**ESTONIAN QUALITY AGENCY
FOR HIGHER AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION**

EKKA

Assessment Report

Social Sciences

Journalism and Information

PhD studies

University of Tartu

Tallinn University

December 2018

Contents

Introduction

Quality assessment of a study programme group involves the assessment of the conformity of study programmes and the studies and development activities that take place on their basis to legislation, national and international standards and developmental directions with the purpose of providing recommendations to improve the quality of studies.

The goal of quality assessment of a study programme group is supporting the internal evaluation and self-development of the institution of higher education. Quality assessment of study programme groups is not followed by sanctions: expert assessments should be considered recommendations.

Quality assessment of a study programme group takes place at least once every 7 years based on the regulation approved by EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education *Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups at the Level of Doctoral Studies.*

The aim of the assessment team was the evaluation of the Study Programme Groups (SPG) of Social Sciences and Journalism and Information at the level of doctoral studies in two universities: University of Tartu and Tallinn University.

The team was asked to assess the conformity of the study programmes belonging to the study programme group and the instruction provided on the basis thereof to legislation and to national and international standards and/or recommendations, including the assessment of the level of the corresponding theoretical and practical instruction, the research and pedagogical qualification of the teaching staff and research staff, and the sufficiency of resources for the provision of instruction.

The following persons formed the assessment team:

Jonas Hinnfors (chair)	**Professor, University of Gothenburg, Sweden**
Suzanne Franks	Professor, City University London, UK
Emily Grundy	Professor, University of Essex and London School of Ecomomics, UK
David Inglis	Professor, University of Helsinki, Finland
Knud Erik Jørgensen	Professor, Aarhus University, Denmark
Mart Laatsit	PhD student, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark
Jaanika Puusalu	PhD student, University of Exeter, UK

The assessment process was coordinated by Hillar Bauman and Tiia Bach (EKKA).

After the preparation phase, the work of the assessment team in Estonia started on Monday, 15 October 2018, with an introduction to the Higher Education System as well as the assessment procedure by EKKA, the Estonian Quality assurance organization for higher and vocational education. The members of the team agreed the overall questions and areas to discuss with each group at the three institutions, who were part of the assessment process. The distribution of tasks between the members of the assessment team was organised and the detailed schedule of the site visits agreed.

During the following days, meetings were held with the representatives of the University of Tartu (Tuesday 16 October and Wednesday 17 October) and Tallinn University (Thursday 18 October and Friday 19 October). In all cases, the schedule for discussion on site for each of the various study programmes only allowed for short time slots to be available for team members to exchange information, discuss conclusions and implications for further questions.

On Saturday, October 20, the team held an all-day meeting, during which both the structure of the final report was agreed and findings of team meetings were compiled in a first draft of the assessment report. This work was executed in a cooperative way and the members of the team intensively discussed their individual views on the relevant topics.

In the following two sections, the assessment team summarises their general findings, conclusions and recommendations which are relevant across the whole SPG. In so doing, the team provides an external and objective perspective on the programmes and the contexts within which they are delivered. Ultimately, the intention is to provide constructive comment and critique which may form the basis upon which improvements in the quality of the programmes may be achieved. In formulating its recommendations, however, the assessment team has not evaluated the financial feasibility associated with their implementation.

The assessment team evaluated altogether 6 doctoral programmes in two study programme groups at Tallinn University and the University of Tartu:

Institution	Study programme group	Doctoral programme
University of Tartu	Social Sciences	Sociology
		Political Science
	Journalism and information	Media and Communication
Tallinn University	Social Sciences	Demography
		Sociology
		Government and Politics

General findings and recommendations

Strengths

- Since independence, Estonia's university system has undergone remarkable changes with a string of reforms, not least regarding social sciences at the University of Tartu and Tallinn University. Only a few years ago, the University of Tartu restructured itself into four faculties, one of which is the Faculty of Social Sciences. In 2015, Tallinn University merged a great number of institutes into six academic schools, one of which is the School of Governance, Law and Society (SOGOLAS). These reforms have come on top of several previous ones. Out of this turmoil has emerged a modern social sciences research and educational system with dedicated staff and students.

- The team was struck by the strong commitment by students and staff to give back expertise and knowledge to Estonian society. Many students take this approach perhaps even too far. Although they work on their PhD project they put in long hours on teaching and supervising at the university or in a non-university position.

- Although dedication as such does not automatically contribute to good quality the team's meetings with alumni and relevant employers gave the distinct impression that the 'end-product' (graduates' analytical capacity, presentation skills, time management talents etc) is highly regarded and appreciated. In spite of repeated concerns expressed by staff and students (including remarks in the self-assessment reports) about a lack of demand and appreciation by the Estonian society for people with a social science PhD degree we encountered rather firm statements about the opposite when we met with employers and alumni. PhD holders seem to be hired and highly valued by ministries, NGOs and other relevant employment sectors.

- Overall, the Programme Managers seem to be the right people in the right place, in some cases they were exceptionally well qualified. The team's general impression is that the Programme Managers are pro-active, well-connected and with good teaching and research backgrounds.

- The seminar system - in various organisational features - is well-run across the board and offers an arena where students and staff regularly present, discuss and comment on each other's drafts and papers.

- To some extent the seminars function as an addition to the regular supervision and reviewing processes. As for supervision and annual review features we found no immediate issues. On the contrary, where there had been previous concerns, the responsible parties had taken steps to improve routines and procedures. In some instances where self-assessment reports expressed concerns our interviews could convincingly reduce these substantially. All in all, supervision does not seem to be a problem. Moreover, the steps taken to include actual drafts, chapters etc in the

annual review process (this was pointed out to the team during several interviews) is a distinctly positive aspect.

- The intention to meet international quality criteria is laudable. The requirement that PhD theses include peer-reviewed articles in international journals (re compilation theses; or one such article on top of a monograph style thesis) is organisationally attractive. Even more so, perhaps, is the thorough final dissertation committee system with its international evaluator presence.

Challenges

- **Perhaps the most evident challenge is the fact that students take rather long to graduate.** Potentially there are a range of reasons behind this. When student funding falls far below the national average salary levels, it is only natural that students develop strategies to find other sources of income. Teaching is one such option, various non-university positions another. From the employers' point of view it might be tempting to use PhD students who have one foot in the academic world while at the same time providing comparatively cheap labour.

  While the combination of PhD studies and parallel employment has several appealing consequences, such as multi-tasking skills development and networking opportunities (including offering bridgeheads between academia and the rest of society) the negative aspects should not be underestimated. In the long run, the system may not be sustainable. Long hours where weekends and evenings are sacrificed causes difficulties for students with families – with disturbing equal opportunities consequences. Moreover, when the academically relevant topics and issues are referred to the late hours it might be difficult to keep the focus on the academic quality criteria. If PhD projects never finish at all, the value for state money is questionable. With many students working as teachers the ensuing blend of the different roles of being a student, staff, a colleague, an outsider might lead to unintended consequences.

  Yet another potential reason behind long finishing times is the quality of teaching and supervision. Although some issues may remain in this respect, we appreciate the efforts that have been made in recent years to reform the system.

  While draconian measures are to be avoided, we strongly recommend all relevant parties to consider the priorities regarding finishing times – and the corresponding tools. Just formulating a target (e.g. '50 per cent or 75 per cent of all PhD projects should meet the 4 + 2 years criterion') will probably change nothing. Funding, clear procedures regarding all stages of the PhD project and a sensible balance between the PhD project and other types of employment are essential factors to consider.

- **A general feature of the social sciences programmes is a certain lack of fully transparent guidelines, rules and procedures for staff and students to follow –**

with the apparent positive exceptions mentioned above. One might say that on the one hand many things are quite good regarding the various social sciences PhD programmes. On the other hand, an overall impression is that students, staff, teachers and Programme Managers seem to be muddling through without always clear expectations about what is actually asked by them or about how to go about things. Nor is it entirely clear whether the relevant actors follow the (partly vague) rules and guidelines (and whether this is desirable or not).

In many instances Programme Managers try to sort things in a way that works at least for the time being – often with good results. However, without making the system unwieldy and bureaucratised, it would be welcome if some of the rather implicit rules and procedures were made more transparent and accessible – in order to meet international professional standards. A key actor then, would be the middle level, i.e. the Faculty or School level as a communication centre between the top university structures and the various programmes. ***We recommend the universities to carefully think through how the middle level is being organised, funded and manned for optimal legitimacy as well as efficiency.***

The new funding scheme and its potential consequences – including finishing times: While the improved funding scheme (in various guises depending on potential university top-up contributions) is a very positive feature as such we did not find any clear analyses regarding its consequences. Currently, many students teach or work outside the university to make ends meet. An indirect side-effect for those working at the university is that they become rather well-integrated. Moreover, they pick up generic skills through teaching etc and fill holes (sometimes quite substantial) in the programmes' teaching schedules. The opposite is true for those who work outside the university. They might struggle to become fully integrated at the University. Another aspect concerns whether students are expected – and likely – to be full-time students or whether part-time is an option. In none of these respects have we found any clear–cut structures or any guidelines nor even analyses of long-term consequences. ***Quite a lot of people we came across had full time jobs outside the university. In relation to these we recommend that the available formal part-time pathways be utilised more often than is currently the case.***

Will students still teach as much as they currently do when funding is improved? If not, how and where will the institutes (similar) find new teaching staff? What is – and will be - expected by PhD students in terms of reasonable workloads inside or outside of the university? If students reduce their non-PhD workload what can the university do to keep them integrated? Moreover, in case the new funding scheme allows for full-time PhD studies, will pressures mount on the students to actually graduate inside a four or four plus two year timeframe or will they still be working more or less full time on the side?

The team strongly recommends all responsible parties – from the relevant top political levels down to the individual programmes – to clarify workload expectations, expected finishing time and the conditions for part-time work – and to analyse the consequences of the new funding scheme. One country to look at

might be Sweden, where a major funding reform was implemented during the 1990s/early 2000s.

- ***The integration of students***. Superficially, many students are well-integrated. To some extent this is because of well-functioning seminars but otherwise basically because so many students teach and work at the university with offices etc. However, the team learned that many PhD students do not really know each other. They never form cohorts with shared experiences where students can help and relate to each other as PhD students. Only rarely are there any designated work-places or offices available to cater for PhD students' needs as such. ***We recommend the universities to think through these structural aspects and to begin to organise PhD offices/desks and social events to boost PhD community ties***.

- ***Selection/acceptance procedures*** – In order to be accepted as a PhD student it is essential for applicants to build up a relationship with a potential future supervisor, often in relation to an existing research project. Although the final decisions are taken by various types of appointments committees the system is vulnerable in the sense that the ties between accepted students and supervisors and with research project leaders could grow too strong with reduced levels of PhD student independence. ***Fully aware that applicants have to produce a research plan and go through an interview by the appointments committee, we still recommend the universities and Programme Managers to consider whether the application process can become more focused on applicants' objective merits and less on their pre-established ties with a supervisor***.

- ***Thesis requirements.*** Currently, it is required that compilation theses include at least three peer-reviewed international journal articles. While this requirement has the potential to keep up academic standards the system is not without its risks. PhD finishing times have been agonisingly slow and the pressure to get articles published is considerable. This invites co-authoring strategies (often the supervisor plus the student), which might go too far. Moreover, the peer-reviewing hurdle might tempt students to go for rather low-ranked journals – or for journals where the ties between editors, local universities and reviewers could grow too strong. ***The team recommends the universities to consider alternative publishing requirements with an open mind. Many Swedish universities apply a 'one published article plus at least two publishable manuscripts' policy. Students, who are always fully funded, are required to finish within five years with 20 per cent teaching over the five year period included as part of their study plan. Most students finish on time. Danish universities, on the other hand, apply a 'five published articles' policy. Students, who are always fully funded, are required to finish within three years. Most students finish on time. We strongly recommend the relevant parties to consider quality levels, publishing strategies and funding systems to strike a better balance between these aspects. As inspiration, comparisons between the Danish or Swedish systems might be useful***.

1. Assessment report of SPG at the University of Tartu

1.1. Introduction

In 2017, the University of Tartu (UT) celebrated the 385th anniversary of its founding. According to the University of Tartu Act, adopted on 16 February 1995, the University of Tartu is the national university of the Republic of Estonia. Its mission is to advance science and culture, provide the possibilities for the acquisition of higher education based on the development of science and technology on the three levels of higher education in the fields of humanities, social, medical and natural sciences and to provide public services based on teaching, research and other creative activities.

