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## **Assessment Report**

# Teacher Training and Educational Sciences

University of Tartu  
Tallinn University

2017

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## Introduction

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

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

Quality assessment of a study programme group takes place at least once every 7 years based on the regulation approved by EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education [\*Quality Assessment of Study Programme Groups in the First and Second Cycles of Higher Education\*](#).

The assessments areas and standards are:

### Study programme and study programme development

#### Standards

- ✓ The launch or development of the study programme is based on the Standard of Higher Education and other legislation, development plans, analyses (including labour market and feasibility analyses), and professional standards; and the best quality is being sought.
- ✓ The structure and content of modules and courses in a study programme support achievement of the objectives and designed learning outcomes of the study programme.
- ✓ Different parts of the study programme form a coherent whole.
- ✓ The study programme includes practical training, the content and scope of which are based on the planned learning outcomes of the study programme.
- ✓ The study programme development takes into account feedback from students, employers, alumni and other stakeholders.

### Resources

#### Standards

- ✓ Resources (teaching and learning environments, teaching materials, teaching aids and equipment, premises, financial resources) support the achievement of objectives in the study programme.
- ✓ There is a sufficient supply of textbooks and other teaching aids and they are available.
- ✓ Adequacy of resources is ensured for changing circumstances (change in student numbers, etc.).

- ✓ Resource development is sustainable.

## Teaching and learning

### Standards

- ✓ The process of teaching and learning supports learners' individual and social development.
- ✓ The process of teaching and learning is flexible, takes into account the specifics of the form of study and facilitates the achievement of planned learning outcomes.
- ✓ Teaching methods and tools used in teaching are modern, effective and support the development of digital culture.
- ✓ Practical and theoretical studies are interconnected.
- ✓ The organisation and the content of practical training support achievement of planned learning outcomes and meet the needs of the stakeholders.
- ✓ The process of teaching and learning supports learning mobility.
- ✓ Assessment of learning outcomes is appropriate, transparent and objective, and supports the development of learners.

## Teaching staff

### Standards

- ✓ There is teaching staff with adequate qualifications to achieve the objectives and planned learning outcomes of the study programme, and to ensure quality and sustainability of the teaching and learning.
- ✓ Overall student assessment on teaching skills of the teaching staff is positive.
- ✓ The teaching staff collaborate in the fields of teaching and research within the higher education institution and with partners outside of the higher education institution (practitioners in their fields, employers, and staff members at other Estonian or foreign higher education institutions).
- ✓ Recognized foreign and visiting members of the teaching staff and practitioners participate in teaching the study programme.
- ✓ The teaching staff is routinely engaged in professional and teaching-skills development.
- ✓ Assessment of the work by members of the teaching staff (including staff evaluation) takes into account the quality of their teaching as well as of their research, development and creative work, including development of their teaching skills, and their international mobility.

## Students

**Standards**

- ✓ Student places are filled with motivated and capable students.
- ✓ The dropout rate is low; the proportion of students graduating within the standard period of study is large.
- ✓ Students are motivated to learn and their satisfaction with the content, form and methods of their studies is high.
- ✓ As part of their studies, students attend other Estonian and/or foreign higher education institutions as visiting or international students.
- ✓ Employment rate of alumni is high.
- ✓ Alumni and their employers are pleased with their professional preparation and social competencies.

The aim of the assessment team was the evaluation of the Study Programme Group (SPG) of Teacher Training and Educational Sciences in two higher education institutions: University of Tartu and Tallinn University.

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

<b>Milan Pol (chair)</b>	Professor, Masaryk University Brno; Czech Republic
<b>Päivi Atjonen</b>	Professor, University of Eastern Finland; Finland
<b>Kerttu Huttunen</b>	Adjunct Professor, University of Oulu; Finland
<b>Maritta Hännikäinen</b>	Professor, University of Jyväskylä; Finland
<b>Diarmuid McAuliffe</b>	Lecturer, University of the West of Scotland; UK
<b>Ulla Mutka</b>	Professor, JAMK University of Applied Sciences; Finland
<b>Hannele Niemi</b>	Professor, University of Helsinki; Finland
<b>Florian Rampelt</b>	Student, University of Passau; Germany
<b>Margit Timakov</b>	Head, Estonian Teachers' Union
<b>Peter van Petegem</b>	Professor, University of Antwerp; Belgium
<b>Rupert Wegerif</b>	Professor, University of Exeter; UK

