EKKA

ESTONIAN QUALITY AGENCY
FOR HIGHER AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Report for Institutional Accreditation

University of Tartu

2022

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Introduction

Institutional accreditation

'**Institutional accreditation**' is the process of external evaluation which assesses the conformity of a University or higher education institution`s management, work procedures, study and research activities and environment to both legislation and the goals and development plan of the higher education institution itself. This is feedback-based evaluation in which an international assessment panel analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the institution of higher education based on the self-assessment report of the institution and on information obtained during the assessment visit, providing recommendations for improvement and ways of implementing them.

The goal of institutional accreditation is to support the development of strategic management and quality culture that values learning-centeredness, creativity and innovation in the higher education institutions (**HEIs**), as well as to increase the societal impact of education, research and development delivered by the HEIs.

HEIs are assessed according to twelve standards of institutional accreditation. Assessment focuses on the core processes of the HEI – learning and teaching, research, development and creative activities, and service to society – as well as on strategic management of the organisation and resource management. The learning and teaching process is examined in more detail under five standards (study programme, teaching staff, learning and teaching, student assessment, and learning support processes). Throughout the assessment process, there is a focus on academic ethics, quality culture and internationalisation.

The Institutional Accreditation Report consists of two parts: (1) evaluation of twelve institutional accreditation standards, and (2) a report on quality assessment of a sample of study programmes.

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

The institutional accreditation of the University of Tartu took place in April 2022. The Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA) composed an international expert panel, which was approved by the higher education institution. The composition of the panel was thereafter approved by the order of EKKA director.

The composition of the expert panel was as follows:

Jürgen Kohler	Chair, Professor, former Rector, Greifswald University, Germany
Fiona Crozier	Secretary; independent consultant, UK
Engel-Mari Mölder	Student, Tallinn University of Technology, Estonia

Liz Bacon	Professor, Principal and Vice-Chancellor; UK; President of EQANIE
Laurent Counillon	Professor, University Nice Sophia Antipolis, France
Markus Dettenhofer	Senior Consultant, Research and Innovation Governance at World Bank; National Secretariat of Science, Technology and Innovation, member of the Advisory Council, Panama; Czech University of Life Sciences, scientist
Anca Greere	Professor in English Linguistics and Translation Studies, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania; (previously) Quality Assurance Manager, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, United Kingdom
Aalt Willem Heringa	Professor; Dean of the Law School; Maastricht University; The Netherlands
Jonas Hinnfors	Professor, University of Gothenburg, Sweden
Sokratis K. Katsikas	Director, Norwegian Center for Cybersecurity in Critical Sectors (NORCICS), Dept. of Information Security and Communication Technology, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Gjøvik, Norway. Former Rector of the Open University of Cyprus
Andres Kütt	Jio Egov Center of Excellence, CTO, Estonia
Oliver Vettori	Dean Accreditations & Quality Management / Director Programme Management & Teaching and Learning Support, WU Vienna; Austria

Assessment process

The assessment process was coordinated by EKKA staff – Mr Hillar Bauman and Ms Jekaterina Trofimov.

The Panel held two preparatory meetings, the first on February 25, 2022 when the schedule, background and approach to the visit were discussed and agreed, and the second on March 28, 2022, when the Panel agreed the questions and the handling of the meetings. Meetings were held with staff, students, and external stakeholders of the University of Tartu from 11 to 14 April.

In finalizing the assessment report, the panel took into consideration comments made by the institution. The panel submitted the final report to EKKA on July 5, 2022.

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

Information about the University of Tartu

Introduction and history

The University of Tartu (UT) is one of the oldest universities in Northern and Eastern Europe and was founded in 1632 by King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden. During the university's 390 years, teaching has been conducted in Latin, German, Russian and several other languages. On 1 December 1919, the Estonian-language University of Tartu of the Republic of Estonia was opened.

The UT is a public university operating under the University of Tartu Act, the Higher Education Act, Organisation of Research and Development Act and its statutes and under the framework created by other legislation. It is the largest university in Estonia and is in the top 1% of the world's most cited universities and research institutions in twelve fields of research.

As Estonia's national university, the UT works to preserve and develop the Estonian language and culture, to offer higher education in Estonian, to preserve the national cultural heritage and provide the related services to the public. The University's mission is to advance science and culture, provide the possibilities for the acquisition of higher education based on the development of science and technology at the three levels of higher education in the field of the humanities, social, medical and natural science and to provide public services based on teaching, research and other creative activities.

Structure and governance

The highest decision-making body of the UT is the Council, which is responsible for the UT's economic activities and long-term development, approves the UT's statutes and adopts the strategic plan and budget. The Senate is the UT's academic decision-making body and is responsible for the teaching, research and development at the university.

The Rector is accountable for actioning the decisions of the council and senate and manages the everyday activities of the UT, is responsible for the lawful and expedient use of the university's assets and implements the highest administrative and disciplinary authority in the university within the rector's competence.

During the analysis period, the UT's development was strongly influenced by the reform of its governance and structure which aimed to better align the decisions of different governance levels with the UT's general objectives, to create better conditions for applying academic excellence in teaching and research and to ensure the UT's balanced and sustainable development when implementing its mission.

Statistics and key performance indicators (KPIs)

In 2020, the University had 3,767 members of staff, of which 1,607 were academics and 248 were international. In that year, UT counted 2,813 research publications. There were 13,641 students, 60.6% of which were at Bachelors, 31.1% at Masters and 8.3% at Doctoral level. There were 1,678 international students.

The UT's objectives are in line with national priorities and the expectations of society. The entire university community was involved in the preparation of Strategic Plan A2025 and trends in research

and higher education at the UT and in Estonia as a whole were discussed during its development. The KPI's associated with the current strategic plan include, among others:

- Percentage of international employees taking Estonian language courses (45%)
- Percentage of international students taking Estonian language courses (75%)
- Percentage of international graduates (13-15%)
  Percentage of international academic employees (15-20%)
  Percentage of students participating in learning mobility among graduates (18%)
- Student drop out rate (< 9%)
- Students' satisfaction with teaching of courses (95%)
- Percentage of publications among the world's top 10% most cited research publications (17-20)
- Volume of international research funding (mEUR) (17.8).

Main impressions of the self-evaluation report and the visit

According to UT, the drafting of the self-evaluation report (SER) was a joint effort across multiple working groups, involving around 80 people from both academic and support units as well as students. The process was led by the quality manager and discussions were held, background materials were shared and seminars and discussions took place with the representatives of faculties, the University of Tartu Student Union (UTSU) and support units. Finally, the draft SER was discussed by the senate and council.

In the view of the panel, the SER is a well-structured and well-written document, although in some areas it lacked useful detail. The list of strengths and areas for development at the end of each section provided a useful indicator as to how well the University feels that its processes are working, although this could have been more analytical in parts.

The panel found the site visit to be well-organised and attended. All those members of staff and students that met with the panel were open and transparent in their discussions and the interviews provided the panel with the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the documentation and of the University as a whole.

The panel would like to take this opportunity to thank the University for the care with which it organised the site visit and would like to thank all those who attended the interviews.

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

At the previous institutional accreditation, UT received recommendations under the headings of Organisation and Management; Teaching and Learning; Research, Development and/or Other Creative Activity and Serving Society. The recommendations correspond to the current standards 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11 and 12; the main detail of the response to the recommendations is to be found in this report, in the commentary under the relevant standard. A summary is given below:

Standard 2:

The previous accreditation report included two recommendations as follows: "the Committee recommends that the University implement fairly, consistently and without delay its proposed system of professional review"; and "the Committee recommends that the University ensures that systematic annual staff performance appraisal is carried out". The University has successfully worked towards addressing these recommendations. Details can be found in Standard 2 below.

Standard 4:

The previous accreditation report included a recommendation that 'The University should provide clear and accessible guidance on ethical behaviour.' The April 2022 Accreditation Team concludes that this recommendation has been fully met by the UT through a range of documents and procedures. Please refer to Standard 4 details below.

Standard 5

UT received three recommendations relating to Internationalisation in its last institutional accreditation; these related to the need to increase student international mobility (both incoming and outgoing); the need to increase the number of curricula taught in English and the need to consider the impact of any tension between the goals of being an international university and the promoter of Estonian language and culture. The University responded to all of these points, which are dealt with under Standard 5 below.

Standard 6

The previous accreditation report included the following recommendations: '1) The university should implement fairly, consistently and without delay its proposed system of professional review. 2) The university should ensure that annual staff performance appraisal is carried out with all employees. 3) The university should give consideration to whether the gender pay gap can be reduced further.' UT has met these recommendations. As for staff appraisal (recommendations 1 and 2 above), UT has introduced formalized, systematic evaluation of its staff every five years, which considers the key factors of staff performance such as teaching, administration and development of teaching, research, development, and creative activities, participation in university governance and institutional development, and also social and public activities. As for reducing the gender pay gap (recommendation 3 above), UT has tackled the issue by conducting a broadly-based survey leading to a gender equality plan which contains diagnoses and recommendations for improvement. – For the recommendation to include staff participation in social and public activities, see above and the assessment related to Standard 12 below.

Standard 9

The previous accreditation report included the following recommendation: 'The University should systematically monitor the progress of doctoral students and create as favourable conditions as possible to help them complete their studies within the standard period of time.' UT has made improvements to conform with the recommendation made in the previous assessment. Monitoring of PhD students' academic progress has been made more consistent with the e-support in Moodle gradebook, which is being used by the faculties in an active way. E-support provides the possibility to

evaluate and track students as well as determine their levels in terms of study progress. Defending doctoral theses in a timely way is now supported by organising doctoral students' progress reviews as well as improving regulations of Regulations for Doctoral Students. For further detail, see Standard 9 below.

Standard 10

UT received one recommendation related to learning support systems: 'The Committee recommends that the University makes the monitoring of students' academic progress (both credit accumulation and grade achievement) consistent across the faculties so that both students at risk of failure and those performing exceptionally well can be identified and supported'. UT has responded to this point and has developed a dashboard to monitor the students in a consistent way. For further details, see Standard 10 below. UT has a reasonable understanding of the reasons for its students' drop out and is therefore able to provide support and interventions, while there is still scope for deeper analysis and more targeted support; for further detail, see Standard 8 below.

Standard 11

The previous accreditation report included the following three recommendations: 1) the duality contained in the UT's mission – an "internationally recognised research university" and a "national university responsible for the continuity of Estonian intellectuals and language and culture" – may hinder the realisation of the university's vision of a "rapidly developing international research university", as it requires a focused approach to the choice of areas; 2) potential risks of project-based (and thus unevenly distributed) research funding to the academic cohesion of the university should be mitigated; and 3) the university should systematically monitor the progress of doctoral students and create as favourable conditions as possible to help them complete their studies within the standard period of study. The University has successfully worked towards addressing these recommendations. Details can be found in the report on Standard 11 below.

Standard 12

The previous accreditation report included the following recommendation: 'To motivate teaching staff to participate in social and public activities and collect input for performance appraisals, the university would benefit from a respective monitoring system.' UT has addressed this recommendation sufficiently. Monitoring and assessment of social and public activities of staff were explicitly integrated into staff appraisal, and robust processes to do so are in place (see Standard 6 above).

Summary of the institutional accreditation findings

General Findings:

In general, the panel found the University to be a well-managed and responsive institution with strong goals and ambitions, particularly in relation to its dual role as promoter of the Estonian language and culture and its aim to be an international university that places Estonian higher education in a global context.

The University is staffed by well-qualified, motivated and committed personnel who teach and actively research in their fields. Substantial competence was shown by numerous University members in leading positions at all levels, both academic and administrative. Bottom-up participation and decentralised self-management are ensured. Therefore, a strong sense of ownership is felt throughout the University.

Considering the University in its context, there is a balance of strong features and challenges. Among the strong points in favour of the University are, apart from highly qualified, committed staff and its identification with the University, the well-founded aspiration of the University to be a highly reputable place of learning and research, and its high esteem which it rightly enjoys both in and outside Estonia. Among the challenges for the University are the decline in student numbers incurred in general by demographic trends, which may put small programmes under threat, and which is particularly felt due to the fact that the domestic market is small; the low level of national basic funding for research; and the University's off-centre location.

The commendations and recommendations that the panel set out in this report were evidenced not only through documentation and interviews at the site visit but also through the six study programmes that formed part of the institutional accreditation process.

Commendations:

The UT supports its overarching goals through its vision, mission and strategic management process that responds to European policies and expectations. Its processes for the recognition of prior learning are commendable across the institution and the learning and teaching at the UT, together with evidence of strong and impactful research are well-supported by appropriate learning resources.

Areas of concern and recommendations:

A key concern for the panel was the lack of connection between the central management policies and decisions and the resulting response or actions of the Schools and Institutes. This was demonstrated by a concrete lack of action planning to translate overarching strategic plans into concrete actions and also

in the lack of oversight and control of the quality management system; despite a widely shared ethos of trust and quality culture, there was little coordinated evidence of results or actions.

Although the panel recognised the tension for UT in working with its first two strategic goals of promoting the Estonian language and culture and being an international university, nevertheless, it is of the view that an institutional articulation of what it means to be an international university will assist UT in achieving its goals.

In addition, in order to ensure complete buy-in from its academic staff, a clearer progression route for promotion is necessary. The curriculum design process must be strengthened in order to ensure a systematic articulation of learning outcomes together with the teaching and assessment associated with these at module and programme level.

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

Key to evidence

E: interviews with employers and other external stakeholders

M: interviews with management staff

S: interviews with students

A: interviews with alumni

T: interviews with teaching staff

 R: inspection of resources (e.g. library, laboratories)

SER: Self-Evaluation Report

D: documentation (electronic and hardcopy)

W: website

1.1. Strategic management

Standard:

Development planning at the higher education institution is purposeful and systematic, involving various stakeholders.
The higher education institution regularly evaluates the achievement of its stated objectives and the impact of its activities.

Guidelines:
The HEI has formulated the objectives and key results for its core activities – learning and teaching; research, development and creative activities, and service to society – taking into account national priorities and the needs of society, focusing on its strengths and reducing unnecessary duplication both within the HEI and throughout higher education in Estonia.
The HEI is managed in accordance with its mission, vision and core values, as well as objectives set out on the basis of those principles. Responsibility for implementation of the goals and action plans of the development plan are clearly specified. Achievement of the objectives and effects of the activities are evaluated regularly. Creativity and innovation are supported and given value in both core and support activities.
Membership of the HEI (including students), as well as external stakeholders, is involved in developing and implementing the HEI's development plan and action plans. The HEI members share the core values that serve as a basis for the institution's development plan.

Indicators:

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

Evidence and analysis

The management structures and processes of the University of Tartu (UT) which underpin its strategic planning and implementation are clearly described, and these are in operation (SER, W). These structures and processes are as follows:

At central level, the overarching, fundamental objectives of UT are explored, defined, and decided by the University Council, which consists of 6 external members and 5 university employees and is responsible for funding and budget policies, for deciding on long-term development and on the strategic plan. The University Senate, consisting of the Rector, 16 employees and 5 students, is responsible for academic matters, namely for teaching, research and development, for quality assurance related to these fields, and for formation of academic units. The Rector carries out day-to-day management, is responsible for the budget, and decides on the formation of non-academic units. The Rector is supported by the Rector's Office, whose structure comprises the vice-rectors for academic affairs, for research and for development; the deans of the four faculties, and the area directors for administration, finance, and the academic secretary. Outside this central core there are four faculties - arts and humanities, social sciences, medicine, science and technology – led by deans supported by vice deans with specific remit for studies and for research and development. While this structural setup is largely defined by legislation and embedded in UT statute, it follows a standard model of traditional universities which is fit for purpose in principle. The reduction to four faculties was an autonomous decision by UT which has proved to be beneficial since it has made the UT's structures leaner and therefore more efficient, while there is still some room for optimizing processes between UT's central level and faculties as to facilitating effective strategic planning and transformation (for detail, see hereafter).

Development planning takes external, i.e. national and societal priorities and societal expectations and needs, into account while also making provision for broad internal participation (SER). At a political level, this is achieved by, in particular, referencing UT's strategic development to the national plan "Estonia 2035" and to related budget projections at national and EU levels (SER). From a procedural and communication perspective, matching UT and national objectives is safeguarded by dialogue with the government and by means of an administrative contract with the ministry. As for referencing to societal expectations, external members in the UT Council provide input and ensure reference to interests of society at large, as does consultation with external partners, such as industry and commerce, and also with regional stakeholders (SER, E). Internally, participation is safeguarded by the inclusion of key institutional players, among these all of the deans, in the Rector's office where essential strategic and operational matters are discussed and agreed on, by the senate where staff and students are represented, by the operation of a strategic planning committee, which includes various levels and groups inside the university including students, by collecting suggestions on the UT website, by running

public workshops on specific themes and holding a targeted, input-based strategy conference, and by including external experts in UT governance bodies and in workshops (SER; E, M, S, A).

In effect, therefore, alignment to national priorities and participation of internal partners and external partners is holistic and allows for sufficient input to UT's developmental processes. This is evident in several ways: while not abandoning blue sky-research, UT has made a strategic decision to shift its research focus more strongly towards application-driven research, as expected by Estonian society and government and by the European Union (M). In line with that focus, strengthening transfer of knowledge through partnering and spin-offs is a major objective (see also standard 11). From the perspective of education, strong elements of outreach to society by fostering education of non-traditional, external learners, namely with a view towards further education, are visible, thus securing long-term employability (see also standard 12) (M, T). Finally, UT endorses its statutory role of champion for supporting and developing Estonian cultural heritage, while striking a fair balance with keeping its justified aspiration to be of significant relevance internationally (M) (see also standard 5).

Putting the aforesaid institutional bodies, processes, and input factors into action, UT has repeatedly formulated strategic plans, with the current strategic plan (plan A2025) covering the period from 2021 to 2025 (SER) and made publicly available via the UT website (SER). Plan A2025 formulates UT's mission, core values, and vision (SER).

As for institutional mission, UT sees its role as a national university for Estonia serving society by acting as an institution which pioneers knowledge through research and development, by fostering academic education and skill development for all age groups, and by strengthening Estonian culture and language. Defining UT's mission in this way, which is in line with overarching national strategies (as pointed out above), is fitting and credible in view not only of UT's history, but also of its current underpinning by UT's breadth in academic fields, its quality and quantity of teaching and research, and its overall size within the Estonian system. In effect, UT embraces the role ascribed to it as a national institution by the University of Tartu Act, even though UT mission statement does not, as it could do, reference its mission to that act in a more explicit way. With regard to core values, UT identifies research-related features such as critical thinking, quest for truth and problem-solving; academic freedom und university autonomy; openness to new ideas to serve innovation and positive change; internal, national, and international cooperation; a human-centred approach and support of individual development and internal and societal responsibility. These values, which are widely accepted by many higher education institutions, coincide with UT's mission and are valid as such.

UT's vision, as formulated in general terms, follows succinctly from its mission as a key national and internationally renowned research and teaching university which is embedded in, and is intent on developing, Estonia's cultural heritage and societal as well as economic progress on the one hand, and on the other hand, all aspects of academic performance at the level of international excellence in fields both of teaching and learning and of research.

UT summarizes its aspirations in three overarching headlines (SER): Top-level research, which addresses global and national issues; educational excellence; service to society, which focuses on evidence-based government, development of entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity, sustainable development, and digital environment. Plan A2025 details these elements of UT's vision into ten concrete aspects: (1)

Promoter of Estonian language and culture; (2) International University; (3) Inspiring learning environment; (4) University of lifelong learning; (5) Supporter of Development of the talented; (6) Influential research centre; (7) Developer of research-based society; (8) Accelerator of smart economy; (9) Inspiring and pioneering organisation; (10) Key partner of regional development. Each of these ten aspects is underpinned by three so-called 'courses of action' which spell out specific transformation activities in order to accomplish the related vision. This approach is systematic and logic, and the contents of UT's vision and its translation into ten specific action lines and their respective sub-agendas is valid in terms of academic and societal relevance and credible in terms of UT's institutional ability to accomplish these aspirations.

In terms of concrete aspects of institutional reform with regards to internal structure and governance, UT has aimed at better alignment of decisions of different governance levels with UT's strategic objectives, at creating better conditions for excellence in teaching and research, and at fostering sustainable development. Moreover, academic units of equal weight were created, especially by reducing the number of faculties to only four in recent years, cooperation between deans and respective academic entities were improved, and governance and management at faculty level was made more effective, namely by identifying institutional and personal roles more concretely (SER).

Implementation of the strategic plan is operationalised via five tools: first, in a managerial way, by drafting and implementing annual action plans. Second, by means of holistic planning, i.e. at central level by establishing and publishing aligned strategies for finance, raising private funds, space development, and language and internationalisation, and at decentral level by ensuring and monitoring the alignment of strategic planning of faculties and other UT units (SER). Third, also at central level, by allocating funds specifically in support of implementing strategic objectives. Fourth, at the level of staff, by translating strategic objectives into individual performance agreements as well as personal performance and development appraisals. Fifth, by means of continuous communication and joint learning, namely in the Rector's Office where rector, vice rectors, deans, and top administrators meet regularly, in joint management seminars regularly held on specific topics, and in committees, e.g. for academic affairs, where students participate; in addition, there are targeted communication channels both for providing information to and feedback from staff, students, and externals.

The "Action plan for 2021 of the University of Tartu strategic plan A2025" (SER) is appropriate in that it takes up all ten action lines systematically, with each of them being explained in brief. With reference to these ten lines, three, in one case four, concrete "Courses of action" are indicated in a telegram-style manner, which are followed by brief task descriptions under the label "Activities of the Rector's Office in 2021" and in five cases, according to the statement made in the aforesaid Action Plan, under the heading "Activities in faculties/areas of responsibility in 2021"; finally, one to four budget-specifying items are added under the headline "Central additional support"(D). The "Action plan for 2022" published in February 2022 (supplied on request after submission of the SER) is structured in a similar mode.

In principle, the existence of these action plans, which are used as tools for practical underpinnings of the correlate strategic objectives, are to be welcomed. Their positive elements lie in the provision of meaningful and relevant key performance indicators that are concrete, and in the fact that these action

plans specifically state their motivation, interpretation and objectives (SER), in indicating responsibilities of UT units and leading staff, and in outlining budgetary support measures (SER).

Nonetheless, these action plans for 2021 and for 2022 fall short in several aspects; the same applies to action plans at faculty level which were made available during the site visit. The core concern centres around the fact that the action plans refer to high-level strategic goals and UT unit assignments of tasks and related leadership responsibilities only, rather than to more concrete hands-on implementation planning of each step which should be taken in the course of each specific action line on order to accomplish the given strategic objective. In that respect, UT and its faculties and other units are advised to elaborate action plans which include more elements than the ones which are currently used (see above). In addition to these, more elaborate action plans should, for example and in particular, specify the following factors, too: Assignment of personal responsibilities not only at leadership level but also of other personnel to be involved in the implementation process; specifics of required data and other external and internal non-quantitative information input with relevance for the given action line; reference to external and internal expectations and limitations; specification of funding requirements along the line of the implementation process; defining milestones of accomplishment of interim stops on the way towards the final goal; and description of lines and times of reporting along the way.

Organizing action plans in such a comprehensive way would go beyond linking the implementation of action lines to individual performance agreements of those university members who are specifically responsible for accomplishing set objectives, as UT does (SER); while this tool is valid and useful, it falls short as regards underpinning implementation processes by specified mapping of the road towards achieving set objectives. Moreover, the approach suggested above would see action planning as a more pro-active matter of designing fit-for-purposes processes in a holistic way, which would add a significant ex-ante element to implementation processes, thereby complementing UT's current strong focus on monitoring outcomes of change processes mainly through its highly developed data collection system and by reporting on outcomes (cf. below), which tends to reflect an ex-post approach to assure quality of change processes.

Moreover, as for aligning faculty level strategies to the overarching UT strategic objectives, there is oversight in terms of harmonising objectives in general and of harmonising key performance indicators. However, oversight in terms of close assessment of concrete implementation steps is not ensured systematically and holistically. Alignment relies mainly on attributing personal responsibilities and ex-post monitoring of, and reporting on, the degree of accomplishment of strategic objectives, whereas there may be a need for a policy and practice of ex-ante assessments of detailed action plans of faculties and other units (cf. above) with a view towards scrutinizing their overall procedural fitness for purpose to accomplish the defined goals.

The suggestion regarding action planning should not be seen as denying the quality of UT's overall monitoring and evaluation practices, which should be maintained at the high current level. Monitoring and subsequent evaluation of the accomplishment of strategic objectives and of the impact of UT's activities is carried out by using various tools (SER). Foremost, plan A 2025 is underpinned by 19 performance indicators, with four main lines: international national university; education; research; organisation impact. In support of monitoring, a performance-oriented information management by

means of digital dashboards was created, mainly to provide statistical data. Monitoring also includes feedback opportunities, e.g. for staff and students, via surveys e.g. on management performance are in place. Eventually, an annual implementation report is provided, which serves as base for analysis by the University Council (SER, M, E)

The evaluation of implementation effects and effectivity is interreliable. On the one hand, this is indicated by fair self-criticism with reference to deficiencies in reaching certain strategic and organisational objectives. Among these are (SER): Reduction of members in institute councils; inclusion of external members in institute councils; need for closer networking and clarification of division of duties. On the other hand, information is made available and used, e.g. through database and surveys such as staff and student surveys and a qualitative management survey held in 2020, which showed satisfaction grades with regard to governance and management. Finally, the University Council receives annual reports on UT's strategic development and accomplishment of objectives, with the Council's assessment of these reports feeding back into UT's developmental processes.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that UT conforms to the requirements of the standard.

UT's mission and vision are strongly aligned to national and European policies and expectations. Mission, vision, and strategic planning are done on a reliable base, taking up information gained through valid consultative processes throughout the university, including students, and also with externals.

Devices for systematic and valid monitoring of outcomes are in place, as are processes for adjustment where required. In as far as development planning also covers aspects of implementation of planning, action plans exist, including core elements which make them fit for purpose. However, these elements should be more concrete, and they should preferably include an added element of ex-ante quality steerage; the latter is to say that faculties should be systematically accompanied by UT's rectorate or a central administrative unit in a supportive mode, i.e. in an advisory and where necessary readjusting manner, right from the start of implementation processes at faculty level throughout their entire span.

Strengths

- UT uses various means to blend leadership with bottom-up practices in the process of developing its strategic planning. It consults with external partners and with its academic and administrative staff and students; broad internal participation of faculties, staff and students is provided. The participatory approach ensures not only broad intake of ideas but also shared ownership and endorsement of the strategic objectives.
- UT's strategic plan attaches importance to aligning university objectives to national and European economic, societal, and cultural aims in multiple ways and in a cross-sectoral manner, e.g. by emphasizing application-oriented research, supporting life-long learning, and being the guardian of Estonian cultural heritage.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The panel is concerned by the fact that the action plans currently in place at UT and its faculties are not sufficiently detailed as regards indication as to how action lines are operationalized in concrete terms. Therefore, UT is recommended to review its concept of action plans, introducing a clearly detailed plan for each action line in UT's strategic planning, thus strengthening a more hands-on, ex-ante perspective to action plan design. Such plans should be underpinned by concrete descriptions of operations (as detailed above in the report).
- The panel is concerned by UT's reluctance to monitor those faculty-level processes more closely from their onset which aim at implementing action lines intended to achieve university-wide strategic objectives. UT is therefore recommended to strengthen pro-active oversight of its central level over the existence and sufficient quality (for specification, cf. the recommendation above) of action plans at the level of faculties and other units, and over progress made along the line of action plan implementation, e.g. by introducing a system of regularly staged reporting or other ways of ex-ante monitoring action plans and the processes for their implementation.

1.2. Resources

Standard:

The higher education institution develops its staff and manages its physical and financial resources in a purposeful, systematic and sustainable manner.
Internal and external communications of the higher education institution (including marketing and image-building) are targeted and managed.

Guidelines:

The HEI has an efficient staff development system in terms of both academic and support staff. The principles and procedures for employee recruitment and development are based on the objectives of the HEI's development plan and are fair and transparent. The principles for employees' remuneration and motivation are defined, available to all employees, and followed.

Allocation of the HEI's financial resources is based on the objectives of its development plan. The management and development of its infrastructure (buildings, laboratories, classrooms, IT systems, etc.) are economically feasible. Sufficient resources are available for updating the infrastructure for education and research, and/or a strategy exists enabling the HEI to acquire them.

The HEI has a functioning system for internal and external communications, relevant to the target audiences. The information made public about HEI's activities (including study programmes) and the findings of external evaluations is correct, up to date, easily accessible and understandable. The HEI has a system to popularise its core activities and academic career opportunities. The HEI members are informed of the decisions relevant to them in a timely manner.

Employee satisfaction with management, working conditions, information flow, etc., at the HEI is surveyed regularly and the survey results are used in quality improvement activities.

Indicators:
- Distribution of revenues and costs
- The results of the staff satisfaction survey
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

Evidence and analysis

This section discusses UT's processes for human resources management; financial management; management of infrastructure; and internal and external communication. These processes are described in the SER, and they are publicly available through the institution's website; they are generally observed.

