Tallinn University
Decision on Institutional Accreditation

7.06.2021

The Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education decided to accredit Tallinn University for seven years with a secondary condition.

Pursuant to clause 43.2 of the document "Guide to Institutional Accreditation" established on the basis of the authorization contained in subsection 38 (3) of the Higher Education Act and Section 24(5) of the Statutes of the Republic of Estonia Education and Youth Board, the Higher Education Assessment Council of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (hereinafter the Council) states the following:

1. Tallinn University (TLU) and EKKA agreed on the institutional accreditation period on 23.10.2019.

2. On the basis of point 8 of the 'Guide to institutional accreditation', the following study programmes were also assessed in the context of institutional accreditation:

   Law (Estonian language of instruction), bachelor's studies

   Law (English language instruction), bachelor's degree

   Integrated natural sciences (Estonian language of instruction), bachelor's studies

   Education Innovation and Leadership (English Language of instruction), Master's Degree

   Digital Learning Games (English language of instruction), Master's degree

   European Modern Languages (Estonian language of instruction), bachelor's studies

   Health Behaviour and Well-Being (Estonian and English language of instruction), doctoral studies

3. On 21 December 2020, the Director of EKKA approved the composition of the Institutional Accreditation Committee (hereinafter referred to as the Committee):

Anja Oskamp (Chair)	Professor of Law; Former Rector of the Dutch Open University (Netherlands)
Helen Thomas (Secretary)	Freelance Educational Consultant (United Kingdom)
Marge Vaikjärv	Student, University of Tartu (Estonia)
Liz Bacon	Professor; Deputy Principal and Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the at Abertay University; President of EQANIE (United Kingdom)
Carmen Fenoll	Professor of Plant Biology, University of Castilla-La Mancha; former Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs (Spain)
Anca Greere	Professor of English linguistics and Translation Studies, University of Babeş-Bolyai (Romania); former Quality Manager at the English Quality Agency for Higher Education (UK)
Martin Halliwell	Professor and Head of School, University of Leicester (United Kingdom)
Aalt Willem Heringa	Professor and former Dean of the Law School, University of Maastricht (Netherlands)
Alar Karis	Director of the Estonian National Museum; former Rector of Estonian University of Life Sciences and University of Tartu (Estonia)
Ole Bækgaard Nielsen	Professor and Head of Public Health Department, Aarhus University (Denmark)
Oliver Vettori	Dean of Accreditation and Quality Management; Director of Learning and Learning Support Systems at WU Vienna (Austria)
Rupert Wegerif	Professor, University of Cambridge (United Kingdom)

4. TLU submitted the self-analysis report to the EKKA on 18 January 2021; the EKKA evaluation coordinator sent the self-analysis report to the Committee on 19 January 2021.

5. A virtual assessment visit to TLU took place on 15–19 March 21.

6. The Committee sent the draft assessment report to EKKA on 2 May 2021, EKKA forwarded the draft assessment report to the higher education institution for comments on 3 May 2021 and TLU submitted its comments on 17 May 2021.

7. The Committee submitted the final assessment report to EKKA on 27 May 2021. The assessment report forms an integral part of the Decision. The report is available on the EKKA website.

8. The final assessment report and self-analysis report were forwarded by the Secretary of the Council to the members of the Council on 1 June 2021.

9. The assessment committee's assessments were as follows:

Standard	Assessment
Strategic management	Partially conforms to requirements
Resources	Conforms to requirements
Quality culture	Partially conforms to requirements
Academic ethics	Conforms to requirements
Internationalisation	Conforms to requirements
Teaching staff	Conforms to requirements
Study programme	Conforms to requirements
Learning and teaching	Conforms to requirements
Student assessment	Conforms to requirements
Learning support systems	Conforms to requirements
Research, development and/or other creative activities	Conforms to requirements
Service to society	Conforms to requirements

⭐**Worthy of recognition**:

A mandatory ELU (Integrating Specialty Innovation) course in all curricula, which gives all students the opportunity to experience interdisciplinary problem-based learning and supports, among other things, the development of general competencies such as cooperation and innovation. This is an initiative from which higher education institutions in Estonia and abroad could learn.

