

Assessment Report
**Humanities; Languages and
Cultures; Theology**

PhD studies
University of Tartu
Tallinn University

2018

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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 at the Level of Doctoral Studies*.

The aim of the Assessment Committee was to evaluate the Study Programme Groups (SPG) of Humanities; Languages and Cultures and Theology at the level of doctoral studies in two universities: University of Tartu and Tallinn University.

The Committee 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 formed the Assessment Committee:

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Martin Halliwell (chair) | Professor, University of Leicester, UK |
| Kristian Bankov | Professor, New Bulgarian University, Bulgaria |
| Anne Boddington | Professor, Kingston University, UK |
| Barbara Burns | Assoc. Professor, University of Glasgow, UK |
| Julia Dahlberg | University of Helsinki, PhD student, Finland |
| Anca Greere | Professor, Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania and Assistant Director, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, UK |
| Hans-Günter Heimbrock | Professor emeritus, Goethe-University Frankfurt, Germany |
| Gerrit Immink | Professor emeritus, Protestant Theological University Groningen, The Netherlands |

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Jaakko Leino | Professor, University of Helsinki, Finland |
| Henrik Meinander | Professor, University of Helsinki, Finland |
| Irina Moore | Senior Lecturer, University of Wolverhampton, UK |

The assessment process was coordinated by Hillar Bauman (EKKA).

After the preparation phase, the work of the Assessment Committee in Estonia started on Monday 27 November 2017 with an introduction to the Higher Education System as well as the assessment procedure by EKKA, the Estonian Quality assurance organisation for higher and vocational education. The members of the Committee agreed the overall questions and areas to discuss with each group at the two institutions that were part of the assessment process. The distribution of tasks between the eleven members of the Assessment Committee 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 (Tuesday 28 November and Wednesday 29 November) and Tallinn University (Thursday 30 November and Friday 1 December). 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 Committee members to exchange information, discuss conclusions and implications for further questions.

On Saturday 2 December the Assessment Committee held an all-day meeting, during which both the structure of the final report was agreed and findings from the meetings were compiled in a first draft of the assessment report. This work was executed in a cooperative way and the members of the Committee extensively discussed their individual views on the relevant topics.

In the following two sections, the Assessment Committee summarise their general findings, conclusions and recommendations which are relevant across the whole SPG. In so doing, the Committee provides an external and objective perspective on the programmes and the contexts within which they are delivered. Ultimately, the intention is to provide constructive comment and critique which may form the basis upon which improvements in the quality of the programmes may be achieved. In formulating its recommendations, however, the Assessment Committee has not evaluated the financial feasibility associated with their implementation.

General findings and recommendations

Institutional strengths and external challenges within the Estonian national Higher Education context

1. Strengths

The Assessment Committee has identified five main strengths that distinguish the two Universities within the broader higher education context of Estonia. It was clear to the Assessment Committee that the two Universities are focusing on specific academic areas and address a variety of needs within Estonian society.

- **High Quality and Relevant Doctoral Programmes**

The Assessment Committee confirms that there is strong evidence of the high quality of humanities doctoral programmes at the University of Tartu and Tallinn University. Each institution recognises the importance of the humanities research within the Estonian higher education system and the central role it plays at national level, and is making a clear contribution to the sustainability and well-being of Estonian society through their humanities programmes.

- **Intellectual Development and Internationalisation**

Faculty members at Tartu and Tallinn universities are committed to the intellectual development of their doctoral students and encourage their participation in supportive academic communities. Both institutions emphasise the international dimension of their PhD programmes and encourage their doctoral students to participate in conferences abroad and in longer term study visits. This global emphasis is an intrinsic aspect of the culture of these two research-intensive universities.

- **Graduate Knowledge, Skills and Careers Training**

The Assessment Committee has found that the two universities are producing articulate and self-reflexive graduates who acquire the required knowledge and skills to qualify for a humanities PhD. There is also good evidence that the humanities PhD in Estonia is an appropriate qualification for an academic career and a range of cultural, educational and policy-level professions.

- **Distinctive Features of Humanities at the University of Tartu and Tallinn University**

Both universities have their distinctive strengths and are recognised and commended for their unique qualities. For example, Tartu has an impressive breadth of language and linguistics programmes at the doctoral level, while Tallinn is making innovative use of its 'Studies of Cultures' cluster of specialisations that brings into creative dialogue a range of humanities subjects.

- **Innovative Collaboration with External Organisations**

The willingness of the two universities to develop mutually beneficial relationships with a range of external organisations in the development of doctoral programmes (for example, via co-supervision) is a notable quality, although these relationships might be further strengthened in the coming years.

2. External Challenges

The Assessment Committee recognises that the University of Tartu and Tallinn University are dealing with external challenges that place additional pressure on the effectiveness and quality of their programmes. To support the universities in continuing to fulfil their responsibilities with regard to PhD programmes and to allow them more easily to manage the existing programmes, the Assessment Committee highlights three areas for consideration by national authorities.

- **Higher Doctoral Allowances:** There is strong evidence to show, that many Estonian doctoral students registered for a full-time PhD must work a substantial number of hours to supplement their state grants. Students and staff confirmed that these doctoral allowances are currently well below a living wage. We recommend national authorities consider raising the doctoral allowance to ensure it is sufficient to cover living expenses, so that the PhD students do not need to work to support their studies.
- **Stronger Career Development:** The Assessment Committee believes that a clearer articulation of the reward and recognition for PhD supervisors at the national level would benefit each university, as would national guidance for supporting lecturing staff who do not hold PhDs in order that, if they wish to, they can complete a doctorate in a timely manner. Such a framework for professional development will enable the universities to deepen and broaden their subject specialisations.
- **More Effective Use of Data:** The Assessment Committee encourages the two universities to use a systematic approach to data collection to support programme development. Data capture on the gender balance of PhD registrations and completions, for example, would strengthen a University-level commitment to equality and diversity. Data capture could also be extended to different language groups, as well as to the relative number of state-sponsored students, externally funded students, and international students studying for a humanities PhD in Estonia. The tracking of graduate destinations would also be welcomed, but the Committee believes that it is important to always prioritise the quality of research and supervision over statistical issues relating to targets.

1. Assessment report of Study Programme Groups at the University of Tartu

1.1. Introduction

In 2017, the University of Tartu celebrates the 385th anniversary of its founding. The University of Tartu, established in 1632 as Academia Gustaviana, has been reborn a number of times throughout its history. In the Swedish era, Latin was the language of the university. Wars forced the university into exile in both Tallinn and Pärnu. The university was even closed from 1710 until 1802 when it was reopened as the Imperial Tartu University (Kaiserliche Universität zu Dorpat), being the only university in the Russian Empire to use German as the language of instruction. In 1893, in the wave of Russification, the university was renamed Universitas Jurjevensis. In 1919, the imperial university was reformed as Tartu University of the Republic of Estonia with Estonian as the language of instruction. Starting from 1944, Tartu State University operated under Soviet rule. As Estonia regained its independence, the curricula of university were modernised, studies systematically reorganised and the university restored its name to the University of Tartu.

According to the University of Tartu Act, adopted on 16 February 1995, the University of Tartu is the national university of the Republic of Estonia. Its mission is to advance science and culture, provide the possibilities for the acquisition of higher education based on the development of science and technology on the three levels of higher education in the fields of humanities, social, medical and natural sciences and to provide public services based on teaching, research and other creative activities.

The Faculty of Theology and the Faculty of Philosophy are among the oldest at the University of Tartu. Between 2010 and 2015 the Faculty of Philosophy and the Faculty of Theology and Viljandi Culture Academy (a college) were separate academic units. Within the Faculty of Philosophy, the College of Foreign Languages and Cultures was established on January 1, 2015 by uniting the Institute of Germanic, Romance and Slavonic Languages and Literatures, and the Language Centre. In 2016, structural reform incorporated the faculties and colleges into the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. The Faculty consists of 4 institutes, one school, and two colleges. At the Faculty level, the Dean's Office is the highest administrative body, in which the Vice Dean for Research is responsible for coordinating research within the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, including doctoral studies.

Doctoral curricula are offered by the institutes of History and Archaeology, Philosophy and Semiotics, Estonian and General Linguistics, and Cultural Research as well as the School of Theology and Religious Studies. After the

restructuring of the University of Tartu in 2015, the curricula of Germanic and Romance Languages and Literatures and Russian and Slavic Philology were housed at the Institute of Cultural Research, but the responsibilities for the teaching, review and defences are shared by the College of Foreign Languages and Cultures, the Institute of Cultural Research, and the Institute of Estonian and General Linguistics.

General Information on Students

| Curriculum | 2011/12 | | 2012/13 | | 2013/14 | | 2014/15 | | 2015/16 | |
|--|----------------------|------------|----------------------|------------|----------------------|------------|----------------------|------------|----------------------|------------|
| | Incl. working at the | | Incl. working at the | | Incl. working at the | | Incl. working at the | | Incl. working at the | |
| | Total | UT | Total | UT | Total | UT | Total | UT | Total | UT |
| History (80356) | 91 | 19 | 86 | 17 | 77 | 21 | 62 | 15 | 51 | 12 |
| Philosophy (80355) | 18 | 6 | 20 | 7 | 18 | 6 | 14 | 5 | 15 | 6 |
| Semiotics and Culture Studies (80326) | 33 | 10 | 33 | 10 | 32 | 9 | 30 | 7 | 25 | 3 |
| Estonian and Finno-Ugric Linguistics (80354) | 80 | 28 | 82 | 27 | 77 | 23 | 67 | 22 | 61 | 13 |
| Germanic and Romance Languages and Literatures (80353) | 35 | 16 | 35 | 16 | 31 | 15 | 31 | 13 | 25 | 8 |
| Literature and Cultural Research (80352) | 57 | 7 | 62 | 12 | 60 | 14 | 60 | 15 | 55 | 10 |
| Russian and Slavonic Philology (80350) | 19 | 5 | 20 | 3 | 17 | 3 | 15 | 3 | 14 | 2 |
| Theology (80357) | 40 | 8 | 37 | 7 | 34 | 3 | 33 | 5 | 29 | 4 |
| Faculty of Arts and Humanities total | 373 | 99 | 375 | 99 | 346 | 94 | 312 | 85 | 275 | 58 |
| UT total | 1493 | 481 | 1504 | 502 | 1457 | 493 | 1401 | 487 | 1348 | 380 |

General Information on International Students

| Curriculum | 2011/12 | 2012/13 | 2013/14 | 2014/15 | 2015/16 |
|--|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| History (80356) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Philosophy (80355) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Semiotics and Culture Studies (80326) | 6 | 7 | 9 | 10 | 10 |
| Estonian and Finno-Ugric Linguistics (80354) | 17 | 18 | 19 | 17 | 15 |
| Germanic and Romance Languages and Literatures (80353) | 3 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Literature and Cultural Research (80352) | 11 | 13 | 16 | 15 | 16 |
| Russian and Slavonic Philology (80350) | 6 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 5 |
| Theology (80357) | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Faculty of Arts and Humanities total | 46 | 51 | 55 | 51 | 47 |
| UT total | 103 | 122 | 129 | 139 | 143 |

Number of Students Admitted

| Curriculum | 2011/12 | | 2012/13 | | 2013/14 | | 2014/15 | | 2015/16 | |
|--|------------|------------------------------|------------|------------------------------|------------|------------------------------|------------|------------------------------|------------|------------------------------|
| | Total | incl. those continuing at UT | Total | incl. those continuing at UT | Total | incl. those continuing at UT | Total | incl. those continuing at UT | Total | incl. those continuing at UT |
| History (80356) | 7 | 7 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| Philosophy (80355) | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Semiotics and Culture Studies (80326) | 7 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Estonian and Finno-Ugric Linguistics (80354) | 8 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 |
| Germanic and Romance Languages and Literatures (80353) | 4 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Literature and Cultural Research (80352) | 9 | 8 | 9 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 |
| Russian and Slavonic Philology (80350) | 6 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Theology (80357) | 5 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| Faculty of Arts and Humanities total | 49 | 42 | 34 | 27 | 29 | 25 | 24 | 19 | 24 | 21 |
| UT total | 255 | 218 | 190 | 151 | 179 | 153 | 168 | 137 | 171 | 139 |

Students who left Studies

| Curriculum | 2011/12 | | 2012/13 | | 2013/14 | | 2014/15 | | 2015/16 | |
|--|---------|----------------------------|---------|----------------------------|---------|----------------------------|---------|----------------------------|---------|----------------------------|
| | Total | Incl. at student's request | Total | Incl. at student's request | Total | Incl. at student's request | Total | Incl. at student's request | Total | Incl. at student's request |
| History (80356) | 7 | 2 | 11 | 0 | 16 | 3 | 14 | 3 | 15 | 2 |
| Philosophy (80355) | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Semiotics and Culture Studies (80326) | 4 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 6 | 1 |
| Estonian and Finno-Ugric Linguistics (80354) | 6 | 2 | 6 | 3 | 7 | 4 | 9 | 2 | 10 | 4 |
| Germanic and Romance Languages and Literatures (80353) | 2 | 0 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 6 | 2 | 7 | 1 |
| Literature and Cultural Research | 3 | 1 | 7 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 10 | 0 | 4 | 1 |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| (80352) | | | | | | | | | | |
| Russian and Slavonic Philology (80350) | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Theology (80357) | 5 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 6 | 1 | 4 | 2 |
| Faculty of Arts and Humanities total | 30 | 10 | 41 | 17 | 41 | 13 | 49 | 9 | 47 | 11 |
| UT total | 119 | 45 | 148 | 55 | 128 | 42 | 154 | 40 | 171 | 48 |

Doctoral Theses Defended

| Curricula | 2011/12 | | 2012/13 | | 2013/14 | | 2014/15 | | 2015/16 | |
|--|-----------|--------------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------|--------------------|
| | Total | Incl. in 4+2 years | Total | Incl. in 4+2 years | Total | Incl. in 4+2 years | Total | Incl. in 4+2 years | Total | Incl. in 4+2 years |
| History (80356) | 3 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 4 | 1 |
| Philosophy (80355) | 1 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Semiotics and Culture Studies (80326) | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 2 |
| Estonian and Finno-Ugric Linguistics (80354) | 5 | 1 | 6 | 2 | 9 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 8 | 2 |
| Germanic and Romance Languages and Literatures (80353) | 0 | 0 | 6 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Literature and Cultural Research (80352) | 0 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 3 |
| Russian and Slavonic Philology (80350) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| Theology (80357) | 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Faculty of Arts and Humanities total | 12 | 7 | 26 | 10 | 19 | 8 | 18 | 3 | 25 | 11 |
| UT total | 95 | 68 | 114 | 57 | 117 | 62 | 107 | 45 | 120 | 75 |

1.2. General findings and recommendations at University and Faculty level

These strengths and recommendations apply across all humanities programmes. They are only restated at programme level to highlight additional elements.

Strengths

The Assessment Committee found that the specified standards in all eight humanities programmes at the University of Tartu were met and in some cases exceeded. The Committee commends the Arts and Humanities Faculty for:

- The high academic quality of its supervisors, students and programmes
- The positive attitude and enthusiasm of its doctoral students
- The strong sense of teamwork between supervisors and doctoral students, leading to feelings of inclusion and mutual respect, especially for those students directly involved in research projects.
- The commitment of supervisors who are deeply engaged with and care for their doctoral students
- The international opportunities that facilitate mobility and enhance the professional and academic development of its doctoral students.
- The self-reflectiveness and articulacy of its doctoral students and graduates.
- The developmental role and flexibility of doctoral seminars and skills courses in the PhD experience, including the writing retreat and the focus on professional orientation.

Recommendations

1. Sustainability

University and Faculty Structures: Clarify, review and potentially simplify the structures that support doctoral study. Ensure that the labels (for example, college, schools, institutes, centres) are used consistently and are easy to understand inside and outside the University.

The Assessment Committee recommends a clarification of the terminology and the tasks relating to Doctoral Schools and Graduate Schools. This is because the labels used to classify the structures and programmes in which the doctoral students operate were initially unclear to the Assessment Committee. During the interviews the structure of institutes, schools and colleges was clarified to some extent, as was the often unclear distinction between the Doctoral Schools and Graduate Schools. The content offered by the two Graduate Schools within the Faculty seems to be additional to what is provided by the Doctoral Schools, but greater clarity in defining the distinctive roles of these two entities is needed. It would benefit the University to seek alignment with the term 'Graduate School' in a European context to enhance EU and international collaboration.

Efficiency: The efficiency of the PhD programmes might be improved in order to ensure completion within a maximum of 6 years. The Assessment Committee would like to see the alignment of expectations at different levels of the University about the expected time to complete a University of Tartu PhD.

The efficiency of the PhD programmes is a major concern at all levels of the University, as underlined in the self-evaluation report and the interviews. The Assessment Committee is of the opinion that this concern about efficiency would

benefit from focused reflection and positive action at all levels of the University, and also on a national level in term of funding regulations. The Assessment Committee noted divergent expectations with respect to the 4+2 system at these different levels. If no joint action is taken at all levels, improvement at programme and supervision level might be ineffective and inconsistent.

The Assessment Committee understands the national legal regulations regarding the 4+2 system for the completion of doctoral studies, but believes that university regulations about student funding could usefully be reviewed because most students with state funding effectively study part-time in order to make a living. The Assessment Committee also recommends that the Faculty defines the task of the supervisor after the cut-off in the 4th and the 6th year. An evaluation of the student's progress might usefully be conducted so that a structured plan of work can continue after these cut-off points, as well as to clarify the rights and responsibilities of the student entering with 'external' status.

Sustainability: Formalise a plan to ensure that the quantity and quality of students remains stable and sustainable, including strong links to the professional world, making use of the Careers Service and an Employer Advisory Forum.

As the number of students might not rise (for demographic and funding reasons), the sustainability of the teaching programmes needs reflection and action in terms of the number of PhD students and the academic quality of the programme. The Assessment Committee considers that a more strategic approach to sustainability is necessary, and one which duly considers the involvement of various stakeholder groups. A sustainability plan could usefully include methods of attracting international students, steps towards improving research methodology and interdisciplinary research strategies, and developing a closer relation between the topics of doctoral research and research programmes in the Faculty. Strengthening links to the professional world (via the Careers Service) would help ensure that specific doctoral-level expertise and research skills are deemed beneficial to both academic and non-academic settings.

Societal Impact: Provide doctoral students with a better understanding of the skills they would typically acquire during doctoral training and the roles that graduating students may assume in Estonian society.

The Assessment Committee acknowledges that high academic standards are pursued in the doctoral training provided by the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. As the opportunities for an academic career are considerably lower than the number of PhD graduates, the sustainability of the PhD programme will improve if career options outside academia are made more attractive and the societal relevance of doctoral research is reinforced. The Committee recommends a stronger focus on the link between PhD research and the needs of society. Openness to the challenges of contemporary society can enrich the student

experience, helping them to see the relevance of their work to a broader public and to understand the usefulness of their skills for the national future.