UT has a central office which regulates human resources management. However, the main responsibility for academic personnel management lies with the Director of the Institute (M, T). The panel found that the regulations for employee recruitment; leave; job descriptions; industry sabbatical

guidance; and evaluation of academic staff are fair and transparent (SER, M, T). Nevertheless, it appears that not all staff are aware of all guidelines (M, T). The positions of academic staff are filled following a public recruitment procedure, and competition for the positions of associate professors and professors are generally open to Estonian and international applicants (SER, M, T). The selection of academic staff takes place in collegial decision-making bodies (SER, M, T). Support for self-development of staff has been set as an objective in A2025 (SER). Regulations for employee remuneration are defined and available to all employees, and these regulations are being followed (SER, M, T). Salaries are linked to individual work plans (M), and staff members are allowed to engage with additional activities outside UT, as long as no conflict of interest arises (M). UT supports the adaptation of its international staff members in Estonia: both international staff and their family members can attend language courses and cultural seminars free of charge (SER, M). UT supports the development of its managers, and a comprehensive recognition system is in place (SER). UT has responded to the recommendations made in the last IA report to implement fairly and consistently and without delay its proposed system of professional review and to ensure that systematic annual staff performance appraisal is carried out (SER, interviews).

UT's financial strategy until 2025 provides a financial framework for the strategic plan (SER). The University's financial activities, financial accounting, planning, analysis, preparation of the budget and draft annual report, and the organisation and development of procurement are the responsibility of the head of finance (SER, M). The budget is discussed and agreed upon in the budgeting committee (M). Funds provided by the state are distributed internally following the same principles as those followed to determine the distribution of funds among institutions. Even though this has been identified as a non-optimal practice, and discussions to change it have repeatedly been held, a concrete decision on the matter has been deferred (M). The day-to-day management of the funds is carried out through the execution of the budget, the principles for the preparation, amendment and reporting of which are laid down in the budgeting rules (SER). The accounting and financial reporting procedures are laid down in the internal accounting rules (SER) and annual reports are prepared in accordance with the Estonian financial reporting standard (SER). To increase and diversify the revenue base, a strategy for the involvement of private funds has been drawn up, opportunities for joining new partnership networks are analysed, and a project writing unit has been formed (SER, see also standard 11). Currently, the financial standing of all units is positive (SER, M); in the view of the panel, this is a good indication of a healthy financial status. However, the sustainability of the University finances in the face of decreasing student numbers is acknowledged by management as an issue to be continuously monitored (M). The Finance Office systematically organises internal training courses on accounting and budgeting. All accounting documents have been digitised and their coordination and approval take place as digital workflows (SER, M).

With regards to the management and development of infrastructure, UT has formulated a spatial development strategy to 2025, which is increasingly linked to UT's digital development (SER). UT prefers to manage buildings itself and has in place rules on the use and disposal of immovable property; rules on construction work and investment in immovable property; and rules on using buildings and rooms (SER). Three major central IT systems, namely study information system; document management information system; financial and human resources software and a number of individual digital

environments exist (SER, M). UT has set a goal to organise the central IT services and their management and development processes by the end of 2022; this is work in progress, aiming at addressing the new and continuously developing needs of the institution (SER, M). UT is a highly digitalized institution; notwithstanding the many obvious benefits of this commendable achievement, this same digitalization means that the University's processes strongly depend on the continuous and smooth operation of all IT systems. This is acknowledged, but a business continuity plan spanning all University processes and not only extending itself on the IT infrastructure is still to be developed. Moreover, the IT infrastructure needs to be consolidated and further developed by adhering to a well formulated IT architecture; this is also still to be developed (see also standard 10 for more detail and for suggestions of opportunities for further improvement). The library is well funded and very well equipped; it makes available copies of all textbooks used in UT's courses and also has extensive outreach activities, some of which also generate income (M) (see also standard 10). However, even though UT supports open science, staff members are expected to pay publication fees for their open access publications from their own funds. UT should reconsider this practice and explore whether these costs can be covered by its own resources.

UT publicly makes available, through its website, information about its activities (including study programmes), as well as findings from evaluations. This information is correct, up to date, easily accessible and understandable, even though some documents are only in Estonian, hence likely to be difficult for international staff and students to understand (website, M, T, S).

UT takes internal and external communication, including marketing and publicity, seriously. The competent unit is very well staffed, with more than 60 staff members across the University units. Moreover, all staff members, and primarily managers of all levels, are responsible for the communication of internal information (SER). UT has identified the main communication channels and the target audiences it wishes to reach (SER) and has developed a consolidated communication plan that was provided to the members of the panel during the site visit. The panel has learned that the University has been quite successful in external communication through the national media (M), particularly throughout the Covid pandemic, and examples of good practices in this domain were made known to the panel (M). However, formal assessment of the effectiveness of the communication plan (both internal and external) is still to be developed; this can be remedied by establishing a process for assessing how well the communication plans are carried out and how effective they are.

Once a year, UT invites all employees to openly assess the working environment, give feedback to their manager, highlight positive points and draw attention to what needs to be changed. The survey is conducted in an electronic environment, and its aggregated results are accessible to all university staff. 1,511 employees (40% of staff) replied to the 2020 survey (SER). Among the academic staff, most satisfied appear to be those that have been working in UT less than five years; the level of satisfaction drops for those employed for five years or more. International staff and professors appear to be the most satisfied. This issue has been raised with the management, but no visible feedback has been offered or action taken (M).

Conclusions

In the view of the panel, the University conforms to the requirements of standard 2.

The panel has found that UT has in place efficient and effective financial, physical, and human resources management processes. In view of its commendably high extent of digitalization, some more work is still to be done for developing a business continuity plan and its associated processes. While internal and external communication has been appropriately planned, some work is still to be done on formally measuring the efficiency and effectiveness of the plans.

Strengths

- UT follows the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers when recruiting academic staff.
- The formulation of a Spatial Development Strategy to 2025 which, among other principles, states that the university guarantees the preservation and increase in the value of its historical buildings in central Tartu.
- The extensive digitalisation and its continuing digitalisation process. In total, nearly 97% of all official documents were processed electronically in 2020, compared to 75% in 2017.

Opportunities for further improvement

- UT may wish to consider revisiting and improving its practices for making all staff aware of its guidelines regarding personnel management.
- UT may wish to systematically address the matter of distributing financial resources internally, and to come up with a method that will allow the distribution of funds to be guided by, and aligned with, the strategic development plans of the University.
- UT may wish to consider funding the cost of open access publications for all its staff.
- UT may wish to develop a business continuity plan to ensure smooth and continuous operation of all its processes in the event of failures of, or disruption to, critical services such as IT.
- UT may wish to consider developing a formalised process for assessing the effectiveness of the communication plans, both internal and external.

1.3.   Quality Culture

Standard:

The higher education institution has defined the quality of its core and support processes, and the principles of quality assurance.

In the higher education institution, internal evaluation supports strategic management and is conducted regularly at different levels (institution, units, study programmes).

The findings of internal and external evaluations are analysed and quality improvement activities implemented.

Guidelines:

Members of the HEI have agreed upon definitions for the quality of their core and support processes and are guided by them in their daily work. The HEI has established its policies and procedures for internal quality assurance (internal evaluation). The regular internal quality assurance both at the institutional and study programme level takes into account, inter alia, the standards set out in these Guidelines. All members of the HEI, including students and external stakeholders, participate in internal evaluations.

Internal evaluation of study programmes results in feedback from experts within the HEI and/or from outside it. Regular reviews and enhancements of study programmes ensure their relevance, including their compliance with international trends. In the course of internal evaluations, peer learning, comparisons with other HEIs regarding their results and means for achievement, as well as a sharing of best practices take place, among other things.

Internal evaluation is based on the following key questions in quality management: What do you want to achieve, and why? How do you want to do it? How do you know that the activities are effective and will have the desired impact? How do you manage the quality improvement activities?

Indicators:

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

•   Other indicators depending on the HEI

Evidence and analysis

UT's quality management system is closely related to the strategic plan, thus reinforcing the close relationship between quality management and strategic management. Throughout the SER the terms "quality management" and "quality assurance" are used synonymously, with the former being slightly favoured. The system is very much built upon the logic of the PDCA cycle (SER). While the SER itself is rather sparse regarding details on the system, UT's publicly available website features a subsite on quality management, listing in detail all relevant documents (statutes, regulations, guidelines, reports) related to quality assurance and across all areas of operation (governance; teaching and learning; research and development; service to society). This impressive array of linked and interlinked documents is also organised along the four elements of the PDCA cycle (W). This visible connection of the various elements of the university's quality management system signals a system with a high level of integration. However, the panel was not able to verify this during the various interviews. Based on the interviews, the panel has serious doubts as to how the different elements are connected in practice, and in particular, if and – if so – how the loop is consistently closed (M, T, S). Some student interviews in particular shed doubt on the question of how effectively UT acts upon repeated feedback on shortcomings (S). The improvement part of the website in particular is rather sparse in in comparison with the other parts of the PDCA cycle, citing general processes and guidelines as evidence of/safeguards for improvement with the goal to "develop leadership skills", "develop teaching and learning skills" or "update curricula". Yet as for other than the sections on planning or assessment, there are no specific instruments named, nor could the panel find any reference to regular action plans, improvement cycles or the systematic documentation of past actions and their impact across all areas of operation which could provide visible proof of the system's effectiveness (W). This is not to say that the PDCA cycle is never closed in practice – but that the panel does not see how this closing is systematically ensured and monitored, also in terms of oversight. One option that could help the university in this regard are documented action plans stemming from regular evaluations such as mentioned in section 1.7 on the programme level, which are then regularly monitored. Such an element would still be in line with the university's largely bottom-up approach to quality assurance.

As required by the EKKA Standard on quality culture, UT employs a variety of evaluation procedures complementing the often informal feedback mechanisms. According to the SER, these include internal evaluations of teaching and learning and the monitoring of curriculum level KPI; course level feedback and programme level feedback from students; employee satisfaction surveys; employee performance appraisals; evaluation of academic staff and progress review of doctoral students; and internal auditing (SER). These instruments are clearly known throughout the university (M, T, S), although the panel heard that they are somewhat hampered by low response rates and survey fatigue (M, S, SER).

Research is, according to the University, mostly assessed by the scientific communities outside of the university (e.g., peer reviews during the publishing process) as well as through funding bodies or the government. Systematic internal evaluations are not conducted beyond individual staff appraisal (see also standard 11). For service to society, no specific assessment procedures are defined, with exception of annual public reports of institutions such as the museum, or botanical garden or when the university seeks an external label for its operations (W). In line with the university's own ambitions and narrative, this can be seen as is an area for development (see also standard 12).

The panel observed a quality culture throughout the institution which is responsive to stakeholder views, despite some weaknesses as regards the systematic closing of the quality management cycle, e.g. on the level of programmes (see above). Student and employer feedback in particular is regularly sought, and, even more importantly, readily provided by students and external stakeholders alike, who feel that the university is very open to their suggestions and complaints (M, E, T, S). This is in line with the quality management principles the University Senate adopted in May 2021 (W). There are ten principles in total; yet, as for the university's understanding of quality, readers are referred to the strategic plan, as the principles do not specify this understanding.

Even in the strategic plan, however, the panel could not find the criteria and standards which would allow the university to systematically and regularly make the leap from data gathering to actual evaluations. This starts with the overall quality concept: according to UT's principles, quality is operationalised via the mission, fundamental values, vision and tasks of the University (W) – there is no specific quality policy or, as is often done by higher education institutions by means of a 'quality handbook', explicit explanation how the processes work holistically as a system. Such a policy is not needed, if the university's understanding of quality is clearly explicated elsewhere, of course. The strategic plan, which according to UT is the primary source of its quality understanding, however, pays little explicit reference to quality (the term is hardly mentioned at all) or quality dimensions and standards, leaving the question on the university's actual understanding of quality and how this is translated into practice, ultimately open. The panel perceives this as a gap, also in the light of the standard which demands a clear and agreed upon definition of quality. Documents such as the guideline on good teaching could be an effective starting point but are not visibly linked to the other parts of the PDCA cycle. To take the example of this document further, it is listed as a support/development document in the "Acting" Section of the university's quality cycle, with no corresponding goals/measures on how (and to what degree) these principles would be brought to life, how they are regularly assessed and how the university would know the principles are actually systematically followed by its staff.

Interviewees repeatedly referred to the grassroot level culture and the feedback affinity of all actors, when asked about shared minimum standards or actual quality criteria (M, T). Even though such an approach does have its merits, there are also several drawbacks: The identification of problems will rely on the personal ethos and quality values of individuals and remain subjective. All feedback needs to be interpreted, and without a "coordinate system" of target values or standards or benchmarks to weigh findings, the panel found that improvement may often be rather reactive and ad hoc. An effective quality culture in the sense of shared values and efforts is invaluable – but it needs to be complemented by a system that ensures everyone is acting in accordance with this culture.

In addition, the panel found a lack of specific oversight of the quality assurance system. According to the QM principles and interviews, the Rector is ultimately responsible (SAR, M), and the QM website lists other actors with responsibilities for certain elements. But these actors highly depend on potential problems to be reported from below, and the panel could not identify actors with the responsibility (or tools) to identify structural problems, double check on findings and improvements or to ensure consistency of quality processes across the entire institution. UT was clearly following up on the recommendations from the last accreditation, for example, with regard to the increase of English language programmes or support for students with learning disabilities, but evidence suggests that follow-ups are not as well traceable on the level of everyday operations and routine QA processes (S), e.g. in the form of regular and well documented action plans on the unit and/or programme level, including information of how they are followed up on. This also links to the recommendations provided on standard 1. The university has a well-defined, technically impressive and transparent KPI system – yet in order to fully close the PDCA cycle, it is advisable to not only define clear quality parameters as mentioned above (which would help the "P" part), but also instruments and indicators that support to assess the effectiveness of the "A", e.g. in the form of regular meta-evaluations of the system, that help to reflect on the adequacy of processes as well as the system's outcomes.

Conclusions

As has been indicated in the analysis part, the panel had some concern regarding the lack of clear and explicit quality goals/targets, standards and criteria which would guide the quality assurance system (by clearly linking plans, actions, assessment and impact monitoring) and ensure consistency of processes and their effectiveness. The risk is further increased by a lack of strategic oversight within the system, where problems that are not identified or deemed relevant on the grassroot level will very likely not be recognised on the higher levels and principles (such as the ones on good teaching) are not sufficiently safeguarded throughout the organisation. Which problems to tackle is therefore decided at the most operational level. There is also no evidence that structural problems beyond individual cases are identified and, consequently, remedied.

The panel therefore concludes that UT currently only partially meets the requirements of the standard.

Strengths

- The high level of transparency and the systematic way in which UT documents various components of its quality assurance system across its different areas of operation and makes this information available to the broader public.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The panel is concerned that UT's strong trust- and personal-ethos-based system is not sufficient to safeguard quality. The university is therefore recommended to balance its strong trust- and personal-ethos-based system with additional elements of oversight and control; and most importantly to clearly link all elements of the PDCA cycle logically and causally. Any efforts in this regard will benefit from clear "coordinates" in which the quality efforts are anchored. UT is thus recommended to break down "quality" in observable categories in all relevant documents (starting with an institutional policy document or the strategic plan), to define minimum standards and to identify relevant institutional/national/international benchmarks that help to monitor progress and determine improvement. The example above on how the principles of good teaching could be used in order to systematically ensure quality and drive improvement could also serve as a blueprint for similar guidelines.
- Individual roles and responsibilities with regard to quality assurance should be clarified and actors' efforts in this regard supervised. This will also help to give the PDCA cycle direction, instead of creating what may be called a "DC(A)" cycle, i.e. a cycle with some elements of the PDCA cycle missing or being underdeveloped.
- The panel is concerned with the level of internal awareness of quality assurance processes. Internal awareness of the components of the QA system, how they work together and where they are not yet effective, should be raised, in order to help close the PDCA cycles more consistently.

Opportunities for further improvement

- QA processes for service to society could be much more clearly defined, as the current documentation is mainly a collection of statutes and reports with little relevance for QA.

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1.4 Academic ethics

Standard:

The higher education institution has defined its principles for academic ethics, has a system for disseminating them among its members, and has a code of conduct including guidelines for any cases of non-compliance with these principles.

The higher education institution has a functioning system for handling complaints.

Guidelines:

The HEI values its members and ensures that all its employees and students are treated according to the principle of equal treatment.

Employees and students of the HEI are guided by the agreed principles of academic ethics in all their activities.

The HEI respects fundamental values and policies of research set out in the document, 'Research Integrity', issued jointly by Estonian research institutions, the Estonian Academy of Sciences, the Estonian Research Council and the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research.

The HEI supports its students and teaching staff in their understanding and responding to ethical issues. Teaching staff and students do not tolerate academic fraud, including cheating and plagiarism, and they will act immediately upon any such occurrence.

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

Indicators:

•   The percentage of student papers checked by plagiarism detection systems and the percentage of detected plagiarisms

•   Other indicators depending on the HEI, for example statistics about complaints (total number, the proportion of decisions taken in favour of the applicant)

Evidence   and   analysis

The university's overarching *principles of academic ethics* are formulated via a series of documents in the 'Good practices at the university' compilation of guidelines and documents (SER). The guiding principles are the following: 'Research-based activities'; 'The academic freedom and autonomy of the university'; 'Openness'; 'Cooperation'; 'A human-centred approach and individual development';

'Responsibility'. These principles are supported by three overarching good practice subareas with documents (SER):

The 'Teaching and learning 'subarea:

The 'Teaching and learning' subarea (W; SER) lists a number of 'Good practice of teaching' principles (learning-centred; based on a scientific way of thinking; based on cooperation; supports creativity and entrepreneurship; leads to self-analysis and supports individual development and links learning to real life) as does the 'Good practice of learning' principles (purposed and structured; includes self-reflection and analysis of studies; is focused, open and investigative; requires preparation; is done in cooperation with fellow students; is done in cooperation with teaching staff and supervisors and is ethical).

In addition, there are formal documents, such as the 'Study Regulations' (SER) and 'The Copyright Act' (Parliamentary Act) with some concrete cases to illustrate the meaning of the various guidelines, policies, rules, definitions etc (e.g. regarding plagiarism). This subarea also includes guidelines regarding Doctoral studies ('Good practice of Doctoral Studies' document, which also includes the 'Advisory code of conduct for supervisor').

Finally, the subarea includes a document regarding 'Good practices of giving feedback', with some detailed concrete examples of good feedback (W).

The Research subarea

The second overarching subarea is 'Research', which is linked to the 'Estonian code of conduct for research integrity', signed by Estonian Higher Education Institutions on 1 November 2017 and to the 'Instructions for applying the code of conduct for research integrity', approved by the Senate on 31 January 2020). The Code of conduct offers detailed guidelines under the following value statements: Freedom, Responsibility, Honesty and objectivity, Respect and caring, Justice and Openness and cooperation. These are then translated into detailed guidelines for planning and carrying out of research, of authorship, publishing of results and application of results and on how to uphold research integrity. Both documents include a range of concrete examples/cases to illustrate the meaning of the various guidelines, policies, rules, definitions etc. This document includes instructions about how to deal with suspicions about breaches of research integrity, including advice regarding the complaints procedure.

According to the SER: 'When starting their studies, students confirm that they have read the relevant documents'. However, the report also states that 'The response to academic fraud (cheating, plagiarism) requires further organization and harmonization'. Moreover, the UT has recently changed its approach to cheating/plagiarism, so that 'In addition to reprimanding and ex-matriculating /a/ student, there is now the option to issue a warning to the student'. 'In 2016-2021, 12 students were ex-matriculated due to improper behaviour'.

The UT regularly checks students' written papers using the 'Ouriginal' plagiarism detection system. However, while this is applied to all theses as these are considered to be the apex of programmes (M), this check is not compulsory in general but merely a common practice (SER); UT should consider the

plagiarism detection as a standard applied in all cases. A good feature is the new (2019) requirement that all bachelor curricula include a compulsory course of at least 3 ECTS with the basics of research ethics (SER).

There are also four Research integrity counsellors, one for each faculty (SER). Their role is to help university members with questions about adhering to the principles of research integrity or if there is suspicion that research integrity has been violated. Such support is confidential in order to protect the university member. The Research Integrity counsellors will also help to solve specific dilemmas. (D). According to the counsellors (SER), there are gaps in the teaching staff's awareness of intellectual property issues. The counsellors provide help in case a formal complaint is formulated but are not involved in the handling of complaints and suspicions.

To deal with the 'increasing number of studies which are subject to approval', an Ethics Committee has been set up and the University's specially dedicated 'Centre for Ethics' is available for consultation (D; SER).

Finally, the UT applies an 'Open Science' policy with the objective 'to make research open, global, creative and cooperation-based by using modern e-infrastructures that are open access and free of charge (lSER). There is also a UT library support and advice team regarding data management, licences etc.

The 'Other good practices and agreements' subarea:

The third subarea, 'Other good practices and agreements' covers four different areas: 'Leadership', 'Data protection', 'Preventing corruption' and 'Equal treatment'.

The Leadership focus at the UT is guided by the 'Good practice of leadership at the University of Tartu' document. This document provides a range of concrete examples/cases about leadership-related issues with suggested solutions.

Data protection is dealt with in a series of documents (W; SER) but according to the SER 'raising awareness … needs to be stepped up'.

In a special document, 'Guidelines on preventing, identifying and solving conflicts of interest and corruption-prone situations', the UT has compiled an extensive list of relevant rules and concrete examples to illustrate the meaning of conflict of interest and corruption.

Finally, the subarea includes detailed documents pertaining to equal treatment, namely 'Guidelines for Equal Treatment' which includes concrete cases/examples to illustrate the meaning of the various guidelines, policies, rules and definitions, and a 'Gender-Equality plan'.

The equal treatment policies were formalised following a 2016 survey, which established (SER) that 'general awareness … is low', 'Information was difficult to find', there was 'no university-wide support network', 'People did not know how to … [file] a complaint' and there was a demand for 'a clearer division of roles' (to deal with equal treatment issues). In addition, a 2021 analysis of implementing the

European Charter and Code for Researchers in Estonian R&D institutions found 'that the university needs to pay more attention to raising awareness of discrimination and equal treatment issues.' (D).

As regards actual problems, a 2019 survey of students at Tallinn and Tartu universities found that roughly five per cent of students had been exposed to bullying (D). As regards staff, the annual employee satisfaction survey includes the statement 'the atmosphere at my workplace is positive.' Details on concrete action are difficult to ascertain, but interviews (M, S, T) conveyed to the panel that UT takes action in such cases.

As for staff, there were 21 complaints between 2019 and 2020, of which 11 occurred in 2020. Complaints included sexual harassment, workplace conflicts or bullying, and equal treatment issues (SER). UT tackles these issues. Handling employees' complaints and counselling are regulated in the 'Guidelines for Equal Treatment' document. Employees complaints are normally handled at the academic unit; furthermore, the complaint can be submitted to the academic secretary (SER). In addition to considering concrete cases, UT explores its employees' satisfaction by means of an annual survey, which asks whether or not 'the atmosphere at my workplace is positive.'

The Gender-Equality Plan (adopted in 2021) includes gender-balance figures for a number of decision-making bodies and the faculties. The target of reaching the 40% threshold for both genders has been met so far on the UT Council and Senate and on the Humanities, Medicine and Technology Faculty councils. Among academic staff, figures vary widely between different staff positions, similarly to the situation found in other higher education institutions. The panel is confident that UT's Gender Equality Plan helps UT to raise awareness of the challenge to ensure gender equality even further, thus making a valid contribution to ensuring a more balanced spread of career opportunities in the near future.

Since 2017, a Counsellor-Chaplain (CC) position has been set up. The CC's brief is to 'contribute to UT employees' psychological and mental well-being, increase their ability to act effectively, and help improve the relationship climate in the university's working environment. He can also give advice on how to support a student who needs help' (D).

The CC organised 433 'talks' with staff/students in 2017-2020 and 112 talks had been held from April-December 2021. Primarily, the talks deal with personal problems, work-related problems, problems of communication and religious and spiritual problems (D). Finally, an anonymous whistleblowing platform is under development. (D).

The panel found that the principles of academic ethics are clearly defined. The guiding documents are very elaborate and often detailed. Overall, plans, guidelines etc are in place with recently approved/adopted documents covering relevant areas. An appealing feature of most plans/guidelines is that they include concrete cases/examples to illustrate what is meant by a certain guideline/requirement.

The recently launched Research Integrity Counsellor position (one per Faculty) is a promising feature for improving awareness etc about research integrity. To some extent figures and data are provided. However, some questions concern the following aspects: Although detailed equal treatment and gender equality plans are in place there are still some lingering problems about low awareness and some lack of support. There is an increasing – although low as such – number of equal treatment

complaints (2016-2019: 10; 2020: 11). Whether this is down to increased awareness (SER) or to a worsening of the problem is difficult to tell. It was confirmed during the site visit that there are no regular surveys (M).

While the complaints procedures are described in detail, the equal treatment complaints-handling process comes across as rather complicated or is at least open to interpretation concerning what steps should be taken by whom and when. On the one hand, there is a procedural structure in place., which is positive. On the other hand, the procedures seem to require that complaints are brought to a supervisor, head of the structural unit, dean or academic secretary. The involvement of very high-ranking people early in the process could potentially create trust issues, and if the problem cannot be solved at the level of managers, the employees/students have the right to file a formal complaint to the academic secretary, who may or may not set up a committee to resolve the problem, i.e. again a high-level procedure. These steps are very good and show that the UT takes these matters seriously but there might be a number of cases in-between clearly illegal cases and more inappropriate cases. There may be a risk that the inappropriate cases will fly under the radar in the current system.

The panel would suggest that the UT considers introducing especially dedicated equal treatment complaints officer ('Support Officer') in all institutes/colleges. This would then be the first person to approach and would unequivocally be on the side of the person who is coming forward.

The Counsellor-Chaplain is a very appealing feature at the UT with a clear remit. However, at the same time it is a little unclear whether the CC is primarily acting as a kind of therapist or a mediator or something else. Although counselling as such is very useful, the focus seems to be on two-way 'mediation' and 'reconciliation' rather than cautioning those who do not follow the equal treatment guidelines. Interviews (S) suggested that the UT members who are in need of support face a very long wait to access trained therapists and psychologists. The panel is aware of the overall Estonian shortage of trained staff but would still encourage the UT to consider setting up their own mental health support centre.

The new Research Integrity Counsellor position is an interesting and appealing feature. Largely they appear to have a role as advisors but it became clear to the panel that they are also developing into taking a more proactive role – which the panel regards as a very positive step.

According to the SER 'the response to … cheating and plagiarism … requires further organization and harmonisation' /New 'Study regulations' from 2021/2022/. Some steps have already been taken in that all bachelor students receive compulsory teaching about academic writing (3 ECTS about plagiarism) and in that almost all written assignments are run via the Ouriginal system. However, the panel heard no good reason as to why not all assignments are checked by Ouriginal. A good feature in the UT's policies to handle cheating and plagiarism is the option to issue a warning to students who have been close to plagiarising.

An interesting feature is the Centre for Ethics (CfE). However, it was not clear to the panel whether the Centre is involved in the awareness work as such. However, it was clarified at the site visit that the CfE does indeed work in tandem with the new RICs and with other UT actors.

Currently the UT does not have a whistleblowing function. However, whistleblowing regulations are currently being worked out both at the national level and at the university.

Conclusions

The panel concludes that the UT conforms with the requirements for this standard.

The UT has defined its principles of academic ethics and there is a system for disseminating them among staff and students. Guidelines for handling cases of misconduct are in place and there is a functional complaint handling system.

Strengths

- The new Research Integrity Counsellor position continues to develop with evidence that the role is working in a systematic and proactive way to disseminate the principles among the UT members.
- UT's documents pertaining to Academic Ethics are particularly good in that they provide principles and guidelines underpinned with concrete examples, thus illustrating what the principles and guidelines actually mean. This applies throughout, including the elaborate document on good leadership practices. Documents alone do not lead to the desired outcome, however, an important element of achieving good practice is to be able to formulate principles and guidelines in a clear, precise and understandable way and the UT has done an excellent job.

Opportunities for further improvement

- While the system for handling misconduct and the complaints procedures are clear, they involve people either rather high up in the UT hierarchy (academic secretary, Institute Director) and as soon as a complaint is filed a formal commission is set up. This might put members off from even discussing borderline cases. There is no institutionalised position for members to talk to at their own institutional level and whose brief is solely to be supportive. This could potentially mean that cases are never reported, especially when there is a grey area between illegal and inappropriate. The UT might want to set up Supporting Officers at each Institute. This might be especially useful for students.
- The UT relies on actual cases (reported misconduct and mental /similar/ issues) as a way of establishing the level of problem regarding harassment issues as well as mental health among UT members. The UT might want to consider using regular surveys to get a better picture of any problems.
- UT members with mental health problems face long waiting times before they can receive professional help. The UT might want to set up its own mental health centre.
- While plagiarism detection by means of 'Ouriginal' takes place frequently already, plagiarism detection should be introduced as a standard practice applied in all cases of written work.

1.5 Internationalisation

Standard:

The higher education institution has set objectives for internationalisation and assesses the attainment of these objectives regularly.

The higher education institution has created an environment that encourages international mobility of students and teaching staff, supporting the development of learning, teaching and RDC activities, as well as the cultural openness of its members and Estonian society in general.

Guidelines:

The HEI creates opportunities for international student exchanges by offering study programmes and/or modules taught in English. The learning environment at the HEI supports internationalisation and cultural openness.

Recognition of qualifications and recognition of prior learning and work experiences for student admission and programme completion are in accordance with the quality requirements set by the HEI, are systemic and consistent with the expected learning outcomes and support international student mobility. The organisation of studies at the HEI facilitates student participation in international mobility (e.g., study programmes enable mobility windows). The HEI has agreements with foreign higher education institutions and, through international exchange, sends its students abroad to study and undertake internship, providing comprehensive support for this. Members of the teaching staff encourage students to participate in international mobility.

International lecturers participate in the process of teaching, including supervision of doctoral theses.

The HEI supports and recognises the participation of its teaching staff in international teaching, research or creative projects, as well as their teaching, research or creative work and personal development which are performed at HEIs abroad.

