

Decision Regarding Assessment of the Arts Study Programme Group

Estonian Academy of Arts

29/09/2017

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 Arts study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at the Estonian Academy of Arts in seven years, with a secondary condition

On the basis of subsection 10 (4) of the Universities Act and points 41.1 and 42 of the document, 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education', authorised in points 3.7.3 and 3.7.1 of the Statutes of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (hereinafter referred to as 'EKKA'), the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education (hereinafter referred to as 'the Council') affirms the following:

1. On 24.03.2016 the Estonian Academy of Arts 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 09.02.2017, approved the following membership of the quality assessment committee for the Arts study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at the Estonian Academy of Arts (hereinafter referred to as 'the Committee'):

Professor John Butler	Chair of the Committee, Chief Executive Officer, EQ-Arts, United Kingdom
Mark Dunhill	Dean of the School of Art, University of the Arts London, United Kingdom
Marjan Hester Groot	Associate professor; Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Netherlands
Emma Järvenpää	Student, Leiden University, Netherlands
Žilvinas Lilas	Professor, Kunsthochschule für Medien Köln, Germany
Christine Pybus	Lecturer; CIT Crawford College of Art and Design, Cork, Ireland
Merja Salo	Professor, Aalto University, Finland

Maren Schmohl	Vice Rector, Academy of Applied Design, Art and Media, Germany
Jari Kukkonen	Vitalonga OÜ, Estonia

3. The Estonian Academy of Arts submitted the following programmes for evaluation under this study programme group:
 - Interior Architecture (BA)**
 - Interior Architecture (MA)**
 - Jewellery and Blacksmithing (BA)**
 - Graphic Design (BA)**
 - Ceramics (BA)**
 - Glass Art and Design (BA)**
 - Leather Art, Accessory Design and Bookbinding (BA)**
 - Fashion Design (BA)**
 - Textile Art and Design (BA)**
 - Product Design (BA)**
 - Product Design (MA)**
 - Media Graphics (BA)**
 - Creation of Environments (BA)**
 - Design and Applied Art (MA)**
 - Design and Applied Art (MA, *taught in English*)**
 - Design and Engineering (MSc, joint programme with Tallinn University of Technology)**
 - Interaction Design (MA)**
 - Art History and Visual Culture (BA)**
 - Art History and Visual Culture (MA)**
 - Cultural Heritage and Conservation (BA)**
 - Cultural Heritage and Conservation (MA)**
 - Photography (BA)**
 - Fine Arts (BA)**
 - Fine Arts (MA)**
 - Animation (BA)**
 - Animation (MA)**
 - Scenography (BA)**
 - Scenography (MA)**
4. The Estonian Academy of Arts submitted a self-evaluation report to the EKKA Bureau on 8.02.2017 and the assessment coordinator forwarded it to the Committee on 20.02.2017.
5. An assessment visit was made to the Estonian Academy of Arts during 9–11.05.2017.
6. The Committee sent its draft assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 23.06.2017, EKKA forwarded it to the Estonian Academy of Arts for its comments on 26.06.2017 and the Academy delivered its response on 10.07.2017.
7. The Committee submitted its final assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 23.07.2017. 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 Academy’s self-evaluation report to the Council members on 25.08.2017.
9. The Council with 9 members present discussed these received documents in its session on 29.09.2017 and, based on the assessment report, decided to point out the following strengths,

areas for improvement, and recommendations regarding the Arts study programme group at the Estonian Academy of Arts.