Alumni: Harness the network of alumni for career mentoring beyond academia.

The Assessment Committee found that there did not seem to be a systematic approach to engaging with alumni. Information on where a PhD degree is relevant to employment and what the experience of graduate could be more extensively used to develop doctoral programmes. It would be beneficial to enable alumni to have regular and formal input into discussions about the PhD study programmes offered. The Assessment Committee therefore recommends that the Faculty of Arts and Humanities formulates an alumni policy specifically regarding doctoral programmes, that an alumni network or similar is created, and that over time alumni and activities that include alumni (for example, employability workshops) are integrated more into the doctoral programmes.

2. Student Issues

Regulations: Clearly articulate regulations relating to registration, part-time study and suspension for a justifiable reason (for example, maternity or sick leave) and clarify supervisory expectations for staff and students.

In discussions with staff and students, the Assessment Committee noted a lack of clarity as to the status of students. This is a particular concern with respect to justifiable suspensions from the programme: for example, maternity or sick leave. It is important to ensure that staff and students clearly understand their responsibilities and supervisory expectations. The institution might also consider introducing a maximum suspension period (or total of separate periods) to ensure that academic work does not become outdated. It is recommended that guidelines for a student's return to study be put in place to ensure that contact with the supervisor is reestablished promptly and a workplan is agreed for the first few months. These aspects may be helpfully brought together by reconsidering the interrelationship between the doctoral study agreement, the doctoral plan and the annual progress review. Guidelines could be provided in a Doctoral Handbook.

Student Status: Formally recognise the status of external/non-funded students.

The Committee heard from both students and staff that students who had exceeded the formal study period and were classified as external students found it difficult to maintain the momentum of their research and complete their thesis promptly. Formal recognition of the status of external students (the term 'external' may have the effect of making the student feel excluded from the university community) could help candidates to remain focused on their studies. Modest funding for writing camps or international mobility could be crucial at this stage in helping students to devote time to focused writing.

Facilities: Ensure the workspace for doctoral students is adequate and unified across all departments and programmes.

The Committee heard from students that a range of workspace arrangements were available in their departments. While some prefer to work at home, and those with lectureships may have their own office, others said they would benefit from having a designated desk space where they could work on a daily basis. In view of the fact that providing appropriate desk space is linked to student well-being and productiveness, and is therefore regarded as a priority in many other European institutions, the Assessment Committee believes that the University would benefit from improving and standardising the physical workspace for all students to ensure they are fully supported, that all are treated equally, and that these arrangements enhance their sense of belonging to a community.

3. Supervision

Quality of Supervision: Establish the frequency of formal supervision meetings (including when the student is abroad) and how/when feedback is given in order to ensure consistency of the doctoral experience.

Duties related to doctoral supervision are an obligation, counted under the teaching tasks of staff members. The Committee noted a considerable variety in practice and some problematic issues. Some PhD students met their supervisors quite often, but for others it was difficult to reach them. Some PhD students, who had close contact and good communication with their supervisors, tended to talk to them primarily about issues regarding research projects and teaching, and not as frequently about their thesis. The Committee found that there are unequal opportunities for students living in the city and those further away.

The Faculty might consider enhancing the quality of supervision by further clarifying the responsibilities of those involved in supervisory work. The Assessment Committee recommends that the University develops explicit instructions concerning supervisory practice. These could include a standard for the frequency of supervisory meetings and the amount of a supervisor's working time allocated to each doctoral student. Procedures for feedback could also be laid out in a clear form, including when the student is visiting another institution abroad. Co-supervisors from beyond the University could usefully be given instructions concerning their role and are made aware of supervisory requirements. All expectations for the PhD programme could be captured in a Doctoral Handbook to provide increased consistency and transparency.

Supervisor Training: Initiate and develop mandatory supervisor training and mentoring, and extend to co-supervisors from collaborating organisations. Consider periodic refresher courses for experienced supervisors every five years.

The Assessment Committee noted that there was considerable variance in the supervisory experience and expertise of staff members. It is also fully aware of the students' feedback on the need for better supervision. The Committee noted some staff members expressed a wish to enhance their competence in this respect, while others were more reluctant. The Assessment Committee notes there are optional training modules for supervisors at University level, but it heard that the lack of research specificity meant that some supervisors thought that these courses were insufficiently useful for enhancing supervisory expertise. There is no system to monitor participation of supervisors in such training.

The Committee believes that compulsory supervisory training courses would benefit the PhD programmes to enhance the skills and competences of staff, update them on procedural matters, and facilitate the sharing of good practice. As such, the Committee recommends that all new supervisors participate in mandatory supervisor training tailored to the humanities. The Committee also suggests that experienced supervisors demonstrate their commitment to continuing professional development through participation in a range of refresher activities organised by the University every five years. To assure consistency, the University and the Faculty might consider encouraging supervisors working in industry or professional practice to participate in developmental activities. The professional development of research supervisors might be maintained and reviewed periodically to assure the currency and competency of supervision.

Collaboration: Clarify the policy on co-supervision and ensure co-supervisory roles from partners outside the University are quality assured.

The Assessment Committee noted that both students and alumni wished to bridge the gap between academia and society. As external organisations have considerable potential to offer expertise, the Faculty could look actively for opportunities to involve competent external individuals as co-supervisors (from museums, archives, media, performing arts and the heritage sector). Such collaboration could open up opportunities for innovation in the format of the thesis, including practice-based elements, without losing academic quality. However, the role of the external co-supervisor could usefully be defined and co-supervisors could also be included in supervisory training.

Reward/Recognition: Devise a fair system in which the monetary rewards given to supervisors for doctoral completions can be used more strategically or be reinvested to support research activities.

The Committee noted that supervisors receive a financial reward on completion of a PhD within the six-year period. Staff and students indicated that this reward system did not change their perspective and had no undesired consequences for the supervisory relationship. However, the Committee noted a potential conflict in the governance between financially incentivised efficiency with regard to progress

and the academic integrity and quality of work produced. The University might wish to reconsider its regulatory framework to remove this perceived conflict. It may also consider whether, in place of a personal bonus system, the funding could be used strategically to support research activities for doctoral students and their supervisors. The Committee found the current arrangement of not rewarding the supervisor after the six-year completion limit had elapsed held a particular risk to the quality of the work being produced, as reward was exclusively linked to efficiency and not quality.

The Committee noted that supervisors receive a financial reward on completion of a PhD within the six-year period. Staff and students indicated that this reward system did not change their perspective and had no undesired consequences for the supervisory relationship. However, the Committee noted a potential tension between efficiency with regard to progress and the quality of work produced. The University might consider whether, in place of a personal bonus system, this money could be used more strategically to support the research activities of doctoral students and their supervisors. The Committee found the current arrangement of not rewarding the supervisor after the six-year completion limit had elapsed held a particular risk to the quality of the work being produced, as reward was exclusively linked to efficiency and not quality.

4. Staff Capacity

Workload: Formally determine and recognise supervision workload at an appropriate rate that aligns with expectations at Bachelors and Masters' levels.

Supervisors are appointed depending on topics proposed by PhD students who have been admitted to the programmes. The number of PhD supervisees is not always quantified against the existing workload of the supervisor, and the supervision workload is not considered formally within the workload model of the Faculty. As there are no formal requirements that determine the minimum time spent on supervision, the Assessment Committee heard from both staff and students that the expectation is that staff make themselves available and students seek their availability as and when needed. It would be beneficial to develop and implement clear Faculty-wide guidelines on individual hours for each full-time PhD supervision. The workload pattern could include regular one-to-one meetings, as well as time to consider student work and progress, and could be communicated to students at the beginning of the programme. In summary, it would be advisable to implement a formal monitoring system of the supervision workload and the quality of the supervisory interaction.

Staffing Resource: Ensure that the University recognises and evaluates the relationship between staffing resource and supervisory capacity and expertise.

The University recognises that research students are best served by supervisors and supervisory teams with sufficient expertise, experience and commitment to fully support each student and their research. In this context, it is important to ensure that individual members of staff do not carry excessive supervisory loads, and where necessary co-supervision is initiated to ensure the breadth and depth of the topic being investigated.

The Assessment Committee noted that currently there was no systematic analysis of supervisory capacity with respect to new admissions. PhD topics are mapped against supervisors, but the evaluations that are conducted seem inconsistent and do not guarantee that the total workload of the supervisor remains feasible. In this respect, it would be beneficial to implement strategic planning for developing new doctoral projects and in capacity building for staff.

5. Quality Assurance

Annual Progress Review (APR): Clarify the function of the Annual Progress Review and its role within the life-cycle of the doctoral student. Ensure that APRs are used consistently across programmes.

From the meetings conducted with staff and students, it was confirmed that many of the quality assurance arrangements at PhD level are informal, with few specific requirements formulated for PhD activities conducted by students, for (co-)supervision, assessment, feedback or periodic review of provision. The APR is the sole formal mechanism at programme level that establishes if the student has made sufficient progress to enable them to move into the next academic year. A form that records the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System points (ECTs) granted for various activities and sets a final decision of positive/negative/not reviewed is in existence and is consistently used across programmes. However, from the self-evaluation report and in interviews, the Committee noted a level of variation in implementing APR across programmes.

The Assessment Committee heard that some programmes organised a collective event where the progress of all students was discussed, whereas other programmes organised individual meetings with students. The Committee was told that if any sensitive discussions needed to take place these would be dealt with outside these group sessions. Students found this experience positive. However, they noted that the feedback was frequently insufficient for them to know how to progress and that feedback on academic performance was not consistently provided. These students rely on the Doctoral Seminars for detailed feedback on their work, and suggestions of where and how they could prepare better for future publications. The self-evaluation report noted that the APR is used to collect feedback on supervisors, however the panel failed to see how this could be adequately achieved within a group event, and it noted that students and staff were unaware of this function of the APR process. A more consistent approach to the APR process across study group programmes would enable

higher comparability of student experience, better opportunities for feedback, and increased clarity and effectiveness of procedures.

Research Ethics: Consider extending the activity of the research ethics committee to cover all research projects with ethical implications.

Interviews with staff and students indicated that clear institutional guidance was not always available in matters of research integrity, in particular relating to gaining ethics approval for interviewing live subjects. There was an awareness of the need for care in this area, but doctoral students were often operating without the help of a clear code of practice. The panel therefore recommends that the principles and relevant standards of research integrity are embedded across the University. In addition to clear guidance on ethics approval matters, it would be beneficial to make local advice available to staff and students who are unsure about a research conduct issue. In addition to a printed policy and an appropriate committee structure, it may be helpful to appoint an academic member of staff as a Research Integrity Adviser in each Faculty to help with these matters.

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

1.3.1. History

Study Programme

Comments

The launch and development of the study programme has been based on the standards of legislation and national strategies that are outlined in the University development plans and regularly reviewed by the Faculty Dean and the Office of Academic Affairs. The last internal review of this type took place in 2014 and resulted in a number of major changes in the curriculum. In addition to this, the doctoral programme has undertaken a number of smaller changes in the curriculum to ensure its efficiency and attractiveness. Among these is the current plan to revise the list of specialisations. One of these revisions is the decision to close the specialisation of ethnology, which has had no new PhD students since 2007.

The doctoral seminars are correctly understood as the essential form of supervision. According to student feedback, PhD students in Archaeology are mostly satisfied with how these are conducted, whereas some of PhD students in History feel they have not learnt what they had expected to. This is a reflection of the wider range of topics, source categories and methods of historical research,

which are difficult to cover comprehensively in seminars. Nevertheless, the study programme offers a good range of courses: for example, a course in Management of Science events. Most popular have been the courses in Teaching Practice in Higher Education and Scientific Writing in English.

Student feedback has revealed that many hope that the outcome of courses would be more concrete in form of, for example, articles. These suggestions are under consideration in the ongoing reformulation of the study programme. However, the Assessment Committee noticed during the interviews that there existed different opinions about how well the Annual Progress Review (APG) of PhD students is implemented and meets a specific purpose. The feedback between such annual reviews takes place informally during personal supervision and other contacts between the teachers and doctoral students. There was also a general concern that the societal status of the doctoral degree will in the future not be competitive enough to attract talented students to the programme.

Strengths

- The broad scientific competence of academic teaching staff enables a number of various courses.
- A flexible attitude towards the choice of language in which the doctoral thesis is written.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The Assessment Committee recommends a thorough evaluation of how the teachers and students involved in the APG would like to improve it and clarify its central purpose. The Committee recommends a more regulated system for the feedback between these progress reviews through a specified number of meetings and anonymous feedback arrangements.
- The Assessment Committee recommends more skills oriented course in the curriculum. Steps in that directions have already taken, but more systematic co-operation could be done with the cultural sector and private entrepreneurs, especially in the digital sector.

Resources

Comments

As stated in the self-evaluation report, the Institute of History and Archaeology has, in all crucial respects, resources that meet the requirements set in the Higher Education Standard. The former five separately situated units of the Institute have recently been concentrated to two units with well-equipped seminar rooms and modern working facilities, such as a new archaeology lab. The feedback from the staff and PhD students confirmed that these improvements have considerably improved the research environment.

Another important resource has been the twenty research projects recorded between 2011 and 2016 by the Estonian Research Information System and led by members of the institute staff, which have involved 58 doctoral students. All in all, 62% of the doctoral students (121, external students included) have been involved in research projects during the review period. Three professorships in areas of national significance (Archaeology, Estonian History and Art History) have permanent funding from the Ministry of Education and Research, meaning that the teaching and supervision is sustainable. A major concern for the future is thus the uncertainty of research funding and insufficient PhD scholarships.

The programme has had few students from abroad (only 2 from 2011-16). This is because courses have so far been given only in Estonian, but in 2017 a complete PhD course in English was created to attract more international students.

Strengths

- Excellent site in the Tartu city centre, next the University Library (under renovation) and new building of the National Archives.
- New and well-equipped working facilities for teachers and PhD students.
- Numerous externally-funded research projects that have engaged many PhD students.
- Three professorships with permanent funding from the Ministry of Education and Research.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The Assessment Committee recommends a systematic implementation of courses and seminars held in English into the programme. This would give doctoral students more training in both spoken and written academic English and entice more History students to write a thesis in English. Simultaneously, it would also attract more international students.
- The Assessment Committee understands the societal need to maintain the national language as a living tongue in the academic community, but also encourages the University to instruct its doctoral students in English to prepare them for demanding tasks and careers elsewhere in the EU and in other parts of the world.

Teaching, learning, research and/or creative activity

Comments

The Institute of History and Archaeology follows University regulations and indicators concerning the doctoral studies and in the effort to improve efficiency and standards. The University of Tartu has set as its goal for 2020 to ensure that at least 63% of its PhD students will graduate within 4 years. Between 2012 and

2016 this percentage grew among History and Archaeology PhD students from 19 to 57, which is an excellent achievement.

Feedback shows that students are satisfied with the regularly arranged doctoral seminars and personal meetings with supervisors, as well as with the nature of the research projects in which some PhD-students are able to participate. Each of these supervision forms were appreciated by the PhD students. An average of 4.3 (out of 5) answered they were satisfied with the teaching and supervision skills (this is slightly better than the average at University level of 4.1).

Students monitor their progress through data in the university IT-system and in dialogue with their supervisors. However, as the self-evaluation report spells out, only 13% felt they had enough supervision about which courses they are required to attend. Many wish for a more frequent schedule of personal supervision. The supervisor representatives stated that such meetings are arranged whenever the students need them, but acknowledged that there is no precise requirement about the frequency of meetings. The lack of regular supervision hours seems to be predominantly a problem for part-time students who live outside Tartu.

The programme has implemented a number of courses that support independent learning and self-analysis, which are appreciated by the PhD students and advocated by teaching staff. In addition to study plans, progress reviews and feedback, these include intensive seminars, writing retreats and a course in Management of Science, comprising an annual spring student conference.

Strengths

- The percentage of PhD students graduated within 4 years has increased markedly between 2011 and 2016.
- The proportion of students satisfied with the teaching and supervision was good and slightly better than on university level.
- The Assessment Committee is reassured that courses in independent learning and self-analysis serve their cause well.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The Assessment Committee recommends that the History programme would implement more clear-cut regulations for how often the teacher meets the PhD student for personal supervision and consultation. This would serve especially those students who do not live in Tartu.
- The Committee supports the action plan in the self-evaluation report for developing the teaching of study skills and independent learning skills, as well as a plan to introduce a course in time management.

Teaching staff

Comments

The statistics in the self-evaluation report reveal that the institute is by all standards the largest research-intensive centre for History and Archaeology in Estonia. Teaching staff cover a wide spectrum of academic expertise with good national and international networks, which are frequently activated in the supervision of the students and evaluation of their doctoral theses. Both supervisors and students believed this scientific standard and outreach activities to be crucial resources in attracting new students to apply to the programme and to advance successfully in their studies, including timely completion.

Teaching staff at the University of Tartu are not obliged to take part in the educational course for supervisors. According to the self-evaluation report, only 34% of the teaching staff in History and Archaeology have attended these in-service training seminars. The attendance by the junior staff members is clearly higher than this. During their meeting with the Assessment Committee they emphasised their practical usage of the courses in question.

Strengths

- The teaching staff covers a wide spectrum of academic expertise and networks, which combined with a strong infrastructure, is an excellent context for doctoral studies in the unit.
- Younger members of staff attend frequently training seminars and value the new skills they develop from them.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The Assessment Committee recommends that senior members of staff might be actively encouraged to take part in the in-service training seminars and allow them to share best practice.

Doctoral students

Comments

The number of students admitted to the programme has decreased considerably since 2012 (from 20 per year to 3-4 per year) due to the national Universities Act which dictates that the universities are obliged to pay an allowance to all full-time doctoral students. Those who enter the programme have to persuade the Admissions Committee that their project plan for the thesis is feasible and topical. Once they begin the studies their advancement is regularly reviewed and supervised. The number of drop-outs has risen during the assessment period as a consequence of the implementation of tighter study requirements. The short-term mobility of the students is good, whereas their long-term mobility is at a much lower level. The most utilised funding source for their mobility are the Archimedes Foundation and international scholarships. The programme produced

16 PhD holders between 2011 and 2016, who have entered the Estonian labour market since. More than half of them (9) work in educational and research institutions, whereas 7 are working in different occupations.