10. At its meeting on 7 June 2021, the Council with 11 members present, discussed the documents received, and decided to highlight from the evaluation report[1] the following strengths, areas for improvement[2] and recommendations and suggestions for further developments[3].

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[1] Achievements exceeding the standard level (not compliance with the standard) are identified as strengths.

[2] Improvement areas and recommendations point to shortcomings in meeting the requirements of the Institutional Accreditation Standard and affect the Council's final decision.

[3] Suggestions for further development are improvement suggestions that do not contain any reference to non-compliance with the standard and which it is for the higher education institution to decide whether or not to take into account it. Suggestions for further developments do not prejudice the Council's final decision.

10.1. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Strengths

1. The thoroughness with which the university has addressed previous accreditation recommendations.
2. A strong sense of community, shared values and a collegial approach within the university. The voices of staff, students and stakeholders are heard.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. TLU has defined its focus areas and priorities; however, they are not sufficiently clear and are therefore open to different interpretations. The university is encouraged to define clear and consistent priorities related to measurable key performance indicators.
2. TLU's management system is characterised by highly dispersed management. Although this ensures the involvement of staff at all levels, the Committee found that in practice this has led to inconsistencies/excessive variability/incoherence in its implementation. It is recommended that TLU develops reporting and monitoring of academic units in a way that ensures continuity of practice and compliance with documented rules throughout the university. This is particularly important in view of the increased focus on inter- and multidisciplinary and joint curricula.
3. The tools to measure progress towards strategic objectives are not as supportive as they could be, as they are not specific enough. In order to allow TLU to monitor its progress towards achieving its objectives, it is strongly recommended that the strategy and the related key performance indicators be concrete and measurable.
4. Although the development plans of the different units are based on the university's strategic plans, they are still not fully aligned. In order to ensure an appropriate and coherent approach to the priorities of TLU throughout the university, the development plans of both academic and support units need to be aligned with them.

Suggestions for further developments

1. It is desirable to harmonise as much as possible the practices of different units and to systematically exchange good practices in order to ensure that they can learn from each other and improve the quality of learning and teaching.
2. It is advisable to use the process of preparing a new development plan, among other things, to address the issues of identity and positioning of the university.

10.2. RESOURCES

Strengths

1. The management of resources is well governed by universal and transparent written procedures and rules.
2. TLU has a significant focus on staff development and satisfaction. It is particularly impressive that TLU has achieved an average wage increase of around 50 % over the last five years.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. Staff salaries have risen significantly, and the current model provides for annual individual wage negotiations. It is recommended to analyse whether existing practices ensure a coherent approach and equal treatment and, if necessary, to amend the system.

Suggestions for further developments

1. It is desirable to rethink how the long-term strategy and university priorities could be better taken into account in the process of allocating core revenues.
2. The freedom of employees to develop themselves can be motivating from an individual point of view, but it is also advisable to plan staff development in a targeted manner based on the university's strategic objectives.
3. TLU could consider implementing transparent financial models that would ensure an increase in the capacity of the research support system, taking into account the expected growth of externally funded research.

10.3. QUALITY CULTURE

Strengths

1. The university has a strong dialogue orientation and a focus on problem solving, as evidenced by well-documented follow-up activities and high satisfaction of university staff with the implementation of these activities.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. The Committee found evidence (e.g., in relation to the Digital Learning Games curriculum) that real quality problems may not always reach decision-makers and that pragmatic solutions to problems at unit level are not necessarily consistent with university policies. Thus, in order to address potential gaps in the quality management of TLU and to harmonise quality management processes across different units, it is desirable to develop a clear framework that clarifies and links processes at different levels of quality management and specifies who is responsible for what.
2. Currently, the exchange of best practices is taking place through different networks and informal channels and lacks a systematic approach. It is recommended that TLU systematise the sharing of best practices and develop

a structure for analysing and exchanging quality-relevant information outside existing networks.