Indicators:

- Teaching staff mobility (in-out)
- Student mobility (in-out)
- Other indicators depending on the HEI, for example:
  - Number of English-taught study programmes by main units and levels of study
  - Percentage of foreign students (by study programmes, levels of study, in total in the HEI)
  - Percentage of study programmes that include English-taught subjects (of at least 15 ECTS)
  - Number of ECTS acquired through external mobility

Evidence and analysis

Internationalisation strategy and objectives

Internationalisation is referenced in the UT's Strategic Plan 2015-2020 and the new plan for 2021-2025. It is also referenced in the university's mission statement *("…contributing to the development of education, research and technology and other creative activities throughout the world"*); the university's vision (*"The University of Tartu is a rapidly developing international research university…"*), its core values *("Cooperation between people, institutions and research areas at the university, in Estonia and at the international level…")* and its development objectives *("Graduates who change the world"* and *"Research and development work that has a global impact and guides the development of Estonia").* There are clear links between the Strategic Plan and the Erasmus Policy Statement.

The first two strategic goals of the 2025 strategy locate the UT as a promoter of the Estonian language and culture and as an international university. These goals and their objectives follow on from those set in the 2020 plan. Specific objectives and targets have been set, including the percentage of international employees and students taking Estonian language courses; the percentage of international graduates; the percentage of international academic employees and the percentage of students participating in learning mobility among graduates. All strategic objectives and targets in relation to internationalisation are monitored in the same way as other targets relating to goals in the strategic plan (see also standard 1). The panel was informed that the Head of Internationalisation and Protocol Office and the Study Abroad Centre (SAC) provide input to the annual report in their respective fields of responsibilities: the former in relation to partnerships, networking and staff exchange and the latter in relation to Erasmus+ partnerships in Europe, student exchange, support services and internationalisation of curricula.

In relation to these first two strategic goals, the 2015 Institutional Accreditation report pointed out that, *"… the duality contained in the UT's mission – an "internationally recognised research university" and a "national university responsible for the continuity of Estonian intellectuals and language and culture" – may hinder the realisation of the university's vision of a "rapidly developing international research university", as it requires a focused approach to the choice of areas."* The University responded to this comment, saying that *"As a comprehensive national university, the UT cannot focus on a limited number of research areas…The university will be the universitas only if it covers a broad spectrum of specialisations and acts as a national university, an international university as well as a developer of the economy and society."* The panel followed up more generically on the potential tension inherent in the first two goals in the strategic plan and noted that, across the different groups of staff that it interviewed, the challenge was recognised but not deemed to be insurmountable.

The panel heard from various groups of staff that, despite, some success in terms of reaching goals in relation to the Estonian language, it is difficult to balance the tensions between the promotion of the Estonian language (for example, the number of Estonian doctoral students will not grow unless there are sufficient Masters programmes in the home language) with targets that will meet the recommendation in the 2015 Institutional Accreditation report, *"That the University should increase the number of English-taught curricula, in addition to or replacing Estonian-taught curricula in order to attract international students and increase the international competitiveness of Estonian students":* In fact, the University has responded to that recommendation in that in 2020/2021, foreign-language curricula made up 23% of all curricula of the first and second level of studies and since 2016, masters level foreign-language curricula have increased by 35%. The panel also heard various proposals, in particular from the Internationalisation and Protocol Office and the Study Abroad Centre, for solutions to this tension such as more mixed mode curricula with Estonian programmes including some courses in English and vice versa. It was recognised in meetings that such solutions come with additional effort with regard to English language competences necessary for both staff and students, and it is not always desirable for those with interest in Estonian to be exposed to English-medium teaching on some components of the curriculum.

In particular, the panel noted the approval by Senate in 2020 of the *Language and Internationalisation Principles* which provide a framework for the development of the university and the organisation of its everyday work in maintaining the balance between ensuring the sustainability of the Estonian language and culture, and internationally high-level research and teaching. The principles are of particular use in supporting the work of international staff (see below).

Focusing more on the second of the two strategic goals, the panel was interested in exploring the concept of the UT as an "international university." Various interview groups provided the panel with their views on the concept, which ranged from staff and students pointing out the impact of interaction with incoming international peers and colleagues and the value of being confronted with a different perspective ("internationalisation at home") to the more strategic view of the need to ensure the international visibility of Estonia as a small country looking outwards. The UT has joined several European research networks such as LERU-CE7, Coimbra, and ENLIGHT, in order to secure its role in EU research policy-making and to facilitate partnerships and the mobility of students and teaching staff. The panel discussed the extent of the University's involvement in partnerships and networks and was informed that all such relationships are monitored in order to ensure that inactive partnerships are terminated and that input into networks is of internal value.

Although the panel concurred with what it heard, at no point did it hear or read a convincing and coherent shared definition of what it means for the UT to be an international university. The panel saw evidence of strategic direction (e.g. the stated lack of intention in the Annual Report 2020 to increase the number of international students significantly and the clear location of the University's international aspirations lying mainly in Europe). However, it is of the view that the dissemination of a clear, strategic definition of the UT as an international university would assist the whole institution as it endeavours to address the synergy and meet the targets for the first two of its strategic goals.

Studies in foreign languages and student mobility (See also standards 10 and 11)

As stated above, since the last institutional evaluation, the UT has actively developed non-Estonian-taught curricula at Bachelor and Masters level with a view to ensuring that students are able to experience "internationalisation at home" if they do not plan to study abroad and also that students who do plan to do so are prepared. The number of incoming international students also increased during this period to 12% of the total number of students. International students' studies have been significantly supported by national initiatives such as the scholarship programme for master's and doctoral students Dora Plus (2015–2023) and the Development Cooperation Programme offered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Incoming international students are offered courses and modules that are generally part of the UT curricula and that are taught in English. However, UT recognises that, in some disciplines, it is difficult for international visiting students to find suitable courses. In addition to the increase in English language courses referred to above, the UT also has plans to work in in cooperation with partner universities, to create intensive courses that will be integrated into the Erasmus+ programme, to increase the volume of English-taught courses in these disciplines.

The panel learned (T) that training on working in a multicultural classroom is available but is not mandatory for any teachers (see also standard 8), although it is taken into account during staff appraisals to which additional money is awarded for good performance (see also standard 6). The UT has a Good Practice guide for Learning and Teaching, however this does not detail aspects in relation to English-medium multicultural classroom interaction and the panel formed the view that this could be important for future consistency (see Standard 8).

It is also important to note that some studies could not have an English-medium counterpart or be transformed as international programmes, as they either form part of the national heritage and with UT being responsible to offer these as subsidised by government or they contribute to the development of the Estonian language with specialised terminology being promoted at professional levels. In this respect, the panel understands that UT is careful with the programmes it does offer through a foreign language and options to diversify through modules, rather than full-scale programmes may be more appealing also into the future. The majority of incoming and outgoing student mobility is organised through the University's participation in the Erasmus+ programme, the mobility agreements for which are organised at the level of the academic units, with agreements signed by the units' Erasmus mobility coordinators. In 2020/2021, the UT units had 960 Erasmus+ cooperation agreements with European partners which represents a significant level of international interaction in addition to the networks in which UT participates and which facilitate wider international student mobility opportunities, for example in Australia. Enhanced mobility opportunities are also offered to students through the ENLIGHT network via short-term, flexible learning opportunities which may be combined with e-learning. The panel found that the number of partnership agreements was high and asked about their level of activity and value for UT. It was informed that a monitoring process had begun to strategically close agreements which were no longer valuable.

The Study Abroad Centre (W, M) informs students of international mobility opportunities via various channels, including social media. The panel was informed that as of the 2020/21 academic year, a 'mobility window' of 15 ECTS is available as an elective module in the first and second level of higher education, (excluding programmes with an obligatory integrated period abroad and Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmacy programmes). This mobility window was described in documentation as a module or set of courses in the curriculum, including practical training, which students can complete abroad. The University's self-evaluation report described the mobility window as one which, "helps to plan studies abroad better to avoid the extension of the standard period of study and supports the achievement of learning outcomes during the studies abroad." Agreements are required with partner HEIs to support the mutual recognition of studies.

The mobility window is governed by the university's Study Regulations; in order to have their studies abroad recognised, the student prepares a study plan before the start of the study or practical training period and draws up a learning or practical training agreement based on the study plan which must be approved by the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Committee. From 2021/2022, students participating in Erasmus+ mobility in Europe can use the Online Learning Agreement; an academic affairs specialist from the relevant unit approves the agreement on behalf of the UT.

The review panel recognised the efforts made by the University to respond to the recommendation in the 2015 institutional review report that it should, "…concentrate its efforts on increasing international student mobility in both directions." Through discussion, it was clear to the panel that the creation of the Study Abroad Centre, which offers services that are aimed at improving mobility and which include support on visas and residence permits, is a significant addition to achievement of the University's international goals; its expertise and motivation was evident in discussion. However, despite the inclusion of the mobility window in the curriculum and despite various documents and discussions that were offered in order to help clarify its function, the panel failed to get a clear picture of how the mobility window operates in practice and how many credits are achieved, although it should be noted that the processes for RPL operate effectively across the UT. As such the mobility window description ranged from a full semester without any planned courses with all students expected to find study-abroad, to components of a semester earmarked for recognition, to fully independent choices applying to individual students who were given the opportunity on return to extend (with a fee-waiver) their studies by one semester to cover all that was taught during the period they were abroad. Various programmes recognised that a full and successful operationalisation of the mobility window would take more time with predominant challenges in finding comparative courses abroad to ensure full recognition without the need for extension. The panel found that the different situations associated with the concept of "mobility window" created high levels of confusion for students and staff.

In relation to doctoral studies, the UT believes that these are international by nature and its *Good Practice of Doctoral Studies* requires supervisors to create opportunities for the doctoral student to interact with the relevant international research community to meet the research needs of the doctoral student. The eleven Doctoral Schools support the mobility of doctoral students and organise international multiple specialisation-specific or interdisciplinary events each year. Lectures, workshops and intensive courses are provided by international academic staff. Some doctoral schools offer the possibility of involving an external consultant for the doctoral thesis and cooperation with international supervisors is supported by joint supervision agreements of doctoral students.

International academic staff and staff mobility (see also standard 11)

According to the SER, in 2020, the percentage of international academic staff at UT had increased to 15% of the academic staff body. The 2020 Language and internationalisation Principles provide the framework for involving international academic staff in the UT's daily activities and governance and the University follows the principle of parallel language use in the work of its decision-making bodies in order to facilitate this. International staff and their family members are offered free Estonian language and culture courses and leisure activities and Estonian employees are offered foreign language courses. The University also offers programmes that provide an introduction to other cultures. International staff are also supported by the Tartu Welcome Centre, which was set up in 2019 and through internationalisation contact persons who help introduce them and their families to UT and assist them in adapting to life in Estonia.

The UT encourages employees to gain international experience and, in its evaluation of academic staff, takes into account the completion of professional continuing education abroad and involvement in large-scale international collaboration projects. In 2016–2020, about 20% of academic staff participated in mobility, mostly for teaching purposes. Diverse opportunities are provided for professional development abroad such as international grant opportunities, which are communicated by means of a grant-matching tool that uses the Research Professional database. Mobility-related activities are coordinated by the International Cooperation and Protocol Office.

Mobility to other Erasmus+ countries is to a large extent for the purpose of professional training, with mobility into the UT mainly for teaching purposes. The number of researcher exchanges funded under bilateral agreements has decreased as opportunities offered by EU programmes have increased.

Conclusions

The panel concludes that UT conforms to requirements in relation to standard five.

It would concur with the University's own view as set out in the SER that its network of partners enables the UT to "increase its international visibility, broaden its geography of cooperation and participate in European research and higher education policy-making." It also saw evidence that international staff and their family members are indeed provided with "…systematic opportunities to participate in Estonian language courses and a support system to help them settle in Estonia." However, it highlights two areas in particular in which it believes that action should be taken to strengthen the University's position both strategically and operationally.

The University acknowledges the tensions between the first and second strategic goals in its 2025 strategic plan and the panel heard various possibilities to address these challenges. However, it heard few convincing explanations of what it means for the University of Tartu to be both a national and an international university. The panel is of the view that the University will be unable to fully meet these strategic goals unless there is an institutional understanding amongst all staff and students as to what it means to be an international university whilst promoting the national language and culture.

The University recognises (SER) that there is work to be done in relation to the mobility window in the case of curricula where the mobility window has not yet become fully functional and also that descriptions of mobility window modules are not yet presented to students on the website. However, the panel believes that, overall, the mobility window is not well-understood or defined. Students were unclear as to how and when they might study abroad and had differing understanding as to the number of credits that were offered for study carried out overseas or the relationship of that work to the achievement of their programme/course learning outcomes.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The panel is concerned that there is little or no shared definition of what it means to be both a national and an international university. The panel views UT's intention as defined in its Strategic Plan 2025 to locate UT both as a promoter of the Estonian language and culture and as an international university as reasonable and valid and therefore recommends UT to consider more fully the relationship between these two goals, and to set out clear definitions that are disseminated and communicated across the institution to ensure that its unique position in this regard is well understood internally and externally.
- The panel recommends that UT further clarifies and disseminates the structure and operation of mobility window. UT is therefore recommended to clarify and disseminate the structure and operation of the mobility window, including any options for how this operates and the number of credits that can be recognised for the achievement of programme learning outcomes.

Opportunities for further improvement

- The University should consider some of the ideas articulated by the Internationalisation and Protocol Office, the Study Abroad Centre and others in relation to providing solutions to the challenges presented by the dual role as national and international university.

1.6 Teaching staff

Standard:

Teaching is conducted by a sufficient number of professionally competent members of the teaching staff who support the development of learners and value their own continuous self-development.

Guidelines:

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

The HEI supports systematically the development of its teaching staff. Members of the teaching staff engage in development of their professional and teaching skills, improve their supervision competence, and share best practices with one another.

Teaching staff's participation in research, development and/or creative activities supports the teaching process and ensures competence for the supervision of students' theses (including doctoral theses).

Members of the teaching staff collaborate in fields of teaching, research and/or creative work within the HEI and with partners outside the HEI, e.g. with field practitioners, public sector organisations, companies, other research and development institutions, and lecturers from other Estonian or foreign higher education institutions. Qualified visiting lecturers and practitioners participate in the teaching process.

When assessing the work of teaching staff (including their periodical evaluations), the effectiveness of their teaching as well as their research, development and creative work is taken into account, including student feedback, the effectiveness of their student supervision, development of their teaching and supervisory skills, their international mobility, and their entrepreneurial experience or other work experience in their fields of speciality outside the HEI.

Indicators:

•   Competition for elected academic positions
•   Number of students per teaching staff member in full-time equivalent (FTE)
•   Percentage of teaching staff holding a PhD degree
•   The results of the students' feedback about the teaching staff
•   Teaching staff participating in continuing training or other forms of teaching skills development
•   Other indicators depending on the HEI

Evidence and analysis

The workload of teaching staff is defined as the sum of the percentage of the legal week duration devoted to teaching, research and other activities. The panel's understanding is that a 40% teaching load corresponds to 2 days of teaching and 3 days of research and other activities. Salaries come from funds raised at the Institute level plus some basic teaching funding by the Ministry. As a result, the management of the teaching staff is the responsibility of the Heads of Institutes who therefore have a double involvement in teaching and research programmes. While this directly connects teaching and research at a high level (see below), it can also lead to conflicts of interest or instability if the salary of a staff member who delivers a strategic part of teaching is endangered by the loss of a research grant.

The number of teaching staff: student ratio (1:8.5 in 2020) is described as 'very satisfactory' in the SER. This ratio is well in line with a total of ~1600 academic staff for approximately 13600 students. The panel noted that the number of international academic staff has nearly doubled in the past five years (8.4 to 15.5%) which is a positive trend (SER). However, although these numbers reflect a positive situation, they could be made more specific as the academic workload profile is personalized and can range from 100% research to 100% teaching, with all possible configurations in between. Consequently, merely calculating a simple ratio may inadvertently overestimate the availability of teaching staff per student.

A new staff career model has been established, in which seven academic positions (professor, associate professor, research fellow, lecturer, junior research fellow, junior lecturer, and teacher) are now associated in four major categories, in line with the R1-R4 European system. The average age of Junior Research Fellow (31,5), Research Fellow (40,1), Senior Research Fellow (48,5) and Research professor (53) cover rather a long time in relation to career progression. Similar figures (age) are noted for teaching staff: Lecturer (46), associate professor (51) and full professor (55). While the proportions between the different categories are satisfactory, this time span for career advancement raises questions. In particular, it takes on average more than 13 years after a PhD to start to reach a more secure position.

The new career system also includes a systematic 5-year staff appraisal procedure that was implemented in 2021. The rules and procedures are explicit in well-established documents (e.g. Regulations for the evaluation of academic staff - effective as of 30 April 2021) and encompass a large and complete array of activities that include, for example, research, teaching, innovation or international aspects, as well as the feedbacks on students' assessment. This is a commendable improvement in the global academic staff appraisal process. However, a possibility for promotion resulting from a good appraisal depends on the budgetary availabilities, which appear not to be secure or visible. This results in a yearly number of promotions that is still low (six in 2021-2022 for a total of more than 1600 academic staff), which is not satisfactory yet. Setting up an ambitious career procedure without a transparent and pluriannual promotion plan, and sufficient opportunities, could be detrimental to the University. One staff member met during the site visit indicated that promotions were based "more on internal negotiations than on merit"; this comment did not gather disagreement from the other colleagues present. Taken together, such a career model without a straightforward promotion system that is independent from grants could backfire in terms of staff satisfaction and motivation, as demonstrated through the staff survey results made five years after recruitment. This

could also lead to serious inequalities between faculties that receive large research grants for costly research and others where this is not the case. Hence, the problem of opportunities for advancement must be treated centrally and swiftly.

The gender ratio situation is summarized in a very well-presented public plan (*UT Gender Equality Plan 2022-2025*) that contains lines of action and corresponding KPIs. In this respect it should be important to also encode gender equality in decision-making and in the composition of assessment committees such as those for staff recruitment or promotion.

Gender ratio issues are included in the larger problematic of equality treatment that is part of the 2025 plan of action. Addressing these issues in a broad and coordinated manner is a positive trend that should be acknowledged.

The teaching staff is well research oriented and trained. As a whole, 70% of the teaching staff have a PhD and those fulfil 75 % of the total teaching hours. Professors, associate professors, senior research fellows and research professors all have PhDs, which has also become a requirement for lecturers since 2018. Taken together, this shows a very high research level across the entire academic staff.

This is in very good alignment with the Key Performance Indicators (SER) for which the publication number per employee is stable at about 1.3 per year. Furthermore, 17% of UT publications are in the top 10% world's most cited publications. These performance indicators confirm the very good commitment of staff to international-level research. In this respect, the system of Institutes in which their directors pay the staff in large part through competitive research shows efficiency. This visible commitment of staff to research has positive effects by ensuring the proximity of teaching and research, as was evidenced during the site visit to some of the Institutes. On the other hand, the panel also heard that some research-oriented staff delivered unsatisfactory teaching with no pressure to change as they are paid by their Institutes and are mostly indispensable for research (see below).

The collaboration of UT staff with the socioeconomic sector has increased significantly since the last institutional review. In particular, the number of contracts has increased from 53 to 82 and the income from contracts in the meantime increased from €2.2 to 6.8M. Furthermore, the University offers much flexibility for staff members to collaborate for a fraction of their time with industry or to create their own start-ups. While this corresponds to strong incentives, both from the European Commission and from the Estonian government, this line of action should not, in the long-term, become detrimental to the high level of fundamental research and quality teaching present in this University.

UT also intends to promote interdisciplinary collaborations within the staff projects in several ways: e.g. communication and funding of curricula. Of note, the structural reform that reorganised the University into four faculties of equal weight bears fruit at this level because it makes the possible connections much easier to identify and facilitates contact between staff members, Deans and Heads of Institutes.

UT has been active in raising attractive possibilities for staff mobility and international projects through Erasmus and Erasmus+ programmes and dedicated European and/or Nordic alliances (e.g., Enlight) that could in principle yield very interesting opportunities. While the percentage of incoming international staff has doubled during the period of interest, it is surprising to see a steady decrease in outgoing mobility (SER), even before the COVID crisis. During the site visit, the panel heard that "now that the

crisis is over, staff members are eager to travel" but this matter very likely will need attention during the next period.

The number of posted advertisements for positions has decreased from 487 to 164 between 2016 and 2020, while in parallel they moved to being permanent contracts with no defined limit of duration and must be filled through public external recruitment. However, the ratio of qualified applicants per position did not increase and has stagnated at around 1.4 (SER), thereby not reflecting the greater competitiveness that might have been expected. This was discussed in detail during the site visit and the reasons appear to be multiple: the requirement that UT promotes Estonian language and culture in large part through teaching, which reinforces the need for Estonian speaking staff, which is difficult to find abroad; that UT internally generates very qualified staff initially on temporary positions, who are then internally recruited to these "open positions". There is therefore a catch-22 between the obligation to advertise open positions to comply to European Standards, and to recruit very good internal people. This said, given the increasing level of competition that irrigates research and higher education worldwide, UT has to ensure a significant contribution of external staff to bring different ideas and visions.

The university strongly supports the development of teaching and managerial skills. UT has recruited 6 pedagogical engineers, and training is available and encouraged through different courses, incentives and events, for example the "Lecturer to lecturer conference" and "Visit a colleague" week (SER). In addition, UT implements the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) initiative for the development of higher education teachers' expertise in teaching and student learning. This results in a high percentage of academic staff who have participated in teacher training courses and events (SER), all on a voluntary basis. These commendable efforts were acknowledged by teaching staff met during the visit who concurred in recognising the excellent quality and atmosphere of these training sessions and events.

In contrast to this very good feedback on pedagogical training, student representatives explained during the interviews that some of the academic staff members who did not perform as expected in teaching could stay under the radar, despite negative feedback, as they were devoting most of their time to research. This situation should be addressed and under these conditions, monitoring the pedagogical activity in depth via the five-year appraisal system, might not be sufficient.

Conclusions

The panel concludes that the University conforms to the requirements for this standard.

The overall quality of teaching staff is excellent, with a very good level of qualification and with strong involvement in research. This is very visible through the activity of the Institutes that secure very satisfactory funding and constitute an excellent environment for the staff and students. The University has also invested well in supporting teaching staff training and development, which is commendable. An important reform of the career model is also under way.

However, the panel noted areas of potential weakness which could pose difficulties for the future if they are not taken into consideration. Those concern in particular the stability of the staff advancement procedure and feedback. They are detailed below, together with several suggestions for improvement.

Strengths

- The overall level and research involvement of the teaching staff are well above standards (70% have a PhD) and there is a trend to maintain that level of excellence (lecturers must have a PhD in the new career model).
- The teaching staff is very involved in research activities, supported by very good Institutes that operate well within the international standards for research. The output of publications is very good.
- A strong effort has been invested in supporting teaching staff development with recruitment of pedagogical engineers, seminars, training sessions and best practice sharing sessions that many staff find interesting and enjoyable and in which they take pride.
- The career model of the academic staff has been refocused and is now aligned with international standards, with four grades (junior, research fellow-lecturer-Associate prof-prof.) Much effort has also been invested in a 5-year appraisal procedure that is well described and which was implemented a year ago.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The new career model and appraisal system are important improvements, but the panel is concerned that these efforts are hampered by the fact that possibilities for promotion resulting from a good evaluation (6 for >1600 employees in 2021-2022) are neither sufficient nor stable, as sufficient funding provision must be available beforehand. This also results also in over extended time periods in moving from PhD to assistant professor. Consequently, the level of staff satisfaction, which is very good at the beginning of the career, decreases after 5 years. Also, there are concerns that quality assurance processes related to teaching quality leave too many teachers of insufficient pedagogical involvement under the radar if they do not want to improve.
- The panel therefore recommends that UT should secure funds for a sufficient number of staff merit-based promotions every year and communicate this adequately to ensure motivation through opportunities for advancement. It could also consider reviewing junior level staff more frequently, e.g. by introducing forms of feed-back and progress assessments in addition to the five-year formal review.
- It is also recommended that staff appraisal should include the evaluation of teaching quality, notably through the courses assessments (but not of the teachers themselves). The directors of Institutes and Deans should be more proactive in this matter. The consequences of non-satisfactory teaching and/or a lack of effort to improve should be more visible and strengthened.

Opportunities for further improvement

- Gender ratio is an important concern, and different tools have been designed to raise the awareness, but a more top-down proactive attitude could be useful. A course of action could be to encode gender equality in the procedures for the recruitment of appraisal of the academic staff.

- Concerning the staff/student ratio: the repartition between teaching and research is very personalised so the reality may not be as simple as dividing the raw numbers. The ratio of academic staff versus students is very good (>8:1), but it may be different if based on how the total of full teaching times is divided by the number of students. It may be worth refining this indicator, taking into account this number of teaching hours.

- The HEI, thanks to its international visibility, is involved in European networks (Enlight, Erasmus +), which support exchange and collaboration. However, those networks still seem underused for staff development. These could be extremely good levers in the post-covid era.

- Appraisals should become a more open and peer-based process, in particular with adequate gender representation and more international members in the panels.

- The so-called open staff recruitment is generally internal recruitment due to different constraints. The University might consider how best to increase external recruitment to bring in other cultures and ideas (see also standard 5).

- Research collaboration with private sector companies and different agencies (e.g Ministry for Environment) is rightly seen as a present and future priority, and staff is free and encouraged to do so. Efforts should be continued to involve private stakeholders in the programmes.

- Taken together, UT has a great historical and current involvement in structuring the scientific landscape in Estonia, which is commendable. Consequently, the panel was surprised to hear during interviews that research collaborations with other HEIs in Estonia were "not so important", possibly because many consider UT itself to be a flagship and therefore more or less self-sufficient. This should probably be a subject of future attention, given the average size of HEIs in the world and the global competition in which they are involved.

1. 7 Study programme

Standard:

Study programmes are designed and developed while taking into account the expectations of stakeholders, higher education and professional standards, and trends in the relevant fields. The objectives of study programmes, modules and courses and their planned learning outcomes are specific and coherent. The study programmes support creativity, entrepreneurship and development of other general competencies.

Guidelines:

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

The planned learning outcomes are in accord with the requirements for the corresponding level of the Estonian Qualifications Framework, and in planning them the HEI has taken into account the future needs, among other things. In developing study programmes, the HEI has conducted a comparative analysis of similar programmes in leading foreign higher education institutions.

The objectives of the study programme and its modules, the planned learning outcomes, theoretical and practical learning, the proportion of independent work and internship, and the assessment of the achieved learning outcomes form a coherent whole.

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

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

Indicators:

Number of students per study programme

Other indicators depending on the HEI

Evidence and analysis

The SER refers to the strategic plan for criteria and processes re the initiation, termination and operation of study programmes. The panel found that it is through the application of these criteria that UT and, in particular, its faculties seek to meet the requirements set up by the standard considered here.

The SER and the strategic plan are clear as to how UT organises study programme initiation and design, and how the actual decision-making process is structured. Thus, in the sense that the process of programme-related developmental approaches and decision-making within the university is defined, there is clarity as to how study programme objectives and their intended learning outcomes, their course layout and modules and courses are specified. In practice, that process is started bottom-up from faculty level based also on consultation with labour market representatives, with the final decision being taken by the Senate. In relation to the design and development of study programmes, programmes are opened, revised and closed or merged, based upon wishes expressed by the ministry, employers, i.e. the labour market, and the University's own assessment of need, necessity, and fit with the programme profile in relation to its vision and mission. Although stakeholders are consulted, the panel did not see evidence that they are involved consistently and systematically across the institution. Their involvement is rather viewed as a well-heeded principle or possible practice rather than a standardised process.

However, there is an absence of an explicit, sufficiently elaborate format for curriculum design that allows for the validation and description of the learning outcomes of the whole programme, of each year of the programme, and of the separate courses and modules, with all these course elements being fittingly linked to intended outcomes in terms of student competencies, to teaching practices, and to the modes of assessments. No such format was mentioned or forwarded in interviews, e.g. when assessing six specific programmes, and discussions of this matter during the on-site visit confirmed that, whilst issues such as teaching modes, the integration of skills and their alignment and preparation for the labour market are taken into consideration, there is no clear and systematic process for ensuring the aforesaid qualitative features of programme design. Moreover, in particular, the panel could not identify clearly how matters such as international classes and mobility, electives, entrepreneurship and digital skills, for example, might be considered in a systematic way for each module and programme.

While the panel saw evidence, through the study programmes that it reviewed in detail, that most of the aforesaid aspects are taken into consideration in programmes in effect, the panel nonetheless wishes to draw attention to its perception that UT may be advised to be guided more regularly by principles of systematic procedural approach to qualitative programme development, rather than by referencing mainly to the standards set up in the university's strategic plan. Considering the programmes which the panel was asked to check, there were some cases which showed weaknesses as to clarity of valid learning outcomes and correlate competence definition, of coherence in structure and progression, and alignment of assessment practices; some programmes did not demonstrate that the learning objectives are appropriate for the level of the programme (see the reports on the six study programmes specifically considered, under 2 in this report).

Nonetheless, it cannot be concluded that study programmes do not meet the necessary qualitative requirements in general. However, in essence the point made here is that the university's current modes of designing and evaluating study programmes do run the risk that clarity on specific learning outcomes is underdeveloped and seem not to be aligned fully to each other, that the courses and the

assessment modes are not always constructively aligned; i.e., to sum up, that overall consistency of the programme tends to be low due to shortcomings in programme planning processes. In effect, therefore, as for the assessment of the qualitative level of study programme development as such is concerned, it is difficult to testify systematized, holistic provision for quality design of study programmes throughout the university. The process of designing programmes and evaluating these as a university, and also as external evaluators, would benefit greatly from a format for curriculum design which explicitly addresses motivation and comprehensive outline of learning objectives, of alignment of competences and skills, and of assessment. Such procedural format would better guarantee that all criteria of optimal programme design in terms of identification of valid programme objectives, intended learning outcomes and aspired student competencies, of matching content, compilation and progression of programmes, and aligned assessment are met reliably. Introducing processes of programme development in such a way would be to the benefit to UT in as much as it has proved to be beneficial to those universities which already apply this approach.

