strengths

- Strategic leadership for quality culture: The Quality Manager's appointment has been transformative, improving coherence, clarity, and accessibility of quality processes, and this is supported by Pallas leadership, which is essential for true progress.
- Systematisation of institutional documentation: More than 30 regulatory documents have been developed or streamlined, reducing variability and providing shared reference points for staff, and contributing to shared understanding of expectations.
- Progress in teaching and learning enhancement: Targeted internal training and clearer guidance for visiting lecturers support more consistent teaching quality.

### Areas of concern and recommendations

- Limited response rates regarding course-level feedback weaken the reliability of data used for quality enhancement. The panel recommends that Pallas make efforts to increase student participation in feedback surveys, harmonising departmental practices for feedback analysis and follow-up, and refining mechanisms for recording and monitoring improvement actions to ensure consistent implementation and review.
- The panel notes that aspects of the institution's quality assurance of teaching and learning—particularly the consistency of course design and the clarity of learning outcomes and assessment—require further development, and that curriculum development should be considered an ongoing responsibility. It therefore recommends that the institution continue strengthening these areas by clearly planning, documenting, and communicating learning outcomes and assessment methods to students.

### Opportunities for further improvement

- The panel suggests that Pallas finalise the internal evaluation procedure and quality manual so they clearly align with operational practice, meet user needs, and, if feasible, be consolidated into a single manual. The finalised manual could serve as an onboarding resource for all new staff and be reviewed regularly to ensure continued relevance and accuracy.

## 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. Attention is paid to the application of principles of academic ethics in the digital environment: avoidance of creative theft, the protection of intellectual property rights etc.

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

### Indicators

- The percentage of student papers checked by plagiarism detection systems and the percentage of detected plagiarisms
- Other indicators depending on the HEI, for example statistics about complaints (total number, the proportion of decisions taken in favour of the applicant)

### Evidence and analysis

The SER (pp. 26-27) and interviews on-site provided evidence that Pallas has significantly strengthened its academic ethics framework since 2022 through the adoption of the Pallas Code of Ethics (approved by the Council in 2024) and the establishment of a permanent Ethics Committee. These measures address key recommendations from the previous institutional accreditation, which called for the creation of a permanent structure for handling ethical issues and the preparation of a comprehensive ethics document linking institutional principles with the Estonian Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, the Code of Ethics for Estonian Researchers and the Magna Charta of European Universities.

The Code of Ethics (Annex 13) defines institutional values, principles of ethical conduct, and procedures for handling suspected violations. It provides a transparent mechanism for managing complaints and ensures fair treatment across all Pallas community levels.

The Ethics Committee, comprising representatives from management, academic staff, support staff, and a student, handles cases of academic or interpersonal misconduct, offers consultations, and leads awareness-raising initiatives of academic ethic. Members of the Pallas community can report concerns anonymously via the institution's website.

Pallas regulates ethics through a multi-layered framework of documents: The Code of Ethics provides general ethical principles and procedures; Study Regulations and Internal Work

Procedure Rules translate these into specific behavioural expectations for students and employees; Ownership of Intellectual Property Rights in Works Created During Studies and the Exercise of Those Rights and Guidelines for Final Projects ensure ethical authorship and ownership of creative and academic work; Guidelines for Formatting Written Papers emphasize academic honesty and the responsible use of AI and citations (SER p. 26, table 5). Together, these documents create a comprehensive system ensuring ethical standards in academic, research, development and creative activities contexts.

Ethics education is integrated systematically into the curricula, covering both theoretical and practical teaching and learning areas: courses on Intellectual Property and Artificial Intelligence, Basics of Academic Writing, and Fundamentals of Scientific Work address plagiarism, AI ethics, and intellectual property rights. Study and work regulations explicitly outline expected behaviour and case-handling procedures. Students are instructed annually on plagiarism and academic honesty by course leaders in their first year, and the topic is reinforced throughout the study cycle (SER, p. 27).

All final theses are checked using StrikePlagiarism software. Between 2020–2024, the rate of detected plagiarism or suspected plagiarism ranged from 0 to 3 cases per year, out of 45–62 submissions (SER, p. 27, table 6). These low numbers suggest both effective prevention and consistent application of plagiarism checks. Confirmed violations are dealt with by the Ethics Committee when informal resolution between parties fails.

The panel was convinced by the SER and on-site interviews, that the Ethic Committee's activities go beyond case management. They organise information sessions, promote ethics awareness, and plan training and infographics for staff and students. Students have been involved in creating educational materials, embedding ethics learning into the broader Pallas community culture. The inclusion of ethical discussions in diverse contexts, such as appropriate visual content in art or ethical dimensions of AI in creative work, demonstrates applied understanding of academic ethics across Pallas.

Overall, evidence from interviews and SER shows that Pallas has a functioning system for handling complaints of academic fraud or cases of unfair treatment, and that awareness of ethical behaviour has increased within institution considerably in the past couple of years. Both staff and students acknowledge improved communication channels and institutional trust, though full assessment of the system's effectiveness will require more time and data, given its recent establishment.

## Conclusions

The institution has established a comprehensive ethical framework including an operational Ethics Committee, clear complaint-handling procedures, and visible integration of ethics into teaching and learning, research, development and creative activities. The institution actively promotes ethical awareness and ensures transparency in handling issues. A permanent Ethics Committee ensures continuity, transparency, and inclusivity by involving representatives from all institutional levels.

**The panel concludes that Pallas fully conforms to Standard 4 'Academic ethics'.**

## Strengths

- Comprehensive regulatory framework: The Code of Ethics, study and research regulations, and work procedures clearly define ethical principles and case management.
- Integration of ethics into curriculum: multiple courses and information sessions exist to address plagiarism, intellectual property, and ethical behaviour in a systematic manner.

### Opportunities for Further Improvement

- It is suggested to continue the active awareness-raising regarding ethical behaviour within Pallas through regular information sessions, visual materials (e.g., infographics), and the involvement of students in promoting ethical principles. Such initiatives strengthen a shared understanding of academic integrity and contribute to fostering a cohesive ethical culture across the institution.
- It is proposed to develop comprehensive guidelines for the use of artificial intelligence: While some guidance currently exists (e.g., Guidelines for Formatting Written Papers), there is no unified written policy within institution addressing AI use, particularly in creative work. Developing institution-wide guidelines would support the conscious, transparent, and responsible use of AI in both teaching and learning, as well as research and creative practices, ensuring coherence and fairness across Pallas.

## 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 (including virtual) mobility (e.g., study programmes enable mobility windows). The HEI has agreements with foreign higher education institutions and, through international exchange, sends its students abroad to study and undertake internship, 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)
- Other indicators depending on the HEI, for example:
  - Number of English-taught study programmes by main units and levels of study

- Percentage of foreign students (by study programmes, levels of study, in total in the HEI)
- Percentage of study programmes that include English-taught subjects (of at least 15 ECTS)
- Number of ECTS acquired through external mobility.

### **Evidence and analysis**

The SER (pp. 28-30) defines internationalisation at Pallas as encompassing student and staff mobility, the involvement of foreign experts in teaching and assessment, cooperation with international universities, companies and networks, participation in global exhibitions, conferences and competitions, engagement of foreign partners in RDC projects, and the dissemination of disciplinary knowledge both within Estonia and internationally. The panel finds that this conceptualisation is comprehensive and supported by evidence gathered through the SER and interviews.

Pallas demonstrates a strong mobility culture. Outgoing student mobility has reached approximately thirty percent in recent years, positioning Pallas well above the Estonian average (SER, p. 30). Interviews confirmed that mobility is embedded across curricula: students described Erasmus+ exchanges, Nordplus projects, BIP courses, and short-term study trips linked to observation practice. Most students undertake at least one international experience. It is also reported in interviews that the Erasmus+ coordinator provides clear guidance and support throughout the process. Incoming mobility remains modest at approximately seven students per year, but the SER and interviews indicate that visiting students receive dedicated support, including tutoring and access to English-taught courses.

Staff mobility is similarly pronounced. According to the SER (p. 29) and confirmed in interviews, nearly forty percent of academic staff engaged in international mobility in 2024. Pallas has established internal "Internationalisation Principles of Pallas University of Applied Sciences" (Annex 14), which clarifies definitions of internationalisation and goals for staff mobility. The goal is that each speciality department each year to send at least one lecturer to teach or train at a foreign higher education institution, and/or involve at least one international visiting lecturer in teaching/RDC activities. According to the SER, these goals – with a few exceptions – are met. The percentage of academic staff who have participated in work mobility has increased over the last three years (Table 7). Lecturers described substantial pedagogical benefits gained from visiting foreign institutions, noting that international examples, methodologies and contemporary practices are integrated into teaching afterwards. The SER also reports that Pallas hosts more than ten foreign visitors per year, which is proportionally high given the institution's size, though interviews indicated that access to foreign lecturers may be somewhat uneven across departments.

Pallas participates actively in international networks, including Nordic-Baltic Network of the Art and Design Education (CIRRUS), the Global Association of Art and Design Education (Cumulus) and the European Association for the Applied Sciences in Higher Education (EURASHE), with planned accession to KUNO, a Nordplus network comprising 18 Nordic-Baltic fine art academies (SER, pp. 28-29). Interviews emphasised that these networks provide valuable opportunities for benchmarking, professional dialogue and collaborative projects. Staff reported that international exhibitions, exchanges, and conference participation make meaningful contributions to teaching and RDC, though these activities may not yet be fully leveraged in the curricula. Students similarly noted that many of their course assignments require international contextualisation, while they also expressed a desire for more systematic exposure to international professional milieus.

The learning environment supports internationalisation, though language-related constraints remain. The SER acknowledges that the predominance of Estonian-medium instruction limits the scale of inbound mobility. Interviews further highlighted that while some English-taught courses exist, their distribution across programmes is uneven. The SER (p. 30) identifies the development of a cross-curriculum English-taught module as a strategic priority, and staff consistently described this initiative as necessary for improving the internationalisation of domestic students and the attractiveness of Pallas to foreign students. The panel considers this direction appropriate and timely.

In organisational terms, the panel finds that internationalisation processes are generally functional but not yet fully formalised. The SER (p. 30) identifies the need to map and visualise existing practices and clarify responsibilities. Interviews confirmed that Erasmus+ procedures are well understood, but broader internationalisation responsibilities across departments are more diffuse.

## **Conclusions**

The panel concludes that Pallas conforms to requirements for internationalisation. The institution demonstrates outstanding levels of student and staff mobility, active engagement in international networks, and evidence that international experiences enrich teaching, learning and RDC. While certain areas would benefit from further systemising, the institution meets the standard.

**The panel concludes that Pallas fully conforms to Standard 5 'Internationalisation'.**

## **Strengths**

- Pallas achieves exceptionally high levels of outgoing student mobility that significantly exceed national averages. Staff mobility is similarly strong.
- Membership in CIRRUS, Cumulus and other networks provides meaningful opportunities for international collaboration.
- Erasmus+ coordination is widely perceived as effective, and both staff and students consistently affirmed the supportive internationalisation culture at Pallas.

## **Areas of concern and recommendations**

- The panel recommends further expansion of English-taught provision to strengthen internationalisation-at-home and increase inbound mobility. Implementing the planned cross-curriculum English-taught module will be essential for achieving this.

## **Opportunities for further improvement**

- The panel also proposed formalising internationalisation processes and clarifying responsibilities across departments and central units. More systematic mapping of mobility workflows will improve transparency and reduce procedural fragmentation.
- Additionally, optional intercultural competence training could complement the institution's broader internationalisation efforts and support the growth of English-taught provision.

## 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

Distribution of teaching staff by age and the percentage of young members of the teaching staff ensure the sustainability of studies. The career model of academic staff motivates capable young people to start an academic career and creates opportunities for their advancement.

The HEI supports systematically the development of its teaching staff. Members of the teaching staff engage in development of their professional, teaching and digital competences, improve their supervision competence, and share best practices with one another. IT and educational technological support (including trainings) are available to teaching staff.

