

**Assessment Report**

**Study programme groups of  
Psychology and Social Services**

PhD studies

**Tallinn University  
University of Tartu**

2018

## Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| INTRODUCTION .....   | 3  |
| GENERAL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....   | 5  |
| 1. ASSESSMENT REPORT ON TALLINN UNIVERSITY.....  | 10 |
| 1.1 STUDY PROGRAMME GROUP OF PSYCHOLOGY AND STUDY PROGRAMME OF HEALTH<br>BEHAVIOUR AND WELLBEING ..... | 11 |
| 1.1.1 INTRODUCTION .....   | 11 |
| 1.1.2 GENERAL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....   | 13 |
| 1.1.3 STRENGTHS AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF THE STUDY PROGRAMMES BY<br>ASSESSMENT AREAS .....         | 14 |
| PSYCHOLOGY (PHD) .....   | 14 |
| HEALTH BEHAVIOUR AND WELLBEING (PHD) .....   | 22 |
| 1.2 STUDY PROGRAMME OF SOCIAL WORK .....   | 31 |
| 1.2.1 INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....                                      | 31 |
| 1.2.2 STRENGTHS AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF THE STUDY PROGRAMMES BY<br>ASSESSMENT AREAS .....         | 33 |
| SOCIAL WORK (PHD) .....  | 33 |
| 2. ASSESSMENT REPORT ON THE UNIVERSITY OF TARTU.....   | 43 |
| 2.1 STUDY PROGRAMME GROUP OF PSYCHOLOGY .....  | 43 |
| 2.1.1 INTRODUCTION .....   | 43 |
| 2.1.2 GENERAL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS AT STUDY PROGRAMME GROUP LEVEL.....                         | 44 |
| 2.1.3 STRENGTHS AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME BY ASSESSMENT<br>AREAS .....          | 47 |
| PSYCHOLOGY (PHD) .....   | 47 |

## Introduction

**Quality assessment of a study programme** group involves the assessment of the conformity of study programmes and the studies and development activities that take place on their basis to legislation, national and international standards and developmental directions with the purpose of providing recommendations to improve the quality of studies.

**The goal** of quality assessment of a study programme group is supporting the internal evaluation and self-development of the institution of higher education. Quality assessment of study programme groups is not followed by sanctions: expert assessments should be considered recommendations.

Quality assessment of a study programme group takes place at **least once every 7 years based on the regulation approved by EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education** *Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups at the Level of Doctoral Studies*.

**The aim of the assessment team** was the evaluation of the Study Programme Group (SPG) of Social Services at the level of doctoral studies at Tallinn University, and the study programme group of Psychology at the level of doctoral studies at Tallinn University and the University of Tartu.

The assessment team was asked to assess the conformity of the study programmes belonging to the study programme groups and the instruction provided on the basis thereof to legislation and to national and international standards and/or recommendations, including the assessment of the level of the corresponding theoretical and practical instruction, the research and pedagogical qualification of the teaching staff and research staff, and the sufficiency of resources for the provision of instruction.

The following persons formed the **assessment team**:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Cathy M. Craig<br>( <i>Chair of the panel</i> ) | Professor in Perception and Action Psychology; Former Dean for Postgraduates, Faculty for Engineering and Physical Sciences; Queen's University Belfast (Northern Ireland), Currently CEO INCISIV Ltd. |
| Marian J. Jongmans                              | Professor of Special Education; Associate Dean & Director for Graduate School, Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Utrecht University (The Netherlands)  |
| Juha Hämäläinen                                 | Professor of Social Work, Department of Social Sciences, University of Eastern Finland (Finland)   |
| Karen Lyons                                     | Emeritus Professor of International Social Work, Faculty of  |

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
|                  | Social Sciences and Humanities, London Metropolitan University (United Kingdom) |
| Ain Aaviksoo     | CEO, VIVEO Health OÜ (Estonia)  |
| Gabrielle McHarg | PhD student (Psychology), University of Cambridge (United Kingdom)              |

The assessment process was coordinated by Tiia Bach (EKKA).

After the preparation phase, the work of the assessment team in Estonia started on Monday, 12<sup>th</sup> of November 2018, with an introduction to the Estonian higher education system as well as the assessment procedure by EKKA, the Estonian quality assurance organization for higher and vocational education. The members of the team agreed on the overall questions and areas to discuss with each group at the universities that were assessed. The distribution of tasks between the members of the assessment team was organised and the detailed schedule of the site visits agreed.

During the following days, meetings were held with the representatives of the University of Tartu on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November, and with the representatives of Tallinn University from the 14<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> of November. The schedule for discussion on site for each of the various study programmes only allowed for short time slots to be available for team members to exchange information, discuss conclusions and implications for further questions.

On Friday, November 16<sup>th</sup>, the team held an all-day meeting, during which both the structure of the final report was agreed, and findings of team meetings were compiled in a first draft of the assessment report. This work was executed in a cooperative way and the members of the team intensively discussed their individual views on the relevant topics.

In the following sections, the assessment team summarise their general findings, conclusions and recommendations which are relevant across the two SPGs. In so doing, the team provides an external and objective perspective on the programmes and the contexts within which they are delivered. Ultimately, the intention is to provide constructive comment and critique which may form the basis upon which improvements in the quality of the programmes may be achieved.

## General findings and recommendations

### Financing of Doctoral Programmes

Funding of research and higher education in Estonia is going through significant change, with more emphasis being placed on autonomy and sustainability. Pressure on limited budgets is forcing universities to develop comprehensive plans that clearly articulate the value of both their educational and research programmes while clearly demonstrating future sustainability. Senior Management in both universities appears to be aware of this need and are proactively taking steps to address it.

From the self-evaluation documents and site visits, the panel concluded that physical resources for conducting high quality doctoral studies are adequate in both universities. It is important to note that one of the main challenges remaining concerns the low financial support available to PhD students. Although this has been recently addressed by the national government there are two different approaches being adopted by the two universities. The University of Tartu has taken the management decision to top up the stipend to a level that means students can live off the stipend and study full-time without incurring hardship. However, the panel would suggest that students receiving this top up should be 100% committed to their studies meaning they are contractually obliged to *not* work 100% in a job outside of the University. This is common practice in other countries. In Tallinn University there is no additional university top up.

The panel would recommend that a minimum full-time doctoral student stipend is established at the national level. Students receiving this stipend would be contractually obliged to work full time on their doctoral studies only, with any additional teaching duties being agreed by the university. A student who is working as well as studying would be classed as part-time, and would receive half the full time stipend. A full time student would be expected to complete in a maximum of 3 to 4 years while a part-time student would be 6 to 8 years. This type of directive would be more in line with other international competitor universities in the UK and other European Universities. The panel also suggests that both universities continue to explore alternative means of financing doctoral education. This includes exploring the opportunities for increasing their overall resource base outside of traditional research and academic funding sources both nationally and internationally (e.g. collaboration with industry, public entities and NGOs in different forms).

### Perceived value of Doctoral Education in Estonia

A theme that was recurrent across the visit, and the programmes, was the lack of worth attached to having a PhD. Those who wished to work, or continue to work, in higher education, acknowledged that having a PhD was most likely going to be a requirement for the job. However, given that teachers in secondary education now earn more than those in higher education, this devaluation of the higher education profession could be very damaging. The panel was dismayed to

discover that the value of having a doctoral degree could actually have a negative effect, with employers classing candidates with a doctoral degree as being 'overqualified'. The panel heard from both employers and alumni how they may be overlooked by future employers as they would need to pay them more.

This very narrow, limited perception of doctoral education needs to be addressed by all the key stakeholders: the government of Estonia, the universities, the employers, the staff and students themselves. Demonstrating the true value of Doctoral education should involve increasing awareness of the transferable skills developed during a PhD and the research results obtained by the PhD students. The universities should put more effort into building partnerships with potential employers and jointly advertising these benefits using explicit examples of the benefits a doctoral education can have to the local economy.

Furthermore, specific programmes in the areas of Psychology and Social Services (including Health Behaviour and Wellbeing) are highly relevant from both a global as well as an Estonian perspective and can make valuable contributions to demographic, technological and cultural transformations. The panel feels that these disciplines can add significant value to other sectors such as ICT. Also, given the will to develop an Estonian welfare state, the role of social services has a particularly important part to play.

### **Academic Focus of the Doctoral Programmes**

Overall, the doctoral programmes reviewed are well-established and *reasonably stable* with the exception of Health Behaviour and Wellbeing programme in Tallinn University, which is only in its third year of being and differentiates itself from the others by having a strong interdisciplinary focus. In all the programmes there appears to be a strong focus on scientific excellence as measured ONLY by published articles. The panel believes that over-reliance on one metric to determine research excellence is driving the wrong behaviours. Universities in particular should be aware that research excellence can also be measured by both societal and economic impact along with the research environment that will help to organically grow new, exciting themes of research. The panel strongly suggests that the purpose of Doctoral education is redefined so that it is more in line with the thinking across Europe and North America. The panel strongly suggests that the universities takes a look at the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions that can help support the training and development of researchers [https://ec.europa.eu/research/mariecurieactions/actions/co-funding-programmes\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/research/mariecurieactions/actions/co-funding-programmes_en). The panel chair was involved with an application from her institution that was successful.

The number of taught elements (and associated credits) on all programmes reviewed was deemed excessive and outside the norm in all other European universities. In some cases there seemed to be a certain pride that Estonia demanded the highest number of credit points (60ECTS) for the taught elements of the programmes. The panel would strongly urge the universities to review the need for so many ECTS being ascribed to courses. A doctoral training programme is not about gaining knowledge but is about acquiring and developing core research skills that can also be transferred to domains outside of academia. This will only happen when there is an environment within which students can practise them. The panel recommends that the compulsory elements are reduced and

more optional elements that encompass more transferable skills are included. These would include classes on entrepreneurship, leadership and innovation. Whilst the University of Tartu claims these courses started in autumn 2018, the panel saw no evidence of the students being aware of these courses, nor of the staff encouraging them to take them. Furthermore, these should be delivered by outside partners who fully grasp the importance of doctoral level education in driving forward the economy. Where possible, this should include external stakeholders who have employed PhD graduates because of the skills they have. This will also help students realise the value of their doctoral training and open up a broader range of possibilities when it comes to employment.

### **Internationalisation**

The panel appreciates the current internationalisation efforts being made by the two universities. Given that Estonia is a small country, connections to the outside world are extremely important. The panel recommends that both Tallinn University and the University of Tartu increase their efforts to attract (and retain) foreign PhD students and staff to Estonia, but also continue to facilitate travel abroad for different purposes and durations (conference visits, collaborations, sabbaticals, internships, summer schools, etc.). Whilst successful summer schools have already taken place, the panel would also recommend that the two universities organize more summer schools and corresponding international scientific events (workshops, conferences), inviting key international staff to Estonia to give classes and invite students from other countries to also attend. This will also help raise the profile of Estonian science by bringing more staff and students to Estonia for short periods of time.

It was noted that the Doctoral School is a key means of distributing funds to support such activities. The panel would encourage the Doctoral School to try and extend its remit beyond the simple distribution of funds. For example, it should aim to be more of a central hub for doctoral education for both national and international students. The universities should not underestimate the power of using activities and events as a means of bringing researchers together, from different disciplines and schools of thought, to truly provide an environment that will help create the next generation of excellent scientists.

The panel would also urge the two universities to formalise relationships with external supervisors to acknowledge their help and support but also provide a means of building more formal arrangements between the two academic institutions. It is not good practice to rely solely on the 'good will' of an external academic to provide full time supervision for students at Estonian universities when they have their own contractual duties to deliver within their own institutions. A formal letter acknowledging the supervision they are providing (for free) along with an invitation to visit the university and meet staff/senior management would seem the minimum required in these situations. This would help formalise these relationships and acknowledge the important contribution external supervisors are making to the doctoral programmes.

