

Assessment Report

Social Sciences

University of Tartu

Tallinn University

Tallinn University of Technology

2016

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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 in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education*](#).

The aim of the assessment team was the evaluation of the study programme group of Social Sciences in three higher education institutions: Tallinn University, Tallinn University of Technology, and the University of Tartu.

The team was asked to assess the conformity of the study programmes belonging to the study programme group 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:

David Inglis (Chair)	Professor of Sociology, Department of Sociology, Philosophy and Anthropology, University of Exeter – United Kingdom
Heikki Hiilamo	Professor of Social Policy, University of Helsinki – Finland
Jonas Hinnfors	PhD, Professor of Political Science, Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg – Sweden
Florian Rampelt	Student, University of Passau – Germany
Margus Sarapuu	Head of Task Force on Zero Bureaucracy, Ministry of Economics and Communication – Estonia
Mati Vaarmann	Ambassador – Estonia

Gediminas Vitkus	Professor and Head of European Studies Department, Institute of International Relations and Political Science – Lithuania
Brigita Zepa	Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Latvia; Director of Baltic Institute of Social Sciences – Latvia

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

After the preparation phase, the work of the assessment team in Estonia started on Sunday, May 8, 2016, with an introduction to the 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 the overall questions and areas to discuss with each group at the three institutions which were part of the assessment process. 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 (May 9-10), Tallinn University (May 11-13), and Tallinn University of Technology (May 13). In all cases, 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 Saturday, May 14, the team held a 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 two sections, the assessment team summarise their general findings, conclusions and recommendations which are relevant across the whole SPG. The team provides an external and objective perspective on the programmes and the contexts within which they are delivered. 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

The assessment team was generally positively impressed by the quality of programmes and teaching practices in the social sciences offered by the three HEIs under consideration. There was ample evidence of good pedagogical practices, strong staff commitment to teaching, and positive levels of student satisfaction. The assessment team also found various issues requiring reflection and remedial action that seem to be endemic across all HEIs in Estonia.

The assessment team found ample evidence of teaching being offered at international levels of competence and expertise. Increasing amounts of teaching was offered in English, and we found much of that teaching to be highly international in nature and quality. Small pockets of parochial and narrow teaching practices do exist, which students in particular felt unsatisfied with. The assessment team recommend that programme managers seek to counteract practices which students – rightly – perceive to be unfair and unhelpful, acting more thoroughly than may have been the case in the past on problems identified through the various mechanisms of feedback from students, including end of class or year questionnaires and student representatives on teaching committees.

In terms of other aspects of the internationalization of teaching and education, the level and amount of circulation of students and staff to other countries to pick up new experiences and skills remains disappointing. While the assessment team recognizes the pragmatic reasons for relatively few students taking up opportunities offered by the Erasmus programme and similar mechanisms, we believe that both the quality of graduates and the expectations they have of teaching will be raised by increased participation in international exchange programmes, and that HEIs do more to systematize their facilities in this regard, and to make it easier for students to access both concrete details about how exchanges work and can be funded, and also information about why exchange visits are beneficial for them. There was also widespread dissatisfaction among staff about the lack of resources made available both to facilitate their international movement – either as guests in foreign institutions or by attending conferences and so on outside Estonia – and also to allow for visits to HEIs by foreign academics who would undertake short periods of guest teaching. We urge senior managers to do as much as possible to support further internationalization of staff, in terms of both outward and inward movement, by making at the very least modest sums available each year for these purposes, probably organized on a competitive bidding system.

The assessment team were impressed by the competence and commitment of staff at all stages in their careers. Particularly noteworthy were many young, early career academics, whose careers were already strongly and beneficially international in nature and who were able to teach up-to-date and cutting-edge material in ways comparable to teaching offered in other European countries. Many of these early career staff had PhDs from outside Estonia. It seems vital to ensure that their careers continue to develop in highly international ways, for the future of successful social science in Estonia will depend largely on this cohort.

We therefore urge senior managers to take especial care in fostering the careers of this group, including taking action on the internationalization mechanisms noted above. We also found evidence that promising early career researchers who were carrying out PhD studies while teaching, often struggled to balance commitments to finishing the PhD with teaching duties. As a sign of a healthy and sustainable programme of study is that the vast majority of teachers possess reputable PhDs, it is in the interests of senior managers and unit heads to ensure that early career personnel are not overly burdened with teaching commitments while trying to complete PhD studies, as the future vitality of the programmes on which they teach depends on them possessing a PhD.

A particularly positive feature of social sciences in Estonia is, in the case of most of the programmes assessed, a strong connection between pedagogy and practical work-life experience. This took various forms: internship opportunities for students at various levels; effective linkages between academic units and employers in both the public and private sectors, often facilitated by alumni of particular programmes; strong consideration by institutions and programme managers of the employability potentials of social science degrees; awareness amongst students both of those potentials and of the transferable skills, including those derived from quantitative methods training, afforded by a social science degree. The productive connections between the social sciences and the labour market, primarily domestic but also potentially international, constitute a notable and valuable dimension of the social scientific scene in Estonia. We found evidence that there was on a whole a good balance of more traditionally academic and more pragmatically-oriented skills being taught across programmes, without the former being unduly sacrificed to the latter. Estonian students are on the whole being well equipped to enter into the world of full-time graduate-level employment, and we would want to encourage staff at all levels to maintain this successful focus on employability issues. Social science graduates are already making clear and worthwhile contributions to Estonian society, and this trend should both be welcomed, as well as maintained and cultivated further.

The assessment team was generally positively impressed with the quality of teaching materials available physically and online, and the physical infrastructure of buildings where teaching and learning take place. Social science pedagogy seemed generally well resourced and this was the opinion of the majority of staff and students we spoke with.

A frequent problem that we encountered was that both staff, and sometimes students too, felt that the social sciences were not regarded as central to HEIs' current and future priorities, and were treated as secondary to natural science, technology and medical disciplines. Such a widespread feeling obviously may be having negative consequences for staff morale. To avoid this senses spreading and deepening further, and to prevent it from harming the recruitment of early career staff in the future, we urge senior HEI managers to give more clear messages to staff across the social sciences that their work and their contribution to their respective institutions is highly valued.

There is a relatively high drop-out rate among social sciences students across all of Estonian Higher Education. The assessment team acknowledges the

demographic, legal, political and other reasons for the drop-out rates in all the HEIs we assessed. We noted some positive steps being undertaken both to understand better the reasons for dropping-out, and also to try to mitigate the levels of drop-outs. Yet both better understanding and policies that would be based upon it seem in the early stages of development, and there was a sense that at least for some staff high drop-out levels were simply a 'fact of life' about which little could be done. We recommend that senior managers in all HEIs take a more systematic approach to uncovering both the macro-level / structural and micro-level / experiential reasons why so many students drop-out, and to base future retention policies more firmly upon a sound social scientific research base.

The panel noted the general fall in numbers of potential Estonian undergraduate students, now and in the future, due to a shrinking population of young people in the country. It is therefore vital for the future sustainability of programmes in the social sciences that more international students are recruited. The panel recommends that more effort is put into both the recruitment of international students at BA and MA levels, and also the support offered to them while at university in Estonia. Small things can make a big difference to the quality of international students' experience – for example, ensuring that all signs in university buildings are in English as well as Estonian, and that international students are supported so as to be able fully to participate in internships and extra-curricular activities. The trend to more courses being offered in English is to be welcomed, but more efforts need to be made in this direction so as to increase the attractiveness of programmes to an international student clientele.

The assessment team noted the problematic nature of funding of university teaching and teachers, with more precariousness in terms both of the types of staff contracts and of the funding base of most programmes, than is healthy for creating sound and sustainable university education going on into the future. We noted frequent worries by staff that particular programmes were not fully sustainable due to the uncertainty of which staff would be available to teach in a given academic year. We also heard various complaints by students as to courses not being available because of staff changes. At present, the system is kept going by most members of staff being willing to be more flexible and generous in teaching commitments than their contracts may stipulate, a clear outcome of stresses and strains induced by a funding system which overly relies on the winning of external research funding to make teaching possible. While these large issues to do with the Estonian government's universities policy and funding regime are beyond the control of HEIs, nonetheless the assessment team feels the need to point out that the inadequate funding base undercuts the potential of the social sciences in Estonia, not least in terms of contributing in various ways, including in terms of financial benefits and economic development, to Estonian and wider European society.

We note the impending changes towards the implementation of full-time and more secure contracts for university staff as a result of EU legislation, and we welcome this move, as it can lead to more sustainable social scientific provision across the country. However, we urge senior HEI managers to implement these changes in ways which reduce the risk of fewer staff being employed overall, with

consequent negative consequences for the range and quality of teaching currently offered across the social sciences.

There is no evidence to suggest that there is too much social science, or too many programmes in social science, in Estonia at the current time, and changes in contractual arrangements should not go together with a reduction in the variety and breadth of programmes currently offered across the three HEIs under consideration.

1. Assessment report of SPG at the University of Tartu

1.1. Introduction

Programmes to be assessed	Government and Politics (BA) Sociology, Social Work and Social Policy (BA) Sociology (MA) European Union-Russia Studies (MA) European Studies (MA) Baltic Sea Region Studies (MA)
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The University of Tartu was founded as the Academia Dorpatensis (Academia Gustaviana) in 1632. The University has currently 60 bachelor, 72 master and 34 doctoral study programmes. The University has recently undergone major structural changes and has now four Faculties: the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, the Faculty of Social Sciences, the Faculty of Medicine, and the Faculty Science and Technology.

Sociological and political studies are located within a recently reorganized University structure which is intended to consolidate these subject areas. As a result of a merger between the Institute of Government and Politics and the European College, the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies was formed in 2016. All programmes to be assessed in the SPG of Social Sciences belong to the newly created Johan Skytte Institute except for two programmes (Sociology, Social Work Social Policy; and Sociology) which are taught in the Institute of Social Studies. Both units are part of the Faculty of Social Sciences.

The assessed programmes are located within a dedicated building where much, if not all, teaching takes place. Staff reported that the last three years had been challenging for the social sciences, including in terms of budget levels.

Statistical Data of the Study Programme Group

Number of students

		11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16
Bachelor's studies	Government and Politics (riigiteadused)	212	182	170	135	133
	Sociology, Social Work and Social Policy	212	197	163	144	114
Master's studies	Sociology	40	35	31	31	20
	European Studies	73	59	57	54	58
	Baltic Sea Region Studies	26	26	29	22	26
	European Union-Russia studies	35	36	35	40	39
TOTAL		598	535	485	426	390

Source: HaridusSILM

Number of admissions

		11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16
Bachelor's studies	Government and Politics (riigiteadused)	47	45	48	21	43
	Sociology, Social Work and Social Policy	44	42	23	29	27
Master's studies	Sociology	10	8	6	10	6
	European Studies	11	10	16	14	16
	Baltic Sea Region Studies	19	13	14	10	16
	European Union-Russia studies	16	9	14	14	15
TOTAL		147	127	121	98	123

Source: HaridusSILM

Number of graduates

		11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15
Bachelor's studies	Government and Politics (riigiteadused)	53	38	27	41
	Sociology, Social Work and Social Policy	34	23	41	30
Master's studies	Sociology	8	10	4	12
	European Studies	8	6	9	6
	Baltic Sea Region Studies	1	11	7	13
	European Union-Russia studies	7	9	7	14
TOTAL		111	97	95	116

Source: HaridusSILM

Number of interruptions

		11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15
Bachelor's studies	Government and Politics (riigiteadused)	31	26	27	21
	Sociology, Social Work and Social Policy	25	37	24	31
Master's studies	Sociology	5	1	6	4
	European Studies	15	14	10	8
	Baltic Sea Region Studies	10	2	5	3
	European Union-Russia studies	3	7	6	5
TOTAL		89	87	78	72

Source: HaridusSILM

1.2. General findings and recommendations at the study programme group level

The physical infrastructure within which teaching and learning activities take place is generally of a high quality, and housed within one bespoke building.

The assessment panel were overall favourably impressed by the nature and standard of teaching across all of the programmes assessed.

The level of integration between BA and MA programmes varied. While student progression from BA to MA in Sociology was relatively straightforward, it was not so much in the Politics subjects. Senior managers need to ensure more smooth progression from BA to MA studies in those areas.

There was ample evidence of strong links between academic units and programmes on the one side, and employers and cooperation partners on the other. Opportunities for student internships and activities like guest lectures by employers and alumni, were praiseworthy. However, employers and cooperation partners were unclear about expectations by academics as to their activities, and their role within programmes. Thus steps must be taken to systematize more the role of employers and partners within all degree programmes.

The University-level system of feedback from students to staff was identified by both staff and students as having various imperfections. In any future system, we recommend that it is made compulsory for all students to give feedback on all courses they have taken.

While there is some evidence of internationalisation of teaching staff, a priority for financial support from the University is the arranging of more guest teaching by eminent foreign visiting academics. This will seriously enhance student experience and transferrable skills.

Younger, early career staff are a particular credit to the institution. Senior managers should take steps to ensure that those completing PhDs in particular are given sustainable and manageable teaching loads, and teaching loads are organised such that they are not working to the detriment of PhD completion of career development.

There is a widespread feeling among staff members that senior managers in the University need to take the social sciences more seriously vis-à-vis other subject areas. Staff morale in this regard needs to be addressed constructively by senior management.

1.3. Strengths and areas for improvement of study programmes by assessment areas

1.3.1. Government and Politics (BA)

Study programme and study programme development

Comments

The study programme has undergone changes and the trend is to reduce the number of courses and to integrate these into bigger courses with the goal of increasing interdisciplinarity, by offering a more comprehensive picture to students. Special attention is being given to initiatives to make curricula more attractive and innovative.

The development of curricula has benefited from the usage of a structured feedback system, and several examples were provided both by lecturers and students on the accommodation of students' expectations into the study programme.

The defining feature of the study programme is its flexibility. A lot of responsibility is left to the student to plan their own studies – more or less, they can organize their own programme – and there is a sense that students might get lost in the process. Counselling is available, but seems to lack a structured approach. Moreover, several courses have basic and introductory learning objectives, and in terms of progression from introductory courses to more advanced courses, the flexibility can cause problems.

The programme is quite well balanced, with a good combination of general perspectives and specialization/more focused courses. There are introductory compulsory courses, specialization courses and an extensive number of electives.

The programme also offers a choice of courses in English, including compulsory ones, and this prepares students for English language MA studies.

It is possible for students to include a semester abroad, but this presumes good planning, especially in relation to being able to take compulsory courses for timely graduation.

In many ways, the programme offers many of the features that a regular political science programme does.

While some courses are rather short, most of them cover about 6-8 ECTS. Overall, we find this programme provides students with a good foundation for further studies and provides them with many interesting topics.

Strengths

A particularly appealing aspect of the programme is the very solid research methods foundation – followed up by research-focused assignments inside the regular courses. The research and analysis focus is something that permeates the programme and we consider this a very strong point.

In many ways the programme's rich supply of elective courses is a strength. Students have many options to find interesting topics and to develop their own knowledge.

A working feedback system has created a programme more fully corresponding to the needs of students.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

As regards the various courses, they seem to provide suitable topics. However, given the programme's 'Government' aspects, one could question why the managers have dropped the Public Administration element.

We would like the managers to consider the length of the thesis. 6 ECTS may be too short to reach the analytical levels normally expected at the BA level. We strongly advise against introducing a final exam in place of a thesis. This is because the thesis is a hallmark of a degree of this type and really and profoundly tests the intellectual qualities of a student in ways that an exam cannot.

Moreover, the thesis supervision organization (e.g. topic choice guidance / design choices) might be strengthened, perhaps by introducing a special Thesis Introduction course. However, students' draft thesis topic choices are already dealt with in a formal way, so perhaps it is just a matter of clarifying the current procedures rather than introducing a new course.

The programme managers might want to consider some kind of more structured guidance and counselling - i.e. some kind of structural changes to ensure that students reach courses with a somewhat more advanced analytical level towards the end of the programme. There is a clear need for a better organised counselling system for students to plan their studies better, especially in relation to the mobility issue of being able to spend a semester at a foreign university. This system might be also useful for addressing the relatively high dropout rate among students.

