Decision Regarding Assessment of the Architecture and Civil Engineering Study Programme Group at the Level of Doctoral Studies
Tallinn University of Technology

20/06/2018

The Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education at the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education decided to approve the report by the Assessment Committee and to conduct the next quality assessment of the Architecture and Civil Engineering study programme group at the level of doctoral studies at the Tallinn University of Technology in seven years with a secondary condition.

On the basis of subsection 10 (4) of the Universities Act and points 40.1 and 41 of the 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups at the Level of Doctoral Studies', authorised in points 3.7.3 and 3.7.1 of the Statutes of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (hereinafter referred to as 'EKKA'), the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education (hereinafter referred to as 'the Council') affirms the following:

1. On 20.04.2017 Tallinn University of Technology and EKKA agreed upon a time frame to conduct a quality assessment of the study programme group.

2. The Director of EKKA, by her order on 26.02.2018, approved the following composition of the Quality Assessment Committee for the Architecture and Civil Engineering study programme group at the level of doctoral studies at the Tallinn University of Technology (hereinafter referred to as 'the Committee'):

Mark G Richardson	Chairman of the Committee, Professor Emeritus, University College Dublin (Ireland)
Ruben Paul Borg	Professor, University of Malta (Malta)
Piia Markkanen	Doctoral student, University of Oulu (Finland)
Indrek Raide	Nordic Energy Solutions (Estonia)

3. Tallinn University of Technology submitted the following doctoral programme for evaluation under the Architecture and Civil Engineering study programme group:

   Civil and Environmental Engineering

4. Tallinn University of Technology submitted a self-evaluation report to the EKKA Bureau on 16.01.2018, and the assessment coordinator forwarded it to the Committee on 15.02.2018.

5. An assessment visit to the Tallinn University of Technology took place on 11 and 12 April 2018.

6. The Committee sent its draft assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 18.05.2018, and EKKA forwarded it to the Tallinn University of Technology for its comments on 21.05.2018 and the University delivered its response on 30.05.2018.

7. The Committee submitted its final assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 30.05.2018. The assessment report is an integral part of the decision. The report is available on the EKKA website.

8. The Secretary of the Council forwarded the Committee's final assessment report along with the University's self-evaluation report to the Council members on 4.06.2018.

9. The Council with 9 members present discussed these received documents in its session on 21.08.2018 and, based on the assessment report, decided to point out the following strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations regarding the Architecture and Civil Engineering study programme group at the level of doctoral studies at the Tallinn University of Technology.

Strengths

1) Study programmes' development corresponds well to the strategies of the University and is based on outcome indicators.
2) The doctoral programme mostly relies on research teams having the necessary critical mass. Research themes comply with the national as well as University strategies.
3) The practice of considering articles presented at international conferences as meeting the requirements of publications for the doctoral thesis is also welcome.
4) An invaluable element for research teams is a collaboration with companies in the field of construction, and as a part of it, an industrial doctorate programme that allows grasping the socio-economic realities.
5) The University has a harmonised remuneration system in place for doctoral students, providing them with an income twice the amount of national doctoral stipend.
6) A principle that there cannot be more than five supervisees per supervisor is used to ensure adequate supervision.
7) The infrastructure, including laboratories, are of excellent quality.
8) An excellent example of interdisciplinary research cooperation is the near-zero energy test building.
9) The evaluation process of PhD students facilitates completing the studies within the standard period of study and helps to identify students who are not making enough progress, early on.
10) Teaching staff and supervisors are internationally recognised professionals.
11) New members of the teaching staff are systematically involved as co-supervisors, while more experienced colleagues act as their mentors.
12) The competition model of supervisors is used for creating PhD places.

13) New PhD places are created only if sustainable funding is ensured. Competition for PhD places is international.
14) Supervisors and PhD students work closely together in drafting the study plan. PhD students actively participate in the courses of other universities and research institutions (including international).
15) Alumni and employers are involved in conducting PhD seminars and in the work of the study programme council, thereby contributing to developing a study programme that meets the needs of employers.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

