

Assessment Report

**Study programme group of
Performing Arts**

PhD studies

Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre

2019

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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** .

The aim of the assessment team was the evaluation of the Study Programme Group (SPG) of Performing Arts at the level of doctoral studies at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre.

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

Bruce Brown (Chair of the Assessment Committee)	Research Professor, Royal College of Art, London (United Kingdom)
Anna-Mari Almila	Research Fellow in Sociology of Fashion, London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London (United Kingdom)
Ankna Arockiam	PhD student; Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (United Kingdom)
Hans Hellsten	Professor, Quality assurance coordinator for the Faculty of Fine and Performing Arts, Lund university (Sweden)
Laura Lūse	Head of Art Research Department, Rundale Palace Museum (Latvia)
Anu Vehviläinen	Lecturer, DocMus Doctoral School, Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki (Finland)

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

After the preparation phase, the work of the assessment team in Estonia started on Monday, 3rd of December 2018, with an introduction to the Estonian higher education system as well as the assessment procedure by EKKA, the Estonian quality assurance organization for higher and vocational education. The members of the team agreed the overall questions and areas to discuss with each group at the universities that were assessed. The distribution of tasks between the members of the assessment team was organised and the detailed schedule of the site visits agreed.

During the following days, meetings were held with the representatives of the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre on the 4th of December, and with the representatives of the Estonian Academy of Arts on the 5th and 6th of December. The schedule for discussion on site for each of the various study programmes only allowed for short time slots to be available for team members to exchange information, discuss conclusions and implications for further questions.

On Friday, December 7, the team held an all-day meeting, during which both the structure of the final report was agreed and findings of team meetings were compiled in a first draft of the assessment report. This work was executed in a cooperative way and the members of the team intensively discussed their individual views on the relevant topics.

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

1. Assessment report on the study programme group of Performing Arts at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre

1.1.1 Introduction

Tallinn Higher Music School, the present Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre (EAMT), was founded in 1919 during the first year of the Republic of Estonia. It is the leading educational institution in Estonia in the fields of music and theatre.

With the aim to better organise the Estonian university landscape, the Ministry of Education and Research initiated the division of responsibilities between different higher education institutions in 2012. The area of responsibility of EAMT is music and theatre. Although some performing arts studies also take place at other universities, EAMT is the only HEI in the country that offers programmes at all three levels in all the important speciality fields of music and theatre. According to the administrative contract with the Ministry, EAMT is responsible for providing musical and theatre education, meeting high standards and corresponding to the needs of society, and for ensuring the quality and development of this education.

Although the main role of EAMT is to provide high-level artistic education in the fields of music and theatre, it is also a research institution. At present EAMT is the only institution in Estonia that combines research and university level teaching in musicology from undergraduate to doctoral level.

As of 1st September 2018 there are 5 academic departments at EAMT, with more than 30 majors taught; the staff of EAMT numbers 252 employees (199 in terms of full time equivalent); and there are approximately 650 students studying.

The study programme group of Performing Arts has two programmes at the doctoral level: Music and Dramatic Art, and Musicology. As of 1st September 2018, the number of registered full-time doctoral students at EAMT is 31, of which 27 are enrolled to the Music and Dramatic Art programme and 4 to the Musicology programme.

Statistical data about study programmes

MS - Music and Dramatic Art

MT – Musicology

Number of doctoral students (full-time studies)

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Number of doctoral students MS	36	34	33	33	31	26
Number of doctoral students MT	12	13	13	12	12	6

Source: Self-Evaluation Report of EAMT

Number of graduates and the length of studies

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Number of graduates MS	3	3	3	3	3	4
Number of graduates MT	0	0	0	1	2	1
Of which those graduating within 5 years MS	1	2	1	1	2	2
Of which those graduating within 5 years MT	0	0	0	0	1	0
Average length of studies (years) MS	5.0	5.0	5.5	5.8	4.5	5.4
Average length of studies (years) MT	-	-	-	6.3	4.3	5.6