Strengths

- The implemented study programme has increased the efficiency of the studies and produced a satisfactory number of PhD holders during the assessment period.
- Graduating doctoral students between 2011 and 2016 have advanced relatively well in their careers.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The Assessment Committee recommends that the University of Tartu intensifies its efforts to increase the funds to foster the long-term mobility of PhD students. One way could be to create exchange programmes for the long-term mobility with universities in Nordic countries and other EU countries, which could offer suitable co-supervisors and increase access to important source materials for Tartu's PhD students.
- The Committee encourage those involved in the programme (directors, supervisors, PhD students) to develop a closer and more structured co-operation with the university alumni, and other strategically well-placed figures and companies in Estonia and other EU countries.

1.3.2. Theology

Study programme

Comments

The Assessment Committee is of the opinion that the PhD study programme of Theology is well structured and meets the requirements of the Standard of Higher Education. The programme accords with the University of Tartu's regulations and contains the necessary elements according to international standards.

Since the structural reform of the University of Tartu in 2016, the Faculty of Theology is incorporated into the broader Faculty of Arts and Humanities. The Assessment Committee heard during the interview process that the academic leadership welcomes this integration and has positively embraced advantages, such as working in a larger research community, mutual enrichment, and better chances for interdisciplinary research. At the level of supervisors and students, however, the Assessment Committee heard more reluctant voices, namely that it is too early to come to conclusions, and the concern that the high standards of disciplinary quality will in the future greatly depend on international cooperation.

The Assessment Committee acknowledges that the renewal of the coursework since 2013–14 was an important step to improve the cooperation between Theology and Religious Studies. The Assessment Committee believes that two strategies could usefully be kept in mind regarding curriculum development: (i) the development of Religious Studies as a distinctive field of research and (ii) the development of interdisciplinary research models in the domain of religion.

Strengths

- The Assessment Committee acknowledges that University of Tartu has a strong academic tradition in Theology.
- As Religious Studies is an emerging academic discipline, the current cooperation between the two specialities is appreciated.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The Assessment Committee believes that the sustainability of the study programme will be improved if the programme is underpinned by an overarching research plan for the School of Theology and Religious Studies.
- To promote the visibility and identity of the PhD study programme within the Faculty and the University, the research plan might usefully develop a clear focus on the common intellectual ground between Theology and Religious Studies, the contribution of the different sub-disciplines, interdisciplinary and international cooperation, and cognate disciplines in the Faculty and the University.
- The Assessment Committee highly recommends the further development of interdisciplinary research models in the domain of religion.

Resources

Comments

The Assessment Committee understands that the low level of funding available for doctoral students is a major concern for the quality and sustainability of the programme. Moreover, the vulnerable status of the student after the 4th or the 6th year causes uneasiness, both for staff and students.

In line with the University-level recommendations, the Assessment Committee emphasises that structural funding of students by means of State funding, EU funding and research grants is necessary for the viability of the programme. In addition, the Faculty could better support qualified staff members to participate in international learned societies and research projects in order to be part of an international community of scholars.

Strengths

- In general, the infrastructure of the University of Tartu provides good conditions for PhD studies and research.

- The Assessment Committee acknowledges the efforts to support students to participate in international conferences and to study abroad.
- The access to resources in the University Library and the workspace of doctoral students is adequate.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The Assessment Committee recommends that the Faculty clearly defines the task of the supervisor after the cut off of funding in the 4th year and after the 6th year.
- Since the writing of the thesis is usually an individualistic pursuit, the Committee believes that the School of Theology and Religious Studies could strengthen the research community for doctoral students.

Teaching, learning, research and/or creative activity

Comments

The Assessment Committee considers that the teaching and supervision in the doctoral programme is performed according to high academic standards and clear procedures. The School of Theology is aware of the fact that a narrow research area of a student might require specific supervisory competences. The appointment of a co-supervisor is good practice, provided that the School guarantees academic quality. As the research of the doctoral student is usually an individualistic pursuit, it is a good practice that doctoral students engage with Estonian research organisations.

The Assessment Committee found during the interviews that the supervisors are dedicated to guide the students and that students and supervisors meet on a regular basis. However, meetings specifically focused on the thesis might be scheduled more systematically, not only on request of the student.

The teaching skills that doctoral students acquire during the doctoral programme are highly appreciated by the students, but the time investment in teaching is not always in proportion with the credit points, and this could cause delay in the production of the thesis.

Strengths

- The courses, small conferences and seminars of the Doctoral Schools provide an adequate structure that enhances the academic and professional skills of the students.
- The supervisors are committed to their field of research and dedicated to the research work of their students.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The timely completion of the doctoral thesis requires supervisors to carefully monitor the research path of the doctoral student.

- The Assessment Committee recommends that supervisors pay attention to mandatory and optional courses, the formulation of research questions, the progress of the thesis, time management, and writing skills.
- The Committee recommends that the study programme highlights the societal relevance of research in the field of religion and give students a better understanding of the usefulness of their academic and professional skills in their future roles in religious communities and in society.

Teaching staff

Comments

The teaching staff of the School of Theology and Religious Studies participates in national and international networks of academic research and this secures the academic level of the topics of the doctoral theses. The School has six chairs. At the moment, 6 academic staff members have research grants and 12 doctoral students are involved in the grants. The staff concedes that a close link between the student's dissertation topic and the supervisor's research topic is beneficial.

The self-evaluation report states that supervisors develop their skills in the process of supervision at BA and MA level. The Assessment Committee points out, however, that the supervision of doctoral theses requires additional research skills and distinctive methodological knowledge.

According to Faculty leaders, the integration of the School in the larger Faculty of Humanities was beneficial. The new structure has been operative since 2016. The Assessment Committee recommends that the Faculty evaluates the effects of the integration in the near future and align expectations at all levels of the School of Theology and Religious Studies.

Strengths

- A community of teaching staff that stimulates international mobility of doctoral students.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The Assessment Committee recommends strategic research planning in the disciplines of Theology and Religious Studies in order to generate new doctoral topics and to improve capacity building of staff.
- The Committee recommends the implementation of staff meetings to discuss and reflect on the difference between supervision at MA level and doctoral level. The Committee supports the action plan to develop a concordance to ensure that feedback is collegial and supportive.

Doctoral students

Comments

The Assessment Committee noted that both students and alumni reported that a doctorate is not uniformly respected in Estonian society and not always helpful in relation to finding a job at the labour market. That means that students are not stimulated by societal receptivity to complete their thesis. Consequently, the motivation to finish the doctoral study comes from the significance of the research topic and from personal motivation. The Assessment Committee recommends that doctoral teaching and supervision addresses the relevance of the humanities in general and of Theology and Religious Studies in particular for the sustainability and wellbeing of society.

Students are positive about the courses of the Doctoral School, although they experience that some courses (for example, the English writing course) are too focused on the sciences.

The Assessment Committee noticed that the main reason for a student's lack of progress is their employment outside the University required for them to make a living. This being so, the Committee advises that the supervisor pays attention to a realistic research plan and the time management of the student.

Strengths

- A supportive environment for doctoral students to conduct their research and write their dissertation.
- The involvement of 12 doctoral students in research grants.

Areas of improvement

- The Assessment Committee recommends that the supervisors take a more proactive role in arranging supervisory meetings and focus on timely completion of the thesis. They might also carefully monitor and limit the amount of time students spend on their teaching duties.

1.3.3. Philosophy

Study programme

Comments

The Faculty of Arts and Humanities offers a broad and high quality doctoral study programme in philosophy, located within the Institute of Philosophy and Semiotics. One of the oldest and most established departments of the University of Tartu, in 2016 the Institute of Philosophy of Semiotics was incorporated into a new Faculty infrastructure comprising four institutes, one school and two colleges. Philosophy at Tartu is the only such disciplinary unit in Estonia and extends across all major philosophical fields encompassing various specialisations

in research. The department hosts four chairs in the History of Philosophy, Practical Philosophy, Philosophy of Science, and Theoretical Philosophy.

The number of PhD students in the department is relatively modest but a critical mass has been sustained and the effectiveness of the programme, continuation and timely completions have improved in the evaluation period. Testament to the quality of the programme is that the majority of graduates elect to write their thesis in English and an impressive number have successfully secured postdoctoral positions at distinguished universities internationally including Ruhr-University Bochum, New York University and Harvard University.

Strengths

- Philosophy at the University of Tartu is internationally recognised (101-150 in the QS World University Rankings by Subject 2017).
- Given the evidence presented and positive dialogue conducted during the visit, the Assessment Committee can confirm that Philosophy at the University of Tartu offers a high quality doctoral student experience and meets international doctoral standards for PhD study in Philosophy.
- Managed through the Faculty and working with colleagues in Linguistics and Semiotics, Philosophy participates in the national and EU funded Graduate School in supporting the leadership and development of doctoral research in Estonia in partnership with Tallinn University, the Estonian Literary Museum and the Institute of the Estonian Language. Doctoral students on the programme benefit from collective events and from extended interdisciplinary discussions facilitated by the Graduate Schools.
- Internally, the PhD programme in Philosophy is clear, coherent, rigorous and engaged. It attracts and recruits postgraduate students from the University's Masters in Philosophy, from other Universities in Estonia and modest numbers of visiting international students.
- From the discussions with supervising staff, students and alumni, the Assessment Panel was impressed by the engagement and eloquence of the students in describing their independence of judgement and intellectual broadening of perspectives as the result of their doctoral studies, while also participating in broader Graduate School courses and research activities and gaining more generic and transferable skills.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The Assessment Committee identified concerns about the use and interpretation of data and statistics, including an anomaly in the University's parameters concerning effectiveness: for example, regarding as drop-outs some of the most successful PhD students in Philosophy moving from Tartu to very prestigious universities internationally. The Assessment Committee noted that this inadvertently has a negative impact on the statistics presented.

- Highlight the major philosophical traditions represented in research and teaching in course documentation.
- The Assessment Committee recommends that the department articulates and clarifies its core strengths and expertise. This would provide external clarity and legibility, and would be particularly beneficial for attracting more international students and visiting academics.

Resources

Comments

The Department of Philosophy is well-resourced and provides sufficient staff and researchers with appropriate qualifications to support and supervise doctoral studies.

Strengths

- The resources and workspaces for students are good and include two major collections, three important archives, and a visiting scholars' programme, although there were some immediate difficulties in retrieving literature from the University Library.
- The students have good online access to the academic publications required for their research and the department hosts an annual international conference.
- The department has comfortable and updated classrooms and offices and its own library and study space including circa 14,000 books.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The 2013 survey of doctoral students revealed that the parallel engagement in full-time employment alongside full-time study is a considerable challenge that prevents students from successfully completing their doctoral thesis in a timely manner.
- The long-term plan for space provision is to enlarge the individual workspaces and the social and informal learning spaces so as to improve communication and social support for students so as to strengthen institutional relationships between students and staff members.
- The self-evaluation report, discussions with staff members and current students highlighted the lack of sufficient financial support for full-time study within the 4+2 timeframe. The Assessment Committee heard that the University hopes to contribute additional funds to reduce the need for doctoral students to take up secondary employment.
- In addition to financial issues identified at all levels, students, supervisors and alumni raised concerns as to the standing and value of a PhD in Estonian society, and especially so for Philosophy PhDs.
- The Assessment Committee recommends that a targeted effort is required to articulate the civic, social and cultural value of studying arts and

humanities subjects at the highest level, evidencing and highlighting the significant impact that these subject have on everyday life.

Teaching, Learning, Research and/or Creative Activity

Comments

The Graduate School in Linguistics, Philosophy and Semiotics (GSLPS) and led by the University of Tartu supports the work of the Department of Philosophy. The Graduate School provides a wide range of activities that complement those of the doctoral research community at the University of Tartu. It offers intensive seminars, guest lectures, symposia, graduate conferences and writing retreats to develop and advance students' transferable skills.

Strengths

- The Assessment Committee noted the positive impact of the two Graduate Schools in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities: namely the Graduate School of Culture Studies and Arts, and the Graduate School of Linguistics, Philosophy and Semiotics.
- The Assessment Committee noted the development of innovative formats of teaching that encouraged and enabled PhD students to design and develop new taught courses, articulate teaching methods, understand and apply the principles of assessment, and gain their first teaching experiences.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- There was some concern that the additional layer of complexity within the Faculty (two Graduate Schools) was confusing externally, although the Assessment Committee noted that both appear to function adequately.
- The Assessment Committee would recommend and encourage opportunities to participate in innovative forms of teaching, such that doctoral students from all areas can develop their leadership and teamwork skills, as noted in the self-evaluation report.

Teaching Staff

Comments

The Assessment Committee recognises the teaching staff group in the Department of Philosophy as a mature, high-quality research community with an international reputation. The Assessment Committee noted the Faculty's successful bid to extend the philosophical research capacity of the four existing chairs with respect to two new professorships: a Professor of Philosophy of Language and Professor of Intellectual History Estonian History of Thought. These

appointments will clearly enhance the University's reputation and positively broaden the department's philosophical breadth and supervisory opportunities.

Strengths

- The Assessment Committee noted the research cooperation with philosophy staff in the Institute of Cultural Studies at Tallinn University, particularly in sharing supervisory expertise.
- University of Tartu academics have successfully won institutional and personal research grants from a wide range of national and international funding sources.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Supervision at the University of Tartu is considered as part of the teaching task, and the Assessment Committee noted that it would be beneficial for all members of staff to engage with, and support one another, to enhance the supervisory competence of the department, but also to refine and introduce new methods and practices to doctoral supervision.
- Supervisors demonstrated a range of engagement with the supervisory process. Some have positively adopted the practice of using formalised written methods to identify the students and the supervisor's expectations of the supervisory process at the outset of the doctorate.
- Following discussions with directors, supervisors, alumni and students, the Assessment Committee recommends that supervisory expertise and good practice might be discussed and shared more effectively, particularly given the remarks and some complaints from students.

Doctoral Students

Comments

The Assessment Committee welcomed the degree of engagement of the doctoral students, their active participation in research projects, and their enthusiasm for internationalisation that is vital for the sustainability of the programme.

Strengths

- Many of the students are actively involved with national and international research projects with their supervisors and related staff. These students recognise the need to organise their own events, including, for example, a Spring School for Career Planning.
- It is clear that the students are perceived as an integral part of the department's research community. In particular, the students appreciated the Graduate School experiences and the benefits of developing writing and teaching skills, as well as being part of a broader interdisciplinary programme of study.

- The Department of Philosophy has successfully met the aim of graduate students studying or undertaking research at abroad for at least one semester of their doctoral programme.
- The DoRa Plus initiative facilitated through EU structural fund support is designed to stimulate dialogue and to build a critical mass of international students and partnerships, alongside opportunities for the students to participate in funded research. Both assist in extending the reach of departmental research and to internationalise the programme overall.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Further strategic work was required to innovate and develop career opportunities beyond the PhD solely as a training for academic life, as this alone, would not enable the sustainability of philosophical study at doctoral level without further recourse to interdisciplinarity.
- A more strategic and instrumental approach to philosophical application within Estonian society may be required. Dialogue and discussion across the University may assist in bringing together humanities and scientific publishing traditions, for example, in order to assure the long-term sustainability of philosophy at Tartu.
- Students expressed a need for sustained and collegial discussions and were very proactive in seeking out employment and practical applications for philosophy that would enhance their employment prospects.
- In dialogue with the students, the Assessment Committee addressed the main concern noted in the self-evaluation report relating to the time allocated to doctoral supervision. There is clearly a need for further work and discussion to be undertaken as to how expectations and responsibilities for supervisors and students are established and agreed. Students wished to ensure that there was a clear distinction between working closely with supervisors on specific funded projects and dedicated time and supervision to focus on the specifics of their PhD subject and their research challenges. The Assessment Committee recommends that the University clearly outlines minimum expectations and responsibilities for students and supervisors at the outset of the PhD.
- The students also raised the issues of the relative scarcity of feedback. Although online open feedback opportunities were welcomed and provided for reflection and review on the supervisory process, it did not resolve issues relating to the importance of the one-to-one intellectual bond that develops during doctoral study.
- The Assessment Committee noted the efforts of the Faculty and the department to continuously improve supervisory practices for new students, but believed there was more that could be done to ensure that the supervisory experience continued to develop. In particular, the

Committee believes it is important for the community of supervisors (and potential supervisors) to meet on a more regular basis to discuss what might be deemed or emerging as good or innovative supervisory practices, including how feedback from students is acknowledged, discussed and responded to, as part of the quality assurance and enhancement processes of the Faculty.

- In particular, the Assessment Committee recommended that the selection of accredited taught courses and study choices are distinguished from intellectual and methodological advice in supervisions. While the Committee understood the necessary link between planning a study programme and supervision, it was not always entirely clear how these two processes were distinguished and whether the supervisor was ultimately responsible for both. This is an issue of clarification.

1.3.4. Semiotics and Culture Studies

Study programme

Comments

The PhD in Semiotics and Culture Studies is among the most reputed doctoral programmes in semiotics worldwide. Alongside its BA and MA programmes, it makes University of Tartu the largest hub for semiotics in the world. The historical foundations of the Department of Semiotics are impressive, being the heir of the Tartu-Moscow School, founded in the 1960s by Juri Lotman. Today, semiotics at Tartu goes beyond the field of cultural semiotics. It has successfully developed social and biosemiotics research that has helped make the PhD programme interdisciplinary with a broad choice of research topics.

Strengths

- The large number of qualified teaching staff, covering cultural, social and biosemiotics.
- Strong international integration of the programme, provided by a number of visiting professors, an international summer school, a good number of international students.
- The department publishes one of the top international semiotic journals, *Sign System Studies*, which gives an option for publication for the PhD students and helps to raise the overall quality level of the all publications of the department, the PhD thesis included.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- A general problem is the relation of the programme to the world outside academia. In the self-evaluation report, there is an explicit point in the

action plan where the department shows its awareness of its need to address directly relevant social issues, but the proposed solution concerns mostly improvement of the interdisciplinarity and interdepartmental collaboration. A real and effective collaboration with organisations and companies outside academia is not taken as a strategic goal, although during the meeting with the supervisors a number of successful collaborations on a doctoral level were listed: 5 PhD students have contributed with their research to the construction of an online platform for secondary schools and two PhD students in biosemiotics have applied their research in Ecological NGOs. The PhD programme has the great responsibility to maintain the Tartu-Moscow School tradition; but, at the same time, within the 58 topics (in the self-evaluation report appendix) there might be more applied research topics than at present.

Resources

Comments

The infrastructure at the University of Tartu leaves a positive impression, the main University buildings are among the best things to see in Tartu from an architectural point of view, and the interior spaces are large, clean, ordered and well equipped. The most important issues with the resources concerns the student's allowance, the system of funding of the teaching staff and the temporary out-of-service of the main University Library.