Internationalisation is a central strategic emphasis in both universities. In doctoral programmes, student opportunities for studying abroad seem to depend

on the student finding appropriate opportunities in other labs or supervisors using their contacts. Our general impression is that it is the students who appear to be more proactive and that in general, there seems to be relatively good opportunities for studying abroad in all assessed programmes.

### **Programme Success**

The success of any educational programme can in part be determined by the number of admitted students who successfully complete the programme. Failure to complete the programme could be caused by a number of problems, including admitting students onto the programme who do not have the ability to follow the programme. The panel observed low completion rates in ALL of the doctoral programmes assessed and dropout rates that are in some cases twice the rate of completion. Indeed from the general doctoral statistics presented, it can be observed that low graduation rates and high dropout rates are endemic to all Doctoral programmes across both universities. From discussions with senior management, staff and students and reviewing the student feedback in the self-assessment documents, the panel is aware of three main factors that appear to influence completion rates. These factors are common to all programmes assessed and include:

1. Low rate of the student stipend that means students need to work alongside their studies so they are never really full-time (the impact of the increased stipend now needs to be carefully monitored going forward);
2. The expected need for at least 3 publications to defend a thesis;
3. The lack of integration into established research projects, or, integration into research projects that then end before studies are completed.

Whilst difficult for our panel to judge, other factors such as the suitability of the candidates admitted would also need to be considered. Likewise, the low number of applicants might suggest that some students are admitted just because they applied. A larger number of applicants for a limited number of places available would be more indicative of a healthy programme where selection is more competitive. These factors are further compounded by the lack of a clear management decision around the status of students who are enrolled full-time and who work full-time but now received a stipend that has increased by 130%.

### **Supervision**

The panel felt that in general there are researchers of high calibre who are supervising the students. However, in some cases the amount of time these supervisors are actually available to meet and guide the students appears to be highly variable. Annual progress monitoring meetings do take place but these are too infrequent, particularly for those students who exceed 4 years.

To ensure that poor supervision is not a factor that negatively impacts on completion rates, it is important that both universities introduce a more robust system that outlines a minimum number of prescribed contact points between the supervisor (preferably with a co-supervisor present too) and the student throughout the academic year. These meetings should be officially recorded with clear project action plans put in place (and progress monitored with respect to



the previous meeting). The focus of such meetings would vary according to the stage that individual students are at in their research. Such regular meetings would also enable supervisors to monitor the engagement and wellbeing of students who can feel isolated and stressed. This type of system has already been implemented in many UK universities (usually a minimum of 6 face to face meetings per year for full time students) and helps ensure that students do not just 'fall off the radar' and end up withdrawing. At both universities we were made aware that students who go past the allotted time often feel disconnected but also the difficulties supervisors have trying to keep them engaged.

# 1. Assessment report on Tallinn University

## Tallinn University Context

The panel welcomed the fact that the Estonian government had increased the PhD stipend to 660 Euros. Although significantly improved from 422 Euros, this still falls far short of what it would take to complete a PhD full time and not have to supplement one's income by working alongside the PhD. The aim of senior management in the university needs to be clear around the role of top ups. Unlike the University of Tartu, Tallinn University has not added more funds into the pot to further top-up the stipend.

The panel would strongly recommend that Tallinn University's senior management team thinks carefully about the status of Doctoral students enrolled on various programmes. The panel recommends that the current 660 Euros represents part-time status and students work alongside their PhD studies. However, a few specially ear-marked PhDs for strategic areas are clearly identified as being full-time with students receiving double the stipend. In line with other universities in Europe, full-time status would mean the student is expected to spend the majority of their time on their studies and that any additional work would be teaching in the university that would be carefully monitored by supervisors. This would create the optimal conditions to finish a PhD in 3 to 4 years. The Part-time status would remain at 6-8 years (more in line with other European countries such as the UK, France and the Netherlands).

Overall it was difficult to get a sense that there is a strategic vision for the development of research strengths at a programme level. The new School of Natural Sciences and Health does offer a great opportunity to develop new areas of distinctive research strength. Although it seems to be organically happening, the panel would encourage more PhD students to be admitted on the basis that they are linked to research programmes. This is slightly different from research projects which are the projects that are funded. A research programme is a longer term vision (usually 5 years) of what research an academic member of staff would aim to carry out in that time. This 5 year plan would also have written into it possible sources of funding that could help bolster the programme.

As outlined in the overarching summary, all programmes could benefit from having more strategic partnerships with employers, NGOs and industry. These partnerships can begin in the Masters programmes and then be extended into doctoral studies. This comes back to the realisation that doctoral studies are changing and the purpose of a PhD is also changing across the globe. By engaging partners, students can be more involved in research that is related to societal challenges but also allows both employers and students understand the worth of a PhD and the wealth of skills that are developed as part of the process.

As mentioned in the introduction, completion rates remain a problem. Graduation rates of 15% would not be acceptable on any Bachelors or Masters programmes

and should be seen as a signal of a systemic problem with Doctoral programmes across the board. Whilst many factors are contributing, the panel does believe that the 'at least 3 publications' needs to be relaxed. Interestingly the panel observed that it is often implicit pressure that the students can put on themselves to meet this high standard in order to defend the PhD thesis. The panel would urge supervisors in all programmes to 'set the tone' and encourage students to submit a monograph and one publication, particularly when a career in academia is not the path students wish to pursue, or for whom projects require more time spent on data collection such that going through peer-review three times would be very difficult within 4 years.

Whilst internationalisation is present, it is very patchy and very much depends on the student. The panel would urge Tallinn University to put formal arrangements in place when the supervisor involved is employed outside Estonia. This should include a formal letter acknowledging their supervision and an invitation to come to the university to meet Estonian academics (including the co-supervisor) and the student in person. This will help the external supervisor see that their contribution is appreciated and valued. A supervisor within Tallinn University also needs to be appointed as a co-supervisor (not a consultant) to ensure the student is supported in the best possible way. This type of formalisation of roles will help build more meaningful international partnerships going forward.

Finally, the panel is of the opinion that the Doctoral Schools could help raise the international profile of Estonian science by organising its own summer schools in specific areas where there are research strengths but also in general skills such as data analytics and methodologies where outside experts could also come along (including industrial partners who are looking to hire people with these skills). This would provide an opportunity to showcase the strengths in Estonian science on the world stage. This will allow more interactions to take place between Estonian doctoral students and students from other countries.

## **1.1 Study programme group of Psychology and study programme of Health Behaviour and Wellbeing**

### **1.1.1 Introduction**

The panel considered that, given that the programmes of Psychology and Health, Behaviour and Wellbeing are situated in the same School, the School of Natural Sciences and Health (SNSH), they should both be considered together.

To provide context, the SNSH was formed in 2015 and the Psychology programme was moved from the Institute of Psychology into a new academic unit. It is recognised that any type of structural reform will be disruptive and will take a certain amount of time to 'bed down' into the new system and recognise the new opportunities available. To date, the Psychology programme has not yet benefited from any more interdisciplinary interactions in terms of projects.

However, during our visit we observed the naissance of potential projects that were resulting from the interdisciplinary dialogue that was taking place across the School. The School has been instrumental in the development of a new programme that embodies interdisciplinary projects that emerge around the theme of Health Behaviour and Wellbeing (HBW). The panel was particularly impressed with this programme as they considered it to be illustrative of the types of new areas that could emerge in doctoral studies and that could also include Psychology.

Since 2012, the Psychology programme has admitted 12 students with, according to the official data, only two graduating. During our visit we were made aware of two other students who are about to graduate (one already defended her thesis in the summer). One of the criteria used to judge the success of any educational programme has to be the number of admitted students (judged to have met the entrance requirements) and the number who successfully complete the programme.

Whilst not unique to this programme, the panel has identified low completion rates as an area of concern and one that needs to be urgently addressed. Since 2006, 20 students have been admitted, 5 have graduated but 11 have dropped out. This high percentage of dropouts (not unique to this programme) clearly highlights a problem with doctoral education.

### **Student data about Psychology programme (2006 - 2012)**

|                     | 06/07 | 07/08 | 08/09 | 09/10 | 10/11 | 11/12 | 12/13 |
|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Admission           | 2     | 1     | 1     | 1     | 2     | 1     | 1     |
| Number of students  | 12    | 11    | 9     | 8     | 9     | 7     | 8     |
| Number of graduates | 0     | 0     | 2     | 0     | 1     | 0     | 1     |
| Number of dropouts  | 1     | 1     | 3     | 1     | 0     | 2     | 0     |

*(data from HaridusSilm)*

### **Student data about Psychology programme (2013 - 2017)**

|                                      | 13/14 | 14/15 | 15/16 | 16/17 | 17/18 |
|--------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Admission                            | 3     | 2     | 2     | 2     | 2     |
| Number of students                   | 10    | 8     | 10    | 11    | 13    |
| Proportion of international students | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0     | 9%    |
| Number of graduates                  | 0     | 2     | 0     | 0     | 0     |
| Number of dropouts                   | 0     | 2     | 0     | 1     | 0     |

*(data from SER)*

The Health, Behaviour and Wellbeing programme only started in 2016/17. It has taken in, on average, 4 students per year and now has a total of 11 students enrolled. To date there are no dropouts or graduates. It will be important to monitor this closely as the programme matures.

### Student statistics about Health Behaviour and Wellbeing programme

|                                      | 16/17 | 17/18 | 18/19 |
|--------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Admission                            | 4     | 3     | 4     |
| Number of students                   | 4     | 7     | 11    |
| Number of graduates                  | 0     | 0     | 0     |
| Number of dropouts                   | 0     | 0     | 0     |
| Proportion of international students | 0%    | 0%    | 0%    |

(data from SER)

## 1.1.2 General findings and recommendations

Firstly the panel would like to acknowledge the quality of the self-assessment report that greatly assisted the panel in this evaluation process. The panel appreciates the time and effort that is required to pull all this information together.

It should be noted that the Psychology programme at Tallinn University is very different from the programme at the University of Tartu and focuses on a small number of research strengths in Educational and School Psychology, Cultural Psychology, Developmental Psychology and Neuropsychology. The bulk of the students work in the area of Educational and School Psychology, a research area that is successful in obtaining outside funding. This means that students admitted onto the Psychology programme often work on research projects in these topic areas. This provides a supportive environment within which students can also exchange ideas.

The Doctoral School of Health and Behavioural Sciences is appreciated by the students and offers them the opportunity to interact with other doctoral students in those disciplines. It also provides funding for international seminar series and writing camps. That being said, the panel thinks that the Doctoral School can do more to foster a more collaborative environment between the universities, rather than a competitive one (an observation made by staff). The Doctoral School could be better utilised to provide a forum for organising social gatherings and other events that would help foster a higher general sense of wellbeing among students in all disciplines.

In terms of overall strengths, the panel identified the following:

1. Possibility to work in a research programme to provides additional support for PhD students in terms of funding but also in terms of a research environment.
2. Doctoral School writing camps, seminar series and external speakers and the opportunity to meet and network with other PhD students and staff from outside their university.

3. Awareness of the importance of student wellbeing with Programme Directors offering support to other students not involved in their own research programme.

The panel also identified some general areas for improvement. These included:

1. Ensuring that students who have an international supervisor also have a co-supervisor at Tallinn University.
2. Looking at internationalisation in the broadest sense to ensure there is some broadening of horizons for both staff and students.
3. Diversification of research topics and areas. Trying to build more interdisciplinary research strengths within the School that involve Psychology.