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

After the preparation phase, the work of the assessment team in Estonia started on Monday 28 November 2016, with an introduction to the Higher education system as well as the assessment procedure by EKKA, the Estonian Quality assurance organization for higher and vocational education. The members of the team agreed the overall questions and areas to discuss with each group at the two institutions, who were part of the assessment process. The distribution of tasks between the members of the assessment team was organized 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 29 and Wednesday 30 November) and Tallinn University (Thursday 1 and Friday 2 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 team members to exchange information, discuss conclusions and implications for further questions.

On Saturday, December 3, 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 two reports, the assessment team summarize their general findings, conclusions and recommendations which are relevant across the whole SPG. 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 can form the basis upon which improvements in the quality of the programmes can be achieved. In formulating its recommendations, however, the assessment team has not evaluated the financial feasibility associated with their implementation.

## **General findings and recommendations**

Although the situation at the two universities concerned differs in some aspects, similarities and common features can be found in the programmes under review.

Teacher training and educational sciences programmes as realized at the University of Tartu and Tallinn University are of a good quality and they have a potential to supply the Estonian labour market with qualified professionals working in schools and other educational institutions. The employment prospects of graduating students are very good.

Programmes seem to respond well to societal needs; they are the result of broader professional and other discussions conducted within the universities concerned and also outside – with key stakeholders.

Programmes at both universities have undergone significant changes in the recent past, and these changes seem to be of a positive nature. Programmes are well thought through, they are in line with current trends in teacher education

and educational sciences. Although teaching and educational science programmes are differently located within the structures of the universities concerned, in both cases they have a common platform that unites the effort across the university and provides the opportunity for interdisciplinary approach (Pedagogicum in Tartu; Educational Innovation Centre and Basic Module in Tallinn).

Consequently, the aims and learning outcomes are very clear and well defined, content, methods and forms are modern and multifaceted with an emphasis on student-centered approaches, and teaching and learning are supported by current technologies. There is a good interrelationship between theory and practice at both universities, proportions between educational and subject-related courses/modules are acceptable.

Resources for teaching seem to be in principle sufficient – some learning environments are very good, others are sufficient for the realization of the programmes. Study resources are well provided for, although more literature in Estonian language would be welcomed by students.

The staff seem to be well qualified for their teaching roles, and they often closely collaborate (peer-peer schemes, collegial observations, mentoring to novice staff members are in place). Staff teaching is generally positively assessed by the students, and also by some other stakeholders.

Students seem to be enthusiastic and actively involved. They are a highly heterogeneous group in life and work. Many students study and work at the same time which creates a number of challenges for them as well as for the university. Student groups also differ in terms of their size, very often they are rather small, which on a positive note opens up lots of possibilities for collaboration.

Both universities are proving to be open-minded and change-oriented with respect to the programmes concerned; they respond well to the feedback from students but also from other stakeholders' groups. The feedback from students is collected regularly and acted upon by the universities.

#### Some issues to consider:

The relatively high drop out rate and the frequent exceeding of nominal study time seem to be at least in part due to students having to work and study at the same time. The universities are trying hard to be flexible to make it possible for all students concerned to follow through on their studies. Still it seems necessary for the universities to look for new strategies how to reduce these phenomena. Yet the most effective solutions to reduce drop out and maybe also exceeding of nominal study time may be beyond the students' or university's reach. National improvements may be required to assist in the financing of studies.

The importance of graduation at masters level can hardly be underestimated, as emphasized by employers. The current situation in Estonia is that the bachelor students are not financially incentivized to continue their studies to masters level (bachelor graduates can gain year-to-year contracts with schools, but their salaries are the same as for masters graduates). The employers clearly would



prefer graduates with a master's degree because of their stronger scientific and professional background. Their knowledge base is broader and more up-to-date. They have more project management skills and are more fluent in English. Therefore, the university should really encourage students to graduate at masters level and should gain support for this through a change in government policy.