Source: Self-Evaluation Report of EAMT

Admission numbers in 2012–2017

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Number of students admitted MS	7	2	4	5	4	5
Number of students admitted MT	3	2	1	0	1	0
Of which international students MS	4	0	3	1	0	2
Of which international students MT	0	0	0	0	0	0

Of which recent MA graduates from EAMT MS	2	0	0	2	3	3
Of which recent MA graduates from EAMT MT	0	0	1	0	1	0

Source: Self-Evaluation Report of EAMT

1.1.2 General findings and recommendations

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

In exercising its professional judgment the Assessment Committee concluded that the Performing Arts group at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre had met the all of the standards set out for doctoral programs under each of the five assessment areas below. In so doing the Academy had also evidenced good practice in some areas as there were others where continuous improvement had already been highlighted in the Self-Assessment document or had emerged during the assessment visit.

Areas of strength

- The Academy continues to build intellectual and material resources to support research in musicology, music and dramatic art that, in part, are either of international standing or excellent within the national context. In particular the research library, performance rooms and construction of a new concert hall provide outstanding facilities.
- In having the benefit of committed and effective leadership the Centre for Doctoral Studies is rapidly establishing a sound governance framework for doctoral research and supervision within the Academy. This will help to assure the quality of the provision and treat all students equally and fairly by making clear both entitlements and obligations.
- There is a strong sense of academic community, with doctoral candidates being attracted by supervisors many of whom are at the forefront of their research discipline.
- There is a high level of academic scholarly expertise within the respective disciplines of the study programme group as there are strong disciplinary cores in which the work of each student can be embedded.
- Relationships between the Doctoral Council and supervisors/students are positively good as are the close links between supervisors and their students. The overall

academic community coheres around a vibrant seminar programme that includes cross-programme meetings and presentations from invited international experts.

- The programmes provides students with advanced knowledge of their chosen disciplinary specialism. Also, and more generally, students reported that they valued the PhD programmes for the 'training of the mind' that it gave them and so, on graduation, the ability to deal with complex problems in the world of work.

Areas for continuous enhancement

- Whereas the Doctoral Council is making rapid progress in establishing a robust governance framework for the doctoral programmes there remains a need to ensure that entitlements and obligations are clearly spelt out for both students and supervisors. In this respect the College may consider the production of a student handbook that is written and structured in a plain language designed to speak directly to students and being for their specific reference. It should be a 'one-stop-shop' that contains all of the entitlements, obligations and guidance that students and supervisors may need to refer to and could also double as a recruitment tool (the output format could either be a web-based pdf or print).
- Steps could be taken to develop strategies that ensure the next generation of doctoral supervisors are well trained and prepared. In order to bring early career academics having no supervisory experience into the programme it is recommended that the Doctoral Council should consider developing an approach to the formal approval of research supervisory teams that balance different levels of experience and knowledge.
- The high level of disciplinary expertise offered by supervisors has helped to evolve a traditional academic model of good scholarly research that is, understandably, more inward looking than it is public facing. Consequently, there could be improvements made in areas of outward facing activities such as, for example:
 - Students and alumnae expressed a strong view that they would benefit from support for, and training that helped them manage, the transition from academic study into the professional workplace in terms of identifying opportunities and preparing their skills portfolio. Also, that employers and alumnae could be of assistance in helping to realise this objective.
 - Although some research undertaken within the programmes has had significant impact outside the academy, in local communities and in industry, there is no section of the Academy's website that makes this material readily available to a

wider public audience so they can better understand the value of research in the creative and performing arts¹.