Resources

Comments

The programme operates in a recently renovated building in historical part of Tartu, and is well equipped with rooms, equipment, teaching materials, free wireless Internet connections, etc.

Strengths

The situation with resources was evaluated as excellent and as the “best in Europe” by some of the staff and students.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Although the situation was considered excellent, at the teaching staff meeting it was proposed that in the new situation of consolidated programmes the common understanding of budget principles could be elaborated.

In addition, there should be an opportunity for lecturers to finance the engagement of extra-curricular staff and experts for being able to enrich the courses.

Teaching and learning

Comments

The teaching staff and students were all aware of the general direction taken by the administration towards more student-centred, interactive and practical approaches in teaching and learning activities. This transformation towards new teaching methods seems to be generally well supported by encouragement and training support for the teaching staff. Almost all lecturers had participated in relevant courses to allow them acquire the necessary skills, especially junior staff, as teaching methods are already included into their PhD programme. Starting from the year 2020, the necessary PhD qualification will become a requirement for applying to the teaching position.

The teaching staff tries to make sure that necessary theoretical knowledge is balanced with the ability of the students to apply this knowledge in practice. Obviously in this transitional phase the level of success is too early to evaluate, but at least the conscious attempt by all sides is clearly visible.

The interviewed students confirmed this finding, and were generally satisfied with the development and responsiveness of the teaching staff to their needs. As the feedback system is well in place, we were told that this information is also used in developing the content of the lectures.

The curriculum is very rich in elective courses, which enables students to choose within a wide selection of topics in developing their own curricula.

The internship is voluntary and the department does not offer extra support for the students to ensure good internship opportunities. For example, it was mentioned by students that several Ministries have cancelled taking in willing students.

Strengths

The existing system of feedback is definitely a strength, and operates in a responsive way to accommodate the needs and recommendations of students.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The transformation to engage new teaching methods could be further supported by offering continuous support and encouragement by senior managers.

The department may also consider offering their support to students in their search to find good internship positions, by negotiating with potential institutions the necessary framework agreements.

Teaching staff

Comments

The teaching staff is of a high quality, are favourable to self-development and keep open communication lines with students. They appear to know well the needs and concerns of their students, due to the properly functioning system of feedback.

The teaching workload is not too high, but at the same time high enough for making it difficult for staff to find sufficient time for increasing the share of research in their overall activities. This would be useful in order to lay the ground for the enhanced capacity to apply successfully for extra funding from competition-based national or foreign sources.

Strengths

Teaching staff are well qualified and student satisfaction with teaching quality is high.

Staff are motivated to provide good education to students, and are ready for this purpose to engage in self-development opportunities offered by the department and university. The majority of the teaching staff have taken courses designed to improve their teaching skills.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

It would be strategically important to create the conditions and motivation for increasing the capacity to apply for more research funding from national and foreign sources.

Students

Comments

In general, students seem to be very happy with the programme and with their teachers. They are happy about the frequent discussion seminars and about the overall analytical level of the teaching they receive.

Strengths

The students come across as dedicated and committed. Very often they engage in full-time work outside their studies. While from one point of view this may be problematic in terms of workload, time-planning and so on, the students have a lot of experience already in this regard and this is a distinct strength.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The students' major concern has to do with the programme's great flexibility, which can create a sense of bewilderment. The programme offers counselling – which the students are positive about – but this is mostly up to the students to initiate. While student initiative is natural to expect, at the same time we suggest that the programme managers think through the counselling system to make it more structured, so as to avoid confusion, avoiding unsuitable elective choices by students, and thus to reduce drop-out rates.

Moreover, when students take courses in another department, e.g. economics, they sometimes encounter different rules and procedures and will sometimes feel rather lost. Programme managers should be aware of this, and perhaps try to harmonise procedures and rules with other subjects/departments/institutes.

The thesis supervision organization (e.g. topic choice guidance / design choices) might be strengthened, perhaps by introducing a special Thesis Introduction course. There is an element of students feeling lost in this process. However, students' draft thesis topic choices are already dealt with in a formal way, so perhaps it is just a matter of clarifying the current procedures rather than introducing a new course.

1.3.2. Sociology, Social Work and Social Policy (BA)

Study programme and study programme development

Comments

This is a very wide-ranging degree programme, encompassing three broad subject areas. It has been formed from a merger of previously separate degree programmes. The merger has brought advantages (in terms of variety of courses offered) and disadvantages (involving a lack of overall coherence, especially in terms of student perceptions and experiences).

Strengths

The wide choice of courses students may take.

The potential for students to cross-fertilize knowledges from different subject areas, and to build their own discipline-based curricula.

Strong connections between staff and employers, especially those offering internships.

Quantitative methods training was highly praised by students and employers.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The actual choices made by students tended towards them staying within one of the three subject areas covered by the programme. The merger of previous programmes seems not to have led to much loss of discipline-based identities among students. Students seem to exist within three, still relatively self-enclosed silos. There is not much sense of a common student identity across the whole programme. Steps should be taken *either* to break down barriers between disciplines more, *or* to have three separately named, but interpenetrating, degree programmes.

Students reported some confusion about the variety of courses on offer.

It may be preferable to have three separate named BA programmes – in Sociology, Social Work, and Social Policy respectively – in order to reduce potential confusion and to give both students and employers a clearer idea of what a particular programme of study entails and which courses should definitely be taken within it, both for purposes of employability, of appropriate professional accreditation (particularly important for students of social work), and of having the necessary pre-requisite courses to be able to move on to Master's level studies in the chosen subject area without any problems.

If the current multi-discipline programme is retained, it may be better to give it a more generic title – e.g. BA Social Sciences.

As there is some confusion among employers offering internships and other assistance (e.g. guest lectures) about what is expected from them, and what they can expect from students, and as arrangements are currently rather patchy and ad hoc in nature, a more formal set of procedures should be put in place, outlining clearly what each party is expected to do, which standards they are expected to meet, and how external participation fits into the aims and objectives of the programme of study.

There seems to be no adequate mechanism for ascertaining – in the period before students complete their studies – how many students are taking courses in one of the three major areas the degree covers. This means that programme managers lack information that would allow them to prioritise and de-prioritise different parts of the programme. We recommend that monitoring mechanisms be created to allow programme managers to have access to more up-to-date data about relative shifts in student course choices and priorities.

We do not encourage a general shift away from having an undergraduate thesis as a crucial part of the final year of study, for the thesis is a hallmark of intellectual quality, stretches students to become autonomous learners, thinkers and researchers, and is generally highly valued by employers. However, we do recognise that failure to complete the thesis can be a major reason for drop-outs and failure to complete studies. Therefore we would suggest that *only* for very weak students, or students in extreme circumstances, an end-of-studies

examination replace the thesis – but this option not normally be offered to students who are performing reasonably well in their studies.

A substantial number of courses have relatively small amounts of ECT credits attached to them, making it more confusing for students to navigate through the programme in terms of course choices. A smaller number of courses, with larger amounts of ECT credits attached to them, would be desirable for minimising potential student confusion.

Resources

Comments

Library and online materials are more than adequate for the needs of teaching the programme.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Staff should ensure they keep up-to-date in developments in online learning systems such as Moodle.

More teaching rooms which offer flexibility in arranging the learning space are highly desirable for developing more interactive methods of teaching.

Teaching and learning

Comments

Teaching includes a wide variety of teaching methods, combining lectures, seminars, group discussions, individual research projects, etc. Various interactive teaching methods are used. Attention is paid to developing students' general learning and social skills. Students have opportunities for career counselling. Critical thinking, creativity and innovation are additional target outcomes of studies. Teaching is generally research-based; with the results and experiences of the social research carried out by academics regularly integrated into studies.

In both BA and MA programmes, teaching is research-led. The results and experiences of the social research carried out by lecturers are regularly integrated into teaching.

To improve teaching quality, several teachers have taken courses covering new teaching methods. Lecturers sometimes attend their colleagues' classes, and discuss their experiences of implementing new teaching methods.

Interactive teaching methods are widely used. In the case of interdisciplinary courses, the teaching is carried out by teams.

Strengths

There is a good mixture of research methods training offered.

The combination of more theoretical and more practical studies is generally working well.

Criteria and methods of assessment are generally clearly described.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

There is currently a lack of clarity about the role of student representatives in general, and in staff-student feedback processes in particular.

The BA thesis should be retained, as it is a very important part of the intellectual quality of such a degree. However, ECTS credits should be increased to at least 10, to reflect the fairly substantial amount of work involved in carrying it out successfully. There also needs to be more staff supervision support for students undertaking a BA thesis, in part to ensure greater likelihood of successful completion.

Some students are of the view that some modes of assessment on some courses are too simplistic and "tick box"-like. The programme manager should have an overview of all modes of assessment across the programme and investigate whether such student dissatisfaction is warranted.

Teaching staff

Comments

A large number of staff, with a broad range of expert profiles, teach across this wide-ranging degree programme.

Strengths

There is evidence of high levels of commitment to teaching among staff.

There is wide subject expertise offered from across the three broad subject areas.

Early career staff in particular are highly motivated.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Staff workloads are high and need careful management by senior managers.

Early career teachers require more mentoring and career development opportunities, such as being funded to attend conferences abroad.

There is no senior appointment in the area of Social Work. More senior staff need to be recruited in order to provide intellectual leadership on this side of the programme.

The Social Policy side of the programme lacks a Professor, and so lacks intellectual leadership for developing the programme.

There needs to be more formalization of the mechanisms whereby good practice across courses is shared among staff.

The unit can capitalize more on the enthusiasm of employers and partners to give guest teaching. This is currently organised in an ad hoc and individualised way, but recruiting coherent teams of guest lecturers (e.g. colleagues from different wings of Tartu's local government and social services) would be a good way to make external teaching more coherent and systematic.

The relative absence of guest lecturers from other countries undermines the international quality of teaching provision. The University should support at least one visiting lecturer to the programme each academic year.

Students

Comments

The programme offers a very wide curriculum with the opportunity to study a broad range of social science subjects. That is appreciated by the students. Students were generally satisfied with the programme. They value the possibility to choose from a large number of elective courses.

Some students would like to have three different programmes, one for each area of emphasis, to avoid potential confusion about course choices and building a coherent curriculum (see above).

Students are of the view that teachers pay attention to feed-back if given directly, anonymous feedback does not necessarily have the same effect.

Student international mobility is quite low.

Strengths

Students have a chance to develop their own profiles within the broad range of social science subjects and materials offered.

It is relatively easy for students to arrange internships.

One academic takes a group of students to the Netherlands every year for the purposes of cultivating international professional experience.

There is strong contact between the student body and employers providing internship possibilities.

Students are equipped with skills that are appealing to employers on local and national labour markets.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Students would like to have more training in how to present research results in laypersons' terms, a request supported by the assessment team.

Managers should seek to remove existing obstacles for student international mobility, and to do more to encourage students to take up Erasmus and other opportunities.

Students require more substantial and systematic counselling as regards course choices at the very beginning of their studies, so that the risk of starting on a specialist path (in either sociology or social work or social policy) is not left too late, and that all required and/or important courses for a subject pathway are taken at appropriate points within a student's trajectory and do not have to be taken later on in the study period in a rushed or otherwise problematic way.

A minimum requirement for how many, and which, research methods courses a student on a particular pathway (sociology or social policy or social work) should take, should be worked out and made clear to students at the beginning of each year of their studies.

The system of feedback from students to staff is imperfect, and students are not obliged to give feedback on all courses. We recommend that feedback on courses be more strongly encouraged by staff, and that the University seriously consider making feedback compulsory for students to give on all courses.

1.3.3. Sociology (MA)

Study programme and study programme development

Comments

This is a general MA programme in Sociology, covering a wide range of areas of sociological concern. The general nature of it is positive in various ways, but somewhat less positive in others. Relatively low numbers of students indicate problems of sustaining the programme over the medium-term, but we noted that staff are very alive to the challenges involved and are taking positive steps to deal with matters of student recruitment. It is a very sound programme that eminently deserves to continue over time.

Strengths

The programme has been very recently revamped, highlighting and accentuating more practical training elements.

Since student numbers are decreasing in Estonia overall and the number of students in this programme is relatively low to begin with, there is a pressing need to attract more students. Teaching methods have been revised to address the fact that students are working in full time employment. Courses are arranged during weekends from Friday through Sunday, which means that the teachers have gone to great lengths to accommodate students who are working while studying. The flexibility has made it possible to attract students who would not have signed up otherwise.

The programme enjoys outstandingly good links with local employers and partners, who are engaged, enthusiastic and strong supporters of the programme. This is a very major strength and can be capitalized on in more systematic ways.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The title of the programme – MA in Sociology – is very generic and quite old-fashioned sounding. It may not be helping to recruit students, especially those seeking more tailored and specific programmes of study. Programme managers should consider creating more bespoke programmes – e.g. MA in Media Sociology – while basing these on existing courses taught at MA level, to create a suite of programmes without markedly increasing the number of courses offered or the amount of teaching time required to run them. In this way the MA level of teaching may become more sustainable in terms of increasing student numbers over the medium term. Such an approach to naming programmes may help to extend the new focus initiated by programme managers to recruit new types of students, including those already in professional jobs like museum management.

The appointment of a new programme manager drawn from senior staff is a positive development. We suggest that it may perhaps be useful for a deputy programme manager, drawn from early career staff, to be appointed, to assist the senior staff member in what appears to be ambitious plans for expanding student markets.

There are currently too few meetings among staff to discuss curriculum development, to assess consistency of grading and feedback across courses, and to share good teaching practices, and this should be rectified in the interests of making the core group of teachers into a more cohesive entity.

Resources

Comments

Library and online materials are more than adequate for the needs of teaching the programme.

Strengths

The use of online resources such as Moodle is very strong.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Staff should continue to ensure they keep up-to-date in developments in online learning systems such as Moodle.

Teaching and learning

Comments

Teaching and learning involve a good array of methods of assessment. Learning is very flexible, include weekend teaching and advanced use of online materials. Contemporary e-learning methods are used, including 100% online courses, as are active learning and problem-based methodologies and some interdisciplinary teaching methods.

Strengths

There is a notable strength in the teaching of quantitative methods.

Teaching delivery is very flexible, accommodating the needs of students in full-time employment.

Interactive teaching methods are particularly appreciated by students.

The supervision procedure for Masters theses is well structured.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Students would like to see more courses offered in English, a recommendation that the assessment team supports.

The expertise in quantitative methods should be maintained and extended, especially if it will be affected by staff departures.

There is a rather too mechanical way of collecting feedback and it is not necessary to give feedback for all courses. Feedback is not discussed among teachers. Teachers decide themselves how students' performance is evaluated. Feedback mechanisms from students to staff need to be more systematized in order to be able to work more effectively than is currently the case.

There is a lack of formal mechanisms (including face-to-face meetings) for staff to discuss innovations in teaching methods, assessment procedures and so on – this needs to be remedied.

Some courses are still offered in classical lecture format. While this format is still wholly valid, programme leaders should carefully note levels of student satisfaction/dissatisfaction with this teaching style and take action as necessary.

Some students find the teaching of theory less stimulating and accessible than the teaching on other types of courses. Theory teachers should explore new teaching methods that may engage students more effectively.

There was some evidence of the transition from Masters to PhD studies being felt by some students to be more problematic than it need be; the programme leaders should investigate if this is indeed the case.

Teaching staff

Comments

The programme draws on the expertise of a range of staff, drawn from more experienced and more early career personnel. There is a high level of competence in general.

Strengths

Teaching is strongly research-led. The academic staff have strong international research profiles which support research-led teaching. The funding for research is obtained in both national and international competitive circumstances. Publication records and bibliometric data demonstrate internationally recognized ongoing research. The results of research are regularly integrated into courses. Students are encouraged to participate in academic research projects. The curricula are designed to allow for the dynamic inclusion of research foci into students' study plans, and thus students at MA level increasingly take part in real research projects.

Some teachers are really enthusiastic about teaching in English.

There is excellence in quantitative research methods teaching, praised by both students and employers.