Research needs to be further developed in the various teacher education and educational science programmes under review. It can even be said that research within these programmes does not seem to be a real priority for the universities, since their budgeting does not support it effectively. In the various programmes, relevant suggestions for research are known. But this knowledge and awareness of necessity for more research needs to be translated into research practice. There is also a need to explicitly and clearly formulate expectations towards the staff and proportions between the teaching activity and research for each staff member/unit. At the moment, research seems to be a rather non-systematic activity often perceived by staff as something that is done in their spare time without proper resourcing and other necessary support. This has consequences for the relationship between teaching and research in working with students, to support teaching where up-to-date research is embedded in their teaching, and also in encouraging staff to improve their qualifications profile. To improve the quality and the quantity of research requires firm leadership and academic support from the department/faculty so that it is not left on the shoulders of individual staff members alone

Mobility is another area that deserves more attention within the programmes under review. In most cases this seems to be a rather underdeveloped area. It concerns both staff and student mobility – both should be encouraged more effectively. In the case of student mobility, there does not seem to be sufficient support and flexibility from the side of the programme providers; consequently, mobility is an opportunity that the vast majority of students do not consider realistic and even beneficial. A strategy therefore needs to be developed which looks at how you attract visiting scholars and students from abroad that would benefit both universities and their teacher education and educational science programmes.

The burning issue is without doubt about 'respect and appreciation' for the teaching profession. In fact, the issue of becoming and being a teacher in Estonia is seen as having a very low value among high school students and being and becoming a teacher and teacher retention is as a consequence a serious challenge. This is a matter of national importance, and the universities need to work together with other partners and stakeholders to make strategic plans and improvements in this societal issue.

Although the above mentioned issues for the teaching profession in Estonia are somewhat challenging, with VET where the status of teachers is so very low that there is an even greater challenge ahead with a huge loss of VET teachers in the near future. Estonia has set aims for education for the next coming years and have analysed the major strategic actions in the near future. Vocational training is one of Estonia's priorities (Estonia's Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020; the development plan under the governance of the Ministry of Education and Research "Smart and Active People" 2015–2018). The Lifelong Strategy 2020 (p.6) refers: "Vocational education is not recognized as an opportunity for good

quality studies, and the labour market lacks skilled workers with the appropriate qualifications. This sets high demands for in-service training as well as quality of vocational education." In this frame, vocational teacher education is a burning issue. In Estonian society in general there are 490 vocational teachers who are 60 years of age or older and so there will be a big retirement boom very rapidly among the teachers who are working at the moment in vocational schools. Vocational teachers are needed urgently and teacher education is responsible for their qualification.

The self-evaluation reports (SER) have analyzed the situation and make an urgent conclusion that even though study places are, as a rule, filled with motivated and capable students, however, the last year has shown a decrease in admissions numbers. This is very much due to the general demographical situation in Estonia. Both universities (Tartu and Tallinn) have done very much good pedagogical development work in Vocational Teacher Education. Still the drop-out rates in the program are quite high. A high level of dropouts, postponement or interruption of studies is a big area of concern on which teaching staff is very aware of. It seems that the reasons for high drop-out rates are not only pedagogical. They are strongly connected with demographic changes in society, public attitudes to vocational education and the structures of education.

The perceived 'low status' of the teaching profession is one reason why students from high schools/secondary level schools do not want to join teacher education programs. Vocational education and becoming a vocational teacher is even less valued than other teachers' academic routes. Much work has been already done together with universities and Ministry of Education to promote the status of teacher education. Still there is a lot of room for promotion and improvement of the status of vocational teachers together with the universities, Ministry of Education and Research, Teachers' Association, the Estonian Association for Advancement of Vocational Education and other stakeholders.

