



HAKA

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Kvaliteediagentuur

Assessment Report on Fulfilling the Requirements of
the Secondary Condition of Social Services Study
Programme Group

Tallinn University

2023



Table of contents

Introduction	3
Background and aim of the assessment	3
Assessment process	3
General progress report.....	4
Report on fulfilling the requirements of the secondary condition.....	5

Introduction

Background and aim of the assessment

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 Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education approved by EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education.

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 quality assessment of social services study programme group of Tallinn University took place in October 2020. EKKA Council decided at its meeting on 27.01.2021, that the next assessment is to take place in seven years if the HEI meets certain requirements set by the Council.

The task of the current expert panel was to evaluate whether the requirements (secondary condition) set by the Council have been met by Tallinn University.

The expert panel consisted of the following members:

Professor Kerstin Svensson	School of Social Work, Lund university, Sweden
Senior Lecturer Louis Charfe	School of Social Work, Care and Community, University of Central Lancashire, UK

Assessment process

The higher education institution sent its progress report on the fulfilment of the requirements of the secondary condition to HAKA on 27.01.2023

The members of the expert panel wrote the report based on the written materials presented by the HEI and the information obtained in the interviews held (electronically) on 03.05.2023.

In the following sections, the expert panel summarises their findings regarding the fulfilment of the secondary condition and provides feedback on the progress the HEI has made in connection with experts' recommendations made in the assessment report in 2020.

In finalising the assessment report, the expert panel took into consideration comments made by the institution. The panel submitted the final report to HAKA on 09 June 2023.

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

General progress report

General assessment of the actions taken by the Tallinn University with regard to improvement areas presented in the HAKA Council decision on 27.01.2021.

Comments

It stands clear that a lot of activities have taken place since the last institutional accreditation. The presented written material, supported by the interview show how a new master's program in Child Welfare has been developed, the amount of internships in the programme is expanded, literature and other resources for supporting a wider language use (Estonian, English, Russian) has been developed and structures for collaboration within and between each study programme has been further enhanced. There have been many positive changes made to the various programmes within the department based on the recommendations made in the original assessment report. Enhanced collaboration, providing literature and other resources in different languages, facilitating for international exchange for both teachers and students as well as safeguarding that each programme is related to the labour market are important work done for all the programmes. Other measures taken have been more specific for each programme, why we mention some examples:

The programme for Health Promotion Specialist has introduced a feedback system for alumni, which inform about the labour market and also opens for new possibilities for internship places. The programme's relation to the labour market has also been strengthened through development of job specifications together with national organisations.

The PHE in Youth Work and MA in Youth Work Management are in a process of further developing their theoretical awareness in the programmes. This is done by close collaboration with MA students in data collection and discussions with alumni and partners, but also with other youth work academics. For policy makers better understanding of youth work several information efforts have been made through videos on Youtube and other social media blogs, podcasts, traditional media etc. Also here, students and alumni are active partners in the work. For the MA in Youth Work management, a new course has been developed with clearer focus on economics, and another will be revised this year for topics related to administration.

The programmes in Social Pedagogy and Social Work have jointly taken help from international colleagues for developing the subject-specific content in the courses, so that they are more specific for their respective degrees. They have more explicitly related the study programmes to the professional standards for each discipline.

The programmes in Social Pedagogy are supported by a newly created doctoral position for studies in topic related issues for social pedagogy. Seminars on social pedagogy are now held twice a year and monthly meetings for teaching staff on literature, assignments and other curriculum issues are also held twice a year. There are also annual curriculum council meetings where relevant professional organisations, representatives from the labour market, alumni and staff meet. This is a very positive development. The MA programme in social pedagogy and child protection is closed and replaced by the new MA programme in Child Welfare.

The BA and MA programmes in Social Work have extended the amount of internship, and also further developed the collaboration with the internship's organisations. New admission requirements have been established for MA level and a compulsory compensatory module is

demanded for students without BA in Social Work. The MA in Social Entrepreneurship has a project running 2021-23 for supporting how university activities' impact on society can be measured.

Commendations

- The collaboration within the university, the programme group as well as between the different programmes is very well developed. The interview supported the documents that a tight collaboration have made the amendments and development of a new programme possible, despite several involved programmes and also on different campuses. This has helped there be more clear definitions between courses as well as collaboration where there is a similar focus.
- The range of digital media platforms being used and content being produced by students on the Youth Work programme was identified as innovative and also an area of excellence.
- The panel would also like to commend the university staff on the collaboration they have developed between themselves and various ministry departments such as the Ministry of Education and Research and the Estonia Association of Social Pedagogues. This has meant that courses are being developed in line with the relevant professional standards and with regards to the professional skills and competencies the students need to demonstrate as part of their studies and internships.