Early career staff in particular seem highly enthusiastic.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

More mentoring should be offered at academic unit level to early career staff, especially those seeking to complete PhDs while teaching.

More international guest lecturers being funded by the University would seriously enhance student experiences and transferrable skills.

More training opportunities should be offered, for staff at all career stages, to improve their pedagogic skills and ensure they remain fresh and up-to-date.

Students

Comments

Numbers of applicants are relatively low, although reasonable in the national context. The chosen candidates are however still strong. It is possible to work full

time and study full time in this programme. Students drop out fairly often. An unfinished thesis is one reason behind dropping out. According to students, the quality of teaching is not fully coherent: there are some less motivated teachers and some very highly motivated ones.

Strengths

Students value the high quality of research methods teaching. They also feel the programme strikes a good balance between quantitative and qualitative methods. Students are engaged in various staff-led research projects and often take their thesis topics from these projects.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The programme managers should improve overall performance of teachers, preventing the presence of any poorly conducted courses as indicated by ongoing student feedback. This is especially needed on more specialist courses, where specialist researchers may lack very extensive teaching experience.

Combined/interdisciplinary courses are sometimes perceived by students to be dominated unhelpfully by one discipline. The programme manager(s) should ensure that teachers take equally into account all students from all disciplinary backgrounds.

The risk of MA Sociology students taking more than a reasonable number of non-sociology courses should be monitored, to ensure the sociological core of the programme is not diluted.

1.3.4. European Union-Russia Studies (MA)

Study programme and study programme development

Comments

The European-Russian Studies MA programme is run in parallel with the European Studies programme by the same team of programme leaders and teachers. It also has a very clear defined mission and target group. The programme seeks to respond to increased interest in the conflicting interaction of Russia and the European Union, as well as to exploit, as was noted in the self-assessment report, 'Estonia's favourable geopolitical location, the country has often been regarded as a bridge between the East and the West'. In that sense the idea to establish a programme with this particular marketing orientation and name was successful. On the basis of the self-assessment report, and on findings from the site visit, it is possible to conclude that the study programme and study programme development of this MA are in general compliance with the relevant standards.

Strengths

The collated information allows us to conclude that the programme in general meets standards which demand the development of study programmes based upon labour market needs.

The programme, which is run in English, attracts international students, and contributes to more general strategy to internationalize social science studies in Estonia.

In some courses students are encouraged to improve their marks by participating in Massive Open Online Courses/MOOCs ("Qualitative Research Methods" at <https://www.coursera.org/course/qualitativemethods>). This is another strong example for the university's outstanding strategy in digitalisation, and should be considered a best practice example for the curriculum development of other study programmes.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The General Module consists of four courses, which cover economic, external relations, ideological and historical aspects of the EU-Russia interaction. However taking into account the aim of the programme to analyse functioning of both these political actors, the panel recommends staff to consider developing courses devoted particularly to Russia. As was confirmed during the interview with students, the programme still could be better balanced in that sense. Since the Russia element is the most important selling point of the programme, it is recommended to make it more substantial element of the curriculum.

The description of learning outcomes to a certain extent could be better synchronized with the titles and description of individual modules. It was not clear enough how and in what way the modules listed in the "Directing module" section (e.g. "Biopolitics, medicine and healthcare", "Policy transfer in action: the case of public engagement", "Ethics and justice in pluralistic world", etc.) meet learning outcomes to achieve the ability to approach European Union- and Russia-related issues. The relevant personnel have assured us that there is in fact no such confusion.

It is obvious that the introduction of those kinds of modules is a consequence of the adopted interdisciplinary approach; however it is recommended to keep modules more closely related to the main study object - i.e. to the EU-Russian interaction. Otherwise it is difficult to avoid feeling that the programme suffers from a certain degree of inconsistency; it needs to become a more coherent whole.

Resources

Comments

Resources (teaching and learning environments, teaching materials, teaching equipment and premises) were adequate for the needs and support the achievement of objectives in the study programme. The level of satisfaction with these aspects was on a high level, both among teachers and students.

The supply of textbooks is mainly sufficient, but to some extent it needs compensation with the mixed use of journal articles. The use of Moodle as an online study environment is comprehensive and creates general levels of satisfaction among users. The international curricula are able to cover direct costs from the tuition fees, research and teaching related projects.

The data presented in the self-assessment report (*Table 12. Curricula costs in 2012-2014; p. 49*) on rapidly changing real costs of curricula during the last four years, including the costs per student, seems questionable and unclear to the team.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

There appears to be some uncertainty regarding the further development of the study programme since the study programme representatives expressed their concern during the site visit over the fact that the budgeting of the programme is prepared on a short-term basis. We have been subsequently reassured by the University that budgeting is in fact currently stable, a situation we hope that the authorities will take steps to ensure will remain the case.

Teaching and learning

Comments

The programme's interdisciplinary approach seems to be working well and there are quite impressive efforts by the organizers and teachers to co-ordinate their activities and to create a common narrative.

Strengths

Although sometimes executed in a slightly superficial manner, the teachers are very creative in making students active and to prevent them from falling behind.

The teachers are truly dedicated and committed.

Students presented a MOOC as their group project which is an exceptionally good practice for innovative teaching and learning, and also an example for virtual mobility.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Consolidating the good ideas inherent in the development seminar is important – currently the implementation might need to be improved in terms of structure and organization. As indicated during the interview with the students, these are now sometimes poorly implemented. We recommend the relevant decision making bodies to take a firm grip regarding the development seminar in order to clarify its structure and organization.

Given the University's overall goal about increasing the number of PhD students, a 30 ECTS thesis would provide a solid foundation in terms of research and analytical skills. We recommend the relevant decision making bodies to extend the Master's thesis to 30 ECTS.

In general the courses and the teaching appear to reach very good analytical levels. However, the relevant learning objectives are not always formulated accordingly. We recommend the relevant decision making bodies to reformulate – and thus safeguard – the relevant learning objectives in keeping with MA level criteria.

Teaching staff

Comments

The teaching staff of the programme is very international and includes lecturers from different European countries and from the United States. There is the possibility that the requirements for Estonian language skills will be modified in future to make it possible to increase the pool of good candidates.

The feedback of students is collected systematically and the panel was assured that the students find teaching quality satisfactory. The level of responsiveness was considered the most important characteristic of the system, and there have been cases, where based on the students' feedback the lectures were modified or teaching staff has been changed.

The university management emphasized that in addition to striving for higher levels of academic excellence, they regard it increasingly important to support developing teaching skills. There will be a requirement for lecturers to participate in teaching skills courses in future, which is strongly supported by the panel.

Teaching staff found their workload and working conditions satisfactory and appear to participate actively in curriculum development. They were also informed about the reasons behind the latest changes in curricula and also possible developments in upcoming years.

The staff communicate actively with each other and share resources to avoid presenting overlapping content.

Strengths

The internationally diverse teaching staff is already in line with the University's strategic goal to increase teaching quality by hiring internationally strong lecturers.

The feedback system seems to be working well and provides an effective communication channel between students and the department.

Teaching staff have gone along with the latest reforms and have taken on-board a more interdisciplinary and student-centred approach to teaching.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The panel had the impression that although feedback is collected, there is still some room for accommodating students' needs or explaining the decisions made in curricula development. Continuous attention in designing courses so that they are useful to students and correspond to the needs of the labour market are recommended.

Acknowledging that the academic staff is a most valuable asset of the university, the human resources management, particularly the career and skills development of teaching staff, would benefit from more systematic attention on behalf of the management staff to attract, keep and motivate the best people available.

There is always room for learning from the best experiences of fellow teachers, so it is worthwhile investing in a working format to discuss and monitor the development of the programme in general, but also to share the observations and good practice of teaching staff among each other.

Students

Comments

The student places are mostly filled with motivated and capable students, and their satisfaction with the content, form and methods is very high. As indicated in the self-assessment report, students very successfully get into jobs in public or educational institutions relevant to their field of study. Through the former European College an alumni database is still running that could be used as an example of good practice for other units and/or study programmes.

As indicated during the interviews with students from the European Union-Russia Studies programme, as well as students from the Baltic Sea Region study programme, there seems to be a lack of English language proficiency with some students.

Strengths

The exceptional performance of some students, as well as the student-teacher interaction, became very clear upon the presentation of the EU-Russia Relations MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) organized by some students with their

teachers' support. The M.A. study programme obviously manages to prepare students very well for research-based lecturing and therefore future careers in higher education.

Based upon students' feedback during interviews, the overall student support as well as extracurricular activities appear to be especially strong with the European Union-Russia Studies programme.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The panel strongly recommends managers to continue to support Estonian students to allow them to spend a significant time during their studies abroad, either doing an internship or during a semester abroad, in order to broaden their European perspective.

1.3.5. European Studies (MA)

Study programme and study programme development

Comments

The European Studies MA programme was developed in order to meet the needs of junior and sometimes senior and higher officials working in the public sector to obtain more knowledge about the European Union and achieve better opportunities for jobs or promotions in various public offices in Estonia and/or a career in EU institutions. The programme has been functioning for a number of years and, according to the self-assessment report, since the educational reforms in 2013, the number of candidates has significantly increased. The interview held with students of the study programme confirmed the existing demand for this kind of the programme and good chances for its future sustainability. On the basis of the elements from the self-assessment report and on findings from the site visit, it is possible to conclude that the study programme and study programme development exhibit general compliance with the required standards.

Strengths

The collected information allows the panel to conclude that the EU study programme in general meets those standards which require the development of study programmes based on labour market needs.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The General Module consists of four courses, which cover legal, external relations, institutional and historical aspects of the European Union. However, taking into account the interdisciplinary nature of the programme, it is

recommended also to have a course on EU economic governance/monetary union.

The description of learning outcomes to a certain extent could be better synchronized with the titles and description of individual modules. It is not clear enough how and in what way the courses listed in the "Directing module" section (e.g. "Biopolitics, medicine and healthcare", "Ideals and myths of leadership and management", "Ethics and justice in pluralistic world", etc.) meet learning outcomes aimed at students achieving the ability to approach European Union-related issues.

It is obvious that the introduction of those kinds of modules is a consequence of the interdisciplinary approach. However, it is recommended to keep modules more closely related to the main study object - i.e. to the European Union. Otherwise it is difficult to avoid the feeling that the programme suffers from a certain degree of inconsistency and needs to become a more coherent whole.

In order to contribute to the more general strategy to internationalize social science studies in Estonia, the panel suggests in future that staff consider the option of the full internationalization of the programme by increasing the amount of English language tuition, perhaps even to the extent of offering the whole programme in English.

Resources

Comments

Resources (teaching and learning environments, teaching materials, teaching equipment and premises) were adequate for teaching needs and support the achievement of objectives in the study programmes. The satisfaction with these aspects was on a high level both among teachers and students. The supply of textbooks is mainly sufficient, but to some extent it needs compensation with the mixed use of academic articles. The use of Moodle as an online study environment is comprehensive and users are satisfied with its use.

The data presented in the self-assessment report (*Table 12. Curricula costs in 2012-2014; p. 49*) on rapidly changing real costs of curricula during the last four years, including the costs per student, seems questionable and unclear to the team.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

There appears to be some uncertainty regarding the further development of the study programme since the study programme representatives expressed their concern during the site visit over the fact that the budgeting of the programme is prepared on a short-term basis.

Teaching and learning

Comments

The programme's interdisciplinary approach seems to be working well, and there are quite impressive efforts by the organizers and teachers to co-ordinate their activities and to create a common narrative surrounding and informing the programme.

Strengths

Although sometimes executed in a slightly superficial manner, the teachers are very creative in making students active learners and preventing them from falling behind.

The teachers are truly dedicated and committed.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The Development Seminar is a distinctly positive feature of the programme in terms of its foundations and underlying idea. However, its structure and organization are not yet satisfactory and need to be improved. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to clarify the structure and organization of the Development Seminar.

Instead of the current Thesis ECTS requirement we believe a 30 ECTS Thesis would be more in keeping with the University's stated goal about increasing the number of PhD students. A 30 ECTS Thesis would help students reach more advanced research and analytical skills. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies extend the Master's thesis to 30 ECTS.

In general the programme's various aspects indicate that teaching is carried out at a very good analytical level. However, the relevant formal learning objectives are sometimes at odds with these levels. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to safeguard all learning objectives by reformulating them in accordance with established MA level criteria.

Teaching staff

Comments

The teaching staff of the programme are very international and include lecturers from different European countries and from the United States. There is the possibility that the requirements for the Estonian language skills will be modified in future to make it possible to increase the pool of good candidates.

The feedback of students is collected systematically and the panel was assured that the students find teaching quality satisfactory. The level of responsiveness was considered the most important characteristic of the system, and there have

been cases, where based on the students' feedback the lectures were modified or teaching staff have been changed.

The university management emphasized that in addition to striving for higher levels of academic excellence, they regard it as increasingly important to support development of teaching skills. There will be a requirement for lecturers to participate in teaching skills courses in future, which is strongly supported by the panel.

Teaching staff themselves found their workload and working conditions satisfactory, and appear to participate actively in the curriculum development. They were also informed about the reasons behind the latest changes in curricula and also possible developments in upcoming years.

The staff communicate actively with each other and share resources to avoid presenting overlapping content.

Strengths

The internationally diverse teaching staff is already in line with the University's strategic goal to increase quality by hiring internationally strong lecturers.

The feedback system seems to be working well, and provides an effective communication channel between students and the department.

Teaching staff have gone along with latest reforms and have taken on-board a more interdisciplinary and student-centred approach to teaching.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The Panel had the impression that although feedback is collected, there is still some room for accommodating students' needs and explaining the decisions made in curricula development. Continuous attention in designing the courses useful to the students and corresponding to the needs of labour market is recommended.

Acknowledging that the academic staff is a most valuable asset of the university, the human resources management, particularly the career and skills development of teaching staff, would benefit from more systematic attention on behalf of the management staff responsible for attracting, keeping and motivating the best people available.

There is always room for learning from the best experiences of fellow teachers, so it is worthwhile to invest in a working format to discuss and monitor the development of the programme in general, and also to share the observations and good practice of teaching staff.

Students

Comments

The student places are filled with highly motivated and capable students, and their satisfaction with the content, form and methods is generally high. As indicated in the self-assessment report, students very successfully get into jobs in public or educational institutions relevant to their field of study. Through the former European College an alumni database is still running that could be used as an example of good practice for other units and/or study programmes.

On this MA programme there were many students who are already working (e.g. for EU fundraising agencies) and therefore could easily fit their work experience to their studies.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

As mentioned above, although they support the general idea, students were not satisfied with the implementation of the development seminar. They expressed their wish for more individual meetings and less group activities, in order to better consider the individual study situations and support thesis development.

As indicated during the meeting with the management of the university, development plans could better support the learning mobility of students in the study programme.

The learning mobility numbers of Estonian students are generally very low at the University of Tartu, and in this programme not one student studied abroad in 2015 (self-assessment report, page 27). The explanation within the self-assessment report (page 26) was to a certain extent disappointing, especially considering the content as well as the objectives of the MA programme in European Studies:

“The MA students are satisfied with the level of teaching and study environment, having therefore no interest in and need for studying abroad or in another university in Estonia. Moreover, Estonian-taught programme is oriented to educate nation-wide specialists, thus mainly concentrating the studies around Estonian cases”.

The panel strongly recommends managers to strengthen further the support for Estonian students to allow them to spend a significant time during their studies abroad, either doing an internship or during a semester abroad, in order to broaden their European perspective. Obligatory mobility windows should therefore also be considered as an option for Estonian language MA programmes. We do however recognise the difficulties of encouraging students in full-time employment to spend time abroad.

1.3.6. Baltic Sea Region Studies (MA)

Study programme and study programme development

Comments

The Master's programme in Baltic Studies was established in 2005. The focus of the programme was three Baltic States – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Later (in 2010) it was reorganized into a wider Baltic Sea Region Studies programme. This step definitely should be assessed as a positive development. The new programme was able to respond to further integration among the Baltic Sea Region countries and the rise of the region's economic and political importance in the European Union and in the world. Its main objective was to give students the competence required for working in various institutions (both private and public) of the Baltic Sea Region and related countries.