Both universities seem to have very productive and professional relations with many associates beyond the university – employers, alumni, schools, and more. This presents a good opportunity to balance their own work and to influence positively the context within which they operate. Perhaps now more attention needs to be given to the collaborative potential that exists between the two universities concerned, University of Tartu and Tallinn University in the field of teacher education and educational sciences. Quality assurance processes need to be strengthened by the use of the expertise of other university providing teacher education and educational sciences programmes. This way, programmes as well as research, for instance, could benefit from mutual communication of these universities, from co-ordination of some activities and strategies. Estonia is a relatively small country and collaboration between the key institutions in the field of teacher education and educational sciences is highly desirable. Also, it is desirable that the universities concerned are actively and intensively involved in international co-operation, in international structures of education, research and development in the field of teacher education and educational sciences.

# 1. Assessment report of SPG at the University of Tartu

## 1.1. Introduction

The University of Tartu was established in 1632 and has developed as the national university of the Republic of Estonia, with a mission to advance science and culture, to provide the possibilities for the acquisition of higher education based on the development of science and technology in the fields of humanities, social, medical and natural sciences, and to provide public services based on teaching and research.

There are 21 study programmes of teacher education and educational sciences at the University of Tartu (incl. Narva College): Primary School Teacher (INT BA+MA), Primary School Teacher in Multilingual School (INT BA+MA – Narva College), Special Education (BA), Special education and Speech Therapy (MA), Early Years Teacher (BA), Early Years Teacher in Multilingual Environment (BA – Narva College), Early Years Educator (MA), Teaching Humanities and Social Subjects in Basic School (BA), Humanities in Multilingual School (BA – Narva College), Teacher of Humanities in Multilingual, School (MA – Narva College), Teacher of Several Subjects in basic School (MA), Teacher of History and Civics (MA), Teacher of Estonian Language and Literature (MA), Teacher of Estonian Language and Literature in Non-Estonian School (MA), Educational Science (Sciences) (MA), Educational science (Math and Sciences) (MA), Secondary School Sciences Teacher (MA), Teacher of Mathematics and Informatics (MA), Teacher of Arts, Handicraft and Home Economics (MA), Teacher of Vocational Training (BA), Educational Sciences (MA).

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

### Comments

Although the self-evaluation report of University of Tartu was a bit too descriptive in nature rather than one with an emphasis on self-reflection and analysis, during the whole process of evaluation we collected enough evidence about the programmes under review.

Recent years have been a period of structural reform at the University of Tartu and the current model of teacher training provisions is the result of intensive discussions across the university. While individual programmes remained close to the “subject units”, a joint platform dealing with teacher training across the university has been established (Pedagogicum) to co-ordinate major developments in the field.

### Strengths

- University Leadership support. The leadership of the university seems to be supportive of reforms within the teacher education and educational sciences programmes. There is whole university plan for the development of teacher training programmes (2016-2020).
- Labour market needs. The programmes clearly respond to the labour market needs in Estonia.
- Conceptual basis, development. The programmes are built on a solid conceptual basis, curriculum of the programmes has been modernized and its development is realised in a multifaceted way.
- Broader involvement. The development of the programmes is often done in consultation with teacher unions, employers and students.
- Joint platform. Pedagogicum seems to be a very promising platform for development of study programmes and also has the potential to connect teaching and research more effectively across the programmes; also it can serve the promotion of interdisciplinarity.
- Pre-service as well as in-service. The attention has been also paid to in-service programmes at the university.
- Broader social role. Especially Narva College seems to be playing a very important social role as a kind of community centre in the town/region.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Since teacher training programmes are located at different units across the university, we recommend joint and regular evaluation activities in order to reflect on developments.
- The Pedagogicum has started well but it needs constant care and development and should not focus on administrative issues only and so become separate from the "real life of teacher educators".
- Some critical issues seem to exist in most of the programmes reviewed, such as high drop-out rate, lack of research and low international mobility. We recommend paying specific attention and to adopting concrete measures that will reduce these issues.
- More collaboration, not only with key stakeholders but also with other relevant universities in Estonia (in this case mainly Tallinn University) and abroad, is recommended.
- In general, the university needs to collaborate with its partners in Estonian society to promote the value of the teaching profession.