Further considerations

- A possible challenge for the future is to uphold the close collaboration with all relevant parties. So far, there is no sign of any problem, but as it demands continued regular meetings and information exchange, there is always a risk that the interest might decrease after a while. Allowing staff time to maintain these links is important and should be recognised in their workloads where possible.
- The issue of supporting students on their internships whilst they also manage personal commitments and their studies will be a continued challenged due to external conditions. However, there has been positive progress and the department has worked hard to make sure these are more flexible to accommodate student's personal commitments. This is an on-going issue for all universities where their courses have an internship requirement and the need to balance this with supporting their students. The staff team are well aware of this issue and should continue to reflect on how they can do this effectively.
- As the new Master in Child Welfare develops the course team need to develop academic assessments and assignments for the taught modules, that support students to link their theoretical learning to their practice in a meaningful way that supports their learning and direct practice.

Report on fulfilling the requirements of the secondary condition

At its meeting on 27.01.2021 HAKA Council decided that the next assessment of social services study programme group of Tallinn University will take place in seven years but set a secondary condition that the university must meet in two years.

The following are the requirements set by the HAKA Council to be met by Tallinn University, and the expert panel's assessment on the developments the Tallinn University has made in this regard.

The structure and content of modules and courses in a study programme support achievement of the objectives and designed learning outcomes of the study programme.

It is difficult to achieve in depth knowledge of the field on the Master level study programmes in the Social Services study programme group at Tallinn University, in particular on the Social Pedagogy and Child Protection as well as Social Work programmes, because there is no eligibility criterion requiring previous education in a similar field, graduates of whatever Bachelor programmes are admitted. Therefore, a significant amount of time is spent on covering topics during the Master studies that should rather be the pre-condition for admission to the study programmes. Admission criteria for Master's programmes should be clarified in order to ensure the achievement of learning outcomes corresponding to the Master's level for all students.

Assessment of the expert panel: the secondary condition is fully met

Evidence and analysis

The MA programme in Social Pedagogy and Child Protection is closed.

A new two-year master's programme in Child Welfare has been developed with the complications from the former well in mind. Now, the admission is well controlled, the demands on the students' set standards that facilitate learning outcomes on master's level. This programme will start in 2023. As shown in the study programme form, admission to the programme require bachelor's degree in social work or social pedagogics, Diploma in Professional Higher Education, or corresponding qualifications. Admission of students from other specialities than social work demands a completion of prerequisite compulsory courses, minimum 25 ECTS, before application. The admission exam includes interview, CV and letter of motivation.

The objectives of the Child Welfare programme aim towards deepened generic knowledge in the field, with more specific knowledge in areas such as systematic knowledge, managing and leading child welfare as well as developing this practice on local and national level.

The study programme modules are organised with a combination of compulsory and elective courses, why there is a common core, but also possibilities for a kind of specialisation. Language in relevant languages is possible to study in elective courses, specifically English, but also other languages. Fieldwork for 10 ECTS is compulsory.

The MA in Social Work has new admission requirements that ensure relevant knowledge in social work for studies on MA level. The compulsory compensatory module is a requirement also for students without BA in Social Work for admission to this MA programme.

Conclusion

The requirement of the secondary condition is fully met. The admission criteria do now ensure that the MA students have relevant knowledge for studies in MA level, which supports the students in achieving in depth knowledge of the field.

Strengths

- The emphasis on admission requirements, and an admission process that include both written material and interviews is a very good way of ensuring that the students have relevant knowledge to build further understanding from.

- The focus on Child Welfare is good. This is one of the most central areas for social work and social pedagogy, and also an area more relevant to a broad range of qualified staff.
- The focus on leadership is also an important one and links directly to the professional standards held by the Ministry of Social Affairs.
- The teaching will also cover an international perspective which will support students to have the ability to critically analyse and understand the competing theories within child welfare and examples of innovative and best practice.

Opportunities for further improvement

- It would also be best practice for the course team to make sure that all assignments and assessments on this programme focus on supporting students to apply their learning to their practice. This could be done in a range of creative ways but with a focus on how the theoretical application has supported the student to develop their practice and the outcomes of this. For example, how have they used a theoretical framework in practice and what was the outcome?
- While the more focussed programme facilitates deeper knowledge, the stricter demands for admission might lead to fewer students. It is reasonable to be prepared for not only new students, with different background, but maybe also a different number of students. This, and much more, will show, when the programme has started and might demand that new forms of solutions are demanded in specific situation.