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; supervisory and digital competences, 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
- Number of students per teaching staff member in full-time equivalent (FTE)
- Percentage of teaching staff holding a PhD degree
- The results of the students' feedback about the teaching staff
- Teaching staff participating in continuing training or other forms of teaching and digital competences and professional development
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

### Evidence and analysis

The SER contains detailed information of the statistics of the teaching staff and a description of their profile (Annex 16). The duties of the staff are described in the "Job Description of the Study and Research Structure Employees" and the qualification requirements in the document "Qualification Requirements for Pallas Academic Employees and the Conditions and Procedure for Assessing Compliance with Them", which was provided to the expert panel on request. As of 31 December 2024, Pallas had 55 people working (39.6 FTE) in the teaching and research structure. This includes assistants to department heads and technical assistants. The number has increased slightly over the last five years. In 2024, the position of junior researcher was created. A table (Figure 13) shows the average age of the academic staff and the gender balance. The average age has dropped over the five last years (from 53.0 to 51.9) and the gender balance is 50/50 except amongst professors (9 men/7 women). This can be considered acceptable. All permanent academic staff have a dedicated portion of RDC in their position, as regulated in the "Job Description of the Study and Research Structure Employees".

A substantial proportion of the teaching staff at Pallas consists of visiting lecturers. In direct teaching activities in 2025 (i.e. the spring semester of the 2024/25 academic year and the autumn semester of the 2025/26 academic year), a total of 106 lecturers were involved, each typically teaching one to two courses. The total teaching load delivered by these lecturers amounted to 410 ECTS credits across all curricula (this represents approximately 23% of all taught ECTS credits), which corresponds to an average of approximately 11 full-time equivalent lecturers. The panel acknowledges that this extensive involvement of visiting lecturers contributes to a diversity of perspectives and ensures strong links to professional practice. However, the ratio between permanent academic staff and visiting lecturers appears imbalanced overall, and even more so within certain departments. The situation is particularly challenging in the Department of Photography, which employs five permanent staff members (3.99 full-time equivalents) alongside 25 visiting lecturers (SER, p. 59). This imbalance may lead to several challenges: department heads becoming primarily administrative managers, difficulties in cultivating a coherent local quality culture when most teaching staff are not institutionally embedded, fragmentation in curriculum development, and a fragile institutional memory in some areas.

The panel considers it essential for Pallas to define and implement an appropriate balance between permanent academic staff and visiting lecturers, in line with the expectations set out in the Estonian Standard of Higher Education. In the panel's view, a formal institutional policy is needed to establish a sustainable and strategically grounded ratio that supports long-term development, academic continuity, and quality assurance.

To support staff development, Pallas conducts annual performance and development reviews with regular teaching staff, a practice acknowledged positively by the panel. However, as noted in the SER, these reviews do not apply to visiting lecturers. Given that visiting lecturers constitute a substantial share of the teaching workforce, this creates a risk of limited oversight and uneven access to professional development. The panel recognises that attention has been given to strengthening pedagogical competence and offering training opportunities for all teaching staff, yet the current arrangements could be further enhanced to ensure consistent development support across the entire teaching body.

Another challenge relates to the employment arrangements of teaching staff, reflecting a broader issue within the higher education sector. When a course is shared among multiple teachers, additional administrative work is required to ensure coordination and consistency in delivery. This burden is compounded by the low compensation rates for visiting lecturers, who are frequently not remunerated for the extra effort involved in coordinating and aligning the course.

Students have the option to provide feedback through TAHVEL. At the same time, they can choose which courses to give feedback on, potentially limiting the breadth of responses. However, the active involvement of the head of the department, who engages directly with students and encourages open communication, provides another important avenue for feedback.

According to the SER, Pallas plans to develop an on-boarding system for new and visiting lecturers to better support their professional development and engagement with the institution. Certain measures are already in place, such as dedicated mailing lists, as mentioned in the SER (p. 33) and in interviews. These developments seem highly relevant given the large number of visiting lecturers.

The number of students per academic staff member is lower compared to other higher education institutions in Estonia, which must be considered positive. In interviews, students confirmed the effects of small and inclusive environment by expressing satisfaction with teachers and the individual support they receive as students. The panel finds this to be satisfactory.

According to the SER, the teaching staff receives support to develop teaching and RDC through internal training, and a series of experimental seminars. Annex 7 shows a calendar for the academic year of 2024/2025 which confirms such a plan. The information is shared through a shared mailing list. Teachers' RDC activities at Pallas are characterised by a multitude of practices, varying from academic research, via practice based technical research to design- and artistic research. Pallas' RDC performance indicators for 2020-2024 (Table 12) show a steady increase in number of public exhibitions and ongoing research projects. Annex 25 give a detailed overview of the academic staff's participation in domestic and international exhibitions. This indicates an active RDC environment at the institution. The number of staff with a doctoral degree has increased from 3 to 4 members over the last 5 years. (From 6,5% to 7,3% of the FTE) While the increase in doctoral-level staff is numerically small, the contribution of these individuals can be disproportionately significant. In an academy where research-based artistic practice and pedagogical innovation are becoming more important, even a slight rise in doctoral qualifications can support curriculum development, quality assurance requirements, and artistic research capacity. Thus, the practical impact of this growth may outweigh its statistical modesty. As discussed under standard Resources, performance and development reviews are carried out once a year. Teachers are generally satisfied with the development opportunities but at the same time, they acknowledge that time is often short for participation.

Academic staff are evaluated every five years through the "attestation," a periodic assessment of the performance and suitability of regular academic staff, designed to support their development and career prospects and to confirm their suitability for the post. This is carried out in compliance with "Terms, conditions and procedures for the attestation of academic staff of the Pallas University of Applied Sciences" (approved by the council 16.01.2025). In conclusion, the panel finds the follow-up and support of teaching staff to be systematic and to meet the standards.

Student feedback shows that teachers at Pallas in general strive towards a student-centred and safe learning environment that values individuality. Some challenges are identified – such as some variety in teaching methods at the Department of Furniture (Fig. 34), students' understanding of the curriculum at the Department of Painting (Fig. 32), and transparency of assessment in the Photography curriculum (Fig. 31) – but these are generally addressed through Plan-Do-Check-Act processes.

### **Conclusions**

Teaching at Pallas is conducted by a sufficient number of well qualified staff. Many teachers are practitioners in their respective field, which secures a variety of perspectives and qualities in teaching. Academic staff is highly regarded by the students. The RDC activities vary according to the multitude of artistic and professional profiles of the staff, which informs the learning in an adequate way. However, the significant reliance on visiting lecturers poses challenges for continuity, coordination, and consistency at departmental level. The panel therefore considers it important for Pallas to establish a clear institutional policy on the balance between permanent staff and visiting lecturers, ensuring long-term development, academic continuity, and consistent support for the professional development of all teaching staff.

**The panel concludes that Pallas partially conforms to Standard 6 "Teaching Staff".**

### Strengths (if applicable)

- Teachers are dedicated to and engaged in educating students to become skilled and creative practitioners

### Areas of concern and recommendations

- The significant reliance on visiting lecturers poses challenges for continuity, coordination, and consistency at departmental level. The institution should address the issue of balance between regular academic staff and visiting lecturers and ensure an adequate balance that comply to the intentions in the Estonian Standard of Higher Education.

## 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 and developing study programmes (incl. programmes conducted in a foreign language), the HEI is guided by its objectives, its competence areas and the needs of the labour market, and takes into account national strategies and the expectations of society. The study programmes are based on up-to-date sectoral know-how and research.

The planned learning outcomes are in accord with the requirements for the corresponding level of the Estonian Qualifications Framework, and in planning them the HEI has taken into account the future needs, among other things. In developing study programmes, the HEI has conducted a comparative analysis of similar programmes in leading foreign higher education institutions. The objectives of the study programme and its modules, the planned learning outcomes, theoretical and practical learning, the proportion of independent work and internship, and the assessment of the achieved learning outcomes form a coherent whole.

The development of general competences (incl. creativity and entrepreneurship) and speciality-related digital competences as well as support for the development of a self-directed learner is a natural part of the study programme, and these are integrated with speciality studies.

Expected student workloads defined in the study programmes are realistic and consistent with the calculation that, on average, 1 ECTS credit equals 26 student learning hours. The study programme offers sufficient challenge for learners with different levels of knowledge and skills.

### Indicators

- Number of students per study programme
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

## Evidence and analysis

The SER states that Pallas' educational provision is based on professional higher education curricula, in accordance with the Higher Education Act and the Higher Education Standard. The curricula, which belong to the arts curriculum group, cover three fields—Art, Design, and Conservation & Restoration—and consist of eight programmes: 1) Media and Advertisement

Design, 2) Textile, 3) Photography, 4) Sculpture, 5) Painting, 6) Interior Product Design, 7) Leather Product Design, and 8) Conservation and Restoration (Figure 17). The objectives of all programmes are publicly available in the online study information system, TAHVEL, while curriculum and module objectives and learning outcomes are set out in each department's curriculum (Annexes 27.1–27.3). All programmes are delivered in Estonian.

Curriculum development and updates follow the Higher Education Act, the Higher Education Standard, and the principles of the PDCA cycle (Figure 15), and are carried out in cooperation with the Curriculum Councils. The Curriculum Statutes of Pallas University of Applied Sciences define the structural, content-related, and quality requirements for professional higher education curricula, as well as the procedures for opening, managing, closing, and assessing them (Annex 18). Internal evaluation takes place through each department's annual activity report, alongside consideration of broader societal trends and feedback from students, alumni, and stakeholders. All curriculum amendments are approved by the Pallas Curriculum Council (Annex 19).

In response to the 2023 Institutional Accreditation, internal evaluations, and feedback from alumni, employers, and students, as well as relevant societal and professional trends, Pallas undertook a comprehensive Curricula Reform. According to the SER (p. 36), the reform included establishing a minimum course volume of 3 ECTS, creating larger courses of 6–9 ECTS, introducing a new Conservation and Restoration programme, harmonising the structure, content, and volume of curriculum modules, and updating the content of individual courses. During panel interviews with the departments of Interior Product Design, Photography, and Painting, it was evident that each department had implemented significant and thoughtful changes, updated study content, and developed new courses.

Comparing the Pallas curricula 2022 and 2024 the number of compulsory courses is significantly lower now (Figure 16.). Also, the general competencies (e.g. creativity, creative entrepreneurship, critical thinking, independent action, teamwork) are integrated into the curricula. The Pallas curricula (240 ECTS) from 2024/2025 is based on modules: General module (60 ECTS), Study field module (15 ECTS), Specialty module (93 ECTS), Practice module (36 ECTS), Elective and optional module (21 ECTS) and Final project (15 ECTS). Pallas study programmes have distinct profiles. For example, the curriculum of photography is oriented towards applied photography and practical learning (Annex 27.1.). During the Panel interviews, students were pleased with larger courses, comprising with practice and theory, and alumni warmly welcomed curricula reform. According to SER, the number of courses and assessments per semester were significantly reduced (p. 37). The same observations were made during the interviews with the departments.

Prior to the panel visit, the SER included Learning Environment Survey and Alumni Survey 2025 (Figure 18) with alumni (graduated 2021–2023) and students' (2025) assessment of the development of general competencies in curricula. Comparing the feedback between alumni and students, significant progress has been made in Digital competencies and Sustainability. Regarding general competencies, based on students' feedback, more attention should be paid to oral and written self-expression skills and initiative and entrepreneurship skills.

In the SER, Pallas indicates its intention to enhance both vertical and horizontal coherence across the curricula and to create more opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration. During interviews, the panel learned from students and teaching staff that interdisciplinary collaboration and joint creative projects could still be further developed. The panel was,

however, pleased to note that Pallas has provided platforms for teaching staff to share best practices and receive support in implementing the curricula reform. The departments furthermore demonstrated a clear commitment to ongoing curriculum development, ensuring that the programmes remain relevant, coherent, and aligned with both professional practice and academic standards.