However, due to a number of reasons well described in the self-assessment report, a decision was taken to further transform the programme. From academic year 2016-2017, on the basis of the old Baltic Sea Region Studies programme, a new curriculum, the Central and Eastern European, Russian and Eurasian Studies MA programme (CEERES), will be adopted. As the self-assessment report noted "the Baltic Sea Region Studies curriculum as such will be closed and the content will be transferred into a separate module under the International Relations and Regional Studies curriculum with the goal to train experts in international relations with the clear focus on the Baltic Sea Region".

Despite that analysis and an interview with programme manager, faculty and students persuaded the evaluation panel that the programme in general meets the standards of a high quality study programme. The assessment team understands and conditionally supports the decision as to the further development of the programme in the direction of the CEERES curriculum.

The assessment panel does express some regret that such an international, clearly interdisciplinary and relatively niche programme, focusing uniquely on the Baltic Sea Region, as well as the collected know-how involved in its running, will be disappearing. On the other hand, the assessment team hopes that the recommendations indicated below may have some use within the context of the new CEERES study programme.

Resources

Comments

Library and online materials are more than adequate for the needs of teaching the programme.

Strengths

The use of online resources is strong.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Staff should continue to ensure they keep up-to-date in developments in online learning systems such as Moodle.

Teaching and learning

Comments

Based on elements from the self-evaluation report and on findings from the on-site visit, the assessment team discovered that the teaching and learning within the context of this programme complies with required standards.

Strengths

Teaching methods and tools used in teaching are modern, effective and support the development of a digital teaching culture. The process of teaching and learning was flexible and facilitated the achievement of planned learning outcomes.

The programme manager adopted an individually-focussed approach that enabled students to consult which courses are the most suitable for them to take. Another very positive aspect was the practice that the MA thesis writing process has been developed into three semester seminars. That facilitated the students' research process. This approach encouraged students to choose their thesis topic earlier (already during the second semester) and enabled them to make their choices in elective modules more useful for the thesis writing.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The assessment panel suggest increasing the profile of the programme's learning outcomes among students. As was indicated in the text of the self-assessment report, and as was confirmed during the interview with students and alumni in general, students pay too little attention to learning outcomes and so their assessment of the course based on learning outcomes is not very well understood.

Teaching staff

Comments

Based on the self-assessment report and on findings from the on-site visit, the assessment panel can confirm that there are faculty members with adequate qualifications to achieve the objectives and planned learning outcomes of the

study programme, and to ensure quality and sustainability of the teaching and learning.

Strengths

The programme is taught by experts in the field.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

As was revealed during the interview with the faculty members, they basically rely on the programme manager but do not feel very closely attached to the programme. Therefore it is recommended to pay attention as to how to increase the motivation of the teaching staff to be more committed to the learning outcomes and the study programme in general.

Students

Comments

Students appear to be very satisfied with the general support offered to them throughout their studies.

Strengths

The feedback system is already working well, and the newly introduced constant feedback system, including midterm evaluations, is highly appreciated.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The number of Estonian students is very low. During the interview students suggested that in order to get more Estonians into the programme, there should be a better branding and/or marketing for the future study programme with explicit support offered to this target group. More focused scholarships could also be helpful.

As indicated during the interview with students of the study programme, in some seminars the level of prior knowledge seems to differ a lot, especially due to the integration of Erasmus Bachelor students in the seminars. This appears to be unsatisfactory for Master students. We therefore suggest managers agree on specific prerequisites for Master's level courses and transparently communicate the intended learning outcomes in order to ensure a curriculum appropriate to the Master's level.

As indicated during the interview with international students, they are not involved enough in extra-curricular activities, especially due to a lack of information in English, and this should be rectified by the appropriate authorities.

2. Assessment report of SPG at Tallinn University

2.1. Introduction

Study programmes to be assessed	Traffic Safety (ProfHE) Liberal Arts in Social Sciences (BA) Social Sciences (BA) Sociology (BA) Sociology (MA) Political Science (MA) Politics and Government (MA) Government and Administration (MA) International Relations (MA) Urban Governance (MA)
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Tallinn University is a public university that has evolved as a result of a number of mergers between several research and development institutions in Tallinn. As a result, the university represents the largest merger project ever undertaken in Estonian higher education and has been known as Tallinn University since 18 March 2005.

The University is active in six fields: Education, Social Sciences, Humanities, Arts, Health Sciences and Natural Sciences. The total number of students in 2014 was 9485 and the number of study programmes open for admission 136 (SER p. 5)

In 2014 a structural reform was initiated with the aim to integrate research and teaching in order to improve the quality of studies and the calibre of research; to simplify management and reduce administrative levels; and to ensure the financial sustainability of the academic units. The former institutes were re-organized into six Schools: Baltic Film, Media, Arts and Communication School, School of Humanities, School of Digital Technologies, School of Educational Sciences, School of Natural Sciences and Health, School of Governance, Law and Society; and two colleges (Haapsalu College and Rakvere College).

The study programmes that were assessed belong to two different Schools: School of Humanities, and School of Governance, law and Society. The programme of professional higher education (Traffic Safety) is taught at Haapsalu College.

Statistical Data of the Study Programme Group

Number of current students from 2011-2015 in the

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Governance and Administration	100	66	60	51	53
International Relations	37	45	52	59	59
Liberal Arts	-	23	38	36	36
Political Sciences	27	25	25	27	27
Politics and Governance	458	389	374	290	298
Social Sciences	66	81	73	62	63
Sociology, BA	138	135	120	100	102
Sociology, MA	47	43	35	27	27
Traffic Safety	56	53	55	57	63
Urban Studies	23	19	23	23	23

Source: Self-Assessment Report of TLU

Number of new admitted students from 2011-2015

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Governance and Administration	14	13	13	13	16
International Relations	19	15	28	26	15
Liberal Arts	18	9	18	8	27
Political Sciences	9	8	9	12	15
Politics and Governance	116	86	91	62	43
Social Sciences	35	26	17	17	19
Sociology, BA	32	24	30	25	25
Sociology, MA	11	11	11	7	6
Traffic Safety	19	14	20	20	20
Urban Studies	8	9	15	8	14

Source: Self-Assessment Report of TLU

Number of dropouts from 2011-2015

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Governance and Administration	21	11	15	15	9
International Relations	8	5	13	13	14
Liberal Arts	-	5	6	4	4
Political Sciences	8	8	6	6	6
Politics Governance	63	58	52	88	28
Social Sciences	20	25	21	15	13
Sociology, BA	23	12	25	29	19
Sociology, MA	6	5	6	9	7
Traffic Safety	9	6	5	3	4
Urban Studies	2	6	8	4	2

Source: Self-Assessment Report of TLU

Number of graduates from 2011-2015

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Governance and Administration	12	23	6	7	10
International Relations	5	9	8	9	17
Liberal Arts	-	-	-	6	9
Political Sciences	4	3	3	4	4
Politics and Governance	85	83	54	59	59
Social Sciences	-	5	7	12	10
Sociology, BA	20	12	20	16	10
Sociology, MA	5	10	13	6	6
Traffic Safety	-	22	13	15	9
Urban Studies	1	8	3	4	6

Source: Self-Assessment Report of TLU

2.2. General findings and recommendations at study programme group level

The assessment panel visited both the University of Tallinn campus and Haapsalu College. The panel were in general favourably impressed by the study programme group. We found many elements of good practice.

We encountered many impressive students, at all level of studies. Students seem overall satisfied with the courses they take and the programmes of study more generally.

Programmes are increasingly flexible and attuned to the changing needs of students, including cyclical teaching. A range of teaching methods and forms of assessment is deployed.

We were also struck by the strong connections programmes have with employers and cooperation partners, many of them alumni of social sciences at the University.

We found generally high levels of commitment to teaching among staff members, with some outstanding levels of commitment exhibited by individuals.

Resources and facilities are on the whole sound, and both staff and students seem generally content with them.

The trend towards increasing international diversity, of both staff and the student body, is to be welcomed. A more multi-cultural atmosphere and ethos is clearly developing.

The assessment team's visit to the University came at the point of major processes of institutional reform, which has impacted on staff in various ways. As regards the recent reorganization of staff and programmes into academic Schools, it is not yet clear how this will impact upon curricula and teaching practices.

The timing of our on-site visit raised certain problems, with the team being asked to review several programmes that have very recently been altered, some quite substantially. Sometimes we were given outlines of new curricula on the spot in meetings, which was initially confusing and problematized our role as assessors, for we then had to recast our opinions of programmes and their functioning immediately in light of newly received information.

Once initial confusion had been diminished, it was generally the case that the new curricula made sense and had been designed to deal with problems that had been encountered in the previous versions of particular programmes. More generally, it became clear to us that the main principles underpinning curriculum reform – at either School or University levels – included a drive to offer more courses in English and to increase the practice-oriented aspects of courses and programmes. Both of these orientations seem sensible.

Obviously any institutional reform will bring challenges, including in terms of communication between different layers of the academic structure. We found that at the moment communication between different levels of staff was imperfect, with those lower in the hierarchy often not fully aware of the nature of changes to curricula and programmes that had been initiated by those higher up. As the new School system takes root and stabilizes, care should be taken to foster more effective channels of communication between different types of staff, such that decision-making takes on a less one-way and top-down character.

A further inconsistency which needs some attention is that we found levels of support and guidance for students varied quite a lot between different programmes. Support for students was often too dependent on the personal initiative of particular members of staff. A more systematized approach to student support across the whole School is recommended, to prevent too much variance in practice.

The University-level process of feedback from students to staff was a frequent source of complaint from both groups, and is clearly an area for urgent improvement. We note that senior staff have indicated that steps have already been taken in this direction. At School level, we found that in-course and in-programme feedback mechanisms were variable. Again, this is an area that needs a more consistent set of School-level policies and procedures. Some students believe that the feedback system does not work, so School-level managers should instantiate School-wide policies to allow feedback mechanisms really to function effectively, and so winning student trust in the system.

We found good examples of feedback on coursework from staff to students. However, the amount and quality of feedback varied considerably across courses

and programmes. Steps should be taken at School-level to ensure and monitor consistency of feedback across the board.

A general problem is that the staff salaries are insufficiently competitive in the labour market. We recommend that the relevant decision-making bodies assess whether salaries can be increased.

Staff workloads are clearly a challenging area, given the funding and policy regime in Estonian HE and its effects on staff salaries and contracts. Workloads seem not as evenly spread as they could and should be, and we urge School-level managers to monitor the equitability of teaching loads closely in future. This is especially so in the case of early career researchers, who must be given sufficient space to complete PhDs and to engage in effective career development opportunities and not become overloaded with teaching duties. An over-reliance on using PhD student teachers to take courses and lead programmes is very much a path to be avoided.

The physical infrastructure in which teaching takes place is sound. Online resources for learning are generally good, but access to some academic journals seems limited according to students. There has been a problem with off-campus licenses to use statistical software packages, limiting statistical and quantitative research methods training, especially in terms of flexible learning and homework exercises.

We noted that the University's continuing professional development opportunities are perceived by many staff to be too heavily concentrated in Estonian language only; more English language training would be a distinct advantage for the internationalization of staff.

In a related vein, we discerned that Student Council information was still mostly in Estonian only, which contradicted the trend towards the increasing internationalization of the student body and learning environment. Likewise, most centralized, University-level support services seem to be in Estonian, meaning extra support for international students has had to be given at School-level. We urge the University to ensure this situation is rectified.

The drive to create more courses in English across the board of programmes is beneficial in various ways. But the assessment team urge School-level and programme managers to ensure that this trend is not to the detriment of the amount and quality of courses offered to students taking Estonian language degree pathways.

2.3. Strengths and areas for improvement of study programmes by assessment areas

2.3.1. Traffic Safety (ProfHE)

Study programme and study programme development

Comments

There is a regional rationale for the College to be situated in Haapsalu with the purpose to avoid outflow of people to larger cities. However, there are good reasons for this arrangement.

Based on the self-assessment report, interviews with the Director, Programme Manager, teachers, students/alumni and employer representatives, the panel would like to make the following comments.

The relationship between the College and the local community is close to being symbiotic (a term used by several interviewees). While on the one hand this relationship is fruitful, in the sense that the College receives support and students are encouraged to choose topics relevant to the local community (and sometimes even benefit from local supervision help), on the other hand the local focus can lead to a slightly myopic analytical approach. To illustrate: often thesis topics apply a general perspective to a local issue, e.g. the placing of a local zebra crossing. An alternative and less short-sighted – but less frequent – approach might have been to compare local zebra crossings in order to draw more generalizable conclusions.

The College is currently contemplating some kind of future MA option – preferably at the Tallinn University Campus in Tallinn. How specialized this should be is yet to be determined, but talks have begun with the Department of Psychology for some kind of cooperation. We support this development.

Strengths

There is some distinct positive synergy established between the College's four programmes (IT/Health/Industrial Design/Traffic safety) - e.g. there has been cooperation with the IT section to develop 3D models suitable for traffic safety purposes; there have also been some cooperation between traffic safety and design in terms of how to design street lamp prototypes. Traffic safety as such forms an essential part of the College and appears to be strongly supported.

A very well developed and quite extensive cooperation programme is established with a Norwegian University college (staff visits; student visits).

There is a systematic relationship between the local community, employer organisations and the College.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

While the programme manages creatively to apply essential analytical approaches even when a course's main focus is practical, and while the programme provides a number of traditional academic courses and research methods, it is important to stress that there are differences between this sort of professional HE programme compared to a regular BA programme. In terms of solidly academic underpinning and research methods, the programme is a little weak – but we would like to add that we highly appreciate that the programme includes research methods courses and a final thesis (rather than a final set exam). This weakness is in no way alarming, but students who plan to move on to a regular social sciences MA programme might find it challenging to catch up. We recommend the relevant-decision making bodies to consider whether the traditional academic/analytical elements need to be strengthened.

Resources

Comments

If the building is in need of some refurbishment, the premises are very functional and up-to-date. Students and staff have full access to Tallinn University's library services, including online services. There is a nearby training track with slippery road sections and other relevant features.

Strengths

Particular care has been taken to allocate resources to develop systems and accommodate the needs of distance learners, including seminar rooms and up-to-date computer classes. The on-line learning platform functions well for the students.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Statistical software licences are lacking – something that was pointed out during the interviews. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to provide the students and staff with relevant licences to be able to use statistical software (SPSS) from distant locations.

Some students would like the College to provide cars for the purposes of practical teaching and learning, and this is underlined in the self-assessment report. However, there are a number of practical problems concerning this, regarding where the cars would be based (Haapsalu or Tallinn, where some of the teaching is carried out). Whenever a student does not own their own car, the College has provided cars in an informal and non-bureaucratic manner. We recommend the

relevant decision-making bodies assess whether any further measures are necessary or not.

Teaching and learning

Comments

We have a positive impression of the efforts made by teachers and managers to apply analytical approaches on practical skills elements /seminars; debates; comparisons; journal articles; research methods/an effort to set local cases in a comparative perspective. This is all reflected in the theses. Some students have problems in navigating the programme.

Strengths

Teachers systematically apply progressive teaching methods where interaction and group work are emphasized.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Through the interviews we found that there is a need to improve student counselling at the beginning of the programme. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies consider ways by which to improve student counselling.

Teaching staff

Comments

The teachers are dedicated and very open to pedagogical training and establishing amicable relations with the students. They express the importance of teaching being informed by research. However, apart from drivers' teacher training, there is no clear connection between research and teaching.

Strengths

There is a well-developed system of annual pedagogical teacher training, e.g. with the help of a local school. This system appears to be very established and appreciated and was emphasised during the staff interviews. However, there may be issues with this system (please refer to 'areas for improvement' above).

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Although teachers holding a PhD are used to some extent, they do not form a clearly visible part of the College and the programme. Currently roughly 70-80 % of the teaching is carried out by local teachers (some of these holding a BA or an MA), while about 20-30 % of teaching is done by other lecturers, some of whom

hold a PhD. We recommend the relevant decision-making body to consider increasing the teacher PhD element, e.g. by carefully planning for guest lectureship agreements.