Practical and theoretical studies are interconnected. The organisation and the content of practical training support achievement of planned learning outcomes and meet the needs of the stakeholders.

The practical training included in the curricula of the Social Services study programme group is often too short, unstructured and raises questions about the competency of graduates. Practical training should be better integrated into the curricula and should allow for actual practice, not mere observation. Practical training should likewise be more thoroughly supervised by teaching staff.

Assessment of the expert panel: the secondary condition is fully met

Evidence and analysis

The study programme of Health Promotion has an internship constituting 30 ECTS and the study programme of Youth Work 29 ECTS, due to their character of being professional higher educations. Even if the extent of the internship has not changed, cooperation with internship organisations has been improved and expanded. The structure of the internship in Youth Work comprises of five different parts where the students step wise get more and more into the practice. Here, internship packages are developed together with organisations so that an overview of the full internship can be found.

The study programmes in social work have both extended the internships and developed new ways of working with internship courses. The volume has increased from 6 to 10 ECTS in both BA and MA programmes. The competences that should be reached is directly linked to competencies described in the Social Work Qualification Standard, which aligns the training with the future professional demands. Beyond the specific courses of internships, there are courses in Internship Based Field

Visits (4 ECTS) and Fieldwork in Community (4 ECTS) in the BA studies. In the MA programme, the competences to be reached are aligned with Level VII Social Worker Occupational Qualification.

The BA study programme of Social Pedagogy has three modules of internship, in total 18 ECTS. There is a structured plan for the three modules and an aim to reach then occupational standards.

Cooperation with supervisors is maintained or further developed. Close contacts between the university teachers and the supervisors in practice are upheld through structured collaboration, where even job shadowing in internship organisations is possible as well as including supervisors in other study related activities. The students work with portfolios that are assessed in relation to the aims. In the ongoing process, the next step is to enhance skills in and through working with AI, a new project is started.

Conclusion

The requirement of the secondary condition is fully met. Practical training is now well integrated in all curricula. The study programmes are clearly related to professional standards, the periods of internships are now of relevant length, they are well structured in relation to each other, with clearly defined assignments, and there is a close collaboration with the organisations for internship.

Strengths

- The close contact between the programme staff and the organisations for internship provides a solid base for keeping good quality of the internship.
- The increased volume of internship and the structured modules has good chances to support the students' learning processes.
- Working with portfolios is a very good way of helping the students get a comprehensive understanding of their competencies.
- The reflective peer activity was highlighted as an example of good practice that also helps strengthen the students learning.
- The linking of aims to professional demands supports the students' readiness for practice.
- The work the university staff do with the various ministry departments in developing skills and professional standards which are then reflected in the teaching.

Opportunities for further improvement

- The MA study of Youth Work Management are still in an ongoing process. With support from the development in the other programmes, there are good chances for a positive outcome. At this moment it is though to early to tell.
- The extensive collaboration with the organisations for field practice is crucial. Thus, it is important that staff are given sufficient time within their workload to continue the partnership working that has been developed.

There is a sufficient supply of textbooks and other teaching aids, and they are available.

There is good access to electronic literature in English available in the Social Services study programme group at Tallinn University, but students would also like to use materials in Estonian and hard copies of textbooks. Many students will also need to know the terminology in Russian in their future work. The University should take a consistent approach to using materials in appropriate languages in teaching and learning.

Assessment of the expert panel: the secondary condition is fully met

Evidence and analysis

It is clear that there has been lots of work done and continues to be done on making sure there are a wide range of textbooks and learning resources. The university has the added pressure of making sure that these are in a range of languages to reflect the ethnic diversity of the Estonian population, as well as that many social science resources are in English. Throughout the department it was clear to the panel that their staff had developed and strengthened student access to a wide range of materials. These were also from a wide range of Estonian organisations which could be clearly seen for example in the health promotions programme in particular. Estonian articles and scientific literature have been translated, teaching staff have been active in developing material and applying for funding for doing so. Courses and textbooks in Russian have been developed for supporting students' language skills needed in practice.

Staff within the department are part of working groups within various ministry departments, each with a different focus and theme. These working groups are developing a range of suitable materials for the programmes within the department which means that they are up to date and relevant to current practice within the student's field of study. As a result of these developments the university staff interviewed confirmed that there had been more student engagement with these new materials.

Conclusion

The requirement of the secondary condition is fully met. Literature is now available in relevant languages, in print as well as in digital formats. Language courses are offered and textbook is produced in Russian. Literature in Estonian is used through material from both scientific journal and reports from public bodies etc.