The panel acknowledges that the Curriculum Reform has been a major revision process and is impressed by the quality of the reforms. It recognises that the process is still ongoing, as old and new curricula run in parallel and further adjustments will continue over time. Some further merging of course content may still be appropriate, and curriculum development remains an ongoing process. In addition, the documentation and communication of learning outcomes and assessment methods would benefit from further streamlining, as discussed in more detail under the standard Quality Culture. Nonetheless, the panel wishes to commend Pallas for the significant effort, strategic planning, and dedication demonstrated in updating and strengthening its curricula.

### **Conclusions**

Pallas' curricula are well-structured, professionally oriented, and aligned with the Higher Education Act and Standard. The comprehensive Curricula Reform, including the introduction of a new Conservation and Restoration programme, harmonisation of modules, and integration of general competencies, has significantly improved coherence, course structure, and alignment with professional practice. Students and alumni have responded positively to these changes, appreciating the balance of theory and practice. While interdisciplinary collaboration and some general competencies could be further strengthened, the panel acknowledges the reform as a major and ongoing process and commends Pallas for the strategic planning, effort, and commitment demonstrated in updating and enhancing its curricula.

**The panel concludes that Pallas fully conforms to Standard 7 'Study Programme'.**

### **Strengths**

- The restructuring of study programmes, including the consolidation and enlargement of module sizes, ensuring greater coherence and depth in learning.

### **Opportunities for further improvement**

- To consider, in the following years, to create larger both in-depth and flexible study modules.
- To further encourage interdisciplinary collaboration – both within the institution and with other universities – so that joint projects become a natural and regular part of institutional life.
- To continue supporting the quality assurance of teaching and learning, ensuring the new curricula are delivered and developed in a consistent manner across all departments.

## 1.8. Learning and teaching

### Standard

Admission requirements and procedure 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

Admission requirements and procedure are fair and impartial. In the admission process, student's ability for academic progress on the chosen programme is assessed.

The academic recognition of foreign qualifications is based on international conventions, agreements between countries, and the Estonian legislation.

Learning and teaching process takes into account students' individual abilities and needs and supports their development. Learning offers sufficient challenge for students at different levels. Students participate in planning and implementation of the learning process. Organisation of independent work and face-to-face teaching motivates students to take responsibility for their studies.

Teaching methods and learning aids used in the learning and teaching process are modern, appropriate and effective and support the development of digital culture, contributing – among other things – towards the development of a self-directed learner, creativity, innovation and the development of digital and other general competencies. The HEI has a Code of Good Learning and Teaching (including online) and it is applied in practice.

The internship is integrated with speciality studies, the requirements for the internship are defined and the student's supervision ensured.

Students are motivated to learn and contribute to improving the quality of their studies by providing meaningful feedback on both the learning and teaching 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
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

### Evidence and analysis

According to the SER (p. 38), Pallas admission requirements and procedure ensures fair access to higher education. The admission procedure is organised by admissions committees, information about the admission is published on Estonian Admissions Information System (SAIS) and on the Pallas website.

According to the SER (p. 38), Pallas ensures equal access by open competition. Pallas also carries out First-Year students' Survey (Figure 19) where students' assessment of the availability of admission-related information was rated 2024 as follows 'The delivery of entrance exam results was well organised' 4,8/5 and 'The information needed for admission was available' 4,5/5. During the interviews alumni also stated that the entrance process seemed to be fair and transparent. The delivery of entrance exam is clearly well done.

The panel observed in various interviews that Pallas has a student-centered approach and carries out diverse pedagogical approaches, and actively supports their student's creativity,

innovation and career planning. That can also be seen in the Learning Environment Survey 2024, 2025 (SER, Figure 20), where students rated 4,2/5 both 'I can experiment and express myself creatively during my studies' and 'Studying on the curriculum offered me enough of a challenge'.

During the interviews, teaching staff highlighted that students serve as a key source of motivation, and the institution's emphasis on small study groups is recognised as an effective approach for enhancing competence development. The panel views this as a positive reflection of the institution's focus on fostering an environment that encourages professional growth, creativity, and student-centered learning. Furthermore, in the interviews with the teaching staff, it was stated that the best practices of Pallas are the school's atmosphere (supportive, safe and synergetic), feeling of belonging, sharing practices, being present to the students, aiming to make creativity to flourish, teamworking, and learning environments like the school's gallery, Gallery Pallas. It was also mentioned that students' learning of analytical and collaborative skills is well supported with different pedagogical methods, like concept-based learning, problem-based approach, peer learning and teamwork. During the interview with the teaching staff, it was stated that teaching and learning processes are in a constant evolution with the ever-changing parameters. In Pallas learning and teaching process considers students' individual abilities and needs and supports their development.

As reported in the SER (p. 39), all Pallas curricula include a 36-ECTS practice module, supported by additional practical subjects in other modules. The module aims to help students apply their knowledge in real work environments and develop teamwork skills, and it comprises various forms of internship, including observation, placement, individual, speciality, and final project practice. Internships are organised according to the Study Regulations (Annex 21).

Pallas develops internship opportunities with partner organisations, and several students undertake their internships abroad. These placements provide practical work experience, exposure to different professional contexts, and industry contacts. Their positive impact on students' transition to working life was confirmed in the 2025 alumni survey (SER, p. 39). Interviews with teaching staff indicated that support and supervision for internships are provided before, during, and after the internship. This includes collecting feedback and organising seminars in which students share their internship experiences.

Teaching staff reported that the curriculum renewal has created potential for greater collaboration between lecturers, particularly in courses worth six ECTS. However, during the panel visit, evidence of interdisciplinary collaboration was limited, and there appeared to be more separation than integration between departments. This observation is supported by student feedback in the Learning Environment Survey 2024 and 2025 (SER, Figure 20), where students indicated that their studies could be more flexible and that departments could cooperate more closely. In the longer term, the updated curricula, together with the shared e-learning platform (Moodle), could provide increased opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration.

The panel observed that Pallas actively develops ways to share good practices among full- and part-time teaching staff, for example through meetings such as "Let's talk about evaluation" and "Let's talk about grading," as well as summer seminars, all offered via a structured internal training calendar (SER, p. 18; annex 7). Teaching staff noted the need for updated tools, programmes, spaces, and a shared channel for information, such as timetables for visiting lecturers. The SER confirms that Pallas continues to develop e-learning support, including the Moodle environment, instructional materials, and technical assistance to enhance lecturers' readiness for blended and flexible learning (SER, p. 18). These processes are currently

underway, and both pedagogical and technical support are provided. The panel also noted that Pallas supports artist-teachers' careers through measures such as sabbaticals every five years, opportunities for exhibitions, and international exchanges (SER, p. 11).

Feedback from students is collected for example from the internship, courses and general study environment (SER p. 39). However, the number of students giving feedback varies a lot. The head of department organises a yearly feedback session with a group of students. Before the studies the feedback is collected from the applicants on admission procedure and after the studies by alumni survey. In addition to previous ones, the feedback from the stakeholders is collected. Students' participation in planning and implementation of the learning process is possible through diverse avenues, like being in the Student Council or in the Curriculum Council (SER, p. 39).

In the Alumni Survey 2025 (SER, Figure 21), respondents rated "Studying on the curriculum offered me enough of a challenge" at 4.1/5 and "I can experiment and express myself creatively during my studies" at 4.0/5. These results suggest that alumni perceive the programme as both academically demanding and supportive of creative exploration. The findings align with the Learning Environment Survey 2024, indicating continuity between current student experiences and alumni reflections.

Alumni interviews further reinforce this picture: Pallas was described as experimental, community-oriented, and providing opportunities. Interviewees also emphasised strengthened practical/manual skills and good preparation for MA studies, pointing to the curriculum's relevance for both professional and academic development.

Comments on the curriculum renewal were positive, highlighting clearer structure, increased focus on generic skills and collaborative work, and the inclusion of creative and academic writing. Taken together, these quantitative and qualitative insights indicate that the curriculum is experienced as appropriately challenging, creatively enabling, and improving in structure and relevance.

### **Conclusions**

Overall, the panel concludes that Pallas provides a student-centered learning environment with fair and transparent admission procedures (SER, p. 38) and actively supports students' creativity, professional growth, and career planning. Feedback from students and alumni (SER, Figures 19–21) indicates that curricula are challenging, allow creative experimentation, and offer opportunities for interdisciplinary learning, although some collaboration between departments could be further developed. Curriculum renewal, the shared Moodle platform, and structured professional development for teaching staff (SER, p. 18; annex 7) contribute to improved teaching practices, pedagogical support, and the sharing of good practices. Students have access to internships, mental health services, and participation in institutional decision-making through the Student and Curriculum Councils (SER, p. 39; Annex 27.1). Alumni feedback highlights the practical and academic skills gained, as well as the benefits of a supportive and collaborative institutional community. In conclusion, Pallas demonstrates a coherent approach to fostering student learning, staff development, and continuous improvement of its educational environment.

**The panel concludes that Pallas fully conforms to Standard 8 'Learning and Teaching'.**

## Strengths

- Pallas is an engaging community where all stakeholders are involved in the development of learning and teaching processes.

## 1.9. Student assessment

### 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, assess the degree of achievement of learning outcomes (including general competencies), and support the development of a self-directed learner.

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 develops the teachers' assessment competence and supports the solid application of digital technologies in assessment.

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.

### Indicators:

- The number of credit points applied for and awarded under the accreditation of prior and experiential learning scheme (APEL)
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

## Evidence and analysis

The collected evidence shows that assessment practices at Pallas are broadly aligned with the nature of artistic higher education (SER, Annex 21). According to the SER, assessment methods for each course are defined in the curriculum, and specific assessment criteria are documented in the course programme (SER, p. 41). These criteria are introduced to students at the beginning of the course, and assessment periods are listed in the academic calendar, yet several systemic inconsistencies remain.

Students and lecturers confirmed that assessment criteria are available in the Study Information System when registering for a course. However, the panel did not find the assessment criteria of the courses published on TAHVEL. While some departments provide

detailed explanations from the outset, others allow the format to evolve during the course, which affects transparency.

Assessment methods are versatile and appropriate for creative arts education (SER, p. 41). Lecturers reported using analytical assignments, group problem-solving, project-based work, presentations, portfolio reviews and traditional written tasks. Many practical subjects emphasise the learning process rather than only the final output, which supports the development of reflective and self-directed learners. Small study groups make it possible to give feedback throughout the process (SER, p. 41).

At the same time, learning outcomes are formulated inconsistently across departments, which makes alignment between outcomes, teaching methods and assessment criteria uneven at the institutional level. Lecturers note that while the practice of joint development of assessment tasks and criteria has improved, many assessment criteria are still developed individually, which contributes to differences in expectations and grading approaches between departments.

Feedback to students is frequent and often personalised, which students appreciate. Due to the small institutional size, teachers maintain close contact with learners and provide continuous support (SER, p. 41). However, the quality, structure, and timing of feedback vary considerably depends on the lecturer. Although several departments conduct regular discussions with student groups and review survey results, systematic feedback processes and clearly defined institutional expectations are not fully established.

Final projects are assessed by committees consisting of internal and external experts, which offers diverse feedback and helps to ensure objectivity. A structured and transparent committee procedure is used both in course-based assessments and in final project defences. Committees typically include the subject lecturer, department head and invited members, while final projects are evaluated by a seven-member committee consisting of the head of the department or an academic staff member from Pallas and experts in the field or representatives of employers from outside Pallas, including an expert from abroad (SER, p. 41, Figure 22).

Assessment rubrics are increasingly being developed and tested in committee evaluations (SER, p. 41), although their use is not yet consistent across all departments.

The RPL is well organised in the institution. The SER outlines clear procedures for recognising prior studies, work experience and creative activities, including the submission of documentation, self-analysis and portfolios when relevant (SER, p. 42). The Academic Affairs Office provides extensive support (Figure 24), students are aware of their rights, and application procedures are clear and structured (SER, p. 42).

Several assessment-related development activities have already been implemented, including updated regulations (Annex 22), institution-wide seminars on assessment, and multiple staff training sessions (e.g., “About Evaluation in Higher Education Institution”, “Course Programme Design”, and Pallas’ own “Let’s Talk About Assessment” seminar) (SER, p. 42). These initiatives have contributed to transparency of assessment principles, although continued work on rubrics and institution-wide alignment is planned.