### 1.1.3 Strengths and areas for improvement of the study programmes by assessment areas

#### Psychology (PhD)

##### Study programme

###### Standards

- ✓ The launch and development of the study programme are based on the Standard of Higher Education and other legislation, national strategies, university development plans, the effectiveness of research and development, various analyses (including labour market and feasibility analyses); striving for the best overall programme quality.
- ✓ Doctoral programmes contain at least 70% research, development or other creative work by doctoral students, making the results thereof public in international peer-reviewed research journals or in other ways that have international dimensions.
- ✓ Study programmes incorporate doctoral student participation in conferences and/or other professional activities, and are counted towards completion of the study programme.
- ✓ Doctoral programmes enable doctoral students to acquire leadership and teamwork skills, develop coaching and teaching skills as well as a proficiency in foreign languages at the level needed for successful participation in international working environments.
- ✓ Different components of a doctoral programme form a coherent whole supporting the personal development of each doctoral student.
- ✓ Study programme development takes into account feedback from doctoral students, supervisors, employers, alumni and other stakeholders.

###### Comments

In Estonia, there are only two universities that offer a PhD Programme in Psychology: Tallinn University (TU) and University of Tartu (UT). The programme at TU is sufficiently distinctive from the one being offered at UT. The merits of having two different programmes at two different universities have been acknowledged.

The moving of the TU programme from the Institute of Psychology to the School of Natural Sciences and Health in 2015 has meant that students can now choose general courses from a list that includes courses from other Schools.

### Strengths

- Psychology focuses on a small number of research strengths in Educational and School Psychology, Cultural Psychology and Developmental psychology and Neuropsychology. This means the students admitted onto the programme are well supported and often work on funded research projects.
- The programme offers appropriate courses in statistics and methods that are valued by students.
- Students are active in seeking out other courses to personalise their training (e.g. participation at summer schools)
- The study programme appears to be suitably flexible and diverse to accommodate different needs.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- More opportunities to develop transferable skills and work outside of the specific research area. Also helping students to identify the transferable skills they are developing (e.g. data analysis, report writing) and communicating this more widely to society at large to demonstrate the value of a PhD qualification.
- The Psychology students should be actively encouraged to participate in the interdisciplinary seminars offered by the HBW programme – the advantages of broadening horizons need to be advocated by supervisors and the School more widely.
- It is recommended that the “Learning and Teaching in University” course, which is compulsory for students on HBW but not Psychology, contains a practical element. Students reported that they wanted to learn how to improve their pedagogic skills and felt that some kind of peer observation of teaching/feedback from staff would help. This could be combined with some written feedback provided by the Bachelors or Masters students at the end of the class.
- The courses on statistics, data analysis methodologies could be shared with the doctoral programme in Educational Sciences and perhaps others. Likewise, qualitative courses in Educational Sciences should be promoted amongst the Psychology students to diversify their skills base.

## Resources

### Standards

- ✓ In conducting doctoral study programmes, an adequate number of teaching staff and researchers participate, who hold the appropriate qualifications required to carry out doctoral studies and supervise doctoral theses in a given study programme.
- ✓ Universities shall ensure that sufficient funds are available to conduct doctoral studies, to provide development activities associated with doctoral studies and research, and to support the professional development of teaching staff and researchers.
- ✓ Resources (teaching, learning and research environments; libraries; resources required for teaching, learning and research) support the achievement of objectives set out in study programmes as well as the actual teaching, learning and research at the level of doctoral studies. Resource development is sustainable.
- ✓ Trends in the numbers of current learners, admitted learners and graduates (by study programme) in doctoral studies under the study programme group during the last five years indicate sustainability.

### Comments

The Psychology programme at TU is much smaller than the programme at UT with, on average, 2 students per year being admitted to the programme in a small sub-set of psychological research. Reviewing the figures over the last 5 to 7 years indicates that the student population is relatively stable, with slight growth being observed over the last few years. Student dropout is still high compared to the number being admitted and the number of students finishing on time could be higher (see comments in general section 1.1).

On the whole staff are competent and well qualified to supervise in specific areas of primarily Educational and School Psychology. One member of staff is currently supervising 8 out of 14 projects which is very high. A more even distribution of supervision across the staff should be encouraged. However, it is recognised that any supervision needs to be provided by someone competent in the field. This may explain why a small number of students are being supervised by external supervisors.

The lab facilities we saw seem appropriate for the small psychology cohort that exists. We would, however, urge the Faculty to think about how Psychology, and other minority disciplines, fit in with the Faculty's strategic research plan. Perhaps some common doctoral study rooms could be earmarked to offer a space to promote interdisciplinary dialogue. Some areas such as analytical Chemistry appear to be very well resourced with the opportunity to do some interdisciplinary projects. It would be good to get an understanding of what resources are necessary to support these projects and how psychology can be included in a more concrete way.



### Strengths

- Students are often admitted and are included as part of research projects that are reasonably well funded. This provides a solid research culture and stimulating environment within which the students complete their studies.
- The Doctoral School offers funds to support international collaboration, the organisation of seminars and workshops and opportunities for the students to learn how to write scientific papers (writing camps).
- Suitable facilities are available for the students, particularly those working in Educational Psychology.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- During interviews the panel noted that a small number of students are being supervised by academic staff who are not employed by TU. Whilst it is a positive thing for students to find suitable supervisors outside of TU when the expertise is not available in-house, it is important that these sorts of arrangements are formally recognised through some kind of letter of engagement which could include a small level of remuneration if deemed appropriate. A formal supervisor within TU also needs to be appointed to ensure the student is adequately supported.
- The Doctoral School should be used to promote more genuine collaboration between TU and UT doctoral programmes. This should include more opportunities for the doctoral students to get together and share experiences in an informal way and not just to present their work once a year.
- The School is well resourced in Natural Sciences (e.g. analytical chemistry). A clear plan for the place of Psychology (and other minority disciplines) within the School, including funding for equipment, should be developed.

## **Teaching, learning, research and/or creative activity**

### Standards

- ✓ Uniform principles, based on best international practices and agreed upon at the university level, shall be followed while implementing doctoral programmes and assuring the quality of the doctoral studies (including supervision of doctoral theses).
- ✓ Doctoral studies support students' personal and social development, including creating an environment which will prepare them to successfully participate in international working environments at research and development institutions, as well as in the business and public sectors.
- ✓ Supervision of doctoral theses; modern methodology used in teaching and research; organisation of studies; and doctoral students' professional research, development and/or other creative activities all support achievement of the objectives and learning outcomes of doctoral studies.
- ✓ Assessment of outcomes of the learning, research and creative work done by doctoral students is relevant, transparent and objective, and supports the

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  | <p>development of doctoral students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Doctoral students are asked for feedback regarding supervision on a regular basis and the results of these surveys are taken into account for quality improvement activities.</li><li>✓ Effectiveness of the doctoral studies is analysed and such analyses serve as a basis for planning quality improvement activities.</li></ul> |
|--|--|

### Comments

From the self-evaluation report, robust mechanisms for reviewing the programme and gathering feedback exist. It is not clear though, to what extent changes are implemented as a function of feedback. Whilst it is very apparent that those students involved directly in a research project are well catered for, it is unclear how those outside of research projects are integrated into the programme and have a sense of belonging to a PhD community.

The panel would recommend that in addition to the annual progress monitoring more formal touch-points (e.g. 6 per year for full-time students) are introduced. This will help improve student engagement particularly for those who find themselves outside the allotted timeframe.

### Strengths

- There is a strong research theme that creates the sense of a research community for PhD students involved.
- Outputs from PhD theses are of a good standard and help drive up the scientific quality of the university's research.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Ensure there are more systematic touch points with students beyond 3 or 4 years that include meetings (formal and informal) to keep them engaged and help improve completion rates.
- Create more of a PhD community across the whole School that includes other disciplines and provides a kind of informal peer support. Also use it to provide an opportunity for students to talk about their work to a non-specialist audience.
- Encourage students to present the significance and wider impact of their work to the general public building on good practice already observed in some Masters programmes.
- A more systematic reporting mechanism where it is clear to supervisors and students how feedback is taken on board and changes are implemented.

## Teaching staff

### Standards

- ✓ Teaching staff participate in research, development and/or creative activity at the level of and to the extent sufficient to conduct doctoral studies in the curriculum group and to supervise doctoral theses.
- ✓ Teaching staff develop their supervisory competences and share best practices with one other.
- ✓ Teaching staff collaborate in fields of teaching, research and creative work within the university and also with stakeholders outside the university (public sector organisations, enterprises, other research and development institutions).
- ✓ Teaching staff further their skills at foreign universities or other research institutions, participate in international research and creative projects, and present papers at high-level conferences.
- ✓ Qualified international and visiting teaching staff are involved in conducting doctoral studies, participating in doctoral thesis defense panels and/or reviewing doctoral theses.
- ✓ When assessing the work of teaching staff (including their evaluations), the effectiveness of their teaching as well as of their research, development and creative works is taken into account; including the effectiveness of their student supervision, development of their teaching and supervisory skills, and their international mobility.

### Comments

This is a small programme with a relatively small number of teaching staff at TU participating in the supervision of the psychology doctoral students. Indeed, two out of four students that we met, who either completed this year (2018) or in 2014 were supervised by supervisors outside of TU. Whilst the panel recognises that this is very beneficial for the student in terms of finding the best person to supervise their personal project, it is quite a high-risk strategy. PhD students should be seen more as a resource that could help build new research areas within the School. Also, as pointed out above, one member of staff currently supervises 8 out of 14 of the PhD topics we saw in the self-assessment report. This would appear to be a significantly high load for one member of staff.

Although the small number of staff at TU who supervise appear to work well together, more needs to be done to include the supervisors who are external to the university and ensure they are brought into the supervisory framework of the doctoral programme at TU. Whilst the numbers are small there does appear to be some collaboration with external institutions and departments at other institutions. More could be done to build up links with other bodies who could benefit from the psychological research being conducted with TU. This need to ensure the research has a broader societal and economic impact is something that should be considered. Staff from other universities are included in the supervisory teams but this needs to be formalised so that the student is better supported but also so that staff at TU benefit from these international connections. Our visit also highlighted how students would like to be more supported in terms of developing their linguistic and literacy skills. Whilst the

writing camps are good, students would like more opportunities to develop these skills.

### Strengths

- Good student engagement with the programme.
- Strong research theme that carries international credibility.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- A more transparent workload model that ensures a better balance of supervisory responsibilities.
- Where possible try and distribute the load across other staff who have strong areas of research and are qualified to supervise students or promote co-supervision (possibly even making it mandatory) through which a student gets more support and a junior member of staff learns how to supervise well.
- More linguistic support and 'team' writing to help develop those skills in students.

## **Doctoral students**

### Standards

- ✓ When admitting students to doctoral study, their suitability for successful completion of their studies is assessed on the basis of transparent criteria.
- ✓ Doctoral students plan their studies as well as research and development activities in collaboration with their supervisor(s), setting out specific objectives for each year and taking responsibility for achieving these objectives.
- ✓ Evaluation of doctoral students is transparent and impartial. Its purpose is to support development of the doctoral students, provide an opinion regarding the effectiveness of their work to date, and assess their capabilities to complete their studies on time and successfully defend their doctoral theses.
- ✓ Universities offer doctoral students counselling on completing their studies and planning their further careers.
- ✓ Doctoral students' extracurricular teaching, research and/or creative activities or other work-related activities at the university support successful completion of their doctoral studies.
- ✓ Doctoral students participate in international mobility programmes or take advantage of other opportunities for learning or research at foreign universities and/or research and development institutions<sup>1</sup>.
- ✓ Alumni are regularly asked for feedback on the quality of the doctoral study, and employers are asked for feedback on the preparation of the graduates.

---

<sup>1</sup> In the context of this document, 'research and development institutions' denote both research institutions and research-intensive companies.

Comments

Overall the panel was satisfied with the admissions protocol. A number of students seem to have come through the system, having studied and Bachelors and Masters level, often with the same supervisor. With this in mind it is important to consider how others outside of TU are aware of the programme and the specific expertise available to supervise projects. The students paid tribute to the strong emotional support they received from the programme director. Whilst many of the students are supervised by the programme director it is important to ensure those who are not, and who have gone beyond the allotted time, are still supported to ensure completion.