Strengths

- A well-resourced University Library and good availability of special collections for semiotic literature.
- Online access to all the necessary critical literature.
- Flexible possibilities for supplementary funding for PhD students: for example, department research projects, funding for conferences and seminars, and opportunities for mobility.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- A major problem is related to the level of the student funding and the necessity of doctoral students working during their study period. This is in line with the recommendations at University level to increase the level of funding to a higher base level.
- One particular direction for making the PhD programme more self-sustainable is to encourage more systemic collaboration with private and public organisations outside of higher education. There might be research needs in such organisations which could overlap with the research standards of the PhD programme.

Teaching, learning, research and/or creative activity

Comments

The taught courses correspond to the international standards and cover a unique combination of specialisations: cultural, social and biosemiotics. The programme is open to and attracts foreign candidates, and the international standards are enhanced by academic exchange with other prestigious semiotic centres. The Assessment Committee was able to verify a good level of integration of the PhD candidates with the research goals of the department.

Strengths

- The doctoral programme is supported by BA and MA programmes (the MA is taught in English), which makes Tartu unique with such a large inventory of semiotic courses. This raises the expectation of the quality of admitted students compared with other European PhD programmes.
- It was apparent from the self-evaluation report and interviews that international students are less prepared for the PhD programme compared to Estonian graduates who have taken a BA or MA in semiotics. International students typically have to take some additional MA courses, which is a good indicator for the high level.
- Seminars and doctoral schools that help students to improve their research projects.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The major recommendation is to ensure that the quality and quantity of the supervision is regulated, as outlined in the University-level recommendations. In the interviews, the Assessment Committee ascertained that students are satisfied with the supervision, whereas supervisors were concerned about a significant imbalance in the workload faced by some of them.
- A second important issue concerns the involvement of external experts and professionals as co-supervisors. In the self-evaluation report there are good reasons to open the programme to co-supervision. However, during the interviews it was apparent that none of the three parties (programme directors, supervisors, students) were particularly interested in this. As with other humanities PhD programmes, the shared expectation is for an academic career after completion of the PhD, although all involved parties are aware that only a small number of doctoral graduates are successful in securing an academic post. It is apparent that the only focused attempt to meet PhD students with professionals from the corporate world was the organisation of the Semiofest in 2016. This is a good example of an event that might be organised again in the future.

Teaching staff

Comments

The Department of Semiotics has a good number of qualified teaching staff due to the three semiotic programmes at BA, MA and PhD level. Most staff members are well known internationally and preserve the tradition of Lotman heritage. The ratio between young and experienced scholars is favourable for long-term development of the programme.

Strengths

- The Assessment Committee detected a high level of cooperation and mutual satisfaction between students and staff members, even better than between the students themselves. Probably this is one of the reasons for the PhD candidates strongly aspire to an academic career.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The Assessment Committee detected that only a small number of the teaching staff were involved in the PhD programme. This might be redressed to ensure broaden the group of supervisors.
- It appears that the programme prioritises theoretical and methodological topics over applied semiotics. Since the former is one of the distinctive features of the Tartu-Moscow school, the recommendation does not question this specialism, but the development of applied semiotic projects might benefit the sustainability of the PhD programme and enhance its positive reputation outside academia.

Doctoral students

Comments

Students are motivated and happy with their study. In the interviews students expressed no explicit concerns about how the profession was recognised outside of academia. Instead, the doctoral studies are associated exclusively with an academic career and intellectual self-fulfilment. The low monetary value of state funding is seen as the primary reason that PhDs take longer than 4 years to complete and sometimes lead to drop-outs. It was apparent that the APRs had a positive impact on the efficiency of the programme.

Strengths

- A good number of international students.
- Active participation and appreciation of the seminars.
- Awareness and appreciation of publication possibilities that the department provides.

- Sense of pride of belonging to an important and historic academic tradition in the field of semiotics.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The main recommendations align with University-level recommendations with respect to efficiency, sustainability and societal impact.
- Opening the doctoral studies in semiotics to the labour market is in the action plan of the self-evaluation report, but in the interviews it was not an aspect that supervisors and students were particularly concerned about. When asked what might be improved in the programme, the students wished more collaboration with the Department of Philosophy. The Assessment Committee recommends that the efforts to involve doctoral students with a more vocational orientation might begin in the recruitment phase and with the conception of research projects.

1.3.5. Estonian and Finno-Ugric Linguistics

Study programme

Comments

The study programme in Estonian and Finno-Ugric Linguistics is the largest in the Faculty in terms of both enrolled students and doctoral theses defended. The thematic area of the programme is of particular national interest. The University of Tartu is the most important research-intensive centre of Estonian language in the world, and also one of the main centres of Finno-Ugric studies worldwide.

Both students and academic staff members have opportunities for international mobility. The programme allows for a wide range of research topics, and it has inherent connections with Estonian society. Students seem generally content with the programme and they have access to a wide range of expertise in the subject area. However, they wish to have more opportunities to engage in professionally-oriented experiences so they can develop the necessary skills to enable them to assume different types of careers both within and beyond academia.

The self-evaluation report mentions "limited professional careers related to the topics of PhD dissertations" as an area of improvement. Given that there are not enough prospects for all doctoral students in academia, they might be made aware of this at an early stage and offered more professionally-based experiences that would give them better opportunities in a wider labour market.

Strengths

- The programme is highly significant both for Estonian society and for the international community of Finno-Ugric studies.

- Both students and academic staff have good opportunities for international mobility.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Connections with non-academic employers could be stronger and research topics could be considered in the light of their career implications.
- More emphasis could be given in the curriculum to professionally-oriented experiences with a view to broadening the employment perspectives of graduates.

Resources

Comments

Given the inherent connection between language and national identity, the subject area of the programme is of special interest to the university and society. This is reflected in its resources. The institute has three professorships dedicated to "research areas of national significance" which receive direct funding from the Ministry of Education and Research. More generally, the programme appears to be well resourced in comparison to several others in the Faculty.

The students face the same financial problems as those of the other programmes: it is difficult to work full-time on the PhD research unless they receive extra funding from a research project. On the other hand, many of them may choose to work alongside their doctoral studies even if it was not financially necessary in order to acquire teaching experience, for example. There is officially no part-time doctoral student status, even though most of the doctoral students can only pursue their studies part-time given their need to work to supplement their doctoral allowance.

It seems that the students are treated differently depending on their potential engagement in a research project. This may be a problem with regard to comparability and consistency of the student experience as offered by the programme.

Given that student experiences vary and their research opportunities may be dictated by whether they can be involved in project work or not, the Assessment Committee believes that the strengths listed below may not be equally valid for all individual students in this study programme.

Strengths

- The programme itself is relatively well resourced.
- Three dedicated professorships with direct funding is a notable asset.
- The programme resides in adequate, newly renovated facilities.
- The department has been successful in acquiring research projects and grants.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Because the state stipend for the doctoral students is insufficient, the Assessment Committee believes the grant needs raising, in line with its recommendation at national and University levels.
- The University Library is currently unavailable, which disturbs research and doctoral studies in particular.
- Not all students have a dedicated workspace.

Teaching, learning, research and/or creative activity

Comments

Coursework and other activities besides the doctoral dissertation have been added to the curriculum. This seems to divide opinion. Some students, alumni and supervisors found it highly beneficial that the students are given more transferrable skills and that there exists a taught component that goes beyond their research topic, while others felt that this part of the curriculum is often demotivating and irrelevant.

There appears to be a certain lack of consistency among doctoral students with respect to their doctoral experience: some are included in research projects while others are not; some of them have dissertation topics that are more closely related to their supervisors' research interests than those of others; some students don't feel a strong sense of belonging and feel isolated in their work.

It seems that virtually all doctoral students aim for a career in the academia. The programme also appears to train them for that. Yet, highly trained experts in this subject area, notably of the Estonian language, are certainly needed outside of the academia as well.

The topics of doctoral dissertations are commonly based on the topics of MA theses. While this is economical in the sense that the doctoral student has a fair background in the topic at the outset, the choice of topic may need more attention than it is currently given. The choice of topic might be given further scrutiny by the supervisor and discussed at greater length with the applicant in the light of existing research projects, the supervisors' expertise, and academic and non-academic career prospects.

Strengths

- Research projects and similar groups provide diverse support for a notable portion of the doctoral students.
- The Annual Progress Review regularly gives both the doctoral students and the supervisors an overview of how the student is progressing and what they have learned and achieved.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Career options outside of the academia could be given more consideration in curriculum planning and in the choice of dissertation topics.
- Students may need clarification concerning the relevance and usefulness of some of the courses offered.

Teaching staff

Comments

The highly qualified teaching staff actively participate in supervisory training, international conferences and other events in order to maintain and develop their skills and expertise and to ensure a strong level of academic recognition.

The programme supports internationalisation in many forms, including sending teaching staff to teach abroad for a full semester or a year at a time and inviting international visiting lecturers to Tartu.

The alumni interviewed by the Assessment Committee felt that they do not have as strong a connection with the programme as they would like to have. They also felt that when they do serve as external co-supervisors, their role is not always clear. Co-supervision has become more commonplace recently but is still not very common and could be used much more.

Strengths

- Students seem very happy with their supervisors and appear to have good relationships with them overall.
- Supervisors are available and welcoming to students.
- Both the teaching staff members and visiting lecturers contribute to the strong international profile of the programme.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The alumni of the programme could be used more often as co-supervisors, visiting lecturers and as a reference group for different planning tasks.
- External co-supervisors, alumni or other, could be offered training or other support for supervision.
- The students need a practical way of giving feedback to the supervisors.

Doctoral students

Comments

In terms of numbers, the programme appears to function very well in that there is a constant flow of enrolments and awarded degrees. On the other hand, the number of enrolled students is gradually falling, and the number of students dropping out of their studies rising. This appears to be a more general trend in arts and humanities within the University of Tartu, and while it may not be as big

of a problem for this particular programme as it is for smaller programmes, it deserves a certain amount of attention.

While the programme officially functions in Estonian and English, other languages are used as well, notably Finnish and Russian. This helps students with different language backgrounds to participate in the programme. Perhaps more importantly, practically all foreign students also learn Estonian, unlike those of most other programmes, which allows them to integrate better in the programme and in the academic community.

Even though the subject area attracts mainly Estonian nationals, both the students and supervisors are well motivated and encouraged to spend time abroad and to pursue an international academic career.

Some 60% of the doctoral students in the programme are included in ongoing research projects. Nearly half of the students are not, but they generally feel that it would be useful for them to be included.

Strengths

- The programme has a steady throughput of students and graduates.
- The students are encouraged to build a strong international research profile.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- As the student admission rate is declining, it is important to think about ways to actively recruit new doctoral students.
- Doctoral students could be given the possibility of participating in research projects, teams and thematic discussion groups.

1.3.6. Literature and Cultural Research

Study programme

Literature and Cultural Research at the University of Tartu has five divisions in the fields of Estonian literature, comparative literature, theatre, ethnology and folklore. These specialisms are compliant with both national legislation and the University of Tartu's statutes and regulations. They mirror the strengths in language research at Tartu, but also emphasise the literary, textual and performance aspects of research. The programme is broad in its disciplinary range and attracts students with different educational experiences. The programme attracts highly qualified and motivated students, some of them international. This is the only programme of its kind in Estonia, and it is producing articulate and self-reflexive students with a broad range of skills and expertise. Many students are working in interdisciplinary fields and some are collecting and evaluating primary-source data through interviews and interactions

with human subjects. There are productive connections between the programme and a range of organisations in Estonia, including the Estonian Literary Museum, the Estonian National Museum and the Institute of Estonian Language.

Strengths

- The Assessment Committee found evidence of a broad ranging and interdisciplinary curriculum that encourages students developing innovative projects for their doctoral study.
- The directors and supervisors are engaged closely with the student experience and are sensitive to the needs and intellectual ambitions of their students.
- Students have a strong sense of the requirements of peer-reviewed publications and the benefits of international experiences. An immersive international experience is encouraged by the Faculty.
- There are opportunities for local and international students to mix and exchange ideas in order to tackle theoretical and methodological questions.
- Many of the students have teaching experiences and more than half of them are connected to broader research projects in the study programme.
- There are robust connections to external organisations that enhance the study programme and can offer potential career routes to the graduates of this programme.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The Assessment Committee recommends that the programme considers the differences in student experience for doctoral students attached to broader research projects compared to those that have devised their own course of study in dialogue with their supervisor.
- A more robust approach to time management would be helpful to ensure that the majority of students on the programme complete within 4 years.
- Deepening the relationships with external organisations to ensure that co-supervisory expertise is used would strengthen the support and advice a student receives. This would also include developing new relationships with other organisations, both public and private, to widen the range of career destinations for graduating students.

Resources

Comments

The study programme is well resourced in terms of student access to suitably qualified staff, library facilities and funding for international mobility. The Assessment Committee was satisfied that the resources are adequate for the

programme, although not all the students had their own study space for the duration of the programme.

Strengths

- The programme is well resourced, especially in its library facilities and access to material held by its external partners in Tartu and Tallinn such as the Estonian Literary Museum, the Estonian National Museum and the Institute of Estonian Language.
- The doctoral supervisors whom the Assessment Committee met were appropriately qualified and highly committed to the success of their PhD candidates.
- The availability of funding for international trips such as conferences and longer-term study visits.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The Assessment Panel recommends parity of treatment in the workspace arrangements of PhD students on this programme, preferably with a private workspace that the student can use consistently through their period of study.
- As with other programmes the Assessment Committee observed, the period of study abroad might be supported more formally by regular contact with the Tartu supervisor.
- The programme might usefully deepen its relationship with its excellent array of external organisations via co-supervisory arrangements and placements. There is some inconsistency in the ways in which PhD-holding alumni working in these organisations can be used as co-supervisors.

Teaching, learning, research and/or creative activity

Comments

The Assessment Committee was impressed by the commitment and motivation of its directors and supervisors, with obvious care on display for students on both intellectual and pastoral levels. Directors and supervisors are committed to develop a stimulating and inclusive academic environment, and in helping their students develop intellectually vibrant research projects. There is a strong culture of interdisciplinarity and a productive emphasis on the 'Studies' aspect of the programme. There is an expectation that students will take relevant taught courses at the beginning of their programme of study; for international students (who are working in English) Estonian language courses are encouraged. Staff are engaged in thinking about diverse career tracks for their students, including postdoctoral opportunities and broader international projects to which students can be attached. Many of the students that the Assessment Committee interviewed had teaching experience at the BA level.

Strengths

- Motivation and commitment of the programme's directors and supervisors.
- A stimulating and inclusive academic environment.
- A strong culture of interdisciplinarity.
- Staff are thinking about career tracks for graduates in and beyond academia, including postdoctoral studies and international projects.
- Teaching opportunities for doctoral students on the programme.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The Assessment Committee believes it is important that the workload of supervisors is formally recognised in a standardised model, and that a regular pattern of supervisions is established.
- More attention could be usefully given to variability of the student experience, especially between students attached to research projects compared to those who are not.
- Co-supervisory arrangements with external partners could be formalised and deepened. This might include, specifically, a stronger set of relationships with theatre and performing arts organisations.
- Some standards would benefit from being formalised, especially the ethical approval for students working with human subjects.
- The Baltic Student Seminars that currently held once a year might be developed further.

Teaching staff

Comments

All the teaching staff that the Assessment Committee met with were both very committed to their field of studies and in ensuring that their doctoral students were fully integrated into the culture of the study programme. This strong sense of collegiality and commitment to an inclusive culture is a real strength of the programme. Supervisors are good on guiding students through the variety of options on the taught part of the programme and in helping students address methodological questions. The sequence of doctoral seminars are a good way of sharing best practice. As with other programmes, there was some inconsistency in the expectations of individual supervisors about the amount of contact they are expected to have with their doctoral students.

Strengths

- The inclusive and collegiate environment that is promoted by supervisors on the programme.
- The quality of the research of the supervisors on the programme.

- Commitment to the quality of the doctoral programme on behalf of supervisors.
- The sequence of doctoral seminars as a forum for sharing best practice.
- Commitment to internationalisation and interdisciplinarity.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- As for other study programmes, the Assessment Committee believes it is important that both supervisors and students have a clear sense of the expected number of dedicated supervisions within a year. There was some confusion about what “physical encounters” between supervisors and students represented as these were not always meetings where the student’s doctoral work was explicitly discussed. There is a concordance of best practice but not all supervisors seem to be aware of this, and there is no uniform mechanism for evaluation beyond the APR.
- The Assessment Committee recommends a formal training course for new students that could usefully include intellectual and questions about the ethical aspects of research, given that a number of students are working with live subjects, especially those working in ethnology and folklore.

Doctoral students

Comments

The Assessment Committee was very impressed by the articulacy and self-reflexivity of the doctoral students that it interviewed. They spanned a variety of research projects that clearly evidenced both the quality and the interdisciplinary range of the programme. All of these students were engaged in employment to supplement the doctoral allowance, but all accepted that this was a reality for Estonian doctoral students. A number students (and alumni who had completed their PhDs at Tartu) had extensive experience working with external organisations, and the Committee witnessed good evidence of career tracks beyond academia. There were concerns that a number of students were going well beyond 4 years to complete, even when other life experiences (for example, maternity leave and family commitments) were taken into account.

Strengths

- Well-qualified and highly motivated students who are dealing with complex literary and cultural issues from both contemporary and historical perspectives.
- Students are articulate and are able to think deeply and self-reflexively about their studies.
- Students understand the importance and benefit of international experiences and mobility.

- Good evidence of integration with external organisations such as the Estonian Literary Museum, the Estonian National Museum and the Institute of Estonian Language. In this respect, there is evidence that students are being well prepared for careers beyond academia.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Consistent workspace for doctoral students, preferably for the course of their study.
- The Assessment Committee believes it is important that attention is given to ensure that students graduate within a four-year period and there are clear and uniform expectations about the number of articles that are required at the outset. There was variability in this respect.
- In line with the University-level recommendations, students on this programme would benefit from a stronger sense of ethical guidelines as it pertains to primary research activities.

1.3.7. Germanic and Romance Languages and Literatures

Study programme

Comments

Germanic and Romance Languages and Literatures at the University of Tartu have a longstanding and well-earned reputation for academic excellence which was clearly evidenced during the Assessment Committee's visit. The doctoral curriculum is compliant with both national legislation and the University of Tartu's statutes and regulations, and through a regular process of internal review in recent years (February 2012 and October 2014) has been developed to ensure that the needs of PhD students in a changing labour market are addressed. The study programme continues to attract highly qualified and motivated candidates both from Estonia and abroad, and these students are supported by very dedicated members of staff. In line with comparable doctoral programmes across Europe, there is a focus on the benefits of gaining transferable skills and of international mobility, as well as on excellence in research.

Strengths

- The Assessment Committee found evidence of a flexible curriculum that has been adapted to meet the needs of students. Smaller student numbers have led to resourceful solutions and a more individually tailored approach.
- The staff's responsiveness to student feedback on curriculum content, and the fact that the supervisor and programme director discuss training and learning needs with each individual candidate, are examples of good practice.

