

**Decision Regarding Assessment of the Business and
Administration Study Programme Group
Estonian Business School**

11/04/2017

The Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education decided to approve the report by the Assessment Committee and to conduct the next quality assessment of the Business and Administration study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at Estonian Business School in seven years, with a secondary condition

On the basis of subsection 10 (4) of the Universities Act, point 3.7.3 of the Statutes of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (hereinafter referred to as 'EKKA') and point 41 of the document, 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education', authorised in point 3.7.1 of the above-mentioned EKKA Statutes; the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education (hereinafter referred to as 'the Council') affirms the following:

1. On 18.11.2016 Estonian Business School and EKKA agreed upon a time frame to conduct a quality assessment of the study programme group.
2. The Director of EKKA, by her order on 10.10.2016, approved the following membership of the quality assessment committee for the Business and Administration study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at Estonian Business School, Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre and Tallinn University (hereinafter referred to as 'the Committee'):

Tanja Dmitrovic – Chair of the Committee	Professor, Head of the Chair, Faculty of Economics, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia
Jaakko Pekka Juhani Lehtonen	Professor Emeritus, University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Anne Perkiö	Lic.Ed, Head of the Programme, Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, Finland
Kotryna Peilauskaite	Student member of the Committee, University of Vilnius, Lithuania
Tõnu Pekk	Entrepreneur, Estonia
Muhammed Abdul Rauf	Head, School of Business, Wittenborg University of Applied

	Sciences, Holland
Simone Ella Gertrud Wesner	University of London, Birkbeck, United Kingdom

3. Estonian Business School submitted the following study programmes for evaluation under the Business and Administration study programme group:
 - International Business Administration (BA)**
 - Entrepreneurship and Business Administration (BA)**
 - Business Administration and Languages (BA)**
 - International Business Administration (MA)**
 - Entrepreneurship (MBA)**
 - Business Innovation (MBA)**
 - International Business Administration (MBA)**
4. Estonian Business School submitted a self-evaluation report to the EKKA Bureau on 22.09.2016 and the assessment coordinator forwarded it to the Committee on 5.10.2016.
5. An assessment visit was made to Estonian Business School during 06–07.12.2016.
6. The Committee sent its draft assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 25.01.2017, EKKA forwarded it to Estonian Business School for its comments on 6.02.2017, and the School delivered its response on 20.02.2017.
7. The Committee submitted its final assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 21.02.2017. That assessment report is an integral part of the decision, and is available on the EKKA website.
8. The Secretary of the Council forwarded the Committee's final assessment report along with the School's self-evaluation report to the Council members on 23.02.2017.
9. The Council with 10 members present discussed these received documents in its session on 11.04.2017 and, based on the assessment report, decided to point out the following strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations regarding the Business and Administration study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at Estonian Business School.

Assessment at the Study Programme Group and Programme Levels

Strengths

- 1) Over the years Estonian Business School (EBS) has evolved into a well-managed business school with a functioning quality assurance system. The EBS mission and vision are clearly communicated throughout the School, and are also reflected in the objectives of the study programmes.
- 2) Students highly value the practical content of their studies and the sense of community at the School. At EBS students are dealt with in a personal manner and provided with comprehensive support and assistance as needed. There are good working relationships between teaching staff and students. EBS offers opportunities to its students to study according to individual study plans, as needed.
- 3) EBS has established an impressive partner network which allows its students to spend part of their studies at prestigious business schools abroad (e.g. in the Business Innovation programme). This is well in line with EBS's international focus and increases the competitiveness of its students in the labour market.
- 4) EBS places a strong emphasis on the development of skills and competencies, especially in language skills. Teamwork and entrepreneurial spirit are also encouraged. The School is actively

involved with the challenges of the digital world, using open source resources where possible and fostering innovative teaching methods.