3. Although the university takes into account the needs of external stakeholders, this activity is not systematic. The needs of external stakeholders and alumni need to be identified in a more regular and systematic way and quality indicators linked to these perspectives.

Suggestions for further developments

1. It is recommended to also introduce other procedures for external evaluation of research in addition to the national ones.
2. It would be useful to harmonise quality standards and strategies across all study programmes.
3. It is desirable to consider the introduction of regular external audits to support the consistent implementation of quality processes.

10.4. ACADEMIC ETHICS

Strengths

1. A comprehensive and structured approach to the development of research ethics.
2. The gradual and careful development of good academic practice at Tallinn University, which provides a solid foundation for academic ethics.
3. Students are involved in the good learning practices project producing online materials on plagiarism.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. TLU should consider more effective and accurate solutions for recording and analysing data on academic fraud.

Suggestions for further developments

1. It is desirable for the TLU to ensure consistency in the handling of academic fraud cases, especially in the context of an increase in the number of interdisciplinary and joint curricula.
2. It is recommended to invest more in preventive work, including staff development, which is also a means of reducing academic fraud.

10.5. INTERNATIONALISATION

Strengths

1. The number of curricula in English is relatively high and the level of incoming mobility is good for students and lecturers.
2. The TLU has identified internationalisation as one of its main strategic focus areas.
3. The university's readiness to use both Estonian and English as a working language and support for foreign lecturers in Estonian language studies.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. The Committee has not identified an explicit definition of the areas in which TLU wishes to be internationally competitive. The development plan and the self-analysis report also lacked relevant indicators. In order to be able to demonstrate the realisation of its ambitions for internationalisation, the university needs to define more clearly the scope of its internationalisation, develop specific objectives with key performance indicators and provide the necessary resources.
2. The Committee found that, although credits acquired abroad can be recognised under the legislation for both elective and compulsory courses, students were not informed of this in detail. The biggest problem in this regard was with the European Modern Languages study programme, where students were convinced that credits for compulsory courses could not be transferred. It must be ensured that the recognition of credits acquired abroad for both compulsory and elective courses is consistent and accurate for students. For Erasmus exchange and credit recognition, a comparison of TLU curricula with those of foreign universities must also be carried out.
3. The mobility of students on the European Modern Languages study programme is below international standards for such (language learning) curricula. Sufficiently ambitious targets and action plans need to be developed.

Suggestions for further developments

1. Building on the university's strengths and fields of expertise, a concept and its implementation plan for "internationalisation at home" should be developed. This would help to overcome the current weakness in outgoing mobility and would also provide teachers with new opportunities for joint teaching with foreign higher education institutions.

10.6. TEACHING STAFF

Strengths

1. As a whole, the faculty is highly qualified. 60 percent of the teaching staff have a doctoral degree. The faculty is committed to providing students with a positive and supported learning experience, which is highly appreciated by students.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. In order to ensure a fair distribution, transparency and comparability of the workload, priority should be given to activities supporting a uniform calculation of the workload.
2. The Committee found that the university is not aware of the benefits or effects of the resources invested in courses for professional development of teaching staff. There is also a risk that these courses only take into account the needs of individual preferences and not the needs of strategic developments. This in turn means that the university will miss an important opportunity to support the achievement of strategic priorities. It is recommended to introduce a system of recording and monitoring of courses for professional development of staff to ensure that choices are better aligned with strategic priorities.
3. The curriculum for digital learning games does not have enough theses supervisors with the necessary qualifications. A sufficient number of qualified teaching staff must be ensured for the high-quality implementation of the curriculum.