- Likewise, students would benefit from training, when on the doctoral programme, on how to manage the future impact of their research and how to gather material needed to evidence this.
- The three areas of the doctoral program employ different research methodologies. Musicology, generally, employs a traditional scholarly model with embedded traditions on the nature of research rigour evidenced through textual forms. The research outputs of composition, theatre and performance are, generally, non-text. They employ different methodological approaches and criteria for the assessment of research rigour. Though a “White Paper” on artistic research is being prepared in collaboration with the Estonian Academy of Arts this was not available to the Assessment Committee and there is still work to be done to establish the defining characteristics of artistic research where the outputs are non-text.
- More opportunities to diversify financial support for doctoral studies could be explored. Whereas Estonian state funding for doctoral studies is the major source of financial support, research grants funded by the EU Horizon 2020 programme, for example, could incorporate doctoral scholarships and so bring additional funding. Such grant applications would also require the inclusion of a research impact plan as mentioned above. Also, the possibility of recruiting international students (i.e. non-EU) at full cost could be more fully explored.
- Doctoral programmes are commonly seen as the Third Cycle of the Bologna Framework which itself is based on the good practices of teaching and learning. At doctoral level, learner autonomy also becomes central with students moving into the role of proto-researcher. In this respect research universities consider doctoral programmes to be part of, and an indicator for, the vibrancy of an overall research environment. In this respect, in terms of future strategic planning over a 5-10 year horizon, the Academy may wish to consider its future international profile as being predominately teaching and learning or as a leading research university in the creative and performing arts

¹ The Assessment Commitment came across the following example of research impact buried in the Academy’s website: Aivar Simmermann "Use of applied theatre in the grief support camps of the non-profit association Children's and Youth Crisis Programme from 1995–2017"

(with advanced knowledge and enquiry underpinning the undergraduate student experience).

External Challenges

- The Assessment Committee heard that most doctoral students in Estonia have to undertake other paid work in order to supplement the State's doctoral stipend which is thought to be well below the living wage. This impacts both on their quality of life as well as completion rates and time to completion. The state could explore raising the level of this stipend either through additional funding to support the same number of doctoral stipends or by reducing the number of places to which the existing level of resources is then directed.
- The funding regime mentioned above serves to limit the critical mass for research and innovation through doctoral programmes. This constrains the education of a next generation of researchers and creative entrepreneurs in Estonia. This is not a question of being 'big' or 'small' but of a size that maximises the creative potential of research programmes and makes them more efficient to operate. In this sense the Assessment Committee consistently heard that the critical mass in areas of creativity and innovation was too small to be fully effective and that the system needed to expand in order to achieve an optimal critical mass. The Academy may wish, in its future strategic planning, to consider ways to increase the critical mass of research through doctoral programmes and alternative funding streams.
- The Assessment Committee heard that Estonia's national indicators for research are based on the assessment of text-based outputs and, therefore, exclude the creative and performing arts and design from research assessment where the outputs are non-text. Furthermore, this removes the possibility of artistic research receiving performance-based research funding. It is now a standard in the international research community to consider artefacts and performances as legitimate outputs where the research component has been made discoverable and accessible in the public domain. Generally, most nations now consider research, innovation and creativity to be key drivers to national prosperity and well-being and this is certainly so in the EU research framework. The Assessment Committee encourages the Estonian Research Council and/or relevant government agencies to consider extending the assessment of research to include non-text outputs so that a balance between research in the sciences and the arts may help to stimulate the kinds of innovation and interdisciplinarity that are needed to deal with significant social challenges we face. In

this respect the Academy's wealth of talent could help to position it as an international leader in the area of research and innovation.

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

Musicology (PhD); Music and Dramatic Art (PhD)

Overall

The Assessment Committee concluded that the doctoral programmes in Musicology and Music and Dramatic Art at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre were embedded in an institutional environment that was supportive, rich in knowledge and providing excellent facilities for doctoral research. In the judgement of the assessment committee both programmes complied with all of the standards for doctoral programs set for each of the 5 assessment areas with some areas of excellent practice and others where continuous enhancement were still possible. These areas are highlighted in the following sections for each assessment area.