The Faculty of Social Sciences as such at the University of Tartu came to be at the beginning of 2016 as the result of a structural reform which also saw the creation of three other faculties. The Faculty consists of four institutes, two schools and two colleges. Teaching and research in the fields of law, economics, business, educational science and educational management, psychology, sociology, politics, and media and communication studies is conducted in the faculty. The faculty's colleges in Narva and Pärnu are important regional higher education and research centres as well as development leaders in the regions.

All of the institutes and schools of the Faculty of Social Sciences (but not the colleges) have their own PhD programmes. There are all together seven programmes: Economics and Business Administration, Educational Science, Law, Media and Communication, Political Science, Psychology, and Sociology.

The assessment team evaluated 3 PhD programmes: **Political Science programme** (the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies) and **Sociology programme** (the Institute of Social Studies) belonging to the study programme group of Social Sciences, and **Media and Communication programme** (the Institute of Social Studies) which belongs to the study programme group of Journalism and Information.

Data of student numbers of the Faculty of Social Sciences

(Source: SAR of UT)

Total number of students

Curricula	2012/13 No. of students	2012/13 Incl. working at the UT	2013/14 No. of students	2013/14 Incl. working at the UT	2014/15 No. of students	2014/15 Incl. working at the UT	2015/16 No. of students	2015/16 Incl. working at the UT	2016/17 No. of students	2016/17 Incl. working at the UT
Economics	71	19	67	17	63	14	64	16	61	17
Political Science	**21**	**2**	**21**	**3**	**17**	**2**	**15**	**4**	**13**	**6**
Law	104	9	95	6	94	6	81	7	73	9
Psychology	37	17	34	14	30	11	27	10	24	6
Educational Science	34	18	32	17	35	16	37	15	35	15
Science Education	13	6	13	6	12	4	9	2	6	0
Media and Communication	**36**	**9**	**32**	**6**	**29**	**10**	**30**	**10**	**28**	**11**
Sociology	**28**	**9**	**20**	**6**	**16**	**7**	**13**	**6**	**12**	**4**
Faculty of Social Sciences total	**344**	**89**	**314**	**75**	**296**	**70**	**276**	**70**	**252**	**68**
UT total	1504	502	1457	493	1401	487	1348	380	1258	362

Total number of international students

Curricula	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Economics	4	3	8	9	14	16
Political Science	**5**	**6**	**5**	**7**	**7**	**9**
Law	1	1	2	2	3	3

Psychology	2	1	2	3	1	1
Educational Science	0	1	2	2	1	2
Science Education	0	0	0	0	0	0
Media and Communication	**4**	**3**	**2**	**2**	**1**	**1**
Sociology	**1**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**1**
Faculty of Social Sciences total	**17**	**15**	**21**	**25**	**27**	**33**
UT total	**122**	**129**	**139**	**143**	**158**	**186**

Total number of students admitted

	2012/13		2013/14		2014/15		2015/16		2016/17	
Curricula	**No. of students**	**including those continuing at UT**	**No. of students**	**including those continuing at UT**	**No. of students**	**including those continuing at UT**	**No. of students**	**including those continuing at UT**	**No. of students**	**including those continuing at UT**
Economics	9	6	7	6	10	6	6	4	8	5
Political Science	**4**	**0**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**1**	**2**	**1**	**2**	**1**
Law	4	4	4	4	3	2	3	3	6	6
Psychology	4	4	4	3	4	3	5	4	4	4
Educational Science	3	2	4	3	5	4	5	5	5	5
Science Education	2	2								
Media and Communication	**3**	**2**	**3**	**2**	**3**	**2**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**
Sociology	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**2**	**2**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
Faculty of Social Sciences total	**30**	**21**	**25**	**21**	**29**	**20**	**25**	**21**	**29**	**25**
UT total	**190**	**151**	**179**	**153**	**168**	**137**	**171**	**139**	**177**	**133**

Number of dropouts

Curricula	2012/13 Total	2012/13 Incl. at student's request	2013/14 Total	2013/14 Incl. at student's request	2014/15 Total	2014/15 Incl. at student's request	2015/16 Total	2015/16 Incl. at student's request	2016/17 Total	2016/17 Incl. at student's require
Economics	8	5	12	2	6	2	11	8	7	2
Political Science	**2**	**0**	**2**	**2**	**5**	**2**	**3**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Law	8	2	2	1	12	6	14	7	11	6
Psychology	5	3	3	3	7	6	4	1	2	1
Educational Science	7	5	1	1	2	2	4	2	2	1
Science Education	1	1	1	0	1	1	3	0	3	1
Media and Communication	**2**	**1**	**5**	**2**	**2**	**0**	**1**	**0**	**1**	**0**
Sociology	**8**	**0**	**3**	**2**	**6**	**2**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Faculty of Social Sciences total	**41**	**17**	**29**	**13**	**41**	**21**	**41**	**18**	**26**	**11**
UT total	148	55	128	42	154	40	171	48	146	48

Total number of graduates

Curricula	2012/13 Total	2012/13 Incl. in 4+2 or less years	2013/14 Total	2013/14 Incl. in 4+2 or less years	2014/15 Total	2014/15 Incl. in 4+2 or less years	2015/16 Total	2015/16 Incl. in 4+2 or less years	2016/17 Total	2016/17 Incl. in 4+2 or less years
Economics	4	2	2	2	5	1	1	0	3	1
Political Science	**2**	**0**	**3**	**2**	**0**	**0**	**2**	**0**	**3**	**0**

Law	5	3	2	0	5	2	4	0	6	2
Psychology	4	2	3	1	3	0	5	3	1	1
Educational Science	0	0	1	1	2	1	4	4	1	0
Science Education	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0
Media and Communication	**4**	**4**	**4**	**2**	**1**	**0**	**3**	**2**	**4**	**2**
Sociology	**1**	**0**	**2**	**1**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**4**	**0**
Faculty of Social Sciences total	**21**	**12**	**17**	**9**	**18**	**4**	**20**	**10**	**22**	**6**
UT total	114	57	117	62	107	45	120	75	138	65

1.2. General findings and recommendations at study programme group level

General comments, Political Science, Sociology, Media

Strengths

- The head managers are pro-active, and on top of what they are doing.
- Seminars and reviewing, both as regards the ongoing regular work (drafts etc) and the final product (articles, manuscripts), are well-functioning.
- The institutes have good access to international scholars and are well networked.
- The 'product' as such – the analytical skills, presentation skills, time management skills etc are good – and appreciated by potential employers.

Challenges

- In general, students are well integrated.

  o On the one hand this is very good as they can develop research ties with staff, including co-authoring; they develop needed teaching and supervision (BA/MA) skills
  o On the other hand, too much integration can have unintended consequences: students might become too tied to co-authors (and lack independence), they may be overburdened by teaching and other tasks which takes focus away from their PhD research. ***We strongly recommend the relevant parties to consider these aspects.***

- There seems to be a general lack of guidelines, visible structures and practices; this may result in counterproductive informal, implicit practices and uncertainty among staff as well as among students. ***We strongly recommend clarification and improvements concerning the following aspects:***

  o There is some confusion regarding the appropriate study time (4? 4+2? 4+?)
  o It is not entirely clear whether the part-time option is brought to the students' attention as a more suitable study plan for those students who are working full-time in parallel with the PhD studies
  o It is quite common that students are personally invited to apply for the programme, which is not at all bad as such. However, it appears that several applicants (admitted PhDs) have already established a relationship with their supervisor pre acceptance (e.g. via BA or MA contacts). In the long run this may not be beneficial to the quality of the students. We sense a lack of transparency and objective criteria regarding the application process.
  o The new funding system is very good as such – and answers calls for better financial stability for the students. However, there is still some uncertainty about whether students will meet the same pressure as before from the Institutes (similar) to teach or whether the pressure to finish inside the 4+2 format will increase. Moreover, although information about the funding system is available there was still some confusion about whether part-time projects will be possible – and about how part-time projects will affect the funding. The new funding seems to improve the conditions for individual, independent PhD research projects but, at the same time, pressure seems to be mounting from the Uni (and perhaps from the ministry) to tie PhD students closer to externally funded research projects (which might reduce independence)
  o We were surprised to find that there are no Uni/Faculty/Institute tool/s in place to monitor equal opportunity consequences of policies/reforms/changes
  o It is not always clear whether students have access to desk-space, software and other resources (they might have if they also teach a lot, i.e. not because they are PhD students)
  o A key actor to facilitate smooth and informative communication between the Uni level and the institutes/programmes is the faculty level. This level is extremely important in any respect re policies, guidelines, implementation. However, of immediate concern is the Vice-Rector's suggested merger of the current 30 Uni study programmes into six. Although these plans are possibly just vague suggestions yet the Faculty level did not seem to grasp the potential alarm they might cause among the institutes.

1.3. Strengths and areas for improvement of study programmes by assessment areas

1.3.1. Political Science

The Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies at UT is a relatively small department, responsible for a relatively small PhD programme (currently 16 PhD students). The institute has an excellent performance profile, for instance in terms of publication metrics, rankings, external funding and the degree to which the institute is integrated in European and international networks and activities.

Study programme

Comments

The doctoral programme in Political Science is based on UT regulations that expect candidates to acquire a suitable range of skills to reach an appropriate international standard. The curriculum comprises 60 ECTS credits for doctoral courses plus 180 ECTS credits (75% of the total) for research work. Students have an appointed supervisor, and possibly also a co-supervisor.

The programme is managed by a Programme Director. It is reviewed internally and can be adjusted accordingly. The required doctoral courses make a palette of core courses and there are also various elective courses. Students must compose a package of core courses and select selective courses according to their research needs. They are guided by their supervisors and the Programme Director but also take advice from peer students into account. Courses can be taken from other institutions where relevant or necessary, and these also carry credit.

Students are strongly encouraged to attend conferences and courses abroad, but there is no specific internal budget for this. Nevertheless, students often do secure travel grants from the Doctoral School or from project funding. Hence, while funding used to be an issue, it is less so now even if funding opportunities are unevenly allocated.

During the time spent on preparing the thesis students develop transferable skills relevant to research and professional practice, including teaching, analysis and presentation. Estonian and international students who met the team appreciate the option of attending specialist courses abroad. External stakeholders who met the team praised the skills students develop during their studies and teaching experiences.

Study programme development seems to take into account feedback from doctoral students, supervisors, employers, alumni and other stakeholders. However, feedback is mainly obtained in an informal way. Students generally believe their studies have contributed to the skills they need.

A fair amount of PhD theses are article based with a frame-text – as a minimum at least three published articles in high-ranking journals.

Strengths

- The compulsory dissertation seminar is an attractive feature

- The compulsory teaching practice (6 credits) is an attractive feature for increasing students' post-graduation lecturing skills. The informally required teaching adds to the skill yet reduces focus on thesis work

- The compulsory international conference participation/presentation element is a best practice

Areas of improvement and recommendation

- There seems to be inconsistent objectives behind the top-up initiative and the existing culture concerning time horizons and balance between part-time and full-time doctoral studies.

- Due to ongoing efforts at restructuring doctoral studies at the UT, the accumulated knowledge regarding doctoral studies within political science is at risk of being lost during the process. The same applies to the ownership of and engagement in doctoral studies.

Resources

Comments

The building, opened in 2011, provides a fair base for research activity and teaching. Other funding and facilities are obtained through collaboration with a range of universities and other institutions (e.g. think tanks and academies), and this seems to most likely be the source of more resources.

Core facilities are crucial for successful research and consequently for the success of PhD training, and overall, most resources appear adequate. The Faculty requires applications for doctoral study to specify the resources required for the proposed project. In general, staff and students agree that the necessary equipment is available, e.g. students have desks. This is very good as such. Yet they also point out that the absence of office-space is a factor when searching for root causes of completion time. If this only applies to students who are in fact rarely present at the institute (because they work or live elsewhere) it may not be a problem as such.