Few of the local teachers are active researchers. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to creative incentives for teachers to be active as researchers as well as teachers.

While pedagogical teacher training is a very appealing systematic part of the College's approach to teaching, it is not entirely clear whether school pedagogy for minors is applicable for university teaching. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to consider introducing teacher training pedagogy specially designed for university teaching.

Students

Comments

Through the interviews it is clear that the students have a genuine academic interest, especially as regards studying psychology and pedagogy. Students also express an interest in continuing their academic studies at the Master's level.

There appears to be a good and relaxed relationship between staff and students. The College takes good care of its students. The benefit of a small-size unit is that every student is given a lot of attention.

The local attachment can be an asset in terms of a sense of belonging. However, student mobility is very low. Only short visits to Norway are arranged.

Although Tallinn University has dropped the compulsory student feedback system, Haapsalu still applies it on a voluntary basis (every semester).

Strengths

The programme's target group is working age adults. Students are very appreciative of what they feel is a unique curriculum and they also appreciate the opportunities offered regarding distance learning.

There is a very amicable and in many ways fruitful relationship between the College and the surrounding community. The students can benefit from this, e.g. they can collaborate with Haapsalu city authorities in planning the city's traffic safety measures.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Student mobility is very low. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies remove as much as possible barriers to student mobility.

2.3.2. Liberal Arts in Social Sciences (BA)

Study programme and study programme development

Comments

This is a wide-ranging programme which covers many areas of the social sciences. Students may create their own curricula, according to pre-existing or emerging needs and interests. It is aimed at international students, with teaching in English.

The programme supersedes the BA Social Sciences degree. The assessment team were presented with a new curriculum outline during the on-site visit. It was initially challenging to work out how the programme had been altered from the previous version. However, it became clear that the absolute number of courses had been reduced and more elements had become mandatory. The assessment team believes these to be positive developments. The programme seems to be in a constant state of development, so it is difficult for us to assess precisely in which direction it is moving.

Strengths

The programme attracts some excellent, highly committed and well prepared students, especially international ones.

The fact that courses are taught in English is very good.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The energy that the current programme leader has brought to the role is commendable. The interviews revealed that there is no set job description outlining the parameters of the programme leader role, what it rightly involves and which tasks should be done by other people. The assessment team recommends that there is a need for a clear job description to make the role sustainable when a new person takes it over, and to ensure that tasks are fairly divided up and not overly concentrated on one individual. Oversight tasks for such a programme are large and cannot be handled by one person only. A committee, led by the programme leader, should be established to allow for all oversight tasks to be properly and sustainably carried out.

It is difficult for students to specialise in a given discipline once they have decided what area(s) they wish to specialise in. Programme managers need to consider more how to reconcile the broadness of the programme with potential student demand for specialisation.

Progression from this BA to MA level studies is problematic, as students may have inadvertently not taken enough courses to be qualified to enter an MA in a

given subject area. More extensive course choice counselling is required to counteract this problem.

While there are potentially good links with partner organisations to be made as regards internships and other opportunities for students, current links are diffuse and unsystematic. More needs to be done to connect with partners.

According to the self-assessment report, the programme theoretically involves very many courses but at the pragmatic level 'some courses have been forced to be taught as literature seminars or book exams even though the subject matter would require classes. This issue has been noted by the students as the programme's weakest point and will be fixed soon as other social science programmes in English will be open that will provide courses for various modules'. We strongly recommend that the School and University take steps to ensure that courses are not missing from the curriculum from year to year.

Resources

Comments

Tallinn University is located in spacious and mostly renovated, or recently built, very good premises for all teaching and meeting purposes. In terms of literature access, the online library resources are excellent. There may be some minor issues concerning the availability of hard copies from the library but no major concerns. There is fast and free wireless internet available throughout the premises.

Strengths

The programme has dedicated management and support staff with excellent command of English and good contact with the students.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

More resources are needed to guarantee a systematic level of student counselling.

More resources are required to facilitate students with sufficient options for internships.

While online resources are excellent, hard copy literature is less available. We recommend the relevant decision making bodies to consider increasing the availability of hard copy books.

Teaching and learning

Comments

Given the diversity of the programme, and the multiple courses on offer, there is a very wide range of teaching methods used across the whole programme.

Strengths

The number of options open to students is very large.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Some students are not happy with assessment methods on some courses. The programme manager should create a small committee to monitor student feedback on such matters and take action as required.

There seems to be insufficient information, both for staff and students, about assessment methods and criteria across all courses. Because teachers from different subject areas and disciplines use different assessment methods, sometimes students have had difficulties in understanding and complying with them. Staff should be more proactive in making course requirements more transparent, and communicating these requirements to students. There needs to be systematic consideration by programme leaders of the range of assessments students may have to deal with.

The programme managers should make course requirements and assessment criteria more transparent to students, and generally improve communication to students about what the programme involves and how to make the most of its multiple opportunities.

Teaching staff

Comments

A broad range of teachers from many disciplines is involved in the programme.

Strengths

The assessment team found evidence of lively and interesting teaching methods among staff, and an awareness of the needs of students on this programme in comparison to students taking more specialist curricula.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Given the multiplicity of different staff from various disciplines, the programme manager should ensure that at least those staff teaching courses with substantial numbers of students from this programme on them, should be more familiar with the aims, objectives and structure of the programme as a whole, as this was a gap identified among those teaching staff who were interviewed.

Staff seem unaware of who teaches on the programme and there seems to be little communication among them. The programme managers should reflect on how to improve communication across staff members, including in terms of sharing best practice for students taking this programme. One possibility is that representatives from different Schools meet at least once a year to discuss the challenges set by the programme.

Some members of staff reported not being involved in creating exam questions for their subject areas. A tighter system for gaining staff input into exam question setting must be adopted.

Students

Comments

There is a clear demand for this type of programme, where students can pick and choose multiple courses from various social science curricula and develop their interests in some of them, in order to deepen their knowledge of specific areas while taking a broad suite of courses from different disciplines. Candidates are interviewed by trained interviewers to ensure that admitted students have the necessary skills and motivation to complete the programme.

Interviews with students revealed that feedback mechanisms from students to staff were imperfect.

Students have multicultural backgrounds and only very few speak Estonian, which makes it difficult to find places for internships.

Strengths

There is a growing number of social science courses conducted in English.

Competence in English among most students is very high, appropriate for a programme taught in English.

Students seem to think that there are currently more than enough option courses for them to choose from.

The assessment panel encountered some excellent, highly motivated and well organised students and graduates.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

There needs to be tighter regulation of student to staff feedback mechanisms in general. Given the diversity of courses and teachers on the programme, more thought needs to be put into how feedback on a particular course, coming from students taking this programme, is dealt with and acted on.

Given the highly international nature of the programme and the student body, the relative lack of international mobility among students seems like an under-

used opportunity and more should be done to encourage take-up of Erasmus and similar opportunities.

See the point about more systematic counselling being required as regards course choices.

2.3.3. Social Sciences (BA)

Study programme and study programme development

Comments

The programme has now been discontinued. The assessment team will only make brief comments.

Strengths

The large number of courses and subjects that students could choose from.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The potential problem of too many optional courses, leading to lack of coherence and confusion among students.

Resources

Comments

Tallinn University is located in spacious and mostly renovated, or recently built, and very good premises for all teaching and meeting purposes. In terms of literature access, the online library resources are excellent. There may be some minor issues concerning the availability of hard copies from the library but no major concerns. There is fast and free wireless internet available throughout the premises.

Teaching and learning

Comments

The programme's diversity was both a strength – in terms of student choice – and a weakness – in terms of it being very large, sprawling and difficult to have oversight of.

Teaching staff

Comments

There was a very large number of teaching staff involved in this programme.

Strengths

The programme drew upon a wide range of talents and forms of expertise.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Interviews with students revealed a possibly widespread perception that the quality of teachers and teaching varied very widely across the degree, from very good to poor.

Students

Comments

Students wishing to take general studies, rather than specialist ones, took this degree.

Strengths

Interviews with students pointed to broad satisfaction with the high level of course choice.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Interviews with students revealed some student dissatisfaction with allegedly inappropriate modes of assessment on a minority of courses and inflexibility of a minority of teaching staff in that regard.

2.3.4. Sociology (BA); Sociology (MA)

Study programme and study programme development

Comments

There has been some (problematic) overlap between the BA and MA programmes in terms of courses being taken by students at both levels. This now seems to have been resolved.

Strengths

A committed group of teachers is producing well-informed graduates who often go into forms of employment directly related to their studies in Sociology.

There is cooperation between programme managers and teachers on the one side, and institutions and professionals outside the university on the other.

Teaching is research-led, especially at MA level, and there is efficient integration of research and teaching. This leads to various positive results - e.g. strong Masters theses.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The assessment team welcomes moves to end the overlap between BA level and MA level courses, as the robustness of MA level teaching is undermined by such an overlap. Programme managers should ensure that no courses are routinely taken by both BA and MA students. (This would not prevent MA students auditing BA level courses on an ad hoc basis if they wish to develop knowledge in a given area which is taught at BA level).

Progression from BA to MA level studies was not quite clear. More thought should be given by programme managers as to how to ensure clearer and smoother progress between the two levels, avoiding unnecessary repetition of course contents but involving a clear step up in terms of intellectual challenge for students as they move to the higher level.

Resources

Comments

Tallinn University is located in spacious and mostly renovated, or recently built, very good premises for all teaching and meeting purposes. In terms of literature access, the online library resources are excellent. There may be some minor issues concerning the availability of hard copies from the library but no major concerns. There is fast and free wireless internet available throughout the premises.

Strengths

The infrastructure is close to excellent for the support of higher education study processes.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

While online resources are excellent, hard copy literature is less available. We recommend the relevant decision making bodies to consider increasing the availability of hard copy books.

The University is striving to become more international, which makes it important to develop an English speaking environment. We recommend the relevant

decision making bodies to safeguard that all relevant information regarding signs, documents etc. is available in English and that all relevant support staff are English speaking.

There is no University licence to use statistical or qualitative analysis programmes outside the campus. Access to computer classes for students is limited. Both issues should be resolved.

More flexible classrooms and areas for discussion and informal meetings are highly desirable.

Teaching and learning

Comments

Teaching and learning practices were found to be in general of a high standard, and well thought through.

There is a compulsory practical work course (4 ECTS). There is an appointed practice coordinator who helps to find practice places in external organizations, and offers counselling both for the students and the providers of practice places, in order to ensure the suitability and quality of the practical experience for the aims of the study programme. In 2015, written guidelines for practice assessment for supervisors were composed.

Strengths

Many modern learning and teaching methods are used throughout the programme, including active learning and problem-based methodologies, interdisciplinary teaching, and e-learning.

A wide variety of assessment methods are used. Assessment criteria are clearly described.

The retention of the BA thesis, despite suggestions to remove it from the curriculum because it can impede students completing their studies, is strongly welcomed by the assessment team, as it is a crucial feature of producing autonomous graduates who can carry out research work on their own. Interviews revealed strong support from staff, students, partners and employers for the retention of the thesis.

The BA programme has strong quantitative methods training, valued by students.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Cooperation partners and employers are particularly keen on graduates having well developed quantitative research methods skills. Attention should be given to ensuring that partner and employer needs in this regard are factored into future curriculum planning.

The MA is perceived by students to have less strong quantitative methods components than the BA, and this potential absence should be reflected and acted upon by programme managers.

There is currently a formal agreement that can be signed-up to by thesis supervisors and student supervisees, outlining what the expectations are from each party. While the agreement is an excellent practice, its being purely voluntary undermines a systematic use of it across all teaching staff, which in turn leads to inconsistency and a lack of a guarantee that all students are treated equally in terms of amount and quality of supervision. The assessment team recommends that it become compulsory for all thesis supervision at both BA and MA levels.

The expectations as to what a BA thesis involves (amount of time involved, level of attainment expected, etc.) seemed unclear to some BA students. The expectations should be communicated more clearly to students.

While staff members seem keen to share amongst each other examples of good practice and pedagogic innovation, there are too few opportunities to do so. We recommend that teachers of each programme meet at least once a year to focus on positive developments, actual and potential, which would improve the quality of the programmes and of student experience on them.

MA students indicated that, on some courses, only grades were given and no qualitative feedback was offered. As the latter is crucial for MA students' intellectual development, and as student numbers are relatively low, there should be qualitative feedback offered on all MA level assessed work, and this should be sufficient in quality and quantity for students to make good use of it.

An absence of qualitative feedback on many BA courses was noted by students. Whether such feedback is offered seems to depend too much on the initiative of individual teachers. There needs to be a much more systematic policy on how much qualitative feedback is given to students across all BA courses.

MA students seemed unaware that they are allowed to choose some courses from outside Sociology and/or the School. Student counselling at the start of the academic year for MA students should emphasise these opportunities more, and should more generally be strengthened so that students are facilitated in choosing courses best suited to their needs and emerging interests.

Teaching staff

Comments

The assessment team found that teaching staff are well qualified and generally highly committed to teaching. This is despite the general problem, endemic to Estonian HE, that teaching is carried out by researchers who must juggle multiple other commitments.

Strengths

The involvement of students on staff research projects has been a positive feature of the programme.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

There is something of an imbalance in the teaching staff, with a relatively high number of early career staff who are still studying for PhDs.

The assessment team encourages senior managers to recognise – and to act upon the recognition – that the viability of the programme depends on the career development of early career staff, which in turn means that the programme becomes more sustainable in that it is taught by more experienced and contractually secure staff members.

Employers and cooperation partners would welcome more opportunities to discuss their needs with academic staff and programme leaders. This would allow for a more systematic integration of the programme with external users, a development that the assessment team encourages.

Career development plans for early career people seemed unclear. Support for early career staff, especially in terms of career development, is currently patchy. We recommend that system of mentors, made up of senior staff, be introduced, with the aim of creating more satisfactory guidance, in both career development and augmenting teaching skills terms, for early career people, especially but not only for those seeking to complete PhDs while undertaking teaching duties. It is also important for early career development to support staff completing PhDs with some funding to attend international conferences and other events.

The assessment team found some uncertainty among staff, especially more junior ones, of how the workload model functions. Senior managers should communicate the nature of the workload model more thoroughly, and should ensure a more equitable division of teaching tasks than seems currently to be the case.

To make the programme more international in nature, we strongly encourage senior managers to support and facilitate visits by guest lecturers, at the least one per academic year, but more would be much preferable.

Students

Comments

Students are generally satisfied with the programme. They find that teachers and supervisors do their jobs well.

Due to the recent structural reforms, there has been staff changes and the students do not always know where to find counselling.

Students are also unclear about thesis requirements and have sometimes difficulties in finding supervisors.

Student international mobility is low, due to reasons familiar throughout Estonian HE, such as family commitments and studying while in full-time employment.

Strengths

Students value the high quality of research methods teaching in the programme.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Improve access to, and quality of, student counselling.

Make thesis requirements more transparent, and communicate these requirements to students more effectively.

Make the agreement on thesis supervision compulsory.

If an MA thesis is presented in the form of a scientific article, allow that the article be *submitted* to a journal, rather than is currently the case that it must be *accepted* by a journal.

There should be closer and more careful scrutiny by programme managers of the suitability (or otherwise) of organizations which can offer student internships. We found evidence among students of worries that some organizations may be unsuitable, but that there was little or no checking of their suitability by academic or administrative staff.

There was little evidence of the role of the Student Council in assessing and feeding back on courses. We recommend that their input be solicited more.

2.3.5. Political Science (MA)

Study programme and study programme development

Comments

The Political Science programme provides students with key advanced knowledge and analytical skills in an area that is very important for Estonian society. It offers a range of good quality courses and is run by dedicated teachers and programme managers, and attracts students who are very positive about their subject and the programme's objectives.