Study programme

Standards

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

Comments

The two programmes offer a scholarly academic environment and clear disciplinary base in which each student can build their academic 'home'. The programmes have a good international outlook and strong networks with leading scholars at home and abroad. All of this, combined with a strong doctoral seminar programme, ensures that students are exposed to a rich intellectual environment through conferences and workshops. This said, the admirable scholarly depth offered by the programmes tends to be inward looking. This is particularly so in traditional history based areas such as musicology whereas the practice-based dramatic arts tend to have more direct engagements with communities and citizens outside of academia. The academic depth of the scholarly environment could be enhanced through more horizontal relationships between the largely separate academic disciplines (both within the academy and with other institutions as well as potential beneficiaries of research outside of the academy) through, for example, closer relationships with alumnae and employers. Although, the committee heard of some research that was embedded in the local community there was no evidence made available to illuminate this and plans to ensure that, in future, research will translate to have beneficial impact elsewhere outside of the academy were still to be developed. Alongside the advanced understanding that students gain through their research within a specific discipline they also confirmed that the intellectual rigour this involves also gave them a 'training of the mind'. However, this needs to be a more systematic element of the education rather than a by-product. There is a danger that a heavy emphasis on purely vocational skills could weaken the research element of the programme and, here, the balance needs to be right between vocational training and intellectual rigour. Alumnae confirmed this 'training of the mind' to be a valuable asset once in the world of work and also suggested that more specific support for professional preparation could be offered within the doctoral programme. Similarly, in-course training could be given on the development of research impact in support of future career development whether within the academy or some other professional sector. In support of this the Academy could also make better use of the public facing side of the institutional website to provide short case studies that demonstrate the value of their research within society, the economy and culture. Students were able to create their own programme for participation in yearly conferences, so providing exposure to important debates and leadership experience. Overall, the study program provides a rich environment for doctoral research, offering each student an academic home and good range of experience.

Strengths

- Excellent scholarly academic environment and clear disciplinary base in which students can make their academic 'home'.
- Doctoral students, overall, are satisfied with the academic environment;
- International outlook and strong networks;
- Strong seminar programme and programme of yearly conferences that expose students to a rich intellectual and creative environment.

Areas of enhancement and recommendations

- Alongside the advanced knowledge of their specialist discipline students valued the intellectual rigour of the doctoral programme and the 'training of the mind' it fostered. This could be a more systematically managed in helping students to deal with complex problems in the world of work.
- More horizontal relationships could be established between discrete specialist disciplines in order to foster the transfer of good practices and opportunities for collaboration.
- Closer collaborative relationships could be built with alumnae and employers.
- More specific support for professional preparation could be offered within the doctoral programme in order to help students bridge the transition from study to work.
- Doctoral students could be given workshop training on the importance of research impact, how this can be managed and evidence collected as well as writing impact plans when submitting grant proposals.
- The Academy's website could provide short case studies that illustrate the value and beneficial impacts of their research within society, the economy and the environment.

Resources

Standards

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ In conducting doctoral study programmes, an adequate number of teaching staff and researchers participate, who hold the appropriate qualifications required to carry out doctoral studies and supervise doctoral theses in a given study programme.✓ Universities shall ensure that sufficient funds are available to conduct doctoral studies, to provide development activities associated with doctoral studies and research, and to support the professional development of teaching staff and researchers.✓ Resources (teaching, learning and research environments; libraries; resources required for teaching, learning and research) support the achievement of objectives set out in study programmes as well as the actual teaching, learning and research at the level of doctoral studies. Resource development is sustainable. |
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- ✓ Trends in the numbers of current learners, admitted learners and graduates (by study programme) in doctoral studies under the study programme group during the last five years indicate sustainability.

Comments

Doctoral students have access to an excellent range of disciplinary knowledge and expertise. Generally, supervisors tend to support students with substantially more hours per annum than the minimum specified in the regulations.