- Students gain a clear sense of the standard required for peer-reviewed publications and international conference presentations and are strongly supported in, and accredited for, these activities.
- The programme enables students to develop teaching experience and other transferable skills, as well as proficiency in foreign languages at the level needed for participation in an international professional context.
- Student international mobility is encouraged.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The transferable skills being developed are good, but are largely focused on an academic context such as teaching and writing skills. It would be beneficial to develop courses that address the pressures of the job market: for example, professional conduct, leadership, networking, communication media and financial management. The Assessment Committee recommends that the Faculty liaise more closely with employers and alumni to identify the gaps which could usefully be filled.
- Given the small student numbers and the imperilled position of Germanic and Romance Languages and Literatures at doctoral level, staff might work actively to increase the profile of the University by cultivating more links with national cultural institutions of the languages studied (for example, Goethe Institut and Alliance française), as well as with other university departments across Europe, with whom partnerships and collaborative initiatives might be developed.
- It was apparent both from the self-evaluation report and from discussion at all levels of the University during the site visit that a more robust approach to timetables, deadlines and annual progress review is needed in order to help more students graduate within the standard study period. It would be beneficial to clarify annual requirements for doctoral students in terms of their written output a clear upper limit for the number of teaching hours in which PhD students can engage. Tougher sanctions for non-completion of the required research output would lead in many cases to more focused study and swifter completion.

Resources

Comments

On the whole the study programme is well resourced in terms of student access to suitably qualified staff, library facilities and funding for international mobility. In common with many smaller language and literature units across Europe, there is limited potential for academic staff to secure competitive large research project grants which in turn bring in resources from which doctoral students can benefit.

Strengths

- There is a good infrastructure in terms of physical environment, library resources and Graduate School activities.
- The doctoral supervisors whom the Assessment Committee met were appropriately qualified and highly committed to the success of their PhD candidates.
- International networks of staff facilitate student mobility, and adequate funding both for study abroad and also for shorter conference trips is available to students via the DoRa Plus and Kristjan Jaak scholarships.
- The Assessment Committee heard very positive feedback from students on the usefulness of writing boot camps and other Graduate School initiatives.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- It appeared from interviews with students that their situations varied in terms of having a personal workspace. In light of international evidence which indicates the positive impact on doctoral students' mental wellbeing and research output of having a dedicated desk space, the Assessment Panel recommends parity of treatment in this respect for all PhD students.
- It is recommended that more formal supervision arrangements be put in place for students going abroad for a longer study period: for example, a formalised expectation of a Skype conversation or email exchange once every two weeks could be introduced, so that students can continue to draw on the advisory resources of their home institution.
- The Committee notes the forthcoming investment in three professorial posts to boost research groups and attract new research funding. The Assessment Committee recommends that as many academic staff as possible be encouraged to engage with these research groups and that active participation in bids for competitive funding is supported by Faculty-led workshops on making successful project applications.
- Given the difficult financial position in which most doctoral students find themselves, the Faculty might usefully consider increasing the number of junior researcher positions available, in order to help students complete their PhDs more quickly.

Teaching, learning, research and/or creative activity

Comments

There is a strong sense at the University of Tartu of the connection between effective teaching, learning and research, and evidence of a vibrant academic community into which doctoral students are well integrated. The quality of both teaching and research is high by international comparison, giving students a very

beneficial intellectual and social environment in which to develop. The PhD programme itself is both rich and rigorous, with appropriate objectives and learning outcomes. PhD candidates participate in the delivery of the undergraduate teaching programme, which allows them to gain relevant experience for potential future employment. Such activities, however, can also be extremely time-consuming and can hold them back from working on their thesis, so this balance needs to be carefully managed. Given that the majority of PhD graduates nowadays end up working outside academia in the business and public sectors, more innovative steps are needed to develop a broader range of training in transferable skills in order to prepare students better for the range of options open to them after completion of their studies.

Strengths

- The model of directed reading courses, which allows students to choose the most relevant material in discussion with their supervisor, means that content is flexible and adapted to the needs of the individual.
- Students gain experience of public speaking by presenting their work and responding to questions at doctoral seminars.
- There are regular opportunities for discussion of progress with the programme director.
- There is a good international focus, with opportunities for student mobility, and an external colleague from abroad is present at all PhD defences.
- Students gain valuable experience of teaching and thesis supervision at BA level.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The Assessment Committee noted the heavy workloads of supervisors with multiple responsibilities, and recommends that supervision responsibilities be formally recognised in workload models. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to carefully consider supervisor capacity before new PhD candidates are allocated.
- In interviews during the site visit it emerged that there was little dialogue between supervisors at subject level and the Graduate Schools in terms of developing suitable training courses on transferable skills. It is strongly recommended that a more joined-up approach be adopted, with practical suggestions from staff feeding into Graduate School course design.
- The report mentions co-supervisors in some instances, but does not state that having two supervisors is standard practice, and during the site visit staff expressed the view that co-supervision was not always necessary. The Assessment Committee recommends co-supervision as the norm as this has benefits in terms of sharing workload, increasing accountability and giving the student more than one perspective on their work.

- Interviews with students revealed that they were not adequately briefed on standards and procedures relating to research integrity (including, for example, ethical approval for some aspects of research, data management, avoiding plagiarism and self-plagiarism). It is therefore recommended that these procedures are clarified and guidance is provided, ideally in the form both of training and of published information on research integrity policy and procedures.

Teaching staff

Comments

The Assessment Committee was impressed by the professionalism of the staff members it met during the site visit. There is a clear culture of collegiality, of dedication to the success of doctoral students, and of maintaining the highest standards of research by publishing in reputable, peer-reviewed journals. The current staff has both the competence and the capacity to supervise PhD work. Supervisors often take their doctoral students with them to international conferences and facilitate international mobility for their students through their existing networks. While some early career staff members have been keen to develop their skills by participating in supervisor training, it would be beneficial for all colleagues to demonstrate their commitment to continuing professional development by engaging with such training that would provide a forum for sharing best practice and for refreshing awareness of institutional procedures.

Strengths

- Staff members who serve as doctoral supervisors are established scholars in their field with a strong research record and international networks. This is recognised and appreciated by doctoral students.
- Successful supervision of doctoral students is a key factor in appointing new professors and associate professors.
- International scholars are involved in graduate seminars and in supervising and reviewing doctoral work.
- There is a collegial approach to assisting doctoral students across the Faculty, which includes colleagues not formally involved in the supervision of the students in question.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Interviews with staff during the site visit revealed a degree of reluctance on the part of established staff to update their knowledge by engaging with supervisor training. Part of the reason for this could be that current training is generic across the university and is regarded as being primarily for those new to the profession. In line with University level recommendations, the Assessment Panel recommends a change in culture

and practice in this regard, including formal and mandatory supervisor training, tailored to the humanities context.

- The Assessment Committee formed the impression from interviews with students that supervisors were generally accessible and willing to help whenever their doctoral students needed support. However, in order to manage student expectations of very busy supervisors and to ensure parity of treatment, there might usefully be clearly publicised guidelines regarding the frequency of formal meetings between supervisor and student. As practice currently varies with regards the frequency of meetings, the Assessment Committee recommends that this matter be discussed across the Faculty and a unified approach be adopted.

Doctoral students

Comments

The competition for funded PhD places means that rigorous selection criteria apply and only the best qualified students, with clearly defined research proposals, are admitted to the study programme. The Assessment Committee was particularly impressed by the dedication and articulacy of the PhD students it met, as well as by their ability to juggle multiple commitments and maintain an international perspective. A persistent problem lies in the disappointing completion rate which would benefit from active investigation by the University.

Strengths

- There is a rigorous and competitive selection procedure, allowing the University to admit only the best doctoral candidates.
- The students interviewed by the Committee were articulate, highly motivated individuals who displayed a proactive approach to their studies and an ability to balance a range of commitments.
- The students clearly understand the importance of international mobility and seek out relevant opportunities for study or conference visits abroad.
- Evidence suggests that PhD graduates are entering careers in areas for which their qualifications are appropriate.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The Assessment Committee believes it is important to change the culture from one of regarding a PhD as a personal interest to a more professionalised one with annual targets for completion. Student awareness of key milestones and annual requirements might usefully be sharpened both by clearer induction guidance and a more robust APR.
- The Committee recommends that students have regular and formal opportunities to comment on the quality of the supervision they are receiving. This could form part of the APR, for example, and would allow

any deficiencies in supervisory input or availability, or any problems in the working relationship, to be addressed at an early stage.

- One reason for dropping out or delaying submission can be isolation, stress and problems with mental health. A more structured approach to supporting doctoral student well-being is recommended, as well as other initiatives to promote a sense of a community and peer-support for doctoral researchers.

1.3.8. Russian and Slavonic Philology

Study programme

Comments

The Russian and Slavonic Philology PhD study programme is run by the Department of Slavic Studies, at the College of Foreign Languages and Cultures, belonging to the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. It is pursuant to all the legal acts of the Country and to the rules of the University.

The current version of the doctoral programme of Russian and Slavonic Philology was approved by the Council of the University of Tartu in March 2011 and was subsequently revised in 2012 and 2013 by the Faculty Council in line with the institutional efforts to update doctoral curricula to better comply with present-day needs of society. The programme includes a focus on interdisciplinarity, entrepreneurship and transferable leadership skills. Curriculum design meets the legal requirements set out for postgraduate study programmes in Estonia. The modules are consistent with the level appropriate for doctoral studies.

Strengths

- The programme is well incorporated into the general curriculum structure of the Languages and Cultures doctoral study programme at Tartu University.
- The analysis of the subject-specific competences and learning outcomes indicates that the programme aims and learning outcomes are consistent with the type and level of studies and the level of qualifications offered.
- After closely analysing the curriculum design of the programme and during discussions with staff and students, the Assessment Committee noted that there is clear evidence of flexibility, as it is shaped to meet the individual needs of doctoral students and encourages them to work in archives, study and use new research methods, and participate in local and international conferences.
- It became apparent from discussions with staff and students that the international reputation and the extensive networks of the Department of Slavic Studies benefit other departments within the study area: for

example, in terms of lectures given by international scholars.

- The high rate of student participation in research projects (formally and informally).
- The resilience of the programme's recruitment strategies, which extend to recruitment from outside Estonia: for example, from Russia and Latvia.
- There is a genuine commitment amongst staff members, which was commended by students, who particularly noted the friendly and collegiate atmosphere in the department.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Although the programme's name is Russian and Slavic Philology, the discussions with staff and students indicated that interest in Slavic Philology has been steadily declining, and there are currently no students undertaking research in that area (other than Russian).
- The subjects included in the programme cover a wide range of topics within the field of Russian and Slavonic Philology. However, it was puzzling to discover that there are no modules on topics such as the historical geopolitics of the Russian language, geolinguistics and the post-Soviet transformation of Russophonia, language policy, and multilingualism, particularly, taking into account the constantly changing functions of the Russian Language in post-Soviet space and in the world.
- The topics of some doctoral theses, although interesting, seem to be at a remove from the current developments in modern Russian studies.
- Doctoral students can give feedback on all the subjects of the curriculum in the Study Information System (SIS), but it mostly happens informally during doctoral seminars and in communications between the programme director/supervisor and doctoral students. It would be helpful to develop mechanisms to record students' feedback.
- Although the programme managed to recruit students from outside Estonia, it was noted during the interviews with staff and students that a clear and consistent marketing strategy could benefit the programme in the long term.
- In order to streamline the current offerings and optimise student intake, the Assessment Committee recommends a possible restructuring and renaming the programme (for example, to Russian Philology).
- It might be beneficial to consider including in the curriculum geo-political and socio-political elements analysing the position of Russian in the Baltic States and globalised world and its changing functions in post-Soviet space, taking into account the existing expertise within the university in language ecology and the interethnic processes in the Baltic countries.
- The above point might be helpful in creating fresh topics for doctoral theses, which could branch away from traditional philological topics and

increase the interdisciplinary aspects of students' research and its practical application.

Resources

Comments

During the meetings with staff and students it was revealed that they were generally happy with the university's and the institute's facilities.

Strengths

- The department has a sufficient number of qualified teaching staff with prior supervision experience to supervise PhD students.
- The students noted that the university library has a wide variety of materials for Russian and Slavonic studies, including electronic resources and databases. There is open access to publications in Russian (literary theory, folklore, linguistics, dictionaries, reference books, encyclopedias, periodicals in the field of philology). Both students and staff can use databases subscribed to by the university library.
- Overall, the students were very complimentary about the quality of teaching rooms and available equipment at the University.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Although the College of Foreign Languages and Cultures has a working room available to all PhD students, it is not always sufficient to accommodate those wishing to work there.
- There is no dedicated working space for PhD students in the Department of Slavic Studies. Other departments within the College have various arrangements.
- In line with the University level recommendation, the Assessment Committee believes it is important to review doctoral allowance. It is currently insufficient to cover living expenses and means that PhD students must work to support their studies.
- Ensure the workspace for doctoral students is adequate and unified across all departments and programmes.

Teaching, learning, research and/or creative activity

Comments

Teaching, learning, and research appear to be the distinguishing characteristics of this programme. Both staff and students testified to the attractiveness of the academic offer, and to the extensive skills built by the programme. The content of the programme corresponds well with planned learning outcomes and the level

of study. Department members are committed to the intellectual development of their doctoral students and encourage their participation in research projects and various joint activities organised by the Doctoral School, which give them a chance to be a part of a wider student and academic community. They emphasise the international dimension of their PhD programme and encourage their students to participate in local and international conferences and summer schools and to publish in *Russian Philology* and the *Acta Slavica Estonica*, as well as in international journals. The Annual Progression Review serves as an effective method of quality management of the programme.

Strengths

- The programme has been able to attract not only a sufficient number of students, despite challenging demographic trends and increasing interdisciplinary competition for potential students, but also a respectable number of very skilled and motivated students locally and outside Estonia.
- The practice of producing individual programmes for the doctoral examinations was particularly commended by students.
- The compulsory doctoral seminars, which take place once a month, were commented on positively by the students.
- Both staff and students view the mandatory Teaching Practice in Higher Education as a valuable part of the course, allowing students to gain practical teaching skills and making them feel a genuine part of the academic community.
- The students' commitment to their studies is exemplified by their enthusiasm to learn and improve their theoretical, methodological, and practical skills. The Committee learned from the students that they sometimes exceed the number of European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System points (ECTS) required to complete the curriculum, because they are eager to participate in new courses and gain new experience and knowledge.
- Close and regular contact with their supervisors was another strength of the programme which was commended by students. They particularly noted the friendly and collegiate atmosphere in the department.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- As mentioned above, the subjects included in the programme seem not to extend to the constantly changing functions of the Russian Language in post-Soviet space and in the world.
- Although the department maintains informal contacts with its graduates, a clear system and regular practice of tracking graduate destinations is absent. It could be useful to collect data on their patterns of employment, which subsequently might be helpful for designing new modules and choosing topics for future theses and research projects.

- As was discussed during the meetings with programme directors, staff, and students, the programme is well designed in terms of intellectual and professional content. However, it would be beneficial to strengthen professional skills outside academia to enhance societal impact.
- To provide students with a wider choice of courses covering geo-political and socio-political elements of Russian in the Baltic States and globalised world. The existing expertise within the University in sociology, language ecology, and the interethnic processes in the Baltic countries might be helpful in developing wider interdisciplinary contacts and cooperation between different departments in creating a new menu of elective courses. A systematic comparison with similar programmes in other home and foreign institutions might also be of benefit in the development of the programme to address the issues of employment outside academia.

Teaching staff

Comments

The staff of the Russian and Slavonic Philology programmes at Tartu University are clearly respected by the students, who appreciate the close and frequent contact with their supervisors and the stimulating intellectual learning environment within the department.

The academic staff implementing the programme are highly competent and well qualified, and the number of suitably qualified staff is sufficient to ensure a smooth implementation of the PhD programme and the achievement of its learning outcomes. All members of staff involved in teaching and supervision are active researchers and some are distinguished scholars of national and international standing.

Strengths

- The dedication and availability of supervisors and the collaborative approach they take in supporting doctoral students.
- Student feedback on teaching quality is high. During our meeting with students, the Assessment Committee learned that staff are very helpful, highly professional, passionate about their subjects, and approachable.
- During the meeting with staff the Committee received strong evidence of staff involvement in academic mobility, for example, research visits, national and international conference attendance.
- The Russian and Slavonic Department was commended for good teaching and learning practices and international expertise by its students and colleagues from other departments alike.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Discussions between the Assessment Committee and the supervisors confirmed that all supervisors have opportunities to develop appropriate skills and subject knowledge to enable them to support, encourage and monitor research students effectively. However, the courses and activities offered by the university for supervisors are not mandatory and there is no system to keep track of supervisory training.
- The self-evaluation report and the discussion with supervisors revealed that supervisors are expected to have personal consultations with students at least once every two weeks and many supervisors exceed this number. Although close and frequent contact with students is commendable, it places high demand on staff time, and the practices vary between departments.
- Although there are clearly very good examples of teaching and learning practices within the department, there is no formal system of peer observation. There seems to be no formal process to ensure that good practices are spread not only across the institute, but across all study programmes.
- The Assessment Committee recommends that all new supervisors participate in mandatory specified supervisor training to assure their competence in the role. In line with the University level recommendation, it also suggests that experienced supervisors demonstrate their continuing professional development through participation in a range of refresher activities every five years.
- To ensure comparability of staff workload and student experience across the departments, it would be beneficial to develop and implement Faculty-wide clear workload model for PhD supervision.
- A formal and regular peer observation system would contribute to the practice of sharing the best teaching, supervisory, assessment, and research developments between different departments in the Faculty.
- From discussions with the Vice-Rector, staff and students, the Committee found that many Estonian doctoral students registered for a full-time PhD must work to supplement their state grants. This contributes to the non-completion of the studies or a longer period of study.

Doctoral students

Comments

The students of the Russian and Slavonic Philology programme were articulate and poised. They served as persuasive ambassadors of their programme, and made a favourable impression on the Committee. They were satisfied with their academic progress, supervision, resources, and the department overall.

Strengths

- Students are articulate, thoughtful, motivated, skilled, and satisfied with their programme and supervision.
- The quality and compulsory nature of doctoral seminars organised by the department was particularly commended by the students, who noted that the seminars are interesting, intellectually challenging and also help to reduce the feeling of isolation among doctoral students.
- The international student body.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The students confirmed the fact, stated in the self-evaluation report, that the opportunity to study at other higher educational institutions for a semester or a year was unfortunately not realised due to the lack of funding, as most available funds were used for short term mobility to work in the Russian archives and libraries.
- Although overall the students were satisfied with their working environment, it was noted that a dedicated working space specifically for the students on this programme would be beneficial, especially taking into account provision of such spaces in other departments.
- In order to free mobility funding for longer periods abroad, the Assessment Committee recommends establishing agreements with central Russian archives to have access to their digital collections, as well as interlibrary loan agreements with large universities in Russia (to use their e-books and other electronic resources).