Some students do avail of international opportunities but this will depend often on the student's own personal circumstances. As mentioned above more needs to be made of formalising supervisory arrangements that involve researchers outside of TU.

The panel met with 2 students who provided their written feedback on the positive aspects of the programme and offered suggestions as to how the programme could be improved. The summary of the points is presented in the table below.

| <b>Positives</b>   | <b>Negatives</b>   |
|--|--|
| <b>Support</b>   |  |
| Intellectual support   | Would like more help with language editing (e.g., articles)  |
| Emotional support  | Support needed for students who are not in a research group  |
| Formal guidance  | Maybe even more overall social events where you can meet other students without pressure to present your work. And PhD students value free food. |
| Director of programme still believes in me even if I'm in doubt of something |  |
| <b>Other</b>   |  |
| Possibility to work in research group  | Possibility to publish your articles as teamwork and with other researchers from other universities would be a good improvement                  |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Doctoral school has actually helped me a lot to develop as a researcher. Writing camps, conferences, etc. |  |
|---|--|

### Strengths

- The Doctoral School provides an opportunity for TU students to network outside of their own discipline. The writing camps and conferences with international keynote speakers are highly valued.
- Strong emotional support for the students provided by the Programme Director
- Being part of a research team with additional support provided by other students and research fellows

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Creating more of a PhD community to allow students to build a wider network that extends beyond the programme (e.g. more informal events across the School/University and also with alumni)

## Health Behaviour and Wellbeing (PhD)

### Study programme

#### Standards

- ✓ The launch and development of the study programme are based on the Standard of Higher Education and other legislation, national strategies, university development plans, the effectiveness of research and development, various analyses (including labour market and feasibility analyses); striving for the best overall programme quality.
- ✓ Doctoral programmes contain at least 70% research, development or other creative work by doctoral students, making the results thereof public in international peer-reviewed research journals or in other ways that have international dimensions.
- ✓ Study programmes incorporate doctoral student participation in conferences and/or other professional activities, and are counted towards completion of the study programme.
- ✓ Doctoral programmes enable doctoral students to acquire leadership and teamwork skills, develop coaching and teaching skills as well as a proficiency in foreign languages at the level needed for successful participation in international working environments.
- ✓ Different components of a doctoral programme form a coherent whole supporting the personal development of each doctoral student.
- ✓ Study programme development takes into account feedback from doctoral students, supervisors, employers, alumni and other stakeholders.

### Comments

Overall the panel was very impressed with this programme and had never seen another programme quite like it. The School should be commended for having the initiative to start a doctoral programme that is enabling interdisciplinary research to grow organically. The programme involves a wide range of activities to promote networking and interdisciplinary dialogue. This includes an interdisciplinary seminar series. The activities that are included in the programme allow students to acquire leadership and teamwork skills.

From what the panel read in the self-assessment report and witnessed during the visit, this study programme appears to be truly interdisciplinary and diverse. The programme covers a number of different disciplines and seems to be working towards answering really important research questions that directly impact on the needs of society. The strengths and areas for improvement identified in the self-assessment report reflect what was garnered from interviews. The areas for improvement outlined below are designed to help a promising programme to continue to develop and grow.

### Strengths

- The programme is truly interdisciplinary and diverse and allows both students and supervisors to work on a wide range of topics that will help solve real-life problems.
- The interdisciplinary seminar series looks very interesting and promotes interdisciplinary dialogue. Both staff and students appear to benefit and recognise its worth, which is a real strength of the programme's purpose and practice (perhaps consider making this compulsory for other study programmes).
- Flexibility of courses is important to foster an interdisciplinary approach and is present in this programme. This is much appreciated by the students.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Continue to build connections with academic staff in other study areas and doctoral programmes.
- Work towards building more international connections, national and international networks, and connections with external stakeholders, which may increase funding opportunities and help develop project ideas.
- The Masters programme in Social Entrepreneurship could be used to help build connections with external stakeholders and also increase awareness of this programme amongst this student body. We are mindful though that this should not become an internal pipeline that would jeopardise the admission of external candidates.

- The plan to develop a course about ethics in collaboration with other schools in TU is commendable, and we encourage this. This type of course should be made available to other Doctoral programmes.

## Resources

### Standards

- ✓ In conducting doctoral study programmes, an adequate number of teaching staff and researchers participate, who hold the appropriate qualifications required to carry out doctoral studies and supervise doctoral theses in a given study programme.
- ✓ Universities shall ensure that sufficient funds are available to conduct doctoral studies, to provide development activities associated with doctoral studies and research, and to support the professional development of teaching staff and researchers.
- ✓ Resources (teaching, learning and research environments; libraries; resources required for teaching, learning and research) support the achievement of objectives set out in study programmes as well as the actual teaching, learning and research at the level of doctoral studies. Resource development is sustainable.
- ✓ Trends in the numbers of current learners, admitted learners and graduates (by study programme) in doctoral studies under the study programme group during the last five years indicate sustainability.

### Comments

As this is an interdisciplinary programme, the staff required to supervise the projects will vary according to the research interests of the students who apply. This appears to be working well at the moment with some visiting professors at the University carrying out supervisory duties. Going forward however, this needs to be carefully monitored as the success of the programme will depend on keeping a diverse range of research topics.

This programme appears to be well-resourced in terms of the development grant and lab work facilities but also in terms of teaching staff available to supervise the projects. We agree with the identified areas of improvement, and hope that the planned improvement activity involving reserving research funding is carried out and that the programme is able to increase student exposure to research and practice in other countries and universities. In another section of the report, the need to have a strategy for sustainability without EU funding is very welcome and one that the panel endorses. Due to the nature of this programme, many students are happy with the allocated stipend because it means they are often able to continue working in the field that inspired their projects.



### Strengths

- The programme is doing well to utilise resources from other study programmes (such as chemistry and ecology), which helps to encourage interdisciplinarity.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The PhD stipend is deemed insufficient to do full time study. We would recommend that students who receive the current stipend and work alongside their studies are classed as being part-time. A new stipend that is twice the current stipend should be reserved for students who are working full-time on their PhD project. These students would not be allowed to work alongside their PhD.
- Though the director of the programme and the teaching staff seem motivated, the programme would benefit from engaging supervisors from a range of disciplines across the university- perhaps with a co-supervision model to ensure students have positive, within-university supervision (even if they have excellent supervision from outside of the university).

## **Teaching, learning, research and/or creative activity**

### Standards

- ✓ Uniform principles, based on best international practices and agreed upon at the university level, shall be followed while implementing doctoral programmes and assuring the quality of the doctoral studies (including supervision of doctoral theses).
- ✓ Doctoral studies support students' personal and social development, including creating an environment which will prepare them to successfully participate in international working environments at research and development institutions, as well as in the business and public sectors.
- ✓ Supervision of doctoral theses; modern methodology used in teaching and research; organisation of studies; and doctoral students' professional research, development and/or other creative activities all support achievement of the objectives and learning outcomes of doctoral studies.
- ✓ Assessment of outcomes of the learning, research and creative work done by doctoral students is relevant, transparent and objective, and supports the development of doctoral students.
- ✓ Doctoral students are asked for feedback regarding supervision on a regular basis and the results of these surveys are taken into account for quality improvement activities.
- ✓ Effectiveness of the doctoral studies is analysed and such analyses serve as a basis for planning quality improvement activities.

### Comments

Creativity seems to be a central tenet of this programme which is excellent. Students engage in projects that are very innovative and attend seminars that

cover a wide range of topics. The identified strengths and areas for improvement came through in our discussions with both academic staff and students. We see some plans already in place to improve activities (such as holding the interdisciplinary seminar series on an annual basis, which will make them more available), something that will add value to this programme but also to other doctoral programmes whose students are also encouraged to attend. Although this is a relatively new programme, from what the panel could ascertain from the assessment report, assessment of outcomes of learning, research and creative work seems appropriate and appears to support the development of doctoral students. Once students start to graduate from the programme this can be determined in a more complete way.

### Strengths

- The seminars, diverse courses, and variety of projects that invite interdisciplinary dialogue and create a collaborative research and learning environment.
- The students appear to be very supportive of each other which is related to the culture created by the course.
- The learning environment seems to have a strong focus on solving societal problems and engenders a deeper degree of intellectual curiosity.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- There is scope for more development in terms of social elements of the projects. For example, more collaboration with social science programmes could benefit students working on more technical projects who could take time to understand better the social implications of their research projects.
- Though it is difficult to evaluate how well research is being communicated and put into practice in public health organisations and education (since no one has yet completed the programme), we suggest that this is considered as a priority for students and that the programme helps facilitate the public dissemination of research.
- More international collaborations should be developed and used to add to strengths of the programme, while also highlighting to other countries the novelty of the programme (i.e. a model of interdisciplinary doctoral education).

## **Teaching staff**

### Standards

- ✓ Teaching staff participate in research, development and/or creative activity at the level of and to the extent sufficient to conduct doctoral studies in the curriculum group and to supervise doctoral theses.
- ✓ Teaching staff develop their supervisory competences and share best practices with one other.

- ✓ Teaching staff collaborate in fields of teaching, research and creative work within the university and also with stakeholders outside the university (public sector organisations, enterprises, other research and development institutions).
- ✓ Teaching staff further their skills at foreign universities or other research institutions, participate in international research and creative projects, and present papers at high-level conferences.
- ✓ Qualified international and visiting teaching staff are involved in conducting doctoral studies, participating in doctoral thesis defence panels and/or reviewing doctoral theses.
- ✓ When assessing the work of teaching staff (including their evaluations), the effectiveness of their teaching as well as of their research, development and creative works is taken into account; including the effectiveness of their student supervision, development of their teaching and supervisory skills, and their international mobility.

### Comments

The self-report suggests that there is a lot of collaboration between teaching staff, and that they are active in research and publications. We did not meet many members of staff, and some are only visiting at Tallinn, but those we met were enthusiastic about the programme and have a strong academic record. Some of the teaching staff do have clear international links, but these sorts of activities could be developed more widely across the staff group. The strengths identified in the self-assessment report were reflected in conversation, and we do identify the CEBNS to be a strong provider of research and development. We agree that the identified areas for improvement, specifically regarding staff workloads and mobility are areas to address. The planned activity to provide supervision training for supervisors would be an excellent addition to the programme.

### Strengths

- The variety of teaching staff from different scientific disciplines and the variety of seminar speakers give the programme a truly interdisciplinary flavour.
- Student reflections about the teaching staff indicate that teachers and supervisors offer motivation and support to the student body.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Care should be taken to ensure that students have a supervisor or co-supervisor within the university and the university should be working to facilitate connections with external supervisors and not leave such arrangements to the students.
- The self-assessment report reflects a heavy workload for staff. We recommend working smarter with external organisations and other university staff to maximise each staff member's opportunities to engage in research, development, and mobility.

- Develop plans to facilitate international activities that provide an alternative to long-term mobility and ensure staff are engaging in internationalisation and broadening their horizons (e.g., visiting lectureships, short-term collaborative projects, short-term study visits, etc.).
- Much credit should go to the programme coordinator for conceiving, developing and implementing such a forward thinking programme. Her energy and enthusiasm embody the need to adopt a truly interdisciplinary approach when trying to address real-world problems. We do recommend that thought be given to mentoring a deputy, perhaps one of the early graduates of the programme, to ensure that the vision is perpetuated and the programme is sustainable.

## Doctoral students

### Standards

- ✓ When admitting students to doctoral study, their suitability for successful completion of their studies is assessed on the basis of transparent criteria.
- ✓ Doctoral students plan their studies as well as research and development activities in collaboration with their supervisor(s), setting out specific objectives for each year and taking responsibility for achieving these objectives.
- ✓ Evaluation of doctoral students is transparent and impartial. Its purpose is to support development of the doctoral students, provide an opinion regarding the effectiveness of their work to date, and assess their capabilities to complete their studies on time and successfully defend their doctoral theses.
- ✓ Universities offer doctoral students counselling on completing their studies and planning their further careers.
- ✓ Doctoral students' extracurricular teaching, research and/or creative activities or other work-related activities at the university support successful completion of their doctoral studies.
- ✓ Doctoral students participate in international mobility programmes or take advantage of other opportunities for learning or research at foreign universities and/or research and development institutions<sup>2</sup>.
- ✓ Alumni are regularly asked for feedback on the quality of the doctoral study, and employers are asked for feedback on the preparation of the graduates.