Given the range of the research (including practice-based outputs in non-text form alongside more traditional scholarly publications) there is a need to be clearer about the requirements for supervision and assessment. Student feedback has made reference to “the unclear requirements for the creative work”. Similarly, it cannot be presumed that someone who has been engaged in creative practice at the highest level will automatically make a good research supervisor and, in such instances, it is not always the case that potential supervisors who have a background in creative practice will, themselves, have completed a PhD programme. Whereas this does not prevent such professionals also being excellent doctoral supervisors there nevertheless is a need to better assure that they possess (if not the required qualifications) the appropriate expertise to support doctoral supervision at the highest level and, if not, how training will be made available to ensure an effective bridge between creative practice and rigorous research. Though the assessment committee was informed that there is a five-year review of Professors this a retrospective exercise that does not necessarily protect the student experience at the beginning of a supervisory agreement. In view of this the assessment committee would encourage the Centre for Doctoral Studies to have a formal process for approving supervisors, prior to the five-year professorial review, and, in the process make clear what indicators, other than the holding of a PhD, would qualify for approval.

The funding made available by the institution to support the doctoral programmes meets the threshold necessary for such work. As mentioned earlier in this document there is a need, however, to look at alternative sources of funding alongside that provided by the state which is barely sufficient. In particular, the stipend is not sufficient to support the cost of living, so this places additional pressure on students who may need to find further resources to fund productions or other forms of creative practice where laboratories or workshops are required. Furthermore, it generally perceived, in terms of funding, that physical requirements in the arts and humanities are ‘light’ cost whereas, in reality, the needs of high level fabrication and performance facilities require levels of investment similar to the natural and physical sciences. In this respect the physical resources to

support doctoral study are excellent with new performance facilities and library resources possibly unrivalled. Their ongoing maintenance is a priority where public access to such resources also makes an enormous contribution to civil society in Estonia.

The evaluation committee noted in the self-assessment document that steps were being taken to reduce intake to the doctoral programmes in order to improve completion rates. Although the percentages quoted in the self-assessment document were high at circa 30% in absolute numbers this represented just two students. Here, the numbers are too small to form reliable judgments though the assessment committee felt that the completion rates, overall, were good. Here the issue is one of critical mass which, presently, is too small to form reliable judgments or to provide the range of expertise and funding that may be appropriate.

Strengths

- Students have access to an excellent range of intellectual resources and expertise and receive considerable support from their supervisors.
- Physical resources to support doctoral study are excellent with new performance facilities and library resources possibly unrivalled.
- There is a clear grasp of the quality assurance process with, for example, the improvement of completion rates being identified as a strategic aim.

Areas of enhancement and recommendations

- The critical mass of students may be too small to provide the range of expertise and funding that may be appropriate and the committee recommends that the Academy looks at long and medium term strategies to grow this.
- There is an opportunity to explore alternative sources of funding for doctoral support alongside that provided by the state.

Teaching, learning, research and/or creative activity

Standards

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

Comments

The Centre for Doctoral Studies, on behalf of the Academy, has established and is maintaining common principles for the implementation and on-going assurance of doctoral programmes based upon the best international practices. In this respect there is much debate internationally about the characteristics of research in the creative and performing arts and design. Though the assessment committee was told about a policy 'White Paper', (being prepared in collaboration with the Estonian Academy of Arts) on the principles of artistic research, this was not available for consultation during the visit. There is some evidence gathered from conversations during the visit and from student feedback (quoted in the assessment document) that this issue has yet to be fully clarified within the Academy. For example, feedback from students includes "The vague assessment criteria, the unclear requirements for the creative work", "Creative and research activities could be more integrated", and, "the candidates' interest in and ability to conduct research should be considered more in the admission process, rather than merely taking account of their high creative standard". This said, common understandings of what might constitute research in the creative and performing arts and design, are part of an international debate in which many institutions are engaged. This is particularly so in nations, such as the UK, Australia, New Zealand and some of the Nordic countries,

where funding for research is based upon performance review derived from quality assessment. Because similar conditions for artistic research do not yet exist in Estonia it may be helpful for the Academy to reach outwards to other institutions where these debates have already been tackled and to some greater or lesser degree resolved.

