

Decision Regarding the Assessment of the Social Services Study Programme Group

University of Tartu

15/09/2015

The Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education decided to approve the report by the Assessment Committee and to conduct the next quality assessment of the Social Services study programme group in the first and second cycles of higher education at the University of Tartu in seven years with the following secondary condition:

The University of Tartu shall submit to the Council an action plan and report on eliminating the shortcomings by 15.09.2016.

The University of Tartu submitted for evaluation the following study programmes from the Social Services study programme group:

- Leisure Time Manager-Teacher (Diploma of Professional Higher Education)
- Youth Work (Diploma of Professional Higher Education)
- Social Work and Rehabilitation Administration (Diploma of Professional Higher Education)
- Social Work and Social Policy (MA)

Assessment Committee

Andy Gibbs (Chair)	Leader, Centre for Wellbeing and Health, Edinburgh Napier University; European Higher Education Expert at the British Council (UK)
Ruta Butkeviciene	Associate Professor, Researcher; Department of Philosophy and Social Sciences, Lithuanian University of Health Sciences (Lithuania)
Ülly Enn	Archimedes Foundation, Youth Agency, Expert in Youth Work (Estonia)
Heikki Hiilamo	Professor of Social Policy, Department of Social Research, Head of Discipline for Social and Public Policy, University of Helsinki (Finland)
Andreas Karsten	Youth Policy Labs at Demokratie & Dialog; Expert

	in Youth Work (Germany)
Rudi Roose	Associate Professor, Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy, Ghent University (Belgium)
Johans Tveit Sandvin	Professor of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Nordland (Norway)
Inguna Zarina	Student, University of Latvia; Academic Affairs Officer, National Student Union of Latvia; National Accreditation Board for Higher Education in Ministry of Education and Science (Latvia)
Miriam Teuma	Chief Executive Officer, Agenzija Zghazagh; Expert in Youth Work (Malta)

The Committee's Comments on the Study Programme Group

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- *Processes of internal quality assurance should be more systematic.*
- *An overall plan should be prepared to develop the teaching skills of lecturers and to ensure that all teaching staff can attend such courses.*

Study Programmes Findings

LEISURE TIME MANAGER-TEACHER (DIPLOMA OF PROFESSIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION, UT VILJANDI CULTURE ACADEMY)

Strengths

- *The overall atmosphere at UT Viljandi Culture Academy supports the development of creativity, motivation and dedication. This aim is expressed in the Academy's vision and underpinned by its strategy.*
- *Employers and alumni highly value the preparation of graduates for youth work practice. The specialisations within the study programme are based on a uniform concept.*
- *The study programme includes a focus on entrepreneurship.*
- *Several international projects have been introduced to develop creative learning, involving both students and teaching staff.*
- *Modern methods are used for teaching and learning which take into consideration the learners' needs and changes in the profile of youth workers.*
- *Teaching staff are very competent and highly motivated, and collaboration among them is meaningful and effective. Students are very pleased with teaching staff.*

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- *The study programme should be oriented toward community-based youth work rather than toward school-based youth work. Some elements of the vision for the programme, such as intergenerational approaches, require further introduction.*
- *The Academy should ensure that the name and content of the study programme comply with the professional profiles of graduates who work less frequently as leisure time managers in schools and more frequently in various other occupations involving youth work. A greater focus is needed on general competencies of the youth field. This would also help to strengthen the international dimension of the study programme. Newer trends and additional subjects should be introduced into the programme, for example, self-management of youth workers, working with youth who have special needs, using intergenerational approaches in youth work, and using high-tech environments creatively in youth work.*
- *Since students have admitted to having difficulty writing their theses, it is also necessary to develop their academic writing and research skills, despite the practical orientation of the study programme.*
- *The library has no section for youth work literature; the existing books are distributed across several categories and are hard for students to find. Acquisition of youth work literature, including in foreign languages, needs to be improved.*
- *The Moodle system is not sufficiently employed to provide students with e-materials or the links to e-resources. Teaching staff use different e-platforms instead.*
- *According to both teaching staff and students, the classrooms are not ideal for experiential learning.*
- *The study programme includes courses with overlapping contents, some newer trends in youth work are not sufficiently reflected, and entrepreneurial as well as intergenerational approaches could be recurring themes of the programme. The study programme should be reviewed in this regard.*
- *Teaching staff should be offered more opportunities for their professional and pedagogical development, including internationally. Their research activity could be increased by participation in international projects. Cooperation with international universities would necessitate more English courses as well.*
- *It is necessary to seek ways to increase international mobility.*
- *The Academy should find ways to support student learning for those who work parallel to their studies, for example, to recognise learning obtained at their workplaces as part of the study programme.*
- *Students would benefit from greater cooperation between the Academy and other educational institutions offering youth work courses in Estonia.*

YOUTH WORK (DIPLOMA OF PROFESSIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION, UT NARVA COLLEGE)

Strengths

- *There is a clear need for the study programme, both regionally and nationally. The working languages of graduates are Estonian and Russian. The study programme is well embedded in the region and cooperation with youth work institutions is strong .*
- *The learning environment in Narva College is excellent and the library is well equipped.*
- *External lecturers, including from other universities, are involved in teaching.*