### Comments

The admission criteria are well outlined on the website and reflect the university-wide standards that appear appropriate for the degree programme. The number of applications has been increasing across the last 3 years, and this year included the first international student. Having 11 students enrolled is testament to the programme's success and broad interest to potential students from many

---

<sup>2</sup> In the context of this document, 'research and development institutions' denote both research institutions and research-intensive companies.

different backgrounds. We agree with the strengths and areas for improvement listed in the self-assessment report and would particularly like to echo the importance of networking externally and communicating science with society (though we were pleased to hear that a course about writing press releases is now available). Students appear to engage in a wide variety of activities that help support their learning. Although too early to say if this will help aid completion, we did meet one student who is almost ready to submit his final thesis.

As this is a new programme we are unable to comment on the counselling for students on completing their studies and plans for other careers. There appear to be international mobility opportunities with some students planning on availing of these. Again, as this is a new programme it is too early to assess this.

We briefly surveyed 3 students who spoke about the strengths of the programme and areas for improvement. Their responses are summarised below:

| <b>Positives</b>  | <b>Negatives</b>   |
|---|--|
| <b>Interdisciplinarity</b>                                      |  |
| Interdisciplinarity   | Some studies are with masters students and they aren't very helpful      |
| Different people and disciplines                                |  |
| Interdisciplinary approach                                      |  |
| Varieties of subjects and possibilities to reach out            |  |
| Multidisciplinary approach (horizon opening themes in seminars) |  |
| <b>Support</b>  |  |
| Formal and emotional support from program and school leaders    | Want more support on building international relationships and networking |
| Supportive mental environment                                   | Assigned help in data analysis would be good                             |
|   | More bureaucratic support in the beginning of the first year             |
| <b>Curriculum</b>   |  |

|   |                                   |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| Want more flexibility in choosing subjects, less of a strong curriculum | Leadership training would be good |
|---|-----------------------------------|

### Strengths

- Students are often working in a variety of fields and bring their own subject expertise and experience which help strengthen the discussions that happen within the cohort and add to the approaches taken in the projects they are working on.
- The students we met were very enthusiastic about their topics and had brilliant ideas for how their research would be practical in their fields of work. They all identified problems that need to be solved and are working diligently with excitement and passion to solve these problems. This is to be highly commended and is an example of how doctoral research can have significant relevance and potentially impact on society.
- This programme invites a group of students from a variety of research and professional backgrounds to engage with the university in a new way. Most of the students we spoke to are non-conventional doctoral students who most likely will continue to work outside academia after their studies. This helps diversify the university environment and makes a very positive contribution.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- This programme is very new, and so we cannot evaluate completion rates. We would, however insist that, as suggested in other programmes, students are well-monitored throughout the course of their studies. This will encourage them to continue to engage with the research and complete on time.
- Though it is encouraging that there is a student nearly ready for pre-defence, we do recommend that all work used to support the defence and to evaluate the readiness to receive to a degree has been completed as part of the doctoral programme. Bringing in publications from previous attempts at a doctoral degree or a Masters degree could devalue the programme. This practice should only be considered if the previous publications are an integral part of the current thesis project.
- As most of the students will most likely not enter a career in academia, we would strongly suggest that these students are encouraged to consider the monograph and one publication option to ensure they complete on time.

## 1.2 Study programme of Social Work

### 1.2.1 Introduction and general findings and recommendations

The study programme group of Social Services has two PhD programmes: Health Behaviour and Wellbeing, and Social Work. As the Health Behaviour and Wellbeing was analysed together with the Psychology PhD programme above, the sections below focus on Social Work only.

During a structural reorganisation in 2015, the Social Work PhD programme was re-located to the School of Governance, Law, and Society (SOGOLAS), which provides an interdisciplinary context for its operation. Tallinn University's vision is to promote interdisciplinarity and internationalisation, as well as maintaining a high quality of work that contributes to the development of Estonian society. These strategic aims are discussed more fully below.

A new R&D strategy at the university level is being formulated that will focus on research funding for students in order to enable them to study full-time and be part of research teams. Although this can be an ambition for the social work doctoral programme, many students will value and benefit from working in a relevant field alongside their studies.

The Open Academy Office, which has been created to provide life-long learning courses and research, might be a beneficial partner to the social work programme, especially as practitioners are interested in furthering their education, research, and improving the field in general. Indeed, many students commented that they enrolled on the programme because of an interest in life-long learning. In addition, there is also a Masters programme that is being developed around social entrepreneurship, which could provide an opportunity to develop new partnerships through engagement with students on this course.

#### Student data about Social Work PhD programme

|                    | 06/07 | 07/08 | 08/09 | 09/10 | 10/11 | 11/12 | 12/13 |
|--------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Admission          | 0     | 0     | 4     | 2     | 2     | 4     | 1     |
| Number of students | 13    | 11    | 12    | 15    | 16    | 17    | 14    |
| Graduates          | 1     | 0     | 0     | 1     | 0     | 2     | 0     |
| Number of dropouts | 0     | 4     | 0     | 0     | 3     | 3     | 1     |

*(data from HaridusSilm)*

|  | 13/14 | 14/15 | 15/16 | 16/17 | 17/18 | 18/19 |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Admission  | 2     | 3     | 3     | 2     | 2     | 1     |
| Number of students                               | 14    | 14    | 15    | 17    | 16    |       |
| Number of dropouts                               | 1     | 0     | 1     | 3     | 1     |       |
| Proportion of international students             | 17%   | 25%   | 15%   | 13%   | 18%   |       |
| Number of PhD dissertations defended (graduates) | 1     | 2     | 0     | 0     | 0     |       |

*(data from SER) \*We know two students have defended in the last several months, and that is not reflected here.*

On average, the intake is sustained, at two students per year. Since 2006, 25 students have been admitted onto the programme and 17 have dropped out. Only 7 have completed. Although the ex-matriculation of students a few years ago helped to improve the percentage of students completing their degrees on time and helped to re-focus the organisation on completion, there is still a concern around the number of students graduating. This situation needs to be monitored going forward to ensure the sustainability of the course.

Overall the panel was impressed by the development of the social work programme, which is still relatively new in Estonia. Social work has a distinctive place within SOGOLAS and draws upon the resources of the school, especially by including supervisors from different fields. The programme is an established example of interdisciplinarity and is connected with the goals and political will to develop an Estonian welfare state within which the role of social work is seen as being very important.

Although this is a small programme, it is important for Social work to maintain its individual identity, whilst still being part of the interdisciplinary vision of the School and University. This is especially important as social work is still developing as a discipline and profession within Estonia and the Baltic region generally. The university's ambitions of achieving research excellence, interdisciplinarity and internationalisation are all well-realised in this programme, and we strongly recommend that this programme retains its separate identity as a unique programme, especially as it is the only social work doctoral programme in the Baltic States (according to the self-assessment report).

### **Strengths**

The doctoral programme of Social Work is an important element of the Estonian Welfare state. Its potential in this respect could be better realized through closer co-operation with the Ministry of Social Affairs and other external stakeholders. In terms of strengths the panel found the programme has been developed in an interdisciplinary way to reflect the nature of social work with efforts being made to develop activities that bring staff into contact with others, partly in the department and partly as part of the doctoral school.

Although the PhD programme is small, its specificity helps attract students from other Baltic States because of their recognized expertise at TU. The panel was pleased to see that second supervisors are involved and are contributing to interdisciplinarity, internationalisation and staff development. The pre-PhD course



to give potential students a flavour of what it is like to do a PhD is an excellent initiative. It helps to manage student expectations of what a PhD is about and also helps ensure there is an admissions pre-procedure that matches student interest to already established research teams whilst retaining the flexibility to accept individual interest applications. Another strength is that the team have implemented a comprehensive strategy to address low completion rates and ex-matriculated students a number of students 3 years' ago.

### **Areas for Improvement**

It is important that the low number of staff without a PhD qualification is addressed. This is important to create a vibrant research culture and ensure there is the research expertise to supervise the research topics. Although there is collaboration with external agencies the panel recommends that the study programme develops a better model to do this to create more dialogue and opportunities for collaboration.

Finally, whilst not imperative, the panel would ask the programme team to consider the development of a Professional Doctorate in Social Work that could complement the existing system. The programme team could look at other models across Europe (e.g. UK) to see what might work best for the programme at TU.

## **1.2.2 Strengths and areas for improvement of the study programmes by assessment areas**

### **Social Work (PhD)**

#### **Study programme**

##### Standards

- ✓ The launch and development of the study programme are based on the Standard of Higher Education and other legislation, national strategies, university development plans, the effectiveness of research and development, various analyses (including labour market and feasibility analyses); striving for the best overall programme quality.
- ✓ Doctoral programmes contain at least 70% research, development or other creative work by doctoral students, making the results thereof public in international peer-reviewed research journals or in other ways that have international dimensions.
- ✓ Study programmes incorporate doctoral student participation in conferences and/or other professional activities, and are counted towards completion of the study programme.
- ✓ Doctoral programmes enable doctoral students to acquire leadership and teamwork skills, develop coaching and teaching skills as well as a proficiency in foreign languages at the level needed for successful participation in international

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | working environments.<br>✓ Different components of a doctoral programme form a coherent whole supporting the personal development of each doctoral student.<br>✓ Study programme development takes into account feedback from doctoral students, supervisors, employers, alumni and other stakeholders. |
|--|---|

### Comments

The identified strengths and improvement areas are described informatively in the self-evaluation report. The Social Work study programme has a unique position at the national level because it is the only study programme of its kind in Estonia. It seems that the study programme is closely connected to the national welfare strategy and the programme aims to be internationally recognised, with comprehensive international mobility included. Our impression of the programme from meetings and conversations with a range of academic staff, students, and stakeholders is that these goals are being met.

Students participate in conferences and other activities that help develop a broad range of transferable skills. As with all the programmes though, it is important to showcase these skills and show their importance for areas of employment outside of more traditional routes.

### Strengths

- Interdisciplinarity is embedded in social work education and is clearly demonstrated in this programme, partly by its location in SOGOLAS, and partly through supervisory arrangements which draw on a wide range of disciplines.
- The established practice of co-supervision helps promote interdisciplinarity and better supports students. This is a model that could be adopted by other doctoral programmes across TU.
- The programme offers flexibility in student choice of topics and the wide range of courses that are made available. A diverse range of research methods and approaches is also offered and is seen as a strength.
- The Pre-PhD course that is offered is very valuable and helps students understand the demands of a doctoral course and the nature of social work. It is expected that this approach will help ensure only serious candidates, who have a more informed understanding of the course, will apply.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- There could be more collaboration with external agencies to identify common research interests and develop joint research projects (note the Social Entrepreneurship Masters programme could act as a vehicle to help initiate such conversations).
- The study programme has an important role to play in demonstrating the value of research to the development of practice, services, and policies in

relation to social work and social welfare. Students should be encouraged to disseminate their research more widely and engage in conversations with external stakeholders and agencies.

- Social work staff should consider how they can obtain funding for team-based research so that students are able to work collaboratively within a team to extend their research skills.
- As students value their work outside of academia which is the trigger behind their own research, the university should consider recognizing these students as being part-time (see a more comprehensive explanation of this suggestion in the introduction of the report). In addition, a professional PhD model could be considered as an alternative option for students wishing to follow a more clinical route.