## **Conclusions**

Although assessment methods are suitable for the artistic profile of the institution and many good practices are evident, there is insufficient institutional coherence in how assessment

criteria and learning outcomes are formulated and communicated. Feedback quality and lecturer assessment competence also show notable variability. These weaknesses hinder full transparency across programmes.

**The panel concludes that Pallas partially conforms to standard 9 'Student Assessment'.**

#### **Strengths**

- The personalised nature of teaching allows for frequent individual feedback, supporting students' creative development that creates a strong sense of academic and social belonging.
- The assessment of final projects is strengthened by the involvement of external experts, ensuring relevance to professional fields and enhancing the objectivity of evaluation.

#### **Areas of concern and recommendations**

- The timing and clarity of assessment information vary between departments. It is recommended assessment criteria are published in TAHVEL, and this should be supported by monitoring mechanisms, to ensure compliance.
- The competences among teaching staff regarding assessment are uneven. It is recommended to introduce training addressing assessment criteria, learning outcome alignment, grading rubric development, and constructive feedback methods.

## **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 internship 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 drop out, and takes steps to increase the effectiveness of the studies.

In order to carry out studies and research, development and creative activities, the availability of up-to-date study and research literature, other study materials and tools (including those for independent work) and access to research databases is ensured. Study literature, materials and other teaching aids are of equally high quality.

To support study activities, timely and relevant information and communication technology solutions have been planned, including the study information system, document management, online learning environments, analytical tools for teaching and learning. Support for online learning and IT is available to students.

The HEI supports student participation in extra-curricular activities and civil society initiatives.

The HEI monitors student satisfaction with the counselling services, the online learning and IT support provided and makes changes as needed.

#### **Indicators**

- The average duration of the study by levels of study
- Dropout/withdrawal rate (during the first year and the whole study period)

- Students' satisfaction with the support services
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

## Evidence and analysis

Pallas has established a comprehensive and well-functioning system of learning support services that aligns with the requirements of the standard. The small ratio of students to teaching staff (Table 9) enables personalised interaction and ensures that students feel seen (SER, p. 44).

This contributes to early identification of students' needs and supports timely intervention. Academic counselling is provided by the Academic Affairs Office and within departments by heads of departments and their assistants (SER, p. 44). First-year students are introduced to study regulations, curriculum structure and support mechanisms during an institutional information day; the same information is available in SIS (SER, p. 44, Pallas website). Individual discussions and personalised advising are used to support academic progress, which includes schedule planning, addressing study deficiencies, and monitoring the reasons for academic delays or discontinuation.

Support for students with special needs is offered based on the student's consent, and staff collaborate to adjust learning processes as required. The institution has identified further development in this area, including staff training to support students with diverse needs (SER, p. 44).

Career guidance is integrated into the curriculum and closely linked to specialty teaching and internships. Many teaching staff members are active practitioners (Annex 16), enabling them to share labour market expectations and industry practices directly with students. Reviews of students' progress also incorporate career-related discussions, internship choices, and future planning (SER, p. 44). Organizations offering internships are very satisfied with Pallas students, emphasizing their unique practical skills and knowledge (subsection 3.8.3).

Psychological counselling has been available since spring 2024 through a cooperation agreement with an external provider (Katriito Clinic), offering access to psychological counselling (Pallas website). The institution has conducted information sessions on mental health and organised staff training on ADHD, autism spectrum disorders, and upcoming trainings on anxiety disorders, depression and gender awareness (SER, p. 44). Awareness of psychological support services has improved, but the subject still requires continued attention.

Support for study mobility and international students is coordinated by the International Relations Manager, who provides advising on mobility opportunities and supports incoming visiting students. Integration events and a student tutor system help international students adapt to the institutional community and Estonian cultural context (subsection 3.5.5).

The Pallas Library contributes significantly to the learning environment through a strong subject-specific collection and access to research databases (SER, p. 44).

The institution provides modern ICT solutions that support learning, including centralised information through the website and SIS/TAHVEL, access to Microsoft 365 services, and digital

learning environments such as Teams and Moodle. A transition to a self-hosted Moodle in 2025 is expected to further improve customisation and usability. Study materials and digital resources are accessible to students (SER, p. 44).

Student satisfaction data shows high levels of approval regarding the learning environment, physical facilities and availability of study materials (Figure 25). Dropout rates are significantly lower than national averages (Figure 26), and the nominal completion time has been stable (4.2–4.5 years across curricula). The institution monitors dropout reasons, which are mostly connected to personal, health, family or work-related issues rather than academic difficulties (SER, p. 45).

Overall, Pallas has established effective academic, psychological, career and mobility support mechanisms, provides adequate access to learning resources and digital tools (SER, p 44), and actively monitors student wellbeing and progression (SER, p 45). While certain development initiatives are still in progress, the existing system meets the requirements of the standard.

## Conclusions

The institution provides comprehensive and accessible academic, psychological, career and mobility support services. Access to learning materials and digital infrastructure is adequate and regularly enhanced. Student satisfaction and low dropout rates indicate that the learning support systems are functioning effectively. Planned development activities demonstrate a proactive institutional approach to continuous improvement.

**The panel concludes that Pallas fully conforms to Standard 10 'Learning Support Systems'.**

## Strengths

- Pallas demonstrates a well-developed psychological support system. A formal cooperation agreement with a professional service provider is in place to ensure access to psychological counselling. Staff training is available and it enhances institutional awareness.
- Effective support is available for international students, which includes orientation activities, information sessions and a student tutor system all contributing to smooth integration.
- The low student-staff ratio enables individual attention, early identification of needs and flexible problem-solving.

## Opportunities for further improvement

- The panel suggests putting further focus on accessibility for students with physical disabilities.

## 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 the profile and the mission of the HEI. The HEI applies digital tools for the administration and re-use of research data.

### 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
- Proportion of projects with a positive financing decision out of the submitted project applications.
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

### Evidence and analysis

Research, Development and Creative work at Pallas is defined within the framework of applied and academic research. For Pallas this includes a multitude of practices, varying from research in the fields of arts, design, conservation, and restoration, as well as creative practices of the academic staff. Pallas' key research areas are *design, conservation and restoration*, and *arts*. This focal point is set out in the RDC Strategy (Appendix 8) and was confirmed in the meetings with academic staff and the scientific manager. Pallas has defined objectives and focus of its RDC activities in the Pallas Development Plan (Annex 9) and specified in the RDC Strategy with indicators approved by the Pallas Council 15.02.2024, and annual action plans (2023-2025) (Annex 8.1, 8.2, 8.3).

The strategic starting point for Pallas' RDC activities is the KUVA initiative (a Development Plan for the Field of Art in Estonia) which underscores art as a value, a tool for reflection, learning, and community building (Annex 8). To assess the implementation and societal impact of Pallas' RDC activities, the institution uses several sets of indicators. These include number of public exhibitions and creative projects of employees, number of ongoing RDC projects amongst employees, number of academic publications, and number of presentations at conferences and seminars (Table 12). In addition to numeric indicators, Pallas also values activity in the cultural field in general. Participation and memberships in domestic and international associations and

networks (Annex 26) also serves as an indicator of relevance and impact. Communication of results is executed through internal RDC seminars which focuses on sharing of best practices. In addition, Pallas launches several publications. According to the SER, seven publications were published between 2020-2024.

International presence is important for Pallas' RDC activities on an institutional level. Pallas is a member of CUMULUS, joined CIRRUS in 2023, and has initiated a process of becoming a member of the Society for Artistic Research (SAR) with the ambition of document RDC projects through Research Catalogue.

According to the SER, all departments integrate RDC activities by taking into account ongoing RDC projects when planning teaching. Students actively participate in RDC projects through internships, commissioned works and exhibitions. This was also confirmed by students in interviews. Annex 25 confirms students' participation in exhibitions and events through the recent years.

Pallas has hired a scientific adviser as of June 2023 to develop the RDC system and to collect RDC statistics (exhibitions, publications, etc.) for monitoring and analysing. The panels' interviews with academic staff and the scientific adviser confirmed that the function is well in place and has helped the institution in managing the RDC activities according to the institution's objectives.

The RDC activities at Pallas are led by the RDC council. The task of the council is to evaluate and approve project applications and their budgets, plan infrastructure investments, and approve the exhibition programme, the Pallas publication plan, and RDC documents. As such the RDC council is both an advisory and a decision-making board. It is however challenging to find the positioning of the RDC board in the institutional organization structure (Fig. 2. The Structure of Pallas). It is the panels view that this needs to be clarified.

A major change in RDC funding occurred in 2023 as state-run universities of applied science began receiving targeted support for RDC activities from the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research. In addition to SekMo funds for doctoral students, this represented a paradigm shift in the funding opportunities for RDC activities for Pallas. As a result of this, two doctoral students became affiliated with Pallas, to complete their PhDs and to further enhance research-informed teaching. The institution has responded well with a substantial increase of RDC volume. This is indicated in Annex 23, which shows Research, development and creative activity projects of Pallas University of Applied Sciences funded by the targeted state support 2023–2025.

Numeric data shows that the total number of public exhibitions and creative projects of employees have increased the recent five years. Number of exhibitions, creative projects per full-time worker is constant, the number of ongoing RDC projects have increased substantially (see above), and the number of presentations at conferences and seminars has increased. Other data shows consistency. This proofs an institution with ambitious academic staff and management which have taken action to lead the RDC activities in a solid and reliable manner.

## **Conclusions**

Over the past two to three years, Pallas has significantly strengthened its RDC activities. This progress has been supported by new funding opportunities and internal organisational changes, including the appointment of a Scientific Advisor, the adoption of an RDC strategy, and the implementation of the Pallas Development Plan. The objectives and goals of RDC are clear and well-aligned with the institution's profile. Academic staff and researchers are highly committed, and the engagement of two doctoral students further demonstrates this commitment. The panel

acknowledges the role of the RDC Council but suggests clarifying its position within the institutional organisational structure.

**The panel concludes that Pallas fully conforms to Standard 11 “Research, development, creative activities”.**

**Strengths**

- Strong managerial decisions have enabled the institution to take substantial systemic steps towards a more robust framework for RDC activities.

**Opportunities for further improvement**

- It is suggested that Pallas clarifies the RDC council's formal role and position in the organisation structure.

## 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, participating in the development of non-profit sector and charitable activities, 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 clearly defined the objectives for in-service training, measures their implementation and plans improvement activities. The HEI plans in-service training based on the present and future needs of the labour market target groups. Evidence-based learning supports the learning and self-development of adult learners.

The HEI takes advantage of digital means in order to provide trainings and services to the public at large.

### Indicators

- Number of people in continuing training and other privately financed open forms of study (by responsibility areas or structural units)
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

### Evidence and analysis

Pallas demonstrates a clear commitment to societal engagement, positioning itself as an institution that extends the impact of higher art education beyond its immediate academic community (SER, p.50). The panel interviews confirmed that through initiatives such as offering continuing education, managing a public gallery, and organising creative projects, the institution actively collaborates with cultural organisations, community groups, and professional entities. These efforts reflect a broader approach to fostering connections with external stakeholders and contributing to the wider cultural landscape.

Gallery Pallas has an important role in fostering collaboration and public engagement within the Estonian art field. During the site visit, it became evident that Gallery Pallas is actively engaged with both local and national exhibition institutions. As a founding member of the Association of Estonian Art Institutions, the gallery plays a key role in strengthening inter-organisational cooperation, while also advocating for the broader interests of the arts and raising public awareness about the importance of cultural initiatives. Gallery Pallas strategically aligns certain exhibitions with topics of civic relevance, such as contributions to Tartu's 2024 European Capital of Culture programme, including architectural competitions and urban development projects. This approach both enhances the gallery's societal impact and provides a rich, experiential learning environment for local general education schools, hobby schools, and kindergartens, effectively linking community engagement with pedagogical objectives.