Suggestions for further developments

1. In order to ensure that all teaching staff have modern pedagogical knowledge and skills, it is desirable to make it compulsory to prove the existence of such competences.
2. It is advisable to include human resources development topics in the university development plan.
3. Systematic mentoring and pedagogical training for practitioners, alumni and students involved in teaching should continue to be ensured in order to ensure the quality of the teaching they carry out and the students' satisfaction with it.
4. It is recommended to increase the number of teaching staff with a doctoral degree on the law curricula.

10.7. STUDY PROGRAMME

Strengths

1. All curricula have undergone an internal evaluation since 2016, which in some cases has led to their full transformation to ensure that students' and employers' expectations are met.
2. The University has been successful in creating the image of students as self-leading and with an entrepreneurial mindset.
3. The ELU course allows all students to understand their studies both within and beyond the boundaries of the field of specialisation.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. In order to ensure the consistency and systematic nature of curriculum development across all study programmes, the internal assessment procedure of study programmes and its implementation need to be made more specific.

2. The university's policies, procedures and guidelines on the closure of study programmes need to be clarified in order to ensure that they are implemented consistently, and that students, teachers and other stakeholders are informed in a timely manner.

3. The university lacks a clear understanding of how and on what grounds new study programmes are being developed. It is recommended to develop a specific strategy for the development of new study programmes (including joint study programmes).

4. Some sample study programmes (integrated sciences, digital learning games) have very low student numbers, sometimes falling below the minimum requirements. All necessary measures are needed to ensure the sustainability of the study programmes.

5. The development of a study programme for digital learning games (including basic courses) does not take into account the competence of existing teaching staff, and therefore a significant part of the curriculum is taught by master students from the second year of the same study programme. It is necessary to ensure that courses in the curriculum are covered by appropriately qualified teaching staff.

Suggestions for further developments

1. It is recommended to develop a more systematic approach to stakeholder involvement in curriculum development, e.g., formal alumni and employer networks.

2. It is desirable to implement consistent measures to reduce interruptions and to increase the percentage of graduation within nominal time.

10.8. LEARNING AND TEACHING

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. In order to be confident in the systematic application of the student-centred approach, it is necessary to develop clear procedures to monitor and control the teaching and learning methods applied in different academic units. These procedures should include an assessment of the consistency between teaching methods and learning outcomes in order to ensure a systematic implementation of the student-centred approach.

Suggestions for further developments

1. The use of data analytics is recommended to improve student enrolment and learning and teaching as well as reduce dropouts.

2. The development of innovative teaching, learning and assessment methods should be more broad-based at the university and effective dissemination of these methods across the university should be ensured.

10.9. STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. There is currently no overview at university level of the types and methods of assessment implemented. It is necessary to develop a system that provides the management with a comprehensive overview and to determine whether the achievement of learning outcomes and the acquisition of general competences are assessed.
2. Due to difficulties in transferring credits acquired abroad, more comprehensive advice and clearer procedural rules need to be provided.
3. A particular problem is the participation of master students in the digital learning game curriculum in the assessment of their peers. The involvement of students in teaching is commendable, but a summary assessment should be carried out by the faculty.

Suggestions for further developments

1. It would be useful to set up a university-wide appeals committee so that the approach to appeals would be more consistent.

2. It is recommended to increase the diversity of evaluation methods (e.g., peer review, continuous evaluation).

10.10. LEARNING SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. The satisfaction of foreign students with counselling services is low. It is necessary to identify the reasons for this and to introduce improvements. In doing so, particular attention should be given to the problems in which the university can provide solutions and separately to those which are not under the control of the university (accommodation, health care).
2. Despite some progress, the drop-out rate remains an issue. It is necessary to provide students with all relevant counselling services and other possible solutions in a timely manner.
3. Despite the existence of appropriate regulations, the use and response to feedback is not systematic. The problem needs to be addressed in order to improve students' learning experience.