2. Assessment report of SPG at Tallinn University

2.1. Introduction

Tallinn University is the third largest public university in Estonia, focusing primarily on the fields of humanities, social and natural sciences.

In 2015, a significant structural and management reform took place which merged 26 existing units into nine: 6 academic units: Baltic Film, Media, Arts and Communication School; School of Digital Technologies; School of Educational Sciences; School of Governance, Law and Society; School of Humanities; School of Natural Sciences and Health; 2 regional colleges (in Haapsalu and Rakvere) and the library. In addition, 5 centres of excellence (research clusters), 9 research centres and 15 support units were formed. The objective of Tallinn

University for 2015–20 is to consolidate activities into five main focus fields: educational innovation; digital and media culture; cultural competences; healthy and sustainable lifestyle; society and open governance.

The three study programmes, History, Studies of Cultures, and Linguistics, were in separate institutes before the structural reform in 2015, and have been part of the School of Humanities since September 2015.

In Tallinn University, the main directions in linguistic research are: first and second language acquisition, multilingualism and language contacts, micro-sociolinguistics, to some extent early bilingualism and typology, text linguistics and discourse analysis, language and communication. These areas are covered by 4 professors and several associate professors and lecturers as well as PhD students working on these topics.

In Estonia, there are two universities that offer a PhD programme in History: Tartu and Tallinn. In this regard, both focus to a large extent on Estonian/Baltic history using first and foremost the rich archival holdings of the country's archives and libraries. As a rule, research activities in Tallinn stress transregional developments in the broader framework of North-eastern Europe, questions of memory culture, the history of minorities, visual culture and other multi-disciplinary topics.

The Studies of Cultures programme is unique in Estonia as no other study programme has such a broad range of specialisations. Cultural phenomena are studied and researched within a large variety of disciplines from anthropology and cultural studies to literary studies, cultural semiotics and cultural philosophy in contemporary academia.

Figures related to doctoral students

| | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|--|---------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|
| Total number of doctoral students (TU) | 377 | 370 | 378 | 386 | 363 |
| No of doctoral students, SPG (incl. those who work in the university) | | | | | |
| History | 25 (7) | 24 (9) | 25 (8) | 26 (5) | 25 (1) |
| Linguistics | 31 (6) | 30 (5) | 26 (7) | 27 (5) | 26 (5) |
| Studies of Cultures | 81 (20) | 84 (20) | 84 (21) | 87 (17) | 77 (15) |
| State-commissioned education request for Doctoral student places | 22 | 22 | 25 | 25 | 25 |
| Total number of admissions (TU) (incl. those who directly enrolled from the 2nd cycle of studies of the same university) | 46 (8) | 44 (6) | 46 (11) | 42 (16) | 50 (9) |
| Admissions, aggregate data on SPG (incl. those who directly enrolled from the 2nd cycle of studies of the same university) | 17 (7) | 15 (2) | 14 (5) | 14 (10) | 14 (2) |
| History | 2 (1) | 3 (0) | 2 (2) | 2 (1) | 2 (0) |

| | | | | | | |
|--|---------------------|-------|--------|--------|-------|--------|
| | Linguistics | 6 (0) | 2 (0) | 2 (0) | 3 (3) | 4 (2) |
| | Studies of Cultures | 9 (6) | 10 (2) | 10 (3) | 9 (6) | 8 (0) |
| Total number of withdrawals (TU) | | 32 | 31 | 23 | 23 | 53 |
| Incl. voluntary withdrawals | | 13 | 12 | 11 | 12 | 23 |
| No of withdrawals, SPG (incl. voluntary withdrawals) | | | | | | |
| | History | 2 (2) | 3 (0) | 0 | 1 (0) | 2 (1) |
| | Linguistics | 1 (0) | 2 (0) | 3 (2) | 1 (1) | 2 (2) |
| | Studies of Cultures | 8 (3) | 6 (2) | 5 (2) | 4 (1) | 15 (9) |
| No of doctoral theses defended (TU) | | 12 | 23 | 16 | 25 | 19 |
| Incl. the number of dissertations defended within the standard period+2 | | 9 | 13 | 5 | 8 | 6 |
| No of doctoral theses defended, SPG (incl. the number of dissertations defended within the standard period+2) | | | | | | |
| | History | 1(0) | 2(0) | 0 | 0 | 1(0) |
| | Linguistics | 1(1) | 1(1) | 3(2) | 3(0) | 1(0) |
| | Studies of Cultures | 1 | 5(5) | 3(0) | 1(0) | 6(5) |
| Proportion of TU students going abroad, doctoral level | | 1,9% | 3,2% | 9% | 4,4% | 2,8% |
| Proportion of students going abroad ¹ (SPG) | | | | | | |
| | History | 4% | 16,7% | 32% | 32% | 16% |
| | Linguistics | 3,2% | 3,3% | 23% | 14,8% | 11,5% |
| | Studies of Cultures | 6% | 10,7% | 8,3% | 5,7% | 9% |
| Proportion of international students at doctoral level (TU) | | 6,6% | 8,1% | 10,9% | 12,4% | 13,2% |
| Proportion of international students (SPG) | | | | | | |
| | History | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | Linguistics | 9,7% | 6,7% | 7,7% | 3,7% | 7,7% |
| | Studies of Cultures | 6,2% | 4,9% | 6% | 6,9% | 14,3% |

¹ Tallinn University does not collect the data about doctoral students who work in the university while they are studying.

2.2. General findings and recommendations at University and Faculty level

These strengths and recommendations apply across all humanities programmes at Tallinn University. They are only restated at programme level to highlight additional elements.

Strengths

The Assessment Committee found that all of the specified standards in all three humanities programmes at Tallinn University were met and in some cases exceeded. The Committee commends the Humanities Faculty for:

- The strong interdisciplinary approach that stimulates a diversity of fresh ideas and innovative methods in doctoral research.
- The engagement with the culture and environment of Tallinn as a city.
- The flexibility and freedom of its doctoral students to shape their own PhD, allowing them to choose between fieldwork, theoretical study and taught courses to suit their academic needs and intellectual interests.
- The international opportunities that facilitate mobility and enhance the professional and academic development of its doctoral students.
- The strong sense of collegiality between supervisors and students, leading to a culture of belonging and an independence of mind.
- The collaborative approach to supporting doctoral students, as evidenced by the dedication and availability of supervisors.
- The self-reflectiveness and articulacy of the University's humanities doctoral students, graduates and alumni.
- The proactive approach to identifying and raising awareness of the needs of society and translating these into research initiatives.

Recommendations

1. Sustainability

University and Faculty Structures: Ensure the quantity and quality of students is sustainable through a process of systematic planning, including maintaining strong links to the professional world, making use of the Careers Centre and the input of employers.

A challenge for the sustainability of the PhD programmes lies in the expectation of entering an academic career on completion of the doctorate. Both doctoral students and academic staff have this expectation, although both groups are aware that the number of opportunities for an academic career are considerably lower than the number of PhD graduates.

After conducting its interviews, the Assessment Committee had the impression that a completed doctorate which did not lead to an academic career was considered less of a success or as the fulfilment of a hobby.

The Assessment Committee recommends that Tallinn University strengthens its links to the professional world to promote doctoral-level expertise and research skills for the benefit of public and private organisations, making use of the Careers Centre, as well as the input of employers.

Building Capacity: The Faculty might consider a system of adjusting the workload of lecturing staff without PhDs who wish to embark on doctoral study in order to ensure that they can finish within an adequate timeframe.

An aspect that was not obvious in the self-evaluation report, but arose during the interviews, is work overload for lecturing staff without PhDs who are conducting doctoral studies. The Assessment Committee recommends that more precise regulations are introduced which guarantee fewer teaching hours for such colleagues, in order to improve their chance of completing their PhD in time.

Collaboration: Consider strategic collaboration with non-academic partners within Estonia and internationally in order to stimulate applied research projects. Additionally, strengthen academic partnerships by building, for example, on the experiences from the national doctoral schools.

As the self-evaluation report indicates, many of the humanities PhD topics are strictly theoretical. Without questioning the necessity of this kind of research, and with due respect for academic freedom, the Assessment Committee recommends the establishment of long-term strategic collaboration with non-academic partners, both public and private, where doctoral research could be linked to professional activity and could benefit museums, libraries, archives, ministries and digital media organisations.

Allocating Grant Money: The University might consider redistributing its resources to increase the value of a PhD scholarship rather than just creating more PhD positions at the current grant level.

In the self-evaluation reports and during interviews the Assessment Committee encountered a high level of unanimity about the insufficiency of the existing grant of 422 Euro per month (or even the rise to 660 Euro per month in January 2018). This is the cause of two major problems: low efficiency and a high dropout rate. The Assessment Committee notes that doctoral students would benefit immensely from the monetary value of the grant increasing in line with the average salary for Estonia. The Committee believes this to be the only means to ensure their full-time commitment to doctoral research.

2. Students

Induction Programme: Design and deliver an induction programme for PhD students to include general information about administrative and academic arrangements and structures at PhD level.

The information regarding the more practical aspects of doctoral studies and services for doctoral students was not available in a Doctoral Handbook or another easily accessible written form. The responsibility for seeking out information through personal contacts was therefore often dependent upon individual initiative. Students who had not previously studied at Tallinn University reported difficulty in orientating themselves to the structures and regulations during their first year of study there. An induction programme for new PhD students would not only reduce the time spent on seeking out information, but also ensure that all students have enough guidance in order to make informed choices about their accredited courses.

Facilities: Ensure the workspace for doctoral students is adequate and unified across all programmes, together with a social space for facilitating dialogue and provision of suitable technical equipment.

The doctoral programme at the moment does not provide all doctoral students with an allocated workspace. Students reported working at home or in the library, which can lead to feelings of isolation and lack of support. Neither are there any social spaces where doctoral students can be integrated into the social community of their departments. The Assessment Committee would encourage the Faculty to ensure that doctoral students have access to shared or individual workspaces, social facilities and technical resources: for example, subtitling software and eye-tracking technology.

Societal Impact: Give students a better understanding of the skills they acquire during doctoral training and the roles which they may assume in society.

Conversations with students and alumni revealed that some students struggle to see the relevance of the PhD degree outside academia. Given that not all graduates will find employment in the higher education system, PhD training needs to be more focused on skills and experiences which can be useful when building a career outside the academic world. This can, for example, be done by enhancing the societal impact of research, including more co-operation with external partners and developing skills oriented towards professional life, such as time management, project management and leadership skills.

3. Supervision

Quality of Supervisions: Establish the frequency of formal supervisions, including when the student is studying abroad. This might usefully include how and when feedback is given to ensure consistency of the doctoral experience, clarifying the policy on co-supervision with collaborators, and ensuring that co-supervision by external partners is quality assured.

The Assessment Committee feels that the university would benefit from formalising instructions concerning supervisory practices, including a standard for the frequency of supervisory meetings between the doctoral student and the supervisor, and a workload allocation for each doctoral student.

It would be helpful if regular contact between the doctoral student and supervisor could continue in the event of the student visiting another university or institution abroad. Also of benefit would be clear guidance for co-supervisors from outside the university on their status and role, as well as on supervisory practices.

Annual Progress Review: Ensure that an external colleague is invited to contribute to the Annual Progress Review panel. Feedback currently appears to be insufficient for some students and the Faculty is encouraged to improve the mechanisms for feedback.

The Annual Progress Review (APR) is an effective means of monitoring the progress of a student's doctoral studies. In order to ensure consistency and objectivity, it would be good practice for the review committee to include a member from outside the programme. Students experienced the review process as mechanistic, more as a form-filling exercise than an opportunity to reflect on what they have done. Students would benefit from more detailed feedback on the review: for example, in terms of where they stand in comparison to other doctoral students and on what areas of future focus. There might also be a more robust opportunity for students to give feedback on their supervision, and the APR would be a natural channel for that.

Co-supervision within the University: Tallinn University could usefully remove obstacles for co-supervision across programmes, institutes and departments in order to stimulate and foster interdisciplinarity.

The Assessment Committee understood that it may be difficult for students to have co-supervisors from other faculties, departments or programmes. However, in order to promote interdisciplinarity and to provide the students with the best supervision available, the Committee recommends that obstacles that prevent supervisors working across different institutions be removed, whether these obstacles are formal, economic or habitual.

4. Staff and Supervisors

Supervisor Training: Initiate and develop mandatory supervisor training and mentoring, to be extended to co-supervisors from collaborating organisations. Consider periodic refresher courses for experienced supervisors every 5 years.

Discussions between the Assessment Committee and the supervisors confirmed the University recognises that supervisors need appropriate expertise for their role and require professional development opportunities to support, encourage and monitor research students effectively. However, the courses and activities offered by the university for supervisors are not mandatory and there is no system to keep track of those who have undertaken supervisory training. Therefore, the Committee recommends that all new supervisors participate in mandatory specified staff development activities to equip them for this role.

The Assessment Committee also suggests that existing experienced supervisors demonstrate their commitment to continuing professional development through participation in a range of refresher activities designed to support their work as supervisors every five years. To ensure consistency, the University and the Faculty might consider encouraging supervisors working in industry or professional practice to participate in similar developmental activities.

The ongoing professional development of research supervisors might usefully be maintained and reviewed periodically by the Faculty Research Coordinator to ensure the currency and competency of supervision.

Workload: Clarify and monitor the supervision workload at an appropriate rate that aligns with expectations at Bachelors and Masters' levels.

The self-evaluation report states that every supervisor is required to do 50 hours of supervision per academic year. However, the Assessment Committee's discussion with supervisors revealed that this provision does not specify individual supervision load per student, or how these hours are allocated in cases of co-supervision. Therefore, it would be beneficial to develop and implement Faculty-wide guidelines on individual workload hours for each supervisor, depending on the number of PhD students. As students and supervisors are expected to make contact frequently enough to ensure the student's progress, the Committee recommends the University considers monthly supervisions as a model for a full-time student and that the roles and responsibilities of students and supervisors are clearly outlined in an induction programme.

In light of different supervision practices, it would also be advisable to implement a formal monitoring system of the supervision workload. This would enable the key points discussed in meetings to be captured to the mutual satisfaction of the supervisor and student, and for Faculty record keeping.

Professional Development: The Faculty might usefully address the professional development needs of existing supervisors, including access to adequate resources and equipment to support their research. This includes ensuring that sabbatical regulations and practices are aligned across doctoral programmes.

The Assessment Committee is satisfied that the professional development of staff and their access to adequate resources is regularly discussed and approved by the Council. The Faculty Director initiated regular staff meetings in 2016 to discuss various matters and gain feedback on current issues, however participation remains relatively low. During the discussions supervisors indicated that the reason for this is the lack of focused discussion related to each programme. The Committee recommends programme-specific discussions based on the annual inventory results and systematic renewal of equipment for each programme, particularly in areas which traditionally are considered not to be equipment intensive (for example, Linguistics).

The Assessment Committee received clear evidence of regular sabbatical provision. However, in discussion with staff members, the Committee identified a potential concern that sabbatical leave was not consistently managed in practice to ensure the effectiveness and benefits of uninterrupted time for research and reflection. Therefore, the Committee recommends the creation of a set of sabbatical guidelines in order to align practice across all programmes.

Staffing Resource: Ensure that the University recognises and evaluates the relationship between staffing resource and supervisory capacity and expertise.

The University recognises that research students are best served by supervisors and supervisory teams with sufficient expertise, experience and commitment to fully support each student in his/her research. In this context, the Academic Committee recommends that it is important to implement a system to ensure that individual members of staff do not carry excessive supervisory loads.

Alumni: Harness the network of alumni for career mentoring beyond academia.

The Assessment Committee found that whilst there is a considerable need to make use of alumni, nothing concrete has happened as yet, in part because the current focus is on other matters. Therefore, it would be beneficial to develop a plan for how such arrangements could be developed and maintained.

The Committee recommends that alumni pages are created, that an alumni network or similar is created, and that over time alumni and activities with them (for example, employability workshops) are more fully integrated into the doctoral programmes.

5. Quality Assurance

Good Practice: To develop and integrate mechanisms for the communicating and sharing of practices across the three subject areas.

The Assessment Committee noted many good academic and supervisory practices in each of the three doctoral programmes. It was clear that supervisors within each programme communicated effectively with one another and with their students. However, there was less evidence of communication and the exchange of good practices between the three programmes, despite the co-delivery of shared compulsory seminars.

To enhance supervisory expertise and quality for the benefit of students, the Faculty may wish to consider how to improve integration and communication between programmes. The following mechanisms are suggested: (i) establishing a Doctoral Handbook for effective supervision drawn from experience and annual review; (ii) developing a forum and/or mentoring scheme for supervisors; (iii) extending opportunities for co-supervision.

Risk Management: Identify and address the level of risk related to cases where there is only one supervisor in a specialisation and students would therefore be left without appropriate supervision if that supervisor left the University.

In discussion with doctoral students, the Assessment Committee identified specific concerns and cases relating to supervisory continuity and student support. These were particularly evident with reference to the breadth of the Studies of Culture and Linguistics study programmes and the sustainability of particular disciplinary specialisms.

In order to protect the integrity and continuity of candidates' supervisory arrangements, the Committee recommends that such risks are considered at the point of admission and that an appropriate regulatory framework is put in place to clarify the University's responsibilities towards candidates and to identify a process for supervisory transitions where these may prove necessary.

Regulations: Clearly articulate regulations relating to registration, part-time study and suspension for a justifiable reason (for example, maternity or sick leave) and clarify supervisory expectations for staff and students.

In discussions with staff and students, the Assessment Committee noted a lack of clarity as to the status of students. This is a particular concern with respect to justifiable suspensions from the programme: for example, maternity or sick leave. It is important to ensure that staff and students clearly understand their responsibilities and supervisory expectations. These aspects may be helpfully brought together by reconsidering the interrelationship between the doctoral study agreement, the doctoral plan and the annual progress review. Guidelines could be provided in a Doctoral Handbook, which could be made available to

students and staff and be used as one definitive source of information for all status-related regulations. Familiarising students and staff with such a Handbook during induction, and referring back to it on a regular basis, could prove beneficial in resolving any questions that might arise.

Research Ethics: Consider establishing a research ethics committee to cover all research projects with ethical implications.