The academic community of doctoral students and supervisors is strong with good informal links. This is reinforced through an excellent seminar programme in which students are connected across the programmes and gain experience in leading workshops and other events. Both the outcomes of the doctoral programmes and their assessment are relevant. Where the outcomes and methodologies are non-traditional (i.e. non-text) there is room for further development in terms of ensuring research rigour by establishing clearer criteria for practice-based methodologies and their outcomes. There are good feedback mechanisms, at all levels, between students, their supervisor and the Centre for Doctoral Studies with both current students and alumnae expressing satisfaction with these processes. It is less clear where issues identified through the quality assurance process were turned into actions that might enhance such elements of the student experience and how these actions were monitored over subsequent years. There is a good dataset provided for the quality assessment process upon which sound judgments can be based, these data appear to be scrutinized and analysed as a part of the process.

Though the processes of quality assurance are in place, the degree to which these are used to agree strategic aims that either will continually enhance the doctoral programme or put in place longer term plans to establish the Academy's credentials as a leading research institution in the creative and performing arts, internationally, is unclear. Similarly, the degree to which plans are identified to give research a public-facing presence in terms of its impact on society, culture and the economy within Estonia are not yet evident.

Strengths

- There is a framework of common principles for the implementation and on-going assurance of doctoral programmes based upon the best international practices.
- Work is underway to elaborate the characteristic and principles of artistic research.
- The academic community of doctoral students and supervisors is strong with good informal links.
- There is an excellent seminar programme.
- The feedback mechanisms with students are effective and acted upon.

Areas of enhancement and recommendations

- The requirements for supervision and criteria for assessment could be clearer. The assessment committee would encourage the Centre for Doctoral Studies to have a formal process for approving supervisors and supervisory teams.
- The Academy could reach outwards to other international institutions to learn from their experience of managing and assessing programmes of artistic research.
- There is a need to establish clearer criteria for practice-based methodologies and their outcomes.
- Strategic choice of institutional positioning within the international arena could be considered, i.e. a strong teaching university with some research or a research university where knowledge informs the learning and teaching.
- The principles and opportunities of research impact on society, culture and the economy within Estonia have not yet been developed or are evident in the Academy's strategic thinking.

Teaching staff

Standards

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Teaching staff participate in research, development and/or creative activity at the level of and to the extent sufficient to conduct doctoral studies in the curriculum group and to supervise doctoral theses.✓ Teaching staff develop their supervisory competences and share best practices with one other.✓ Teaching staff collaborate in fields of teaching, research and creative work within the university and also with stakeholders outside the university (public sector organisations, enterprises, other research and development institutions).✓ Teaching staff further their skills at foreign universities or other research institutions, participate in international research and creative projects, and present papers at high-level conferences.✓ Qualified international and visiting teaching staff are involved in conducting doctoral studies, participating in doctoral thesis defence panels and/or reviewing doctoral theses.✓ When assessing the work of teaching staff (including their evaluations), the effectiveness of their teaching as well as of their research, development and creative works is taken into account; including the effectiveness of their student supervision, development of their teaching and supervisory skills, and their international mobility. |
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Comments

Overall, doctoral supervisors are engaged in professional activities directly related to their specialist disciplines. The intellectual and creative environment that they offer is very considerable, especially when combined with the library resources. The undoubted quality of this intellectual resource is further enhanced by the presence of distinguished visiting professors invited to give workshops or lectures at the seminar programmes and the scheme for sabbatical leave that furthers research and builds international contacts.