The panel is of the opinion that the absence of systematic usage of such a holistic template or format for study programme design, which would ensure that the aspects described are met, is prone to run the risk that programmes are offered which are not accurate enough in stipulating fit-for-purpose, level-adequate learning objectives and not sufficiently coherent in order to ensure that individual courses and teachers can provide the best learning experience to serve towards achieving the overall learning objectives. If UT made changes in the quality requirements to be met in planning study programmes as indicated, apart from ensuring programmes from their start, UT would also facilitate the monitoring and evaluation of programmes and learning outcomes, which will enable programmes to spot omissions and discrepancies at the design or evaluation stages.

The panel had been informed, during its meeting with the vice rector, about the university-wide evaluation process the structure of which has been changed recently. According to the new procedure, teaching quality is assessed every year, while the programme director makes an interim report every second year and a more detailed report every third year. In line with the new procedure, every year approximately one third of UT's programmes will undergo a detailed evaluation. This new three-year cycle of detailed programme evaluation enables the councils of academic units and faculties to better review the strengths and weaknesses of programmes and to make better proposals for development as they can focus on fewer curricula at a time. The panel cannot comment on the content of that new process as it was currently being put into practice, but such an approach and endeavour, undertaken on a regular basis, is certainly to be welcomed if it is well-structured via a clear format, and if it is guided by clear targets and goals and by a university wide format for description of learning objectives, teaching activities and modes of teaching and assessment.

Conclusions

While there is clarity as to the process of developing programmes, in particular as far as the decision-making process is organised, and while programmes that were reviewed by the panel in effect generally match the requirements of standard 1.7, there were also some cases which lacked clarity with regard to the validation and validity of learning objectives and related expected learning outcomes in terms of competencies, and on subsequent alignment of curricular layout and assessment practices.

There was no sufficient evidence which that suggests that there is significant involvement of stakeholders external to the UT, including international experts, in the development or review of programmes, throughout all programmes based on systematic implementation of policy. The panel is of the view that the inclusion of such externals would provide an opinion as to the depth and level of the programme according to international standards in comparable settings and universities.

Despite the shortcomings mentioned above, it flows from the positive elements also mentioned above that – when considering all elements of standard 1.7 holistically and while taking note of UT's current undertakings to address the matter – the panel assumes the standard to be met, albeit with some reservation. Despite this positive judgment the panel wishes to formulate a strong recommendation, indicating suggestions for improvement in programme planning. In view of the presence of the university's evaluation and monitoring processes it is recommended to strengthen these processes by setting up transparent and explicit course and curriculum design.

Strengths

- The panel had been informed of the University wide evaluation process that was currently in progress, aiming at improvement of expectations concerning qualitative aspects of study programme design. Such endeavour is to be welcomed if it takes place on a regular basis and is accompanied of clear targets and goals, ensuring a university wide format for description of learning objectives, teaching activities and modes of teaching and assessment.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The panel is concerned that a university wide format for curriculum design and content is not visible. The panel recommends that a clear and consistent template or format in terms of quality criteria be adopted for the articulation of valid learning objectives and expected learning outcomes at programme and at module level when developing or reviewing a programme. This template should include clear guidelines as to what needs to be included in a programme description and should cover all of the elements that must be considered for each programme (as outlined above).

Opportunities for further improvement

- To involve non-UT and where appropriate international experts in the design and evaluation process of programmes.
- To establish councils of stakeholders or other structural means of involving stakeholders in discussions about programmes.

1.8 Learning and teaching

Standard:
Admission requirements and procedure ensure fair access to higher education and the formation of a motivated student body.
The higher education institution systemically implements a student-centred approach that guides students to take responsibility for their studies and career planning, and supports creativity and innovation.
Graduates of the higher education institution, with their professional knowledge and social skills, are competitive both nationally and internationally.

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

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

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

Teaching methods and learning aids used in the learning and teaching process are modern, appropriate and effective and support the development of digital culture, contributing – among other things – towards the development of a self-directed learner, creativity, innovation and the development of other general competencies.

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

Students are motivated to learn and contribute to improving the quality of their studies by providing meaningful feedback on both the learning and teaching process and the organisation of studies.

Doctoral students plan their studies, as well as their research and development activities, in collaboration with their supervisor(s), setting specific objectives for each year and assuming responsibility for achieving those objectives.

Indicators:
•   Student satisfaction with the content and organisation of studies
•   Alumni satisfaction with the quality of studies
•   Employer satisfaction with the preparation of the graduates
•   Other indicators depending on the HEI

Evidence and analysis

The admission procedure at UT is fair and applied consistently across all programmes, with support for admission being provided to potential candidates from a central office. The information that is communicated is comprehensive allowing candidates to make an informed decision about their future. International students follow the same requirements but are offered supplementary support for relocation and cultural integration.

According to the SER and as confirmed in meetings (T), the application window is variable for different categories of students. The panel found that in some cases the length of the window may be too short and it could require reconsideration, especially for international students and those who are rejected and need to find an alternative programme at a different university within the same admission cycle. An insufficient application window may also prove to be detrimental for the University, not just the students, as it may mean that UT could lose students who are put off by the short application window and risk of rejection and who may apply to other universities sooner to ensure that they have secured a place early in the admission cycle. UT also confirmed that it does not offer recommendations for alternative programmes to candidates who have been rejected for their preferred option. The panel found that there are a number of programmes with low intake and high dropouts; it therefore believes that the UT may wish to consider making changes to the admission process to facilitate higher programme numbers.

In analysing the learning and teaching process, the panel found that, in the main, learning and teaching activities motivate students and offer opportunities for development, by consideration of the learning outcomes set for the programmes and courses, respectively. However, it expresses some concern in relation to how the learning outcomes are formulated and how they are applied across teaching, learning and assessment activities to ensure that the programmes are set at the correct levels on the EQF, and that students are sufficiently challenged to achieve the required outcomes. (See Standard S7 and S9)

UT advocates a student-centred approach and produces a Good Practice Teaching guide (W) which describes excellent teaching as 'learning-centred, science-based, involving cooperation between all stakeholders, including the world of work, and promoting creativity and autonomy'. Whereas the Good Practice website has all the hallmarks of guidance aligned to modern-day teaching and learning philosophies, the panel found them to be relatively undetermined and is of the opinion that in implementation in the various programmes there is a varied, rather than shared, understanding of how student-centeredness, and specifically the Good Practice Guide, should be and is translated into practice. The panel appreciates that for given disciplines some elements of student-centeredness may prove more prominent than others; however, it still found that the lack of consistency with regard to the application of a unified vision regarding student-centeredness could be destabilising for both staff and students in conducting (designing and implementing) their daily activities. Furthermore, this situation may lead to high levels of variability in applying the aspects mentioned as core principles. This also makes any evaluation of teaching and learning more difficult and adherence to the core principles less secure.

The study programmes reviewed in detail by the panel demonstrated a level of usage of digital technologies in the teaching and learning process, with both staff and students noting that relevant training to bring everyone to level on digitalisation was offered during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the panel noted that staff development training at UT is not compulsory and left to the availability/interest of the teaching staff to pursue. It found that this inevitably leads to a level of inconsistency with some teachers being better prepared than others to make use of the digital technologies which UT supports. Notwithstanding the fact that there will always be early and late adopters, it still appeared to the panel that technology seemed less than integrated on some programmes and that there was no consistent practice, in the absence of any university-wide digitalization policy.

A number of courses are delivered through the medium of English. UT confirmed that when these were initially introduced, there was reluctance on the part of staff to move into English- medium delivery, but that since then, staff are well accommodated with the specificities of teaching in a foreign language. It was also confirmed that staff are able to access training on multiculturalism and multilingualism, with a view sensitizing them towards the dynamics of multicultural and multilingual interactions. As with other staff training, these courses are optional and there is no monitoring of who attends and whether there are any benefits that impact their classroom performance. Whereas some of the existing staff may have discovered and adapted their pedagogical styles and teaching methods to multicultural classroom environment, UT does not provide any consistent guidance on pedagogical practices for English-medium education and any staff coming new to this may require some time to accommodate, if they are open to change.

UT has outlined a clear and comprehensive approach to recognition of prior learning, including experiential and work-based learning, which it systematically offers as part of the educational experience. Students can complete a form indicating which aspects they seek recognition for and there is a formal process for approval. Specifically, internships may benefit from full or partial recognition. (See also standard 9).

There are also arrangements in place for adjustments to be considered and made for students with disabilities. (SER). (See also standard 10). Once applied centrally, teachers directly agree the most effective adjustments necessary for implementation. Staff have confirmed that UT offers training on this topic but there is no requirement to take up the training even when one of their students might have been recognised as having a disability requiring adjustments. It is frequently the students who know what might work for them or even have the required technical equipment or software to ensure they have full access to the educational content (T). This system does not, however, apply before admission, as such UT does not have a process by which to tell applicants, before they enrol, whether it is possible to accommodate them and what sort of adjustments are likely to be approved. A disability assessment could prove important to applicants as part of the admission process, as it may make the difference between accepting a place at UT or taking up a place somewhere else.

The panel visited some programmes where practice-based teaching and learning was well embedded, with clear links to the respective industries and strong collaborations with industry representatives. Where these were present, they manifested in the form of project-based activities, simulations or real-

life tasks. However, other programmes did not benefit of the same integration of practice into the teaching, even where this could have been successful. With the strong drive of current higher education to meet the employability agenda, the panel believes that more could be done to integrate practice-based, professionally oriented, industry-induced activities to ensure that students develop ample understanding of and receive the necessary exposure to their respective professional contexts.

Some of the programmes visited offered compulsory internships. Generally, internships are very important for practice-based learning, but this will only hold true if they are relevantly linked to the programme learning outcomes and monitored for achievement. In the case of UT, where internships are proposed as mandatory the panel observed that monitoring was not consistent or systematic, and that there was insufficient coordination or linkage with the learning outcomes (See also standard 7). In the main, it seemed that in some cases the success of the internship may be more the result of commitment of the employer hosting the student, rather than coordinated effort by the UT programme management. Where internships were proving extremely helpful to the understanding of future careers and the application of knowledge and skills acquired during the programme, and students expressed a high degree of satisfaction, programmes were less able to demonstrate systematic monitoring of internship activities and any follow-up actions resulting from such monitoring processes (see standard 3)

During the site visit, it was brought to the attention of the panel that there were reported instances of poor teaching across UT, with university management indicating that they were aware of such instances but had little leeway or inclination to act to resolve these situations until they escalated. Even though the staff appraisal system seemed to be informed by sufficiently varied sources and the dashboards could allow for monitoring and early recognition of any reported slippage on teaching, the University did not seem to have a clear mechanism in place to take relevant and necessary steps towards addressing such concerns (see Standard 6).

UT has acknowledged that drop-out rates are an issue, but generally attributes these to external, contextual reasons, listing personal commitments, mismatch of expectations, financial difficulties or simply no interest in finalising through a graduation thesis as the relevant skills have been acquired. It was suggested to the panel that learning and teaching reasons do not sit at the core of dropouts. However, when asked about monitoring arrangements to pick out cases which could potentially lead to drop-outs, it was confirmed that such monitoring is not systematic and that there are rarely any concrete measures which might be resorted to in order to avoid individuals dropping out (see also standard 10).

Graduates of UT are well appreciated and deemed highly employable. The various industry representatives, whom the panel met, confirmed that they recruit UT graduates with confidence and that these have the skills necessary to integrate in full-time employment. Some alumni confirmed that their contractual engagements see them working internationally and they feel they are well equipped for successful international team-working/co-working. It was emphasised to the panel that more could be done to embed 21st century skills (soft skills) across the curricula, and the University has confirmed that a project was launched more recently to create a systematic approach for curriculum development with full consideration of soft skills in focus. This will eventually have to trickle down to learning and

teaching as pedagogies will need to more strongly be geared on developing soft skills, by designing learning tasks and measuring learning by due consideration of such skills.

Conclusions

In the view of the panel, UT conforms to requirements for this standard.

Overall, admission procedures, learning and teaching activities, and graduate employability outcomes are aligned with the expectations of the standard. However, more can be done to offer consistency and address problematic areas, which currently do not pose a systemic risk.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The panel is concerned that throughout UT's programmes there is no equal understanding and implementation of student-centred teaching throughout UT's programmes. UT is therefore recommended to ensure that a clear vision of student-centeredness is outlined and included in curriculum design and curriculum evaluations, to allow for consistent application.

Opportunities for further improvement

- UT may wish to consider enhancements to the admission process by offering an earlier admission window, proactively recommending students alternative places and/or completing a disability assessment, if relevant, prior to enrolment.
- UT may wish to issue formal policy stipulations on the use of digital technology in learning and teaching, to ensure more consistent usage with better integration.
- UT may wish to intensify practice-based teaching and learning on programmes where this is not sufficiently embedded.
- UT may wish to issue formal guidance (maybe by extending the Good Practice Teaching Guide) relating to English-medium instruction and what constitutes good pedagogical practice.
- UT may wish to review internship arrangements to ensure these are set out and monitored for alignment with programme learning outcomes.

1.9 Student assessment

> *Standard:*
> **Assessments of students, including recognition of their prior learning and work experiences, support the process of learning and are consistent with expected learning outcomes.**
> **The objectivity and reliability of student assessments are ensured.**
>
> *Guidelines:*
> The assessment criteria are understandable to students and students are informed about them in a timely manner. Members of the teaching staff cooperate in defining assessment criteria and apply similar approaches.
> Assessment methods are versatile and relevant, assess the degree of achievement of learning outcomes (including general competencies), and support the development of a self-directed learner.
> If possible, more than one staff member is involved in the development of assessment tasks and student assessments. Along with assessments, students receive feedback that supports their individual development.
> The HEI supports the development of teachers' assessment competencies.
> Evaluation of doctoral students is transparent and impartial. Its purpose is to support the development of doctoral students, to assess the effectiveness of their current work and to evaluate their ability to complete the doctoral studies on time and successfully defend their doctoral theses.
> When recognising prior learning and work experience towards the completion of the study programme, results obtained through the studies and work experiences (the achieved learning outcomes) are assessed. Students are aware of their rights and obligations, including the procedures for challenges regarding assessments.
>
> *Indicators:*
> •   The number of credit points applied for and awarded under the accreditation of prior and experiential learning scheme (APEL)
> •   Other indicators depending on the HEI

Evidence and analysis

UT's student assessment is based on the national regulation and is specified by the University's Study Regulations. The Guide for good practice of teaching (W) sets ground understanding for teaching staff to implement appropriate grading systems and give students useful feedback. (SER) It is compulsory to publish via Study Information System (SIS) the intended student assessment methods and criteria by 15 April for Estonian and 1 March for non-Estonian studies in regard to the following academic year's courses, meaning that students are informed early (SER p. 45). The panel learned at the site visit that

plagiarism control, although not compulsory, is a common practice, regularly applied to all written submissions (see standard 4).

The compatibility of the assessment methods with learning outcomes is supported by the degree of satisfaction amongst the students shown in their feedback: 68% strongly agreed and 26% generally agreed with the relevance in the 2020/2021 autumn survey. (SER p. 45) Amongst some study programmes at Master's level, students emphasised the fact that the teaching staff use relevant assessment methods, depending on what is the most suitable approach for any particular course (see also standard 7).

Use of e-support with regard to Moodle course gradebook is supported throughout the institution, actively supporting the students in their progress. (SER) UT uses SIS as a tool to support teaching staff in compiling assessment methods. The students have given good feedback about the usefulness of grading (54% fully agree and 31% partially agree in the 2020/2021 survey) (SER p. 45). In general, students are satisfied with the feedback given to them by academic staff. Procedures for contesting a grade are defined and regulated. (W). During the site visit the panel found that there is general understanding among students concerning the existence of possibilities to contest grades. The panel had some concerns as to whether the student appeal is documented or recorded in case students needed to protect themselves if the case becomes more substantial.

Development of teaching staff assessment skills is supported with different initiatives, which are funded from UT's budget. There is a general training course carried out every semester for the teaching staff where assessment methods are explained and learned (SER). During 2019-2021, different assessment-related training courses were carried out, including those for e-learning practices. It emerged during the site visit that all new teaching staff goes through compulsory training, but old teaching staff might not acquire the most relevant assessment skills as they are not required to take the training. (SER) Teaching staff is provided with a set of guidelines for proper assessment during distance learning. It was implied in the meetings that even during the Covid-19 crisis online student assessment was generally without complications.

Assessment of graduation theses and final exams is generally well managed and regulated with specific rules set for academic papers as well as the Study Regulations. Plagiarism control is regulated as a requirement for graduation theses and final exams by the Study Regulations (SER) (see also standard 4 above). There is a clear set of requirements stated in each faculty's web pages, which support students and teaching staff to have a clear understanding regarding graduation theses and final exams.

Doctoral students' progress is well supported by the doctoral study agreement between different parties. Good practice of doctoral studies is included in the agreement, which helps to establish an individual plan for the student with regard to their studies and research. The student's individual plan is assessed during their evaluation. (SER)

UT requires PhD students to have three publications before obtaining their doctoral degree. If needed, students must engage in the labour market aside from their doctoral studies. The panel has some concerns that the PhD students might not be encouraged enough by their supervisors to finalize their thesis, which results in PhD student drop-out in favour of entering the labour market without a PhD

degree (see also standard 7). Regulations for Doctoral Studies enable faculties to organise doctoral students' progress reviews in a way that is most suitable for them, giving freedom to decide about relevant practices (SER). Rules regulate the necessity of one external member of the review committee. Students can give feedback on supervisor's work – however, this is faculty-dependent and is not a regular requirement –, thus it can be done as good practice or avoided. The Doctoral students' survey in 2020 indicates good numbers regarding the supervisor having time for their students (8,3/10) and satisfaction of supervision's quality (8,0/10) (SER). However, the SER acknowledges that there is a need to increase the quality of doctoral students' progress reviews, which the University plans to pursue by improving the regulations in the Regulations for Doctoral Studies.

Clearly stated rules for the recognition of prior learning and professional experience (RPL) i.e. accreditation of prior learning (APEL), exist in the annex of the Study Regulations. There are RPL committees throughout the Institutes/study programmes that can deal with their specialisations and analyse intended learning outcomes specifically (T; SER). RPL counsellors in each structural unit is provided in case of issues related to applications or curricula/courses regarding RPL (T; SER). Information about counsellors and committees is available in the SIS. Different aspects like the acquisition of skills and knowledge through degree studies, other organised studies, professional experience as well as social and leisure activities are assessed in the RPL process. The number of credits applied for and taken into account indicates significant success in this regard (SER). The numbers have increased since 2015/2016 from 42,074 credit points to 55,873 in 2019/2020. The percentage of RPL considered credits in comparison with all credits has been stable throughout the years, varying between 7-9% (SER) Throughout the years it is seen that many positive decisions have been made.

Conclusions

The panel is of the view that the University of Tartu conforms to the requirements for this standard.

In particular, assessment policies are accessible on the web and regulated by guidelines. Regarding assessment methods and criteria, these are generally related to the teaching and respond to the expected learning outcomes, which the students have emphasised as well. However, the panel noted that there should be a general format that would provide an overview of the assessment methods' relevance in study programmes. The meetings with students and teaching staff showed that students get proper feedback. Recognition of prior learning and professional experience supports students and is notably well-managed at the University.

Strengths

- Recognition of prior learning and professional experience is appropriate and organized systematically throughout the university.

Opportunities for further improvement

- Although students are aware of the possibilities of contesting their grades, further improvements could be made to encourage or monitor the proper documentation of such cases.

1.10 Learning support systems

Standard:

The higher education institution ensures that all students have access to academic, career and psychological counselling.

Students' individual development and academic progress are monitored and supported.

Guidelines:

The HEI assists the student in developing an individual study programme based on the student's special needs as well as educational abilities and preferences.

The HEI advises its students (including students with special needs and international students) on finding internship places as well as jobs. Students are aware of where to get support in the case of psychological problems.

The HEI has a functioning system to support and advise international students (including psychological and career counselling) which, inter alia, helps them integrate smoothly into the membership of the HEI and Estonian society. The HEI analyses the reasons students withdraw from studies or drop out, and takes steps to increase the effectiveness of the studies.

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

To support study activities, timely and relevant information and communication technology solutions have been planned, including the study information system, document management, and e-learning environment.

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

The HEI monitors student satisfaction with the counselling services provided and makes changes as needed.

Indicators:

- The average duration of the study by levels of study
- Dropout/withdrawal rate (during the first year and the whole study period)
- Students` satisfaction with the support services
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

Evidence and analysis

UT offers a wide range of support services to students which are evaluated and improved over time. Students are helped by their Programme Directors and academic affairs specialists to develop their

individual study programme (T), however an area which requires additional support is that of dropout rates. A project in 2017 confirmed that UT needed to improve services at several levels, noting that the most effective interventions occurred at the start of a student's studies and at graduation (SER). The rates of student interruption improved by 6% between 2020 and 2021 which has an overall interruption rate of 10% for the university. At master's level, in 2021 more students interrupted in their second year than their first year, and for doctoral students, more interrupted in their 4th year than any earlier year (dashboard). Over the past five years, there has been an increase in students requesting to terminate their studies, from 38% to 47%, the most common reason being the wrong choice of specialisation. However, the number of students failing to complete because their period of study expired has reduced from 36% to 24%, primarily due to a change in legislation which now permits students to participate in their studies whilst on academic leave (SER). On average 13% of students who interrupt their studies during an academic year will continue the following year, albeit perhaps on another curriculum. In terms of the average time students take to graduate, over the past five years, there has been a slight decrease for all programme levels apart from doctoral studies which has increased from an average of 5.6 years to 5.8 years (SER). The main reason cited was the need for 3 high quality outputs in order for students to graduate which the students found difficult, resulting in some giving up and going into industry; however, the rules are changing to reduce the number of required outputs which should help (S). Students will typically get help from peers and websites, more than programme directors and academic affairs specialists, however UT trains senior students, called tutors, who help first year students to start their studies, 45% of first year students had used the help of tutors, which demonstrates their value and importance (SER).

UT has a learning analytics dashboard which shows the academic background for each student, for example, the number of times they have dropped out or interrupted their studies. This is used by the Programme Director particularly to identify struggling students for targeted support. UT has rules regarding suspension of studies, for example a gap of three years for taking care of children, and two years for health reasons. If students do not return in time, then their studies are terminated. However, if a student drops out there is no time limit to return. Students can be readmitted to a programme and their previous credits will be matched against the current syllabus for credit on their new / updated study programme, so they only need to study the minimum credits remaining to graduate. Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is supported by a committee for each study programme which takes RPL decisions (T&L meeting) (see also standard 9). The main risk for a student dropping out is at the start of their studies so this is the focus of the University support. These students are offered courses to help them prepare for university study. Programme Directors will also offer a range of support services and advice to help students (T).

UT offers a range of counselling services which are operated by the Office of Academic Affairs. The bilingual (Estonian and English) services covered by this office include: those related to study, careers, psychological counselling and supporting students with special needs. They also run courses on study motivation, public speaking, stress, time management, job searching, and how to prepare for studies abroad. Surveys show that 20% of students have used one or more of these services and had reported that the introduction of a booking system in 2020 had made it easier, and more user-friendly, to book an appointment with a specialist advisor (SER). Overall, in 2020, the demand for psychological

counselling increased as a result of the pandemic from 799 students in 2018 to 1402 in 2020. The demand for mental health services (1402) and study-related counselling (1462) was over three times that of the demand for career counselling (422). As of March 2022, an additional psychologist was added to the counselling centre which has reduced the waiting time to receive psychological counselling to an average of 2 weeks. During exam periods the Night Library offers lectures, counselling and therapy dog sessions to help relieve student stress (SER). It is possible that teachers can also undertake the role of counsellors e.g. at Narva which may cause a conflict of interest if the student is also taught by the academic (S). The Counselling Centre collects feedback from individual and group counselling orally at the end of sessions (SER and T). In addition, the Student Union also collects information about their needs and wishes which the Counselling Centre responds to, providing feedback to the Student Union (D). Counselling staff have a good relationship with the Student Union who are a strong voice for the students (T). Improvements are made throughout the year as feedback arrives, so it is an ongoing process (T). The Counselling Centre teaches a "Peer Tutoring" course which obtains feedback annually from both tutors and first-year students. Students also provide course level feedback in writing annually. The above feedback is collected, and alongside the analysis of waiting list times, the information feeds into the changes made (D).

Students with special needs are able to access a variety of support from specialists who can arrange for adaptations in their studies to help if needed. Additionally, many academic staff have also been given some training in this area, for example, in 2020, 119 employees, 67% of whom were academic staff, participated in relevant seminars to help understand how to enhance the support they give to their students (SER). Each seminar focused on a different special needs topic. Videos are also available to staff to help identify special needs and advise them what to do (T). In addition, a guide was created this year for academics to help them understand a range of disabilities and the kinds of adaptations they could consider when teaching students with special needs (T). The current system Panopto can automatically produce captions for videos in English. For Estonian speech, a separate transcription/speech recognition service is required. However, this does not produce the best results, so manual editing is required. (T).

A range of other support is provided around the campus, for example the provision of specialist workstations for the visually impaired, and buildings have been made accessible in addition to the provision of wheelchairs, rollers and crutches in the library and academic buildings (SER). Students with a disability have been able to apply for an exemption from fees for some time however for the 2021/22 start, UT was the first University to allow students with reduced work abilities to also apply for this (SER) In terms of the process for special needs, after students have been admitted (as outlined in Section 1.8) the students first speak to an advisor to discuss their needs and possible support. Information about suggested adjustments is sent to the staff in charge, namely the Programme Director and Student Adviser. The University has a range of existing support, for example speech recognition software, set IT standards for reading, some technical support for the blind is available in the University library, support for carrying books etc. if a student has mobility issues. Whilst the students have a right to apply for adaptations, and the University must offer support, sometimes these cannot be implemented (T). These students can also apply for a scholarship and the Student Union will also offer help if they can. If these are insufficient there are no funds to purchase additional support, however there is a good range

already in existence. Students can contact the centre during admissions to arrange support in advance as well as during their studies (T).

An extensive range of support services are available to international / visiting students. These include advice on their studies, accommodation and visas (SER). UT has partnered with the Tartu Welcome Centre, which was created in 2019 and provides additional support for international students, particularly related to accommodation. It also offers an interpretating service (SER). The library produces an introduction to its services in four languages other than Estonian: English, German, Russian and Finnish and at the start of their programme students participate in an orientation course to help them get started. Students are provided with a wealth of other information and are therefore provided with a checklist to help them keep track of everything during their first few weeks. UT also offers a Buddy Programme, where international students can share their experiences and support each other (SER). Feedback is obtained through participation in the world's largest student barometer undertaken by i-graduate and the results are excellent. For example, in 2017 UT was 1st in Europe, 3rd in the world, for their support for students to apply for visas or residence permits. Their counselling services were also highly rated, coming 4th overall. International / visiting students were over 95% satisfied with a range of teaching and assessment measures. Overall, their feedback was extremely positive, identifying only two areas for improvement over which UT has limited influence, that is the lack of job and traineeship opportunities (SER).

In terms of study regulations, the UT uses SIS, which was introduced in 2001 and exchanges data with the university's Moodle virtual learning environment (also contains study materials), and the Estonian Education Information System. SIS2 was launched in 2018/19 with the aim of enabling UT to become as close to paperless as possible by 2023 and offers a role-based dashboard. It will also be linked to the ENLIGHT network which will allow students to take courses at other ENLIGHT universities. The transition to the new system is being done in phases and students are also engaged at the heart of the development as users of the system. Overall, over 90% of students agree, or somewhat agree that the information systems, digital environments and physical infrastructure support their studies (SER).

In terms of IT support, the office has more than 60 people. However, given the shortages of people in the country in the industry, recruitment of new staff can be difficult and many of the staff have joined the IT department in the past two years. A new strategy is being developed and the importance of IT is supported at the highest levels, alongside investment (M). Central IT provides a range of general services as well as a range of specialist IT support such as high-performance computing and genomics. Some Institutes have their own IT support services which are independent although the teams collaborate. Systems are not as well integrated as they could be, and cybersecurity has been identified as a risk. Institutes with their own specialist IT support have to manage their own security arrangements which potentially introduces further weaknesses into the system. The IT team is currently working on regulations to establish responsibilities and have sought external advice from a consultancy (M). They are also working on business continuity plans which they don't currently have however considerable effort has gone into educating staff about cybersecurity (see also standard 2 for IT-related issues).

The library recently underwent a modernisation process and has an annual budget of over four million Euros per year (M). It provides a range of scientific literature, and a good variety of electronic databases

cover a full range of subjects, supporting both the teaching and the research (SER). It also provides rooms for both group and private work. To aid access, printed materials are digitised where necessary (SER), however the library also earns additional income through teaching and digitisation services offered externally. The role of the library has changed over time, its previous focus being books and journals, but it now has an additional focus on the use of IT, intellectual property and is the main lead of open science and open access in the University. The library is open to the public and is part of a consortium of scientific libraries in Estonia who negotiate access to databases, and coordinate with the National Library. It is normally open from 9am to 9pm however during exam periods (two weeks in the winter and three weeks in the summer), it remains open until midnight. The library budget is split and invested in each discipline based on student and researcher numbers (Resources meeting). A librarian meets with Deans and subject specialists to prioritise purchases for each discipline. In terms of the resource to invest in open access publications, this is currently mostly undertaken by the scientists however the library may play a part in this in future (resources meeting) (see also standard 2).