1) In the Architecture and Urban Design field of study, only a few of the teaching staff have a doctoral degree. Although recognised architects are involved in teaching, they lack the qualifications needed for supervising doctoral students. To fully develop the Architecture and Urban Design field of study, the relevant research focus has to be strengthened at the University, more members of the teaching staff and supervisors shall have a PhD degree; also, better use should be made of collaboration and synergies with the long-standing and successful research teams of the Construction field of study.
2) The description of the subjects of the doctoral programme is too general. They should be more detailed so the doctoral students could make informed decisions in planning their studies.
3) Feedback procedure for different parties should be more individualised and meaningful. There are six very general questions in the feedback questionnaire for PhD students that are addressed to the entire student body. Gathering feedback from alumni is centralised in the University, and the response rate is poor.
4) Doctoral students, particularly international doctoral students, shall be better integrated with the activities of the Institute as a community.
5) The admission procedure for PhD students has to be revisited to make it more transparent. Currently, the opinion of the potential supervisor carries a substantial weight, which can cause bias to prefer the master's graduates of the Tallinn University of Technology. The share of international doctoral students shall be increased.
6) The model for covering maintenance, development and replacement costs of laboratories shall be carefully considered, keeping in mind that the funding will be reduced soon.
7) A minimum number of academic staff that is needed for obtaining the status of research teams shall be put in place for optimum use of resources.
8) PhD students are not very well aware of their rights and obligations concerning the organisation of doctoral studies, supervision and counselling. PhD students shall be offered an orientation course on these topics at the beginning of their studies. The orientation training should go further from being merely a part of communication between the PhD student and their supervisor.
9) A frequent problem with the industrial doctorate programme is that the covered topics do not offer enough for a doctoral thesis, nor do they meet the established standards, which means students are unable to publish articles in high-level research journals. While creating an industrial doctorate place, it has to be kept in mind that the problem set would meet the requirements for a PhD thesis.
10) The income of doctoral students consists of a national stipend and a contractual amount paid by the University. The contract should define the workload of the doctoral student, to make sure they are not overwhelmed with teaching, administrative tasks and research that is not linked to the topic of their doctoral thesis.

11) The learning experience of PhD students may vary depending on the size of the research teams and the supervisor. More sense of community shall be created among the PhD students of the entire study programme, as well as more opportunities for debates, socialising, informal events and sharing of experiences; this could also include, for example, overarching PhD seminars for research teams.
12) It is recommended to engage PhD students in writing project applications as a part of their doctoral studies.
13) PhD students should be prepared to present their research to a wider audience in order to understand its broader relevance and impact for society.
14) Supervisors shall inform PhD students more actively about the opportunities for international mobility and encourage them to take maximum advantage of these opportunities to make international collaboration an integral part of their PhD studies.
15) A clear distinction shall be made between the first evaluation of PhD students (12 to 18 months after enrolling) and the following evaluations. The first evaluation indicates explicitly whether the student continues their PhD studies or not, while the following evaluations contribute to graduating within the standard term. Also, a procedure for challenging the evaluation result shall be established.
16) The share of international teaching staff shall be increased to facilitate international research collaboration and better mobility of PhD students. A separate plan for recruitment of international doctoral students, post-doctoral researchers and teaching staff should be established at the University level.

10. Point 41 of the 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups at the Level of Doctoral Studies' establishes that the Quality Assessment Council shall approve an assessment report within three months after receipt of the report. The Council shall weigh the strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations outlined in the assessment report, and decide whether to conduct the next quality assessment of that study programme group in seven, five or three years.

11. The Council weighed the strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations presented in point 9 of this document and found that the study programme, the teaching conducted under these programmes, and development activities regarding teaching and learning conform to the requirements on the condition that the University eliminates the following shortcoming:

- Clause 6 (7) 2) of the Regulation of the Government of the Republic 'Higher Education Standard' sets out that *conducting the studies meets the requirements if a lecturer or a researcher conducting the studies (which according to clause 2 (6) of the Higher Education Standard also covers supervisors) has the necessary teaching competencies and their qualification supports achieving the objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme.* Only a few members of the teaching staff of the Civil and Environmental Engineering doctoral programme in Architecture and Urban Design (under its new name Civil Engineering and Architecture) hold a doctoral degree. Although recognised architects are involved in teaching, they lack the qualifications needed for supervising PhD students. To fully develop the Architecture and Urban Design field of study, the relevant research focus has to be strengthened at the University, more members of the teaching staff and supervisors shall have a PhD degree; also, better use should be made of collaboration and synergies with the long-standing and successful research teams of the construction field of study.
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12. According to clause 53 (1) 2) of the Administrative Procedure Act, *the secondary condition of an administrative act is an additional duty related to the principal regulation of the administrative act* and, also, according to clause 53 (1) 3), *a supplementary condition for the creation of a right arising from the principal regulation of the administrative act*. Clauses 53 (2) 2) and 3) of the Administrative Procedure Act stipulate that *a secondary condition may be imposed on an administrative act, if the administrative act cannot be issued without the secondary condition* or if the *issue of the administrative act must be resolved based on the administrative right of discretion*. The Council found that the next quality assessment of the group of programmes shall be conducted without a secondary condition in five years and based on points 40.1 and 41 of the 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups at the Level of Doctoral Studies'

DECIDED

to approve the assessment report and to conduct the next quality assessment of the Architecture and Civil Engineering study programme group at the level of doctoral studies at the Tallinn University of Technology in seven years with the following secondary condition:

Tallinn University of Technology submits a report in English by 20.06.2020 at the latest about eliminating the shortcoming described in point 11. Members of the Assessment Committee will be involved to assess compliance with the secondary condition.

The decision was adopted by 9 votes in favour and 0 against.

13. The Council proposes that the Tallinn University of Technology submits an action plan to EKKA about other areas for improvement and recommendations pointed out in the report no later than 20.06.2020.

14. 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
Chair of the Council

Hillar Bauman
Secretary of the Council