## Resources

### Standards

- ✓ In conducting doctoral study programmes, an adequate number of teaching staff and researchers participate, who hold the appropriate qualifications required to carry out doctoral studies and supervise doctoral theses in a given study programme.
- ✓ Universities shall ensure that sufficient funds are available to conduct doctoral studies, to provide development activities associated with doctoral studies and research, and to support the professional development of teaching staff and researchers.
- ✓ Resources (teaching, learning and research environments; libraries; resources required for teaching, learning and research) support the achievement of objectives set out in study programmes as well as the actual teaching, learning and research at the level of doctoral studies. Resource development is sustainable.
- ✓ Trends in the numbers of current learners, admitted learners and graduates (by study programme) in doctoral studies under the study programme group during the last five years indicate sustainability.

### Comments

The panel found the identified strengths and improvement areas to reflect more broadly the general situation within the university. The general facilities of the university are of a good standard and there are places for students to gather socially and informally as well as to work together. These facilities are appropriate to conduct the research outlined in the different projects (non-lab based).

Though funding allowances have increased, we appreciate that the programme is working toward creating junior researcher positions and working with university senior management to increase the doctoral allowance.

### Strengths

- Relevant library resources, including access to e-journals and databases, are available.
- Given the shortage of social work staff qualified at PhD level, this programme makes good use of the wider resources of SOGOLAS and is following a policy of developing the research capacity of social work staff themselves.
- Resources that are made available mean that students take advantage of opportunities for international activities, these include mobility, conference attendance, and involvement of international speakers and supervisors.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Recognition should be given to the staff time required for supervision when calculating staff workloads and allocating teaching. While the time allowed for Supervision is stipulated in TU Employment Relations Rules there was an indication from responses to panel enquiries that some staff find it difficult to give time allowed due to the pressure of work from other duties.
- A number of students have had to go outside of the university to obtain specialist information. This is often done by the students themselves who have used their own initiative. The programme should facilitate access to resources (experts, courses, and literature) particularly those relating to specialist topics.
- Students are reading and writing in a language that is often not their mother tongue. Provision of more language courses as well as one-to-one support for editing English manuscripts should be provided.
- It is important to consider remedies to address the shortage of staff qualified at PhD level who can help with supervision of doctoral students.

## **Teaching, learning, research and/or creative activity**

### Standards

- ✓ Uniform principles, based on best international practices and agreed upon at the university level, shall be followed while implementing doctoral programmes and assuring the quality of the doctoral studies (including supervision of doctoral theses).
- ✓ Doctoral studies support students' personal and social development, including creating an environment which will prepare them to successfully participate in international working environments at research and development institutions, as well as in the business and public sectors.
- ✓ Supervision of doctoral theses; modern methodology used in teaching and research; organisation of studies; and doctoral students' professional research, development and/or other creative activities all support achievement of the objectives and learning outcomes of doctoral studies.
- ✓ Assessment of outcomes of the learning, research and creative work done by

|   |
|---|
| <p>doctoral students is relevant, transparent and objective, and supports the development of doctoral students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Doctoral students are asked for feedback regarding supervision on a regular basis and the results of these surveys are taken into account for quality improvement activities.</li><li>✓ Effectiveness of the doctoral studies is analysed and such analyses serve as a basis for planning quality improvement activities.</li></ul> |
|---|

### Comments

There are several significant strengths to the programme which provide a good platform for high-quality teaching, learning, and research activities. Students mentioned a number of transferrable skills (writing, critical thinking, understanding research, etc.) that were being developed as a result of the doctoral programme. The self-assessment report generally reflects the impression we got during our visit of a positive learning environment.

### Strengths

- Students and staff work collaboratively and present as a cohesive and supportive team which creates a positive research environment.
- A range of courses and seminars are available to the students who found doctoral school writing camps to be particularly useful.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- There are resources within the student group (e.g. specialist knowledge relating to social work; peer support) that could be better used.
- Consideration should be given to the development of some digital courses that could become e-learning resources. Such courses would particularly benefit students and practitioners living at a distance from Tallinn.
- Reference was made to some students needing more taught classes on statistical methods and quantitative approaches. These are currently offered as part of the psychology doctoral programme and should be opened up to the students on the Social Work programme.
- Though the programme is beginning to focus on sharing research with the public and communicating practical applications to practitioners, this is something that needs to be extended to reach a wider audience.
- Having more touch points with students beyond the formal enrolment period and the time they are taking courses is vital to ensure continuous engagement and support of students. Care should be taken to ensure that supervisors and administration staff are meeting with students with a minimum number of touch-points required per year.

## Teaching staff

### Standards

- ✓ Teaching staff participate in research, development and/or creative activity at the level of and to the extent sufficient to conduct doctoral studies in the curriculum group and to supervise doctoral theses.
- ✓ Teaching staff develop their supervisory competences and share best practices with one other.
- ✓ Teaching staff collaborate in fields of teaching, research and creative work within the university and also with stakeholders outside the university (public sector organisations, enterprises, other research and development institutions).
- ✓ Teaching staff further their skills at foreign universities or other research institutions, participate in international research and creative projects, and present papers at high-level conferences.
- ✓ Qualified international and visiting teaching staff are involved in conducting doctoral studies, participating in doctoral thesis defence panels and/or reviewing doctoral theses.
- ✓ When assessing the work of teaching staff (including their evaluations), the effectiveness of their teaching as well as of their research, development and creative works is taken into account; including the effectiveness of their student supervision, development of their teaching and supervisory skills, and their international mobility.

### Comments

Research capacity is not yet well developed with a number of junior staff within the social work team still working towards completing their own PhDs. That being said, the teaching staff have knowledge and energy which provides a strong framework for PhD studies that is much appreciated by the students and offers a context that reaches beyond social work. The staff recognize that this programme is new and that they are working to develop something important and exciting. The self-assessment report reflects the hard work that staff have put in and, if anything, is modest in reflecting the mission and achievement of the programme thus far. The staff seem to be aware of critical markers for success and are working towards achieving them. There is a willingness to collaborate and develop their skills to ensure the programme is a success. This often involves bringing in others from different disciplines and also internationally.

### Strengths

- Teaching staff are involved in several international activities and are making good use of international resources to help them develop social work practices and services relevant to their national context.
- Multidisciplinarity of teaching staff is a real strength. Considering the heterogeneous nature of social work, it is very good that there are supervisors from different backgrounds. It is also beneficial that there is a general researcher who can cover different aspects of social work.

- We had the impression that there was a high standard of competency and motivation amongst staff and there is a good working atmosphere with collaboration and clarity around division of roles.
- The team of supervisors is well-qualified in research, as evidenced in the self-assessment reports through their CVs and publication records.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Staff workloads in teaching are high with relatively little time allocated for research and doctoral supervision. We hope that as more staff are hired, the division of labour with regards to teaching and supervision becomes more balanced.
- Continued support of junior staff to help them complete their PhDs and build research capacity should be maintained through active mentorship and workload reduction.

## **Doctoral students**

### Standards

- ✓ When admitting students to doctoral study, their suitability for successful completion of their studies is assessed on the basis of transparent criteria.
- ✓ Doctoral students plan their studies as well as research and development activities in collaboration with their supervisor(s), setting out specific objectives for each year and taking responsibility for achieving these objectives.
- ✓ Evaluation of doctoral students is transparent and impartial. Its purpose is to support development of the doctoral students, provide an opinion regarding the effectiveness of their work to date, and assess their capabilities to complete their studies on time and successfully defend their doctoral theses.
- ✓ Universities offer doctoral students counselling on completing their studies and planning their further careers.
- ✓ Doctoral students' extracurricular teaching, research and/or creative activities or other work-related activities at the university support successful completion of their doctoral studies.
- ✓ Doctoral students participate in international mobility programmes or take advantage of other opportunities for learning or research at foreign universities and/or research and development institutions.
- ✓ Alumni are regularly asked for feedback on the quality of the doctoral study, and employers are asked for feedback on the preparation of the graduates.

### Comments

There is a small number of students, and the numbers indicate that, on average, two students are admitted each year. One could question whether there is a critical mass of doctoral students enrolled on the programme to merit it existing as a separate programme. However, since this programme is part of SOGOLAS that embraces interdisciplinarity and has other small programmes, the panel is

not concerned. Situating the social work PhD programme within this school gives students access to a wide range of staff expertise and courses. The students themselves come from diverse employment backgrounds, and are trying to answer a diverse range of research questions. The strengths and plans for improvement identified by the self-assessment report are adequate, and we got the impression that they have made progress in improving student completion rates. The outlook is promising for student completion rates with two recent successful defences and three more expected in the coming academic year.

We briefly surveyed 5 of the 6 students we spoke to about the strengths of the programme and areas for improvement. The students' responses are summarised in the table below:

| <b>Positives</b>  | <b>Negatives</b>   |
|---|--|
| <b>Course/Curriculum</b>  |  |
| Flexible curriculum   | More attention to how to present data- where, with whom  |
| Flexibility with courses  | Need more information for the detail of course work and study design for whole nominal period of study                       |
| Flexibility to choose research topic                                | Provide/show practical steps to become professional researchers  |
| Flexible course programmes  | Supervision/guidance and courses on data analysis and statistics would be good (e.g., for longitudinal or hierarchical data) |
| Flexibility (possible to take courses relevant for my own research) | e-learning courses are an area for improvement   |
| Flexibility to choose different courses                             | Skills on teaching (adult education and pedagogy) would be helpful   |
| Strong and good professors who give PhD courses                     | Helping to think through future career (why PhD? Where to use it, etc.) would be helpful                                     |
| <b>International Mobility</b>                                       |  |
| Many opportunities to go abroad and there is mobility funding       | Private life or everyday work set limits to international mobility   |
| Possibilities for mobility both short and long-term                 |  |
| Possibilities for mobility  |  |
| International level – ability to                                    |  |



|   |   |
|---|---|
| participate in conferences and to network   |   |
| <b>Support/Collaboration/Environment</b>  |   |
| Encouraging and motivating supervisors  | Collaborative research projects (with policy makers, practitioners) could improve |
| Good supervision- supervisors have a lot of responsibilities to take care of students | Teamwork during study – good to be part of a team on research level               |
| Environment and practical support (rooms, technology)                                 | Be better to get advice for external experts from study design, preparation, etc. |
| Good supportive resources (e-journals, etc.)  | The library resources (e-resources) are limited, but Estonia is a small country   |
| Funding possibilities (to take courses outside, conferences, etc)                     | Proofreading and translation – not enough financial support                       |
| Doctoral pre-school possibility to have a better start to the studies                 | If there were more funding, the quality of research would be better               |

### Strengths

- The creation of the pre-PhD course helps potential students understand this process better and prepares them for the main doctoral programme. This is to be highly commended and is expected to ultimately improve completion rates.
- Staff have clearly given thought to how to recruit suitable students and the pre-doctoral course run by this programme helps accomplish this goal.
- Successful students often combine work and study, which is particularly good in such an applied field. (However, this poses its own challenges such as completing on time and maintaining the quality of research publications).
- Admissions requirements and what students should expect of the admissions process are well-outlined on the university's website for international and national students.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Students felt that more could be done to support student mobility, teamwork and careers advice; particularly for careers outside of academia. Offering advice about careers outside of academia is difficult for supervisors to provide and should be something that is provided at a University level (e.g. a University Graduate School model)

- Students are taking the initiative to identify new areas of research and finding additional resources. Although some students favour this individual approach, some would benefit from being attached to a research project. Consideration of research posts within research projects (either within the university or in collaboration with external agencies) would allow students to become part of a research team.
- Students suggested (see student feedback summarised above) that greater attention should be paid to help them support each other and provide additional opportunities for social and professional interactions, learning and support. This could be done at the SOGOLAS level.