In terms of support for student participation in extra-curricular activities and civil society initiatives, there are many student groups run by the Student Union. They provide a webpage which explains all the initiatives for students which also include an Erasmus network. From the University side, some institutes have activities for students include a peer mentoring network.

Conclusions

In the view of the panel, UT conforms to requirements for this standard.

Overall a good service is provided to students across the board. There are good feedback mechanisms which support ongoing enhancement, however there are some areas which should be prioritise, such as IT development and psychological counselling.

Strengths

The library is well resourced and has been recently modernised. It has a good approach to dividing the budget spend between disciplines which involves a discussion with the Deans. It also has the ability to generate its own income through teaching and digitalisation. Researchers say have everything they need and staff at Narva feel well supported. Resources can be sent to Narva as needed from the main library. However, whilst the library is overall very strong, there are a few areas for further development – see below.

Opportunities for further improvement

The University may wish to:

- Improve the library provision at Narva for the Law programmes in Tallinn which is below standard, however it is noted that students are able to use other local library facilities instead.
- Ensure independent counsellors are available for all students to talk to on all campuses i.e. do not combine the role of counselling with teaching.

- Allocate a fund for students with special needs whose requirements cannot be supported from existing resources.
- Continue to work with students and employers to improve retention and completion rates of students.
- Areas for IT development:
  o Finalise the IT strategy
  o Reduce complexity of IT services and improve integration between IT systems
  o Clearly define the IT responsibilities of the University and the Institutes
  o Enhance investment in cybersecurity centrally and in institutes to ensure all systems are robust and secure
  o Continue to work towards achieving the ISO27001 standard as planned

1.11 Research, development and/or other creative activity

Standard:
The higher education institution has defined its objectives and focus in the fields of RDC based on its mission, as well as on the expectations and future needs of society, and assesses their implementation and the societal impact of its RDC activities. RDC supports the process of teaching and learning at the higher education institution. Support services for RDC are purposeful and support implementation of the objectives of the core process.

Guidelines:
The HEI places a high value on the role and responsibilities of the field of RDC in society and evaluates the results of its RDC activities, their international visibility and societal impact.
The HEI responds flexibly to the current needs of society and the labour market in terms of its research and plans its research in collaboration with enterprises, public sector institutions and organisations of the third sector.
Members of teaching staff introduce students to their research results as well as the latest scientific achievements in their areas of specialisation, and involve students in their R&D projects where possible.
The organisation and management of RDC take into account the profile and the mission of the HEI.

Indicators depend on the specificities of the HEI:
- Numerical data:
    - (1) scientific publications by classifiers;
    - (2) public presentations of creative work; recognition from international competitions; reviews in professional publications, etc.;
    - (3) patent applications, patents;
    - (4) textbooks, study aids of various formats, etc.;
    - (5) system development solutions; product development solutions; environmental applications solutions;
    - (6) contracts concluded with enterprises;
    - (7) spin-off companies, etc., in line with the profile and priorities of the HEI; etc.
- Number of scientific publications / creative works per member of academic staff and per employee with the requirement to do research (FTE, by areas)
- Number and volume of externally funded projects of RDC activities
- Proportion of projects with a positive financing decision out of the submitted project applications.
- Other indicators depending on the HEI

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Evidence and analysis

In the area of research, development, and creative activities (RDC), an overall impression of the scientific output is discussed, followed by the description of a set of elements/components which underpin good practices at UT.

Considering the customary measures of research output for universities, UT has made steady progress since the last institutional accreditation. An example is the increase in share of 10% most highly cited publications which has moved from 13% to 17,1% over the period of the last five years. Further, it can be witnessed that researchers are able to and do publish in the most prominent journals as both first and corresponding authors. The funding support and success in winning open grant competitions shows a marked improvement over the last period. The funds received in the research budget amounted to €54,5M in 2016, in 2020, the figure was €100.8M. To be highlighted is the success within the EU's Horizon 2020 framework programme, as UT has received funding for 173 projects worth almost €69M (including 7 ERA Chairs, and 5 ERCs). Additionally, activities in connection with industrial innovation has been increasing, as UT has received around €90,000 in licensing income, with service contracts amounting to €240,000, from licensing agreements, and a total of €6,8M coming from R&D service in 2020, which is a tripling in financial value from 2016.

The strategic planning of RDC activities is an area which exemplifies the notions of "academic freedom". RDC is driven to a large extent by the opportunities for funding, primarily through research projects. This has the advantage of being reactive to opportunities as they arise, however at the expense of a planned future in areas that the university believes to be areas of importance. This is reflected in the strategic or action plans of the university, which leaves the precision of actions, timelines and actors largely undefined. One reason behind this type of management could be the consequence that most financing is already "ear-marked" by either the Ministry of Education and Research, or through the individual research grants. This leaves a rather small percentage of free money available for targeted initiatives, as was mentioned by the rector, €6M may be used for strategic initiatives directed centrally at the university out of a total €200M/annual budget for the entire university operations. The area where priority choices have been made most recently is the planned investment in scientific equipment through the infrastructure fund. If the competitiveness of RDC activities is to be compared to the wider regions of Europe or globally, big strategic investments are becoming the norm, and thus incremental improvements will, in the long-term, result in a relative decrease in competitiveness. This was acknowledged during the site visit. UT external alliances have been approached from a pragmatic perspective. These strategic partnerships include EIT-Health, EMBL, CERN, as well as a consortium for biobanking. That is, the relationship and investments into alliances must meet a thresh-hold of 2,5x return in order to justify viability, but also it is an important tool used to leverage shared use of major scientific equipment. Overall, a strategic theme emerges which embraces the Green Deal, digitalization, and health.

Science support services of grants and technology transfer are very well developed and thought-out, even though they are relatively new initiatives. Overall, the grant office is very proactive, it has a digitalized matching service between the funding call and the researcher's expertise. It offers a range of potential services under the umbrella of pre-award activities. As noted, UT has been one of the most

successful institutes within the Widening programme of the EU financing scheme. The office has clear target goals, KPIs, and has set priorities to accommodate its workflow.

The actions under the umbrella of entrepreneurship will take a bit longer to fully be realized, which is understandable; nevertheless, the elements of the proof-of-concept fund, the Science Park, the Venture group, are well thought-out. UT is to be commended for the conceptual work that has gone into processes, including the IP rights, and the relationship of potential conflicts between academics and their commercial activities has a set policy, which is clear.

Assessment processes follow a 5-year plan, which includes the formulation of the plan by the academic and their supervisor, with KPIs to be met. The assessment tends to be dominated by quantitative metrics, with some degree of qualitative assessment; however, there is little external review of academics, with the exception of recommendation letters from external peers. The majority of assessments are performed as an internal process. The level of review is mainly at the individual levels, with some macro quantitative assessments at the level of institutions. Research groups/teams, at the level of team management and performance of the team, is not currently a norm. A need for further development relates to the career path of the academic, since a positive assessment rarely leads to promotion (see also standard 6). Overall, the performance indicators, as shown in the blue box above, includes publications, grants awarded, patents, and engagement with enterprises; however, it was acknowledged that the assessment of activities related to social impact is an area that need a more thought-out approach and development.

Societal Impact

The stated RDC standard includes, "expectations and future needs of society, and assesses their implementation and the societal impact of its RDC activities". In reviewing the SER document, there is an inadequate attention paid to what is meant by the 'needs of society' (for that factor, also see Standard 12). One could assume from this document that it is primarily the engagement of the University with the business community as a source of financing, which is interpreted as societal engagement. However, it became apparent at the site visit that UT is quite engaged with locally impactful research, including projects on soil biodiversity, digital health, and linguistics/genetics. The interest and willingness of different faculties to work on joint projects is worth mentioning here, as it would be an approach to address the needs of society. It has been acknowledged that technologies alone cannot solve societal challenges (e.g., Covid vaccine uptake by society), but rather the inclusion of social and natural scientists working together would be more apt to address matters impacting society. The two-way engagement between society and the academic community, which is already evident in the discussion between UT and government ministries, could be further developed to understand and provide solutions to the challenges of the communities, (e.g. social issues – housing, education, needs of the elderly; environmental – air quality, forestry & soil sustainability; economic – joblessness). Establishment of a system to support purposeful RDC activities within UT would more directly address the 'needs of society' but would also need to be encouraged through assessment indicators.

The new scheme for academic positions has been recently introduced. However, the actuality of promotion will need more work (see standard 6 for more detail).

PhD training and requirements for graduation has been reformed and improved. The three-publication rule has been revised, as well as the sustained funding for PhD students, which is understood to have reduced the drop-out rate and decreased the average time to graduation.

In the view of the panel, the post-doctoral fellow system for recruitment needs further development. At present, a position of post-doc is not consistent with other European research-intensive organisations. This may be one reason for the fact that the external recruitment of post-docs is not considered a norm. This career stage should be seen as an opportunity to bring in new ideas, through personnel with hands-on research proficiency, which can make impactful RDC contributions to UT and then propagate UT reputation and network if/when they continue their career in other institutes worldwide. Recruitment via open-calls, which could be funded through institutional funds or through the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and COST Actions can address part of this issue, but also a clear policy for career progression from post-doc to assistant professor should be considered to make external recruitment a more viable option. At present, having 1.4 qualified applicants per position does not indicate a competition for academic posts.

Conclusions

The panel concludes that the University conforms to the requirements for this standard.

The RDC activities cover a wide spectrum of fields and disciples, which reflects the holistic scale of UT, and is being performed to a high standard. The relationship of the RDC activities to societal impact are evident within the research programmes, and are seen to be as quite creative, with unique combinations of interdisciplinary activities. The teaching and learning activities embedded within the RDC is evident, particularly in the degree of engagement with PhD students, as well as through internships with BS and MS students, but also cooperative learning with members of the society-at-large. As stated in this report, the support for RDC in the form of centralized support offices are very strong.

Strengths

- The scientific support services, particularly the centralized grant office, are of very high level by EU standard, and have been rewarded through competitive funds.
- The Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, as well as the additional agencies connected to UT who have developed a well, thought-out system to support new innovative enterprises.
- The library service and focus on access of research journals through digital, open access is well-invested.
- The overall research output is quite strong, and academically impactful.
- The interest, seemingly at an organic, or bottom-up level, to address important and potentially impactful societal issues is commended. The examples of interdisciplinary work in unique combination, pertinent to Estonian society, is very good. It would make sense to promote this more and give it greater visibility.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- There is a concern that the promotion scheme within the academic ranks is not robust, with limited numbers of promotions per year (4 out of 1604 FTE, in 2021). The panel does not believe this to be motivational from a personnel perspective and could lead to a concern as regards the sustainability of the RDC performance for the future. A review process which leads to clearer guidelines for promotion with achievable targets should improve job satisfaction. The panel therefore recommends that the frequency of review, as well as the manner, be revised and considered more often with respect to the junior level academics. This should include the involvement of external peers, examining qualitative as well as quantitative means, with targets including an assessment of societal impact, and future potential.

Opportunities for further improvement

- The academic assessment process remains mainly an internal process. Assessments needs improvement with a more mixed approach, including qualitative review from external peers. Additionally, the panel encourages the development of concepts for future activities, as it will support younger scholars which may not have the most robust track-record, although a potential good future trajectory.
- Assessment of RDC activities would be further improved if they incorporated peer-review or benchmarking exercises at the level of research teams, research units and institutes. Currently, only the individual and the larger institutional level is being tracked. The working unit of research is at the team level, which must master the supervision of staff, and their development, the coordination of projects, and finding and sustaining critical mass is essential for competitive research.
- The development of a coordinated systemic interdisciplinary, societal challenges and impact centre/support office can more directly address UT's involvement with societal impact. The interest would be to enable more robust mechanisms to bring the different faculty's expertise to work on joint projects to more directly address solutions pertinent to societal challenges while also providing an interface with society related to issues of social, environmental, economic, and technological solutions.
- Regarding the support for new enterprises, focus on patents and licensing, which is well-developed at UT, is one dimension of entrepreneurship, although the panel would encourage more services developed to encourage the formation of enterprises which may be revenue-based, as well as NGOs, thus encouraging the faculties of Arts and Humanities, and Social Sciences. Soft-skills courses, such as project management, communications, people management, business development, etc.
- Addressing the gender imbalance by mainstreaming these issues is commended. The panel suggests that a further step to increase the "family-friendly" work-life balance is to conduct a survey from within the UT staff and academic faculties if the investment in a child day-care within UT would be in enough demand. Research activities tend to be time consuming, which require much on-site time to be most effective. Support for child-care and/or nanny service, relieves some aspects of this added time-commitment which impacts parents differentially, as well as more junior researchers.

- The utilisation of university alliances to advance and leverage the universities activities is quite positive. However, it could be strengthened to support mobility schemes, and cooperative research.
- Renewing the influx of new ideas which is so important for the continuous improvement on research activities is the mobility of the academic staff. Schemes at all levels of RDC personnel needs to be supported:
  - BS and MS Students – mobility schemes (using alliances and Erasmus funding),
  - PhD Students – short and long-term research stays in other universities abroad,
  - Post-doctoral fellows – recruit them as returning Estonians or foreign-national (Marie Curie Actions funding or matching funding schemes),
  - Guest lecturers – increase the number and frequency of seminar series in all disciplines from both public and private sectors,
  - Professor levels – encourage and support sabbaticals of 6-12 month stays (both outgoing and incoming faculty).

1.12 Service to society

Standard:

The higher education institution initiates and implements development activities, which enhance prosperity in the community and disseminate recent know-how in the areas of the institution's competence.

The higher education institution, as a learning-oriented organisation, promotes lifelong learning in society and creates high-quality opportunities for that.

Guidelines:

The HEI contributes to the development of the community's well-being by sharing its resources (library, museums, sports facilities, etc.), by providing consulting and advisory services, participating in the development of non-profit sector and charitable activities, and by organising concerts, exhibitions, shows, conferences, fairs and other events.

The HEI involves alumni in activities aimed at the development of the HEI and the knowledge society.

Employees of the HEI participate in the work of professional associations and in other community councils and decision-making bodies as experts, directing society's development processes as opinion leaders. The impact academic employees have on society is taken into account when evaluating their work.

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

Indicators:

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

Evidence and analysis

UT is the university with most members and the largest volume of teaching, research and development activities in Estonia, thus creating not only an opportunity but also certain obligations in terms of its service to society.

The University of Tartu Act states that UT is a cultural institution in addition to being a universal integrated research, development, educational institution, with the mission to advance culture in addition to science. The mission of UT includes "to bear responsibility for tackling challenges faced by society" and positions UT as a "leader of Estonia's knowledge-based society". Also, its strategy documents stipulate the role of UT in ensuring social and economic welfare as well as promoting progressive change in Tartu and southern Estonia. The relationship between UT and the local

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communities at its Pärnu, Viljandi and Narva colleges ensures that the local colleges are actively engaged in providing service to society both in terms of use of their facilities as well as, for example, engaging local study communities, namely by working with local employers to establish an internship base. Finally, one of the University's goals is to popularise research and scientific thinking in society. Lifelong learning has been stated as a strategy direction in plans A2020 and A2025. This breadth of strategic ambition in relating UT to the society indicates a commitment to the role and mission of UT and leaves an impression of a committee-based bottom-up rather than top-down strategy process. A variety of services to society are included both in the strategy document of the HEI as well as its execution plan. To motivate adherence to these stated strategies, the staff evaluation system implemented in 2017 includes assessment of academic employees' contribution to society.

UT preserves and develops the buildings forming part of UT campus, which belong to cultural heritage, as do the collections and archives containing works of scientific, artistic, and historical value. The UT facilities, its library, museum, natural history museum and botanical garden, as well as UT's sports facilities are open to the public, used as open venues and as a base for a variety of services provided to the public by UT. 32% of registered users of the UT library are from outside of the UT. The Natural History Museum and the Botanical Garden organized about 2283 programmes for 42 506 participants between 2016-2020. The UT Press is stated to be making some books it publishes available on open-access platforms. The facilities of UT are used extensively for providing services to the public, it seems unlikely significantly more could be done given the relatively small size of Tartu. However, there appears to be a lack of more novel ways of opening UT to the society: a systemic program on open-access publications, open data initiatives, hacker- and makerspaces etc. would allow the technological base of the UT to be opened to public in addition to its physical presence.

Offering programmes outside Tartu, e.g. in Narva where a study programme was assessed by two panel members, is one of the elements pursued by UT to provide on-site learning opportunities throughout Estonia in order to facilitate learning for a wider spread of the population. In effect, therefore, this can be seen as a specific mode to serve society at large. Whether or not doing this is justified from the viewpoint of economics for UT may be questionable, and particularly so with respect to the shift to online teaching. However, matching the balance between cost incurred by staff, buildings, and other expenses in Narva on the one hand and servicing society by spreading on-site educational opportunities across the country on the other hand is essentially a matter of setting political priorities. Considering the supply of programmes in Narva holistically by weighing these two factors, the decision of UT to run on-site programmes in Narva is understandable. Especially with the introduction of more distance learning paths, the argument against outpost facilities may weigh more heavily in the future. Likewise, similar reasoning may apply to other UT locations outside Tartu, i.e. in Pärnu and Viljandi.

In terms of lifelong learning, UT provides continuing education courses, public lectures etc., and is doing well in the area in terms of outreach. UT also operates, and has been doing so for decades, the Youth Academy focused on providing education for students of basic and upper secondary schools which covers areas or depth of learning beyond the standard school curriculum on a variety of studies. The market of continuing education is stated to be deliberately targeted by age groups and professions (educators, medical professionals, lawyers, etc.), and the continuing education framework is stated to be subject to continuous improvement with the cadence of three years on top of course-based

feedback. In doing this, UT contributes significantly to updating employability throughout Estonian society, thereby fostering prosperity both of individuals as well as of society at large. The number of learners in the Youth Academy has grown nearly 40% from 2016-2020 while the number of participants in continuing education programmes has remained stable over the past 3 years with 2020 showing 10% growth despite the pandemic.

UT utilizes its infrastructure and staff to provide a wide range of services to the society. Among others, various projects which target the younger population won several awards in 2019 and 2020. Also, all members of both line-ups of the Scientific Advisory Board of the Government of the Republic on COVID-19 formed in 2020 had been affiliated to UT.

While the outflow of expertise to the public is extensive and is considered as part of the work of an academic employee, it was unclear to the panel how this outflow of expertise is distributed among staff, i.e., whether academic outreach is indeed a widespread systemic effort or stems from a relatively small number of high-profile, highly motivated individuals. Also, it was not clear if and how this outreach is coordinated to maximize impact.

Conclusions

In the view of the panel, UT conforms to the requirements of this standard.

UT initiates and implements development activities, which enhance prosperity in the community and disseminates recent know-how in the areas of the institution's competence. It also acts as a learning-oriented organisation, promoting lifelong learning in society and creating high-quality opportunities for lifelong learning.

The main opportunities for further development lie in a more structured linking of service to society with the institute-level strategic planning processes and a more structured approach to horizontal coordination of outreach activities, especially on personal level.

Strengths

- The University has a geographically wide network of colleges and offices, that are utilized in promoting and providing life-long learning, disseminating recent know-how in the areas of its competences, and providing other services to the local community
- The undertakings of HEI for increasing and enhancing life-long learning are well-developed, market based and, via higher education processes link well to the multiple youth-oriented activities.

Opportunities for further improvement

- UT could consider institutionalising the currently person-based grassroots level society engagement activities by establishing a formal coordination mechanism between various units (colleges, institutes, museums etc.) of the HEI to assure the available resources are utilised to the fullest to provide services to the society
- UT could consider assuring strategic attention to the service of society by including specific aspects of providing service to the society (promoting scientific thinking, life-long learning,

opening the facilities etc.) in the institute-level action plans supporting the execution of the HEI strategy.

2. Assessment findings of the sample of the study programmes

The panel evaluates samples of study programmes during accreditation process to evaluate the implementation of principles and regulations for studies valid at the HEI level and the functioning of the internal evaluation system of study programmes at the HEI.

The structure of assessment report combines requirements of several institutional accreditation standards that are relevant at the study programme level and concentrated on three evaluation areas.

The assessment reports of the study programmes are used as the input to the general repo.

2.1.   Law (Bachelor)

General information:

The UT Law Bachelor Programme, which is run in Tartu and in Tallinn, has been in operation for twenty years. It is of significant importance since a considerable number of students enrol in the programme, i.e. in 2021, 696 students overall, of which 477 were regular and 219 block-mode students; there were 125 student-funded places with, by contrast, 571 non-student-funded places. These figures indicate that the programme is in high demand, which is underscored by high admission thresholds since only about one third of applicants are actually admitted. However, in the last three years enrolment has continuously dropped noticeably from its peak of approximately 800 students before 2020. Part of this decline in numbers may be explained as a consequence of the pandemic, but not fully since the decline is uneven when comparing enrolments in Tartu and in Tallinn. Therefore, the drop in enrolment may also raise the question if, and how, the programme could be made more attractive content-wise, e.g. by broadening choice of electives, and by resolving   scarcity of staff. The relatively low number of funded places goes along with relative scarcity of public funding of teaching, which in turn impacts on the provision of sufficient resources such as digital tools, literature, space, and also teaching staff. From the viewpoint of employability, the programme needs to bear in mind that a master's degree is required to allow graduates to enter into the profession. This fact causes the Law School to focus its core interest on linking the bachelor programme to the master programme, preferably by offering an integrated five-year master programme, which, however, has so far not been conceded by the Estonian government. Moreover, this fact also explains why only 73 per cent of bachelor programme graduates report that their jobs are very closely or at least to a great extent linked to the speciality which they studied, while 27 per cent of graduates state that their jobs were not or only to some lesser extent related to their speciality.

The Law School changed the curriculum on 14 February 2022 and received approval for the new curriculum by the Council of Social Sciences on 10 March 2022. The panel was informed about this fact only in the course of interviews during the site visit and received a document which shows the changes and their motivation two days after the site visit. In line with EKKA policy and practice, this report is essentially based on the factual description given to the evaluation team in the SER and its annexes, which show the situation in January 2022. However, the panel has taken note of the changes and considers these as elements of its assessment in as far as projection of improvement is concerned.

2.1.1 Planning and management of studies

- The design and development of study programme(s) take into account the expectations of students and other stakeholders, national strategies, legislation and trends in the particular area as well as labour market needs. The level and volume of RDC activities is sufficient and supports the launching of the study programme(s).

- The objectives of study programme(s), modules (including courses) and their learning outcomes are concrete and coherent. The teaching content and methods and assessment criteria and methods support students in achieving their learning outcomes and developing their key competencies. The study programmes support the development of creativity and entrepreneurship and other general competencies.

- The administration of material and financial resources that ensure the design and implementation of the study programme(s) is purposeful, systematic and sustainable. The learning environment, including materials, tools and technology support the students in achieving their learning outcomes.

Evidence and analysis

According to the curriculum oversight sheet presented to the evaluation team along with the SER, the bachelor law programme shows the following structure: The bachelor law curriculum of 180 ECTS is divided into several types of modules (SER appendix). There are 'Obligatory Base Modules' (48 ECTS). These consist of several obligatory first-year study modules grouped into two sub-modules of 24 ECTS each, with one of these focusing on general, e.g. philosophical, historic, linguistic, doctrinal foundations of law and the other on general competencies such as communication, text composition and research-oriented writing, Estonian language, and also economics, psychology, sociology. 'Narrow field modules' (48 ECTS) offered to second-year students consist of two obligatory sub-modules of 24 ECTS each, one of them related to constitutional law (6 ECTS), criminal law and criminal procedure (9 ECTS each), and the other one related to private law, covering civil law, general part (6 ECTs), law of obligations, general part (6 ECTS), contract law (6 ECTS), and property law (6 ECTS). 'Specialisation Modules' (48 ECTS), which – according to the curriculum oversight sheet – address second- and third-year students, are

subdivided into two sub-modules of equal weight (24 ECTS), one with a focus on public law comprising administrative law (6 ECTS), EU law (6 ECTS), international law (6 ECTS), local government law (3 ECTS), and state liability (3 ECTS), and the other one with a focus on private law comprising company law (6 ECTS), family law (3 ECTS), labour law (6 ECTS), law of inheritance (3 ECTS), and non-contractual obligations (6 ECTS). Finally, the third study year comprises 'Elective Modules' (12 ECTS), which are either courses specified in a list provided by the law school and comprise a compulsory course on legal language of 6 ECTS, or else study experience in multicultural environments; and 'Optional Courses' (18 ECTS) to be chosen freely and thus providing an opportunity to pursue personal interests and sharpen employability– for example, by means of a course on 'public procurement law', on 'basics of entrepreneurship' and on 'business plan'. Finally, the 'Bachelor's Degree Comprehensive Exam' scores 6 ECTS.

Content and structure of the programme, as described, essentially follow the logic of the subject and legislative requirements. The programme is basically fit for purpose in that law programme graduates are educated in the basics of law, which makes them competitive in the labour market (SER). Moreover, the programme offers choices to students in order to address their specific interests and to sharpen their personal profile. This should help to increase individual employability by means of addressing specific needs for their future career, and to choose a master programme and decide on a specialisation which it may offer. The module 'study experience in multicultural environments' is particularly useful in view of employability of bachelor law graduates who choose   not to opt for the route into the law master's programme leading to the classic jobs in the legal professions, and who will often work in an environment where social and intercultural skills play a major role. Such elements of the programme, as well as fostering self-expression, communication and academic as well as general writing skills, and addressing the historic, social, economic and other backgrounds of the law, should also help graduates with developing creativity, entrepreneurship and general social and economic competence to the advantage of their personal development and society as well as business and national economy and international competitiveness in general.

However, there are a number of factors which make the curricular design, i.e. the programme content and course progression, appear to be sub-optimal as regards sufficiently sharp focus on employability, including self-employment, and on competences. This applies, in particular but not exclusively so, with a view towards the needs of those bachelor students who see the law programme as a stand-alone programme. In part, sub-optimal curricular design also impacts on the meaningfulness of intended learning outcomes, i.e. on the stated degree of specification of intended educational objectives at the level of individual modules. While intended learning objectives are generally sufficiently specified, the Law School itself states its awareness of the fact that the definitions of intended learning outcomes would benefit from detailing, sharpening, and more standardisation of style and length.

As regards curricular design and description of learning outcomes, the following critical factors are to be mentioned in concrete terms: Student surveys show that the 'Obligatory Base Modules', which are extensive, largely theory-based and do not directly address legal matters from a hands-on practical experience, dampen interest of first-year students. Students' criticism is understandable and largely justified. While it is understandable from a purely academic viewpoint to commence with issues which

form the base of law and legal thinking, these subject matters are often not easily and fully comprehended by beginners who have not yet had any insight into concrete legal cases, problems, structures, processes, and reasoning. In addition, study elements such as Estonian orthography and composition, at least in as much as it were to deal with other matters than specifics of writing assessments on legal matters and case solving, should not be needed in a highly selective programme which sets high admission standards like the bachelor law programme; if however, Estonian orthography is a false term, as was mentioned during the site visit and indeed appears to be made clearer in the new curriculum, that wording should be corrected for the sake of clearer communication of expected course outcomes, e.g. by stating that the course aims at enhancing capacity for to-the-point and addressee-oriented self-expression.

The Law School should consider reducing the courses ascribed to the 'Obligatory Base Modules', and possibly to either redefine them as optional courses or else to move some of them into later study years where students' contextual knowledge is more advanced and students' grasp of theoretical and societal backgrounds of law is therefore more enhanced.

The law school had identified these challenges in the report submitted to the evaluation team and had indicated that it was intent on tackling the issue (SER). The decision taken in February 2022 shows that this has indeed been done, in the main by reviewing the so-called basic modules. In future, these will comprise the following subjects: Legal system and method (6 ECTS), history of law and legal thought (9 ECTS), introduction to legal analysis and argumentation (3 ECTS), special case management (6 ECTS), Estonian orthography and teaching expression (3 ECTS), economy and law (3 ECTS), man, society, and law (6 ECTS), law enforcement (3 ECTS), research (6 ECTS), and fundamentals of legal research and academic expression (3 ECTS). These changes are useful steps towards improvement. However, there is still scope for reduction and for moving some of these modules into later study years where students should possess better, i.e. more concretely experience-based comprehension of the issues underpinning modules. This may, for example, apply to modules such as the 'special case management seminar'. This may, for example, apply to a module such as the 'special case management seminar'. If 'law enforcement' is understood to mean enforcement of public order, the law school should make sure that this course, which is foreseen as a basic module, is not taught before general administrative law, which is foreseen as a direction module, since 'law enforcement' is a specific application of administrative law. Moreover, the match between the modules 'introduction to legal analysis' and 'fundamentals of legal research and academic expression' is not clear.

The 'Narrow field modules' make sense in that there is a differentiation between a private law strand and a second one on constitutional law and substantive and procedural criminal law, i.e. on public law matters. However, the concrete design does not sufficiently reflect the requirements of employability and academic balance in these respective fields. As for the private law column, non-contractual obligations, which are currently part of 'Specialisation modules', are so basic that these might better be placed into the correlate 'Direction module'. Civil procedural law is missing altogether; although it is recognized that this course is offered at master's level, it appears expedient to introduce also bachelor students to that legal field in order to acquaint them with an approach to procedures which is in stark

contrast to procedural approaches in criminal and administrative cases, and also in order to add a concrete element of practice to studying substantive civil law.

As for the public law column, constitutional law seems underweighted not only on its own merits but especially when compared to the extensive module on õcriminal procedure, in particular since this is of lesser relevance for the employability of bachelor graduates who do not work in the profession. By contrast, administrative law deserves so much attention for reasons of relevance and educational complexity that it should be seen as part of the related 'direction module', and it may also require more weight, i.e. more ECTS points.