The state doctoral allowance is not very attractive to students, being well below the national average salary despite a sizeable recent increase. Importantly, UT makes a priority of topping up the national allowance and demonstrating that the UT ensures that sufficient funds are available. Students also have their income supplemented by taking on teaching commitments. Finally, while teaching or supervision is part of the regular studies (6 ECTS) as much as almost half of the students are de facto part time PhD students in the sense that they have more or less full time non-PhD jobs on the side. This state of affairs makes the

completion time statistics rather misleading. There are some remuneration incentives in place for students to supervise MA and BA students thus improving their financial situation. However, once overdue, students have few options but to teach or work outside of the University (SAR, p 20).

During the last five years the size of the programme's student group indicates sustainability, although staff did express some concern about falling below a critical mass of students.

Strengths

- A clear aspiration by the Institute to allocate resources in order to involve students in research projects and teaching

- The UT allowance top-up is based on the fact that there seem indeed to be sufficient funds available to allow for full-time doctoral studies

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- We recommend the Institute to consider possible means to making full-time PhD projects into properly full-time undertakings where work inside or outside the university becomes supplementary at most

- We recommend improved resources for teaching, learning and research so that the achievement of objectives set out in study programmes can be made more sustainably feasible and less dependent on windfall project funding.

Teaching, learning, research and/or creative activity

Comments

Students have personal study plans that are revised during an annual and now bi-annual progress review. Recognition of prior learning is applied appropriately. Doctoral students are taught by staff yet workloads do not always ensure that they can allocate enough time to the task, or, alternatively, work on doctoral studies take time from research activities. Student workloads are specified by regulations but informal or extracurricular practices seem regularly to exceed sustainable workloads.

Supervisors must have a doctoral degree and do not have a maximum quota of students. However, given the small programme, uneven allocation seems not to be an issue. When applying for new students, supervisors are chosen according to field of study and number of students.

Given that some students work less independently and have more need for supervision, recognition and inclusion, explicit standards would help manage expectations.

Inadequate supervision seems not to be a genuine issue. Supervisors are generally accessible yet may not always have time to engage as timely or substantially as the student might expect. Students who met the team indicated that while access to supervisors is not an issue, reading drafts might occasionally be. These aspects point to the importance of clearly stated and practiced norms. Co-supervision may be one way to ensure extended supervision, but can also cause the main supervisor to invest less time in supervision.

Students may choose to deliver lectures, run seminars and supervise BA and MA theses, with mutually beneficial results. They also engage in seminars in their research groups. The teaching duties of students are not evenly distributed; some students told the team they had major duties in lecturing and supervising BA and MA students when others who wanted to teach had more limited options.

Strengths

- Annual reviewing procedures are in place and implemented

- The inclusion of students in Institute activities, ranging from research seminars to teaching, thus cultivating a professional environment

- The high degree to which doctoral studies support students' personal and social development, including creating an environment which will prepare them to successfully participate in international working environments at research and development institutions, as well as in the business and public sectors.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- It appears that the (bi-)annual student review report process is rather technical. According to the SAR (p 24), 'One of the challenges (as has also been pointed out by PhD fellows) is making the progress review more substantial instead of being simply a procedure.'). These ambitious reports might take time and focus away from the proper research activities. Hence, the challenge is to consider the trade-off between too little and too much reporting in the annual reviews. We recommend the Institute to continue and consolidate the steps already taken to include drafts, papers etc (actual research activities instead of just references to research activities) in the annual reports.

- A more even distribution of teaching and supervision duties among PhD students, guided by clear procedures, would be preferable to reduce the impact on research time.

Teaching staff

Comments

Most teaching is delivered by staff who hold a PhD. New staff must now all have a PhD. Teaching staff are expected to update their teaching skills, supported by the Centre For

Excellence in Teaching and Learning (or similar). The percentage who do so is unclear, but most of the supervisors the team met had not attended any courses in supervision. Teaching and supervision performance are evaluated during professional reviews. Specific training is offered to new supervisors, but seems not to have great traction.

Doctoral students are extensively exposed to international influences by various means, including visiting foreign researchers, visiting fellowships at institutions relevant to the individual students. The high degree to which the institute is involved in European networks is a significant asset. Under UT rules, normally at least one opponent of a PhD thesis must be from outside Estonia.

Qualified international and visiting teaching staff are involved in conducting doctoral studies, participating in doctoral thesis defence panels and/or reviewing doctoral theses

Tartu ranked among the top 200 universities in the world for Politics and International Relations (QS World University Ranking, 2018) and Tartu University ranked first among universities in East and Central Europe.

Both beginner PhD supervisors and senior staff can develop their supervision skills via training provided by the University or the Doctoral School. On the one hand the team met very few staff members with experience from such training. On the other hand, the team did not come across indications that the quality of supervision is a major issue.

Strengths

- Staff members' high commitment to the programme as well as the informal inclusion of doctoral in institute activities

- The embeddedness of the institute in international networks as well as the active socialization of doctoral students in international activities, including courses, conferences and visiting fellowship, the latter typically at institutions hosting staff members with high relevance for the visiting fellow

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Although supervisors are offered training courses they do not seem to take these – does this indicate lack of need or a need for change of culture? We recommend that the Institute introduces a compulsory element of teacher training courses.

Doctoral students

Comments

For admission, students with a suitable background in Political Science or International Relations must prepare a convincing doctoral research plan, perform well during an interview and have a suitable CV. The supervisor is a TU employee, yet in special cases can also be external.

Once admitted, students submit a study plan at the beginning of each year, i.e., a plan for the annual review, recently turned into a bi-annual review. The study plan sets out specific objectives for each year and students take responsibility for achieving these objectives. Students say they at times find themselves professionally isolated yet also acknowledge that social science research often require students to work alone though often connected to peers abroad who share research interests. Among teaching opportunities, students can supervise disciplinary projects for BA and MA students. However, the occasionally considerable extracurricular teaching done by students is not counted in their assessments.

Doctoral students' extracurricular teaching, research and/or creative activities or other work-related activities at the university might support successful completion of their doctoral studies but such activities are also considerable distractions from thesis work and therefore prolong completion time. Academic and personal assistance is available from the TU Career and Counselling Centre. With so few students, there are few alumni or employers to give feedback on the value of their PhD.

Few students finish within the nominal four year period; the average length is 6.7 years which is longer than the 5.6 years in the Social Sciences Faculty as a whole; about 8 per cent finish within the nominal period plus two years; the dropout rate is roughly one per year. Regarding the dropout rate (between 2-5 most years; SAR, p 8), previous low funding levels and (also previously) a poor selection process seem to be some of the causes.

Strengths

- Admission follows clearly set criteria

- Competition to get in is quite high

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Only 8 per cent of the students defend their thesis within the 4+2 format (SAR, p 20). This indicates too many extracurricular activities, whether teaching or other jobs inside or outside the university.

- The dropout rate is relatively high (2-5 most years; SAR, p8). A more in-depth analysis of reasons for dropping out and for slow progress would have been welcome. In order to secure adjustments and learning, it might be an idea to expose the PhD programme to an annual review, a 'how are we doing?' exercise. This should be seen in the context of the standard about analysing the effectiveness of doctoral studies in turn serving as a basis for planning quality improvement activities.

1.3.2. Sociology

Study Programme

Comments

The study programme meets the expected national standards and is positively comparable to similar programmes in other countries. It provides effective training in doctoral studies for students of Sociology. The programme works well for the most part and there are no major flaws.

In terms of University of Tartu links there seem to be fruitful and considerable crossover between Tartu Media and Sociology (and some of the comments in this report on Media/Tartu might be useful for the Sociology team and vice versa).

There was overall broad support for the programme as evidenced by the alumni and current students in terms of the courses offered and the preparation that the programme offers them.

However, there are specific areas for improvement, where consolidation of good practices, fine-tuning of existing practices, and the introduction of new, more clear practices should be attended to. The self-evaluation document indicated some, but not all, of these areas, with others being identified by the review team during the on-site visit.

There was in the self-evaluation document an overly pessimistic view of demand for PhDs in Estonian society at large. The review team found instead evidence during the on-site visit, of enthusiasm among at least some employers regarding PhD graduates, both in general and from this programme.

The numbers of currently registered PhD students given to the review panel during the on-site visit did not fully match with those in the self-evaluation document. This suggests some weakness in accounting processes. This should be rectified, so that all relevant people in the institution are in possession of the same figures.

Strengths

- There is evidence of improved completion rates (SAR, p 9; interviews).

- Synergies and economies of scale operate between the Sociology and Media programmes.

- The programme director is pro-active, giving added value to various activities, such as the otherwise primarily formal annual review.

- Students whose PhDs are attached to research projects led by supervisors seem in particular to be flourishing.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- In comparison, the action points made in the Media self-evaluation document were clearer, more precise and more focused than in the equivalent Sociology document. It is

recommended that both programmes follow the action points in the Media document, where appropriate and relevant.

- The current balance between qualitative and quantitative PhDs and research training should be retained.

- There should be more clear and explicit rules as to how much and what types of co-authorship of papers is permissible for publications used in PhDs by publication. The programme director should monitor whether these regulations are being fulfilled, most likely through including such matters in the annual review of a student's progress. The Institute's rules seem to indicate that a student must be single or first author on at least one paper. This regulation should be revisited by the appropriate business committee associated with the programme, to ensure that staff are sure that this is the most desirable stipulation. It seems that book chapters are acceptable as publications if the publisher is deemed to be "respectable", but there should be explicit guidelines about this so that all staff understand what constitutes acceptability in this regard. The introduction of article-based PhD theses has contributed to connecting Estonian research to the wider international research community. This is very good as such. However, if co-authorship becomes a short-cut to publications the system might backfire in the sense that the PhD candidate will risk becoming too dependent on the co-author (often the supervisor). In the end a lack of originality might follow. Obviously, when an article is co-authored all involved contributors must be given due acknowledgement. However, we recommend the Institute to consider encouraging the students to increase their efforts to publish truly solo-authored articles as well.

- The University should allow for the registration of PhD students on a part-time basis, probably involving double the amount of years of the current nominal period (i.e., double the 4+2 model).

- The relevant staff should examine the possibility of more flexibility in terms of courses students are required to take, and review the current 60 ECTS requirement.

- The application process for acceptance into the programme, and for obtaining funding, should be made more explicit and more easily accessible, especially for applicants coming from outside the local Tartu system.

- The selection criteria and procedures for State- and University-funded PhD positions need to be more formalised, and selection processes should not be within Sociology alone. A more formal peer review of applications for funding would be advisable, organised not at programme level alone but at School/Faculty level. This would allow for more distanced and disinterested reviews by staff members who have no direct personal relations with students, thereby avoiding potential conflicts of interest.

- There is currently no adequate recording and monitoring of equal opportunities issues, as regards, for example, gender differences in completion rates, and the consequences for students of different genders of the introduction of specific policies and practices. This absence should be rectified at School/Faculty level.

- There seems to be insufficient mechanisms for staff or students to record that supervision meetings have taken place, or to note the substance of them and action plans formulated at them. This absence should be addressed at School/Faculty level.

Resources

Comments

Resources are certainly adequate for the successful pursuit of PhD studies. The review team encountered no major gaps or absences in provision of library and other relevant materials. The unit is housed in an attractive and recently refurbished environment.

In terms of financing for PhD students there is a fundamental paradox. The very low completion rate has led to changes in the way that the PhD programme is funded at Tartu. The state stipend has increased and in addition the university provides a further €400 top-up. So the total available per student is now close to the average wage in Estonia. It seems that these adjustments were made on the basis that the completion rates (within the nominal period) would be thereby much improved. However when one discusses this with the participants there is a rather different view. Overall they have no inclination to give up their other jobs/roles – and it appears that they will receive the increased funding in addition to continuing in their other jobs. It would therefore be surprising if the increased funding has significant impact on completion rates. When discussing this with the students/staff the reasoning is that by continuing to maintain a foot in the job market they are in a much better place when the PhD is completed in terms of opportunities and connections. It would seem important to make sure that clarification in terms of expectations of 'full time' students is a priority. This is clearly less of an issue in the case of those PhD students who are participating in closely linked research projects with their supervisors/colleagues.

There is need for more clarity in terms of 'part time' students. Many of the PhD students are de facto part timers – in terms of their input and availability. However, there seems no formal mechanism to recognise this, whereas if they were paid pro rata and given a pro rata completion target that would automatically improve the overall metrics and more accurately reflect the actual situation on the ground.