The Assessment Committee was concerned about the apparent lack of consistency and understanding of research ethics and the impact this may have on the research integrity of the University. The University may wish to consider a mechanism to ensure a rigorous and systematic approach to ethical considerations and practices, including establishing a committee structure for the governance of ethics. Ethical guidelines for shared seminars, and ethical considerations for humanities research could be included in a Doctoral Handbook.

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

2.3.1. History

Study programme

Comments

The launch and development of the study programme is based on the standards of legislation and national strategies, as well as the University's development plans. The teaching staff are enthusiastic about their work and eager to provide their students with a high quality education and a positive environment for study.

The study programme provides doctoral students with good possibilities for participation in conferences and international mobility. The students are also offered a wide range of courses, seminars and events designed to develop research skills and promote the formation of networks and communities. The fact that students at present cannot be involved in research programmes is, however, a challenge that places greater demand on supervisors to find other opportunities to involve students in the research community and to acquire professional skills.

Both staff and students appreciate the high level of academic freedom and the flexibility of the programme. As a whole the programme seem well equipped to take individual needs in to account and to support the individual development of each doctoral student. At the same time, the high level of freedom also place heavy responsibility on individuals in a way that can be a challenge in situations when individual motivation is weak or other problems occur.

Strengths

- Strong focus on interdisciplinary and new methodological and theoretical approaches.
- Flexibility and willingness to adjust to individual needs of students.
- Strong sense of teamwork and a supportive community among the teaching staff.
- The programme offers a complete set of courses in English which is an obvious advantage when attracting foreign students to the programme.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The Assessment Committee recommends developing a consistent method to regularly gather anonymous and written feedback from students and staff. As stated in the self-evaluation report and confirmed in conversation with Faculty management and staff, the study programme does not have any standard procedures to regularly gather and process feedback from staff, students and alumni. Severe problems were generally expected to be brought to the attention of the programme manager by students. Less pressing matters and feedback were gathered informally through oral feedback: for example, in connection to the APR. There is however a risk that certain types of feedback are difficult to express through these channels. It would be beneficial to develop a method to gather study programme specific feedback in an anonymous and systematic way.

Resources

Comments

The study programme seems for the moment to have an adequate level of teaching staff and supervision resources at its disposal. Some of the teaching staffs is however dependent on external funding such as research programmes and projects. Since their positions are not permanent, the possibility of future changes in available staff and supervisory capacity needs to be considered.

The financial resources available for doctoral students present a major challenge. According to the self-evaluation report, and confirmed in conversations with the Assessment Committee, doctoral students need to hold day-time jobs in order to make a living. While the Committee recognises that this is a challenge on a national level, some measures to address the problem can be done on a programme level. The Committee's recommendations focus on different measures which potentially could encourage students to develop working routines and to integrate into the scholarly community of the department.

The self-evaluation report mentions problems that students face accessing critical literature, but during the Committee's visit, no such complaints were voiced. It is

possible that the planned measures mentioned in the self-evaluation report have been efficient to ensure that students have access to the library services.

Strengths

- The department is ideally located in the heart of Tallinn city, with several museums and other institutions nearby. This offers many opportunities for collaboration with external partners.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The Assessment Committee recommends that the study programme considers different ways to offer PhD students workspace and/or social space within the premises of the department. The study programme cannot at the present offer workspace (shared or individual) to the students, nor is there a social space for recreational use of the doctoral students. Students report working at home or in the University Library, while only visiting the physical parameters of departments for seminars and supervision. Consequently, many of them do not know their fellow students very well and lack a supportive community.
- The study programme might also focus on alternative ways to create and maintain work routines and peer support for students. When students have a busy schedule, including duties unrelated to study, it might be hard to develop the work routines necessary to complete a PhD thesis. The study programme has already found one creative way to approach this through the writing workshops mentioned in the self-evaluation report. This concept and others might be developed further in cooperation with the PhD student. The Committee encourages the study programme to emphasis procedures that supports peer support and routines for work.
- The study programme might consider developing a contingency plan in order to make sure that PhD students are not left without supervision in the case of future reductions to staff due to research programmes ending. The Committee recommends the study programme ensures that the supervision of students continues after possible changes in staff.

Teaching, learning, research and/or creative activity

Comments

The study programme generally supports students' personal and social development as well as the objectives and learning outcomes of a doctorate. Students discuss their work and experiences regularly with their supervisor and the student's progress is monitored on a regular basis through the APR. The assessment of learning outcomes seems in general to be transparent and objective, but could be developed further in order to better support the development and progress of doctoral students.

Doctoral students seemed in general very content with the programme. Many appreciated the flexibility of the programme and the high level of freedom to make their own choices and to take responsibility for their personal progress. Some students did, however, point to the risk of isolation and slower progress associated with such freedom. The study programme might wish to consider the duality of the situation: a higher level of freedom places more responsibility on supervisors to guide their students' choices and to offer more feedback on progress, as well as the need to supply deadlines for different tasks.

Strengths

- An open, not overly hierarchical, and creative intellectual climate.
- Staff and supervisors seem well motivated to offer advice and to be flexible when it comes to the needs of individual students. During the visit, students repeatedly mentioned being very happy with the flexibility of the programme and the academic freedom entrusted to them.
- Staff have attempted to develop new and innovative forms of teaching situation, such as the writing workshops mentioned during the visit and in the self-evaluation report.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The study programme might consider different opportunities to teach students research skills, such as project management and planning.
- The structural limitations that makes it impossible to employ PhD students in research programmes is unfortunate as it prevents students from developing planning and project management skills. The study programme might want to consider different ways to include PhD students as external members (without funding) of projects, so they can participate in meetings or contribute to joint publications. If this is not possible, the programme may consider other methods for teaching such skills.
- The programme might consider different options to give feedback on students' progress in a more individual way and to provide structure and deadlines for different tasks. In conversations with students, the Assessment Committee found that although students approved of the APR and found it beneficial, they found it unsuited to follow-up on their actual activities such as field work or archival visits. They also felt that the feedback they received from the APR did not help them to reflect upon their own progress and to adjust their plans if necessary. Several students also wished for clearer deadlines for different tasks from their supervisors. Some also felt that it could be useful to make the monthly seminars mandatory, in order to support regularity and routines.
- The programme might wish to develop additional methods to add an appropriate intellectual challenge for PhD students in classes where students of BA, MA and PhD-level are tutored together. The positive aspects of these classes were the possibility to offer BA and MA students

an introduction to new research methods and to offer a glimpse of the research community. During the Committee's visit, however, PhD students mentioned avoiding these classes as they felt that the teaching situations did not offer them a sufficient intellectual challenge. Students could, for example, be assigned different roles during discussion in class, rather than just being asked to undertake additional reading.

Teaching staff

Comments

The strength of the study programme lies in its focus on interdisciplinary and creative applications of historical methodologies and theories. The teaching staff participate in research, development and other creative activities in a robust manner. Students mentioned choosing the programme because of these reasons.

Research has a strong focus on Estonian and Baltic history, although transnational perspectives are also applied. The study programme is primarily taught in Estonian, although some courses are offered in English. This is reflected in the community of staff and students, especially as the programme has had no international students in the period 2012–17. The proportion of students going abroad for some time has, on the other hand, been relatively high compared to other study programmes in the Faculty, as stated in the self-evaluation report.

On a general level staff and supervisors provide a supportive environment for students, with a strong sense of teamwork and a not overly hierarchical system. Staff and students sometimes write and work together in different ways which might facilitate the development of different joint projects.

Strengths

- Strong expertise on specific geographical area: the Baltics.
- Focus on methodological and theoretical discussions, transnational perspectives and cultural theory, which promotes creative and often interdisciplinary approaches to new subjects and source materials.
- Strong sense of teamwork and collegiality.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- In line with the University-level recommendation, the study programme might consider introducing mandatory training for supervisors and refresher courses for experienced supervisors. Regular meetings for supervisors had been recently introduced, following inclusion of this issue in the self-evaluation report. This allowed supervisors to exchange experiences and discuss common challenges. The Committee encourages the development of these meetings into a schedule that supports regular discussion of matters relating to supervision and the doctoral experience.

Doctoral students

Comments

The student's abilities and motivation to complete their studies are assessed before admittance in to the program, including language skills, willingness to go abroad, and general level of motivation.

The progress of the student was followed up annually through the APR. The supervisors reported on trying to keep in touch with students and ask about progress. Students who did not advance sufficiently were offered additional guidance and supervision. The student's status as full-time student was evaluated during the APR. Students reported that the evaluation took place on the basis of pro-forma documents and did not require a face-to-face meeting, unless there was apparent problems that needed to be addressed. Both students and supervisors found that this rendered the evaluation a certain level of formality and several of the students expressed a wish to receive more in-depth feedback on progress.

Because of the low scholarships offered to doctoral students, the majority of the PhD students reported that they worked to gain a living in addition to their studies. Several of the students that the Assessment Committee met during the visit believed that they did not need a PhD degree for their professional careers, and admitted that their primary motivation was a personal interest in their subject of research. While the Committee recognises this as a general problem at an institutional and national level, the recommendations below addresses the problem specifically from the point of view of this study programme.

Strengths

- Doctoral students are encouraged to participate in international exchange programmes and a good number of students have also done so over the last years.
- Doctoral students have a high level of motivation.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Promote PhD students understanding of the societal relevance of research and the specific skills they acquire through the PhD training. Doctoral students found it hard to indicate the ways in which the PhD degree could be an asset in society and the societal relevance of their research, as well as the distinctive skills the PhD training offered them. In order to orientate the students' at the labor market, the Assessment Committee recommends the study programme develop different methods to help students reflect on the societal relevance of their research and to better understand what kind of skills they acquire through doctoral training.
- The study programme might consider increasing the tutoring of work-related skills and encourage students to develop an awareness of the practical implications of their research, as conversations with alumni confirmed. Curating a museum exhibition, making a documentary film or

other projects of the kind, could potentially be introduced as a part of the PhD thesis. This may also offer more opportunities for cooperation with external partners such as museums, archives and other public institutions, as well as create opportunities for co-supervision outside academia.

- A network of alumni could function as a resource for careers advice, as well as a resource for co-supervisors and for teaching professional skills. As the self-evaluation report indicates, the study programme has at present no systematic method to gather feedback from alumni. In this respect, putting together a systematic procedure would be useful for future self-assessment and development.

2.3.2. Linguistics

Study programme

Comments

The Linguistics programme promotes subjects which are compliant with the research interests of the supervisors. Students are admitted with topics in the specialised fields of multilingualism, language acquisition, psycholinguistics and contact linguistics. The Assessment Committee heard from staff and students that other topics had been accepted, and they found it challenging to deal with this situation, especially the resourcing and progression of the research.

The Assessment Committee found the links with the world of work and society at large as being insufficiently explored. It was difficult to understand how specific topics might be supported by engagement with other potential employers beyond the university setting. As the programme has strong applied elements, the Assessment Committee believes that more interaction beyond the University environment could help refine the programme and enable doctoral topics to be generated through such external collaboration.

There is no obligation for students to travel abroad for longer periods of time as part of the Linguistics programme and any such activity, though encouraged by the supervisor, is not initiated necessarily by the supervisor or the School through any formal arrangement. Students often identify such opportunities themselves and bring them to the attention of their supervisor.

Students have reported that they participate in conferences and this counts towards their APR. However, support for the development of English language skills with a view to successful publication and/or participation in other international activities was not explicit to the Assessment Committee.

The self-evaluation report specifies that there is systematic monitoring of the programmes at doctoral level. However, the Assessment Committee heard from students that no feedback is gathered on the programme or the quality of their supervision, and students were unaware of any formal processes which would

need to be followed in case they had specific feedback to provide or were finding it difficult to work with their supervisor. Employers whom the Assessment Committee met also indicated that their opinions are not sought in view of improving the programme and its compatibility with market requirements. However, these employers emphasised their willingness to contribute such input into programme design and topic selection.

Strengths

- Strengths in the field of Linguistics are consonant with the University level strengths identified above.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Feedback mechanisms are insufficiently robust, and do not generate information to support improvement of the study programme. Feedback from students, staff and external stakeholders might be collected, analysed, and made appropriate use of for programme development.
- Engagement with employers is limited to instances of co-supervision. Systematic collaboration with employers at programme level could prove extremely beneficial. There are areas in the world of work where Linguistic topics have direct applicability and these are worth exploring.

Resources

Comments

According to Estonian legislation, the University provides a doctoral allowance to students which, the Assessment Committee heard, was insufficient to allow students to focus exclusively on their doctoral aims. As such, many students will have to work to complement the allowance and be able to support themselves. The University acknowledges this challenge and notes it is one of the underlying reasons why the delays on completion of the PhD thesis occur.

Supervisory staff are few in numbers for the Linguistics programme, and each have a clear focus on their own research topics which they propose for further study to their PhD students. Where topics are more interdisciplinary or more distantly related to the supervisor's individual area of research, co-supervision may be instituted. There are reported instances where co-supervision is exclusively offered by external colleagues with no Tallinn University staff member responsible for the PhD students. The Assessment Committee heard that there is no requirement for new supervisors and for external supervisors to be trained, to be mentored or to enter co-supervisory arrangements before they consider themselves sufficiently experienced.

The Assessment Committee heard that whereas funds are available for students to apply for grants to travel to conferences and/or for short study trips, staff do not always have resources available for the individual research they are

conducting. Frequently, the technology is lacking to support more complex applied linguistics research, even though students are admitted with such topics.

The Assessment Committee heard that there is no common dedicated space for PhD students and found this to be detrimental to their learning experience.

The Assessment Committee noted that there seemed to be no longer term plan that would ensure sustainability. The Committee believes that actions targeted towards extending the level of engagement with the world of work would enhance the applied component of the programme.

The self-evaluation report notes that Linguistics is not material and equipment intensive, however, topics with a stronger applied component would require a stronger investment in equipment. Topics noted in Language Acquisition, Translation, Subtitling or related professional practice would benefit from a stronger alignment to the technological development currently available for delivery, implementation and research.

Strengths

- Students are able to benefit from existing resources which have been obtained through research grants of their supervisors.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Resource planning is not systematical and does not actively consider developments in the specific fields, including the more applied components. The programme would benefit from a clear plan in regards resource allocation for specific material and equipment necessary for research with applicability to the world of work.
- Supervisors are few in numbers, hence sustainability of a PhD topic is under risk. Mechanisms could be designed to encourage teaching staff with potential to become supervisors to register for and complete a PhD. This would, in turn, help alleviate the tension between wanting to attract more students with a broader variety of topics, and being able to actually offer compatible resourcing.

Teaching, learning, research and/or creative activity

Comments

The doctoral programmes at Tallinn University have a taught component which consists of courses to be taken by the students according to their interests and needs. This includes general courses that are not specific to one doctoral programme, but are available to all PhD students, and subject-specific courses tailored to individual research needs. The taught component uses a course evaluation form to collect feedback, which students have reported completing.

The self-evaluation report notes that most arrangements in respect to supervision are informal, with no specific requirements regarding the time allocated to each individual student and/or the frequency with which one-to-one meetings take

place. As such, supervision varies in intensity, quality and level of support, and comparability and consistency between student experiences can become problematic. The Assessment Committee heard that staff try and group students they are supervising to take some common sessions, also involving employers or other relevant stakeholders. Students speak positively of this arrangement.

It was not clear from the interviews how much time is spent by the supervisor evaluating and providing feedback on student written work in preparation for article submissions and/or their doctoral thesis, and there was no evidence presented to the Assessment Committee of any formal record of time spent as proof of monitoring of supervisory activity.

The self-evaluation report indicates that English language support is offered and students are encouraged to take courses in academic writing and public speaking.

Students participate in conferences and take up opportunities to conduct research work abroad. Any interaction between the supervisor and the student while the student is abroad is informally established and not governed by any requirements. Students reported to the Assessment Committee that they have had varying experiences while they were abroad, with different levels of frequency and no formal requirements to abide by.

Students are formally assessed on progress through the APR. The APR committee consists exclusively of internal members of staff, with no external member to ensure a different perspective. Students told the Assessment Committee that they knew how to prepare for the APR and what was expected of them, however they found that once the form was submitted the feedback they received proved insufficient and did not allow them to understand how they can improve their progress and further develop. Feedback on academic performance, however, is received during regular doctoral seminars and where all students prepare a mock defense. In these seminars, students and supervisors comment on other students' work. This process was reported as being effective and useful in determining any gaps and how these might be overcome.

Students told the Assessment Committee that there is no formal opportunity to provide feedback on supervision. The self-evaluation report notes that progress review results are used as proxies for the quality of supervision and there are direct consequences to supervisors who may no longer be assigned students for supervision. The programme directors acknowledge that lack of progress is not a reflection of the performance of the supervisor and that this may be due to financial difficulties being experienced by the student or personal circumstances.

The relationship between research topics and their relevance for society and in the world of work seems insufficiently explored. Linguistics, as a field, has multiple applications in the language industry, be it represented by foreign language teaching for business/professional communication or by language professions such as translation, revision, terminology and subtitling. Language processing and IT developments also overlap with the field of Linguistics and can

be relevant topics for PhD theses. A closer relationship with society and more involvement from external stakeholders (in programme design, topic selection, resourcing decisions and professionally-based fieldwork) would benefit the Linguistics programme, and allow for a more sustainability in the future.

The University does not have an Ethics Committee and yet multiple research topics presented to the Assessment Committee have a variety of ethical implications. There are no guidelines that students and supervisors use to determine research initiatives that have ethical implications and that require approval. The Assessment Committee heard that in some instances the Ethics Committee of the University of Tartu was consulted. The University has outlined various initiatives to address this issue that it plans to implement in 2018.

Strengths

- The usefulness of the Doctoral Seminars in allowing students to better understand how to improve the quality and relevance of their work
- The group sessions organised by supervisors also with the involvement of employers and other stakeholders

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Supervision practices would benefit from standardisation in which formal requirements can be set to allow for consistency and comparability of student experiences, including when students are on research trips abroad. This information could be captured in a Doctoral Handbook accessible to both supervisors, current and prospective students.
- Co-supervision could usefully be regulated, including for new supervisors and external stakeholders acting as supervisors.
- Including an external perspective on the APR panel, but also in other aspects of the programme design, delivery and monitoring would allow the programme to be better connected to the world of work.
- The APR process would benefit from clearer guidelines to ensure that feedback to students is meaningful and allows them to achieve their objectives. This also links to the implementation of a robust mechanism to capture feedback on supervision.
- Students would benefit from more support in preparing articles for submission to international journals.
- A stronger set of ethical guidelines would benefit the study programme.

Teaching staff

Comments

Supervisors are appropriately qualified for supervision and students are allocated to supervisors based on their specific areas of research. When possible, supervisors involve their students in their own research projects.