- Currently, many activities seem to be funded from EU project-bound money. A plan on how to provide continuing education and research in the future when no EU structural funds are available is recommended.
- Regular external assessment is recommended as well as internal evaluation and the idea of promoting an evaluative culture which means that gradually the staff itself should learn to critically reflect on their own activities so that large-scale external evaluations are no longer required.

## Study programme and study programme development

### Comments

Study programmes have been developed in communication within the university and also with regard to broader views and needs. Study programmes are located at different units of the university but are co-ordinated through the special platform called Pedagogicum.

### Strengths

- The programmes are in principle well designed and thought-through. They have clear aims and content, and organisation of the teaching seems to be acceptable.
- The programmes have been developed in communication with key stakeholders.
- In most programmes the providers actively collect feedback from students and further develop the programmes based on the analysis of feedback.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- More attention needs to be paid in the programmes to inclusive education issues, to work with pupils/students with special educational needs.
- Feedback collected by the Pedagogicum on students' practice periods is recommended to be analysed together with feedback collected by the study programme groups to provide a more comprehensive picture of the whole.
- Some programmes wished that feedback from alumni would be better collected (subject-wise) at the university level. Of course, anonymity of small groups of students in feedback should be guaranteed.
- We recommend that there is greater emphasis on the international dimension of the programmes (relevant current literature, short- as well as long-term student and staff exchanges and visits and the provisions that make this possible, such as international projects).
- Focus needs to be transferred from short-term, possibly not so well interconnected projects to a more long-term development work with more longitudinal financial prospects.

## Resources

### Comments

The learning environment makes it possible to realize the programmes, although some improvements (some buildings/rooms in Tartu) are desirable. The study materials as well as e-support for teaching and learning are at their disposal. While finances are clearly linked to teaching and learning, investment towards research and mobility are clearly underestimated.

### Strengths

- The buildings of the University of Tartu in which programmes are realised are acceptable (some of them in need of reconstruction, though). The premises of the College in Narva are very good.
- Good library provision with up-to-date literature.
- E-support of teaching and learning is provided.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Reconstruction of the building at Salme street is needed.
- Explicit funding of research and also of mobility of staff/students should be considered.
- In some programmes, study materials are often in languages other than Estonian which can be a challenge for some. More study literature in Estonian language is therefore desirable.

## Teaching and learning

### Comments

Teaching is realised on a solid basis consisting of up-to-date theories and use of a variety of methods and forms to meet the needs of heterogeneous student groups and individual students. The programmes are well constructed.

### Strengths

- A variety of methods is used with the aim of connecting theory with practice.
- Students are given generously large spaces in which to pursue individual work.

- There is the determination to reach a balance between theory and practice in teaching.
- Student internships are well organized and well integrated into the programmes.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Strategies to reduce the student drop out rate are required to be developed and effectively implemented.
- Knowledge of Estonian among students of Narva College is currently low and measures to improve it should be considered.
- Reading materials for students (in curricula for different subjects) should be current and frequently updated (some lists of textbooks were rather old and out of date).
- Research-based teaching should become the 'norm' across all programmes.
- Create a culture of 'independent student learning' by providing informative as well as formative feedback – explicit strategies of dealing with this should be considered.

### Teaching staff

#### Comments

There are numerous teaching staff involved in the programmes, including those working in schools. There is a lower share of those having PhD degrees (when compared to the University of Tartu mean). The staff engagement in the research differs and often does not seem to be sufficient. The level of internationalisation is also very different across the programmes. In general the programmes could benefit from increase of internationalisation of staff as well as students.

#### Strengths

- Staff participate in regular staff development activities (mainly focused on teaching).
- Mentoring support is offered to novice staff members.
- There is the evidence of close collaboration with teachers.
- Students highly value the teaching in many programmes.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Increase the amount of research-active staff.
- Develop and implement a strategy for increasing the proportion of PhD qualified staff.
- Implement a professional-academic development plan for all academic staff.
- Encourage and develop internationalisation amongst staff

## Students

### Comments

Students give prevalingly positive feedback on teaching, although their involvement in feedback giving is proportionally low. Many students work and study at the same time, which has a number of consequences, among them the excessing of nominal study time, or dropping out of university completely. University is looking at ways of how to deal with these issues. Students´ tendency to use possibilities of international study exchanges is very low, particularly amongst certain student groups.