At the time of the interviews, the panel had not yet gained access to the most recent study programmes. However, these were provided on request and have been examined by the panel. The new curriculum will be extensively changed and entails the following main changes:

A University-wide interdisciplinary project, language courses and practical work will be introduced

- *Compulsory courses will be increased from 31 to 56 ECTS*
- *The credits for thesis will be reduced from 30 to 24 ECTS*
- *The system of elective models will be abolished to correspond to the standard system of the university*

The current system (now about to be dropped) was designed only three years ago, mainly to create a more coherent programme. Initially, students were hesitant about the programme changes, but there were recent signs that the now abandoned programme was just about to become accepted. The challenge will be to maintain this positive trend when the new programme is implemented.

Regarding the content of the new curriculum, the panel is pleased to note that a solid research and analytical basis is in place and permeates the entire programme.

Strengths

A distinctly positive feature of the programme is the strong focus on academic research and analysis – providing the foundation for further PhD studies as well as the sort of qualities that employers are looking for in MA graduates.

This is one of the few core political science programmes in Estonia, and it offers a clear and advanced inroad into key topics facing Estonia today.

The programme provides a solid element of research methods and research design.

Good quality courses, a mostly well-functioning and creative research seminar, (with clearly fruitful elements of guiding students about thesis design, topic choice, supervisor matching, drafts, etc.).

The thesis is a strong point of the programme. We appreciate that it is still rather an extensive assignment but would like to see the 30 ECTS format kept.

With some exceptions, the bulk of the study programme and course learning outcomes are formulated in the style that can be expected for an MA programme ('independently discover ... issues', 'design data collection', 'independently carry out research' - 'competence to read critically and analyse'). We list this perhaps obvious feature as a particular strength, since it is not always the case that MA programmes follow this format.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Many students have extensive work experience. Therefore it is doubtful whether a compulsory traineeship module is useful. We believe these 6 ECTS could be used elsewhere. This was strongly expressed by the teachers and the programme managers in the interviews. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to make the traineeship module voluntary instead of compulsory.

In spite of major curricula reforms, it appears that the teachers have largely been side-lined. The reform processes seem to have been lacking in terms of vertical communication. This may potentially be detrimental in the sense that teachers' experiences and knowledge is vital. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to more actively involve the teaching staff in any future major curricula reforms.

While the political science programme offers key skills, it appears that the subject itself is sometimes misunderstood outside of the university. Teachers as well as students claimed that decision-makers as well as the general public often believe that 'Political Science' is equivalent to 'political activity'. We recommend that the relevant decision-making bodies develop and launch a communication plan for increasing the visibility of the programme, and for informing the wider society including politicians and potential students about the subject and about the attractive study programme.

While we appreciate that the study programme includes a 24 ECTS final Thesis, this is still somewhat shorter than an international high quality thesis. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to consider going back to the 30 ECTS thesis format

The programme offers several interesting perspectives and these are in fact related to each other in a creative manner, but this is not always self-evident in terms of module names etc. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to consider organizing the courses in themes and/or to rename some courses in order to emphasize to students the programme's coherence.

Resources

Comments

Tallinn University is located in spacious and mostly renovated, or recently built, very good premises for all teaching and meeting purposes. In terms of literature access, the online library resources are excellent. There may be some minor issues concerning the availability of hard copies from the library, but no major concerns. There is fast and free wireless internet available throughout the premises.

Strengths

The infrastructure is close to excellent for the support of higher education study processes.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

While online resources are excellent, hard copy literature is less available. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to consider increasing the availability of hard copy books.

The University is striving to become more international, which makes it important to develop an English speaking environment. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to safeguard that all relevant information regarding signs, documents etc. is available in English, and that all relevant supporting staff are English speaking.

Teaching and learning

Comments

A variety of teaching methods are used, and teachers seem to be dedicated and knowledgeable and highly committed in these respects. This is corroborated by the students who emphasize that many teachers offer inspiring lectures.

Gradually new teaching methods have been introduced, such as student-led and interactive methods; this development of teaching methods is supported by various pedagogical courses available to teachers.

Strengths

Teachers make a highly commendable – and very strong – effort to include research based approaches (through reading lists - academic journals/books on the reading lists; research and analytically solid topics).

There is a fruitful reliance on seminars, essays and other written assignments.

Teachers use creative methods by which to introduce students to potential thesis topics, e.g. the special 'Topics Fair'.

There is a clear awareness among teachers that pedagogical approaches like 'interdisciplinarity' or 'student-led' need to be carefully thought through in order not to become only buzzwords. Teachers and managers show a strong awareness that the first step towards success in terms of interdisciplinarity lies in a solid foundation in a particular established subject such as political science.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

While research methods and analytical approaches are a very appealing feature of the programme's teaching, there seems to be room for some improved structure concerning some elements. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies consider reducing duplication of elements between the various research methods courses and the Masters seminars (although obviously some aspects will clearly have to appear in both places – and the Masters seminar is considered to be very helpful).

Most aspects regarding supervision appear to be well functioning. Some minor adjustments may be implemented. We recommend the relevant decision-making

bodies to think through the organization of supervision to make it even more proactive.

Teachers are very knowledgeable and committed to their subject and to the programme's objectives. However, according to student statements, sometimes teachers follow old teaching routines which may come across as a little less inspiring. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to consider helping teachers to vary their teaching methods.

Teaching staff

Comments

The programme is run by a group of very dedicated and committed teachers; often with a PhD. They are active researchers and open to new ideas and teaching methods

Strengths

Many teachers manage to teach and do research in parallel, but struggle to free up time for research.

The teachers are well internationalized and are encouraged to go on Erasmus exchange visits.

Teachers are passionate about teaching methods and believe in their potential.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

While teachers are passionate about teaching methods, there is a lack of an overall structured system to help teachers reflect on and discuss teaching methods. If there is any overall policy or system in place, the teachers clearly expressed the view that they are unaware of it. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to ensure that teachers are regularly offered teacher training and that they are made aware of relevant policies. This might be achieved by easing teachers' workload when they take pedagogical courses. (NB: we do not recommend any mandatory 'University Policy Quick Fix Teaching Method System'. What we are looking for is a somewhat more structured system of helping teachers to self-reflect than is currently in place.)

The stated shares between research and teaching appears to be roughly in line with what can be expected: Professors: 50R/50T; Lecturers: 25R/75T. However, during the interviews, teachers explained how they cannot always use the research element other than outside regular working hours. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to safeguard teachers' research time.

External research funding might allow for reduced teaching obligations but not automatically; teachers informed us that negotiations might lead to increased salary rather than reduced teaching. Moreover, during the interviews we were informed by teaching staff that the central administrative bodies are hesitant to employ new staff even when external funding exists, for fear that future funding will not be secured. We appreciate the difficulties in employing teachers based on project based external money. However, we recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to be a little more flexible about employing more teachers when external funding has been secured. By doing this, teaching and other commitments will be shared by a larger body of people.

While the teachers are internationalized and incentives are in place, the teachers expressed a wish for even more incentives in this respect. We recommend the relevant decision making bodies to consider further incentives for teachers' internationalization.

Students

Comments

Overall the programme's students are well prepared and dedicated, and have positive views about their education. While the number of students in the programme may not be very large, there seems to be a distinct need for this kind of Political Science programme (and in the Estonian language).

Strengths

Throughout the interviews, it was clear that the enrolled students have made conscious choices by choosing the MA course in Political Science. They appreciate the value of the education and are ready to recommend this to other possible applicants.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The interviews clearly revealed that the students are active and highly committed, but there appears to be some potential in a more structured programme approach in order to increase the mutual benefit of student commitment. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to consider means by which to develop a more systematic approach for keeping students engaged so as to be ambassadors for potential future applicants.

The University's feedback system has become voluntary. Through the interviews with teachers and students, we understood that feedback is used but in an ad hoc fashion. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to establish a feedback system where students are regularly offered a feedback option.

2.3.6. Politics and Government (BA)

Study programme and study programme development

Comments

The Politics and Government BA Programme provides students with key basic knowledge and analytical skills in an area that is very important for Estonian society. It offers a range of good quality courses and is run by dedicated teachers and programme managers, and attracts students who are very positive about their subject and the programme's objectives. The Programme objectives and learning objectives are formulated in good BA style ('enabling', 'developing of competencies', 'familiar with', 'basic research skills') and the programme provides a good foundation for further studies in political science and politics/administration/governance, and this is not surprising given that the programme is in fact in some ways a Political Science ('government science') programme in disguise.

Strengths

The programme offers a solid and well developed introduction to research methods and design. We are especially pleased with this important feature of the programme, including a proper thesis at the end.

Courses offered are topical and well suited to provide knowledge and analytical skills about current social and political developments.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The current BA Thesis is set at 12 ECTS. This is acceptable and we appreciate the emphasis on a proper thesis. However, 15 ECTS would provide an even better foundation for future MA studies. We strongly recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to keep the thesis format and to consider whether 15 ECTS might be possible.

Given the programme's similarity to a Political Science programme, the lack of a distinct political theory/philosophy element is slightly surprising. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to consider the pros and cons of strengthening the political theory element.

The programme includes a bewildering set of electives and it is not easy to navigate the system. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to consider organizing the electives in more clearly visible themes.

Resources

Comments

Tallinn University is located in spacious and mostly renovated, or recently built, very good premises for all teaching and meeting purposes. In terms of literature access the online library resources are excellent. There may be some minor issues concerning the availability of hard copies from library, but no major concerns. There is fast and free wireless internet available throughout the premises.

An overarching issue concerns the high reliance among teachers on external research money.

Resources regarding teaching and learning environments, teaching materials, teaching equipment and premises were adequate for the needs and support the achievement of objectives in the study programme. The satisfaction with these aspects was on a high level among teachers as well as among students.

Strengths

The premises are excellent, with newly renovated buildings.

Online literature access is very good – and this was emphasized in interviews with teachers as well as students.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Online resources are excellent. However, there are some minor issues regarding access to hard copy books. We recommend that the relevant decision-making bodies assess the potential need for hard copy books.

The use of Moodle as online study environment is comprehensive and is met with general satisfaction among the users. However, the multiplicity of different online information platforms (Moodle, ÕIS, ASIO) has caused some confusion among some of the students. We recommend that the relevant decision-making bodies assess potential problems caused by parallel platforms.

Although the premises are modern, there is a shortage of mains sockets. We recommend that the relevant decision-making bodies increase the number of sockets.

Teaching and learning

Comments

Teaching and learning standards and practices comply well with what can be expected. A variety of teaching methods are used, and throughout the interviews it was clear that teachers appear to be dedicated about this.

The process of teaching and learning supports students' individual and social development. The process is sufficiently flexible, takes into account the specifics regarding the type of study, and facilitates the achievement of the stated learning outcomes.

The various practical and theoretical elements of the programme are sufficiently interconnected. The organization and content of the programme (including its practical skills elements) support the achievement of the stated learning outcomes and meet the needs of the stakeholders. This was corroborated by the interviewed employers and cooperation partners of the programme.

Strengths

The interviews with employer and stakeholder representatives clearly gave the impression that there is a very close partnership between the University and stakeholders. Representatives of local municipalities confirmed that they are open for co-operation and welcome BA students who wish to do internships with them.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Teachers use a variety of teaching methods, which is good. However, as was pointed out by some students, in some cases there are also signs that some old routines linger. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to consider measures which monitor and ensure that incentives are put in place for teachers to reflect upon their teaching methods, and increase awareness of innovative teaching methods, learning environments and learning aids that support learning.

In order for efficient student-led discussion and teaching based on interaction, it is essential seminar groups are quite small. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to consider reducing the average size of the seminar groups.

Teaching staff

Comments

The programme is run by a group of very dedicated and committed teachers; often with a PhD. They are active researchers and open to new ideas and teaching methods

Strengths

Many teachers manage to teach and do research in parallel, which is a distinct strength (but the interviews reveal that they have to struggle to free up the time for research).

Teachers are well internationalized and are encouraged to go on Erasmus exchange visits. Teachers expressed a wish for even more incentives in this respect.

Through the interviews it was clear that teachers are passionate about teaching methods and believe in their potential.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

While teachers are passionate about teaching methods, the interviews indicated that there is a lack of an overall structured system to help teachers reflect on and discuss teaching methods. If there is any overall policy or system in place, the interviews with the teachers clearly showed that the teachers seem to be unaware of it. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to safeguard that teachers are regularly offered teacher training and that they are made aware of relevant policies. This might be achieved by easing teachers' workload when they take pedagogical courses. (NB: we do not recommend any mandatory 'University Policy Quick Fix Teaching Method System'. What we are looking for is a somewhat more structured system of helping teachers to self-reflect than is currently in place.)

The stated shares between research and teaching appears to be roughly in line with what can be expected: Professors: 50R/50T; Lecturers: 25R/75T. However, the interviews with teachers revealed that teachers cannot always use the research element other than outside regular working hours. We recommend the relevant decision making bodies to safeguard teachers' research time

External research funding might allow for reduced teaching obligations but not automatically; through our interviews we understood that negotiations might lead to increased salary rather than reduced teaching; the central administrative bodies are hesitant to employ new staff even when external funding exists for fear that future funding will not be secured. We appreciate the difficulties in employing teachers based on project based external money. However we recommend the relevant decision making bodies to be a little more flexible about employing more teachers when external funding has been secured. By doing this, teaching and other commitments will be shared by a larger body of people.

In spite of major curricula reforms it appears that the teachers have largely been side-lined. The reform processes seem to have been lacking in terms of vertical communication. This may potentially be detrimental in the sense that teachers' experiences and knowledge is vital. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to actively involve the teaching staff in any future major curricula reforms.

Students

Comments

Overall the students are well prepared and dedicated. The interviewed students clearly gave the impression that they are happy about their studies.

However, an important issue appears to be the programme's image among potential students and perhaps the general public. Many outside the University appear to believe that political science is about teaching politicians politics or

simply about 'political activity'. Potential students may not be aware of the real aim – to teach future professionals with advanced and very useful analytical skills.

A site visit issue was that it was not possible to include students from the more traditional cohort under 30 in the official interview with students and alumni. Therefore the panel had to make extra arrangements and interview students outside their lecture rooms.

Strengths

The students appreciate the programme's flexibility.

Students appear to be very satisfied with the general support offered to them throughout their studies.

As indicated during the interview with students who are already working, a particular strength of the study programme is its flexible approach that ensures a study path tailored to the individual needs of the students.

The programme attracts students from very diverse backgrounds with a lot of practical experience in different areas of studies already on the Bachelors level.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The students are active and highly committed, but there appears to be some potential in a more structured programme approach in order to increase the mutual benefit of student commitment. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to consider means by which to develop a more systematic approach for keeping students engaged so as to be ambassadors for potential future applicants.

As indicated during the interviews with students, vertical information flows can be improved. Moreover, student representatives expressed the view that there is an overload of general information with too little focus on their programme's specific needs. We recommend the relevant decision making bodies to critically evaluate the current information flows with the official student representatives in order to find a more focused and participatory approach.

Although student counselling is offered and is helpful, the relatively large amount of electives might call for a more structured approach from the department / school / programme regarding counselling. Moreover, students often work – and there is some concern regarding drop-out levels. We recommend the relevant decision making bodies to consider developing a more structured counselling organization.

The University's feedback system has become voluntary. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to establish a feedback system where students are regularly offered a feedback option.

Although mobility numbers are relatively high, students express the wish for more support regarding learning mobility. This involves more clear information about mobility opportunities through the Erasmus coordinator as well as a

supportive curriculum design. We therefore recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to integrate mobility windows in the study programme in order to ensure that students do not lose one year when studying abroad for only one semester.

2.3.7. Government and Administration (MA)

Study programme and study programme development

Comments

The assessment panel notes that there was some confusion in relation to the accuracy of the self-assessment report, which apparently did not include the latest information on changes in curricula of the MA programme in Government and Administration. The Panel was told that the curricula was changed to accommodate broader changes in curriculum development policy.

The study programme is structured as follows (credits offered/credits required): General Courses 4/4 / Core Courses 49/17 / Electives 0/16 / Master's Thesis 30/0.

The credits for courses range from 2 to 7, the lower credits mostly offered for research seminars. During the interviews, the opinion was expressed that 4 credits should be the minimum and that the University has made a decision to move towards an interdisciplinary approach and bigger courses by overturning the previous policy to favour smaller courses for reasons of flexibility. However no evidence of this policy change was presented.