STUDY PROGRAMMES AT THE FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE:

INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE (BA and MA)

Strengths

- 1) The Interior Architecture Department has its own distinct identity and sense of mission, based on regional and international priorities and opportunities.
- 2) As a small unit, the Interior Architecture Department is quite effective and flexible in developing its study programmes. Students' needs have been well considered.
- 3) The study programmes are proactive and innovative, and inspire students to study. Students have been provided with good conditions for independent work and for realising their creativity in the real world from the very beginning of their BA studies.
- 4) The study programmes have close working relationships with their partners in the form of national and international projects.
- 5) Students' satisfaction with the Interior Design programmes is high.
- 6) The department intends to offer 'zero courses' to student candidates where senior students can acquire their first teaching experiences.
- 7) The *forest megaphones project* is a good example of achieving international impact while using extremely limited resources.
- 8) The decision to set up a Materials Lab is a right step worthy of additional support.
- 9) The Interior Architecture Department has created a supportive and challenging learning environment in which students play an active role in their studies.
- 10) External projects enable students to engage in professional practice throughout their studies.
- 11) The Assessment Committee was impressed with an introductory field trip project, which is organised for the first-year students intending to build their character and sense of community.
- 12) Students believe that their requests are taken seriously and that they are included in the decision-making processes of the Department.
- 13) According to the BA students, the content of the study programme is up to date and there is good balance between staff-led and self-directed projects. The MA students believe that the study programme provides them with the freedom to engage in topics of personal interest, and lecturers refer them to professionals to get any needed advice.
- 14) Due to the small size and relative autonomy of the Department, members of the teaching staff work closely as a team. The local, national and international connections have a very positive impact on the students' learning experiences.
- 15) All staff members are actively engaged in professional practice and use their professional knowledge and skills in their teaching work as well.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) The inter- and trans-disciplinary aspects of the study programmes could be enhanced through closer collaboration with other departments as well as with stakeholders from outside the academic sector. It should also be considered as to how to work more closely with other departments in the new building (e.g. with the Architecture Department).
- 2) Given that the contents of the programmes are not directly related to traditional interior architecture, consideration could be given to changing the name of both the programme and the department to 'Spatial Design', for example.
- 3) The role of the Materials Lab in the teaching and learning process should be reinforced and more workshop-type academic events should be organised in order to make education even more learner-centred and project-based.

- 4) Major changes should be made in the MA programme, as the number of students is sometimes unacceptably low and the dropout rate is significantly higher than the averages of the BA programme and the Academy in general.
- 5) Credit values of the practical trainings could be increased.
- 6) More attention should be given to developing the students' entrepreneurial skills.
- 7) It should be investigated as to how the workloads of students' participation in elective courses and voluntary projects impact their core studies.
- 8) Teaching staff do not perceive that adequate support exists for their research at the Academy level. It is recommended that the Academy create suitable conditions for the teaching staff to set up research groups, and support the development of a research culture throughout the Academy.
- 9) Salary levels of the teaching staff are low compared to other higher education institutions in Estonia, which also affects the recruitment and selection of new teaching staff.
- 10) Physical access to the learning facilities for students with disabilities is a serious concern.
- 11) Anonymity of student feedback should be ensured.

STUDY PROGRAMMES AT THE FACULTY OF DESIGN:

JEWELLERY AND BLACKSMITHING (BA), GRAPHIC DESIGN (BA), CERAMICS (BA), GLASS ART AND DESIGN (BA), FASHION DESIGN (BA), LEATHER ART, ACCESSORY DESIGN AND BOOKBINDING (BA), TEXTILE ART AND DESIGN (BA), PRODUCT DESIGN (BA and MA), MEDIA GRAPHICS (BA), CREATION OF ENVIRONMENTS (BA), DESIGN AND APPLIED ARTS (M), DESIGN AND APPLIED ARTS (MA, TAUGHT IN ENGLISH), DESIGN AND ENGINEERING (MSc, JOINT PROGRAMME WITH TALLINN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY), INTERACTION DESIGN (MA)