### Strengths

- Students are manly focused and well-motivated to get engaged in the studies.
- Student groups are heterogeneous which - apart from challenges – also creates a richness of the group and offers unique learning opportunities.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Students need to be encouraged to participate in feedback/evaluation of their programmes.
- Although some measures have been adopted to create a balance between study and work, the issue still needs careful attention – with the aim to improve the quality of learning, reduce the dropout rate and also increase chances for mobility.
- The issue of very small student numbers on some study programmes does ask programme leaders to give consideration to the question of possible course and programme mergers.



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

### 1.3.1. Early Years Teacher (BA); Early Years Educator (MA); Primary School Teacher (INT BA+MA); Special Education (BA), Special Education and Speech Therapy (MA)

#### **Study programme and study programme development**

##### Comments

A high number of new preschool and primary school teachers and other highly educated professionals are needed in Estonia, and the employment prospects of the graduating students are good in these areas.

In these study programmes, representatives of professional unions, employers and students collaborate with the staff members in programme councils, and monitoring systems of the programmes are constantly being improved. Student feedback, especially, has actively been taken into account in developing and updating the study programmes, and the programmes have recently been harmonized with professional standards. The development of the programmes of, e.g., early years teacher and educator have been collaborative by nature and included even colleagues from Tallinn University, and from abroad.

In the primary school teacher education programme it would have been beneficial to know what the plans were for developing the cooperation of the teaching staff in the Narva College and at Tallinn University. It also remained unclear in the self-evaluation report in which ways the teaching in the programmes is research/evidence-based.

The programmes now evaluated have regular links with the employers in several ways. Employers are involved in programme development; the employers have, for instance, evaluated whole study modules and there is a policy of meeting the programme director once a year and/or taking part the work of the Programme council. Additionally, employers and local supervisors conduct the assessment of students together during the pre-service training (practising periods) of the latter in, for example, kindergartens and schools. The mentor-teacher system has also been acknowledged as a positive thing by the employers.

According to the interviews performed during the assessment, the employers were content with the students and perceived them as being self-confident and capable in analysing their work. However, according to some interviewees, the

students should be more prepared to be more inclusive by working with children with special needs. Overall, however, it is very obvious that the employers are very satisfied with the knowledge and skills of the graduated students and that the outcomes of the programmes are relevant and satisfy the needs of the society.

According to feedback, the Special Education (BA) programme has more emphasis on theory rather than practice. Furthermore, the share of about 10 % of practice in masters studies (25–28 in ECTS points) is fairly low given the theoretically oriented bachelor programme(s). In other European university level speech and language therapy programmes the share is usually around 20 % (in 3- to 5-year long programmes).

### Strengths

- The programmes fill a clear labour market need in Estonia and they are, for the most part, practice-oriented.
- Active marketing of some of the programmes.
- In many programmes, multifaceted entrance tests are in use.
- Of the programmes, e.g., Early Years teacher BA programme is a popular programme with lots of applications.
- The curricula have recently been modernized and new courses are developed according to the suggestions/needs of the society.
- Multifaceted ways have been used to develop curriculum; e.g., in collaboration with the teachers of the Teacher Base module.
- Representatives of professional unions, employers and students are included in the work of the Programme Council, monitoring systems of the programmes are constantly developed.
- An active network of innovation pre-school and school establishments has been created.
- Students are encouraged and are already involved in research at the Pedagogicum.
- There is existing international collaboration in teaching/development of teacher training.
- Continuing education is provided focusing, amongst others, on didactics, project work and SEN (children with special/additional needs).