- 5) Graduate employment rates are high and employers are satisfied with their professional preparation and social skills. Graduates also have good language skills and are capable of working in an international environment.
- 6) There clearly are innovative elements in the study programme development.
- 7) EBS has good connections with the Estonian business community and several courses are conducted by industry professionals. Teaching staff are very motivated and dedicated. Among other things, entrepreneurs have contributed to the creation of a business incubator in the Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, which allows students to set up and manage their own companies in the context of their studies.
- 8) Textbooks and learning materials are updated systematically and on a regular basis. The EBS library is the largest library of business literature in Estonia, comprising all the necessary literature in both Estonian and English.
- 9) The students of Entrepreneurship and Business Administration have a pre-incubation model at their disposal.
- 10) Classrooms are of good quality and meet the needs of both students and teaching staff.
- 11) EBS has designed a good learning environment for its students and staff, and the quality management of studies under the guidance of the Vice Rector for Studies plays a key role in its continuous improvement. The School has established a well-functioning system for internal auditing of studies.
- 12) The process of teaching and learning is well organised. Students are supported by study consultants and tutors on a daily basis. The heads of the programmes also provide comprehensive advice to students as needed. Students and alumni appreciate both the digital support systems (SIS, Moodle, personal Skype interviews, etc.) and the regular face-to-face meetings with lecturers. According to the students, the teaching and learning process is professional and flexible and meets their individual needs, capabilities and expectations.
- 13) EBS's advantage in recruiting international students is the existing cooperation agreements with partners abroad.
- 14) Smaller class sizes for the lessons and seminars that are focused on acquiring skills allow for conducting interactive teaching and for providing personal feedback to students.
- 15) Students are highly motivated and prefer EBS to other higher education institutions for very specific reasons (such as the practical approach, its positive image). Students are very satisfied with the School and their study programmes.
- 16) Students are actively involved in the process of study programme development.
- 17) Flexible timetables enable students to combine their studies with work. Most of the studies are conducted in English, which contributes to the internationalisation of students.
- 18) Both Bachelor's and Master's students are actively involved in research projects.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) The weakest element of EBS is an inadequate number of full-time teaching staff in the study programmes.
- 2) If EBS wants to raise its international profile, it should place more emphasis on academic research. It is also advisable to increase funding for scientific research. Motivational mechanisms should be put in place to promote research. Research by the teaching staff should be more visible for students.
- 3) When determining workloads for the teaching staff, their research, administrative tasks and compilation of textbooks should also be taken into account in addition to their teaching loads. The School could also formally recognise the staff members for their voluntary extra activities (such as textbook writing).

- 4) The School could apply a more comprehensive approach to staff development. For example, EBS could establish its own requirements for teacher training as well as for staff's language and pedagogical skills.
 - 5) A larger number of international lecturers should be actively recruited for the MA and MBA programmes.
 - 6) It is recommended that the School have a more interdisciplinary approach to study programme development; for example, more social and cultural elements could be incorporated into the programmes.
 - 7) There are occasional overlaps between courses with similar contents. Members of the teaching staff should thoroughly discuss the reasons and needs for such overlaps and also explain them to the students. Modules could be larger. Communication among staff members from different departments should be improved; currently it is not sufficient.
 - 8) The numbers of ECTS credits for courses do not always reflect the actual workloads of students, which is in contravention to the rules of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. Internationalisation requires an international comparability of courses and credits.
 - 9) Feedback to students seems to be limited to only the results of examinations. Students should be given written qualitative feedback more systematically on all the components of a grade received. For the sake of transparency and equal treatment of students, the assessment process should be clearly documented. It is advisable to establish uniform feedback rules for all formal assessments.
 - 10) As the School also offers study programmes taught in English, it is advisable to introduce software that allows for identifying plagiarism from different languages and for checking the originality of student work. The principles of academic ethics and the consequences of plagiarism must certainly be explained to students in a sufficiently thorough manner at the very start of their studies.
 - 11) All learning materials for the study programmes taught in English should be updated and made available in English.
 - 12) EBS could establish an office for practical trainings, which would assist students in finding practical training places.
 - 13) It is advisable to specify a minimum sum in the annual budget to update library resources.
 - 14) In part, uneven levels of prior preparation of students pose problems. To resolve this situation, preparatory remedial courses could be offered or more stringent admission criteria be adopted.
 - 15) Student mobility in both directions should be further supported. To this end, the transfer procedure of credits earned at other universities should be simplified and more flexible procedures for recognition of prior learning developed. There are no international students in two of the master degree programmes.
 - 16) It is advisable to allow students to also take courses at other higher education institutions.
 - 17) The system for collecting and processing feedback should be uniform for all study programmes.
 - 18) The high dropout rate and low completion rate within the nominal time are a concern. Students should be provided with comprehensive advice and information in the framework of support services and, in cooperation with employers, ways to complete studies in a timely manner should be found.
- 10.** Point 41 of the document, 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education', establishes that the Quality Assessment Council shall approve an assessment report within three months after receipt of the report. The Council shall weigh the strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations pointed out in the assessment report, and then shall decide whether to conduct the next quality assessment of that study programme group in seven, five or three years.