Strengths

- 1) The study programmes include strong elements of an international dimension. The programmes have close relationships with the professional world and with employers. Good cooperation with other higher education institutions, partners and companies in Estonia has been achieved.
- 2) Theoretical and practical studies are well interconnected in the study programmes. Both staff and students appreciate the practical orientation of the programmes and craft-based education.
- 3) According to the students, one of the strengths of the Academy is the provision of personal feedback on both their progress and achieved learning outcomes.
- 4) Alumni and other relevant stakeholders are involved in the process of study programme development.
- 5) Teaching staff are experienced and committed to their teaching work. Many of them are renowned professionals in their fields. Staff members have good national and international connections.
- 6) The study programmes enjoy a friendly and supportive atmosphere, the evidence of which is especially emphasised by international students. Students are satisfied with the teaching skills of their teachers. Students have direct and informal communication with their lecturers and the opportunity to receive personal supervision from them. Teaching staff members are open to students' feedback and agree to make adjustments to the study plans on this basis.
- 7) MA students appreciate the close relationships with businesses through various collaborative projects. Alumni and students are satisfied with the entrepreneurial skills acquired in the study programmes, as well as with the international dimension of programmes.
- 8) Both alumni and employers highly value the professional competence, experimental approach and international experience of graduates from the Academy.
- 9) The student dropout rate is relatively low (below 10%).

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) Led by the Academy management, the structure of the Faculty should be made more straightforward and transparent. For this purpose, it is recommended that the Academy conduct a SWOT analysis, taking into account the external perspective of the Faculty's broad network of partners and connections. A more thorough market analysis regarding both current and planned study programmes should be conducted.
- 2) The Academy's management should initiate and support changes in the Faculty more vigorously. Involvement of the management is crucial, as sometimes the Faculty has not succeeded in taking into account the recommendations already made during the 2006 external evaluation.
- 3) The narrowly segmented study programmes pose an economic challenge for the Academy and run counter to the need for designers with a broader education. Consideration could be given to opening a smaller number of study programmes at the Faculty that are more broad-based.
- 4) An explicit plan should be put in place regarding how to use common resources as the number of applicants is decreasing, while at the same time retaining the strengths of small study groups.
- 5) Since the teaching staff members have not been engaged very much in academic research, the majority of the teaching is not based upon research. Broader and more streamlined programmes would allow the department to develop clearer guidelines for practice-based artistic research.
- 6) The majority of BA students would benefit from a broader and more interdisciplinary approach, which would introduce them to the general concepts and processes of design, while at the same time enabling them to specialise in different materials and areas.
- 7) The study programmes launched in recent years (joint, MA and part-time programmes) should be considered as parts of a new diverse identity of the Faculty of Design, on equal terms with the 'older' study programmes.
- 8) Competition for student places and the number of students admitted to almost all of the BA programmes have been below the Academy's averages for several years.
- 9) Only 54% of graduates work in their chosen fields of study, and many of them earn at lower salary levels than Estonian averages. In cooperation with employers, professional organisations and students, ways should be found to improve the students' professional employment rates.
- 10) The BA programmes should be reviewed carefully and self-critically in order to make them more learner-centred.
- 11) In the BA programmes, more attention should be paid to digital and newer media design in general, and additional resources for that purpose should be acquired as needed.
- 12) Design thinking, design theories and practice-based artistic research should be systematically embedded in all the study programmes.
- 13) More emphasis should be given to studies relating to entrepreneurship.
- 14) A more systematic strategy should be developed on how best to exploit the potentials of e-learning.
- 15) Continuity of timetables should be ensured while also retaining flexibility in learning. Sometimes students find it difficult to manage unexpected changes in their class schedules.
- 16) As regards the assessment of learning outcomes, systematic external and internal benchmarking should be performed.
- 17) Members of the teaching staff should be offered design-based IT and pedagogical courses instead of the current overly general courses.
- 18) Dropout rates for the MA programme in Design and Applied Art and the part-time BA programme in Creation of Environments are higher than the Faculty's average. The reasons for this should be identified.
- 19) The rates for graduating in a timely manner should be improved in all cycles of study.

- 20) The study programmes should be better marketed in order to increase the numbers of potential students.