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- More attention is needed in teaching on SEN children (children with special needs) during the studies. Additionally, there is a need to cover more extensively the areas of anti-bullying, pedagogies of gifted children, and CLIL (content language integrated learning).
- More attention is needed in the provision of feedback on student's skill development from the side of the study programmes to the employers (supervisors on the field).
- It needs to be recognized at the University of Tartu that in, e.g., special education and speech therapy MA programmes there is much face-to-face individual or small group instruction and it is therefore by its nature more expensive than some other programmes.
- Consider arranging more possibilities for practice in the Special Education BA programme.
- International cooperation needs to be promoted; there is much to be gained from collaboration that is language-independent but, at the same time, relevant also in the Estonian context.
- Some courses should be taught in English to attract foreign students.
- It would be beneficial to develop a policy of internationalization at home (inviting visiting professors in a systematic way) and mutual staff exchanges (by the means of bilateral agreements between partner universities) as possible answers to the difficulties of student and staff mobility.

## Resources

### Comments

According to the self-evaluation report, the environmental and material resources (with the exception of ventilation problems in some premises and a relative shortage of study material) are good, as stated in surveys and other feedback of students and staff. Facilities seem to be sufficient as observed during the panel visit, but the Salme street building the panel visited needs renovation; it is old and impractical and it seems not to be, in its current condition, an inspiring, purposeful or modern learning environment.

A desire has been expressed for more specialty-related and contemporary study literature (also in Estonian) in Special Education and Speech Therapy programmes. This needs to have more modern study materials but the panel acknowledges that some good work has already been done to meet this need.

Otherwise situation with the study resources seems sufficient, but in some cases there remains a question on how to use technological resources more efficiently.

### Strengths

- Equipment and other resources (also for e-learning) available, versatile information technology in use.
- Well-functioning wireless networks.
- Active library use.
- Access to professional databases and e-journals is secure.
- Renovated facilities with usually up-to-date digital devices available for staff and students
- Relatively well-equipped speech therapy facilities
- Good library with good selections of e.g., scientific journals and helpful librarians

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Updating of the slow computers in some of the teaching premises.
- Renovation of the Salme street building.
- In some areas, a need for higher education textbooks in Estonian exists (more specialty-related and contemporary study literature).
- Allow more time to organize for preparation of study materials for students (especially for the Special Education BA programme).
- Training in the use of iPads/tablet computers is highly recommended; not all applications in Special Education and Speech Therapy are language-dependent.

## **Teaching and learning**

### Comments

Multifaceted teaching and learning methods are widely used, for example, analyzing of video-recorded lectures, in counseling of parents (in role play) using

information derived from articles read, hands on practice, collaborative learning, much self-reflection and self-evaluation.

Basically, theory and practice are interconnected in teaching and learning (as can be noticed in the syllabi), but the self-evaluation report does not discuss this issue in any depth; it often remains unclear, e.g., how the research-based education is implemented in the teaching. However, theory and practice are interconnected in practical training, as came up in the interviews with the staff members, students and employers, and through the involvement of students in teachers' research projects, often connected in practices in, e.g., early childhood settings. According to some interviewees, there is too little practice during the 3<sup>rd</sup> study year in the Primary school teacher programme.

Students have a lot of supervised individual, independent work. Feedback from the Early Years education MA students, for instance, indicated that the amount of the independent work is in accordance to the amount of work foreseen in the amount of study credits given, but there are also subjects in which the share of independent work is too high. Also syllabi of the study programmes gives some clues on the issue (variation in the amount of lectures, seminars, study material, assignments although the credit points are the same).

It remains unclear in the self-evaluation report, what is planned to improve the students' knowledge and skills in the area of children with special needs and what is the procedure/approach to tackle other shortcomings observed by the employers (lack of school practices, better knowledge of neuropsychology, formative assessment etc.).

### Strengths

- Research-based teaching is encouraged by the management.
- PhD students also teach, e.g. in the Speech Therapy programme.
- Students are satisfied with the study processes.
- General competencies (proficiency in English) are supported in, e.g., Special Education (BA) programme.
- Students get acquainted with digital tools for communicating with parents and also for purposes of their own learning (E-pass work) as part of their studies.
- Multifaceted teaching and learning methods and forms of assessment are used; versatile forms of teaching and studying with video materials are available.
- Involvement of students (in the form of their master's thesis) in research and development programmes takes place in, e.g., Primary school teacher education. Also, in some programmes, students are involved in the research projects of the staff members and publish with the staff and it is possible to teach in the area one conducts research on.