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

According to clause 6 (7) 1) of the Government of the Republic Regulation, 'Standard of Higher Education', *the conduct of studies conforms to the requirements if the teaching is performed by ordinary teaching and research staff who meet the qualification requirements established in legal instruments and whose number, based on their responsibilities, loads of conducted studies and research, and numbers of students supervised, is sufficient to achieve the objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme.* According to clause 2) of the same subsection, *a member of the teaching or research staff who conducts studies in a given subject must have the necessary teaching competence and his or her qualifications must support achievement of the objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme.*

Based on the report by the Assessment Committee, the weakest element of Estonian Business School (EBS) is the insufficient number of full-time teaching staff in the study programmes. Compared to other study programmes at EBS, the percentage of ordinary teaching staff is particularly low in the MBA programme in Business Innovation – only 15.7% (3 lecturers out of 19; see the EBS self-evaluation report, p. 71). The number of EBS's ordinary teaching staff has increased by 8 members and by 4.96 full-time equivalents. These numbers indicate that new lecturers have an average workload of 0.62. The number of extraordinary teaching staff increased by 10 members during the same period. Their workloads have decreased over the years. Extraordinary lecturers had an average workload of 0.17 in the 2014/15 academic year, 0.145 in 2015/16 and 0.136 in 2016/17. These figures have been calculated as an average across the whole educational institution and, in essence, indicate the scattering of teaching assignments among an increasing number of staff members.

According to subsection 15 (1) of the 'Standard of Higher Education', the position of a university professor requires active research, development, and/or creative activity. Research is also required from a docent [ibid, subsection 16 (1)] and from a lecturer [ibid, 17 (1)]. Data of the Estonian Research Information System (ETIS) and the EBS self-evaluation report on the Business and Administration study programme group (p. 12) reveal that during 2013–2015 the ordinary teaching staff published 70 high-quality publications (in the ETIS classifications 1.1, 1.2 and 3.1), which is 39 per ordinary staff member at the School when calculated in full-time equivalents (in reality it is 56). It follows that during those three years, research activity by the ordinary teaching staff at EBS yielded an average of 0.6 publication per year in full-time equivalents, indicating that the research capabilities of the School were clearly in a downward trend compared to the previous years (e.g. in 2012 this indicator was 0.99 annually per lecturer in full-time equivalents. In 2016 the number of high-quality publications increased, but it still remained below the 2012 result. Also, the research activity by the ordinary teaching staff is uneven – some staff members with a PhD have several high-quality publications, but some have none.

Based on the foregoing, it can be concluded that the number of full-time teaching staff in the programmes within the Business and Administration study programme group at EBS is inadequate, and academic research is not emphasised to a sufficient extent. Therefore, research done by the teaching staff does not sufficiently support attainment of the objectives and learning outcomes of the study programmes, and does not guarantee an adequate supervisory competence of the teaching staff in all fields of specialisation, as defined in the 'Standard of Higher Education'.

12. According to clause 53 (1) 2) of the Administrative Procedure Act, *a secondary condition of an administrative act is an additional duty related to the principal regulation of the administrative*

act and, according to clause 53 (1) 3), it is also a *supplementary condition for the creation of a right arising from the principal regulation of the administrative act*. Clauses 53 (2) 2) and 3) of the Administrative Procedure Act establish that *a secondary condition may be imposed on an administrative act if the administrative act cannot be issued without the secondary condition, or if issue of the administrative act must be resolved on the basis of an administrative right of discretion*. The Council found that, without a secondary condition, the next quality assessment of the study programme group should be conducted in less than seven years, and therefore, on the basis of points 41.1 and 42 of the document, 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education', the Council

DECIDED

to approve the assessment report and to conduct the next quality assessment of the Business and Administration study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at Estonian Business School in seven years with the following secondary condition:

No later than 11.04.2019, Estonian Business School shall submit a progress report in English to the Council on eliminating the shortcomings referred to in point 11 of this document. Members of the assessment committee shall be involved in the assessment of compliance with the secondary condition.

The decision was adopted by 10 votes in favour and 0 against.

13. If Estonian Business School does not comply with the secondary condition by the due date, the Council will repeal this assessment decision and set a new date for a quality assessment of the study programme group, or establish a new secondary condition.
14. The Council proposes that Estonian Business School will submit an action plan to EKKA with regard to other areas for improvement and recommendations pointed out in the report no later than 11.04.2019.
15. A person who finds that his or her rights have been violated or his or her freedoms restricted by this decision may file a challenge with the EKKA Quality Assessment Council within 30 days after the person filing the challenge became or should have become aware of the contested finding. A judicial challenge to this decision is possible within 30 days after its delivery, by filing an action with the Tallinn courthouse of the Tallinn Administrative Court pursuant to the procedure provided for in the Code of Administrative Court Procedure.

Tõnu Meidla
Chair of the Council

Hillar Bauman
Secretary of the Council