According to the SER, the Pallas Library serves as a significant cultural and educational resource, extending its reach beyond the university to support art enthusiasts and partner institutions such as the Tartu Art School and University of Tartu. By providing open access to specialised literature and facilitating collaborative initiatives, the library actively contributes to the promotion and dissemination of art education (SER, p. 50). Notable examples include annual exhibitions of the most beautiful books in Estonia and Finland, accompanied by seminars that engage a broader audience. Furthermore, the library's active participation in the Association of Estonian Art Libraries and the Prima Vista art programme at the Tartu International Literary Festival demonstrates its strategic role in fostering professional networks, cultural exchange, and public engagement within Estonia's artistic landscape.

It became evident during the interviews that Pallas makes a substantial societal contribution through student-led projects that integrate art, design, and applied research into public and community spaces. Students actively engage with public institutions, private partners, and non-profit organisations, producing works that enhance cultural heritage, address social needs, and promote accessibility and inclusivity. According to SER (p. 50), most notable examples include conservation and restoration of museum collections, socially meaningful design projects such as adaptive workspaces and gender-supportive accessories, and collaborative innovations like the SemuBot humanoid robot for speech therapy. Initiatives like the textile tapestry celebrating Estonia's literary heritage, the charity project "Colors from Pallas," and the longstanding fashion event "Mood-Performance-Tants" demonstrate the institution's commitment to creative engagement, public visibility, and sustainable practices. According to lecturers, students are actively involved in the organising process, including coordination and communication tasks. They also participate in numerous exhibition design projects.

Pallas actively engages with professional, cultural and policy-making bodies, such as Estonian Artists' Association, Estonian Association of Designers, ICOM, International Association of Art Critics, and many others (SER p. 51, annex 26). It ensures that its staff, students and alumni contribute to the development of the arts and bring contemporary knowledge back to the institution. As stated in the SER, by participating in the development of national art strategies, updating higher education and professional standards, and taking part in working groups and roundtables in the fields of art, design, and education, Pallas influences arts education and professional qualifications in Estonia. This engagement enhances the university's visibility, strengthens its network within the creative sector and ensures that its curricula remain aligned with professional and societal needs. Furthermore, Pallas graduates continue to contribute to art education, emphasising the institution's role in sustaining the field.

The SER mentions that Pallas provides a diverse and dynamic continuing education programme in art, design, and conservation (SER. p. 51). Curricula are closely aligned with the institution's study areas, strategic objectives, and participant feedback, ensuring relevance and quality. The university demonstrates flexibility by offering open courses, and targeted micro-degree programmes for cultural sector professionals. Courses are delivered by a combination of Pallas teaching staff, leading practitioners, and alumni. Feedback indicates high participant satisfaction, highlighting Pallas' capacity to meet regional and sectoral educational needs of lifelong learning (SER, p. 52).

The core courses with a longstanding tradition at Pallas include graphic design, 3D modelling and printing, and introductory drone technology (covering audio-visual, computer, and media skills) (SER, p. 36-37). These courses are part of the state-funded training programme and are offered free of charge. There is also a strong tradition in classical art courses, such as oil

painting, as well as preparatory courses in drawing, painting, and composition (SER, Annex 27.4). Plans are in place to continue developing and expanding these programmes, with an emphasis on creating web-based support for art courses through Moodle and other online learning platforms (SER, p. 36).

In 2025, the target for continuing education participation was set at 320 students per year, with 317 students already enrolled in various programmes (SER, p. 37). Courses are also offered to high school students, although these are not included in the continuing education programme (SER). Income generated from continuing education courses is used to fund further training activities, with remaining funds distributed across departments and the school (SER, p. 37). Most instructors are Pallas faculty, supported by a network of guest lecturers who bring specialised expertise (SER, p. 36). Continuing education courses do not award credit points; instead, academic hours are recorded on diplomas and can be converted into Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) if applicable (SER, p. 37).

The panel considers Pallas worthy of recognition for its substantial and ongoing service to society, demonstrating a clear commitment to extending the impact of higher art education beyond its immediate academic community and fostering meaningful engagement with cultural, educational, and professional stakeholders (SER, p. 50–52; Annex 26).

### **Conclusions**

Gallery Pallas plays an active role in the local and national art scene by collaborating with galleries, participating in cultural initiatives, and aligning exhibitions with civic and societal themes. This enhances the gallery's public visibility while providing valuable experiential learning opportunities for students. Similarly, Pallas Library offers open access to specialised literature and facilitates collaborative initiatives that promote art education and cultural exchange.

Student-led projects at Pallas bring art, design, and applied research into public spaces, addressing social needs and contributing to the enhancement of cultural heritage. These projects also promote inclusivity and accessibility within the community. Furthermore, staff, students, and alumni actively engage in decision-making bodies, strategy development, and professional standard-setting, ensuring that Pallas remains aligned with the evolving arts sector.

Pallas also offers a diverse and high-quality continuing education programme that aligns with the institution's strategic objectives, study areas, and the needs of participants, further strengthening its role in both the local and broader art communities.

- ★ The panel considers Pallas worthy of recognition for its strong and sustained contribution to society through education, culture, and community engagement.

**The panel concludes that Pallas fully conforms to Standard 12 “Service to society”.**

### **Strengths**

- Pallas actively contributes to society by engaging in collaborations with cultural institutions, community groups, and professional organizations. Gallery, library, and student-led projects all play an important role in the public functions of Pallas.
- Gallery Pallas' partnerships with local art institutions, alongside its involvement in professional associations, enhances Pallas' visibility within the Estonian art scene and fosters international collaboration.

- Pallas engages staff, students, and alumni in national art strategy development, updates to higher education standards, and professional qualifications. This active participation ensures that Pallas' curriculum remains aligned with evolving societal and professional needs, while also contributing to the broader field of art education.
- Pallas offers a wide range of continuing education courses that bridge professional practice and societal expectations. The flexible programmes meet regional and sectoral needs and encourage lifelong learning.

## 2. Assessment findings of the sample of the study programmes

### 2.1. Interior Product Design (Professional HE)

The Interior Product Design belongs to the Department of Furniture, which at the time of the writing of the SER had two curricula running: The Furniture Design and Restoration programme (until 2024) and the Interior Product Design programme (from 2024). All data in the SER relates to the whole department, though it is the Interior Product Design programme being evaluated. The department has less than 50 students enrolled. At the end of 2024 the department had 6 employees (4,65 FTE) and 22 visiting lecturers (SER, Appendix 30). A major development at the department is the shift from The Furniture Design and Restoration programme to the Interior Product Design programme.

The Interior Product Design programme's objectives are to provide high quality higher education in the field of product design with a specialisation in interior products. Further to ensure the training of professionals with professional skills in line with labour market requirements, who are competent to realise the objectives set in the field of product design independently and/or in teamwork. It is to develop in learners a comprehensive understanding of the role of art and design in society, with an open mind to innovative challenges. To develop the student's skills of independent learning and raise awareness of the need for professional development and continuing training. It is to ensure, based on the international experience in higher education, the openness of the curriculum to change and developments in today's dynamic world and the competence of the student to continue studies in the master's programme.

The programme offers a specific focus on technical knowledge, sustainable solutions, and local orientation. The programme creates a strong community of staff and students, enabling learners to gain broader skill levels during their studies. The development of the programme has been a systematic and multistage process grounded in feedback from stakeholders, students, academic staff, alumni and external experts.

#### 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 Interior Product Design programme is a result of a revision process based and grounded on continuous feedback and stakeholder input, including students, teaching staff, alumni, and Curriculum Council members. Labor market needs and trends in the field informed the changes, as well as advice from external experts. According to the SER, the aim of the new curriculum was to ensure that it reflects up-to-date knowledge and research, combined with traditional craftsmanship with innovative design thinking and an improved structural coherence. Particular attention was paid to reducing the fragmentation with several small courses to strengthen and support the students' holistic learning journey. Interviews with students confirm that this change is welcomed and works. The level and volume of RDC activities amongst staff is satisfactory (Annex 30), though a concern is that a substantial part is carried out by visiting members of the academic staff.

The Interior Product Design programme's objectives are to provide high-quality higher education in the field of product design with a specialisation in interior products. The inherent logic has been strengthened through the establishment of the new programme. The effect is a more cohesive course structure and a more logical sequence of subjects. Learning outcomes of courses and curriculum are updated and relevant (Annex 27.3) and aligned with contemporary standards and expectations. At Pallas, learning is course-based and includes theoretical and practical learning, supplemented by practical and independent work. Teaching methods are a condition of objective of the course, which largely supports the students' creativity and independence. Interviews with students at the Interior Product Design programme confirm this practice. Student feedback is collected systematically and supports this overall picture.

According to the SER, The Department of Furniture has sufficient material and budgetary resources to implement the curriculum. The funding required for the study comes from the amount allocated to the department from the Pallas budget and the department's own income (mainly commissioned work). Interviews with department heads and leadership revealed that distribution of permanent academic staff is centralized, with different FTE/student ratios between the departments. The departments also receive a lump sum of 500 EUR per student to finance visiting lecturers and other extracurricular activities. Visiting lecturers are mostly invited directly by the heads and other permanent academic staff. Interviews revealed that the department heads in some cases spend much time managing these teaching resources. The panel considers that the resource distribution (permanent staff/FTE) could be more transparent, systematic, and less based on tradition and legacy. The Department of Furniture is reasonably well financially sustainable.

The infrastructure of the Department of Furniture includes well-equipped work and study spaces, the furniture, fixtures, and lighting of which have been updated in recent years. The panel's visit to the physical environment – and interviews with students – confirmed a well-driven department with an updated and purposeful machine park.

### **Conclusions**

The Interior Product Design programme offers a well-structured, cohesive curriculum shaped by feedback from students, staff, alumni, and external stakeholders. Learning outcomes are aligned with contemporary standards, balancing theoretical and practical learning while supporting creativity and independence. The programme has adequate resources and

infrastructure, and staff engagement in RDC activities enhances quality, though visiting staff deliver a substantial part. Greater transparency and systematisation in staff allocation would further strengthen sustainability and programme delivery.

### **Strengths**

- The Interior Product Design programme is an updated and contemporary design programme answering the needs of students, academic staff, alumni, external experts and labour market. The curriculum has been developed through a thorough Do-Check-Act-Plan cycle.
- The programme is managed and headed ambitiously and engaged.

### **Areas of concern and recommendations**

- The ratio between permanent academic staff and visiting lecturers should be monitored closely to secure institutional memory and reduce the managerial constraints for the head of the programme.

## **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**

Admission to the Interior Product Design programme is regulated by the Rules for student admission (Annex 20), which clarifies both procedure and responsibilities. This includes formal qualifying requirements as well as language proficiency requirements. Applicants for each curriculum are required to take a specialty and motivation exam. Admission is based on the combined results of the exams and candidates are notified of the admission decision in the Estonian Admissions Information System. For the 2024/2025 academic year, the Interior Product Design programme admitted ten students + two students who were previously in

academic leave. The competition ratio was 4.7, which was a substantial increase from the year before (3.1).

The teaching methods secure a student-centred approach with a high degree of individuality. The reduced number of courses has helped to make the curriculum more comprehensive and less fragmented. According to the SER, the new approach is constantly monitored to secure insights about the long-term effects of the changes. Both mid-term and final assessments are used in the curriculum. Projects are usually assessed by a committee, which includes representatives of teaching staff and the head of the department (if necessary, also the company or client in collaboration, with whom the project was carried out). The number of assessments has been reduced since the introduction of the new programme. Interviews with students reveal that there are different experiences with course assessments. Some are well structured whereas others are less. Still – all students receive a lot of informal feedback and assessment in the courses. The learning environment survey (Fig. 23) confirms that more students rate the experiences more positively in 2025 compared to 2023.

The Department of Furniture supports and stimulates student mobility. Approximate 50 students from the department have participated in domestic and international mobility over the past five years (Pandemic year 2020/21 subtracted). This gives an average percentage of almost 30%, (which must be considered satisfactory). Other forms of mobility/international visits include exhibition visits, visits to fairs and museums.

Students receive individual support through the exercise of the performance and development review, which is carried out every semester. Here students and teachers discuss the progress of the studies and evaluate the set of goals. As Pallas is a small-sized institution the physical, cultural and environmental conditions for strong student support are at hand. Interviews with both students and staff underline this quality. In addition to support from the department, students receive counselling from the Academic Affairs Office and psychological counselling from the Katriito Clinic.