Strengths

- The integration of students into the national-level doctoral school(s) seems to have been successful, and components of the school(s), such as academic writing sessions, have been particularly appreciated by students. This seems to have been a significant augmentation of training resources offered by the University.

- There is a good level of support for student attendance at conferences and other events.

<u>Areas of improvement and recommendations</u>

- There is a need to clarify more fully the expectations (especially in terms of working hours and external work commitments, as well as completion times) for students who are receiving both governmental and University funding.

- There is a lack of clarity among students as to the availability of software, especially regarding off-campus licenses. Students should be more clearly informed about what is and is not possible in this regard.

Teaching, learning, research and/or creative activity

<u>Comments</u>

The review team found evidence of a quite vibrant academic unit, with various effective features of PhD-level training and pedagogy. Students reported that the nature of training was generally good, and in some cases very good.

<u>Strengths</u>

- There has been an increase in recent years of the amount and quality of training offered to students, such as on how to compose the cover text of PhDs by publication.

- There are effective seminars for PhD candidates, which seem to be appreciated by students.

- The "Collegium" review process, which involves the reviewing of students' work that is at an advanced stage of completion by a panel of senior scholars, is both a positive feature of the programme in itself, and also seems to be achieving the aim of improving completion rates.

- The integration of students into the national-level doctoral school(s) seems to have been successful, and components of the school(s), such as academic writing sessions, have been particularly appreciated by students.

- Increasing access to visiting scholars by students has been a positive development.

<u>Areas of improvement and recommendations</u>

- Expectations that supervisors have of students and students have of supervisors should be clearer, right from the beginning of the student's studies. There should be more oversight of agreements between supervisors and students – for example, in terms of how many hours of supervision will be offered in a year, and what type of supervision will be offered – so that the risk of poor supervision not being identified by the Programme Director is minimised.

- There seems to be a possibility of some supervisors requiring more than 3 publications for the PhD by publications route. This creates inequalities of expectations among students and could defer completion of the PhD. There should be a policy whereby all students are required to have the same number of publications, most probably 3. If a supervisor and student agree for there to be more publications, the merits of this approach should be fully discussed and agreed with the Programme Director, who should have the power to refuse such proposals if need be.

- The methods of dealing with student dissatisfaction – with supervision, supervisor or other matters – is handled mostly informally. While this is in part inevitable and even to some degree desirable, there needs also to be written rules guiding students, supervisors, the Programme Director and other people, as to how to proceed in cases of dissatisfaction. The same applies to supervisor dissatisfaction with a student's performance.

- Students do not seem to have explicit and concrete agreements about meeting supervisors. Arrangements seem rather loose and fluid. Initiative to meet comes more from the student than the supervisor. A more consistent policy about the nature, frequency and quality of student/supervisor meetings, and other interactions, is very much advised

- Expectations as to what students may expect from supervision, and PhD studies more broadly, are not set out clearly enough at the beginning of studies. Some information is on the relevant websites, but students seem to be expected to find information out for themselves rather than explicitly have their attention drawn to it by staff members.

- The monograph form of PhD is under-utilised in comparison with the PhD by publication format. The monograph is assumed to be old-fashioned and unhelpful in the labour market, especially the academic labour market. But this is not necessarily so, for it is the standard format in many other countries. The advantages of the monograph format need to be considered more by the Programme Director and supervisors, and the monograph option offered as a viable one to all students at the start of their studies. The assumption that the PhD by publication is necessarily the best route for all students in PhD studies should be avoided, especially in terms of the induction process offered to new students.

- There should be agreement upper limit of the number of supervisees any one supervisor may have. A limit of 5 students as first supervisor would be one possibility.

- Further efforts should be made to involve early career staff in PhD supervision.

- It would be desirable for the programme to have more explicit and elaborated forms of cooperation with partners and employers in both the public and private sectors. There is scope for more input into the programme, in terms of teaching and careers advice, from those public and private sector institutions that the Institute in general, and specific supervisors in particular, have relationships with.

Teaching staff

Comments

There was evidence of generally committed and well-focused supervision among the teaching staff. The quality of supervision seems to be high for the most part, although some students indicated that this was not fully consistent across the unit. Interviews with students revealed that perhaps a (small) minority of students were admitted to the programme without there being supervisors in place within the unit who had directly relevant expertise in students' subject areas. Such students seemed to have to find appropriate supervisorial expertise outside the unit.

Strengths

- The current Programme Director is pro-active, giving added value to various activities, such as the otherwise primarily formal annual review.

- Many staff members seem to be giving careful and high-quality supervision and research training.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The Programme Director should be empowered to intervene in areas where the quality of supervision is concerned – for example, ensuring that a supervisor has no more than a maximum prescribed number of supervisees at any one time. There should be more effective support from Faculty level for the Programme Director.

- The scope and nature of the Programme Director role seems somewhat too implicit; the post requires the elaboration of more clearly defined role-expectations. This would allow for consistency when the role transfers from one person to another.

- There should be stricter vetting of the suitability of supervisor expertise with student research area before PhD candidates are admitted to the programme.

Doctoral students

Comments

The review team were positively impressed with the intellectual quality and high level of commitment to studies exhibited by the PhD students that they encountered.

Students seem generally satisfied with much of their experience within the unit.

Strengths

- There is evidence that students regularly attend national and international conferences. Presentation of their work at such events contributes effectively to internationalisation, both at the level of individual careers and the level of the programme itself.

- Taking a wide range of courses is seen as an employability asset by students, and that should be maintained and further encouraged.

- Alumni were often impressive and able to demonstrate how PhD studies in the unit had concretely and positively impacted on their careers.

- International students seem well integrated into the unit.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- PhD students whose work is connected to large research projects directed by staff members seem to be flourishing, but rather more so than others whose work is not directly connected to projects. This may be in contradiction to the new funding model, which implies more independence of PhD students from large projects that are funded from elsewhere. Some reflection should be given to this issue and how it may be dealt with and ameliorated.

- Some students could not see the point of the annual review, viewing it as a box-ticking exercise about credits, rather than useful substantive evaluation of the progress their work had made during the year. The lack of substantive feedback from the review process was highlighted as a significant gap in procedures. The unit should reflect on how the annual review may be improved as regards offering more meaningful and useful feedback to students.

- The annual progress review seems not to reward (or reward sufficiently) activities such as conference attendance, nor does it assess broader career development. This should be rectified.

- While it is good practice for all students to have a second supervisor, coverage in this regard seems somewhat patchy and should be made more systematic.

- Given the new funding model for students, there is a need for the unit to develop more explicit support and guidance for students as regards the expectations involved as a consequence of them accepting the funding. For example, there needs to be a guideline as to how much of their time is spent on the PhD, and how much on paid work outside of the PhD studies.

- Especially given the new funding model for students, students should be given more assistance in formulating independent, non-project-based PhD topics.

- More explicit guidance for students on post-doctoral employment opportunities – in Tartu, Estonia and the wider world - would be valuable, as would guidance as to non-academic career paths where PhDs can be usefully deployed.

1.3.3. Media and Communication

Study programme

Comments

This is a well-regarded research intensive department with an international reputation and focus. The programme demonstrates also dynamic leadership and creative, energetic input from the programme director. It has achieved a critical mass as a department with sufficient staff and PhD students to achieve a wide range of research focus in this field. The ongoing international links with ECREA are particular valuable and the other doctoral school opportunities provide further support.

In terms of University of Tartu links there seem to be fruitful and considerable crossover between Tartu Media and Sociology (and some of the comments in this report on Sociology/Tartu might be useful for the Media team and vice versa).

There was overall broad support for the programme as evidenced by the alumni and current students in terms of the courses offered and the preparation that the programme offers them. Although it was indicated in the interviews that there may be scope for further flexibility in terms of the degree of coursework required prior to the thesis. And the practice of more than three articles might be adjusted in some cases. The way to do that might be to insist on more rigorous quality control in the outputs for the PhD – in terms of which Journals were sought – so fewer outputs but of a higher standard. In order to achieve that more support with English editing/proofreading might be a useful consideration – and the benefit to that would be reaped by the whole department as many of the outputs are joint-authored. It is also appropriate to keep the door open to the monograph route where this might be suitable.

Strengths

- There is a coherent vision and leadership from the programme director who is herself an impressive scholar and a great role model.

- There are promising international opportunities for the participants.

- Both the PhD seminar and the collegium process for the pre-defence are valuable.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Examine the possibility of more flexibility in terms of courses and the current 60 ECTS requirement

- Consider funding external students to attend conferences where judged as appropriate

- Ensure both quality control in terms of the publication outputs – and coherence in the way the articles are devised so that producing the cover text is less problematic i.e. it does not have to 'stretch' too far.

Resources

Comments

As far as is evident the overall resources are adequate for the programme. There is a pleasant physical environment and space/library facilities as appropriate.

However in terms of financing for PhD students there is a fundamental paradox. The very low completion rate has led to changes in the way that the PhD programme is funded at Tartu. The state stipend has increased and in addition the university provides a further €400 top-up. So the total available per student – media admits 3 per year – is now close to the average wage in Estonia. It seems that these adjustments were made on the basis that the completion rates (within the nominal period) would be thereby much improved. However when one discusses this with the participants there is a rather different view. Overall they have no inclination to give up their other jobs/roles – and it appears that they will receive the increased funding in addition to continuing in their other jobs. It would therefore be surprising if the increased funding has significant impact on completion rates. When discussing this with the students/staff the reasoning is that by continuing to maintain a foot in the job market they are in a much better place when the PhD is completed in terms of opportunities and connections.

The self-evaluation report references the need to increase the doctoral scholarship to 'enable students to dedicate more time for their studies'. Now that this has been implemented and given the not insignificant investment on the part of the university it would seem important to make sure that clarification in terms of expectations of 'full time' students is a priority. This is clearly less of an issue in the case of those PhD students who are participating in closely linked research projects with their supervisors/colleagues.

The proposal for allocating the additional funds is apparently linked to the annual review – but it will be interesting to see in future years whether this is rigorously applied and really does result in the improved completion rate which is the apparent wider objective.

Another related issue is the need for clarity in terms of 'part time' students. Many of the PhD students are de facto part timers – in terms of their input and availability. However there seems no formal mechanism to recognise this, whereas if they were paid pro rata and

given a pro rata completion target that would automatically improve the overall metrics and more accurately reflect the actual situation on the ground.

Strengths

- Overall good physical space and facilities available for the PhD students.

- Good support for student mobility

- Library and information resources appropriate to a modern and wide ranging programme in this area

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- A need to clarify expectations in terms of what is required from students in receipt of the full doctoral allowance

- Consideration of an official part time route for PhD students – with pro-rata payment and durations.

- Some concerns about need for more social space – but this should be done on the basis of use and need.

Teaching, learning, research and/or creative activity

Comments

There is clearly much good practice in the way that the teaching/supervision is delivered in the department and the leadership is once again evident in implementing these policies. However there is also some unevenness as evidenced by the comments from the current student cohort and it would be beneficial to address this in order to improve the total experience.

The Programme Director's active involvement is important in addressing problems but it would also be good if there were some clearer overall policies/structures which would avoid the need for some of the informal (albeit effective) interventions.
As a matter of course there should be a limit on the total number of supervisions per member of staff – probably no more than 5 as a maximum. In one case a supervisor seemed unclear as to how many PhD students she currently supervised – which gives rise to the impression that she probably had too many!

Furthermore it would be most helpful if there was more clarity of expectation in terms of supervision availability. There is no mechanism to formally record the contacts with supervisor (as in some other institutions) so at the very least this should be clearly

expressed to both parties to avoid confusion and a mismatch in expectations. The practice of co-supervision (either within or beyond the department) should be a matter of course. Although it is voiced as an aspiration there are still a number of cases where this is not the practice, according to the evidence that we were presented at the visit. Involving junior staff as co-supervisors is clearly beneficial to all concerned and should be encouraged wherever possible.

Strengths

- The doctoral seminar works well as a useful vehicle enabling students to present and receive feedback

- Informal arrangements for airing problems and addressing gaps seem to work well – especially due to the effectiveness of the programme director.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- It would be helpful if there was more clarity of expectation (perhaps in formal documentation) of supervision on both sides. The Institute might consider using the existing 'Good Practice of Doctoral Studies' more energetically. This could also include attention to the workloads of both supervisors and students to ensure that the expectations are realistic.