The panel also noticed that several courses were very general, for which the explanation was given that the MA students come with very diverse backgrounds and therefore the creation of some common basics was necessary.

Another observation was that based on course titles and descriptions, some courses may overlap with each other, for example Management of Local Government, The Management and Mechanisms of Estonian Administration, and Administrative System of Estonia in the MA programme, but also Governmental Institutions and Organizations, Public Administration, and Local Governance in the BA programme. These observations were confirmed by some of the students interviewed.

The research part of the curriculum is solid, with Masters seminars, research seminars and systematic support offered by the University to write the 30 credits thesis at the end of the studies.

In respect to internationalization, there are opportunities and counselling support to perform part of the studies abroad, but due to the prevailing profile of the students, they cannot afford the absence from work and family commitments. Also the need for increasing the number of courses delivered by international staff was mentioned.

Strengths

The panel acknowledges that considering the fact that most, if not all MA students are established professionals working full-time, the flexible approach may be founded to enable the students to balance better their professional and educational agendas.

The research is well established in the curricula and seems to serve well for advancing the competences of the students to the next level.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The policy of introducing a more interdisciplinary programme could be better implemented and communicated. This process could be used to develop the programme with less courses that give more credits.

In the course of this process the critical evaluation of possible overlaps in the substance of the courses could be made, and the ways to increase the synergy between different courses could be discussed.

Based on interviews, there seems to be room for further internationalization in respect of including the courses delivered by the international staff. This should be possible considering the strategic goal of the University to increase the proportion of international staff and students.

Resources

Comments

Tallinn University is located in spacious and mostly renovated, or recently built, very good premises for all teaching and meeting purposes. In terms of literature access the online library resources are excellent. There may be some minor issues concerning the availability of hard copies from library, but no major concerns. There is fast and free wireless internet available throughout the premises.

An overarching issue concerns the high reliance among teachers on external research money.

Resources regarding teaching and learning environments, teaching materials, teaching equipment and premises were adequate for the needs and support the achievement of objectives in the study programme. The satisfaction with these aspects was on high level among teachers as well as among the students.

Strengths

The premises are excellent, with newly renovated buildings

Online literature access is very good.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Online resources are excellent. However, there are some minor issues regarding access to hard copy books. We recommend that the relevant decision-making bodies assess the potential need for hard copy books.

The use of Moodle as an online study environment is comprehensive and is met with general satisfaction among the users. However, the multiplicity of different online information platforms (Moodle, ÖIS, ASIO) has caused some confusion among some students. We recommend that the relevant decision-making bodies assess potential problems caused by parallel platforms

Although the premises are modern, there is a shortage of mains sockets. We recommend that the relevant decision-making bodies increase the number of sockets.

Teaching and learning

Comments

On the basis of the elements from the self-assessment report and on findings from the site-visit it is possible to conclude that teaching and learning are in general compliance with required standards.

The process of teaching and learning supports learners' individual and social development. The process is flexible enough, takes into account the specifics of the form of study, and facilitates the achievement of planned learning outcomes.

Practical and theoretical studies are sufficiently interconnected. As was indicated during the interview with employers and cooperation partners of the programme, the organization and the content of practical training support achievement of the planned learning outcomes and meet the needs of stakeholders.

Assessment of learning outcomes in general is appropriate and supports the development of learners.

Strengths

Supervision of the student Master thesis preparation process, based on the Masters seminar, is effective. It is very positive that supervision and preparation of the MA thesis starts right at the beginning of the studies and proceeds gradually.

There is close partnership with stakeholders. Representatives of local municipalities confirmed that they are open for co-operation and welcome MA students who wish to do internships with them.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

It is recommended to consider measures which monitor and ensure that innovative teaching methods, learning environments and learning aids that support learning become more diverse and will be used in the learning process.

It is recommended that managers consider measures which monitor and ensure that theory and practice are interconnected in teaching and learning e.g. by closer supervision of practical training taking place outside the University.

Teaching staff

Comments

The programme is run by a group of very dedicated and committed teachers; often with PhDs. They are active researchers and open to new ideas and teaching methods.

Strengths

Many teachers manage to teach and do research in parallel, but struggle to free up time for research

Teachers are well internationalized and are encouraged to go on Erasmus exchange visits.

Teachers are passionate about teaching methods and believe in their potential.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

While teachers are passionate about teaching methods, there is a lack of an overall structured system to help teachers reflect on and discuss teaching methods. If there is any overall policy or system in place, the teachers seem to be unaware of it. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to safeguard that teachers are regularly offered teacher training and that they are made aware of relevant policies. (NB - we do not recommend any mandatory 'University Policy Quick Fix Teaching Method System. What we are looking for is a somewhat more structured system of helping teachers to self-reflect than is currently in place.)

The stated shares between research and teaching appears to be roughly in line with what can be expected: Professors: 50R/50T; Lecturers: 25R/75T - but teachers cannot always use the research element other than outside regular working hours. We recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to safeguard teachers' research time.

External research funding might allow for reduced teaching obligations but not automatically; negotiations might lead to increased salary rather than reduced teaching; the central administrative bodies are hesitant to employ new staff even

when external funding exists for fear that future funding will not be secured. We appreciate the difficulties in employing teachers based on project based external money. However we recommend the relevant decision-making bodies to be a little more flexible about employing more teachers when external funding has been secured. By doing this, teaching and other commitments will be shared by a larger body of people.

Students

Comments

Student places are filled with motivated and capable students, and their satisfaction with the content, form and methods is high. Most MA students are established professionals working full-time and come from diverse backgrounds, mostly in the public sector. The study programme therefore attracts students with a lot of practical knowledge on the topics being studied.

Strengths

As mentioned above, working students are very satisfied with the flexible approach of their study programme, and are very satisfied with the teaching staff in general.

Students see a strong relation of the study programme to their own professional work experience.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

As indicated during the interviews with students, there still is quite a lack of information/support regarding the overall planning of the studies in the study entrance phase. The panel recommends that a concept for more targeted student support in the first semester of the study programme could be very helpful.

There is very little connection of the MA students to the general student body and student representatives. Full-time working students with a lot of professional experience should be better linked to other students who can strongly benefit from their input, and this also applies to student representation within the University. The panel recommends that older students with working experience should be encouraged to interact more with younger students within their field of study, and vice versa. The department should work out such a strategy together with the student council, Civitas.

As indicated in the self-report, as well as in the discussions with the study programme managers and students, dropouts due to full-time employment are an issue. Recommendation: The department should implement a feedback system for employers as well as employees facing problems with the combination of studies and work in order to better prevent dropouts.

2.3.8. International Relations (MA)

Study programme and study programme development

Comments

On the basis of the elements from the self-assessment report and on findings from the on-site visit, the panel found that the programme complies with the required standards.

The study programme in general effectively meets important societal needs and demand. Both Tallinn as a capital city, and Estonia as a state involved in many international organizations, needs graduates with knowledge and expertise in the International Relations area. The changing regional security environment also heightens demands for IR specialists, who have knowledge and analytical skills in various areas of security, including the most recent developments as to increased cyber-threats.

However it should be noted that the programme exists in relation to a MA programme in International Relations at the Tallinn University of Technology, which contain some broadly similar elements, as well as being different in other respects. There is a danger of too many MA programmes in this area in the same country's limited educational market, and we suggest that future curriculum planning take this fully into account and ensures that excessive duplication and overlap between ostensibly similar programmes be avoided.

In general the structure and content of modules and courses in the study programme supports the achievement of the objectives and learning outcomes.

The focus of the programme is on two main areas. One module focuses on globalization and regional cooperation, and the other on international security and conflicts.

The development of the programme can be assessed positively because of its dynamism. The programme initially shared core courses with then-existing European Studies programme. Then it started to focus on international co-operation and security issues. As was indicated during the interview with programme managers, there is a willingness to make it slightly more Estonian/Baltic-specific, in order to make it more attractive to international students particularly interested in the development of the region. That means that the programme developers are trying to reflect changes which are taking place in the international environment as well as the international situation that Estonia and the Baltic States currently find themselves in.

Strengths

The strength of the programme is a wide coverage of subject areas, starting from the methodological course and ending with electives, which deal with specific issues like Geopolitics and Cyber Security and Geo-economics and Power Politics.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

It is recommended to continue working on making a clearer division between BA and MA levels of IR study. Therefore the assessment team doesn't recommend inclusion into the programme typical BA level courses like "Introduction to International Relations". Students who are joining the programme should be supposed to be already sufficiently qualified to go on with IR studies in-depth. If a student is joining the programme without necessary prerequisites, they should be provided with the opportunity to take additional courses outside the curriculum of the MA programme.

Although the willingness of the programme leaders and managers to turn the programme development towards more Estonian/Baltic specificities can be welcomed, still we recommend not going too far in this regard. According to the experience of other universities, it looks that it would be difficult to guarantee the sustainability of programmes that are overly regionally-oriented.

Resources

Comments

Resources (teaching and learning environments, teaching materials, teaching equipment and premises) were adequate for the needs of learners, and support the achievement of objectives in the study programme. The level of satisfaction with these aspects was high, both among teachers and students. The supply of textbooks is mainly sufficient. The online database of books is highly valued by students, but online access to academic articles in some journals is limited. Use of Moodle as an online study environment is comprehensive and users were satisfied with it.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

We note here the general problem of staff salaries not being sufficiently competitive, particularly for hiring highly skilled international staff.

Teaching and learning

Comments

Based on elements from the self-assessment report and on findings from the on-site visit, the assessment team are content that the teaching and learning within the context of the programme in general complies with the required standards.

The process of teaching and learning is based on a variety of teaching methods. There is a variety of assessment methods. Most courses rely on some combination of short or long essays, exams, presentations (single or group) and general seminar participation. The process of teaching and learning in general supports learners' individual and social development, and facilitates the achievement of planned learning outcomes. Practical and theoretical studies are sufficiently interconnected. As concerns the organization and the content of practical training, the programme has sufficient support from the co-operation partners in the third sector. Representatives of several NGOs confirmed that they are open for co-operation and welcome IR MA students who wish to do internships with them.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

It was revealed in the interviews that there is space for improvement in the area of MA thesis writing support. While the students are supported by the Master seminars I and II, Thesis Seminar and by the course on Research Design and Academic Writing, this support is not systematized enough and not fully consistent. Staff should look towards good practice in neighbouring study programmes (e.g. the MA in Government and Administration), where the Master Seminar looks much more systematically organized.

Staff should try to develop closer contacts with public institutions, as well as with the business sector. While it seems that students themselves are very active in finding internship placements, the assistance from the university side in this regard should be more tangible.

Teaching staff

Comments

Apparently the biggest problem seems to be a lack of staff to run a good quality programme - with just three full-time and two part time lecturers, it is difficult to cover a wide variety subjects that are attractive to students and meet their expectations throughout their studies. The area of international security studies is essentially covered by only one lecturer, which does not offer sufficiently wide scope and diversity to students, whose discontent with this situation was quite evident.

In recent years there have been also big turnover among study coordinators, which has in turn had a negative impact on the workload of academic staff.

The panel was told that the programme can use lecturers from other programmes, and that managers are currently in the process of hiring a full-time professor for international security studies. However, there is uncertainty in the current phase, because the appointments and conditions must be approved by the Senate of the University, and it remains to be seen to what extent this will improve the general level of the capacity of the staff.

Another notable problem seems to be the dissatisfaction of the student body with some of the lecturers. While the majority of lecturers were evaluated well by the students, there were some exceptions, who did not enjoy the support of the students. Despite the feedback that students had given previously, the situation has not improved to a satisfactory level.

This does not correspond very well with the information given by School's staff that they run a systematic feedback system, despite of the fact that this is not supported centrally with an IT system and a general framework for feedback requirements.

Teaching staff are generally aware of the general policy of supporting the development of diversity of teaching skills, and many have participated accordingly at the special trainings of skills development.

Although the dissatisfaction with low salaries is generally known, there was also a case where a PhD student lectures without pay and lives only on PhD allowance of about 380 EUR, which cannot be either fair or sustainable as a solution for staffing problems.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The problems of a dysfunctional feedback system need to be addressed for improving the communication between staff and students. This should allow staff effectively to handle the problem of dissatisfaction felt by some students with the quality and performance of the teaching staff.

Upcoming changes in staffing should be managed in order to bring about more manageable workload for lecturers, which is critical if a programme is to maintain its attractiveness among potential students.

Students

Comments

The student places are filled with motivated and capable students with a very international background. The Estonian employers the panel interviewed were exceptionally satisfied with the alumni of the study programme.

The students' level satisfaction with the content, form and methods as well as the support for international students is generally high, although there are some exceptions.

The diversity of students generally is very positive, yet diverse educational backgrounds cause students dissatisfaction in terms of levels of prior knowledge (e.g. basic knowledge in IR, Geography, English language proficiency).

In the academic year 2015/16, there was a significant drop in student numbers. This could not be satisfactorily explained during the interviews. Also the dropout numbers have significantly increased and have to be dealt with more effectively.

Only one Estonian student out of a cohort of fifteen students started the programme in 2015/16. As one of the strategic goals of the study programme is to 'train and influence Estonian policy makers', more marketing as well as tuition waivers for Estonian nationals should be considered.

Strengths

The obligatory applied activities are a strong instrument for practical experience. Especially the international study trips described in the self-assessment were generally perceived as an example of good practice. However, the minimum study trip length should be re-considered so as to last more than two days if involving travel outside Estonia.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

As mentioned during the meeting with the manager and developers of the study programme, as well as the student interviews, the existing feedback system has not worked well for all courses in recent semesters. This leads to the case that although teaching staff expressed a high satisfaction with their course content and self-perceived teaching quality, students expressed a clear dissatisfaction with some courses and the absence of tangible measures taken following negative feedback. Due to the very limited number of teachers already mentioned above, course content also tends to be repeated in different courses, especially in Security Studies. The panel recommends that student feedback should be carefully reviewed on a course by course basis.

As mentioned during the interviews, there currently only exist informal alumni feedback mechanisms. Given the situation of a very international student body, this should be made more systematic in the future.

The students also provided the feedback that the language entry requirement of English B2 should be reconsidered, as during classes some students were not able to participate in the classroom discussion due to their lower English language proficiency. The current English language entry requirement should be carefully reviewed, and raised if necessary.

2.3.9. Urban Governance (MA)

Study programme and study programme development

Comments

The programme was until recently based in the School of Humanities, although taught by social scientists located in another School. It will soon move to the School of Natural Sciences and Health, which it is hoped will furnish it with a more appropriate home location. We strongly recommend that this valuable programme be continued and strengthened.

Strengths

The programme is comprised of a multi-disciplinary curriculum, involving cutting-edge materials, which challenges students in a series of positive ways.

The programme has create an exceptional cohort of graduates and alumni in civil society and government, making a positive difference to Estonian society and politics.

The range of employers and partners involved with the programme is outstanding, affording excellent opportunities for students to be involved in civil society activities, and for government employees and personnel from civil society organisations to input into the teaching portfolio. The connection between the programme and extra-academic activities and institutions, in Tallinn and elsewhere, is exemplary.

The programme offers great opportunities for those students engaged in full-time professional employment in urban-related areas to expand their intellectual horizons and rethink the nature of their professional practice through sustained engagement with critical understandings of urban life.

There was ample evidence of high levels of commitment to the programme on the behalf of the teaching staff.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

The viability of the programme has depended on the input of research staff with already high workloads and multiple other commitments. It is to be hoped that the new institutional location of the programme will provide a more sustainable staffing basis for it. More administrative support needs to be given to the programme leader, to avoid overload and to ensure that the various potentials that the programme possess can be properly realized.

Resources

Comments

The programme attracts students who are in full-time employment, so teaching resources need to be able to cater for their needs.

Strengths

Both the physical infrastructure of teaching rooms and the provision of online learning materials seem to be appropriate for the methods of teaching deployed and required for this programme.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Students reported that some online-only courses, where the student has no face-to-face contact with a teacher, were insufficiently supported. Where possible, staff should provide at least a minimum level of contact on such courses,

although this could be done through mediated means like Skype or email if face-to-face meetings are impossible.