To sum up, the choice, weight, and location of courses in and between the 'narrow field modules' and the 'specialisation modules', as indicated in both the old and the new curriculum needs an overhaul along the aforesaid lines; or possibly even more preferably, the distinction between these two categories, with the difference between these being hard to understand anyway, should be abandoned altogether in favour of merging them into one category only. However, the site visit revealed that the curriculum oversight sheet presented to the evaluation team misleads readers to assume that the modules must be studied in the study year which is indicated for the modules in the curriculum oversight sheet. De facto, however, students are free to move modules, which would mainly apply to the so-called basic modules assigned to the first study year. Moreover, faculty members pointed out that the labelling which differentiates between 'direction modules' and 'specialisation modules' is of no practical relevance since in reality all of the courses under these name tags are compulsory and of equal importance for students; these subdivisions in terms of grouping were said to be in place only in order to match overall study directives set up by the University and were felt to be a straitjacket which the faculty would rather abandon. The panel supports this view and believes it would improve communication by providing first-glance understanding of the overall curricular design.

Faculty should consider curricular reform towards accommodating specific room for the development of skills and competences, in particular by means of courses which link and integrate knowledge from different legal fields and also from non-legal disciplines. This is a pedagogically useful move in order to address the fact that, in practice, issues are seldom confined to one domain of law, and therefore, to sensitize law students on societal problems and to enable them to solve them holistically. This reform focus will also enhance students' capacity to identify and solve real-life problems, in particular by showing how problems relate to different legal domains and how they are intertwined with other academic disciplines. Setting up such courses could go along with groupwork, which should also foster cooperative skills and support self-management; the law school has realized the benefit of such practice by introducing such concepts in the new curriculum.

While student internships are not explicitly located in the curriculum and explicitly awarded ECTS weight, it is understood that these are in fact included in the curriculum under the rather general label 'practical work of students' and carry 6 ECTS; irrespective of the name, internships need to be more explicitly specified in terms of definition of intended learning outcomes. The curriculum oversight sheet does not explicitly provide a window for student mobility. However, it is understood that students can use the 'optional module' on study experience in multicultural environments to that end, and therefore

the bachelor law programme matches the general university requirement to make provision for a volume of at least 15 ECTS credits for a module 'international learning experience' de facto. Another 15 ECTS credits can be gained if the study abroad period covers subjects from the list of electives.

From a more fundamental, overall perspective on methodology with regard to curriculum design, it is suggested to develop and establish the bachelor programme along structural issues of learning objectives in terms of expected learning outcomes, i.e. by formulating the overall learning goals at the end of the three-year programme, of each study year, and of each module. Doing this should embrace more than factual knowledge. In particular, programme design should also cover the identification of skills and the experience as to how other disciplines contribute to making and applying the law in concrete, practical ways. Along with this approach, teaching modes as well as assessment practices should be reviewed to ensure alignment with the aforementioned goals of learning. While the new curriculum in place from autumn of this year is appreciated as a valid step forward, taking the reform yet further along the lines suggested here should enhance the quality of the programme even further.

The bachelor programme also serves as a stepping-stone into the master programme leading to full professional qualification and the panel saw evidence that this is the case. Most students opt for that path, and this factor is uppermost in the awareness of the law school. There may be a call to demonstrate connectivity in the curriculum design and its description while at the same time contrasting this fact to the relevance of the programme for students who see the offer as a stand-alone programme leading to employability on its own merits.

The Law School states that teaching and learning tools, while these are basically in place, need improvement (SER). This pertains to space including the quality of the Tallinn premises, to law literature, and in particular to digital devices. Moodle is seen as being in need for improvement. Enhancing the digital learning environment is particularly desirable with regard to the high number of external learners. Such shortages may be primarily responsible for the fact that student satisfaction is slightly lower than on average in the UT Faculty of Social Science, and enhancement of digital competence as a learning objective appears to be the one feature which employers agree on. These shortcomings indicate that there is scope for the School to further support students' opportunities to self-manage their studies and thereby to develop self-reliance in shaping their learning capabilities.

As for teaching staff, the personnel available for the programme is involved in research and developmental activities, which ensures good academic backing for teaching and, as is intended as an overarching educational goal and a hallmark of the law school, research orientation of studies (SER). This credibly safeguards academic relevance and high quality in terms of the subject matter of the law bachelor programme. In addition, top practitioners teach, thus adding a practical element to the programme. However, the School states that the number of teaching staff should be increased. Shortages in that respect show that staff are not always fully available for student counselling, feedback, or other supportive activity, and also that students voice their wishes for a broader choice of electives. The Law School is aware of these challenges but finds it difficult to fully remedy the matter in view of general shortage of highly qualified staff and the relative low levels of pay for qualified lawyers (SER).

It is suggested that enhanced coordination between programme offers in Tartu and in Tallinn could be a way forward to solve staff resource problems, at least partly. Such coordination could be particularly advisable in view of the aspiration to broaden the offer of electives and other specialist courses. Considering the scarcity of staff and facilities, teaching modes should also be reviewed, especially with a view towards offering joint courses between the two locations, e.g. in a hybrid version and virtual classrooms shared by Tartu and Tallinn students. From a broader national perspective in view of a third law bachelor programme in Estonia and the overall decline in student numbers in a relatively small domestic market, there could also be a strategic choice whether or not, and if so how, burden-sharing through inter-institutional collaboration especially in the bachelor programmes might be advisable, while diversity, competition and differences could be agreed upon and offered at the level of master programmes.

Strengths

- The bachelor law programme excels in emphasis on traditional understanding of academic quality in that it attaches great importance to contextualising law in its cultural, philosophic, historic, political, economic environment, and by attempting to strengthen students' critical thinking.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The panel is concerned that the programme design does not sufficiently consider its value for bachelor-only students. While the bachelor law programme needs to serve most students as a first step towards admission to regulated law professions via the master programme, the Bologna Process concept of bachelor programmes nonetheless requires bachelor programmes to also serve as stand-alone programmes with relevance for employability, incl. self-employment, and students' personal development. In that light, the law school is recommended to explore systematically and holistically, with broad societal input stretching beyond traditional professions, which factors constitute employability beyond traditional jobs in the legal profession and personal development, which competencies contribute to these goals, and how to translate these findings into programme design for students who do not want to opt for the master law programme. Such assessment would, for instance and in particular, need to explore soft skills in view of personal capacity-building in specific societal functions, such as process steerage, mediation, communication, both in public and private contexts.
- The panel is concerned with the choice of topics/courses foreseen for the programme, their sequencing, and the workload definitions. It is therefore recommended to reconsider these programme design features for relevance and/or for appropriate extent of workload and/or didactically optimal positioning within the curriculum. This applies to, for example and in particular, the suitability of the extensive requirements stipulated at present in the field of so-called 'basic courses'; to the balance between public law fields and procedural matters as contrasted to the extent of criminal law elements; and to the question if and how problem-

based transversal issues covering various fields of law should be offered as curricular learning experience.

- The panel is concerned with the communication of learning outcomes. It is therefore recommended that learning outcomes description for modules are harmonized and standardized throughout, both in terms of style and length and also by taking descriptions beyond listing of expected knowledge, while making sure that the programme objectives and their correlate learning outcomes of the entire programme and of each of its constituent modules are substantially explored and communicated in terms of competencies.

- The panel is concerned with the degree as to which the programme is communicated. Therefore, it is recommended to enhance the description of, and also the communication on, the programme and its overall structure, i.e. namely the sequencing and order of courses and the correlate skills and content. This entails thorough analysis and developmental approach to programme design, leading not only to coherent definition of learning outcomes, but also to outlining modes of teaching activities and their alignment to intended learning outcomes. The same applies to fostering skills, critical thinking, assessments and also, for example, opportunities for international mobility along with recognition of foreign credentials and for internships.

Opportunities for further improvement

- While it is appreciated that there are suitable questionnaires in use, quality assurance processes, especially informed input from students and externals, should be further developed towards making them more interview-based, routinely systematic, and documented, thus adding more dimensions of quality assessment to the current strong practice of informal and mere module-based methods for gathering information.

2.1.2 Learning, teaching and assessment

- Conditions and organisation of admission ensure fair access to education and motivated student body. Students' choice of specialisation is supported.

- A student-centred approach is used in the studies, aiming at the students to assume responsibility for planning their studies and career and supporting the development of key competencies and achieving the learning outcomes of the study programme.

- Student assessment, including taking accreditation of prior and experiential learning into account, supports the students and corresponds to the learning outcomes. Objective and reliable assessment is ensured.

- The organisation of studies including practical work and training is based on the specificities of students and forms of study and supports the student in achieving the learning outcomes. Opportunities have been established for mobility within Estonia and internationally.

- Support services for students are in place and available for students. Individual development and progress of students are monitored and supported.

- Graduates of the study programme are competitive in terms of their knowledge and social skills both nationally and internationally.

Evidence and analysis

The admission of students is well structured and following strict criteria and allowing for strict selection; however, this being the case, the graduation rates as presented in the SER are disappointing and may be seen as a reason for concern. If selection is strict and assuming the curriculum follows the standards and criteria of ECTS, it might be worthwhile to investigate the graduation rates and specifically the reasons for dropouts and delays in study and seek remedies. The panel noted that there might be many factors outside the control of the programme. Nonetheless, following up on students' progress, specifically since the programme, even though it is offered in two locations, is relatively small in student numbers and students could be under closer scrutiny by staff. The effort should be worthwhile for the sake of stepping up insight into reasons for dropout or slow study progress, which should in turn help with offering assistance and guidance when necessary.

The University and the Law programme are proud of the student centred features of the programme and the development of independent students, although the SER does not indicate precisely what is understood by student-centredness, how the development of skills is catered for, how these aspects are taken care of and guaranteed in an overall study programme which describes the alignment of skills, the method(s) of teaching and the coordination thereof, and the realisation thereof in teaching and assessments. It to be is left to the course coordinators/ the staff responsible for a course, with little

coordination of the relevant skills (legal writing, speaking, mooting, writing memo's, client counselling, law lab, IT skills etc) among the different courses with a relevant build-up and a guarantee that these skills are indeed offered and mastered and tested. For this reason it has already been strongly suggested to develop, define and describe the curriculum coherently along the lines of learning objectives and teaching activities and the integration of skills and methods of assessment and teaching modes. Both in the old and the new curriculum, specific courses may devote room to theory and method and reflection. Nevertheless, it is recommended to ask attention for the necessity to build in substantive law course elements which can be qualified as 'evaluative' or 'critical' or 'comparative', i.e. as aspects which train the students in critical evaluation of statutes, case law and legal literature. A bachelor programme is more than conveying the black letter substantive law as it is, and ought also to include aspects of critical analysis and a search for 'better' solutions and options, which does also require the students on how to define 'better'. The amount of ECTS appeared to the panel sometimes to be relatively small for major topics of law, which may easily lead to restricting the course to becoming lessons in legal knowledge and doctrine only, whilst neglecting the aspect of critical analysis and thinking.

Assessment is a necessary part of any curriculum to provide students feedback as to their progress, accomplishments and weaknesses; to test that they meet the curricular and learning outcome requirements and to ensure that skills and substantive knowledge are jointly mastered and that students have sufficient knowledge and know how to apply it. Due to shortcomings in the descriptions of expected learning outcomes and teaching modes, it was difficult to identify progress towards systematic implementation of an approach to assessments which meet these expectations. In this context, reasoned feedback on the good and not so good elements of students' performance, be it written or oral, would be useful, while students mentioned that such feedback is not given in all cases. (Refer to the major overall suggestion to draft such an analysis of the curriculum).

Support services are in place and well described in the SER and various underlying documents. There are concerns about study facilities – particularly space –, library materials and study-materials, and counselling and feedback by staff; the first two points mainly apply to the Tallinn branch, which students complain about and which also the SER identified as a weakness. These aspects are, next to quality of teaching staff and of teaching, of essential importance. It is therefore strongly recommended to resolve these drawbacks with all deliberate speed. The necessary steps need to be taken to add more study spaces and to resolve the scarcity of study-materials by making these available through E-links in course materials and similar links to E-stock in the library. Study-books written by teaching staff might also be expected to be made available in sufficient quantities to students. Finally, the panel suggests to making support available for teaching staff in order to help them with dedicating their time to teaching and feedback, for instance by providing a reasonable number of student assistants and by freeing academic staff from administrative duties as much as possible.

The university and the law bachelor programme are intent on delivering a competitive programme and competitive graduates. Since the vast number of bachelor graduates do not enter the labour market without a master degree, the best way to assess employability as a yardstick for programme quality is to relate to intake in master programmes and job market success of master degree graduates. In that

respect the data given in the SER show that graduates are well received; they are also well received in the sense that many of them have jobs whilst studying in the Law bachelor programme. However, under Estonian law some professions allow for entrance of bachelor graduates, such as bailiffs, public prosecutor offices, assistants to public notaries, municipalities; moreover, there are job opportunities for bachelor graduates in non-regulated professions, such as start-ups, banks, or media. That aspect underlines, as mentioned above, the relevance of ensuring a stand-alone role of the programme, which has led to recommending that this factor must also be taken into account when defining the law bachelor programme content and structure, and that future development of the programme should also include representatives from other than the traditional professions only.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The panel refers to the areas of concern and recommendations as outlined above.

Opportunities for further improvement

- The panel refers to the opportunity for further improvement as outlined above.

2.1.3 Development, cooperation and internationalisation of teaching staff

- Teaching is conducted by a sufficient number of professionally competent members of the teaching staff who support the development of the students.

- Teaching staff follows the principles of academic ethics and the codes of conduct in case of non-compliance.

- Members of the teaching staff participate in international mobility programs which encourage the development of their teaching and RDC activities and the cultural openness of the HEI and the Estonian society.

- The effectiveness of both studies and RDC activities, students' feedback, the effectiveness of supervision, development of teaching and supervision skills, international mobility and entrepreneurial or work experience in the specific field outside the HEI is taken into consideration in evaluating the work of the member of the staff.

Evidence and analysis

The SER points to the difficulties related to a scarcity of competent and high-ranking teaching staff. Options are being explored with regard to employing adjunct staff. Indeed, being able to rely upon a sufficient core of academic staff, being and feeling responsible for the Law programme, and conducting good and well recognised research, and being versed in substance and skills, is key. It is therefore urgent to explore possibilities. One would be to work towards more efficiency in structuring student cohorts; another would be to work together in Estonia to bundle expertise and jointly offer when needed basic bachelor courses as well as to share specialist courses, and to allow and enable students – as is the case already but may be extended yet further – to also follow an elective or another relevant course in another Estonian programme on law or on non-law subjects which contribute to the law programme.

The level of expertise of teaching staff is indeed also defined by the percentage of staff with a doctorate. This number is sufficiently high. It is also positive to note that many of the staff engage in research.

On the level of ethical aspects, the relevant policies and procedures are in place. What might be asked for in a Law programme is whether the programme ought not to contain a Legal Ethics (or Professional Ethics) course for all students, i.e. not only for Master students as is the current practice, or specific ethics-related elements in courses related to ethics-sensitive issues. If so, this could be defined and outlined in the overall curriculum description on the basis of learning outcomes and teaching activities.

International mobility of staff and students is indeed stimulated and enhanced and considered as a feature of internationalisation. However, even though the obstacles and impediments are recognized, internationalisation is still low and less than ought to be expected in the context of an international university. As far as can be seen, the international networks to which the university is a partner do not yet make provision for major exchange of staff and students and for broad and formalized joint collaboration in teaching or in research. Steps in this respect should be taken to enable more foreign students to study in Tartu (and Tallinn), to offer courses jointly taught by a foreign professor and a Tartu teacher, to allow and enable students to follow courses offered by partner schools abroad by digital means, for example. Doing so means making use of the present hardware and software to internationalize at home and to build virtual international classrooms and joint classes and courses. Even in courses purely dealing with national law, an item related to comparison with abroad and with students from another university does open up questions and perspectives.

The 15 ECTS international mobility window seems to be less inviting for students since studying abroad during for one semester usually sums up to 30 ECTS. This means that studying abroad constitutes a study delay, which is only avoided if a student and the law school agree specifically on recognizing another 15 ECTS as part of the so-called 'elective modules' to be taken from the list of courses indicated by the law school. It is to be welcomed that the new curriculum has extended the options for studying abroad.

As the SER also noted, a national law programme is by definition open to the national society and so are internships, law clinics, and offering services to society. It is to be acknowledged that the Law Programme shows various activities in this domain. However, it is advisable to open up the law

programme even further, for instance by setting up a Law Clinic or a website where students and staff can answer legal questions or debate societal issues from a legal perspective.

Evaluation of staff follows the university model and is functioning according to the standards.

Opportunities for further improvement

- The panel suggests increasing the focus on international exchanges for students, both physically and virtually, as well as for a national effort for collaboration in the bachelor level among those institutions which offer Bachelor of Law programmes and therefore the legal basic courses. In the light of low intake and scarcity of staff, seeking collaboration might be worthwhile.

2.2.   Biology and Biodiversity Conservation (Bachelor)

General information

The Biology and Biodiversity Conservation programme commenced in 2016, following the merging and restructuring of two previous curricula. This structural reorganization used, in particular, the information of an OSKA report indicating that "more attention should be paid on the environmental aspects of Life sciences with environmental law, ICTs, education, or communication". The stakeholders from environmental institutes and local companies were also consulted to design the programme.

The curriculum consists of two large modules of 24 ECTS that cover mostly basic calculus, physics, chemistry and biosciences respectively. Those courses are mandatory for all students during the first two semesters. Students then specialize either in Environmental or in Molecular Biology through Narrow fields (48 ECTS) or Specialization (48 ECTS) modules to be followed according to the chosen specialty. In parallel, they can follow 12 ECTS elective modules from the second semester (management, Estonian language and foreign languages), as well as optional courses (18 ECTS). The last semester consists of the Bachelor's thesis (12 ECTS).

Graduates can continue their studies at master's level in "Molecular Biosciences", "Biomedicine" or "Biology and Eco-innovation" at UT or join other masters programmes in Medicine or Life Sciences in Estonia or abroad.

2.2.1 Planning and management of studies

- The design and development of study programme(s) take into account the expectations of students and other stakeholders, national strategies, legislation and trends in the particular area as well as labour market needs. The level and volume of RDC activities is sufficient and supports the launching of the study programme(s).
- The objectives of study programme(s), modules (including courses) and their learning outcomes are concrete and coherent. The teaching content and methods and assessment criteria and methods support students in achieving their learning outcomes and developing their key competencies. The study programmes support the development of creativity and entrepreneurship and other general competencies.
- The administration of material and financial resources that ensure the design and implementation of the study programme(s) is purposeful, systematic and sustainable. The learning environment, including materials, tools and technology support the students in achieving their learning outcomes.

Evidence and analysis

The programme has been developed according to the UT Statutes of Curriculum, which comply with national legislation. Its aim is to provide a broader education in biology than other degrees at UT such as the very specialized Genetics and Biotechnology BSc. After learning the basics in the first year, the students can specialize in either Molecular and Cell Biology or in Biodiversity Conservation. This is particularly attractive to first year students who arrive at UT with an interest in biology and would like to sample its different fields before choosing a specialisation.

This programme is well in line with all stakeholders' expectations. Discussions at the site visit with both internal and external staff and stakeholders demonstrated satisfaction with students and graduates from the programme. During interviews, employers in the governmental Environment Agencies and private biotech companies found the students to be well-trained and employable, although there was a feeling that additional practical training would be beneficial. This was reinforced by the students' demand for more practical training. One issue raised during the site visit was the impact of the European 3-year bachelor format which reduces the possibility to offer deep practical *and* theoretical knowledge in such a short amount of time.

Importantly the programme meets both national biodiversity conservation and environment strategies and is well in line with the European Green Deal initiative. It is also positively impacted by the COVID/post-COVID era in which the volume of activity using biotechnologies and molecular diagnoses has exploded. Consequently, the demand from both public and private employers for the graduates, particularly MSC, but also BSc graduates is very high, and the supply of graduates does not currently fully meet demand.

While it was sometimes a little difficult to obtain a consistent grasp of the programme from the rather ecology-centered short SER, its contents are very well detailed in the annex 3 at the section "Biology and Biodiversity Conservation", which links to both webpages and PDFs that give very clear and relevant information. Every aspect is very well detailed in terms of prerequisites, organization, content and

learning outcomes both for the bio-conservation and molecular biology sections. From the site visit, both the Ecology and Molecular Sciences Institutes buildings are very well organized, equipped and provide the students with an excellent scientific environment both for practical work and internships. In this respect, research is well emphasised by a full 6-month internship at the end of the curriculum.

The 24 ECTS module that covers basic mathematics, physics, and chemistry had been a source of complaint, particularly in relation to a former "chemical principles" course (taught together with students from other curricula) that was viewed as too "chemistry centered" by the students and strongly contributed to a large first-year dropout (>30% of the students). Student feedback has clearly been taken into account and contents have been replaced by a more accessible "General Chemistry course". This significantly reduced dropout rates by a factor of two.

Students also indicated that some courses had too much overlap, and that teaching staff should have more coordination meetings to know what each other taught, reduce redundancy and gain better coordination with respect to the whole curriculum.

The brand-new Ecology and Earth Sciences building is impressive, with a very functional organisation and high-quality equipment. For several years already, the Molecular and Cell Biology Institute has been emblematic for the quality of research at UT. It is very well equipped and funded and should soon receive an extension in the form of a novel building as well. Taken together, this curriculum takes place within very well-equipped laboratories in which interesting projects are conducted. The ensemble constitutes a vibrant scientific environment for the graduates of the present programme.

Strengths

- The programme occupies a unique niche as it blends molecular aspects with biodiversity and ecology, all within a very good design.
- The programme has an excellent employment rate because it has been designed in accordance with an OSKA report, thus aligning it with current and future societal needs, and because it benefits from a very supportive context in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis.
- The programme has successfully fulfilled its goals in securing a sufficient number of students
- The Estonian uniqueness of biodiversity is emphasized, including the use of local specific terminology.

Opportunities for further improvement

- This bachelor programme has strong potential because it ranges from molecular mechanisms to ecosystems but unfortunately the students very rapidly diverge on two separate paths. If the programme evolved towards more integration that would train students longer in both fields, this would add significant value to the programme and the students.

2.2.2 Learning, teaching and assessment

- Conditions and organisation of admission ensure fair access to education and motivated student body. Students' choice of specialisation is supported.
- A student-centred approach is used in the studies, aiming at the students to assume responsibility for planning their studies and career and supporting the development of key competencies and achieving the learning outcomes of the study programme.
- Student assessment, including taking accreditation of prior and experiential learning into account, supports the students and corresponds to the learning outcomes. Objective and reliable assessment is ensured.
- The organisation of studies including practical work and training is based on the specificities of students and forms of study and supports the student in achieving the learning outcomes. Opportunities have been established for mobility within Estonia and internationally.
- Support services for students are in place and available for students. Individual development and progress of students are monitored and supported.
- Graduates of the study programme are competitive in terms of their knowledge and social skills both nationally and internationally.

Evidence and analysis

As previously stated, the conditions and organization of this programme are well designed for those students who are unsure at first of the field in which they want to specialize. The first year gives the basics and some first elements of the future specialization so that the students can make their choice. When they progress to the third semester, their choice of specialization is fully supported by available courses.

The programme is designed so that the students must take the responsibility for choosing their own curriculum by specialization modules after the first two semesters. Furthermore, there are some interesting pedagogical initiatives, such as the compulsory "Seminar in Biology and Wildlife Conservation" that uses an innovative problem-based learning pedagogy and involves students in topics related to their specializations and future research projects.

Beyond its organisation in two separate specialisations (Molecular and Cell Biology / Biodiversity Conservation), after a first-year common core, this programme has the unique trait of moving from the molecule to the ecosystem. In this respect, students are too rapidly separated into what they call themselves "white" and "green" students, and therefore some added value could be lost. While it is clearly a challenge, it would be a great advantage to connect these two different parts of biology in an integrated bachelor curriculum, since nowadays molecular techniques are mandatory to address biodiversity and molecular and genetic problems arise from non-model organisms discovered though the study of biodiversity.

Overall, students are satisfied with the assessment mechanisms which use a blend of varied methods, from pure memorisation to problem solving, multiple choice and one-on-one oral exams. Students did not cite high grades in terms of motivation, as they explained that passing the assessment was largely sufficient for them. They also indicated that study intensity was sporadic, which reflects on their views on grades. The reasons for these are multiple, from student modesty to the fact that the job market is very positive with no current significant competition for jobs. In the panel's view, this attitude should be explored further by the teaching staff.

The students did not demonstrate any strong concern about ethics and did not mention any specific courses or introduction to academic ethics.

The curriculum contains elective courses that develop entrepreneurial skills ("Principles of Entrepreneurship", "Principles of Economics", "Business Plan", "Seminar for Project Writing").

Students have a choice of internships between the two Institutes and can also take internships in the Environmental Agency, a part of the Ministry of Environment or in private biotech companies. Some students even work across these different employers during their curriculum.

Concerning mobility, there is a student mobility window that helps students to identify which courses can be taken at a partner (foreign or Estonian) university and be aligned with the curriculum. There are more than 10 partner institutions aligned with this programme, a mobility window and a large set of opportunities. However, besides COVID, students perceive that they have too many barriers for mobility, including foreign course accreditation, that can result in a loss of half a year during their bachelor programme, and cost of travel and living expenses. This results in a very low number of international outgoing mobility (8%), which could be addressed through proper information, as there is a process for course accreditation and as UT benefits from Erasmus+ exchange and international alliances funding.

Student feedback on support services was generally positive: they have access to a rich and operational digital (e.g., Moodle, Panopto) environment, which offers materials and tests for students' personal work plus information on the courses to follow. The pedagogy supports an active student attitude and contains a balanced mix of personal work and courses. The UT library also offers an important support by very motivated people. Several students complained that they have to commute to distant places within the same day to follow their courses, but these were not in the majority.

As previously stated, the students from this programme are well trained and do not encounter significant difficulties for employment in a very favorable context. This situation must be carefully monitored longer term as it could in part, be a bubble, fed by the COVID crisis.

Strengths

- The programme provides a unique combination of very solid features: employment, internships, quality of teaching and assessment methods, all of which translates into a high degree of student satisfaction.
- The research institutes provide great infrastructure and equipment for the study programme.

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Opportunities for further improvement

- International mobility could be improved by better informing students on the opportunities for exchange and for funding, and on the process for recognition of the courses taken abroad.
- Students could receive more education on academic ethics.

2.2.3 Development, cooperation and internationalisation of teaching staff

- Teaching is conducted by a sufficient number of professionally competent members of the teaching staff who support the development of the students.
- Teaching staff follows the principles of academic ethics and the codes of conduct in case of non-compliance.
- Members of the teaching staff participate in international mobility programs which encourage the development of their teaching and RDC activities and the cultural openness of the HEI and the Estonian society.
- The effectiveness of both studies and RDC activities, students' feedback, the effectiveness of supervision, development of teaching and supervision skills, international mobility and entrepreneurial or work experience in the specific field outside the HEI is taken into consideration in evaluating the work of the member of the staff.

Evidence and analysis

The panel saw evidence of the competence of the teaching staff, who are motivated and sufficient in numbers to ensure both theoretical and practical teaching in the excellent conditions provided through the two Institutes. According to the data from 2020, 93% of the 137 academic staff at the Institute of Ecology and Earth Sciences (LTOM) and 88% of the 46 academic staff at the Institute of Molecular and Cell Biology (LTMR) have a doctoral degree. In the last five years 25 persons have received a PhD in botany and ecology, 23 in zoology and hydrology, 23 in molecular and cell biology and 17 in gene technology. The SER also indicates that in 2020, the academic staff of the curriculum published an average of 6.7 high-level research publications each. Furthermore, 17 international lecturers and researchers worked in the two Institutes.

Staff members are internationally connected through their research activities and are also well aware of the policy to promote Estonian language, culture and heritage, notably through the study of the Estonian ecosystems and biodiversity. The data on the staff involved in this programme are performing at a very high level in research with many ongoing projects, numerous publications in international journals, participation in international societies and journals etc.

International mobility has of course been hampered by the COVID crisis as indicated in the SER: "The teaching staff often participate in foreign conferences and seminars, and they also visit working groups

of foreign universities to develop cooperation projects. Due to the pandemic, travel has decreased in the last two years and has been replaced by participation in virtual conferences and online meetings. It should in principle resume soon to meet pre-pandemic levels.

The novel career model implemented in 2021 ensures that the staff appraisal takes into consideration both the research, teaching and student supervision activities as well as students' feedback on the quality of courses. Important information can also be followed, almost in real time, through the University Dashboard, although its consultation varies among the staff members.

Teaching staff is also encouraged to develop activities in relation to the socio-economic sector and/or entrepreneurship. During the site visit, it was clear that these activities are well implemented by the staff of this programme, thereby providing a rich and stimulating environment for students. However, it must be noted that the mix between these obligations is neither formalized nor systematized, and that they are principally driven by (i) research grant money and (ii) negotiations with the Institute Director. Also, as mentioned in the general section of the evaluation panel for staff, the possibilities for promotion after a very satisfactory 5-year appraisal are not fully clear and some action should be taken there to maintain the staff motivation level at its best.

Non-university experts have been involved in teaching, especially in more applied courses such as "Conservation Biology" and "Practical Course on Protected Species". External experts have also been co-supervisors of final theses which positively reinforces collaborations.

Strengths

- The strong overall scientific level of the staff in both fields.
- The very strong commitment of the staff towards the students, which was clearly visible during the site visit.