Suggestions for further developments

1. Consideration should be given to whether the use of three parallel virtual learning environments is best for the student's learning experience.
2. The VÕTA application form (recognition of prior learning and work experience) should be reviewed and made sure that it is user-friendly and up to date.

10.11. RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND/OR OTHER CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

Strengths

1. The university has a systemic and strategic approach to the development of the field of RDC and significant achievements have been made in research over the past 5 years.
2. R & D is supported by a number of fundamental decisions of the University: the career model for academic staff; the University's own research fund; central support structures for researchers; academic structures that support cooperation and promote multidisciplinarity.
3. The freedom of academic units and centres to apply for and use research grants, to establish international networks and to develop multidisciplinary research.
4. Research has made an important contribution to the university's internationalisation.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. The university must define its research priorities and communicate them effectively both inside and outside the university. Priorities must be defined on the basis of the more successful directions to date, while leaving opportunities for new directions and interdisciplinarity.
2. There is no overview of research performance. Transparent, efficient, effective and consistent mechanisms must be implemented to monitor the performance of research and the development of different units and centres. These mechanisms should be clearly communicated within the university and to relevant stakeholders.

Suggestions for further developments

1. It is recommended to continue to seek a balance between applied and fundamental research in order to serve society in a way that does not prevent teaching staff members from publishing high-level international articles.
2. In the context of growing contractual and project-based research, the allocation of a certain overhead fee to the university's central budget should be considered in order to achieve the long-term strategic objectives of research.
3. TLU could explore ways of exploiting the growing links with companies, developing an industrial doctorate that would allow for more doctoral students

to be admitted and improve their employability outside the academic environment.

10.12. SERVICE TO SOCIETY

Strengths

1. The volume of cooperation with companies and other external organisations has increased. It has created good opportunities for further training and educational innovation.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1. Without the central and public support of the university, the Haapsalu College will not be sustainable in the long term. It is necessary to look for additional resources to maintain the role of the College in learning and teaching as well as in serving the region and the whole Estonian society.

Suggestions for further developments

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

11. If one to four standards are assessed as 'partially conforms' and all the remaining standards are assessed as 'conforms', the Council shall analyse the strengths and areas for improvement of the higher education institution and decides that the management, administration, teaching and research activities as well as the environments of learning and research at the higher education institution meet the requirements, and accredits the higher education institution for seven years; or shall decide that there are shortcomings in the management, administration, teaching and research activities or in the environments of learning and research at the HEI, provide guidance for their elimination, and accredit the higher education institution for three years.

12. The Council examined the strengths and areas for improvement of Tallinn University and considered it necessary to highlight:

12.1. **The compulsory ELU (Innovation for Specialty Integration) course in all curricula merits recognition**, giving all students the opportunity to experience interdisciplinary problem-based learning and supporting, among other things, the development of general competences such as cooperation and innovation.

12.2. **The university is characterised by a series of important strengths**: The university has a strong sense of community, shared values and a collegial approach. The voices of staff, students and stakeholders are heard. TLU has a significant focus on staff development and satisfaction. It is particularly impressive that they have achieved an average wage increase of around 50 % over the last five years. The number of study programmes in English is relatively high and the rate of incoming mobility is good for students and lecturers. It is worth noting that the university is ready to use both Estonian and English as working languages and supports foreign lecturers in Estonian language learning. The faculty is committed to providing students with a positive and supported learning experience, which is also highly appreciated by students. The University has been successful in creating the image of students as self-leading and with entrepreneurial mindset. R & D is supported by a number of fundamental decisions of the University: career model for academic staff; the University's own research fund; central support structures for researchers; academic structures that support cooperation and promote multidisciplinarity.

12.3. **Shortcomings in** meeting institutional accreditation standards mainly concern issues related to strategic management and quality culture under standards that received the judgement "partially conforms with requirements" from the assessment committee. The Council also considered it necessary to highlight issues related to the study programme for digital learning games.