STUDY PROGRAMMES AT THE FACULTY OF ART AND CULTURE:

ART HISTORY AND VISUAL CULTURE (BA and MA), CULTURAL HERITAGE AND CONSERVATION (BA and MA)

Strengths

- 1) The Faculty of Art and Culture has a clearly defined role in the Estonian academic community and society in general.
- 2) All study programmes function very well. Teaching staff members of the programmes have good relationships with partners, employers are involved in the teaching process, and there are many exchanges between educational institutions and study programmes. Practical trainings are well organised and relevant to the needs in Estonia, and particularly in Tallinn.
- 3) A very good interdisciplinary collaboration exists between the Art History and Culture and the Cultural Heritage and Conservation programmes.
- 4) The study programmes are in a relatively good position as they receive research funds from the Heritage Conservation Advisory Panel of Estonia, with whom they also have close cooperation regarding practical trainings and practice-based artistic research.
- 5) The Department has defined its research areas clearly, and collaborates with external stakeholders through research projects as well. Colleagues provide consistent feedback on one another's research projects and doctoral theses, and the doctoral theses are of high quality.
- 6) The teaching and learning process supports the individual and social development of learners, and sometimes even individual study programmes have been developed. The process of teaching and learning is flexible and takes into account specifics of the forms of study. Good connections with practitioners and employers in the field are utilised from the very beginnings of the studies. Alumni, employers, staff members and the student body form a supportive professional community for freshmen, readily sharing information and their experiences with them.
- 7) Practical and theoretical studies are very well interconnected, since the Faculty of Art and Culture is probably the most academic faculty in the entire Academy. Research groups operate within the Faculty who understands how to obtain funding for them. Needed resources as well as good international research connections and collaborations have been obtained for the Faculty through successful research projects.
- 8) There are examples of good teaching practices, such as training graduates to become new teaching staff. Students are also involved in research activities conducted by staff, which greatly motivates both parties.
- 9) Members of the teaching staff are highly qualified, active and renowned researchers who have good international connections. Teaching staff have good working and academic connections in their fields. Staff members carry out academic and research cooperation within the Academy as well as with employers and lecturers from other higher education institutions.
- 10) Students' feedback on full-time lecturers is positive and they are very satisfied with their studies, considering the study programmes to be up to date and appropriate. Feedback from students is taken into account in the process of programme development and changes are made on this basis. The teaching and learning process takes place in small groups and is well organised.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) Currently, the study programmes are not very international, as there are insufficient resources to recruit international lecturers and researchers. The programmes should be better marketed at the international level in order to recruit more international teaching staff and students.
- 2) There is little interest in the study programmes from student candidates, which is verified by the small student numbers. The Faculty should promote its activities and cultural significance more effectively in order to potentially attract more students to the programmes.
- 3) The Faculty has expressed strong criticism of some of the Academy's support structures, and this should be taken seriously and addressed.
- 4) Practical heritage research should not overshadow the more theoretical research in the field of contemporary art history in the Art History and Visual Culture programme.

STUDY PROGRAMMES AT THE FACULTY OF FINE ARTS:

PHOTOGRAPHY (BA), FINE ARTS (BA and MA), SCENOGRAPHY (BA and MA), ANIMATION (BA and MA)