Opportunities for further improvement

- The ratio of teaching versus research is set individually for every staff member, which is good for staff career and motivation. However, as this ratio may depend too much on grants and individual situation, it might be better to formalize, i.e define the balance between teaching and research activities, with underpinning it by advance staff planning.
- Similarly, the staff situation depends heavily on the grant and Institutes situation, both for salary in general and advancement. This should be improved to offer staff more vision on their prospects. This is a general trend noted in UT that applies to this particular programme.

2.3. Entrepreneurship and Digital Solutions (Prof HE, Narva College)

General information

Entrepreneurship and Digital Solutions (EDS) is a 180 ECTS/three-year professional higher education programme within the portfolio of the UT Faculty of Social Sciences. It is operated and located at Narva College in the far east of Estonia and succeeded the Entrepreneurship and Project Management Programme, also offered at Narva, from 2019. Targeting post-experience students, the programme is offered in Estonian and in a "block study mode", with some modules provided by Institutes located in Tartu. Corresponding with its rather recent start, the programme does not have any graduates yet, with an annual student intake of around 20 students. Dropout is considerable, though, resulting in overall 51 students enrolled in 2021 after three intake periods (SER).

2.3.1 Planning and management of studies

- The design and development of study programme(s) take into account the expectations of students and other stakeholders, national strategies, legislation and trends in the particular area as well as labour market needs. The level and volume of RDC activities is sufficient and supports the launching of the study programme(s).
- The objectives of study programme(s), modules (including courses) and their learning outcomes are concrete and coherent. The teaching content and methods and assessment criteria and methods support students in achieving their learning outcomes and developing their key competencies. The study programmes support the development of creativity and entrepreneurship and other general competencies.
- The administration of material and financial resources that ensure the design and implementation of the study programme(s) is purposeful, systematic and sustainable. The learning environment, including materials, tools and technology support the students in achieving their learning outcomes.

According to the SER, the main goal of the Entrepreneurship and Digital Solutions (EDS) curriculum is to teach and develop digitally competent top and middle-level managers. The programme mainly caters to the needs of the local community around Narva, which currently is in need of an overhaul of its economic structures (E). High hopes ride on the success of the programme, but external stakeholders were not only adamant about their needs, but also clear in their praise of the programme's responsiveness to those needs. The programme (as is Narva College as a whole) is firmly embedded in the local community and in general very open to the different stakeholders. The same was confirmed by the students (ST). This close relationship influenced the launch/design of the programme and is carefully heeded in its operation, with the current programme director particularly acting as a "connector" and spiritus rector. National strategies and legislation have also been taken into account. Regarding the "high level research", the programme is supposed to build on (SER), the panel can

confirm that there is quite some room for improvement, as was already admitted by the programme itself in its SER. This is addressed further under 2.3.3.

In terms of structure, the programme consists of two base modules (Social Sciences and Economics, 24 ECTS each), one field module (24 ECTS), two specialisation modules (54 ECTS in total), elective subjects (12 ECTS), optional subjects (6 ECTS), working practice (27 ECTS) and a diploma thesis or graduation exam module (9 ECTS) (SER). Not all modules or courses are offered or were developed exclusively for the programme (T). As a result, the choice of specialisations and courses appears somewhat eclectic from a bird's eye view – it touches upon a great variety of issues but offers little in terms of depth. In addition, teachers are unaware of what others are doing in the same programme (T). Programme management intends to take modularisation even further, which the panel believes is a good idea. In the light of the complexity and dynamics of the world of IT and/or business and economics, the panel encourages the programme to pursue its ideas more systematically, including rethinking what an effective programme for post-experience students and adult learners might look like, including collaborations with other educational providers, further modularisation and exploring the potential of stackable micro credentials.

The current curriculum structure and emphasis seems to work for the highly diverse student body, though, who very often have considerable professional experience in various fields and are mostly looking for a top-up or updating (ST). The working practice and final thesis/project play a key role in their competence development. Didactically, a lot of the programme is taught in a practice-oriented and project-based way.

The publicly available syllabi clearly state the key learning outcomes which the respective modules/courses are aiming for. There appears to be sufficient linking to the programme level learning outcomes, and entrepreneurship and creativity are strongly featured among the key programme objectives, which corresponds with its overall profile. Syllabi contain less information on teaching methods and assessment, though, which makes it impossible to assess their connectedness in terms of "constructive alignment". Examples provided by some interviewees, however, suggest that there is some room for improvement regarding the evaluation of learning effectiveness in connection with the stated learning outcomes (ST, T). In this respect, in terms of measures of success, the programme (as well as the College and the Faculty of Social Sciences) are advised to also think about long term impact of metrics such as the number of start-ups, in particular 2-3 years after foundation, graduates with a career/salary boost and similar. Employment metrics as they are currently used, probably make less sense in this case.

The physical learning environment in Narva deserves a commendation, as the students can make use of a beautifully restored and skilfully designed building with a particularly atmospheric and beautiful library section. Tools for digital teaching are provided by UT as a whole (see standard 10), and students as well as teachers appear to be satisfied with it. The college and the faculty of social sciences seem to be committed to sustaining the programme. Questions related to "break even points" and how the University overall calculates if a programme is affordable are asked elsewhere in this report but apply here as well. It is important to note, though, that Narva College and the programme serve various

purposes (not least of a kind of cultural ambassadorship), which go beyond merely economic considerations.

Strengths

- The EDS program is to be commended for its firm embedding in the local community and for the high praise it earns from students and external stakeholders.
- The learning environment is exemplary and the way it is open for the entire community deserves particular praise.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- In terms of measures of success, the programme (as well as the College and the Faculty of Social Sciences) are recommended to also think about long term impact metrics such as the number of start-ups, in particular 2-3 years after foundation, graduates with a career/salary boost and similar. Employment metrics as they are currently used, probably make less sense in this case.
- Narva College and the programme management are recommended to rethink what an effective programme for post-experience students and adult learners might look like, including collaborations with other educational providers, further modularisation and exploring the potential of stackable micro credentials.

2.3.2 Learning, teaching and assessment

- Conditions and organisation of admission ensure fair access to education and motivated student body. Students' choice of specialisation is supported.
- A student-centred approach is used in the studies, aiming at the students to assume responsibility for planning their studies and career and supporting the development of key competencies and achieving the learning outcomes of the study programme.
- Student assessment, including taking accreditation of prior and experiential learning into account, supports the students and corresponds to the learning outcomes. Objective and reliable assessment is ensured.
- The organisation of studies including practical work and training is based on the specificities of students and forms of study and supports the student in achieving the learning outcomes. Opportunities have been established for mobility within Estonia and internationally.
- Support services for students are in place and available for students. Individual development and progress of students are monitored and supported.
- Graduates of the study programme are competitive in terms of their knowledge and social skills both nationally and internationally.

According to the SER, admission requirements for the programme demand a secondary education degree from Estonia or equivalent from a corresponding educational system. Admission requirements are clearly defined and the panel found no evidence of irregularities. The students who met with the panel were all post-experience students, with some of them indicating that without any professional experience the risk of drop out would be higher (ST). Drop out overall is considerable, in particular in the first year of studies (SER, M). According to the programme management, this was largely due to some issues in the first year of studies, which have been fixed – but effects are yet to be seen (M). However, dropouts appear to be a general issue for the university, and university-wide efforts might be needed.

Students overall voiced their satisfaction very clearly, praising the responsiveness of the programme management and teaching staff with regard to their needs. Problems are addressed and fixed very quickly, mostly informally (ST). This might also explain the rather low level of response rates regarding the official curriculum survey (SER). There are, however, also some problems attached to this highly reactive, feedback-oriented culture. Several students reported that they had contested their grades (in one case even appealing for a lower grade!), but teachers were less aware of this, and there are no official records on such issues. There is a certain risk of lack of transparency and arbitrariness that comes with feedback being dealt with mostly through informal channels and at an individual level. However, in general, the programme and its teaching staff are clearly oriented towards principles of student-centeredness, and the individual support that students receive is laudable.

Students have several specialisations and electives available to them, and are, to a certain degree, able to construct a study path according to their needs and interests. Suggestions for improvement related to the further development of the curriculum have been made above. As a professional higher education programme, EDS clearly prioritises practice-oriented learning, including work-placed learning and recognition of prior learning. This is highly valued by the students who are primarily seeking those elements from their studies (SER, ST). The curriculum offers a mobility window, but only few students can take it – mostly though, because their overall life situation (job, family) does not allow for it. Programme management and teachers are impressively flexible, though, and can accommodate short and longer term stays abroad, which might be owed to the students' professional careers. In this regard, digitalisation of teaching during the pandemic is seen as a huge improvement by the mostly working students (ST). Student support is partly offered by Narva College on site and partly by the University of Tartu on a central level, with Narva College, for example, helping students with a predominantly Russian language background, to update their Estonian and English language skills. Overall, students are happy with the support.

Student assessment is largely exam and/or project based, with the projects often being conducted as group projects. However, reflection on these group experiences or even peer assessment is hardly used. Overall, the choice of assessment methods is largely the responsibility of individual teachers, which leads to an accumulation of similar assessment forms, and sometimes to workload issues due to the little coordinated scheduling of deadlines and exams across the curriculum (ST). How programme level learning outcomes are systematically evaluated in the context of the very course-focused singular assessments, remains an open issue.

Little can be currently said on the graduates, as the programme has yet to graduate any students.

Strengths

- The EDS program is to be commended for its responsive quality culture and the high level of student-centeredness.

Opportunities for further improvement

- Aligning learning outcomes and assessment forms, as well as coordinating and aligning assessment even more closely across the curriculum might benefit all actors involved, most notably with regard to reliable indications on overall learning effectiveness and workload.
- Assessment practices should be more varied and less dependent on teachers' preferences.

2.3.3 Development, cooperation and internationalisation of teaching staff

- Teaching is conducted by a sufficient number of professionally competent members of the teaching staff who support the development of the students.
- Teaching staff follows the principles of academic ethics and the codes of conduct in case of non-compliance.
- Members of the teaching staff participate in international mobility programs which encourage the development of their teaching and RDC activities and the cultural openness of the HEI and the Estonian society.
- The effectiveness of both studies and RDC activities, students' feedback, the effectiveness of supervision, development of teaching and supervision skills, international mobility and entrepreneurial or work experience in the specific field outside the HEI is taken into consideration in evaluating the work of the member of the staff.

The teachers with whom the panel met were all enthusiastic and engaged (T). Students particularly emphasised their appreciation for the more professionally and practice-oriented staff (SER, ST). However, it should be noted that the EDS programme is not fully in line with the UT principle of "high level research-based studies". This is also acknowledged by the institution, as the number of regularly publishing teaching staff in the programme is stated to be "modest", and that research activities in the areas related to EDS need to be further developed (SER). Very much in line with the grassroot level philosophy of UT, such developments are desired rather than actively pursued in a strategic manner and with a clear action plan attached.

Teaching staff in the programme come from a variety of backgrounds: those located at Narva College are more practice-oriented or with a background of professional teaching, which is complemented by sessional staff from the industry or other fields. Several modules and courses are also offered by staff

from the Faculty of Social Sciences in Tartu. Very often those courses are not specifically offered for the EDS programme but are shared among different programmes (T). Overall, teachers have a lot of autonomy in designing their course, including teaching and learning methods and assessment. Some problems attached to this have been mentioned in the previous section. The panel noted a lack of systematic exchange among the teaching staff in the programme. Where teachers are not involved in the programme committee or situated in the same academic unit, they hardly ever talk to each other, and there is little awareness of what others are doing. Curriculum coherence would well benefit from regular teaching staff meetings where the different courses are discussed and aligned. This would also help to raise awareness of students' needs on a more structural level or to reach a consistent way of dealing with students' requirements. This would consciously create explicit quality standards instead of creating implicit ones via individual practices (see standard 3).

Strengths

- The level of professionalism, open-mindedness and reflectiveness among the key actors involved in programme management.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The programme would benefit from regular exchange meetings involving all teaching staff, where connections between courses and modules but also matters such as dropouts and student retention, alignment of teaching and assessment and grading could be handled more effectively. This would also help to create a stronger link between the more research-oriented and the more practice-oriented faculty members.

2.4 Robotics and Computer Engineering (Master)

General information:

The masters in Robotics and Computer Engineering is a two-year, 120 ECTS points programme which was launched in 2014. It is taught in English. Its focus is the training of specialists who can both undertake software development as well as solve technical problems related to equipment (SER), the purpose being to graduate students with capabilities to both create new devices as well as program them. There are three specialisations within the master's programme: engineering, robotics and space technology. The demand for graduates with these skills is predicted to grow in Estonia, also evidenced by the increase in companies needing staff in this area, and as a result, UT took the decision in Spring 2021 to increase the number of students admitted to the programme (SER). The curriculum is composed of a basic module (24 ECTS), a seminar module (12 ECTS), a specialisation module (24 ECTS), a narrow field module (24 ECTS), optional subjects (6 ECTS) and the master's thesis (30 ECTS) (Annex 7).

2.4.1 Planning and management of studies

- The design and development of study programme(s) take into account the expectations of students and other stakeholders, national strategies, legislation and trends in the particular area as well as labour market needs. The level and volume of RDC activities is sufficient and supports the launching of the study programme(s).
- The objectives of study programme(s), modules (including courses) and their learning outcomes are concrete and coherent. The teaching content and methods and assessment criteria and methods support students in achieving their learning outcomes and developing their key competencies. The study programmes support the development of creativity and entrepreneurship and other general competencies.
- The administration of material and financial resources that ensure the design and implementation of the study programme(s) is purposeful, systematic and sustainable. The learning environment, including materials, tools and technology support the students in achieving their learning outcomes.

Evidence and analysis

The study programme is designed in conjunction with stakeholders taking into account labour market demands. To date, the focus of programme in this area has been on software development, the hardware aspects having been left behind; however, the interface between hardware and robotics is now in demand in industry (SER). A 2021 ICT Special Survey of the OSKA labour market demand monitoring and forecasting systems, noted that the ability of Estonia to invest in automation and digitalisation was low compared to neighbouring countries, and that there was an increased need for mechanical, electronic, software, hardware and manufacturing engineers (SER). These skills support the growing demand from industry for these areas of expertise. Input from external stakeholders such as alumni and employers can be through formal channels for those who sit on the Council, otherwise it tends to be through informal discussions with staff, however all the external stakeholders that the panel met reported that they felt there were good opportunities to influence the learning outcomes of the programme.

The masters programme provides a progression from the bachelor programme in Computer Engineering; however, there were insufficient graduates to sustain it alone (11-16 typically per year), so it was launched in English which helps attract international students and provides an international learning environment, alongside Erasmus+ exchanges (SER). This has ensured the future viability of the programme. The programme has a range of compulsory modules (basic and seminar modules), which between them ensure sufficient learning outcomes for the labour market. Compulsory courses are decided by the Programme Council (T), whilst seminar modules develop self-expression skills, and provide practical work experience before entering the labour market. Students have a lot of freedom regarding their choice of modules and can focus on a particular area if they wish, for example machine

learning and AI. However, as stated above, there are three identified specialisation modules within the programme, these are: robotics, computer engineering and space technology. In addition, elementary Estonian will be compulsory within the curriculum from 2023-24 (SER). A joint programme will be launched in 2022-23 with the French university ECAM LaSalle which will permit students to obtain a Diploma in Robotics and Computer Engineering, as well as the master's degree from UT (SER). Approximately 20% of RCE masters graduates continue as doctoral students, which ensures the sustainability of the specialisation (SER).

The programme is well designed with a coherent core and set of option modules, and the sample theses provided were of a high quality. In general, the learning outcomes are appropriate; however, some are not written at the level of a master's programme and these should be addressed. For example, the learning outcomes in the Robotics Technology (6 ECTS) LOTI.05.057 say that students will be able to "list example fields of robotics technology" and are "familiar with and can describe the standard tools/packages of ROS". The ability to regurgitate a "list" or "describe" are not masters level outcomes. Also the word "familiar" is hard to assess and there are better verbs that could be used. Within the programme students undertake a full-time traineeship of 4 months, (or 8 months if part-time). Sometimes these evolve into a full-time job which may prevent students from completing their degree. Thesis supervision includes engaging students in staff research; however, due to workload, staff are not permitted to supervise more than 10 theses at one time. (SER). Despite this limiting factor, the students met had not encountered any supervision capacity limits (Meeting with students). Students did however report that sometimes staff struggled to give them sufficient time to support their thesis, and that some minimum supervision engagement would be helpful (S). Employers and alumni reported highly valuing the practical nature of the course which starts on day one, building solutions to real problems.

UT also provides a range of support to help staff enhance their approach to teaching, to become reflective teachers, and to learn how to use specific technology in their teaching (D). Students felt that the programme supported both creativity and entrepreneurship very well. They commented that many of their courses were extremely creative, for example the development of videos, and their perception was that the programme offered lots of possibilities to develop their creativity. With regard to entrepreneurship, they had courses in this topic and other relevant topics such as accounting, project management etc. (S). Estonia has a strong start-up culture so there is a lot of advice available to them (T).

The learning environment is well supported, there is a good range of labs with a variety of equipment that students can use any time. Resources are adequate and if there is anything students need, they ask, and it is usually purchased for them (S). Teaching income to support the material and financial resources is divided on the basis of credit points; however, this covers only about half the costs, and income has been frozen for the past 2-3 years (M). The rest is supported through grant income to the Institute. Sometimes equipment will be provided by industry which can support both teaching and research. However, there is more room to involve industry in the teaching (M). Staff undertake applied research with companies to help subsidise the income. There are lots of practical courses in the programme, these are run at a ratio of six students to one member of staff in the lab. Technology has the highest growth in student numbers in the faculty; however, financial pressures may force some

consolidation of provision. The student graduation rate is about average for the faculty, which is about 50%. In general, IT curricula have lower graduation rates and the bachelors programme is much lower; however, this master's programme is slightly above the average in the faculty.

Feedback is gathered from students on the modules and at least four courses per semester (S). Feedback from students indicates that, overall, they are satisfied, and although numbers are small, in general there is very positive feedback from the students. For example, almost 80% agree with the statement that "feedback helped me to understand where I need to further develop my knowledge or skills" (SER). There was a small drop in feedback scores when courses were taught entirely online during the pandemic but this was would not be unexpected from a very practically based course. Since 2021 the analysis of student feedback and action plans have become part of the internal assessment of curricula (D). In 2021, students were very positive about the curriculum and project work, however students are keen for more courses on computer science, mechanical and electronics, robotic specialisation (D). Students reported that they are not specifically told of changes taken in response to feedback provided; however, it is available to them if they wish to look it up. They also provide a lot of informal feedback to staff directly (S).

The programme is adequately supported by research, development and other creative activities (RDC) as part of the university strategy, although the average number of high-level publications per member of staff is below the average for the faculty and the University (SER). Students are able to engage with research through projects. However, there is a shortage of staff to provide quality supervision which should be addressed (SER). Engagement with industry is strong, and many students are able to work on thesis topics provided by industry (SER). There is a professional practice module of 24 credits which provides extensive collaboration with industry as it is generally focused around a placement; so, contacts with industry are very good. Many of the academic staff also work in industry and teach part-time. The students also get regular updates on companies who might need to employ students (S). Employers were very positive about the student skills from the programme, recognising that it is impossible to teach everything they want. As a result, soft skills and the ability to learn new technologies became an important aspect of the programme, and this was reported on positively by the employers and alumni (A&E). Alumni and employers keep in touch with the University through a range of mechanisms such as regular newsletters.

Strengths

- The main strengths of the curriculum are meeting the needs of the labour market, close connections with businesses including traineeships, and input to the curriculum e.g. practical problems for students to solve.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- Review the learning outcomes in the module descriptors to ensure they use verbs appropriate to master's level.

Opportunities for further improvement

- The idea to offer all students an industry mentor with part of the learning taking place in the company is strongly supported (SER) as long as an academic is always involved in the assessment of students to ensure consistency of marking.
- Address staff shortages to ensure the quality of project / thesis supervision, and to offer all the courses listed on the programme, more regularly.
- Increase the number of high-level publications per member of staff to university / faculty levels.
- Define minimum levels of engagement required by supervisors to support students with their thesis.

2.4.2 Learning, teaching and assessment

- Conditions and organisation of admission ensure fair access to education and motivated student body. Students' choice of specialisation is supported.
- A student-centred approach is used in the studies, aiming at the students to assume responsibility for planning their studies and career and supporting the development of key competencies and achieving the learning outcomes of the study programme.
- Student assessment, including taking accreditation of prior and experiential learning into account, supports the students and corresponds to the learning outcomes. Objective and reliable assessment is ensured.
- The organisation of studies including practical work and training is based on the specificities of students and forms of study and supports the student in achieving the learning outcomes. Opportunities have been established for mobility within Estonia and internationally.
- Support services for students are in place and available for students. Individual development and progress of students are monitored and supported.
- Graduates of the study programme are competitive in terms of their knowledge and social skills both nationally and internationally.

Evidence and analysis

A consistent approach is taken to admissions, scoring by previous level of study (40%) and a motivation letter (60%). The admissions process is managed by a team of 3 people who review the qualifications and the motivational letter to ensure fairness and consistency (T), and prior learning is taken into account. Challenges have arisen with international students whose previous studies have not sufficiently equipped them for master's level study (SER). A particular challenge is the lack of detail regarding a student's previous studies, which results in trying to guess the contents of a course from its title and which, therefore, does not work well at times (T). In future there will be a new approach which will include a test in programming, mathematics and physics to ensure students have the appropriate

knowledge on entry; this will apply to all students, including their own, to be fair and consistent (SER; D; T).

The student dropout rate is consistently 10-12% which is 2-3 students, and so, overall, very small numbers. The main reasons for dropout are financial problems, students overestimating their own abilities (especially international students who may take a course for interest but who do not have the academic background to be successful), and premature employment (SER; T). With regard to the latter, UT staff talk to employers about the value of completing the degree award as this can be career limiting for the students later on in life; however, often students and employers do not realise this until it is too late. International students tend to recognise the value of completion more than Estonian students as the local demand for these skills is so high (T). In terms of career development there are lots of opportunities in Estonia and a high demand for these skills. The three main specialisations on the programme are directly linked to industry demand; however, students can apply their skills in a wide range of technology fields. Students were very positive about their support and take responsibility for planning their careers (S).

Students take a student-centred approach to planning their studies. This is written into the curriculum as they need to choose one of the well-defined paths. Advice is available if they are unsure what direction to take (T). In terms of the content of the curriculum, each course contains a high proportion of practical work which sometimes arise from industry or research problems. These problems are typically solved through weekly practical session or as a multi-week technical project, or both. Oral or written defence is often used for students to explain their solution and why it is appropriate (SER).

The curriculum also offers a mobility window which permits students to study overseas if they wish; however, students have to find their own placement. An Erasmus+ contract will then be negotiated if needed. Covid has inevitably reduced mobility recently (SER). One challenge has been the range of potential partners for mobility however this has improved in recent times. Students are also provided with seminars on mobility possibilities and central and local administrative support is provided. Students reported they could go at any time. However, it was unclear if the timing was to simply add an extra semester into their studies as students reported that some modules were only taught biennially i.e. once every two years, which meant in practice it might be challenging to find a suitable mobility window (S). Students also reported that some of the courses identified in the programme were not offered in practice which could be disappointing. Reasons given could be insufficient staff to offer them or the fact that an academic might be out of the country. Staff reported that many courses are on offer to provide a wide range of options to students, and they do not expect all of them to run. Managing student expectations is the role of the Programme Director.

Some students reported that, having studied the bachelor programme at UT, the master's programme was not very challenging. Students nonetheless recognised that students come from different study backgrounds and there was some need for levelling up, and that some repeated content was required. However, they felt some content in the basic modules needed reviewing (S).

As regards assessment, a common approach to assessments is to solve a practical problem in a lab which is then discussed with the academic who would provide feedback at that time. For other assessments, students reported that they are given timely feedback on the assessments they have

submitted. Typically, the turnaround times are 1-2 weeks, but it depends on the nature of the assessment and the examiner; normally they receive feedback before the next assignment is due and it is usually help for their learning (S). Where employers were involved in assessment, for example, thesis supervision, there was always an internal examiner as well to aid consistency in marking; however, normally the employers had been involved in the past, e.g. as guest lecturers, so they are already engaged in the University (T). Oral assessments always have at least two examiners present. For other types of assessment, if more than one member of staff is assigned to do marking, it is usual to undertake joint work to ensure consistency of marking across students; however, if there is only one marker, grading is not formally moderated, although there is a culture of cross-marking in the department (T).

In terms of student help and feedback, students are clear who to go to with questions (S). Typically, they ask their Programme Director and the teaching staff for help. They are happy with support from teaching staff (several have been named the best teaching staff members of the year), however students are less satisfied than the University average in terms of the support which they receive from fellow students. No student has sought help from the counselling services so that support cannot be assessed for this programme (SER). However, students reported that they know who to ask (typically their Programme Director) if they were not sure who to approach. As for questions about student life, they would probably ask their peers. They also reported that staff are very accessible out of class, and that they can call them if they need help (S). Student questionnaire feedback indicates that students are most satisfied with their ability to apply theoretical knowledge to solve every day practical problems. However, they are less confident in their specialised digital skills and team working skills (SER). Students are relatively satisfied with the support structures, conditions for study and e-learning environment.

Strengths

- Oral or written defence is often used in assessment so that students can explain their solution, in particular why it is appropriate. Oral defence is commended as it develops critical skills in students and helps them to think spontaneously when answering questions, in addition to ensuring authorship of the work.
- Internal moderation of student grades is important to ensure students are treated consistently.

Opportunities for further improvement

- Increase support to help students find study placements outside Estonia.
- Document clearly how the mobility window works so that students can design of study and do not have to delay graduation because courses are not offered at the right time.
- Clarify to students the process of determining what courses are offered each year to help them plan their studies and to manage their expectations better regarding when courses will be offered.
- Review the content of basic modules to ensure they are sufficiently challenging for students from all study backgrounds; possibly, the review of the admissions test might help to resolve this issue.

- The University is advised to formalise the good practice of moderating marking internally to ensure consistent grading of students.
- Ensure that pre-requisite knowledge of students is defined and assessed to reduce failure rates on individual courses, and where necessary, offer preparatory support. Monitor the new approach to admission's tests to see if it reduces dropouts / failure rates and addresses this problem.

2.4.3 Development, cooperation and internationalisation of teaching staff

- Teaching is conducted by a sufficient number of professionally competent members of the teaching staff who support the development of the students.
- Teaching staff follows the principles of academic ethics and the codes of conduct in case of non-compliance.
- Members of the teaching staff participate in international mobility programs which encourage the development of their teaching and RDC activities and the cultural openness of the HEI and the Estonian society.
- The effectiveness of both studies and RDC activities, students' feedback, the effectiveness of supervision, development of teaching and supervision skills, international mobility and entrepreneurial or work experience in the specific field outside the HEI is taken into consideration in evaluating the work of the member of the staff.

Evidence and analysis

Staff are well qualified, and there are a good range of staff from junior lecturers to professors teaching on the programme. As commented above, the average number of high-level publications by staff is slightly below UT average, but overall it is sufficient to support the programme and the students (SER). There is extensive involvement of industry specialists in the teaching of the programme; nonetheless, the UT staff running the programme are keen to engage more industry professionals (SER). There are sufficient staff to meet the needs of students. Laboratories are run at a ratio of 6 students to one member of staff. However, not all courses can be offered due to the challenge of recruiting staff with the right skills. The staff responsible for the programme would like to increase the range of subjects taught, but it has been difficult to recruit staff with the right expertise, particularly in mechanics, practical electronics, mathematics, programming etc. due to their demand in industry (M).

Staff have a variety of opportunities for international mobility for both teaching and research purposes. Essentially those who want to go can do so, and some do this every five years. In terms of

internationalisation, Robotics is an area with a high number of international staff so the need is less great.

As for following the rules of academic ethics, there were some problems with regard to cheating. These issues were dealt with appropriately. In general, if a member of staff or student identifies unethical behaviour, they are encouraged to report it. Staff are encouraged to speak to the Director of the Institute, but they can also approach anyone in the University with appropriate authority; in particular, there is a University Committee to deal with these issues (M).

In terms of staff development, UT offers a good range of courses internally which staff are encouraged to take, for example ethics, teaching, psychological problems. They are not obligatory but are made available. There is no data currently on the uptake of these (M). No record of staff development is kept, but all requests have been supported in recent times (M).

In terms of attendance at conferences, UT is very open to staff attending. At the professional level, staff without a PhD are encouraged to obtain this academic degree; however, there is recognition that staff can find jobs easily without one. PhDs are supervised and funded in a range of ways. Some are offered internally; some are funded by external companies, and some are jointly supervised with international partners. Where companies are paying for the PhD, they take the role of the main supervisor. For masters' programmes, students can be supported by companies who pay for them to study the programme and provide the thesis topics.

The performance of staff is formally assessed through a process of attestation once every five years. The assessment covers a range of areas as described in standard 6. However, the only feedback on a person's ability to teach is by students. External research shows that student feedback might reflect enjoyment of the course or how easy it was rather than the quality of the teaching and learning experience. The University should consider, therefore, the introduction of an independent assessment of a person's teaching and not rely solely on the feedback from students.

Strengths

- The ratio of students to staff in laboratory tutorials at six to one is a real strength of the programme.

Opportunities for further improvement

- Monitor staff development activities to ensure all staff continue to develop themselves appropriately as it is unclear if all staff undertake what they need to in order to keep up-to-date in how to teach, in their research and in a range of other areas which require continuous development, for example ethics.
- Monitor spending on staff development to ensure sufficient investment in this area.
- Introduce an independent assessment of staff teaching skills for attestation rather than rely solely on student feedback, which may not reflect the quality of the teaching and learning experience sufficiently.