Shortcomings in the implementation of the distributed management model: TLU's management system is characterised by highly dispersed management. Although this ensures the involvement of staff at all levels, in practice it has led to inconsistency/excessive variability/lack of coherence in its implementation. It is recommended that TLU develops reporting and monitoring of academic units in a way that ensures continuity of practice and compliance with documented rules throughout the university and thus the harmonisation of the organisational culture. Although the development plans of the different units are based on the university's strategic plans, they are still not fully aligned. In order to ensure an appropriate and coherent approach to the priorities of the TLU throughout the university, the development plans of both academic and support units need to be aligned with them.

Gaps in quality culture: Quality issues may not always reach decision-makers, and pragmatic solutions to problems at unit level are not necessarily in line with university policy. In order to close the gaps in the quality management of TLU and to harmonise quality management processes across different units, it is recommended to develop a clear framework that explains and links processes at different levels of quality management and specifies who is responsible for what. Currently, the exchange of best practices is taking place through different networks and informal channels and lacks a systematic approach. It is desirable for the

TLU to develop a system for the sharing of best practices and to develop a structure for analysing and exchanging quality-relevant information outside existing networks.

Shortcomings in the delivery of the digital learning game study programme: In the curriculum of digital learning games, a significant part of the studies (including basic courses) is carried out by master students on the second year of the same study programme. A sufficient number of qualified teaching staff must be ensured for the high-quality delivery of the study programme.

13. According to subsection 53(1)(2) of the Administrative Procedure Act, a secondary condition to an administrative act is an additional obligation relating to the basic regulation of an administrative act and, pursuant to clause 3, an additional condition for the creation of a right arising from the basic regulation of the administrative act. Sections 53(2)(2) and (3) of the APA provide that a secondary condition may be imposed for an administrative act if the administrative act should not be issued without a secondary condition or if the administrative act is to be resolved on the basis of administrative discretion.

14. Considering the strengths and shortcomings set out in point 12, and on the basis of point 43.7 of the 'Guide to institutional accreditation', the Council considered that it was possible to adopt a more positive decision if the university met some conditionalities set out in a secondary condition.

Based on the above mentioned, the Council

DECIDED

To accredit Tallinn University for seven years with the following secondary condition:

The University of Tallinn shall submit a report in English by 7.06.2022 at the latest on the activities launched by the university in order to remedy the shortcomings set out in clause 12.3. Members of the Committee shall be involved in the assessment of the fulfilment of the secondary condition.

The decision was adopted by 11 votes in favour. Against 0.

15. If Tallinn University fails to comply with the secondary condition within the set deadline, the Council shall revoke the accreditation decision or set a new secondary condition.

16. The accreditation is valid until 7.06.2028 or until the decision is revoked. The time of the next institutional accreditation will be agreed among EKKA and Tallinn University by 7.06.2027.

17. The Council suggests to Tallinn University to submit in English, together with a report on the fulfilment of the secondary condition, an overview of the

activities of the university regarding the consideration of other areas of improvement and recommendations set out in the Council decision no later than on 7 June 2022.

18. A person who finds that his or her rights have been violated or his or her freedoms restricted by this decision may file a challenge with the EKKA Quality Assessment Council within 30 days after the person filing the challenge became or should have become aware of the contested finding. The Council shall forward the challenge to its Appeals Committee who shall provide an unbiased opinion in writing regarding the validity of the challenge to the Council, within five days after receipt of the challenge. The Council shall resolve the challenge within ten days of its receipt, taking into account the reasoned opinion of the Appeals Committee. If the challenge needs to be investigated further, the deadline for its review by the Council may be extended by a maximum of thirty days. A legal challenge to this decision is possible within 30 days after its delivery, by filing an action with the Tallinn courthouse of the Tallinn Administrative Court under the procedure provided for in the Code of Administrative Court Procedure.

Eve Eisenschmidt
Chairman of the Council

Hillar Bauman
Secretary of the Council