Teaching and learning

Comments

The quality of teaching was in general very high across courses. Teaching was attuned to the needs of mature learners in full-time employment.

Strengths

The programme offers a strongly international curriculum, using up-to-date and cutting edge ideas and concepts, connecting these to more empirical and pragmatic situations that students encounter in their working lives.

The course materials effectively challenge students and require them to master complex ideas and texts.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Students reported that on some courses only grades are offered with no substantive feedback. Qualitative assessment of students' work should be given on all courses.

Some students reported that there was insufficient induction/introduction to the often very complex and challenging ideas and texts that the programme is centred around. For those with no background in social and cultural theory, the first teaching semester was confusing, because not enough had been done to introduce them slowly to new ways of thinking, and texts in English were often in very complicated language. Staff should take steps to ensure that on at least one course in the first teaching semester, a general and easy to follow introduction to core ideas and theoretical schools is offered, and that student progress is monitored particularly through the crucial first semester.

Students felt that connections between theory and practice were not always entirely clear on all courses. Teachers should seek to ensure that the practical applications of theory are thoroughly explored in all courses and should look to build this into assessment procedures.

Teaching staff

Comments

Teaching staff are highly committed to the programme, and are passionate about conveying the material to students, as well as contributing to Estonian civil society and (urban) politics by connecting with employers and practitioners, who themselves are sometimes graduates of this programme.

Strengths

Staff are highly motivated and very well qualified to teach this programme.

The occasional use of guest lecturers from abroad was greatly appreciated by students

Areas of improvement and recommendations

More foreign guest lecturers, supported by the University, would greatly augment the student experience.

The over-reliance on over-committed research staff who are already juggling multiple commitments needs to be addressed by senior managers, in order to render the programme more sustainable in the medium-term. In particular, the programme leader needs more administrative support to ensure that the programme's various future potentials are fully realized.

Students

Comments

Students are very highly motivated. They strongly value the programme's role in enhancing their careers and in expanding markedly their intellectual horizons.

Strengths

Student satisfaction rates are generally high.

A very good calibre of graduate is produced by this programme.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Students found the internet timetable (ASIO) confusing, at least initially. There should be academic and/or administrative support offered at the start of the programme in order to ensure students can navigate the timetable easily.

3. Assessment report of SPG at Tallinn University of Technology

3.1. Introduction

Study programmes to be assessed	International Relations (BA) International Relations and European-Asian Studies (MA)
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Founded in 1918, Tallinn University of Technology is a leading engineering and technology education and research centre in Estonia providing programmes in engineering and technology, natural, exact and social sciences.

The Department of International Relations within Tallinn School of Economics and Business Administration (TSEBA) is responsible for teaching both the Bachelor's programme in International Relations and the Master's (MA) programme in International Relations and European-Asian Studies.

The Social Sciences study programme group consists only of these two programmes forming one of the smallest study programme groups in TUT.

Statistical Data of the Study Programme Group

Number of students

		11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16
Bachelor's studies	International Relations	339	362	322	290	228
Master's studies	International Relations and European-Asian Studies	90	91	91	80	64
TOTAL		429	453	413	370	292

Source: HaridusSILM

Number of admissions

		11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16
Bachelor's studies	International Relations	109	108	52	48	63
Master's studies	International Relations and European-Asian Studies	21	31	17	22	31
TOTAL		130	139	69	70	94

Source: HaridusSILM

Number of graduates

		11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15
Bachelor's studies	International Relations	44	39	45	61
Master's studies	International Relations and European-Asian Studies	12	10	15	21
TOTAL		56	49	60	82

Source: HaridusSILM

Number of interruptions

		11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15
Bachelor's studies	International Relations	73	56	39	81
Master's studies	International Relations and European-Asian Studies	24	13	20	31
TOTAL		97	69	59	112

Source: HaridusSILM

3.2. General findings and recommendations at study programme group level

While Tallinn University of Technology is providing education for the new generation of engineers, it also provides opportunities for acquisition of higher education in the areas of natural and social sciences. This is intended to create synergy between different research and study areas.

However, the social sciences study programme group is very small. In order to create and maintain a greater synergy between various study areas, it would be recommended not only to continue existing programmes but also to consider their expansion, consolidation of their identity, and continued quality improvement.

The International Relations study programmes reflect the fact that initially there was no other Bachelor's programme in International Relations either in Estonia or in the neighbouring countries. This made the programme attractive for international students, who were looking for more attractive opportunities to study abroad. The decision on Master level to combine International Relations curriculum with European and Asian Studies could be evaluated as a good move, since it created additional foundations to maintain the attractiveness of programmes in the IR area.

Another positive development was the decision to suspend the Estonian and Russian versions of the programmes, and to switch only to the English language version. This could be seen as an important and ambitious step towards higher quality, consolidation of curricula and internationalization. However, this move also created several new challenges, which still are to be overcome.

There appears to be a University-wide strategy of having natural science courses in every study programme, including social science ones. This reflects the overall character of the University. Yet every study programme should be fully coherent, and therefore a careful review of suitable compulsory courses is recommended by the panel.

Compared with other universities, TUT has a very large network for international cooperation, which is very beneficial for students.

3.3. Strengths and areas for improvement of study programmes by assessment areas

3.3.1. International Relations (BA)

Study programme and study programme development

Comments

In general, the study programme can be evaluated positively and meets the required standards. In the past couple of years, several important changes were introduced and clearly improved the study programme. As was indicated during the interviews with the faculty, stakeholders and students, all interested parties are satisfied and optimistic about the future. A positive sign is a growing number of applications and matriculated students.

Further development of the programme certainly seems possible. With all courses taught in English, the programme offers a good opportunity for Erasmus students to participate in the courses, and also the possibility of continuously increasing the number of regular international students.

Strengths

The assessment team fully agrees with the statement of the self-assessment report that 'the competence in Asia-Pacific Studies that the Department holds should be regarded as a characteristic strength'. It is a good idea to offer an opportunity to students to focus on that region in their research papers and theses already at the BA level.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

It is recommended to take away or reshape some compulsory courses, which do not contribute to the achievement of the indicated learning outcomes. This especially applies to the General Studies module. Overall, especially in the first few semesters, some courses do not contribute effectively to a coherent International Relations curriculum, and should therefore not be part of it (e.g.

Working Environment and Ergonomics), while others should be elective instead of compulsory (e.g. Comparative Analysis of World Religions).

The curriculum so far does not provide clearly indicated enough mobility windows to support students with learning mobility or internships abroad. Existing Erasmus opportunities should be taken into account when further developing the study programme.

It is recommended to consolidate the courses so as to have longer, 6 ECTS credits courses.

Resources

Comments

Resources (teaching and learning environments, library facilities, teaching materials, teaching equipment and premises) were adequate for the needs of learners and support the achievement of objectives in the study programme. The satisfaction with these aspects was on a high level both among teachers and students. The supply of textbooks is mainly sufficient; only one participant the panel met reported a lack of textbooks time to time. Use of Moodle as an online study environment is comprehensive and users are satisfied with it.

Tuition fees are low for students from Western countries but sometimes too high for local students.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Access to international journals needs some improvement.

Introduction of additional scholarships and other solutions as regards financial support for students, so as to limit financial difficulties for students, especially Estonian ones.

Teaching and learning

Comments

Based on elements from the self-assessment report and on findings from the on-site visit, the assessment team discovered that the teaching and learning within the context of the programme in general complies with required standards. The process of teaching and learning supports learners' individual and social development needs. The process is sufficiently flexible, takes into account the specifics of the form of study, and facilitates the achievement of planned learning outcomes. Practical and theoretical studies are sufficiently interconnected. As was indicated in the self-assessment report, the practical training offered in the Bachelor's programme takes place under the heading of 'Internship'. Assessment

of learning outcomes in general is appropriate and supports the development of learners.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

In the self-assessment report, it was indicated that many of the faculty members often do not prioritize the introduction of modern teaching methods and still rely on traditional ones. The assessment team welcomes the readiness of the programme managers and faculty to change this situation and to work in order to increase the variety of teaching methods and techniques deployed.

As concerns practical training, interviews revealed that international students have certain problems finding a suitable position within Estonia. Therefore the assessment team supports the willingness of the programme's managers to develop better relationships with institutions suitable for internships. It is recommended to pay additional attention to the NGO sector. Especially worthy of attention are organizations with wide international networks (e.g. EATA (Estonian Atlantic Treaty Association), Mondo, etc.), which might be particularly interested to have English speaking students for internships.

The assessment team very much recommend that managers of the programmes multiply their efforts in detecting plagiarism and cheating. As was indicated during the interview with students, existing measures are not sufficient and should be enhanced. We positively note the adoption of Turnitin software, and urge making its use and purpose clearer to students than may currently be the case.

Teaching staff

Comments

Overall, the teaching staff have appropriate qualifications to achieve the objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme, and to ensure quality and sustainability of the teaching and learning. The faculty is very international and has a diverse educational background. The faculty members collaborate in the fields of teaching and research with partners outside of the university (such as members of diplomatic corps, Nordic universities and several universities in Europe). Also it looks like the teaching staff is routinely engaged in professional and teaching-skills development (e.g. seminars conducted by the Personnel Office).

However, mixed responses have been recorded by students concerning the assessment of the teaching skills of the faculty members. As was indicated during the interview with students, teaching quality is variable. Also, according to the self-assessment report, teaching and supervision loads are high, leaving little time to develop skills and competences.

Strengths

Some staff members are undertaking very high quality research and developing international projects (e.g. Network on Multilingualism, Asian Studies Competence Centre, Around the Caspian, etc.).

The Department has a tradition of Top Hat lectures delivered by Ambassadors and other highly ranking individuals from several international organizations.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Consideration should be given to whether the research output among staff members is high enough.

It is recommended that managers encourage more engagement by the teaching staff in professional and teaching-skills development (such as seminars conducted by the Personnel Office), since feedback from students indicates that teaching quality of various courses still remains different.

It is recommended to consider measures to balance the workload of teaching staff, in order to achieve a more reasonable balance between various teaching and research activities.

Students

Comments

Student places are filled with motivated and capable students, and their satisfaction with the content, form and methods is high.

Strengths

The large number of international students coming from different countries (altogether comprising 15 nationalities) has created a diverse environment for intercultural communication in practice.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Connections with alumni (particularly with international alumni) are weak, and this situation should be improved.

International students are not involved enough in extra-curricular activities, because there seems to be a lack of information in English. This problem should be rectified.

3.3.2. International Relations and European-Asian Studies (MA)

Study programme and study programme development

Comments

In general, the study programme can be evaluated positively and meets the required standards. In the past couple of years, several important changes were introduced and clearly improved the study programme. As was indicated during the interviews with the faculty, stakeholders and students, all interested parties are satisfied and optimistic about the future. A positive sign is a growing number of applications and matriculated students.

Further development of the programme certainly seems possible. With all courses taught in English, the programme offers not only a good opportunity for Erasmus students to participate in the courses, but also the possibility of continuously increasing the number of regular international students.

Strengths

The assessment team fully agrees with the statement of the self-assessment report that 'the competence in Asia-Pacific Studies that the Department holds should be regarded as a characteristic strength', which opens avenues for the development of niche specialist areas that are unique in Estonia.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

It is recommended to continue working on making a clearer division between BA and MA levels of study, in order to avoid overlapping of courses with similar contents on both levels (e.g. "Political Science", "International Organizations"). It is strongly recommended to strengthen the analytical credentials of the MA level programme through such means.

The curriculum so far does not provide clearly enough indicated mobility windows to support students with learning mobility and internships abroad. Existing Erasmus opportunities should be taken into account more when further developing the study programme.

Resources

Comments

Resources (teaching and learning environments, library facilities, teaching materials, teaching equipment and premises) were adequate for the needs of learners and support the achievement of objectives in the study programme. The satisfaction with these aspects was on a high level both among teachers and

students. The supply of textbooks is mainly sufficient; only one participant the panel met reported a lack of textbooks time to time. The use of Moodle as an online study environment is comprehensive and users were satisfied with it.

Tuition fees are low for students from Western countries but sometimes too high for local students.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Access to international journals needs some improvement.

Introduction of additional scholarships and other solutions as regards financial support for students, so as to limit financial difficulties for students, especially Estonian ones.

Teaching and learning

Comments

Based on elements from the self-assessment report and on findings from the on-site visit, the assessment team discovered that the teaching and learning within the context of this programme in general complies with required standards. The process of teaching and learning supports learners' individual and social forms of development. The process is sufficiently flexible, takes into account the specifics of the form of study, and facilitates the achievement of planned learning outcomes. Practical and theoretical studies are sufficiently interconnected. As was indicated in the self-assessment report, for the practical training in the Master's programme there is an option to choose between writing a seminar paper or taking up a work placement in the context of the course called Research Seminar and Work Placement. Assessment of learning outcomes in general is appropriate and supports the development of learners.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

As was indicated in the self-assessment report, much of the faculty does not prioritize the introduction of modern teaching methods and still rely on classical ones. The panel encourages the programme managers and faculty to change to rectify situation and work in order to increase the variety of teaching methods and techniques.

It is recommended to pay additional attention to the process of preparation of the MA thesis. Samples of the MA thesis provided for the assessment team have shown that there is still a lot of room for improvement in this area. The panel got the impression that a clear distinction between BA and MA level thesis was not self-evident. Therefore it is recommended to invest more efforts in order to assure that the Master thesis would be based on a significantly greater level of independent student work and much wider application of not only basic but also advanced research skills.

Since the preparation of the thesis is supported by supervisors, who are often overloaded with work, we recommend considering additional support measures in order to make the thesis preparation more systematized and consistent. It is recommended to consider strengthening the Master Thesis Seminar. We suggest expanding its content beyond purely academic writing and to make it a kind of platform for academic discussion on MA thesis subjects. Therefore it would be recommended to have it not only in the 2nd semester, but keep it also in the 3rd and 4th semesters, up to the submission of thesis.

As concerns practical training, international students have certain problems finding a suitable internship position within Estonia. Therefore the assessment panel supports the willingness of the programme managers to develop better relationships with institutions suitable for internships. It is recommended to pay additional attention to the NGO sector. Especially worthy of attention are organizations with wide international networks (e.g. EATA (Estonian Atlantic Treaty Association), Mondo, etc.), which might be particularly interested to have English speaking students for internships.

Teaching staff

Comments

Overall, the teaching staff have appropriate qualifications to achieve the objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme, and to ensure quality and sustainability of the teaching and learning. The faculty is very international and has a diverse educational background. The faculty members collaborate in the fields of teaching and research with partners outside of the university (e.g. members of diplomatic corps, Nordic universities and several universities in Europe). The teaching staff is routinely engaged in professional and teaching-skills development (e.g. seminars conducted by the Personnel Office). However, mixed responses have been recorded by students concerning the assessment of the teaching skills of the teaching staff. As was indicated during the interview with students, teaching quality is variable. According to the self-assessment report, the teaching and supervision loads are high, leaving little time to develop skills and competences.

Strengths

Some staff members are undertaking very high quality research and developing international projects (Network on Multilingualism, Asian Studies Competence Centre, Around the Caspian, etc.).

The Department has a tradition of Top Hat lectures delivered by Ambassadors and other highly ranking individuals from several International organizations.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Consideration should be given to whether the research output among staff members is high enough. The teaching team needs to be strengthened in terms of the connections between research and teaching.

It is recommended that managers encourage more engagement by the teaching staff in professional and teaching-skills development (such as seminars conducted by the Personnel Office), since feedback from students indicates that teaching quality of various courses still remains different.

It is recommended to consider measures to balance the workload of teaching staff, in order to achieve a more reasonable balance between various teaching and research activities.

Students

Comments

Student places are filled with motivated and capable students, and their satisfaction with the content, form and methods of teaching is high.

Strengths

The large number of international students coming from different countries (all together fifteen nationalities) has created a diverse environment for intercultural communication in practice.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

Connections with alumni could be stronger.

International students are not involved enough in extra-curricular activities because of the lack of information in English.