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- *It is impossible to assess the impact of the study programme on society because of the worryingly low number of graduates. The dropout rate is very high and graduate numbers extremely small (total of 13 graduates during the last three years).*
- *The overall study programme as well as its modules and courses needs to be revised to ensure that its structure is logical and content meets the requirements. The current study programme has significant shortcomings with regard to its objectives, expected learning outcomes, supportive literature, reflection of legislation, etc. Both youth work and youth policy fields should be included in the programme.*
- *Despite the practical orientation of the study programme, employers, alumni and students agree that students lack practical skills needed for youth work practice. The College has also admitted this problem in its self-evaluation report and it needs to be quickly resolved.*
- *The shortage of teaching staff hampers development of the programme and endangers its sustainability. The majority of lecturers met by the assessment committee did not have youth work qualifications and/or backgrounds. The College must recruit more ordinary teaching staff with professional qualifications.*
- *Staff participation rates in mobility and research are low.*
- *Learning mobility of students is insufficient, students being limited mainly to practical training facilities in other regions.*
- *The study programme must be further developed to address a growing diversity of employment opportunities in the sector. It is important to ensure that graduates from Russian-speaking communities are well prepared for taking on these roles. The study programme must link theory and practice of youth work more tightly.*
- *Teaching and assessment methods must be clearly related to the expected learning outcomes, and their choices must fit their purposes and take into consideration the abilities and needs of learners.*
- *It should be ensured that correct terminology is used throughout the study programme and course titles like 'Restless and aggressive children' are avoided.*

- *More materials in English and Russian must be used in the teaching and learning, and these materials must be obtained and made available to students.*
- *The requirement to submit final theses in Estonian is one of the obstacles to completing studies. Given the specific features of the region, the committee recommends that the College further improve proficiency in practical Estonian usage by Russian-speaking students and give them the opportunity to write their final theses in Estonian, Russian or English.*
- *Since one of the reasons for dropping out is the opportunity to start working in the youth field before graduation, the College should seek ways to support the learning of those students who are employed in the field, for example, by recognising learning at their workplaces as part of the study programme.*

SOCIAL WORK AND REHABILITATION ADMINISTRATION (DIPLOMA OF PROFESSIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION, UT PÄRNU COLLEGE)

Strengths

- *Feedback from students and employers as well as the experiences of cooperating with international partners is widely used to improve the study programme.*
- *The library of Pärnu College is well supplied with professional literature.*
- *The overall atmosphere of the College is highly appreciated by both students and employers.*
- *Teaching is flexible and offered in various formats.*
- *Good collaboration with foreign universities, especially in Finland.*
- *Teaching staff are motivated and have appropriate qualifications.*
- *Teaching staff are well aware of the need to further develop the study programme and the programme team has prepared a quality action plan.*

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- *The focus of the study programme needs to be determined more clearly. At present it is unclear, including to students, whether the focus is on service provision or service administration. The objectives and expected learning outcomes of all practical trainings should be clearly specified.*
- *Correlations among expected learning outcomes, teaching methods and assessment methods are not always clear.*
- *The use of diverse and modern teaching methods should be at a uniformly high level. Action plans for the development of teaching and learning and for the implementation of a uniform approach should be prepared. At present it is left up to teaching staff whether or not to attend in-service trainings. The College should encourage its lecturers to participate in trainings.*

- *International student mobility rates are low.*
- *It is necessary to provide more opportunities for teaching staff mobility and visiting lecturer involvement.*
- *Students need to be informed of the changes made on the basis of their feedback.*
- *Students and student applicants must be provided with clear and relevant information about employment opportunities.*

SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL POLICY (MA)

Strengths

- *Theoretical and practical approaches are well balanced in the study programme. The content and structure of the programme are consistent with its objectives and expected learning outcomes.*
- *The study programme has a strong international orientation including teaching staff and student mobility as well as research cooperation with leading universities in Europe.*
- *The study programme is interdisciplinary, and it is possible to quickly add courses to the programme to address current problems.*
- *The academic environment at the University of Tartu is motivating with excellent textbooks and teaching materials. Resource development is sustainable.*
- *The majority of teaching staff utilises modern teaching methods.*
- *Teaching staff is highly motivated and conduct teaching in a very flexible way, including during weekends as well.*
- *The study programme is flexible. The needs of working students are taken into account and distance learning is used.*
- *Students are very pleased with the teaching staff.*
- *Teaching staff are actively engaged in research, and several lecturers are extensively involved in international networks and research projects.*
- *Employment rates among graduates within their areas of speciality are very high.*
- *Alumni and employers value highly the theoretical preparation of graduates.*

Areas for improvement and recommendations

- *Social policy is the weaker part of the study programme, although the teaching staff in this area are highly qualified. Social policy should be made more visible in the programme and students should acquire more skills in quantitative research methods. Interdisciplinary cooperation with economists should be enhanced, and research in the field of social work developed.*

- *No member of the teaching staff holds a PhD in social work, and research is conducted more in the field of social policy. It is necessary to improve the academic and research competencies of lecturers in social work.*
- *The proportion of students completing their studies in a timely manner is very small. The problems related to completion must be analysed. At present teaching staff are limited to a passive acknowledgement that students study while working full time.*
- *Since students with bachelor's degrees not related to social policy or social work are enrolled in the programme, it is not clear how the University ensures that they acquire basic professional knowledge and then enhance it during their master degree studies. It is necessary to clearly establish the competencies required to enter the MA programme. The absence of prior professional education may be one of the reasons students do not complete their studies in a timely manner or do not complete them at all.*
- *The assessment of students should be more consistent and transparent.*

The Council weighed the strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations and found that the study programmes, the teaching conducted under these programmes and development activities regarding teaching and learning conform to the requirements if the University eliminates the following shortcomings related to the Youth Work study programme:

- *There are significant shortcomings in the content and structure of the study programme with regard to its objectives, expected learning outcomes, supportive literature, etc.*
- *Theory and practice are not adequately linked in the programme; graduates of the programme lack practical skills for youth work.*
- *The low numbers of qualified teaching staff and students, as well as high dropout rates (often related to insufficient knowledge of Estonian), endanger the sustainability of the study programme.*
- *There is a lack of adequate collaboration with other educational institutions providing youth work programmes.*
- *International student mobility rates are very low.*

Further information:

Assessment Report