- We recommend systematic introduction of second supervisors for all students across the board.

Teaching staff

Comments

On the whole the provision of teaching and supervision seems positive and demonstrates plenty of evidence of good practice across the department as a whole. However there is some unevenness in the provision of supervision to PhD students.

In particular it should be standard procedure that there is ongoing review of suitability before supervisors are assigned to newly admitted students. During our visit there was some evidence of supervisors lacking much up to date experience of publications/engagement which meant that they were less useful to the students in terms of being able to guide them to current networks/contacts/publication processes.

It would therefore be useful to have an ongoing process to ensure that supervisors are suitable and have the correct and up to date skills. This might include some sabbatical opportunities to enable staff to refresh their contributions. But bringing on junior staff as supervisors is also important for the overall health of the department going forward.

It appears that supervisor training is available via doctoral schools. However it is important that those who might best benefit from this are encouraged to attend.

Strengths

- The processes of both the pre-defence and the international/external oversight and review prior to the final defence seem rigorous and well constructed.

- There is good practice in much of the supervision and good outcomes on the whole in terms of student and alumni satisfaction. Teachers are clearly competent in this regard.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- It would be helpful to have more precise clarity of expectation from the supervision process for example in terms of contact hours and oversight of supervisor appointment, or at least some explicit criteria for this.

Doctoral students

Comments

Despite expectations to the contrary it seems that the PhD is increasingly valued in Estonian society. There is a good range of alumni of this programme across the academic sector and beyond in Estonian media and society. So the concerns about lack of value seem to be diminishing which should hopefully lead to greater motivation and a desire to complete in a more timely manner.

The low completion figures are obviously a problem – but one way of addressing this might be to focus upon quality rather than quantity in the production of outputs and to encourage this in the supervision discussions and the study plan.

There are increasingly high numbers of applicants to this programme – and the greater financial incentives will doubtless influence this further. On that basis it is imperative that there are rigorous processes to make sure that the very best and most suitable students are admitted – which should in turn improve overall quality of outputs and rates of progress.

The writing camps are particularly valued – as are many of the other supports from the doctoral schools. It might be a further improvement here to ensure more support in terms of English writing/editing to ensure the very highest quality of outputs.

The department has a good reputation but it could leverage this further and really work on extending co-operation both within and beyond Estonia to the benefit of both staff and

students. In addition to that it would be good if students were able to take up the various opportunities on offer in terms of international links.

<u>Strengths</u>

- There are some impressive alumni of this programme – who are able to make a valuable contribution to society.

- International students are well integrated and accepted into the department and the university.

<u>Areas of improvement and recommendations</u>

- A gap in the provision to students is more experience and training in applying for funding. This would be an invaluable help especially to those students who are going on to careers within academia.

- Overall more career advice/support would be helpful to some students – although others are well networked and already integrated so they are in a good position for post graduation life.

- Maximising the links with external partners both in Estonia (academic and beyond) and overseas would be helpful to the prospects of students and the programme overall.

2. Assessment report of SPG at Tallinn University

2.1. Introduction

Tallinn University is the third largest public university in Estonia, focusing primarily on the fields of humanities and social and natural sciences, with about 7,500 students and over 800 employees.

In 2015, a significant structural and management reform took place whereby 26 existing units were merged into just nine: 6 academic units – Baltic Film, Media, Arts and Communication School; School of Digital Technologies (DT); School of Educational Sciences; School of Governance, Law and Society; School of Humanities; School of Natural Sciences and Health; 2 regional colleges (in Haapsalu and Rakvere), and the library. In addition, 5 centres of excellence, 9 research centres and 15 support units were formed.

Today, the university sees its mission in supporting sustainable development of Estonia through high quality research and study, education of intellectuals, public discussions and promotion of academic partnership. In its activities, the university adheres to such values as openness, quality, professionalism and unity. The vision of the University is to play a leading role in promoting and developing intelligent lifestyle in Estonia, thus contributing to Estonian sustainability and to self-actualization of individuals. The objective of TU for 2015–2020 is to consolidate activities into five main focus fields: educational innovation; digital and media culture; cultural competences; healthy and sustainable lifestyle; society and open governance. The main responsibility for developing a focus field lies with the academic unit, whereas the School of Digital Technologies supports all the rest with modern technologies and analytics.

According to the university development plan for 2015-20, TU wants to promote itself as a leader in the area of society and open governance. This is also the main goal of School of Educational Sciences; School of Governance, Law and Society (SOGOLAS), the biggest school of TU with ca 1,700 students. SOGOLAS is a merger of the following former TU institutions: The Institute of Social Work, the Law Academy, the Institute of Political Science and Governance, the Estonian Institute of Population Studies and the Institute of International Social Studies. SOGOLAS provides education at three levels of higher education, continuing education and conducting research, development and creative activity in the following study areas: politics, policy and institutional design; inclusive society; national and transnational law; security and foresight for global connectedness; social protection and community development. SOGOLAS has four doctoral study programmes, three of them belonging to the study programme group of social sciences: Demography, Government and Politics, and Sociology.

Figures related to doctoral students
(Source: SAR of TU)

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
No of doctoral students, TU total (incl. those who work in the university)[4]	**370**	**378**	**386**	**363 (76)**	**333 (81)**
No of doctoral students *by SP* (incl. those who work in the university):					
Demography	7 (0)	8 (0)	7(0)	6 (2)	4 (1)
Government and Politics	47 (10)	45 (10)	43 (10)	37 (8)	35 (5)
Sociology	24 (6)	25 (7)	26 (3)	27 (3)	25 (3)
State-commissioned education request for doctoral student places	**22**	**25**	**25**	**25**	**25**
No of admissions, TU total (incl. those who directly enrolled from the 2nd cycle of studies of the same university)	**44 (6)**	**46 (11)**	**42 (16)**	**50 (9)**	**41 (18)**
Admissions *by SP* (incl. those who directly enrolled from the 2nd cycle of studies of the same university):					
Demography	1 (0)	1 (0)	1 (0)	1 (0)	1 (0)
Government and politics	3 (0)	2 (0)	2 (0)	4 (0)	2 (0)
Sociology	4 (1)	3 (0)	3 (2)	4 (2)	3 (1)
No of dropouts, TU total (incl voluntary withdrawals)	**31 (12)**	**23 (11)**	**23 (12)**	**53 (23)**	**45 (20)**

No of dropouts *by SP* (incl voluntary withdrawals):					
Demography	0	2 (2)	1 (1)	0	0
Government and Politics	5 (3)	4 (1)	5 (0)	8 (1)	1 (1)
Sociology	1 (1)	1	0	6 (2)	4 (1)
No of doctoral theses defended, TU (incl the number of dissertations defended within the standard period+2)	**23 (13)**	**16 (6)**	**25 (9)**	**19 (10)**	**22 (8)**
No of doctoral theses defended, *by SP* (incl the number of dissertations defended within the standard period+2):					
Demography	0	0	1 (1)	1	2 (1)
Government and Politics	0	1 (1)	3 (2)	2 (1)	3 (2)
Sociology	2 (2)	0	3 (2)	0	1
Proportion of TU doctoral students going abroad [5]	**3.2%**	**9%**	**4.4%**	**2.8%**	**6.01%**
Proportion of students going abroad, *by SP*:					
Demography	0%	0%	1%	1%	2%
Government and politics	0%	1%	1%	1%	2%
Sociology	0%	0%	2%	1%	0%
Proportion of international students, TU	**8.1%**	**10.9%**	**12.4%**	**13.2%**	**13.81%**
Proportion of international students *at SP:*					
Demography	0%	13%	14%	0%	0%

Government and Politics	14%	15 %	21%	28%	31%
Sociology	4%	4%	4%	8%	13%

[4] Data is collected starting from year 2016

[5] *Only* long-term mobility (i.e. more than 3 months)

2.2. General findings and recommendations at study programme group level

Strengths

- In general, supervision seems to be good – this was a key aspect where the interviews gave a wholly different – convincingly positive - impression compared to some of the self-assessment reports.

- The system of co-supervision is well developed

- Many students travel and go to conferences – with sufficient funding available (although it transpired that all students do not seem to be aware of the funding opportunities)

- The local library is well staffed and sufficiently resourced

- The social science programmes have good relations with the outside world with very positive employers. Contrary to the statements in the self-evaluation reports – and by some staff and other interviewees – employers and alumni expressed strong views that PhDs are valued and of benefit to society. However, some employers would welcome a stronger outreach and collaborative activity from the University.

Challenges

- There are some concerns regarding administrative systems at both the University level and lower down

  o We found some confusion regarding the status of PhD students with causes that could potentially be traced back to administrative, legal or political factors.

  ▪ Does the University regard them as full-time or part-time employees/co-workers/assistants?
  ▪ What is expected by the PhD students as regards the time-frame of their PhD project?

- What kind of funding structure does the University envisage for PhD students – and through what funding means (dedicated PhD funding; University or non-University additional employment?)
- What kind of transferable skills (time-management, presentation skills etc) does the University expect the PhD students to achieve and through which channels (PhD training as such? University or non-University additional employment?)

- Overall, the appear to be a range of implicit rules and practices in place that would need to be formalised, such as:

  o Course work: clearer instructions to students about what to expect and how to plan for the courses. We recommend improved advertisement and information procedures with more continuity and long-term stability
  o There does not seem to be any clear system in place regarding how to count student contact hours. We recommend a more robust system in this regard
  o In general staff and students seem to be a little hazy about rules and regulations (without necessarily breaching any rules). We recommend that all relevant parties make rules, regulations and guidelines more visible and relevant to staff and students
  o Although resources are often quite good, there is a slightly disturbing lack of equal access to resources as regards the following areas:

    - Software
    - Work-space (desks, rooms) are almost non-existent. In order to improve PhD efficiency and social well-being, we recommend the School and the Institutes to make office-space etc available to PhD students for improved integration
    - Language editing appears to be available as such but often too late in the thesis process

- Since most theses are in the compilation, article-style format, language editing and help becomes an issue very early in the PhD career. We recommend that language editing/help is offered throughout the PhD career

- While the University provides some health and psychological support for undergraduates there do not seem to be similar systems in place for PhD students. The university might consider introducing such services.

2.3. Strengths and areas for improvement of study programmes by assessment areas

2.3.1. Government and Politics

Study programme

Comments

In many ways this is a well-functioning programme where managers, staff and students are trying to make the best of relatively limited means and sometimes administrative uncertainty.

In a general sense, the programme is based on national and university rules and strategies and there is a clear sense of trying to reach good programme quality. At the same time, while formal rules and guidelines are in place they are perhaps not always clearly communicated in a transparent way to those involved.

More than 70 per cent of the programme consists of research work and the theses are mostly published as compilation (article) theses with publications in international peer-reviewed journals. Less common are Estonian language monographs (with an additional international article). As for conferences, summer schools etc, many students regularly go (and are encouraged to go). University funding is available and those who apply do not seem to have much difficulty in receiving grants. However, as many have other jobs on the side, or family commitments, it really is difficult for some students to actually use the opportunities.

Students develop generic and coherent competences, such as leadership and teamwork skills – and this was pointed out by employers and alumni during our interviews. However, it is not entirely clear whether all these skills are developed as a result of the programme as such or as a positive side-effect of extra-PhD activities such as teaching or working outside of the university. Nor is it always clear what is expected from the students in terms of non-programme teaching and work. Still, supervision as such appears to function well – including the gradual expansion of the supervision system into a dual main supervisor/deputy supervisor system. Both staff and students were positive about these features. Finally, while the new improved stipend system is a positive feature we did not detect any analyses from any university level as to what the consequences might be regarding finishing time, non-PhD work, teacher demand or PhD quality.

Strengths

- Supervision appears to function well – and this is corroborated by the students we interviewed.

- International conference and PhD summer (similar) school options are good

- The local library facilities are good and well staffed

- The seminar features are excellent (both the SP seminars and the SOGOLAS) with a culture where experienced staff as well as PhD students present and comment is a particularly attractive feature.

- The share of students graduating inside the 4+2 years format is distinctly improving and looks likely to continue doing that

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Overall, there seem to be a range of implicit practices and procedures in place which would need to be formalised to ensure that staff and students alike have the same opportunities to plan their work. We strongly recommend that actors at all levels of the university act in order to make procedures and guidelines more transparent – while at the same time avoiding to make the system overly bureaucratised.

