

Decision Regarding Assessment of the Architecture and Building Study Programme Group Estonian Academy of Arts

12/06/2017

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 Architecture and Building study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at the Estonian Academy of Arts in seven years

On the basis of subsection 10 (4) of the Universities Act and point 41.1 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; the Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education of EKKA (hereinafter referred to as 'the Council') affirms the following:

1. On 14.03.2016 the Estonian Academy of Arts and EKKA agreed upon a time frame to conduct the quality assessment of the study programme group.
2. The Director of EKKA, by her order on 15.02.2017, approved the following membership of the quality assessment committee for the Architecture and Building study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at Tallinn University of Technology, Estonian University of Life Sciences, TTK University of Applied Sciences and Estonian Academy of Arts (hereinafter referred to as 'the Committee'):

Matti Rautiola	Chair of the Committee – Professor, Architect, Director General, ARRAK Architects Kiiskilä, Rautiola, Building Information Foundation (Finland)
Hermann Blum	Student, ETH Zürich, ESU (Switzerland)
Philippe Bouillard	Professor, Université Libre de Bruxelles (Belgium)
Ardi Van Den Brink	Professor of Landscape Architecture, Wageningen University (Netherlands)
Emma Järvenpää	Student, Leiden University (Netherlands)
Tiit Kerem	CEO, AS Telora-E (Estonia)

Juris Rihards Naudžuns	Professor, Riga Technical University (Latvia)
Herman Neuckermans	Professor Emeritus, KU Leuven, Department of Architecture (Belgium)
Mark G. Richardson	Deputy Vice President for Global Engagement, University College Dublin (Ireland)
Paul Rullmann	Chairman of the WTR, the Scientific Technical Council of SURF (Netherlands)

3. The Estonian Academy of Arts submitted the following study programmes for evaluation under the Architecture and Building study programme group:

**Architecture and Urban Design (integrated BA&MA)
Urban Studies (MA)**

4. The Estonian Academy of Arts submitted a self-evaluation report to the EKKA Bureau on 14.12.2016 and the assessment coordinator forwarded it to the Committee on 21.12.2016.
5. An assessment visit was made to the Estonian Academy of Arts on 16.03.2017.
6. The Committee sent its draft assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 2.05.2017, EKKA forwarded it to the Estonian Academy of Arts for its comments on 12.05.2017, and the Academy delivered its response on 29.05.2017.
7. The Committee submitted its final assessment report to the EKKA Bureau on 5.06.2017. 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 5.06.2017.
9. The Council with 10 members present discussed these received documents in its session during 11–12.06.2017 and, based on the assessment report, decided to point out the following strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations regarding the Architecture and Building study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at the Estonian Academy of Arts.

A general recommendation for the higher education institutions (HEIs) regarding the Architecture and Building study programme group

Collaboration among departments of architecture and building in different Estonian HEIs should be significantly improved in order to use the scarce available resources as efficiently as possible and thereby support development of the broad area of study of architecture and building at the national level.

General recommendations for the HEIs regarding the ARCHITECTURE study programmes

- 1) When designing the content of study programmes the HEIs should, within the limits of existing resources, take into account future challenges in society, in particular as regards demographic changes, environmental problems, technological revolution, globalisation of the economy, standards and industry, the development of civil society, etc. In the rapidly changing world it would be useful to seek a cross-disciplinary collaboration, especially between building and architecture specialties, but also with other universities.

- 2) It remained unclear to the Assessment Committee why the already limited resources have been split between the three schools of architecture located in close proximity to each other. The HEIs and study programmes should collaborate closely, differentiate their study programmes and explore ways to create further synergies.
- 3) It is recommended that the HEIs encourage and pursue new forms of cooperation with their stakeholders.
- 4) Remuneration of lecturers must be competitive, because low salaries are associated with the risk of losing leading lecturers and there is less chance to involve new talents, including from abroad.
- 5) The problems with transfers of credits acquired through external mobility should be addressed.

The ARCHITECTURE study programmes at the Estonian Academy of Arts (EAA)

Strengths

- 1) The structure of studies has been planned carefully and is very logical. The study programmes are ambitious and well implemented.
- 2) Students acquire the skills of using new information technologies to express their creative ideas in the early stages of their studies.
- 3) Study programmes are being developed consistently in collaboration with other departments, HEIs, professional associations and practitioners.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) The self-evaluation report indicates that interdisciplinary skills are expected from future architects, but in practice workloads of other subjects could be larger and integrated creatively into school projects, developing students' ability to base their design decisions on scientific bases and intellectually justify them.