In terms of future strengths it would be helpful if the Academy were to have a strategy for developing the next generation of supervisors. In this respect a process for approving supervisory teams that included a less experienced, early career, researcher in order that they can start to gain experience as a supervisor and eventually progress to the role of director of studies would be helpful.

As mentioned earlier in this report, the research landscape embraces more traditional forms of historiographical research where the outcomes are normally text-based and, in which, the processes of scholarly rigour are well established. There is also a strong body of emerging research in practice-based areas where the characteristics of scholarly rigour are less clear and still maturing. Here the Academy could fast-track its development by consulting examples of best practices elsewhere with the overall objective to also be a research leader in practice-based areas concerning performance and composition.

Overall, the research environment is built upon strong foundations as well as emerging areas of prospective strength. Based on deep academic traditions the Academy currently offers a traditional scholarly environment for research that is of considerable strength. Naturally, this tends to be inward looking, being based upon strong disciplinary foundations. Without losing the strength of these core disciplines there is an opportunity for greater interdisciplinary relationships between the core disciplines within the Academy and with other disciplines (e.g. in the natural and social sciences) located in other institutions both within Estonia and wider afield. The research environment may also benefit from an outward looking approach to other stakeholders outside of academia (in, for example, local communities, businesses, social services and public agencies) who may benefit from the impact of the research.

The strength and depth of the core research disciplines ensures that all doctoral students gain an advanced understanding of knowledge within those disciplines, which they greatly valued. Furthermore, alumnae and students expressed appreciation of the fact that the doctoral programmes exposed them to an intellectual rigour that helped to train the

mind. Through these twin values each student was helped to build an advanced knowledge of their specialist discipline and build the intellectual scaffolding through which complex problems could, more generally, be handled. Whereas, this latter benefit was a powerful transferable skill it appeared to be a by-product of the programme rather than one of its core objectives. It may help if this essential aspect of the doctoral programmes was made more systematic and, perhaps, training offered in the pedagogies of research whereby the student as an autonomous learner is fostered and supported.

Overall, the relationships between students and supervisors are excellent with students expressing strong satisfaction during the visit. In particular, the majority of supervisors, but not all, are available when students require support and advice. Supervisors and students that were met during the assessment visit were not clear, however, what the minimum annual entitlement to supervisory hours per student might be. Although this entitlement is quoted in the formal regulations it would help if a comprehensive doctoral handbook could set out all such entitlements and obligations so there were clear understandings between the institution, supervisors and students so that all were treated equally and fairly.

Strengths

- The intellectual and creative environment is very considerable with the scholarly infrastructure supporting research to be outstanding.
- There is a good scheme for sabbatical leave with excellent take up.
- A good programme of distinguished visiting professors operates.
- Research supervisors provide a rich environment of specialist knowledge in their respective disciplines.
- The relationships between students and supervisors are excellent

Areas of enhancement and recommendations

- The Academy should consider implementing a strategy for developing the next generation of research supervisors.
- The Academy could consult examples of best practices in artistic research elsewhere with the overall objective being to grow its standing as a research leader in practice-based areas.
- The Academy could explore opportunities for greater interdisciplinary relationships between the core disciplines within the Academy and with other disciplines (e.g. in the natural and social sciences) located in other institutions.

- Alumnae and employers could have a closer role to play in helping to make linkages with other stakeholders outside of academy.
- The committee recommends that training is offered in the pedagogies of research through which the student as an autonomous learner is fostered and supported.
- The committee strongly recommends that a comprehensive doctoral handbook promoting a clear understanding of entitlements and obligations between the institution, supervisors and students is prepared.