- According to the SAR (p 35) there is a need for improved methodological competence among the students. The SP administrator is dealing with this by asking for teaching involvement by teachers from Demography and Sociology. This appears to be a good idea. It might also be a good idea to consider whether more research methods as a compulsory element would be beneficial for the SP.

- The SP is flexible, which can be an asset. However, it appears to be a little too flexible – and so is its planning horizon. Students expressed concern over the SOGOLAS School's lack of administrative clarity which makes forward planning difficult. Here we recommend that measures be taken at the relevant levels.

- In order for PhD students to be able to relate to each other and to be firmly tied to the SP we recommend that permanent workplaces be allocated to the students. Moreover, we recommend that students who work outside the university are regularly brought in by social events etc.

- To benefit even further from links with the rest of society we recommend that the university, SOGOLAS and SP level researchers initiate links where this is possible and appropriate.

Resources

Comments

Although the student numbers are rather low to ensure long term sustainability on their own, the School umbrella makes the SP comparatively viable. While resources for staff development (e.g. teacher and supervision training) are available they are not very generous and it is not compulsory. Still, the resources set aside for supervision are rather generous – 50 hours per year (SAR, p 32).

As regards research, the main source of funding is not the university or SOGOLAS as such but external research funding which the staff secure on their own. The new increased student stipend will help students stabilize their economy but whether it is enough or whether they will reduce their workloads (and thus their overall salaries) from various employers is yet to be investigated. Most students either teach at the university or work outside the university in the public or private sector. As stated in the report: 'the bottom line is that all doctoral students have to work to make a living.' (SAR, p 29).

The local library branch is well equipped and manned and offers several study places, meeting rooms etc. However, SP offices or desks for PhD students are lacking.

Strengths

- (SAR, p 20) A clear awareness from the Institute to try and involve students in research projects and teaching

- According to our meetings with students, funding for language editing is available (Uni level)

- The clearly stated annual hours (50; SAR, p 32) allocated to supervision

- The number of staff (13) with PhD degrees appears to be clearly over a critical threshold regarding teaching and supervision; the underlying funding behind this is good

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- According to the report (p 32-4) there is a need to improve the research involvement for some senior teaching staff. Some steps have been taken already, which we support. We strongly recommend that teaching and research become natural features for all academic staff. A tentative figure might be 50/50 – but, the programme managers have to consider what is best for them.

- Students who do not teach extensively at the Institute do not have any allocated desks or other workplace. We recommend that resources are set aside for this purpose.

- Some PhD courses that are necessary from the SP point of view, such as methodological training are not viable with only Government and Politics students. The SP managers are trying to remedy this by collaborating with teachers from Demography and Sociology. While we strongly support the collaborative approach we also recommend that resources are set aside to reduce the risk that the efficiency of the SP programme is at the mercy of other programmes' teacher planning.

- Given the trend to write article based theses we recommend that language editing funding is made available for early PhD stages

Teaching, learning, research and/or creative activity

Comments

Most of the uniform principles on implementing the PhD programme and assuring its quality seem to be followed. However, many of these practices, including regarding supervision, seem to be defined implicitly, rather than explicitly. Therefore, we recommend that guidelines on supervision be clarified and formulated at either the university or the institute level. This would provide improved guidance to the supervisors and indicate to the students what to expect in terms of supervision.

The overall level of supervision seems to be satisfactory and the students considered the courses provided by the institute to be good. However, some of the courses offered by other institutes were deemed to be of inferior quality. Another point of concern for the students was the organisation of studies – some of the students are dissatisfied with the communication of information and administrative support necessary to organise their studies.

We have learned that feedback on studies is gathered and analysed. However, we do not know the depth and regularity of these.

Strengths

- We believe that the doctoral studies programme creates a rather good environment to support students' personal development. The curriculum offered, coupled with the possibilities of international mobility, provide access to a diverse set of courses with enough flexibility to cater for the needs of the students.

- The doctoral seminars are a strong feature, both in the sense that PhD students have a regular seminar to relate to and that experienced staff use it as well.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Regarding coursework, it was mentioned during the interviews that while students are generally satisfied with the courses offered at the institute, the level of courses in other institutes is often not as good. In addition, there seems to be a demand for a closer fit between the methods training courses on offer and the methods students employ in their own research.

- As many students are already working outside academia, they possess the social skills necessary for a career in the public or private sectors. At the same time, the students do not seem to be equally well integrated with the academic community at the Institute. During our interviews we learned that many of the students do not know each other and only rarely

meet. This is further accentuated by most students not having access to any office-space at the Institute through which to strengthen interaction and socialisation. We recommend that contacts among students be alleviated. This could be achieved via joint seminars or social events. Furthermore, a designated office-space for students is strongly recommended to allow for social contacts as well as providing an area for working on their projects.

- It appears that the students do not always receive the information necessary for planning their studies in a timely and coherent manner. Therefore, the organisation of studies and its administration should be reassessed taking into account the input of students.

Teaching staff

Comments

Supervisors and teachers hold PhDs and most supervisors and teachers are active researchers with regular publications. Some concerns are raised in the report that supervision assignments are unevenly allocated (SAR, p 31). However, the Institute has already begun to deal with this by allocating co-supervisors to several students (interview information) plus has gradually reduced the number of PhD students (SAR, p 7).

As for supervisor skills teachers are invited and encouraged to take training courses – although the number of teachers who have actually done this is and how much, is a little vague (interview information).

Staff are internationally connected both through regular activities (conferences, projects) and via their publications in international journals and other activities such as reviewing for journals (SAR, p 32).

As for assessing PhD theses there are rather thorough pre-defense reviewing and defense panel structures in place to safeguard that quality criteria are met.

At the university level student feedback surveys re teaching quality experiences are conducted. However, as these are not conducted every year some informal feedback is also part of how teaching staff are being assessed.

Strengths

- Most teachers and supervisors publish regularly in international journals.

- The PhD reviewing and defence organisation is a very positive feature.

- The new Associate Professorships will lend academic excellence stability to the programme

- The Institute management appears to be dedicated and qualified for the task to ensure staff issues are dealt with in a good way in the (relatively) new SOGOLAS environment

- Staff are well qualified with seven professors.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- It is not clear to which extent teachers take pedagogical training (e.g. regarding supervision). We recommend that all teachers are obliged to do this.

Doctoral students

Comments

The doctoral programme appears to be popular among potential students, leading to a large pool of candidates to choose from. The first criterion for candidates seems to be a good match in terms of potential supervision (the application has to be accompanied by an approval of the potential supervisor). Arguably the general academic potential of the candidate seems to be taken into account. While previously the criteria may have been more lax in terms of commitment to the studies (most students would already be working full time during their studies), this seems to be changing with the school having set a goal to accept only students that can be offered a junior researcher position related to the topic of their research.

However, at the interviews it was pointed out that there have also been cases, where the match between student and supervisor has not been optimal. Therefore, further efforts may be needed for choosing the students that fit well into the current research fields of the school. That may also alleviate the issue of perceived loneliness among some students, who are concerned about being too isolated with their specific topics. Moreover, it is important that students can make smooth supervisor transfers in cases where the original match was not optimal.

Regarding the planning of their studies, the students follow the annual rhythm of the performance reviews where specific objectives are set for each year and subsequently followed up. The individual study plans have to be coordinated with and approved by the supervisors.

The evaluation process of the programme is guided by clearly defined procedures. No particular concerns were raised during the interviews on the transparency and impartiality of the evaluation process.

Strengths

- In cases where students are employed as lecturers or researchers, it seems to contribute to the doctoral studies by providing for a better integration into the academic community of

the department and for an opportunity to have a work related to their project (as opposed to having a day-job outside the academia).

- Furthermore, these jobs often give the students access to office-space that they need for completing studies. In that respect, the university's plan to hire more of the doctoral students as junior researchers is certainly commendable.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- At the interviews it was pointed out that there have been cases, where the match between student and supervisor has not been optimal. Therefore, further efforts may be needed for choosing the students that fit well into the current research fields of the school. That may also alleviate the issue of perceived loneliness among some students, who are concerned of being too isolated with their specific topics.

- The university has developed a student support system that includes counselling both at the university level and at the relevant academic unit level. However, the feedback we received indicated that all students were not aware of these options or were not happy with the quality of the support provided. Therefore, it is recommended that information should be made available to students regularly and comprehensibly about the various counselling options. In addition, it is necessary to ensure that the quality and availability of counselling on study matters is up to standard.

- Student participation in international mobility programmes appears to be very low regarding long-term stays. This is likely because of family responsibilities or because travelling cannot be combined with jobs outside of academia. At the same time, while we could not determine the frequency of short-term mobility, there seems to be a reasonable access to funding at both the national and university level to support short-term visits or conference participation. Still, some students seemed not to be aware of all the funding options available. Furthermore, students connected to research projects seemed to be in an advantageous position, as they had access to an extra source of funding. It is therefore recommended that information about different funding sources be regularly and comprehensibly communicated to students (perhaps an updated overview of all available funding sources should be sent in the beginning of each school year).

- There is evidence that alumni are asked for their feedback, however, we were not able to determine whether this is done regularly. For example, there is an alumni questionnaire that provides input to the self-analysis of the study programme. A regular feedback mechanism for both the alumni and the employers should be established or maintained.

- We recommend the Institute to continue with the plans to hire more doctoral students as junior researchers or lecturers to maintain a strong connection with the institute while at the same time consider whether improved doctoral funding would be an even better option.

2.3.2. Sociology

Study programme

<u>Comments</u>

The panel was positively impressed with the high level of commitment and enthusiasm demonstrated by staff, administrators and students associated with the programme. High-level doctoral studies are being carried out within the programme. Much progress has been made over the last several years, in light of the major structural changes which the University has gone through. The panel also recognises that the nature of the areas where the programme could be augmented are driven in large part by the challenges thrown up by the wider ecology of the Estonian national academic system and its associated funding models.

The study programme meets the criteria of consisting of 75% research. The thesis can be by publication or monograph. If by publication, the student must have 3 published peer-reviewed journal articles meeting the Estonian 1.1 criteria and a theoretical framework text. If by monograph, the student must provide a substantive, coherent, and extended piece of work, as well as 1 published peer-reviewed journal article that meets Estonian 1.1 criteria. The majority of students are working on publications-based PhDs. Due to the demands of publication, this seems for many students to be somewhat slowing the process of thesis completion.

Students are encouraged to write their thesis by publication. This is considered both by staff and students as offering advantages on the labour market. A further incentive to take the publication route is that monographs are often written in Estonian and therefore more difficult to publish than English language papers. An assumption is made that the quality of research produced via the PhD by publication route will necessarily be high. But in the review panel's view this is not necessarily the case.

Staff seem to be of the view that project-based (or project-related) PhDs are a viable solution to tackle challenges with completion rates. Students who are attached to larger projects are expected to remain in close contact with the institution and their supervisors, which is thought to encourage completion. 4+2 years is seen as a suitable time-frame for students to develop career experience while working on PhD.

The review panel finds that there do not seem to exist clear enough rules on co-publication with supervisors. There appears to be an implicit rule that the student needs to be first author for at least one article. The programme explicitly emphasises that the learning outcomes include development of personal skills as a researcher, as well as providing the opportunity to gain the skills necessary to become an independent researcher (SAR, p 35).

The programme has a large number of elective courses - including courses at the national interdisciplinary doctoral school, international summer and winter schools, etc. - so the student should be able to develop a study plan which is most suited to their specific needs. The panel notes that compulsory subjects make up only 7% of the curriculum (SAR p 36).

Levels of student mobility are quite low (SAR, p 8). This is despite the laudable practice of students being encouraged to participate in conferences (at least once a year (SAR, p 40)) and take part in study visits. It would be helpful for future self-evaluation and external auditing if data on students' conference visits could be collected and stored.

The programme has thesis completion rates that could be improved. The review panel acknowledges the challenges involved in improving completion rates, given the nature of the national and local contexts. University and SOGOLAS staff clearly recognise the importance of timely completion. Yet in interviews staff and students were not entirely clear as to whether finishing in the nominal time is necessary or even beneficial. Resonating with the SAR (p 35), there is a widespread view among staff that most students take longer as it is beneficial for their careers and allows them to gain more experience, and that remaining in the external (mostly non-academic) job market whilst studying allows one to maintain contacts that might be useful for further professional employment.