2.5 Translation and Interpreting Studies (Master)

The Master's Programme in Translation and Interpreting Studies was approved in 2009 and composes a total of 120 ECTS. The working languages are English, German, French, Russian and Estonian. The programme works both from and into the mother tongue, which is expected of a programme catering to lesser diffused language combinations. Generally, student numbers are low, with on average 15 students being admitted and 10 students graduating every year. These seem to be stable numbers; however, where there will be variation is on the language combinations, with language groups possibly falling below economic sustainability.

The programme applied successfully in 2019 to the European Master's in Translation Network, organised by the European Commission, and has since been an active member, with benefits derived from the affiliation being highlighted to the panel during the site visit.

2.5.1 Planning and management of studies

- The design and development of study programme(s) take into account the expectations of students and other stakeholders, national strategies, legislation and trends in the particular area as well as labour market needs. The level and volume of RDC activities is sufficient and supports the launching of the study programme(s).
- The objectives of study programme(s), modules (including courses) and their learning outcomes are concrete and coherent. The teaching content and methods and assessment criteria and methods support students in achieving their learning outcomes and developing their key competencies. The study programmes support the development of creativity and entrepreneurship and other general competencies.
- The administration of material and financial resources that ensure the design and implementation of the study programme(s) is purposeful, systematic and sustainable. The learning environment, including materials, tools and technology support the students in achieving their learning outcomes.

Evidence and analysis

The programme was strategically reviewed and revised with a view to aligning to the exigencies of the European Master's in Translation Network organised by the European Commission. These changed entailed stronger professional orientation on the programme and a detailed evaluation of the EMT competences to ensure these are embedded as part of the revised curriculum. The panel heard that this was a lengthy process which involved multiple stakeholders, including students, employers and staff external to the programme. The changes reported are viewed as positive by exiting students who confirm that the programme has gained considerably in practice-based, professionally- oriented

approaches. In 2019, the admission to the EMT network provided confirmation that the programme's efforts had paid off and that the current version of the programme was comparable with other 84 Master's level programmes in Translation.

The programme was originally designed to cater for two tracks, one in Translation and one in Interpreting; however, the Interpreting track was discontinued until further notice. The panel was told that the major reason for this was low student numbers. Additionally, staff noted that although there might be the expertise amongst them to offer Interpreting courses, they are fairly stretched with their current Institute-wide tasks (including teaching, research, community services and administration) that they would unlikely be able to take on additional workload to cater for the Interpreting track. Both students and alumni noted that there is interest in the Interpreting track and that a graduate with both profiles can more readily access the Estonian and/or international market. The panel believes that multiple options could still be explored to accommodate the interest expressed before a final decision is reached to close down the track altogether. However, it is important for action to be taken swiftly to ensure that the programme does not present itself as only partially functional to an external audience. The panel reviewed whether information on admission may have been in any way misleading in regards the Interpreting track and found that students were explicitly told what to expect without there being any confusion. Additionally, upon graduation the Diploma Supplement clearly notes that the track completed is Translation. Management staff also indicated that the word in Estonian for Translation and Interpreting is the same, consequently there would not be local expectations in relation to the title of the programme; however, international employers would need to access the Diploma Supplement to gain full clarity of the student journey.

The translating and interpreting programme is a strategic programme for the University and for the Estonian government, as it is a direct contributor to the promotion of Estonian culture and the preservation of the Estonian language. Consequently, although debatable if it may be financially sustainable given the low student numbers and the multiple language combinations it caters for, it is of institutional and national relevance and should be supported accordingly. The panel did not find any evidence of supplementary support to that which is offered by the University for any of its other programmes, and research with Estonian (including for the development of specialised terminology) was not privileged in any way.

The learning outcomes for the programme are set to encourage independent learning, critical thinking, specialised analysis and ethical industry behaviours. Teaching is conducted with the support of digital technologies and students were positive about the interactive teaching methodologies applied. Students found assessments to be comprehensive and to allow them to develop towards a full understanding of related professions and relevant skills for smooth market insertion. The feedback from assignments was seen to be sufficiently detailed, although some students found generic, group feedback less effective and highlighted that they much rather prefer individual feedback, which some of the teachers were unable or unwilling to provide. Both teaching staff and management confirmed that they were tackling this request.

The curricular content is mainly aligned with proposals under the European Master's in Translation Network. It focusses on specialised non-literary translations, with discipline-specific content such as

legal, technical, business or EU texts being covered. This is complemented by relevant core components such as discourse analysis, corpora usage, cultural explorations, psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic etc, with some courses taught exclusively in Estonian and some also taught in English. The elective selection is sufficient and gives students the possibility to follow their specific interests, including for Journalism or Editorial careers.

The various stakeholders with whom the panel spoke were positive about the programme delivery and its structure; however, multiple suggestions for further developments were heard during the course of the meetings, with students and employers referring to more recent market trends which were becoming notable in the Estonian context, as well. Courses in audio-visual translations, localisation, machine translation post-editing or project management were just a few of the suggestions put forward. It was also appreciated that the Entrepreneurship course would benefit from expansion towards areas such as client negotiation, costing models or peer collaborations, with both alumni and current students agreeing that especially for freelancing activities it was imperative for a broader professional perspective to be covered and for students to gain more transferable/transversal soft skills. The panel noted that some electives are already going some way towards meeting these requests, as are the guest lectures by professionals sharing their expertise and experience.

The panel probed whether computer-assisted translation tools were fully integrated in the Programme courses or if there was a stand-alone module which covered such tools to then be used, by individual choice, by the students when they resolved tasks for the various practice-based translation courses. Students and staff confirmed that they organised a specific course and it was then up to the students to use such tools, if they found them helpful.

As regards the infrastructure and technical support offered to students, students were positive about the facilities and looking forward to moving into the newly renovated spaces for the Institute. The panel was not able to visit the new library facilities but was assured by the Programme management that they were state-of-the art, as regards the accessible resources and the ergonomic learning spaces provided. Students also noted that they were provided with Trados licenses which expire on completion of the Programme, but that they are also initiated in usage of MemoQ or Memsource to allow them to easily pivot towards freeware, as necessary.

Issues with dropouts have been raised and are acknowledged, with the Programme management noting that it is frequently a case of students no longer interested to finalise their thesis and graduate formally once they have acquired the knowledge and skills they need to enter the labour market. If students find work before graduating and employers are satisfied with the skills they demonstrate, there is high likelihood that these students would withdraw from the Programme. The Programme management are aware of these issues but find themselves unable to tackle the problem consistently. Although the graduation thesis was more recently revised and it currently consists of options between more research-based topics or project-based annotated commentary of existing translations or translations by students in their field of choice, this is still proving insufficiently appealing for students who are set to leave the programme for employment which they managed to secure. The panel noted that this is not a unique situation but that drop-out issues are experienced across a number of programmes. The panel would be keen to see that the University more clearly articulates how it is

supporting programme managers to systematically tackle the issue of drop-outs and improve such metrics. (See also standard 8).

Overall, the programme management structure mirrors quality assurance arrangements in other Institutes with a Programme Council meeting regularly to discuss issues raised by various stakeholders. Although there is a complex dashboard that is at the disposal of management and teaching staff, the panel was of the impression that this was not used to its full potential and that more action could be derived from the overarching analyses the dashboard offered.

Strengths

- The efforts made by the Programme, in partnership with multiple stakeholders, to align with the European Master's in Translation Network of the European Commission are commendable.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The Programme should reach an informed decision in relation to its Interpretation track and amend its curricular structure accordingly. This is most important to how the Programme is perceived internationally and what collaborations can be further instituted based on comparability of objectives, learner profiles and career trajectories.

Opportunities for further improvement

- The University may wish to ring-fence some financial support for research conducted by Programme staff into robustly systematising and further developing the Estonian language.
- The Programme may wish to consider how it could effectively cover more novel trends depicting a variety of emerging career profiles to equip its students for constantly changing market requirements.
- The Programme may wish to consider a stronger integration of CAT-tools into its practice-based courses, where appropriate for the activities proposed.
- The Programme may wish to make more use of the dashboard metrics to inform decision-making and determine relevant actions to be taken.

2.5.2 Learning, teaching and assessment

- Conditions and organisation of admission ensure fair access to education and motivated student body. Students' choice of specialisation is supported.
- A student-centred approach is used in the studies, aiming at the students to assume responsibility for planning their studies and career and supporting the development of key competencies and achieving the learning outcomes of the study programme.
- Student assessment, including taking accreditation of prior and experiential learning into account, supports the students and corresponds to the learning outcomes. Objective and reliable assessment is ensured.
- The organisation of studies including practical work and training is based on the specificities of students and forms of study and supports the student in achieving the learning outcomes. Opportunities have been established for mobility within Estonia and internationally.
- Support services for students are in place and available for students. Individual development and progress of students are monitored and supported.
- Graduates of the study programme are competitive in terms of their knowledge and social skills both nationally and internationally.

Evidence and analysis

The admission requirements are clearly outlined with applicants being expected to demonstrate high level of proficiency in their first foreign language (at least C1 level in English, French, German or Russian) and a B2 level of proficiency in a second foreign language. There is one aspect which the programme acknowledges would require further attention and possibly some level of clarification already as part of the admission process: The fact that some compulsory courses are taught fully in English means that students who do not have English in their language combination may struggle to keep pace.

Students with disabilities are accommodated, with relevant examples being provided in detailing support offered for deaf and blind students. It was, however, recognised that staff do not always know what adjustment options should be made available and are not prepared to take on students with disabilities and have found themselves having to quickly upskill on training for specific pedagogies for these students. It was also noted that frequently students themselves will need to guide staff into providing the relevant support, but the University has made efforts to upgrade infrastructure where this was necessary (see also standard 6).

The Assessment Panel had ample discussion with staff on the concept of student-centeredness and how this is translated in practice and heard that staff consult with students on the content of the courses and offer as much support as possible for their development.

Assessments are set, invigilated and marked by the course tutor. Where more teachers are involved in proving one grade, this is averaged out across the components. Frequently there is just one tutor able to assess a particular disciple or component thereof. As such, there is no second marking or moderation

of marks and it is unclear if assessments are anonymous, although the panel appreciates that with such a small number of students anonymising would likely fail in its purpose.

Recognition of prior learning is effectively practiced, as a formalized process. Students are, thus, able to recognise formal, informal or experiential learning and their application is assessed and decisions made about recognising a course in full or partially. This is particularly relevant as many students have reported being employed or collaborating with different companies, and as such they will have gained the knowledge and skills necessary to attempt some recognition, at least. The panel also heard that the internship can be fully recognized via the RPL route (see also standards 8 and 9).

Engagement with external stakeholders is comprehensive and opportunities for students are plentiful. The programme has a compulsory internship, which students report allows them to develop. The employers who spoke to the panel described the various tasks which they allocate to students, and these seemed to align well with the learning outcomes of the programme. However, when asked, the Programme management was vague on how internships were monitored for consistency and alignment with the learning outcomes of the programme. It was also unclear how any issues with ongoing internships would be picked up, apart from them being directly raised by either the employer or the students. Also, the panel noted that the learning outcomes specific to the internship are generic, highlighting broad-ranging skills rather than translation-specific skills in contexts where this is practice professionally.

A mobility window was introduced to facilitate international exchanges; however, it is yet to be clarified how this may be operationalised most effectively. Some students indicated that they have had to extend their studies because recognition was not automatic, others have said they were successful in recognition and completed in the nominal time. Importantly, even on extension by one semester, students understood that there was no financial burden on them, with UT not charging tuition fees for the extension (See also standard 5). It is also worth noting that students have praised the support received during their mobility both in advance and in situ.

Graduates of the study programme have indicated that it is easy to find appropriate employment or to go into free-lancing. Employers also confirmed that for some students, who might have taken internships with their company, they are willing to open up dedicated job positions. Internationally, EU institutions seem to absorb many of the graduates.

Strengths

- UT excels by its policies and practices in the area of recognition of prior learning, which are formally and consistently applied and thus allow students to make the most use of any academic or professional experience they may have acquired previously.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The programme should redraft the learning outcomes for internships to ensure these align with the specificity of the programme and should engage in effective monitoring practices that can allow for proactive assessment of internship performance and employer suitability.

Opportunities for further improvement

- The Programme may wish to consider if there could be value in assessments being moderated or second marked, even randomly, to ensure that assessment approaches are deemed consistent across courses.

2.5.3 Development, cooperation and internationalisation of teaching staff

- Teaching is conducted by a sufficient number of professionally competent members of the teaching staff who support the development of the students.
- Teaching staff follows the principles of academic ethics and the codes of conduct in case of non-compliance.
- Members of the teaching staff participate in international mobility programs which encourage the development of their teaching and RDC activities and the cultural openness of the HEI and the Estonian society.
- The effectiveness of both studies and RDC activities, students' feedback, the effectiveness of supervision, development of teaching and supervision skills, international mobility and entrepreneurial or work experience in the specific field outside the HEI is taken into consideration in evaluating the work of the member of the staff.

Evidence and analysis

Staff on the Programme are well qualified, knowledgeable and instil confidence in students by displaying expertise gained through first-hand experience as translators or interpreters. However, they generally have their substantive workload anchored in a different programme, possibly a bachelor's or correlated to research. This results in some level of overstretching, which could become risky for the programme long-term.

Staff have confirmed that they are well supported in their research endeavours, with some quoting sabbaticals as a means of focusing on research exclusively, if the need arose.

Staff are in close connection with employers, who recognise the great work being done on the programme and have expressed an interest to develop further collaboration opportunities which can relieve staff of some of the workload burden, for example to sit on graduation panels or to co- supervise graduation theses, possibly also by contract.

Academic ethics is well promoted, and students have confirmed that they inducted, supported and monitored to comply with academic integrity principles. Plagiarism may be less relevant for project- based assignments which have at the core a translation-related task.

Staff indicated that there are multiple opportunities for development and that the University offers many courses they can optionally attend. Such courses are generally sought out when an imminent need arises, like for example when a blind student was admitted to the programme (see also standard 6). International mobility is less appealing to teaching staff, although some have confirmed having taken up a programme of exchange and being fully satisfied with the development opportunities it offered. To compensate for international mobility, internationalisation-at-home manifested in a variety of ways (guest lectures, international conferences organised by UT) also benefits staff members.

The annual appraisal system seems lax across the University, and many of the staff members interviewed explained that they were evaluated where their main affiliation was, with performance on the master's being one small component of their appraisal. It seemed to the panel that the five-yearly appraisal was the one process with more impact and staff indicated that these five-yearly appraisals offered also the opportunity for promotion, for which they knew the criteria very well (see also standard 6).

Strengths

- Many members of staff also work as language professionals (translators, interpreters etc) and can share relevant professional expertise with students.

Opportunities for further improvement

- The Programme may wish to more closely monitor risk associated with staff workload and aim to coordinate across units to ensure staff are not overstretched as this can lead to lower performance.

2.6 International Relations and Regional Studies (Master)

General information:

The Masters in International Relations and Regional Studies run by the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences (SER) is a two-year programme, launched in 2014, worth 120 ECTS and is taught in English. It focuses on training of those who aim for a career with an international focus (SER). The aim is to develop a range of general skills for such careers but also with knowledge that enables graduates to pursue research-oriented careers or doctoral studies (SER). An additional aim is to contribute to 'the sustainable development of the IR field in Estonia.' (SER). The combination of International Relations and Regional Studies is the only one of its kind in Estonia.

Apart from the core module, which covers various aspects of IR, and a methods module and the final MA Thesis module, there are four specialisation modules: European Studies, Russian and Eurasian Studies, EU and Russian Studies, Baltic Sea Region Studies. There is also an elective and one optional module. All single courses are 6 ECTS.

Competition for a place on the Programme is rather high with about 175 applicants for 30 to 40 places (SER). The number of applicants to the Programme has been fairly stable with about 30 students accepted per year (SER); however, in 2021 there was a large increase in the number of accepted students to 40.

2.6.1 Planning and management of studies

- The design and development of study programme(s) take into account the expectations of students and other stakeholders, national strategies, legislation and trends in the particular area as well as labour market needs. The level and volume of RDC activities is sufficient and supports the launching of the study programme(s).
- The objectives of study programme(s), modules (including courses) and their learning outcomes are concrete and coherent. The teaching content and methods and assessment criteria and methods support students in achieving their learning outcomes and developing their key competencies. The study programmes support the development of creativity and entrepreneurship and other general competencies.
- The administration of material and financial resources that ensure the design and implementation of the study programme(s) is purposeful, systematic and sustainable. The learning environment, including materials, tools and technology support the students in achieving their learning outcomes.

Evidence and analysis

The programme is the only one of its kind in Estonia. Given its scope with clear options to study areas concerning the Baltic, the EU and Russia at an advanced level, the programme clearly conforms to Estonian national strategies. This was brought up in the panel's interviews with stakeholders who emphasised the need for a programme of this kind.

The SER (p 83) expressed some concern that the national strategy of taking responsibility for preserving the Estonian language might clash with the intention to be 'international' and to be able to attract sufficient numbers of students by offering English-speaking study programmes, such as the IRRS (T). Other representatives, such as members of the Council and Senate, however, were less concerned.

The responsible Institute works closely with relevant government ministries and with other relevant organisations (M). In a more informal way, alumni are also involved as a source of information for the Institute. As regards expectations in a more general sense, stakeholders, alumni and students all confirmed in interviews that the programme meets their expectations. This is borne out by the 2021 Student Evaluation, where students find the courses 'ordered logically' and 'interesting' and with satisfactory curriculum choices (SER). Students also give high marks to aspects such as understanding research methods, implementing new ideas, analysing and synthesizing, to present their views in writing and orally.

Regarding labour market needs, figures show that Estonian students are successful in getting a relevant job (SER). Non-Estonians might encounter more difficulties in finding a job in Estonia but easily find a job abroad (A; SER). The programme includes 18 ECTS research methods courses, which is a programme feature very much welcomed by stakeholders and a strong benefit for the labour market (T).

RDC activities are strong in relation to the types of assignments, topics, reading lists and assessment methods. These activities fully support the programme's aims and goals (SER; S; A). All key teachers are very active researchers (SER). Students very often get involved in research projects and most students formulate a thesis topic where the supervisor is working on a relevant research project (S).

The programme is structured along nine 'Modules' (IR core module, methods module, four specialisation modules /European Studies, Russian and Eurasian Studies, EU and Russian Studies, Baltic Sea Region Studies/ two elective/optional modules and the MA Thesis). The total ECTS length of each and every module is not given (but one module lists five courses while several other Modules list four courses). The Programme runs over four semesters, 30 ECTS each.

Five courses are considered to be of 'key' character (detailed learning outcomes are provided in Annex 6).

A further 25 courses are 'interconnected' with the Programme. Some courses are described by the SER as 'foundation' for other courses – some of these are described to 'pave the way' for other courses while at the same time sometimes 'third order' courses are taught before the second order courses (SER). The compulsory courses are taught every year, but some courses are taught only every third, fourth or fifth semester because 'Having a course with less than 10 students does not make sense' (SER).

An appealing feature of the Programme is the rich supply of courses open to the students to choose. At the same time, there might be a risk that some of these come a little close to being introductory courses rather than advanced courses, which could harm the Masters' level objectives. However, the strong focus on research methods, the emphasis on research paper-style assignments and the information provided in interviews with students, alumni, stakeholders and teachers who all emphasised the high analytical levels were reassuring that the Programme's objectives are fully met.

There is a strong emphasis on interactive seminars, research papers and research methods. Students both acquire research skills in a more general sense and skills that are specifically related to their choice of thesis topic (S, A, E).

The 2021 Student Evaluation gave somewhat lower marks to features such as understanding enterprises and organisations and to readiness to act as an entrepreneur (SER). However, the panel found that the programme does indeed provide the students with a range of general entrepreneurship competencies, such as oral presentation skills, written paper skills, time management and creativity being strongly supported by the programme. As for entrepreneurship, the programme supports and encourages key competencies, such as taking the initiative, overcome obstacles, and developing critical skills. Moreover, several students use their internships, which are a compulsory part of the programme, to develop future connections with companies. The IRRS as such encourages the students to take responsibility for their studies, thus honing their independence skills (S; T). Finally, the Programme takes advantage of the UT's 'Ideelabor' programme by encouraging students to use this programme, which connects students with companies (T).

The material and resources based on the current intake of students are purposeful, systematic and sustainable. Student numbers have kept up despite the pandemic. However, if the programme was not able to recruit students based on English as the language of instruction its future would be jeopardised. This – in turn – would put in danger the overarching goal to provide a key programme based on essential needs for the Estonian society. One element to consider is the amount of student fee waivers. The number of waivers has recently been cut back, which might in future reduce the number of applicants, although this has not happened yet (M).

The IRRS programme is taught in the renovated Lossi 36 complex with 'modern equipment' (SER). According to the SER, some lecture rooms are 'too small', a problem which has been alleviated via some online teaching. However, in the panel's interviews with students, no such concerns were raised, and the team's tour of the facilities gave no cause for concern. There might be a problem in the future if class sizes grow but currently the lecture rooms appear to be sufficient.

The learning environment in a wider sense is very supportive, with a non-hierarchical environment. Teachers are easy to access, and students receive a lot of encouragement and with many interactivity elements. Classes are relatively small, which supports interactivity (S).

Strengths

- The IRRS offers an academically highly appealing programme, which also meets key societal objectives in Estonia. In spite of demographic challenges, the Programme has a large number of applicants, with a strong element of international students. Graduation rates are high.
- The focus on Research Methods is very good, with 18 ECTS in total (both qualitative and quantitative, each with various subtypes).

Opportunities for further improvement

- Some courses are offered only every third to fifth semester (the reason being low number of students). Although students have note found this to be a problem, the Programme organisers might want to consider reducing the number of elective/optional courses somewhat.
- While learning outcomes are clearly stated, some learning outcomes and the character of the rich supply of elective and optional courses might perhaps to some extent come across as introductory rather than more advanced; however, by contrast the reading lists are based on academic journals, which is good, and stakeholders emphasise the academic and research skills of the graduates and the students strongly emphasise the distinctly more advanced analytical level compared to the bachelors' level. Yet, the Programme organisers might want to reconsider the learning outcomes in order to make sure progression through the Programme to advanced level is explicitly secured.
- The IRRS is an English-speaking programme which relies heavily on international students; if grants and language regulations are tightened, then the Programme might not be viable – however, the UT policy at present appears to be, that although the number of international students should not go up, neither should it be reduced.

2.6.2 Learning, teaching and assessment

- Conditions and organisation of admission ensure fair access to education and motivated student body. Students' choice of specialisation is supported.
- A student-centred approach is used in the studies, aiming at the students to assume responsibility for planning their studies and career and supporting the development of key competencies and achieving the learning outcomes of the study programme.
- Student assessment, including taking accreditation of prior and experiential learning into account, supports the students and corresponds to the learning outcomes. Objective and reliable assessment is ensured.
- The organisation of studies including practical work and training is based on the specificities of students and forms of study and supports the student in achieving the learning outcomes. Opportunities have been established for mobility within Estonia and internationally.
- Support services for students are in place and available for students. Individual development and progress of students are monitored and supported.
- Graduates of the study programme are competitive in terms of their knowledge and social skills both nationally and internationally.

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Evidence and analysis

This programme accepts students from various academic backgrounds. A motivation letter is utilised in order to select the students. These letters put all students on an equal and fair footing and so far as the panel could establish through the interviews, is a smoothly run feature. Teaching staff are aware of the fact that students come from different backgrounds and regularly provide extra material for students who need to reach the same level as others (T). As for taking prior learning into account as an element of the acceptance process, the Motivation Letter plays a key role.

There is a strong emphasis on students taking responsibility for their studies. This is supported via a high degree of interactivity between teachers and students, easy access for students to approach teachers, and the organization of the final thesis. Students are encouraged to define their thesis topic themselves – but with relevant help from teachers –, and students must formally take responsibility for submitting their thesis proposal to the Programme Director (T). As for career planning, students are encouraged to take advantage of their internships as a way of taking responsibility for their career planning. Moreover, the Institute organises 'Career Days' at which students can meet with people from various trades. Finally, students emphasised how the Institute encourages them to think about real life applications as one part of their thesis research projects and to contact the Institute's teachers and professors in order to use their extensive networks outside the UT (S).

Assessment and feedback are described as 'very fast and timely' with an emphasis on gradual learning by means of a range of written assignments and oral presentations (S). This is the programme's way of giving accreditation to 'prior and experiential' learning once the students have been accepted (T; S). Although 'fast and timely' was the overall character of teacher feedback to students, some students also mentioned that feedback did not always meet the set grading deadlines. However, teachers then always communicated the delay to the students (S). There was nothing in the panel's interviews to indicate any non-objective or unreliable assessment.

The organisation of studies including practical work and training is based on the specificities of students and forms of study. The organisation of the studies is varied. Students receive a lot of support to be able to achieve the learning outcomes. Teaching staff is easy to access, and there is a non-hierarchical approach which lowers the threshold between the teacher and the student when support is needed (S).

The programme provides very strong mobility options. Students are strongly encouraged to use this during their second year. Courses abroad are normally recognised by UT. Apart from the Erasmus programme (SER), students are often also able to do their internships abroad (S). Roughly 40-45% of the students study abroad, which is much higher than the figures for the university and the faculty (SER).

Individual development is monitored to alert teachers of any students falling behind. As for counselling services, the students find these very well advertised – both via newsletters and staff. A case in point is

the war in Ukraine. When it started, counselling was offered to all students (S). The UT's 'Counsellor-Chaplain' is available to students as well for support talks – although the extent to which a single person can actually provide more than limited help might be questioned (see also standard 4).

The 2021 Student Evaluation provides some indication that students do receive help and support from teachers/course instructors/tutors/websites (SER). In general, support services are 'mainly provided by the deputy head for academic affairs and an academic affairs specialist, who the students can turn to' (SER). Career counselling is available and appreciated by students, although making an appointment can be difficult as the number of staff is limited (S).

In 2017-2021, 108 students graduated, with 43 (of which 24 were Estonian citizens) finding a job in Estonia (SER). However, the graduates are also competitive internationally, e.g. with NGOs and EU institutions (S). All the panel's interviews provided evidence that the programme produces graduates that are very competitive on the labour market. However, the Estonian labour market is very tough for foreign students (A). This may not be a big problem for international students who can return to their home countries with a competitive degree. However, some international students do find jobs in Estonia as well, especially if they have learned Estonian (T).

Strengths

- The Programme provides the students with a rich variety of teaching methods and assessments: Lectures, seminars, group work, oral presentations, research papers; with a high degree of interactivity (student-student; student-teacher).
- The key thesis assignment is well organised. Supervisors are experts in their field, and it is easy for students to find a suitable supervisor. Students benefit from the IRRS's strong engagement with the outer world (NGOs, EU, Research Projects etc). Teachers are easy to access – with a non-hierarchical approach.
- Assessment is fast and timely with overall assessment not based on a final exam but on continuous submission of – mostly - written papers and tests. Learning outcomes are clearly stated.
- The IRRS students have a rich palette of opportunities to study abroad (Erasmus, Internships; a lot of encouragement to actually go to the country you are writing your thesis about).
- Graduates are very strong regarding analytical skills, and the labour market is not a major problem, especially not for Estonian-speaking students.

Opportunities for further improvement

- Although there are defined time frames within which feedback from teachers to students, regarding grades and assessment, should be communicated, these are not always adhered to. Even though students did not complain about this due to teachers' communication of delays, the Programme organisers might want to consider tightening up the feedback deadlines.
- Enrolment of students from various academic backgrounds, while positive as such, may require devices to ensure that students with little or no previous knowledge of international politics or methodology do not fall behind. Currently there are several introductory elements in the

curriculum (International Relations, International Law and Social Science Methodology), which is good. However, while the students who already have sufficient knowledge in these areas are able to focus on the more advanced courses, students who really need the introductory courses might need additional support to be able to move on in a satisfactory way.

2.6.3 Development, cooperation and internationalisation of teaching staff

- Teaching is conducted by a sufficient number of professionally competent members of the teaching staff who support the development of the students.
- Teaching staff follows the principles of academic ethics and the codes of conduct in case of non-compliance.
- Members of the teaching staff participate in international mobility programs which encourage the development of their teaching and RDC activities and the cultural openness of the HEI and the Estonian society.
- The effectiveness of both studies and RDC activities, students' feedback, the effectiveness of supervision, development of teaching and supervision skills, international mobility and entrepreneurial or work experience in the specific field outside the HEI is taken into consideration in evaluating the work of the member of the staff.

Evidence and analysis

The teaching staff is highly competent with excellent CVs, which is conducive to student development. Most teachers hold a PhD and are active researchers with regular publications (SER). Several teachers spend teaching and research time abroad and publish regularly in international journals.

New teachers have to take a number of compulsory courses to develop their teaching competence (T). Although most teachers have undergone solid pedagogical training, some teachers are 'without sufficient teaching experience' (SER). However, these issues are handled by encouraging teaching staff to be constantly trained' (SER). Moreover, UT has recently updated the requirements for academic staff by putting in place a plan which requires teaching staff to go through assessment every five years, which includes a self-assessment report where they must indicate the training courses they have taken. In addition, teachers are given financial support in order to develop their teaching skills. Every year teachers participate in peer-learning when they visit a colleague at work during a week.

Codes of conduct and principles of academic ethics are in place (D). As regards any breaches of academic ethics standards, these are promptly handled by the Academic Secretary (M). All written student assignments are run through the Ouriginal plagiarism device.

Several staff are part of solid international networks with experience in international activities. The Programme as such is geared towards cultural openness of Estonian society.

Strengths

- The IRRS teachers' CVs indicate high-level competence.