Strengths

- 1) The study programmes meet the needs of the labour market in Estonia. The Animation Department which has gained international reputation must be recognised in particular.
- 2) According to all stakeholders, the study programmes have taken their feedback into account.
- 3) Students have opportunities to participate in a number of projects outside of the Academy, for example, to collaborate with designers and professional networks.
- 4) For the 2017/18 academic year, combined admissions to the study programmes are planned, which should increase synergies between the departments.
- 5) Very good practical training opportunities have been created for students, which broaden their understanding of professional work and improve their communication skills and confidence in dealing with the working world outside the Academy.
- 6) International mobility in both directions works very well in the study programmes. Students in Animation programmes have strong international profiles.
- 7) Good tools and software for developing digital skills and for learning English have been made available in the Faculty.
- 8) The teaching and learning process is flexible, both traditional and new media are taught in the process. Students are encouraged to be open to different concepts.
- 9) Very good relationships exist between the students and lecturers. Due to the small groups, staff members pay individual attention to students.
- 10) Sufficient opportunities have been created for the teaching staff for their self-development and participation in conferences. Staff members actively participate in international exchanges and conferences.
- 11) Students have the opportunity to visit events of international importance, such as the Venice Biennale, with support from the Faculty.
- 12) Students highly value the support services provided by programme coordinators.
- 13) Graduates of the programmes are active in the city's cultural life and collectives.
- 14) Alumni of the study programmes are used as recruiters for the programmes.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) The relationship, synergy and integration of the Scenography Department with the other Departments and the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre need clarification. In order to foster collaboration between Scenography and Theatre students, programmes should be better synchronised.
- 2) It is strongly recommended that the Faculty perform international benchmarking for the study programmes.

- 3) In light of the planned changes for the 2017/18 academic year, the credit values and contents of modules should be reviewed in order to be consistent with the trans-disciplinary orientation of the proposed combined study programme for Sculpture, Painting and Print. This may require the introduction of larger studio modules, especially at the final stage of the BA studies.
 - 4) According to the students, their independent self-directed learning is not sufficiently supported at the early stages of their studies.
 - 5) There is no clear link between the planned learning outcomes and the assessment criteria. Departments have not conducted comparisons between their assessment standards. Summative assessment is often presented in the form of a verbal critique, the length and depth of which can vary widely across departments. The assessment process requires greater transparency and continuity in order to ensure equal treatment of students. The Faculty should establish a harmonised assessment system, which defines the assessment principles and the relationship between assessment criteria and learning outcomes. Students believe that they would also benefit from written feedback.
 - 6) According to the students, the feedback questionnaire in the Study Information System (SIS) is not relevant and it is better to use informal feedback channels. The SIS questionnaire should be reviewed.
 - 7) According to the MA students in the Animation programme, not all of the learning materials have been made available in English.
 - 8) Teaching staff would like the workshops to be managed and funded centrally. The resources purchased for specific projects are not available to everyone.
 - 9) Staff participation in practice-based artistic research should be supported in order to better integrate theory and practice in all aspects of the programmes. More internal interdisciplinary collaboration should be conducted to develop and support practice-based artistic research.
 - 10) There is no system for staff assessment. It is recommended that a staff's forum be created in which staff members can share their best practices of teaching.
 - 11) Alumni of the Faculty form an overly high percentage of the current teaching staff. The backgrounds of staff members could be more diverse. Recruitment of qualified international lecturers is hampered mainly by low salary levels.
 - 12) The Faculty should pay particular attention to recruitment of new students, including the offering of flexible learning opportunities to attract the more mature students and encourage those who had previously dropped out to continue their studies. It is also recommended that more programmes be developed to be taught in a foreign language to attract more international students.
- 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 Academy eliminates the following shortcoming:
- According to subsection 6 (1) of the Government of the Republic Regulation, 'Standard of Higher Education', *a study programme must take into consideration the needs of the labour market and the target group.* The study programmes with narrow specialisations at the Faculty of Design are not consistent with the current needs in the labour market for designers having a broader

education. The rates of graduates becoming employed in their professions are low. The Academy's management should initiate and support changes at the faculties more vigorously.

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) 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 Arts study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at the Estonian Academy of Arts in seven years with the following secondary condition:

No later than 29.09.2019, the Estonian Academy of Arts 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 assessing compliance with the secondary condition.

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

13. If the Estonian Academy of Arts 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 the Estonian Academy of Arts will submit an action plan to EKKA with regard to the other areas for improvement and recommendations pointed out in the report no later than 29.09.2019.
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.

Maaja-Katrin Kerem
Vice-Chair of the Council

Hillar Bauman
Secretary of the Council