Another potential contradiction is that the programme description emphasises the skills that would enable students to develop an international research profile (e.g. peer-reviewed research articles and mobility schemes), but staff and students are on the whole keen to remain in the Estonian job market and to contribute to Estonian society and knowledge about it. The latter orientations are both understandable and praiseworthy – but they potentially could run against the internationally-focused dimensions of the programme. The review panel encourages staff to think through this potential contradiction and to explore ways that it can be managed.

Discussion about work-life balance in relation to completion rates should in future be taken further. The administrative heads and sociology staff are well aware that most students (including those who are nominally 'full-time') work full-time outside of their PhD studies. More could be done to reflect upon, and to provide ways of ameliorating, the strain on students' well-being when they are required to carry out what are in effect two full-time jobs at once.

In light of all these contextual factors, there is a possibility that students for whom timely completion might reasonably be said to be implausible from the beginning of their studies, may still be admitted to the programme. The review panel recognises the challenges that staff face in dealing with such matters and suggests that staff reflect upon them and seek to discover pragmatic ways of dealing with them. One possible way ahead is the creation of more flexible, part-time study options.

The absence of proper part-time study options may impact on issues of gender equality. It is important that maternity/paternity leave not be understood as study leave, enabling resources and extra time for students to work further on their studies.

Strengths

- Staff, students and mangers are highly committed to the success of the programme.

- There is evidence of successful graduates who have produced high-quality theses.

- The programme, and the respective PhD candidates and holders, are highly valued by employers as specialists with transferrable skills.

- There is good engagement with employers and other stakeholders.

- There is a clear system, involving committees, of deciding if student is ready to defend.

- The co-supervisor system, including foreign personnel in supervision, is promising.

- The Library system functions effectively.

- There is support for travel, conferences, and student mobility

- Connections to employers are strong.

- Supervision seems to be of a high standard across the board.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The role of co-authored articles in the PhD should be reflected upon and subjected to clearer rules and guidelines as to what is permitted as regards co-authoring, especially with supervisors. Cco-authored journal articles and project-based PhDs could potentially contradict the aim of fostering intellectual independence and time- and project management skills.

- There seems to be some level of disconnection between the formal bureaucratic requirements that students are meant to observe, and actual practices on the ground. A closer connection between these two levels should be sought.

- It is advisable that PhD students (especially project-based PhD students) not be admitted to the programme throughout the year as paid research assistants. This potentially limits a student's academic freedom and may prevent them learning necessary transferrable skills. It also effectively makes students employees, with possible conflicts of interest arising from the student's status as both employee and supervisee of the project leader.

- As indicated by the employers during the interview, stakeholders could be more involved in developing the study programme. Employers want graduates who are both specialists and generalists. A greater emphasis in the programme upon developing the students' overall research skills, as opposed to their ability to contribute to specific research projects, would help meet these demands.

- Steps should be taken to make clearer to all students the nature, consequences and requirements of part-time registration.

- Steps should be taken to make clearer to all students the nature of research ethics clearance procedures.

Resources

Comments

The library is able to provide extensive support for PhD research, including the purchase of books by request, providing facilities for interviews and focus groups, enabling inter-library loans, and providing computer access and study-space at the campus library 18 hours a day. The panel noted the efficient and helpful working practices of library staff. The overall impression given was of an effectively resourced programme.

The statistics presented in the self-assessment report show that by spring 2017 there were 7 members of teaching staff for 21 students on the sociology PhD study program (SAR, p 76-78). The number of the students admitted to the study program has remained steady throughout the past 5 years (2013-2017), and so, despite high dropout rates in 2016 and 2017 (10 students in 2 years), the programme sustains sufficient numbers for it certainly to be viable.

Attendance of international conferences, summer- and winter schools, as well as the possibility of having a co-supervisor or 'advisor' from abroad are all considered important for the student to gain expertise. This international co-operation and attendance seems not to be a formal requirement, nor is it formally arranged, but rather is largely dependent on the student's (and possibly the supervisor's) own initiative. Some students expressed that they felt they were in a disadvantaged position, with expertise not as easily available to them as for some of their peers.

Depending on whether they are a part of a wider project or working on their own project, students are also in different positions regarding the availability of materials, software, computers, travel funding and work-space necessary to conduct their research.

Strengths

- The library system works well – it seems to have sufficient resources to accommodate PhD students' needs.

- If the programme is admitting students who have additional funding/jobs from projects, then there is additional funding to cover the full nominal time of studies (4 years) if the

project runs out earlier. (Having said that, this additional funding is subject to availability and case-by-case basis.)

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Project-based and University-employee students on the one hand, and independent students on the other are in unequal positions regarding access to resources. The uneven distribution of resources includes language editing, access to software, and funding for conferences. Management should work to provide equal resources for all students, regardless of status.

- If language editing funds are available, then language editing should be made available prior to the pre-defence stage. This was a need very much indicated by current and recently graduated students.

- It is advisable to make software licenses and borrowable computers with licensed software available to all students who require these.

Teaching, learning, research and/or creative activity

Comments

The formal means to assess supervision arrangements and research outcomes is the annual review, when both the student and supervisor(s) are asked to reflect on the progress made during the year, as well as set plans for the coming year. Informal monitoring and feedback for students' progress happens in the 'Student Seminar'.

Teaching staff's supervision responsibilities in the programme are distributed somewhat unevenly. Some staff members are involved in up to 6 PhD supervisions, whilst younger and part-time members of staff may not have any. Those students admitted in 2017 (3 students) all have the same person as sole supervisor.
The majority of specialised courses offering expertise in specific areas are offered conjointly with other programmes in the Institute as well as the University. The programme is quite reliant on a specific supervisor's personal research expertise (and possibly the research project that the student is attached to) as well as the national doctoral school (Doctoral School of Behaviour, Social and Health Sciences). As the doctoral school is interdisciplinary, and focused on research areas that do not relate to all students' work, there is a lack of interest in attending the training provided by the Doctoral School by at least some students.

From the student and staff interviews, it appeared that staff are strongly oriented towards the PhD by publication route. In turn, students tend to see this as the only viable option for PhD studies. The advantages and disadvantages of the publication route in comparison to the monograph route seem to be taken for granted by all concerned without any further consideration.

Despite the preference for the publication route, the University does not have explicit enough rules about the authorship or co-authorship of journal articles, including such potentially tricky areas like co-authoring with supervisors. There is a suggestion that at least one publication be first-authored.

Supervision arrangements operate principally upon implicit practices of good conduct, as opposed to explicit regulation. While this may work well enough in practice, it leaves open the question of how bad practice could be identified by wither students or staff, and how it would be rectified.

The university and SOGOLAS encourage all staff to take a supervision training course. There are no measures in place to make such training mandatory. (However, the vice-rector for research suggested such training might become part of applications for staff promotion).

Supervisors seem to have variable understandings of how many contact hours are allocated for each supervisor per student. From the perspective of the program director, and institute, there are no further means in place to monitor if and how often the supervision is taking place.

This appears to be connected with the additional 3000 Euro 'bonus' that the supervisor receives when their supervisee has completed in nominal time. Some staff understand the 'bonus' money as a delayed payment for their supervision, rather than as a bonus for guiding the student to successful completion. Some supervisors seem to consider their annual workload as supervisors as only partly paid for, and their engagement with the student as in part voluntary work. The 'extra' money is not seen as a motivation to guide students to completion.

Co-supervision is in principle encouraged (SAR, p 38-9) although still relatively uncommon. The arrangements in practice can create some confusion as to staff workload (is it 25 or 12.5 contact hours per student?). Students could also have 'advisors' for their thesis, but the student interview indicated that is not yet a completely common practice. There could be more clarity as to who is in the position to confirm or deny the suitability of the external co-supervisor or 'advisor'. It would be better if there were an explicit protocol for how to proceed if supervisory and advisory practices start to be unsatisfactory (interviews)

Students' post-graduation career development is supported through training for seeking post-doctoral funding. There could also be guidance offered as to using the PhD in non-academic careers.

Strengths

- Students are encouraged to approach experts outside the department, as and when necessary.

- The Student seminar operates as an additional feedback mechanism, while helping to develop a sense of a scholarly community.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- It is advisable that the maximum number of supervisees should be formalised – possibly no more than 5, plus adding junior members of staff to supervision teams, to allow them to gain necessary experience in supervising.

- More assistance needs to be given to students to find supervisor support and other forms of training that are outside of the programme

- The panel advises reassessment by staff of the relative pros and cons of the PhD by publications and PhD by monograph routes.

- It is recommended that all students have a second supervisor.

- Procedures and protocols should be further formalised and tightened in these areas:

    o Co-supervision arrangements – including the role and formal status of external (including non-Estonian) supervisors and advisors.

    o Co-authoring of publications, especially with supervisors.

    o Contact hours and workload hours – especially regarding the status and role of the 3000 Euro 'bonus'. These are formalised by the TU rector. However, knowledge about the exact content of the document does not seem to have reached the people on the ground.

Teaching staff

Comments

The panel found much evidence that staff are strongly committed to the effective supervision of PhD students. The unit has a good range of experts and expertise. However, formal training is not mandatory.

Staff have projects which often involve close connections with multiple public and private sector stakeholders. Students enrolled on the programme, and perhaps especially those who are engaged directly with these projects, acquire valuable experience in working with stakeholders and in applying sociology to diverse professional contexts.

Students seems to have pressing demands for gaining more practical knowledge in academic (especially journal article) writing, as "students indicate that they are lacking practical knowledge about writing and publishing articles (SAR, p 39)". This demand is to be met, according to the self-assessment, by the national doctoral school. The research areas of the

national doctoral school, however, do not explicitly overlap with all students' research interests.

Strengths

- Committed and expert PhD supervisors.

- Staff are keen to explore ways to improve completion rates.

- There is co-operation between external partners and stakeholders and the programme, such that research findings are effectively distributed beyond academia.

- There is willingness to admit the lack of provision of resource for students to acquire the necessary academic writing skills and to examine possible options to improve this situation. (p.39).

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The various types of stakeholder (e.g. Ministries, Statistics Estonia, private research bodies) are interested in receiving more information on the projects and their outcomes that staff and students are undertaking, so that research outputs could be further utilised for policy-making, both in in Estonia and at the broader EU level. Outreach and impact could be promoted further by particular members of staff whose role could be explicitly dedicated to such matters. External stakeholders could play a greater role on the School Council (or equivalent body).

- There could be a more even distribution of supervision tasks across the unit, involving early career scholars more fully, while being attentive to not overly increasing their workloads.

- Steps should be taken by management to ensure that supervision workload arrangements (especially the amount of notional and real hours per student) are more clearly comprehended by all staff.

- Consider the possibility of mandatory supervision training, at least for early career scholars, and refresher courses for more established staff.

Doctoral students

Comments

The panel found that current and recently-graduated students of the programme were of a high intellectual calibre.

The majority of interviewed students were by and large satisfied with the programme.

The Institute is (appropriately) self-critical of its selection procedures, and current lack of fit between some students and available supervisor expertise.

Students often seemed unclear about how long their studies were due to take, and what sanctions there would be (if any) for not completing on time.

Supervisors and students share expectations that working in external employment alongside PhD studies is feasible, and that such work experience is an advantage in Estonian job-market. There is a shared assumption that timely completion of a thesis is not very plausible.

Student mobility in the past 5 years is quite low. In 2013 to 2017, the percentage of students going for long-term study visits (more than 3 months) is on average less than 1%. (SAR, p.8). This is closely related to the student population having external employment during their studies.

Students seemed mostly to be content with the annual review process, as they felt it enabled them to reflect on their year and make plans for the next. However, students expressed concern with the bureaucracy that the process entails, and the lack of support from administrative staff in filling out forms and other related issues.

The key element for establishing a sense of a student intellectual community is the Student Seminar, which particularly helps to foster community in the first two years of the study. As this seminar is not mandatory later on in their studies, students who are not employed in the University or connected to a large project, are left rather isolated.

A formal system to monitor student satisfaction (including all members of the programme) in every semester was put in place in 2017/2018. This has allowed the programme to register and respond to students' training and course needs (SAR, p 38). There is reliance on external training and visiting specialists to carry out some of these forms of training. It would be advisable, where possible, to bring more training in-house, to offset the problem of possible lack of external training resources in the future.