The University offers training for supervisors, however this is not compulsory and only new supervisors are encouraged to participate. The Assessment Committee heard that some do and some don't participate and that information on participation in the training is not captured at programme level and analysed for programme specific purposes. Supervisors with experience do not participate in any refresher training and/or in any good practice sharing events.

Co-supervision is usually determined by the needs of students and may be proposed by the programme director or by the students themselves. Co-supervision may occur with external supervisors, and there are reported situations where both co-supervisors were external. The Assessment Committee noted that external supervisors are not offered any training courses.

The workload matrix does not detail supervision time. The Assessment Committee heard that supervisors make themselves available as often as needed and students confirmed this was the case. However, given the low number of supervisors and the ambition of the programme to expand, lack of formal structures carries the risk that supervisors will find it increasingly difficult to be available on demand, and a minimum requirement could be useful.

For many theses, the Assessment Committee heard that there was just one supervisor, with some more experienced supervisors approaching retirement age. This poses a risk to the students and their potential to successfully complete the programme if continuity cannot be ensured. Existing teaching staff who might have the potential to complete a PhD thesis and take on PhD supervision subsequently are not made any allowances on teaching load if they are in the final stages of preparing their thesis for defense. Sabbaticals are part of university regulations and the Assessment Committee was assured by higher management that sabbaticals are awarded when requested, however staff indicated that any sabbatical may attract a reshuffling of courses and they would have to still complete their workload on return from their sabbatical.

Supervisors are active researchers and they frequently offer co-authorship opportunities to their students for publication of scholarly articles. However, the Assessment Committee heard of multiple difficulties supervisors were encountering in their own research, such as insufficient resources to purchase materials or equipment, insufficient funding to travel abroad to disseminate their research, and insufficient support in developing their own career path.

Strengths

- Supervisors are active researchers and where possible take the students on their own research projects stimulating the sense of belonging to a research community.
- Supervisors are committed to supervision and invest time and effort, making themselves available at all times.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Support for research work and continuous professional development of supervisors might usefully be increased.
- Training for supervisors might usefully be made compulsory, and offered to external supervisors as well.
- The study programme would benefit from sustainable mechanisms in cases where continuity of topics and supervision is at risk.
- Developing and promoting mechanisms for good practice sharing between supervisory staff of the Linguistics programme, and across all programmes at doctoral level might usefully be prioritised.
- The Assessment Committee recommends better support for the continuous professional development of supervisors.

Doctoral students

Comments

Doctoral students report that the support they are offered by their supervisors is adequate. The Assessment Committee met with doctoral students and alumni and found that all were motivated to complete the doctoral programme, though they were aware of and were dealing with the challenges that the reduced allocation posed for them. An elongated time spent on the programme before the defense of the PhD did not seem to be an issue for the students. However, the School found this impacted on their statistics for effectiveness.

Students reported that they would have benefited from an induction course, the operation of the doctoral programme and logistics at the University. New students to Tallinn, found it particularly difficult to navigate structures without prior direction.

The Assessment Committee heard that students were flexible in the way they worked, however they all felt that a space exclusively for doctoral students would enhance their collaboration and allow for increased motivation due to constant contact with the research community.

Some topics students were preparing their thesis on did not have a direct correspondence with research expertise held by supervisors. Some reported major difficulties, such as having to change the topic midway or relying on external supervision exclusively.

Students have a clear understanding of what their work plan is and how progress is assessed. They discuss this with their supervisor and in preparation for the APR. They find this process effective, but they deem the feedback as being insufficient in quantity and quality and would be keen to have an external perspective beyond that presented by the staff of the School.

Students reported on participating in international events and research trips, however, there was no consistency and no formal requirements for study abroad.

These activities are quantified as part of the APR process to determine level of progress, and students are aware of how they are credited for such activities and also where they can seek funding for them. In cases where students find that supervisory expertise is insufficient they report using the opportunities to participate in conferences to supplement the supervision.

Students are aware that employment opportunities in higher education are rare and they are actively considering their chances on the job market. Students coherently articulated how they were aiming to make use of both the generic and subject-specific knowledge and skills. However, they mentioned a lack of interest in PhD graduates amongst some sectors of Estonian society and a lack of understanding of how they could make a difference to professional practice. Students sometimes discuss with supervisors their employment options, however the Committee believes that supervisors could play a more active role in career guidance, making students aware of where the opportunities lie within their specific field of specialisation to give them a greater sense of direction.

Some students who are already employed by the University are making use of the skills developed during the programme to enhance their teaching at BA and MA level, and are finding this very useful.

Alumni spoke positively of their study experience and their relationships with their individual supervisors. However, they also reinforced the need for a more structured approach and more regularity in supervisory arrangements. Alumni expressed a strong desire to contribute their market knowledge and expertise to further enhancement of the programmes. However, the Assessment Committee noted that alumni were rarely invited to offer their views and their support.

Strengths

- Commitment of students to complete the PhD programmes, even beyond the 4+2 timeline.
- Support offered by supervisors to students.
- Usefulness of programme in developing teaching-related skills for BA and MA staff who are also PhD students.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- An induction course might be set up to allow students to familiarise themselves with the operational and logistic details of the study programme.
- Feedback from alumni might be usefully sought on a regular basis

2.3.3. Studies of Cultures

Study programme

Comments

Situated within the School of Humanities, the Studies of Cultures programme is a distinctive, contemporary and ambitious doctoral study programme. Following major structural reform of Tallinn University in 2015, its formation responds both to the University's 2015–20 plan and to its aims to advance and apply research in humanities and arts and to focus on five fields including "cultural competences", alongside educational innovation, digital and media culture, healthy and sustainable lifestyle, society and open governance. The study programme is designed to be responsive to student needs as well as to the diversity and interdisciplinary research ambitions of the programme's academic staff.

Studies of Cultures is one of 15 study programmes regulated by Tallinn University's Statute of Study Programme, which is regularly reviewed and provides the quality framework for all units. Doctoral students have access to a full range of e-learning support.

Studies of Cultures is the largest doctoral programme in the School of Humanities. Although there has been a modest decline in numbers, the programme represents a critical mass of students that enable a sustained interdisciplinary dialogue across thematic areas within the overarching study programme. The School had adopted a targeted approach to grant applications from a wide range of national and EU sources. This not only underpins the research ambitions of Faculty members, but facilitates funding and support for doctoral and post-doctoral students. Timely completions are improving and, although the number of withdrawals is higher than the programme would wish, the School and University are working effectively to improve efficiency and completion rates. Particular testament to the quality and strength of the doctoral environment is the growing proportion of international doctoral candidates.

Strengths

- The strength of the Studies of Cultures study programme lies in its uniqueness and its contemporary approaches to interdisciplinary doctoral study. The programme draws on disciplines that range across the humanities – from anthropology and cultural geography to literary studies, philosophy, cultural semiotics, and visual and material culture – by which cultural phenomena can be researched through different intellectual lenses. The Committee was impressed by the presentation, commitment and detailed articulation of the programme experience by participating staff members and by a diverse group of students and alumni.
- During discussion with the Assessment Committee, all parties described a collegiate environment enriched by co-supervision, regular dialogue and

methodological diversity that challenged students and supervisors to develop new cultural forms, basic and applied research, and innovative interdisciplinary methodologies together, to advance not only their subject of study, but also the cultural, societal and commercial application of their doctoral studies in the Estonian context.

- The Studies of Cultures programme benefits significantly from the national programme of EU funded Doctoral Schools, and particularly by participating with other university partners, in activities organised by the Graduate School of Culture Studies and Arts. Designed to enhance both the culture and efficiency of doctoral study, the Graduate School network, also includes the School of Linguistics, Philosophy and Semiotics, led by the University of Tartu with which colleagues from the Studies of Cultures programme also collaborate regularly.
- The Committee judged the internal organisation of the programme to be innovative, challenging and effective as evidenced by the increase in timely completions and the ability of the current students to reflect on and develop their post-doctoral careers beyond academia.
- Current academic staff members are supported to undertake a PhD as an aspect of staff development so as to increase the long-term sustainability and capacity of the programme and its potential expansion.
- The Committee considered that the design of the Studies of Cultures programme demonstrated further significant potential.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Since 2013 structural reform has impacted significantly on what is now the Studies of Culture programme. Although supportive of the changes that have taken place, the Assessment Committee recognised the imperative to consolidate and implement the changes in full to ensure the quality of doctoral experience is rigorous, consistent and can fulfil its potential.
- Directors, supervisors and students recognised the need to articulate the value and public understanding of humanities and the potential for societal and cultural impact of the Studies of Cultures. The Committee learned of a number of public and media collaborations that facilitated impact, but the activity was not systematically measured or evaluated.
- The Committee appreciated the contemporary approach to studies of culture but noted that the expectation in interviews and on the website remained that doctoral study was predominantly perceived by students and academic staff members as the route to an academic career. Given the limited numbers of academic roles available, the study programme provided a strong basis for more entrepreneurial approaches to doctoral study and opportunities to seek out external partners in order to expand horizons for post-doctoral careers.

- While noting positive support for staff members undertaking doctoral study, the Assessment Committee was concerned about the alignment of workload planning and University regulations, particularly concerning eligibility to supervise or co-supervise doctoral students. This impacts upon academic development, equality of opportunity for students and for staff, and the sustainability of the programme.
- The Committee recommends that the programme complete the consolidation of the various changes recently introduced (including feedback) by evaluating these changes through the Faculty's quality assurance mechanisms and in discussion with current students.
- The Committee recommends the programme enhances its societal, cultural and economic impact and sustains an intellectual dialogue about the value and public understanding of humanities.
- The programme directors and supervisors could usefully reflect on a more entrepreneurial approach to the potential of the programme and explore opportunities for public and private partnerships and collaborations. This might support doctoral studies financially, but equally unlock innovative pathways and extend the career horizons for students.
- That Tallinn University and the School of Humanities reflect on their regulations to ensure that the workload planning for academics undertaking doctoral studies are recognised.
- That the University review its supervisory regulations to ensure that supervisory capacity and expertise is maximised, given that the best and most skilled supervisors may not always be the most productive academic scholars but may be very effective co-supervisors.

Resources

Comments

The programme is well resourced and students and staff recognise the advantages of being located in Tallinn and the many resources available across the city. Learning resources for doctoral students are good, the programme is flexible and staff are responsive to student learning needs.

The majority of current students also studied at Tallinn University for their BA and MA and were familiar with the learning environment. As the programme starts to attract more external and international students, it cannot rely on familiarity and will need to create a more formal induction to learning resources.

Similarly, the Assessment Committee noted that beyond formal class contact there was no informal or workspace dedicated to doctoral students and limited opportunities other than through events to foster peer support. The issue of dedicated space for PhD students is recognised by Tallinn University in the self-

assessment report, but given the particular breadth and diversity of this study programme it is critical to enhance dialogue and social support.

Access to two Graduate Schools and international opportunities for study abroad or to attend conferences and symposia were afforded to all doctoral students through the Erasmus Plus or other EU funded schemes (for example, DoRa Plus) and this had clearly impacted positively on the student experience although it was noted that some opportunities were under-utilised.

The Committee noted repeated concerns from students and staff about the national perception both of the intrinsic value of doctoral study and of studying the humanities in particular. This is exacerbated by issues raised about the challenge of timely completion caused by the limited doctoral stipend, given the nature of the humanities PhD and difficulties of completing within the 4+2 framework. Students also noted the difficulty in securing opportunities to teach on this study programme, or to receive payment or credits for doing so.

Given the breadth and interdisciplinary nature of the Studies of Culture programme and its potential, the Committee noted that supervisory expertise may intermittently be required from beyond the School of Humanities. It was evident from discussions that this had proved more difficult to achieve because of the University's resourcing systems and frameworks.

Strengths

- Access to the resources, training and development opportunities afforded by two Graduate Schools was considered a strength and a significant resource for the programme. These are complementary to the general academic and cultural resources and facilities.
- Students have good learning support and online access to publications required for their research, in addition to career guidance and counselling.
- The University is responsive to student needs and is working to increase international PhD examiners as a means to extend their reach and potential to build partnerships and stimulate dialogue.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Given the diverse and dispersed nature of the Studies of Cultures programme, dedicated workspace is made available for PhD students to study and to facilitate peer support and shared learning.
- Given the expansion of the programme, that students receive a systematic induction to the support and learning resources available and that additional courses are made available in English as requested by students.
- In the self-evaluation report, students and staff identified the challenges faced by students to complete in a timely manner due to financial hardship and the particular difficulties of finding additional and related

employment. The University may give further consideration as to how it allocates resources to support doctoral candidates in Humanities.

- The University may wish to review its resourcing models such that they do not inhibit quality or interdisciplinary research across School boundaries.
- The Assessment Committee recommend that given the limitations of Graduate School funding, consideration is given to adopting more of the generic skills offered into the Studies of Culture programme model to ensure the sustainability of the programme.
- Further consideration could usefully be given to formally incorporating the impact of “culture formation” and innovative applications and careers for Studies of Cultures graduates into the study programme and to creating online resources from these debates.
- The Committee recommends there is a systematic review to ensure all financial barriers possible are removed within the University to ensure doctoral students can fulfil their studies in a timely manner.

Teaching, learning, research and/or creative activity

Comments

The Studies of Cultures programme focuses primarily on various forms of cultural formation and stimulates interdisciplinary dialogue through shared teaching and delivery across the programme through its taught elements.

The Assessment Committee noted the breadth of opportunities for students to bring together novel approaches and “travelling concepts” in cultural theory and to engage in practical field-work and experimentation alongside archival and theoretical research that is not possible elsewhere in Estonia. The Committee also noted that although the model of PhD had been broadened to include options for either a traditional thesis or published papers plus a shorter exegesis, text remains the dominant mode of representation. The Committee noted the degree to which the programme was responsive to the intellectual needs of the students and its willingness to incorporate new ideas through the supervisory process. This ensures that students achieve the appropriate depth and breadth for a doctorate.

Students and supervisors would benefit from the provision of a shared Doctoral Handbook that outlined expectation and explained the key milestones and requirements for both parties. Although the Committee was shown the learning contract, this was clearly perceived by all parties as a more administrative document than one that had any bearing on the student’s progress.

Strengths

- The Assessment Committee noted the students’ engagement with the academic freedom of the programme to develop new and innovative forms of cultural research. They welcomed the unique opportunities this

afforded, but recognised the limits of such freedoms and the rigour required to achieve focus within their doctoral studies while maintaining cultural breadth and gaining new research skills and capabilities.

- Access to the development of the programmes of two Graduate Schools in this context was therefore considered invaluable not only for the doctoral students, but in bringing together academics across Estonia and internationally to explore questions about the changing nature of the PhD.
- A major opportunity for the programme is the challenge it presents to Estonian doctoral traditions and to the role of a PhD in demonstrating the student's capability to undertake independent research. As outlined by students and academic staff members, this is an important societal and cultural question for Estonia at the current time.
- Students reported positively on feedback and on the responsiveness of supervisors to their questions and to their submitted work.
- The interdisciplinary seminars are offered in English and Estonian, and these are welcomed by both international and Estonian students.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Central to capturing and enacting improvement and change would be a Doctoral Handbook that outlines the routes, milestones and expectations of doctoral studies from the perspective of students and supervisors. This would enable the systematic development of good practice, assure that expectations are clearly shared between communities, and identify common ethical considerations in humanities research.
- The Committee recommends the development of a mechanism for a sustained dialogue about the expectations of a contemporary PhD in Estonia that is documented annually as part of the quality assurance process and embedded in the Graduate School programme.

Teaching Staff

Comments

The Assessment Committee recognised and welcomed the diversity of academic expertise staff in the programme and the high expectations of the University to maintain quality supervision. There was less clarity as to the role of co-supervisor and whether all doctoral candidates had two supervisors.

The Committee welcomed the strategic approach and institutional support to making grant applications and the significant increase in collective applications made, and which have the potential to impact on doctoral opportunities.

The Committee, however, expressed concerns that the regulatory framework regarding supervision may, on occasion, prevent the best supervisors from undertaking supervisions because their level of academic production had reduced or they had not managed to supervise one doctorate to completion within five

years. This has the potential to impact upon and influence the candidates and projects selected for entry rather than the highest quality projects.

The workload allocations as outlined in the self-assessment documents were not entirely clear and may require further clarification for students as to the supervisory expectations and how these will be evaluated. Staff members and students reported experiencing different kinds of pressures and further clarity of this issue may be helpful.

Supervisory training has been provided intermittently. It is currently not a requirement for assuring and maintaining standards and ensuring all supervisors are kept informed of regulations and changing expectations.

Strengths

- Supervisors are all well qualified, active researchers and all hold a PhD, which is one of formal requirements to undertake supervisory work.
- Supervisory activity is increasingly shared both within the study programme and across the Humanities. Opportunities for increased interdisciplinarity also exist.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Increased dialogue about the nature and experience of quality doctoral supervision requires a structure to ensure it occurs regularly and systematically and is documented and effectively shared.
- Where supervisory feedback has raised concerns, there may be a case for requiring further training prior to permitting further supervisions.
- The Assessment Committee recommends the regulatory frameworks are reviewed to ensure the student's supervisory experience is of the highest quality. This would, for example, require a review of whether high quality academic output and successful completions are the appropriate measures to ensure academic quality is maintained in the doctoral process.

Doctoral Students

Comments

The Assessment Committee met a representative group of eight Estonian and international doctoral students at different stages of their doctoral degree. The Assessment Committee was impressed by the diversity and their ability to articulate precisely why each selected Tallinn as the place to study.

The students explained how the programme operated and the Assessment Committee explored how the doctoral culture was fostered, primarily through individual care for students by their supervisors. The students also identified the need for more structural adaptations, guidance and introductions to fellow students on the study programme.

The Committee recognised that various social and academic events were held to assist introductions, but both students and academic colleagues identified the need for a handbook that would provide all students with a single document to guide students and supervisors and that laid out all processes and protocols from entry, through to progress review and examination and including complaints procedures and processes for replacement of supervisors.

Strengths

- The freedom and flexibility of the programme.
- Access to and engagement with the two Graduate Schools, the resources of the University and the cultural life of the city of Tallinn.
- The responsiveness of students and their engagement in the programme.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The Assessment Committee noted that the APR had been much improved but believed it could be refined further to ensure it was integrated into the supervisory process and that the student, the supervisor and the University were appropriately represented and heard.
- The production of a more comprehensive Doctoral Handbook (preferably an online version) that explained the elements of the PhD and outlined all expectations and regulations for students and supervisors.
- The Committee recommended that the creation of a dedicated space for students to meet and work would be a positive asset in strengthening the peer support humanities research at Tallinn University.
- The production of a Doctoral Handbook would clarify many of the concerns students had encountered and provide an opportunity to maximise the career potential and innovations for students, as well as to develop strategic ways through which to influence public understanding of the societal and cultural role of humanities research.