## 2. Assessment report on the University of Tartu

### 2.1 Study programme group of Psychology

#### 2.1.1 Introduction

There are only two doctoral programmes in Psychology in Estonia. One in Tallinn University (TU) and one in the University of Tartu (UT). The Institute of Psychology at Tartu University belongs to the Faculty of Social Sciences. The Faculty of Social Sciences came into existence at the beginning of 2016 as the result of a university wide structural reform which also saw the creation of three other faculties. The Institute of Psychology is one of four institutes in the Faculty, along with two schools and two colleges. Teaching and research in the Faculty is in the fields of law, economics, business, educational science and educational management, psychology, sociology, politics, and media and communication studies. The Doctoral Programme in Psychology is one of seven doctoral programmes in the Faculty. Each institute and school has its own doctoral programme.

The Psychology programme at UT from 2012 to 2018 has admitted an average of 4 students per year. There is a steady number of international students also being admitted which shows the international reach and attractiveness of the programme. What is of concern is the fact that 24 students have been admitted since 2012 but 27 have dropped out. Eighteen have graduated since 2012 which is a positive sign, but only 3 have graduated in the last two years. Completion rates as a percentage of the student population currently enrolled is still too low and should continue to be monitored going forward.

#### **Psychology PhD programme at the University of Tartu 2006-2011**

|                     | 06/07 | 07/08 | 08/09 | 09/10 | 10/11 |
|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Admission           | 7     | 9     | 6     | 9     | 5     |
| Number of students  | 26    | 32    | 35    | 40    | 43    |
| Number of graduates | 3     | 2     | 1     | 0     | 6     |
| Number of dropouts  | 0     | 1     | 3     | 2     | 3     |

*(data from HaridusSilm)*

## Psychology PhD at the University Tartu 2012-2018

|                                  | 12/13 | 13/14 | 14/15 | 15/16 | 16/17 | 17/18 |
|----------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Admission                        | 4     | 4     | 4     | 5     | 4     | 3     |
| Number of students               | 37    | 34    | 30    | 27    | 24    | 23    |
| Number of international students | 2     | 1     | 2     | 3     | 1     | 1     |
| Number of graduates              | 4     | 3     | 3     | 5     | 1     | 2     |
| Number of dropouts               | 5     | 3     | 7     | 4     | 2     | 5     |

*(data from SER)*

### 2.1.2 General findings and recommendations at study programme group level

Unfortunately, the panel felt that the self-assessment report for this particular study programme contained insufficient information to allow them to fully assess the programme. Information around staff and students was presented in cumbersome excel spreadsheets making it very difficult to find the required information. That being said the panel has done its best to integrate all the information it could find from additional sources, including looking up extra information from websites and receiving assistance from our EKKA coordinator. We urge the university to take more care when formulating these self-evaluation reports and provide the panel with a comprehensive document that helps the panel fully evaluate the programme.

As expressed by both the vice dean for Research and Development at the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Vice Rector for Research of the University, we see plenty of opportunities for this doctoral study programme to collaborate with other disciplines both within the faculty and the university in general (e.g., medical sciences, sports sciences, biology etc.) more than they are currently doing. We agree that collaboration would be very beneficial for both students and staff, and we would encourage staff to consider new ways to collaborate and facilitate student interaction.

Although the self-assessment report claims that the UT has started preparations for updating the doctoral curriculum so that it meets present-day needs focusing more on interdisciplinarity, entrepreneurship and the provision of transferable leadership skills, there was no evidence of a shift in thinking when discussing with staff within the Institute of Psychology. Here the emphasis was firmly rooted in a traditional academic doctoral programme, where excellence was solely judged by the number of high-quality publications a student could produce.

#### Strengths

The panel considered the quality of outputs (publications) of the students who have successfully completed the programme and considered them to be of a high standard. The alumni interviewed along with current doctoral students presented a very strong profile of doctoral students showing strong research potential.

Whilst there are a large number of credits to attain in the programme, which far exceeds international expectations, the flexibility of the curriculum appears to be very good with different elements counting towards the required 60 credits. The nature of the courses offered provides students with the opportunity to develop strong transferable skills in programming, data analytics, statistics, and project management, even though they are not explicitly aware of the value of these skills to secure employment outside of academia.

The panel found that both the students and staff were very positive about the active measures that have been taken to improve the financial situation of the students. While it is expected that the rise in the stipend will ease financial pressures on students, there was no clear indication from senior management as to how this rise would impact on the students' status. More specifically, it was unclear whether students would now be expected to be full time students instead of being students as well as holding down a full-time job. This is an important consideration that the panel highlighted at the beginning of this report. It is common practice in other countries to require funded PhD students to commit to their doctoral studies fulltime with the possible exception of limited part-time teaching duties or involvement in relevant research project as agreed with the supervisor and, with the additional stipend, this requirement should be possible for Estonian students.

Overall, the students have access to very good equipment and facilities to carry out their research.

#### *Recommendations and areas of improvement*

The Institute of Psychology has so much more to offer than pure academia compared to other institutions at UT. This is both in terms of knowledge creation and providing capable smart individuals. The panel strongly recommends that the Institute puts together a 5 year strategic plan that looks to the future and identifies key areas where Psychology (and behavioural sciences) can impact on society and build collaborations with industrial partners and other external stakeholders.

The Doctoral School of Behavioural Social and Health Sciences seems like a great vehicle to fund initiatives such as seminars and inviting international speakers. Also, their writing camps seem to be very well received. The panel would strongly urge the programme to make more of the Doctoral School and use it as a means to create an environment where more transferable skills such as leadership and entrepreneurship can be developed amongst students from both universities. Also to build more productive scientific links with Tallinn University and TalTech (Tallinn University of Technology).

Students often complained of feeling like 'lone scholars' not having much interaction with their supervisor or other PhD students. The panel would recommend that a special space for PhD students is created where they can be together. This could be at a Faculty level to help ensure there is more general collaboration and cross-disciplinary dialogue between students, as well as providing a space for informal interactions supporting their well-being.

The programme really needs to consider alternative sources of funding for PhD students that are not so heavily reliant on the current model. This could take the form of special earmarked scholarships that are more focused on solving societal challenges and working with industry. This type of Knowledge Transfer programme can add value on many different fronts and help showcase the importance of doctoral education that goes beyond traditional academia. An alternative vision of what a PhD is and its role in society needs to be addressed quite urgently. This involves considering links with the wider community and showing that research excellence is multi-faceted and not just based on publications and citations. The programme should build on the already existing work to disseminate more widely the work that is being carried out. It should also ensure the maintenance of a comprehensive website (in English).

From the feedback reported in the self-assessment and from student interviews it became apparent that the programme needs to be mindful of the need for proper student support. The pressures of working weekends, having no holidays, having financial pressures and trying to balance that with family life will take its toll on the mental wellbeing of even the strongest individual. The panel recommends that a University counsellor/advisor is appointed who can help support all PhD students. Furthermore, more specific advice on careers outside academia should also be provided by a specialist so that students can consider non-academic career paths. This can include CV writing, distilling out key transferable skills and job hunting.

In all interviews, it was acknowledged that both the global and local higher education contexts are rapidly changing and there is a need to be agile when responding to this. As such, a main concern was expressed around the future sustainability of the programme, and that publication-based metrics cannot continue to be the sole measure of research excellence. Even if such discussions are in an early stage, the panel strongly recommends that the management team at Faculty and University level move actively and strategically towards a broader definition of the purpose of the PhD programme. This, among other things, will be very important for actively managing future uncertainty about financing.

## 2.1.3 Strengths and areas for improvement of the study programme by assessment areas

### Psychology (PhD)

#### Study programme

##### Standards

- ✓ The launch and development of the study programme are based on the Standard of Higher Education and other legislation, national strategies, university development plans, the effectiveness of research and development, various analyses (including labour market and feasibility analyses); striving for the best overall programme quality.
- ✓ Doctoral programmes contain at least 70% research, development or other creative work by doctoral students, making the results thereof public in international peer-reviewed research journals or in other ways that have international dimensions.
- ✓ Study programmes incorporate doctoral student participation in conferences and/or other professional activities, and are counted towards completion of the study programme.
- ✓ Doctoral programmes enable doctoral students to acquire leadership and teamwork skills, develop coaching and teaching skills as well as a proficiency in foreign languages at the level needed for successful participation in international working environments.
- ✓ Different components of a doctoral programme form a coherent whole supporting the personal development of each doctoral student.
- ✓ Study programme development takes into account feedback from doctoral students, supervisors, employers, alumni and other stakeholders.

##### Comments

The PhD program consists of 1 full year (60 ECTS) of course work and three years (180 ECTS) of research. As witnessed in the self-assessment report, the University has established adequate processes that govern the different aspects of the study programme including admission, course work and graduation.

As part of their study programme, students are not required to teach but they are encouraged to do so to obtain experience (especially supervising bachelors- or Masters students). If they do, they get credit points counting towards their course work and sometimes get paid. The panel noticed, however, that there is a great deal of variability with some PhD students graduating without ever having taught, some having quite a high teaching load to the extent that it prevents them from making sufficient progress in their research.

The students we interviewed expressed, in general, satisfaction with the volume and flexibility of course work (60 ECTS). While some courses are much appreciated (e.g., methods & statistics, academic writing in English) other courses focusing more on career development would be welcomed.

Coming from a tradition of 'individual-driven' projects, the PhD research has started to be more project oriented, with PhD students working in research teams and groups. As noted during the interview with staff, they generally seem to agree that this is the preferred way forward yet still allowing for exceptionally original projects proposed by students themselves to be incorporated in the programme.

The panel was unable to get a feel of the extent to which the study programme and topics of the research projects of the students are in line with the more general research strategy of the Institute of Psychology. We wonder whether a more overall, strategic approach could be beneficial in the future to contribute to cohesion, collaboration and ultimately successful completion of the study programme.

### Strengths

- The quality of publications and research was generally perceived as high. Those students who have successfully completed the programme produced work of excellent quality and the alumni interviewed along with current doctoral students presented a very strong profile of doctoral students with high research potential.
- Whilst there are a large number of credits to attain, the flexibility of the curriculum appears to be very good with different elements counting towards the required 60 credits.
- The nature of the courses available means the students develop strong transferable skills in programming, data analytics, and statistics.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- We recommend that those PhD students who are engaged in teaching receive proper support to help with developing competencies in this area.
- Special attention should be paid to the content of the courses offered to also include courses focusing more on career development.
- The 3-article publication requirement is onerous and likely contributes to the low completion rates. Supervisors should work to help manage the student's high expectations for publications and ensure that publication goals focus on quality rather than quantity.

## **Resources**

### Standards

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| ✓ | In conducting doctoral study programmes, an adequate number of teaching staff and researchers participate, who hold the appropriate qualifications required to carry out doctoral studies and supervise doctoral theses in a given study programme. |
| ✓ | Universities shall ensure that sufficient funds are available to conduct doctoral studies, to provide development activities associated with doctoral studies and   |



|  |  |
|--|--|
|  | <p>research, and to support the professional development of teaching staff and researchers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Resources (teaching, learning and research environments; libraries; resources required for teaching, learning and research) support the achievement of objectives set out in study programmes as well as the actual teaching, learning and research at the level of doctoral studies. Resource development is sustainable.</li><li>✓ Trends in the numbers of current learners, admitted learners and graduates (by study programme) in doctoral studies under the study programme group during the last five years indicate sustainability.</li></ul> |
|--|--|

### Comments

The number of students (including those from an international background) admitted to the program (period 2012-2017) is relatively stable and so is the number of students graduating (although levelling off since 2016). However, the number of students currently enrolled in the program has declined over the period 2012-2017 and there is a (high) number of students dropping out of the programme (26 students in the period 2012-2017).

The study programme staff members are able to attract substantial sums of funding (in addition to university 'basic' funding), which includes research grants from prestigious international (European) agencies. Nevertheless, during the interviews, members of staff expressed their concern about the lack of continuity of research funding which was aligned with our own general observations. Staff are looking to senior management, and also the state, to provide guidance on how to maintain research programmes when research funding stagnates.

We were able to see for ourselves the newly established lab facilities which seem well-equipped and accessible for students.