Strengths

- The programme attracts various high calibre candidates.

- Students are generally satisfied with the broad thrust of the programme. Dissatisfaction is really only about specific details of procedure and practice.

- Alumni and employers are generally satisfied with the skill-sets that the programme provides for students.

- Students value the annual monitoring process as an opportunity to reflect on their progress and set goals for the coming year.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The panel suggests that equal opportunities monitoring procedures be introduced, especially in light of the different employment statuses of students, as well as the increasing number of international students.

- Some students seem to lack full awareness of the available study/research resources. More clear guidance could be given at the beginning of studies about these matters.

- It would be very positive if more bespoke careers advice could be offered, especially as regards non-academic future careers.

- Allowing admission throughout the year (which is possible, but not implemented by SOGOLAS yet (SAR, p 38)), is not advised. It disadvantages students starting later in the academic year, when some courses have already finished. Subjects that might be essential for starting the thesis, and so eventually also for timely completion, might only be available in half a year's time. As the cohort is small, the importance of starting the programme together for the development of a student community is obvious.

- Student dissatisfaction centres around problems to do with bureaucratic systems not supporting their activities. While the unit will have little power to change wider bureaucratic systems, nonetheless the panel suggests that managers contribute to finding ways to make the bureaucracy more accommodating of students' needs and to communicate what the expectations are about timely completion, and what steps can be taken to try to ensure timely completion.

2.3.3. Demography

Study programme

Comments

The Demography Phd programme is offered by staff in the Estonian Institute of Population Studies which has both an active research programme and a commitment to developing the demographic data infrastructure for Estonia, a particularly important challenge given Estonian history. This involves close collaboration with the Estonian Statistics Bureau. EIPS also has a commitment to ensuring the sustainability of demography in Estonia for which a doctoral programme is considered essential.

Demography is not provided as a full undergraduate degree in Estonia or elsewhere (there was one programme at the University of Southampton, UK but this has been discontinued) although internationally elements of demography are included in the programmes of undergraduate degrees in, for example, Human Sciences, Geography, Economics, Anthropology and other programmes. In general, specialised training in demography starts at Master's level and there are a number of such programmes in Europe, although not in Estonia.

In most countries which provide PhD programmes in demography entry is conditional on having obtained a Master's degree (which may be integrated into the PhD programme). In recognition of the need for international collaboration in training the next generation of demographers, in 2005 the European Association for Population Studies established the European Doctoral School of Demography as a collaborative programme involving 7 European Universities (including Tallinn) and 5 research institutes. ESDS provides an 11-month training programme for first year doctoral students - in general required to already have a Master's- and rotates around major European Centres (in 2018 teaching is split between a first semester in the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research in Rostock and the University of Southern Denmark in Odense). Scholarships are available for students, provided by leading European institutes and centres, and tuition is free. Tallinn University is represented on the Board of the ESDS. Given the commitment of ESDI to developing knowledge on the demography of Estonia students are generally required to pursue a thesis relevant to Estonia (including comparative studies) although one alumni we met had used data from Belgium due to the lack, at that time, of suitable data from Estonia or a similar country.

Strengths

- Students and staff have good working relationships and current students and alumni reported that they were able to discuss their work and benefit from consultations with all staff, not just their supervisors.

- Reviews involving staff and students are held following international conferences where staff and students discuss new substantive and methodological developments in the field. These activities, together with annual review process when student feedback is collected, assessed and used to inform future developments (as reported in the SER and by students) help foster a collective identify as demographers and members of the Institute.

- The students have good opportunities to participate in international conferences and benefit from the networks of the academic and research staff. These activities enable the programme to meet expected standards of fostering teamwork, leadership, language and personal development.

- Most students undertake formal training in demography through attendance at the ESDS. This is an internationally recognised programme of high quality and participation (which involves spending a year outside Estonia) helps participants build an international network.

Tallinn's participation in this programme is a strength and a very sensible way for a small country to address the need for demographic training.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- For students unable to spend a year away to attend the ESDS (for example those with employment or family commitments), delivery of necessary methodological and substantive training is undertaken by ESDI staff. The Programme Director and academic Professor gave a coherent outline of the substantive and methodological areas covered in this training, which covered the areas that would be expected. However, delivering this must be challenging in resource terms especially as the number of students is very small. Some of the core demographic topics (fertility, mortality, migration, population ageing) are covered in elective courses, as outlined in the SER and appendices and described by the Programme Director. In some cases no teacher was identified in the documentation supplied (e.g. mortality), presumably because not all these courses run every year. Tailoring students' need for them with the availability of providing them must be a challenge.

- Possibly it might be helpful to incorporate some free online courses in demography, such as those developed by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities and the International Union for Scientific Study for Population into the formal taught programme. These modules have been designed to be used by lecturers in demography in resource limited settings and so are suitable for PhD students if part of a wider portfolio (these materials are used in the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine distance learning MSc in Demography and Health). Collaboration with the Population Research Unit in the University of Helsinki would also seem a way in which the needs of Tallinn students unable to travel far could be met, as the PRU is a lead partner in running a highly acclaimed PhD programme, including training in demographic and other advanced quantitative methods.

- One target activity mentioned in the Action Plan is elaboration of a methods course in R software (which has the advantage of being free). There is already available a book and accompanying suite of programmes available on some core analysis techniques used in demography developed by the University of Groningen and presumably further developments will complement rather than duplicate this work.

Resources

Comments

ESDI is a small Institute with only 0.5 of an allocated teaching Professor post (SAR, p 13), although it was reported in the meetings with the supervisors and Programme Director that the actual quota should be 1.5, but that other 1.0 was assumed to be met because of the requirement that research staff spend 10% of their time on teaching. There are five staff altogether identified as being on the teaching staff of the doctoral study programme. Some students have international co-supervisors. ESDI staff are involved in development of demographic infrastructure and active in externally funded research projects on which

research students often work. Historical demography has been revived as a research and study area following the appointment of Martin Klesment. ESDI is well integrated in international networks. Supervisor/student ratio is good. Most students are effectively part time, working either on projects in the institute or elsewhere (Ministries), although one recently admitted student interviewed via skype will be following more of a full time pathway. Currently the number of students is small (four) with one admitted per year (SAR, p 7).

Although a nicely fitted common room is available, we learned through the interviews that for students who do not teach or work at the University there really is no PhD work-space or any desks available. The common room is often used for meetings and similar events and cannot really function as a suitable PhD work-space.

Strengths

- The Institute has specialist library and data resources and indeed is actively engaged in developing data infrastructures. It is clearly beneficial for students to have access to these resources and expert advice on their use. Teaching and research staff are all active in the field, including internationally and those we met were highly motivated to develop the discipline and support students.

- The students we met welcomed the opportunity to be involved in projects and the collegial atmosphere if the Institute. Students have good opportunities and support for conference attendance. The employers/partners and alumni reported that the skills and expertise of PhD graduates in demography were highly valued.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- ESDI staff and students also contribute to teaching at BA and MA level, partly out of a mission to develop demography and interest in demography in Estonia. This is a further demand on their time. Raising project funds and support for infrastructure projects is also time consuming, as noted in the SER report.

- The students also commented that the staff had to spend time on these activities partly to ensure salary support for students working on them which cut into time for other activities. None of the alumni we met had completed within the recommended 4+2 period and they explained that the stipend available to date required them to work in addition to study. Two recent students had dropped out due to finding the challenge of work and PhD study too great. However, students and alumni were also in general positive about working on projects in the Institute as they reported that this gave them practical training in research and served as a kind of apprenticeship to complement their other training. A current student working in a Ministry also reported that the activities were complementary.

- A big challenge and potential vulnerability is the small size of the Institute and the student body. Demography is a specialist area and most demography PhD programmes internationally are small. As Estonia is a very small country, the Tallinn programme is particularly so. The Institute has sensibly decided on a focus on studies relevant to Estonia, including comparative studies and studies on countries in transition. Building on existing links with other Baltic countries it could perhaps seek to position itself as a leader of Baltic demography with efforts to recruit from Latvia, Lithuania etc, as well as other transition countries including Russia. Staff need to establish priorities for development and outreach and focus on a few, as currently senior staff in particular are over stretched.

- We recommend the Institute to organise a PhD work-space with desks.

Teaching, learning, research and/or creative activity

Comments

Doctoral students take locally provided courses and, as discussed in the section on the study programme, also in many cases participate in the 11 month programme of the ESDS which involves studying outside Estonia. Feedback from students is collected and incorporated into review and staff-student seminars and reviews of activities serve as further means of review, as well as fostering critical analysis skills and collegiality. The student body is small. International co-supervision is sometimes employed and ESDI is moving to a co-supervision model, although this is partly in order to deal with a problem of different supervisory styles.

Strengths

- Participation in the ESDS is an innovative way of addressing the small scale issue and also exposes students to international contacts and a range of teaching by well-regarded international demographers.

- The collective feedback and discussion sessions after conferences and twice yearly staff student conferences foster learning and collaboration.

- Students value participating in projects and learn relevant skills through doing this.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- As indicated in the SAR and reported in meetings with students and alumni, supervisory practices vary considerably in the Institute. Students reported dealing with this by seeking out other staff members when needed or expressing their issues at meetings where everyone reported on their progress. The proposed solution is to institute dual supervision, however it might be appropriate to alternatively or additionally introduce some common

standards and expectations about supervisory practices.

- Staff, students and alumni all had some doubts as to whether the 4+2 target for completion was achievable and some of the students/alumni we spoke with had taken much longer than this. The main reported reasons were the need also to work (which those working in the Institute in particular valued) and the need to have three articles accepted for publication.

- It is suggested that some formal part time status is enabled/encouraged for staff who are working (with some reduction in their working time too) so that there is recognition that these working students are in fact part time and 4 years FT equals 8 years half time (although very long study periods may be problematic given issues of maintaining motivation, ensuring topic is still relevant/ has not been overtaken by other publications, and risk of changes in the student's life making study less feasible). A strategy needs to be developed to help more students complete in a timely fashion, including proactive supervision in all cases.

Teaching staff

Comments

The number of staff engaged in teaching is small, all of them are active in research and scholarly activity, including internationally. All have also participated in teaching elsewhere.

Strengths

- The supervisors we met with were fully engaged and committed to the programme. The SER and reports from students and alumni emphasised the collegial atmosphere of the Institute and the fact they could discuss their progress and any difficulties at group seminars and post conference meetings.

- Staff have experience of teaching internationally. A target of sending teaching staff on relevant training has been set.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- As already noted, the SAR and meetings with students and alumni indicated that supervisory practices vary considerably in the Institute. Students reported dealing with this by seeking out other staff members when needed or expressing their issues at meetings where everyone reported on their progress. The proposed solution is to institute dual supervision, however it might be appropriate to alternatively/additionally introduce some common standards and expectations about supervisory practices.

Doctoral students

Comments

Doctoral students come from a range of disciplinary backgrounds and are required to have an MA level qualification and undergo a selection exam. They also need to prepare a thesis plan. For the award of PhD, they are required to produce three articles accepted for publication, together with a synthesising frame ('envelope'). Monographs are also acceptable. Co-authorship of papers is acceptable, although the Programme Director and supervisors reported that the normal expectation was that at least one paper should be first or sole authored.

Strengths

- Alumni, partners and employers reported that the skills of those graduating were highly valued. Several PhD graduates have secured international post-doctoral positions.

- The students and alumni we spoke with were engaged and positive.

- The availability of excellent data resources, and the opportunity to work on these, was appreciated.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Students find it difficult to complete within the expected time frame, largely due to conflicts with work. Two recent students have dropped out due to these conflicts. The available stipend is reported to be inadequate to allow students to give up work, in addition they are keen to maintain labour market experience and advantage. Those working in the Institute have the benefit of complementary work and study, but the disadvantage of lack of exposure to other types of work and as much interaction with policy makers. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to consider introducing an official and properly structured part-time route. Such a solution might help to reconcile PhD and non-PhD work.

- If a greater rate of completion in the 4+2 format is to be achieved, all staff and students must be convinced of the value of this and make it clear to students that this is expected from the beginning. This will also require proactive supervision from all supervisors. We recommend that steps be taken to improve procedures in this respect.