Interviews with alumni and representatives from employers and work life confirm the relevance and employability of Pallas graduates.

### **Conclusions**

The Interior Product Design programme has a transparent admissions process and a student-centred, coherent curriculum with both formal and informal feedback. Student mobility is supported, and personalised academic and psychological guidance is available. Graduates are well-prepared for professional practice, as confirmed by students, alumni, and employers.

### **Strengths**

- Pallas is a small higher arts education institution with unique conditions for individual student support and best practice learning and teaching. The Interior Product Design programme has taken advantage of these conditions.
- The department has managed to develop a highly attractive programme with relevance for work life and further education (master's degrees).

## 2.1.3 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 Department of Furniture consists as of 31 December 2024 of six permanent academic staff members who represent 4.65 FTE. This group fills different roles, including lecturer and technical assistant, senior teacher and technical assistant, senior teacher/lecturer, and assistant to the head of the department. In addition, the department has engaged 13 visiting lecturers to run the two programmes. It is unclear how many FTE's the visiting lecturers represent. The ratio of students per academic staff at Pallas is 7.8, which is a smaller number than the average in Estonian higher education institutions (9.7).

As discussed under the standard Teaching staff, the panel sees a need for an institutional policy on a sustainable balance between permanent staff and visiting lecturers. While annual development reviews for regular staff are acknowledged, visiting lecturers are not included, creating a risk of insufficient support. The panel notes positively the attention given to pedagogical competences and training for all teaching staff.

As discussed under the standard on Academic Ethics, Pallas has a Code of Ethics (Annex 13) and a permanent Ethics Committee to ensure continuity and transparent handling of ethical matters. Interviews with students, staff, and committee members confirmed that ethical awareness is strong and clearly present.

Over the past five years, faculty members of the Department of Furniture have actively participated in work mobility (Table 26). Both permanent academic staff and visiting lecturers are active practitioners. Regular teaching staff have participated in study trips, carried out educational and professional projects, and participated in specialty competitions. Annex 25 gives a detailed overview of all academic staff's participation in domestic and international exhibitions, and members of the Department of Furniture are included here.

The overall impression is that the pedagogy, RDC activities, student feedback, programme management, and stakeholder feedback confirm good quality of the programme, its academic staff, and its leadership.

## Conclusions

The Department of Furniture is staffed by committed permanent academic staff, complemented by visiting lecturers who bring additional expertise. Staff development and pedagogical competence are well supported for permanent staff, though visiting lecturers are not yet included in structured reviews. Academic staff actively engage in research, development, and creative activities, enriching teaching and providing students with professional exposure. Ethical awareness is well embedded, supported by a permanent Ethics Committee and a Code of Ethics. Overall, the department provides high-quality teaching and programme management, but establishing a policy to balance permanent and visiting staff would strengthen continuity and long-term development.

## Strengths

- The Department of Furniture consists of dedicated, professional, and skilled academic staff with an ambition to integrate teaching with creative work.

## 2.2. Photography (Professional HE)

The Department of Photography in Pallas offers a four-year programme that allows students to gain experience working under various conditions and contexts with a strong emphasis on practice. According to the lecturers, the study programme of Photography has a distinct profile compared to other regional and international photography programmes: The curriculum is oriented towards applied photography and practical learning. As described in SER, the specialised courses in the curriculum are divided in four blocks: theory, photographic self-expression, digital skills, and internship (p. 56). The curriculum emphasises practical, specialised subjects that strengthen skills-based learning, while also providing foundational knowledge in the humanities and art theory, along with the development of general competencies and hands-on art skills.

The programme admits approximately 8–10 students each year. In the 2024/25 academic year, a total of 39 students were enrolled in the Department of Photography (SER, p. 10). As of 31 December 2024, the department employed five permanent staff members, corresponding to 3.99 full-time equivalents, in addition to 25 visiting lecturers (SER, p. 59). Since the beginning of 2025, the professorial post has remained vacant, and the study programme is at the time of the accreditation overseen by the Acting Head of Department.

### 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**

Based on the interviews with students, it is evident that the Department of Photography has taken student feedback into account and implemented changes to improve the study experience. Within a year, several significant adjustments have been made to the curriculum. For example, the studio course, previously offered in the second year, has been moved to the first year to allow students earlier hands-on engagement with photographic practice. Group discussions on the curriculum have become a productive forum for communication, and students confirm that their opinions are being heard. Representatives of stakeholders and employers also participated in curriculum development workshops and working groups.

Although the number of credit points per course has increased (a minimum of 3 ECTS is allocated to each course), the challenge of managing multiple parallel speciality courses, with separate assignments, remains. For example, the Speciality module (93 ECTS) comprises exclusively 3 ECTS courses, leading to a total of 31 distinct courses over the course of four years (SER, extra annex 3. Study plan\_Photography). One suggestion by the panel was to merge certain courses, such as *Studio Photography II* and *Portrait & Group Photography*, into a larger module. However, the lecturers expressed a concern that simply expanding course modules may not address the need for teaching specific skills. Each course has its own set of learning objectives and merging them could compromise the depth of training required for students to master the necessary skills in each area. Lecturers emphasise the need for courses to remain well-structured and manageable, ensuring they can deliver high-quality instruction without being overwhelmed by excessive content. The transition from smaller credit-point courses to larger, more comprehensive modules has also influenced the structure and focus of studies. The new structure has generally resulted in more substantial and integrated courses. Related subjects have been merged into broader modules, and links between theoretical and practical areas have been strengthened. For example, drawing is now taught alongside photography rather than as a standalone skill.

Students noted that the updated curriculum gives them more room to focus on their own creative projects by reducing the number of general subject courses—such as painting and drawing—which were previously more extensive.

Contemporary developments in the field, such as artificial intelligence and social media, are gradually being incorporated into the curriculum. New courses introducing AI and its applications in photography have already been added, with plans to integrate topics related to social media and portfolio development in later stages of the programme (SER, p. 54). Students

have noted, however, that these subjects could be introduced earlier in the studies to better prepare them for the realities of the contemporary photographic/visual arts' landscape.

Interviews with teaching staff highlighted several observations. Staff noted the potential benefits of increased collaboration between departments—for example, courses such as fanzine-making have made use of workshops in other departments, revealing opportunities for cross-disciplinary work. Some staff suggested that students could benefit from more flexible study pathways, such as the option to follow two distinct tracks from the third year onward—one focused on art and the other on applied photography. It was also observed that while assessments are typically conducted by juries of art experts, students might benefit from curricula and evaluations more closely tailored to their specific focus areas. The new curriculum is regarded as more structured and diverse than in previous years. Alumni and stakeholders expressed overall satisfaction with the range of courses, particularly those that provide broader knowledge beyond technical skills. Feedback indicates that students are generally well-prepared for professional work. Alumni furthermore noted improvements in the curriculum's structure, including greater emphasis on collaborative work, diverse techniques, and discussions, which are important in the evolving field of photography. The inclusion of creative and academic writing is also valued for supporting professional and academic development, and students noted that they would welcome even greater emphasis on these elements.

### **Conclusions**

Overall, the Department of Photography has experienced significant positive changes over the past two years, with improvements in the structure of the study programme and overall development. This process included feedback from students and alumni, as well as employees. Although there is room for improvement, the department's commitment to ongoing development ensures that students are well prepared for professional careers in photography and/or the visual arts, as well as further studies in related fields.

### **Strengths**

- Significant curriculum changes have been made based on student input. Group discussions and the involvement of the head of the department in obtaining direct feedback have fostered an open and responsive learning environment.
- The curriculum has been restructured to offer more integrated and comprehensive courses, with better connections between theoretical and practical subjects (e.g., drawing now directly relates to photography). This provides students with more time for creative practice and a better balance of subjects.
- The curriculum is taking into consideration contemporary developments, such as artificial intelligence and social media, ensuring students remain relevant to the changing landscape of photography and visual arts. Additionally, the programme has increased the proportion of reading and writing, which contributes to students' artistic and academic skills.
- Alumni and stakeholders have noted that the curriculum effectively prepares students for the professional world, demonstrating the technical readiness of Pallas students.
- The department's commitment to continuous curriculum improvement ensures that students are equipped to meet future demands in photography and the arts.

### **Areas of concern and recommendations**

- The panel recommends reducing the number of specialty courses per semester. Despite an increase in credit points per course, students continue to face challenges due to

overlapping specialty courses and a significant number of individual assignments, which increases their workload.

### Opportunities for further improvement

- It is suggested to simplify and consolidate feedback channels (such as TAHVEL, Moodle, and document management system) to ensure students have clearer, easier access to assessment criteria and course materials, improving overall communication and accessibility. This should be done following the shared institutional practices at Pallas level.
- Increased opportunities for cross-departmental collaboration are suggested, similar to the fanzine-making course with the textile department, to encourage broader creative exploration and skills development.
- It is proposed that more focused courses on academic writing, research methods, and critical thinking are incorporated in the curriculum, to better prepare students for the theoretical aspects of their field and support their transition to professional and academic careers.

## 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

Students interviewed highlighted the department's support for internships and noted that guidance is available, while also seeing potential to expand field-specific connections to diversify opportunities. They observed that documentation, writing, and research are included in theoretical courses but could be more closely integrated with practical studies and thesis preparation, particularly in later years.

Students appreciated opportunities to engage in external projects and assignments and noted that many begin developing their professional paths during their studies. They suggested that

additional emphasis on entrepreneurship could further support the transition into professional work. Training related to exhibition processes—such as printing, framing, and curating—is considered useful, and students expressed interest in more structured opportunities to exhibit their work. While courses in bookbinding and zines are available, some students noted room for further exploration of photobooks and self-publishing.

Alumni and stakeholders interviewed recommended including topics such as the role and ethics of the artist, intellectual property, and exhibition organisation to enhance professional preparation. They also highlighted that increased exposure to artist studios, talks, and photography events would broaden students' understanding of the field.

Graduates from the Department of Photography pursue a wide range of career paths, reflecting the department's broad educational approach. Students can focus on either commercial or artistic photography, with many succeeding in both areas. Alumni noted that the department provides a solid foundation in the humanities and offers various internships, enabling students to discover and refine their professional interests.

Students and alumni reported that the skills acquired at Pallas are versatile, allowing graduates to pursue careers as photographers, artists, or educators. They also noted that while technical skills are well addressed, further development in critical thinking and analysis, both in writing and practice, would be beneficial.

The programme's teaching philosophy emphasises flexibility, allowing lecturers to understand their students and tailor their approach to individual needs. The institution has also maintained an appreciation for analogue photography, as it plays an essential role in understanding the process of photography. Despite discussions about introducing a computer-based darkroom, the decision was made to retain analogue practices, which continue to be valued by both faculty and students. Despite the generational shift in how students relate to images, the department's expertise in analogue photography continues to resonate with students, who appreciate the depth of knowledge provided by the faculty.

In terms of guest lecturers, students are generally satisfied with the quality and professionalism of the invited speakers, although they feel there is a lack of formal introduction to these lecturers, and their practices. The so-called 'Artist talks' are also not mandatory, but students have expressed interest in having more opportunities to engage with visiting artists, particularly as part of the study process.

During interviews, lecturers explained that course outcomes, schedules, and assessment criteria are provided via the TAHVEL study information system and introduced in the first lecture. While learning outcomes are generally available, assessment criteria are often missing, and some students do not access TAHVEL regularly, which may limit their understanding of course requirements.

Assessment and feedback processes have evolved significantly. Last year, a more structured approach was introduced, particularly in speciality subjects, improving clarity and consistency. Students reported mixed experiences: some courses are graded, while others follow a pass/fail system, creating uncertainty about expectations and timing. Occasional involvement of staff from other departments can reduce feedback, and although assessments are typically conducted by juries of art experts, students focused on applied photography would benefit from feedback more closely aligned with their goals.

Lecturers also communicate expectations through detailed assignment descriptions and assessment criteria in course materials and are improving content in the virtual learning environment, Moodle. Despite these efforts, students sometimes face challenges in accessing and navigating information effectively.