Strengths

- On the Youth Work programme the panel was very impressed with the range of digital materials the students not only had access to but were also producing. These included blogs and podcasts which were aimed at raising awareness of this field of study as well as employment opportunities. These will also be useful resources for future students.
- Using thematic editions of scientific journals, as *Sotsiaaltöö* in Social Work, is a very good way of letting the students be familiar with new scientific publications in their own language
- There continues to be very positive collaboration between ministries, professional bodies and social science organisations and the university in developing materials.
- There have been several conferences and formal partnerships made between international universities that again have produced materials that can be accessed by students.
- Courses in Russian is offered and literature in Russian is developed, which will be a good support for social work students.

Opportunities for further improvement

- The panel would suggest that the social pedagogy programmes consider using the Social Pedagogy Across Europe MOOC as a free resources their students can access.

The launch or development of the study programme is based on the Standard of Higher Education and other legislation, development plans, analyses (including labour market and feasibility analyses).

Neither the identities of the study programmes nor the boundaries between them are clear for the study programmes in the Social Services study programme group at Tallinn University. The links between the Social Work study programmes and cooperation with other study programmes in the study programme group, i.e., with the Social Pedagogy and Child Protection study programmes, should be clearly defined. More attention should be paid to defining the potential employment opportunities for graduates. For example, the links between the Health Promotion Specialist's study programme and the labour market needs remain unclear.

Assessment of the expert panel: the secondary condition is fully met

Evidence and analysis

Both the written reports and the interview have shown that the study programme group of Social Services has developed structures for contacts between the programmes. Regular meeting are being held for exchange and collaboration between the programmes and the responsible persons for upholding the contacts are clearly defined. These structures facilitates both collaboration when there are joint interests and needs in the programmes, and forums for being more explicit in expressing the different programmes identities.

Each programme is aligned with relevant standards in their professional field and ready to develop the programme when the professional standards are changed. This is the case for Youth Work already in 2023, why a preparation for amendments are planned. The descriptions of possible jobs from each programme is published on the website and is continuously checked and changed when needed.

The panel saw and heard evidence about the extensive collaboration and positive impact of collaboration and joint working with the Education and Youth Board, the Ministry of Education and Research, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Estonian Association of Youth Workers, the Estonian Social Work Association and many other organisations, for facilitating the alignment between the programmes and the needs in the labour market.

The Health Promotion programme are in a process of implementing tools for better connection between the students and their future employers. As a first step, a survey was conducted with alumni. With this as a base, together with extensive collaboration with organisations from the labour market, a job specification of a Health Promotion Specialist has been created and the programme has also been connected to an international collaboration, Age-friendly society. The results have been integrated in the development of courses and internships.

Conclusion

The requirement of the secondary condition is fully met. There is a clear alignment between the curricula and the professional standards for each discipline. Each programme has structures for upholding their specific identities through internal meetings and external collaborations, while a solid cooperation between the programmes also is established.

Strengths

- The embedded professional standards in the aims for each programme supports the potential employment opportunities for students and graduates.
- The close link between the university department and relevant ministries helps strengthen the employment opportunities for graduates and students.
- The fact that many graduates find employment within the ministries is a very positive situation which supports the partnership and collaboration and ultimately ensures that teaching supports students to gain the relevant knowledge but also meet any professional standards.
- Also, the relationships the staff have with other universities are beneficial, for example that Youth Work lecturers have worked closely with the University of Tartu to set up regular meetings with the Youth and Talent Policy department within the Ministry of Education and Research.
- Where there had been an overlap there is now a clearer identity for each programme within the joint modules that is working well. This also reflects the multi-agency working that students will experience once they qualify and have to work in partnership with other professionals. A shared understanding is helpful and a key skill.
- There has been lots of work done to strengthen the link between the labour market and the specialist studies on the Health Promotion programme. The knowledge and experiences from alumni, field visits and internships are used for developing a database of potential employers. Updating of the described content in the presentation of the programme on the website will facilitate for employers to get knowledge on the graduates' competences. Thereto, the council of the Study Programme has regular meetings and the teaching staff collaborate in national committees for development of occupational skills. A member of Estonian Qualifications Authority will be included in HC.

Opportunities for further improvement

- As the department develops the master's programme in Child Welfare they have to monitor the development and make sure that the programme is relevant to current practice and supports the development of positive practice.
- The development of the Health Promotion programme is still in process. The plan is realistic and relevant. Still, it is important that this process also is given the needed resources for its implementation and that the process is monitored and adjusted when needed.