During several meetings staff explained how students are often not keen to go abroad because they are starting families and it is difficult to move the whole family abroad for any period of time due to lack of funds. Apparently, this is not an issue for students without family commitments who are more likely to take advantage of funding available for international study periods.

### Strengths

- The clear commitment of the university to increase the PhD stipend is very commendable. Student feedback states very clearly that working fulltime in a job will prevent them completing PhD studies within the prescribed timeframe.
- The students have access to very good equipment and facilities to carry out their research.
- Some students have taken advantage of internationalisation opportunities, and these seem to be well resourced.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- It is recommended to adopt an extra option for creating new PhD positions that are company or government sponsored. In these cases, the student could work for the company or government agency.
- Sufficient supervision does seem to be lacking for some students (as evidenced by the significantly high drop-out rate). To prevent (further) dropouts from the PhD study programme we strongly recommend a system of active supervision and monitoring. In addition, special training and a requirement for supervisors to engage with their student(s) in a more systematic way should be considered.
- As outlined in the beginning of the report, we recommend a competitive stipend be created for full-time PhD students who would be expected not to work outside their PhD so they can realistically finish in 3-4 years. The current system is more in line with a part-time model.

### **Teaching, learning, research and/or creative activity**

#### Standards

- ✓ Uniform principles, based on best international practices and agreed upon at the university level, shall be followed while implementing doctoral programmes and assuring the quality of the doctoral studies (including supervision of doctoral theses).
- ✓ Doctoral studies support students' personal and social development, including creating an environment which will prepare them to successfully participate in international working environments at research and development institutions, as well as in the business and public sectors.
- ✓ Supervision of doctoral theses; modern methodology used in teaching and research; organisation of studies; and doctoral students' professional research, development and/or other creative activities all support achievement of the objectives and learning outcomes of doctoral studies.
- ✓ Assessment of outcomes of the learning, research and creative work done by doctoral students is relevant, transparent and objective, and supports the development of doctoral students.
- ✓ Doctoral students are asked for feedback regarding supervision on a regular basis and the results of these surveys are taken into account for quality improvement activities.
- ✓ Effectiveness of the doctoral studies is analysed, and such analyses serve as a basis for planning quality improvement activities.

#### Comments

Teaching practices and learning outcomes, which are in accordance with international standards, are implemented to assure the quality and relevance of the doctoral programme. Each PhD student writes an individual study and research plan that maps out the objectives and learning outcomes of the doctoral study programme. The plan is accepted by the supervisor and prior knowledge is taken into account.

The number of students who are allocated a co-supervisor seems to vary tremendously. The panel wonders whether those students who do not have a co-supervisor are actually served equally well. UT seems to be benefiting from the repatriation scheme with one supervisor (of 2 students) now supervising them within the auspices of UT, as opposed to remotely.

Student feedback is collected in the study information system, annual progress reviews and informal discussions. PhD students are requested to annually present a written progress report and to give a presentation. Challenges and possible problems are detected and discussed. The committee prepares written feedback and approves the claimed credits.

### Strengths

- Students were very pleased with the level of research and all reported wanting to do a PhD because of the topics and the way their supervisors engage with them and the topic. This speaks volumes for the quality of the programme.
- The vice dean reported that students are involved in study programme committees and are involved in the development of the programme. This is very good, and we hope that their input is valued in the way that it should be.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- As stated before, effective measures to reduce the dropout rate need to be taken. Study times are relatively long compared to international benchmarks.
- Emphasis on courses to acquire general competencies and transferable skills can be improved upon in order to support the process of completing the PhD degree and preparing students for a career outside of academia.
- More international comparisons, collaborations and exchanges would make the PhD programme more attractive.
- Help should be provided to assist students with developing grant writing skills including personal fellowships to increase the likelihood of finding good postdoctoral opportunities.
- The panel got the sense that the research environment, especially when considering the joint doctoral school with TU, appeared to be competitive rather than collaborative. The panel's enquiries suggested a general lack of engagement in intellectual conversation within Tartu and between universities. We recommend that a culture of collaboration and intellectual curiosity be cultivated. Students appeared to appreciate the doctoral school programmes (especially the writing camps). Equally, some staff members expressed that working at both universities was beneficial. We

hope that all staff will be able to follow these examples and continue to explore new avenues for future collaboration.

## Teaching staff

### Standards

- ✓ Teaching staff participate in research, development and/or creative activity at the level of and to the extent sufficient to conduct doctoral studies in the curriculum group and to supervise doctoral theses.
- ✓ Teaching staff develop their supervisory competences and share best practices with one other.
- ✓ Teaching staff collaborate in fields of teaching, research and creative work within the university and also with stakeholders outside the university (public sector organisations, enterprises, other research and development institutions).
- ✓ Teaching staff further their skills at foreign universities or other research institutions, participate in international research and creative projects, and present papers at high-level conferences.
- ✓ Qualified international and visiting teaching staff are involved in conducting doctoral studies, participating in doctoral thesis defence panels and/or reviewing doctoral theses.
- ✓ When assessing the work of teaching staff (including their evaluations), the effectiveness of their teaching as well as of their research, development and creative works is taken into account; including the effectiveness of their student supervision, development of their teaching and supervisory skills, and their international mobility.

### Comments

According to the information we could find, 16 supervisors appear to be active at UT at the moment. Most have reasonable student loads, but a few have excessively high loads. We do question the availability of these staff members to give high-quality supervision and whether high-quality supervision is available to all students.

We are impressed by the achievements, as stated in the self-assessment report, of staff members involved in the study programme. However, some of these highly valued staff members no longer seem to be active supervisors of PhD students. Also other data that we were able to access (list of supervisors and PhD students supervised by every supervisor, not available in the self-assessment report but presented during the visit) shows that one particular member of staff has had the highest number of thesis students since 2002 (22), of whom 9 students have graduated, 8 dropped out and 5 currently enrolled. The panel was concerned that one member of staff has such a high supervision load. The panel feels this needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. It also makes the panel wonder how attractive the programme will be in the future. The panel suggests that measures are put in place to prepare for a future generation of equally qualified staff but also providing students with active supervision to allow them to complete on time.

### Strengths

- Supervisors participate in international research networks and projects. Research results are published in well-respected international peer-reviewed journals and proceedings.
- Students the panel spoke to were generally (highly) satisfied with their supervisors, with whom several already had established connections from earlier bachelor and/or Master degree programmes.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- It is recommended to encourage (more junior) supervisors to participate in international research networks and projects in order to enhance their careers.
- Careers guidance that extends to opportunities of employment outside of academia should be more clearly developed along with links to external partners and other students in other universities and on other programmes.

## **Doctoral students**

### Standards

- ✓ When admitting students to doctoral study, their suitability for successful completion of their studies is assessed on the basis of transparent criteria.
- ✓ Doctoral students plan their studies as well as research and development activities in collaboration with their supervisor(s), setting out specific objectives for each year and taking responsibility for achieving these objectives.
- ✓ Evaluation of doctoral students is transparent and impartial. Its purpose is to support development of the doctoral students, provide an opinion regarding the effectiveness of their work to date, and assess their capabilities to complete their studies on time and successfully defend their doctoral theses.
- ✓ Universities offer doctoral students counselling on completing their studies and planning their further careers.
- ✓ Doctoral students' extracurricular teaching, research and/or creative activities or other work-related activities at the university support successful completion of their doctoral studies.
- ✓ Doctoral students participate in international mobility programmes or take advantage of other opportunities for learning or research at foreign universities and/or research and development institutions<sup>3</sup>.
- ✓ Alumni are regularly asked for feedback on the quality of the doctoral study, and employers are asked for feedback on the preparation of the graduates.

### Comments

Doctoral students who are successful in completing their PhDs do seem to be the cream of the crop - their academic work is exceptional, and their research output

<sup>3</sup> In the context of this document, 'research and development institutions' denote both research institutions and research-intensive companies.

is of a very high quality. These students are involved in international mobility. Likewise, there is a steady intake of a small number of international students providing an opportunity for intellectual cross-fertilisation between students of different cultural backgrounds. Nevertheless, students note that more funding for long-term projects abroad would be helpful.

Despite a number of excellent students, there are many students who are not performing at the same level, and these students are either not being well supported for their needs or are being poorly selected for the program as it stands with regards to expectations and financial resources. The quality of supervision and feedback varies widely, and students are not given adequate support for future planning- either through counselling about career services or by helping students identify transferable skills they are developing during their doctoral studies.

It was encouraging to notice that, during our interview with the students, they seemed well aware of the need to communicate their passion for science and share results from their projects with the general public (e.g., social media and/or face-to-face communication via other channels). This is required in order to stimulate a positive view of science externally but also to highlight the significant benefits of doing PhD work.

We briefly surveyed the five students we spoke to about the strengths and places for improvement on the program. We were also sent some comments anonymously by email. The responses are aggregated below:

| Positives   | Negatives  |
|---|--|
| <b>Study Programme Courses/Skills</b>   |  |
| High flexibility of PhD Program   | Studying/learning component of 60 credits- maybe it's too high of a number. There are many usual courses, including statistics and writing/presentation, etc., but I'm not sure whether so many classes are needed |
| Flexibility   | Too many courses to take (60 ETP), which take a lot of time. The courses are not being taught every year, so we have to search for additional courses  |
| Flexible curriculum - can take courses from different or related fields - like public speaking, statistics, clinical psychology, etc. | Awareness of the skills - are the skills useful in other areas, etc. I think right now it's something that we have to figure out ourselves   |
|   | Time pressure - as pursuing a dual career, I'm trying to balance between practice and research. It   |

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | would be good if there would be an additional year or two for students like me  |
|  | Lower emphasis on transferable skills   |
|  | Lack of career planning advice  |
| <b>Funding</b>   |   |
| PhD funding has become a lot better  |   |
| Financial support for short-term mobility (international conferences, etc.) is good and OK for the main stipend (though my friends who are not PhD students earn more) |   |
| <b>Supervision/Research</b>  |   |
| High academic quality – supervisors, professors are really interesting, inspiring, and it is possible to learn a lot   | Supporting supervisor – the connection with your supervisor is essential. Sometimes, the connection is not perfect. It would be good if the student would have some additional support. |
| High quality research and resources  | Variable quality of supervision   |
| Support from the institute and supervisor – I’ve never been afraid to ask for help or supervision  | Initial PhD plan (the schedule for doing research) is too optimistic. This can cause stress later in PhD  |
| Openness and willingness to try new paths- academic as well as administrative staff are very open to new ideas and very encouraging                                    |   |
| <b>Internationalisation/External Partnerships</b>  |   |
| International collaboration  | More internationalisation- more English courses and more international students   |
|  | There should be a higher number of external partners  |
|  | Not much information about longer international mobilities. Maybe more international collaboration (e.g., for gathering bigger samples, getting another perspective, etc.)              |
| <b>Equipment and Facilities</b>  |   |
| Equipment and facilities – it is possible to access databases, library is really good, working conditions are good   |   |

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| Good facilities |   |
| <b>Other</b>    |   |
|                 | PhD is not valued externally (or valued as much)  |
|                 | PhD studies can feel quite lonely. There should be more collaboration (or just social events) with other PhD students |
|                 | There is a lot of room for development in communicating our research to the public                                    |

Strengths

- Students selected (who succeed) appear to be of high quality and produce high-quality research publications.
- Many students are participating in international collaborations.
- Successful alumni appear to be pleased with the education they received and the employment opportunities available to them.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Supervision quality and quantity varies greatly across students. Annual goal-setting and more frequent progress meetings throughout the year to keep students engaged would be highly recommended.
- An alumni network should be created to help students find international opportunities after their doctoral studies.
- Employment while undertaking the PhD programme should be directly related to the PhD work e.g. in the same lab or in clinical work that complements clinical research. Junior research fellowships should be used to hire PhD students to work in the lab where they are doing their PhD, and PIs should consider applying for PhD places in grant applications.