The institution is actively working to streamline communication across platforms. In particular, as discussed under the standard Quality Culture, a more integrated approach may be needed to ensure all students consistently have access to learning outcomes, assessment criteria, and course materials. Student feedback is valued and can be provided at the end of each lecture, supporting continuous improvement.

Collaboration between the Department of Photography and external partners has been effective in providing students with valuable practical experience. Projects with organisations such as Tartu Art House, including joint exhibitions with the Estonian Academy of Arts (EKA), allow students to engage in real-world artistic practices. Students also actively contribute to documenting exhibitions, assist fashion photographers, observe professional shoots, and work on assignments such as fashion advertisements for large department stores or portrait photography for events, gaining exposure and networking opportunities. Feedback from industry partners confirms the value of these collaborations, although application numbers for some positions remain relatively low. While the collaborations have been largely successful, students and alumni noted that further expansion could enhance career prospects and broaden professional development opportunities.

Although students are encouraged to take part in exchange programmes, the promotion and practical support for these opportunities could be further strengthened. A recurring challenge is the inconsistent recognition of credits earned abroad, which sometimes results in additional work after students' return.

Pallas hosts incoming Erasmus+ students each year, contributing to a more international learning environment. Both lecturers and students noted that incoming students value the close attention and timely feedback they receive, and that these exchanges are mutually beneficial. Participation in Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programmes (BIP) has further broadened international exposure and collaboration.

## Conclusions

The Department of Photography at Pallas provides a supportive and flexible learning environment that combines practical training, theoretical grounding, and professional development opportunities. Students and alumni value the programme's focus on real-world experience and international exposure, while recognising opportunities to further strengthen the integration of theory, practice, and critical skills.

Teaching is adaptable to individual student needs, and assessment and feedback processes are increasingly structured, though continued efforts to ensure clarity and consistency would benefit students. Overall, the department demonstrates a strong commitment to learning, teaching, and professional preparation, with potential for further development in integrating practical and theoretical elements and enhancing assessment practices.

### Strengths

- The programme provides a versatile education, balancing practical skills and artistic development, and offers opportunities for students to pursue diverse career paths.

### Opportunities for further improvement

- Improve the visibility of Erasmus+ mobility and internship programmes and other exchange opportunities, ensuring that credits from mobility periods are fully recognised.

## 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

Interviews with students indicate that Pallas generally offers a well-structured international experience, supported by staff mobility, visiting lecturers, and various collaborative activities. The Erasmus+ coordinator is widely appreciated for providing clear guidance and facilitating a range of mobility options. Alumni interviewed also highlighted that visiting guest lecturers positively contribute to internationalisation by bringing diverse academic and artistic perspectives, although they noted that exposure to international viewpoints remained limited due to the relatively low number of external visitors. Both students and alumni suggested that increasing the presence and involvement of international guest lecturers—ideally through full-course teaching—could further strengthen this dimension. At the same time, staff interviewed noted that the use of external evaluators from outside Estonia may present challenges when their limited familiarity with the local art context influences grading and feedback.

Teaching staff interviewed in the Department of Photography value the variety of techniques—both analogue and digital—that students are exposed to, as well as peer-to-peer knowledge exchange. They also reported that the relatively small study groups allow staff to get to know students and adapt their teaching to individual needs. At the end of 2024, the department employed five permanent staff members (3.99 full-time equivalents) and 25 visiting lecturers (SER, p. 59). Since early 2025, the position of professor has remained vacant, and the

programme is overseen by the Acting Head of Department. Interviews with teaching staff clarified that the department currently has five staff members: a Head of Department, an Assistant to the Head, two part-time technical assistants, and two part-time lecturers. Staff noted that the high proportion of visiting lecturers creates an administrative burden, leaving the Acting Head unable to engage in teaching. They emphasised that a better balance between permanent and visiting lecturers is necessary, as increasing full-time staff would improve educational quality. Limited remuneration for visiting lecturers can make it difficult to recruit highly qualified experts and may reduce their engagement in administrative responsibilities, which are therefore delegated to permanent staff.

Interviews with staff highlighted that international mobility and RDC activities support the exchange of good practices and curriculum development (SER, p. 59). In 2024, three employees participated in five international work mobility schemes, and the department hosted two international lecturers/experts. Students and alumni also reported in interviews the value of collaboration with external partners, which enhances practical experience and professional exposure.

Teaching staff interviewed also noted challenges in combining artistic practice with teaching responsibilities. While opportunities exist to exhibit work at the Pallas Gallery and participate in RDC projects (SER, p. 57), these do not come with additional institutional resources or dedicated time, and support for balancing teaching with professional practice is limited. Faculty highlighted that engagement with students provides fresh perspectives and learning opportunities; however, exposure and professional development through RDC and international projects are not fully systematised. Staff indicated that strengthening institutional support to integrate artistic practice with teaching responsibilities would further enhance the development and internationalisation of teaching staff.

## Conclusions

Overall, the findings suggest that Pallas offers a well-organised international learning environment, supported by committed staff and valuable mobility initiatives. At the same time, the department faces challenges related to staffing, particularly the reliance on numerous visiting lecturers and a vacant professorship, which place pressure on permanent staff. Strengthening the balance between full-time and visiting lecturers would help ensure more sustainable teaching quality and reduce administrative strain. Furthermore, while guest lecturers and mobility activities enrich the international and artistic dimensions of the programme, greater institutional support is needed to better integrate teaching with staff members' artistic practice and RDC activities. Addressing these issues would enhance both staff well-being and the overall quality of education within the department.

While current collaborations with external partners offer valuable practical experience, increasing the involvement of international guest lecturers could further enhance students' exposure to global perspectives and better prepare them for international career paths.

## Strengths

- The Department of Photography has a professional and dedicated teaching staff who value the collaborative exchange of knowledge and a friendly, student-centred learning environment that adapts to individual student needs.

## Opportunities for further improvement

- It is suggested to increase the number of international guest lecturers and offer full courses taught by visiting experts to provide students with broader global perspectives and expertise.
- Strengthen institutional support for RDC activities to enable lecturers to balance their roles as artists and teachers at Pallas.
- Address the ratio of staff members to guest teachers to reduce the administrative workload and provide stronger academic support for students.

## 2.3. Painting (Professional HE)

Between 2022 and 2024, the Department of Painting implemented a major renewal of its study offer, culminating in the introduction of a new Painting curriculum in 2024/2025 (4 years, 240 ECTS), which replaces the former Painting and Restoration study programme. All data in the SER relate to both curricula, although the emphasis was placed to evaluating the Painting curriculum which was created based on comprehensive analysis, stakeholder feedback, and institutional recommendations. The new Painting curriculum introduces a clearer, more coherent structure with larger modules, improved workload balance, and a stronger progression from basic to advanced skills of Painting. It ensures constructive alignment between theory, artistic practice, professional development and entrepreneurship.

In 2024/2025, the Painting Department has 44 students enrolled across the two curricula. At the end of 2024 the department had 8 teaching staff members (6 FTE), 5 visiting lecturers and 2 foreign visiting lecturers.

The objectives of the Painting curriculum are to provide high-quality applied higher education in the field of art with a specialisation in painting, and to ensure the training of professionals whose skills meet labour market requirements and who are competent to work independently and/or in teams. In addition, the curriculum aims to develop in learners a comprehensive understanding of the role of art in society, the skills of independent learning and raise awareness of the need for professional development and continuing training. It also seeks to ensure, based on the international experience in higher education, the openness of the curriculum to change and developments in today's dynamic world and the competence to continue studies in the Master's level.

### 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 Painting curriculum has undergone significant renewal, culminating in the launch of the new *Painting* programme in 2024/25, replacing *Painting and Restoration*. The redesign process was based on extensive stakeholder consultation, including students, teaching staff, alumni, employers, and interdepartmental collaboration. Feedback has been systematically collected through annual surveys, interviews, and Curriculum Council discussions, ensuring that the programme responds effectively to changing needs in the art field and labour market. The curriculum now includes both traditional and contemporary approaches to painting, with additional courses on digital media, illustration, and creative entrepreneurship, directly reflecting alumni and employer feedback about the need for skills in digital creation, marketing, and project management (SER p. 60-61)

The restructured curriculum responds to the earlier fragmentation of courses identified by the previous institutional assessment and introduces a more coherent, module-based structure. The number of compulsory courses has been reduced from 89 to 56, with larger credit volumes (minimum 3 ECTS per course), to allow for deeper learning and better workload management (SER p. 61). The panel learned during interviews with students and teaching staff that the restructuring of the study programme, which introduced larger course volumes, resulted in the merging of theoretical and practical courses. Students reported that this integrated format has strengthened the coherence of their studies and provided clearer links between theory and practice.

Alumni feedback has played a crucial role in guiding the renewal and improvement of the Painting study programme. Responding to graduates' suggestions, the department placed greater emphasis on general competencies that enhance students' professional adaptability and creative autonomy in a rapidly changing cultural and technological context. As a result, new subjects have been introduced to strengthen skills in digital creation and visual communication, including courses in digital painting, illustration, and layout. To further support career readiness and align with the professional realities faced by graduates, several new subjects were integrated into the curriculum: *Creative Entrepreneurship and Marketing; Intellectual Property and Artificial Intelligence; Author's Position and Group Critique; Art and Society; Self-Marketing and Project Management* (SER p. 61) These courses provide students with practical knowledge of art management, professional ethics, intellectual property rights, and the use of emerging technologies such as AI in creative practice. They also develop critical awareness of

the artist's social role and strengthen students' ability to present, promote, and manage their own artistic careers.

The panel discovered from the SER (annex 27.2) and interviews with students and teaching staff that the objectives of the Painting study programme are formulated clearly enough and are generally coherent. The learning outcomes are described in measurable terms and correspond to the stated objectives. They show a progression from basic to more advanced competencies and demonstrate links between theoretical, practical, and entrepreneurial aspects. The curriculum follows a logical sequence and maintains internal consistency. The shift from general theoretical foundations to specialised studio practice suggests an attempt at constructive alignment between learning stages and outcomes. Teaching methods are described as student-centred and practice-oriented, aiming to encourage creativity, reflection, and developing professional autonomy. The curriculum includes elements of creative and critical thinking, digital literacy, communication, teamwork, entrepreneurship, and ethical responsibility. These competencies are integrated across modules, though the extent to which they are systematically embedded varies.

Students during the interview generally reported that assessment criteria are communicated during introductory course briefings. However, the panel found that the assessment criteria of not all courses were published in the TAHVEL study information system.

Through interviews with alumni and employers, the panel found out that alumni particularly appreciate the supportive, community-based learning environment. They value the programme's strong focus on painting, hands-on skill development, and opportunities for exhibition. Nevertheless, both alumni and employers emphasised the need to further develop students' competencies in professional presentation, portfolio preparation, and funding applications.

The Department of Painting manages its material and financial resources rather independently through a diversified funding structure (SER p. 62) The department's budget, derived from the institution's operating grant, is supplemented by own income and external funding, primarily from the Cultural Endowment of Estonia. The department's own income is generated from collaborative projects, commissioned work, and continuing education courses, while additional grant support has enabled the organisation of study trips and exhibition projects abroad. The combined funding enables the department to carry out daily teaching activities, renew equipment, and acquire materials and tools necessary for learning. It also supports study trips and professional development opportunities for students and teaching staff, thereby contributing directly to the quality and relevance of the study programme.

Cooperation with Estonian research and cultural institutions such as University of Tartu, the Estonian National Museum, Art Museum of Estonia, Tartu art museum and others provide students with exhibition, internship, and project-based learning opportunities.

The panel learnt from the SER (p. 62) and on-site visit that the digital learning environment is well supported: In addition to institutional computer facilities, the department has acquired digital painting tools to expand students' technical competencies. The graphics workspaces have been improved, and the library continuously updates its collection of specialised literature and databases based on the needs of teaching staff and students. The learning environment provides students with facilities that somewhat sufficiently support both contact learning and independent artistic practice. Students have access to painting studios, tools, a lounge area, and personal storage (shelves, drawers, and lockers). The studios function as open, shared spaces that can be used flexibly by different study groups.