Architecture and Urban Design (integrated BA&MA)

Strengths

- 1) The education is of high quality.
- 2) The study programme is well balanced, a number of special courses support the project work.
- 3) The atmosphere in classrooms is very pleasant. The students have their own studio rooms for each academic year, which are connected to common areas, meant for modelling and for the use of modern equipment – all within the limits set by the small spaces.
- 4) A good-quality library is within the academic building.
- 5) The students are allowed to use the wood and metal workshops of the Interior Architecture department.
- 6) Due to funding received through external cooperation, a professorship in the field of energy efficiency has been established.
- 7) The students have a wide range of technological tools for their use that are constantly updated.
- 8) Annual exhibitions and study trips are organised.
- 9) Since 2012 the Faculty of Architecture has published the journal *Ehituskunst*.
- 10) EAA has addressed the problem of subjective assessments of student papers, offering the students a free choice among various master thesis studios.
- 11) The versatile teaching staff allow students to explore different, complementary perspectives on the speciality and its theoretical aspects.
- 12) The international mobility rate of students is high. The number of international students is also increasing.
- 13) Student dropout rates are low. Graduate employment rates are high.

- 14) Good relationships exist between the teaching staff and students.
- 15) The study programme has good connections to external stakeholders who are satisfied with the professional level of graduates.
- 16) Students' projects are of high quality.
- 17) Members of the teaching staff in the study programme have close relationships with alumni.
- 18) The admission threshold is high, only capable applicants are admitted.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) As the needs of society are changing and the range of issues that need to be addressed is expanding – the ecological problems, demographic challenges of ageing population and vast immigration, internationalisation of politics, culture and economy, technological development, change of societal structures, development of citizen society and co-creation, and urbanisation – new tasks for architects are emerging. The study programme should include a comprehensive set of elective courses that address those topics. This is not possible considering the size of current classes. Practice-based research is one step toward offering new solutions.
- 2) Building design is not sustainable without a strong connection to urban consciousness and research-based principles of design. So far the Department of Urban Studies has produced interesting work but the number of students could be increased and connections of the department's projects to the architectural design projects could be strengthened.
- 3) In order to avoid fragmentation, the plan outlined in the self-evaluation report to integrate more special courses into the studio projects should be implemented.
- 4) Limited floor area of the academic facilities does not allow for extensive exhibitions or other events of spacious character.
- 5) The academic building is not accessible for people with mobility difficulties – the stairs are steep and there is no elevator.
- 6) The timetable should be brought to a better balance, so that not so many simultaneous submissions of project work would fall in the same time period.
- 7) There is too little time and money for additional training for the teaching staff.
- 8) Students' awareness of counselling services could be improved.
- 9) Only part of the teaching is conducted in English, which could be a problem if the number of international students increases.
- 10) There is no support programme for students with special needs.
- 11) The large workload of students is a matter of concern. Students' workloads should be made to correspond to the workload represented by the ECTS credits.
- 12) Completing the study programme within the standard period is challenging for students who have attended practical trainings abroad or participated in international mobility programmes.
- 13) Feedback is mostly informal. Feedback mechanisms should be formalised, at least to some extent.

Urban Studies (MA)

Strengths

- 1) The field of urban analysis is a strength for the whole school. Understanding the history of urban development helps shape the urban environment sensibly, keeping sustainability in mind.
- 2) Collaboration with international professionals and institutions is of priceless importance, as it allows for keeping abreast of the current discussions and sets local trends in a wider international context.
- 3) The teaching staff are committed to teaching and available to students.
- 4) The facilities and equipment are of good quality.
- 5) A new academic building under construction will provide new possibilities for teaching and for organising events.

- 6) Enthusiastic lecturers make use of interactive teaching methods. The teaching and learning process has an experimental dimension.
- 7) Employers are satisfied with graduates of the study programme.
- 8) There is close communication with alumni.
- 9) Small study groups allow for a personal approach.

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- 1) Organisation of studies should be more flexible so that students can combine different professional fields. Overlaps in the timetable and between different events should be eliminated.
 - 2) At the current salary level of the teaching staff it is difficult to expand the urban studies. As the success of the study programme is primarily due to the existence of competent teaching staff, this can lead to a risk of marginalisation of studies.
 - 3) Teaching skills of the teaching staff should be systematically developed.
 - 4) The dependence of the study programme on a few international lecturers imposes a risk.
 - 5) Admission procedures should be improved in order to reduce high dropout rates. The number of students completing studies within the standard period could be larger.
- 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, and, on the basis of point 41.1 of the document, 'Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education',

DECIDED

to approve the assessment report and to conduct the next quality assessment of the Architecture and Building study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at the Estonian Academy of Arts in seven years.

The decision was adopted by 10 votes in favour. Against 0.

- 12.** The Bureau of EKKA will coordinate a date for the next quality assessment of the study programme group with the Estonian Academy of Arts no later than 12.06.2023.
- 13.** The Council proposes that the Estonian Academy of Arts will submit an action plan to EKKA with regard to the areas for improvement and recommendations pointed out in the report no later than 12.06.2018.
- 14.** A person who finds that his or her rights are violated or his or her freedoms are 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 the decision may be submitted within 30 days after its delivery, 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