Doctoral students

Standards

- ✓ When admitting students to doctoral study, their suitability for successful completion of their studies is assessed on the basis of transparent criteria.
- ✓ Doctoral students plan their studies as well as research and development activities in collaboration with their supervisor(s), setting out specific objectives for each year and taking responsibility for achieving these objectives.
- ✓ Evaluation of doctoral students is transparent and impartial. Its purpose is to support development of the doctoral students, provide an opinion regarding the effectiveness of their work to date, and assess their capabilities to complete their studies on time and successfully defend their doctoral theses.
- ✓ Universities offer doctoral students counselling on completing their studies and planning their further careers.
- ✓ Doctoral students' extracurricular teaching, research and/or creative activities or other work-related activities at the university support successful completion of their doctoral studies.
- ✓ Doctoral students participate in international mobility programmes or take advantage of other opportunities for learning or research at foreign universities and/or research and development institutions².
- ✓ Alumni are regularly asked for feedback on the quality of the doctoral study, and employers are asked for feedback on the preparation of the graduates.

Comments

The application process has three stages that are clearly understood by supervisors and potential applicants to the programmes. Though this process is applied equally to all applicants there is an intrinsic difference for those applicants wishing to undertake a traditional PhD based on scholarly research and those whose work has been embedded in some aspect of creative practice, whether that be performance or composition. In this latter category it is essential to distinguish the technical skill that accompanies a creative performance/composition from the intellectual rigour that is needed to define this practice

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

as research. Student feedback suggests that, in the latter case, "Creative and research activities could be more integrated and the candidates' interest in and ability to conduct research should be considered more in the admission process, rather than merely taking account of their high creative standard ". Though this is a testing challenge being dealt with by many institutions it is nonetheless important to articulate the criteria for such research whether text or non-text and to make this clear through a doctoral handbook so there is less informal reliance on the criteria to be applied.

Potential applicants to the programme provide a statement of intent for discussion and this is reviewed at the end of the first year should the applicant be admitted. Unlike traditional scholarly research, where the research questions are required to be defined at the outset of a programme, this is not so easy in areas of practice-based research where the research question often emerges as the research is progressed. The assessment committee heard that annual attestations with doctoral students ensure that programmes of research are clearly articulated and that appropriate progress is being made. During the assessment visit the committee understood that student progression was supported from one year to the next with few, if no, instances of a student's programme being terminated because they did not meet the requirements at the annual attestation, or, if given time to recover, they had failed to do so. This said, the average years to completion could be reduced so that students graduate within a shorter period.

Doctoral students are well supported with workshops on study skills such as, for example, time management. There could, however, be further support provided for career planning and the bridge between study and work. This was mentioned by alumnae and current students alike. Though some doctoral students may wish to pursue an academic career upon graduation others may wish earlier guidance on potential routes to employment, either in their chosen disciplinary area (where they may already be established) or in other sectors such as, for example public services, museums, business, etc.

Through the internal evaluation process the Doctoral School has identified completion rates as an area for improvement. However, as mentioned earlier in this report, the critical mass of doctoral students is so small that it is difficult to interpret these data other than to say that, whereas continuous improvement is possible, nonetheless the completion rates appear to be good. Where students have withdrawn there clearly has been an issue of financial support that needs to be addressed. The majority of students also need to undertake paid work to supplement the stipend which, inevitable will extend the number of years to graduation and/or result in a withdrawal.

There is a good process for gathering student feedback every 3-4 years through a written questionnaire. Greater use could be made of this information to feed into the processes of quality enhancement as well as quality assurance.

Strengths

- The application process has three stages that are clearly understood by supervisors and potential applicants to the programmes.
- Annual attestations with doctoral students ensure that programmes of research are clearly articulated and that appropriate progress is made.
- There is a good process for gathering student feedback every 3-4 years through a written questionnaire.

Areas of enhancement and recommendations

- Candidates' interest in, and ability to conduct, research should be considered more precisely in the admission process.
- Further support could be provided for career planning and the bridge between study and work.
- When considering completion rates as an area for improvement the issue of financial support need to be addressed.
- Greater use could be made of student feedback to feed into the processes of quality enhancement as well as quality assurance.