From the SER (p. 62) and interviews on-site panel was made aware that the department is currently reviewing the functionality of its rooms with the long-term aim of optimising spatial use, including the potential installation of movable partitions in larger studio areas. In response to the previous institutional accreditation recommending the provision of additional individual painting spaces, the department has rented supplementary external premises to support students' long-term creative projects, including final works.

While these measures demonstrate progress, further work is needed to ensure that students have sufficiently spacious and dedicated areas for painting. The department is encouraged to continue expanding and improving studio capacity so that all students can benefit from adequate individual working spaces. Planned infrastructural developments, such as improved storage for the methodological fund and a shared workspace for academic staff, will contribute to this effort, but sustained attention to the availability and quality of student painting spaces remains essential.

### **Conclusions**

The Painting study programme at Pallas has undergone a comprehensive and well-structured renewal process, culminating in the launch of a new curriculum in 2024/2025 that replaces the previous Painting and Restoration programme. The redesign was systematic, participatory, and data-driven, incorporating feedback from multiple stakeholders, including students, alumni, staff, and employers, as well as recommendations from prior institutional assessments.

The curriculum structure is now more coherent, balanced, and aligned with the programme's objectives and learning outcomes. The reduction of compulsory courses and the introduction of larger, module-based units have allowed for deeper learning, improved workload distribution, and clearer progression from foundational to advanced competencies. The programme demonstrates constructive alignment between theory, practice, and entrepreneurship, ensuring that graduates develop both artistic mastery and professional readiness.

### **Strengths**

- Clear and coherent curriculum structure, with logical progression and integration of theory, practice, and entrepreneurship.
- Enhanced focus on professional readiness, with new courses supporting entrepreneurship, marketing, and intellectual property awareness.
- Strong partnerships with cultural and research institutions, providing authentic learning experiences through exhibitions and projects.

### **Opportunities for Further Improvement**

- Continue expanding and improving studio capacity so that all students can benefit from adequate individual working spaces.

## 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

The SER (p. 63) and interviews on-site proved that the admission process is well-structured and transparent. It consists of specialty exams (drawing, painting, portfolio) and a motivation interview, enabling the evaluation of both manual and creative skills as well as social maturity. The admissions committee includes departmental and external field experts, ensuring fairness and objectivity. The consistent admission ratio of approximately 4.5 to 5.2 indicates both selectivity and stable interest in the programme. Preparatory courses and open-house events at Pallas further ensure equitable access, helping prospective students from diverse backgrounds to prepare for entrance exams.

Learning is clearly student-centred, with strong emphasis on individual responsibility, artistic development and strong integration of theory and practice, evidenced by the curriculum structure where 62% of courses are practical, 23% theory-based, and 15% allocated to internships (SER p. 63). The inclusion of general subjects provides a solid theoretical foundation that directly supports professional competency development of students in practical and internship settings. Small-group teaching enables personalised guidance and additional learning opportunities, such as masterclasses with external experts and observation internships, enhancing students' exposure to contemporary artistic practices. Digital competencies are systematically embedded through specialty-related practical tasks, internships, and courses that apply RDC.

According to SER (p. 64) and interviews with students and teaching staff on-site the assessment practices employ both differentiated (A-F) and non-differentiated (pass/fail) systems, depending on course type. The recent curricular shift toward more pass/fail evaluations encourages creative risk-taking and process-oriented learning, reducing performance anxiety while maintaining accountability. Students generally confirm that assessment criteria are

clearly communicated via introductory briefings of the courses, however, the panel found that the assessment criteria of not all courses were published in the TAHVEL study information system. The panel recommends that the institution make the assessment criteria available in TAHVEL, thereby improving clarity, transparency, and equal access to essential study information.

Feedback to students is provided both orally or/and in writing, complemented by committee evaluations during semester reviews, which serve as valuable professional simulations. During the interviews, students reported satisfaction with receiving feedback through semester reviews and open discussions, though some still wish for more uniformity and clarity in grading across different courses.

The panel learnt that internships constitute a central component of the Pallas Painting curriculum and that feedback from placement partners is systematically used for curriculum enhancement, as demonstrated by long-term cooperation with the Rehbinder House in Rakvere (SER, p. 63). The scope of professional engagement expanded further through collaborations with the University of Tartu, museums, and galleries, with additional placements already secured for 2025. Independent practice opportunities, such as work with Art & Tonic Gallery, participation in exhibitions and auctions, and commissioned mural projects illustrate the Painting programme's strong alignment with real-world professional contexts. The integration of summer painting practice across all year groups strengthens cohesion and ensures equal access to experiential learning. Observation internships in major European art centres (Venice, Brussels, Berlin, Paris) broaden students' international perspectives and support the development of global artistic literacy. The final project practice, which includes practical implementation, analytical reflection, documentation, and preparation for defence, consolidates students' professional readiness. Evidence from alumni employment outcomes (SER, p.65, interviews with alumni) indicates that internship networks often translate into employment in key cultural institutions across Estonia, confirming the effectiveness of internship-based learning in facilitating graduates' integration into the creative sector.

The evidence provided in SER (pp. 60-65) and during interviews on-site demonstrates that RDC activity is systematically embedded in the Painting curriculum and effectively supports the development of student professional competencies in both artistic and restoration-focused pathways. Exhibition activity on the art track provides early-career visibility, professional feedback, and opportunities to interact with diverse audiences—strengthening students' readiness for independent artistic practice. The content, frequency, and international dimension of student exhibitions organised by the Painting programme indicate a strong and sustainable RDC culture within the department. In the restoration track, student participation in conservation and research projects reflects meaningful engagement with real-world heritage environments and professional standards. The combination of scholarly publication, hands-on conservation work, and participation in international research events shows that students are exposed to current methodologies and sectoral networks.

Overall, the Department's RDC activities demonstrate a robust link between learning, creative and research output, and professional practice, contributing to both student development and the visibility of the institution at national and international levels.

Student mobility is a strong component of the Department of Painting, where the Erasmus+ programme plays an important role in promoting international experience and cooperation. Over the past six academic years, 15 students (SER p. 64) have participated in study or internship mobility across six countries, demonstrating steady engagement in international

learning. Incoming mobility has also increased, indicating growing international visibility and strengthening programme attractiveness.

Student support processes are well developed and include annual meetings, semesterly group discussions, and, since 2025, individual performance and development reviews, which enhance personalised feedback and help guide academic progression. Feedback is collected through surveys and discussions, while students also benefit from access to the Head of Department, the Academic Affairs Office, psychological counselling, and ethical guidance through the Code of Ethics and Pallas Ethics Committee. These support structures contribute to high satisfaction with the learning environment, although economic and family-related factors remain the main reasons for dropout.

The panel learned from on-site interviews with students that first- and second-year students view the new Painting curriculum as offering a more balanced workload and a better integration of theory and practice. They also reported that separating the programme from the painting restoration field has given them more time to focus on painting and monumental techniques. In contrast, students studying under the old curriculum highlighted issues with curricular coherence. However, survey results from 2025 show improvements in both areas, particularly in assessment clarity and diversity of teaching methods.

Alumni feedback was also integrated into curriculum development, emphasising the need for stronger digital skills, communication competencies, and labour-market-oriented abilities. Strong alumni outcomes, 60% working in their field or related areas and 84% active in creative work, demonstrate the programme's relevance and effectiveness in preparing graduates for professional practice.

## Conclusions

The Painting Study Programme demonstrates a well-structured, student-centred and professionally oriented learning environment, supported by transparent admissions, a strong balance of practical, theoretical and internship-based learning, and comprehensive student support systems. High-quality partnerships and diverse internship opportunities ensure strong links with professional art and cultural institutions, while RDC activities and international mobility enhance both creative development and global exposure. Students report overall satisfaction, noting recent improvements in workload balance, teaching methods and curriculum coherence in the new programme structure. Employment outcomes confirm the programme's relevance, with most graduates active in the creative field. Further development is recommended in increasing transparency and consistency of assessment criteria and strengthening digital and labour-market skills.

## Strengths

- Balanced and practice-driven curriculum integrating theory, practice, and internships coherently.
- Strong student-centred culture with accessible and supportive teaching staff.
- Active integration of international mobility and masterclasses, enriching the learning experience.
- Effective internship system connecting students with professional institutions and projects.
- Safe and inclusive learning environment with accessible counselling and ethical support structures.

## Opportunities for Further Improvement

- A continued expansion of digital media, project management, art entrepreneurship, and interdisciplinary theoretical-practical modules is encouraged, to better support the future career paths of Painting graduates.

### 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

SER (p. 66-67) and the interview with teaching staff evidenced that the Department of Painting has a stable and professionally competent teaching staff, consisting of 8 permanent members, all holding a master's degree, with an average age of 55.5 years. Academic staff members are actively engaged in teaching, creative work, and international collaboration (SER, p. 66, table 21). The stability of the core teaching team provides continuity in achieving the programme's objectives.

Between 2020–2024, the department hosted 28 visiting lecturers, of whom 12 were from abroad, offering specialised masterclasses (e.g. icon painting, paper conservation) and contributing to curriculum enrichment, a wider range of professional practices and perspectives. International lecturers also participated in deeper forms of collaboration, including curriculum development and planning for future partnerships. Examples include masterclasses by experts from Germany, Sweden, and Georgia, mentorship provided by a specialist from the Helsinki Art Museum, and proseminars with professionals from Sweden and Belgium. Planned visits for the 2025/26 academic year further demonstrate the department's commitment to maintaining international engagement (SER p. 66).

Teaching staff are deeply engaged in creative, research, and development (RDC) activities, (SER, annex 30) which are closely integrated into teaching. The department's approach ensures that curricular content is directly informed by professional artistic work, ranging from painting and restoration to curating, exhibition practice, and art research. This connection between creative work and teaching allows students to acquire relevant professional experience and develop

critical and technical skills through hands-on projects, such as mural creation, conservation work, and exhibitions in public spaces (e.g., Gallery Pallas, Hotel Pallas project). (SER p. 67)

The panel was informed by SER (p. 66) and during the interviews with teaching staff, heads of the departments and senior management that systematic staff performance and development reviews have been carried out in Pallas annually since 2024, helping to plan training needs and support professional growth. The interview with teaching staff indicated that staff view these reviews as constructive and reflective exercises, helping them plan personal growth and teaching improvement.

In recent years, three teaching staff members have undergone attestation in the Painting department, confirming the department's commitment to maintaining quality standards. In 2024, teaching-related training sessions, which were attended by academic staff of the Painting department included topics such as assessment, curriculum visualisation, change management in higher education, inclusive support for students with special needs, and grading practices (SER, p. 66).

During the interview with the teaching staff the panel found out that academic staff are aware of Academic Ethics requirements and consistently follow the principles in their teaching and professional activities.

The department actively fosters international collaboration and mobility. Between 2020–2024, staff participated in 112 work mobilities, including 50 foreign visits to 11 countries (SER, p. 66, table 21). Activities included teaching exchanges, visiting art biennials and fairs, participating in international conferences, etc. The panel learnt from the interviews on-site, that these international experiences of the teaching staff enhance curriculum content and teaching methodology, bringing in new perspectives, innovative techniques, and broader cultural insights that enrich both teaching and learning.

## Conclusions

The Painting study programme fulfils the criteria for development, cooperation, and internationalisation of teaching staff. Staff demonstrate high professional competence and continuous engagement in artistic, pedagogical, and research activities. International cooperation is aligned with both the programme's objectives and the institution's strategic priorities. The integration of creative work and teaching is a notable strength, ensuring that students gain first-hand insight into professional art practice.

## Strengths

The Department of Painting has a competent, professionally active, and internationally connected teaching team. The combination of stable core staff and targeted visiting lecturer involvement ensures both continuity and innovation in the study programme, supports alignment with contemporary artistic practices, and enhances the overall quality and relevance of the student learning experience.

## Opportunities for Further Improvement

- Expand international networks (e.g. finalise membership in KUNO) to create new teaching collaborations and staff exchange opportunities.
- Formalise the integration of visiting lecturers' contributions into programme development.