- Practice is well organized according to students, employers and evaluating committees, and e.g., Special Education BA programme and Special Education and Speech Therapy MA programmes have good connections with the practitioners in their field.
- Amount of practice has been increased in, e.g. Primary school teacher programme; students give mini lessons to each other and videoed lessons are analysed.
- Teachers collaborate with each other, also in the form of e.g., voluntary reflection clubs.
- In some programmes, like Early Years teacher BA programme, web-based courses are actively created.
- There is flexibility in the forms of teaching for the students to catch up if absence (Early Years teacher BA programme).
- Employers have the possibility of co-supervising and co-defending the theses.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- More attention needs to be paid to learning about children's play and its development in the, e.g., Early Years BA curriculum.
- Child-led and child-centred approach needs to be better implemented in the Early Years programmes.
- Social sciences, issues of multidisciplinary childhood studies, children's rights and age-related education (especially that of the very young children) also needs to be better considered in the Early years programmes.
- Regarding the aims and the contents of the new Education in Innovation MA programme (starting in 2017/2018): consider an emphasis on the development, administration and management of early childhood education, and pedagogical leadership (to clearly differentiation between the BA programme (teacher) and the MA programme (specialist, special adviser).
- In the Special Education programme, only observation of typically developing children is allocated to the first study year. To be able to better combine theory and practice contact with SEN children is needed earlier than during the 3<sup>rd</sup> study year.
- In some programmes, like that of the Primary school teacher, there is a need to examine and clarify the amount of students' independent work loads and the supervision/assessment of the independent work.

- Students need to be told about the contents of the Speech Therapy programme and have theoretical Speech Therapy courses with some practice at the BA level to be able to make informed choices about the MA level.
- “Job shadowing” is seen as helpful at the BA level to get students acquainted with the MA level studies in Special Education and Speech Therapy.
- Establish closer co-operation with the Early Years BA programme in Narva College.
- It is beneficial to plan how courses/teaching given by visiting foreign lecturers can be implemented in the programmes.
- An atmosphere needs to be created to encourage student mobility and think in a broad way; many topics can be learned abroad and adapted to Estonian circumstances.
- Flexibility is needed in giving credits for courses taken abroad as an exchange student to encourage student exchanges.
- To increase graduation at Masters level, support students who graduated with BA in the full-time programme to plan time in the MA Open University programme.

## Teaching staff

### Comments

In some programmes, a considerable number of teachers (e.g. in the Primary School Teacher training programme, over 100) is connected to teaching. It is mentioned in the self-evaluation report that the reason for the large amount of teaching staff is due to the fact that base module is taught by several teachers simultaneously and due to the fact that also employers are listed as they are incorporated into study activities and supervision of students’ final papers. With such a large teaching staff, coherence of the study programme and practices may be compromised and, in the case of external teachers from the field, administrative and planning work for the full-time teaching staff to recruit the teachers and organize teaching is probably very demanding.

Work of the teaching staff is evaluated by the student feedback with high scores; students have stressed the diversity of teaching methods, friendliness of the teachers and rapid feedback provided on students’ work. However, the self-evaluation report does not always clearly describe if and how the teaching of the teaching staff is connected with their research, development and/or creative activities.

According to the self-evaluation report, the teaching staff has improved their professional knowledge, teachings skills, and paid attention to their personal development as well as to the development of their digital competences.

Of the staff members of different programmes, there is a clearly a lower share of those with a PhD degree compared to the University of Tartu mean of 74 %.

Because the University of Tartu is the only place in Estonia where speech therapists are trained, the staff is responsible not only for giving research-based teaching training but also for contributing to scientific work to create the research community in this field in Estonia. However, the staff perceives it very hard to meet the requirements of conducting research with no professors or associate professors working as staff members. Starting from 2018, having a PhD is a prerequisite for the lecturer's position. This needs to be taken into account in the plan for staff development.

In the case of many programmes it is not clear to what extent it is possible for the staff members to teach on the areas they conduct research in. In some programmes, not many members of the teaching staff participate in international collaboration related to curriculum development, research and mobility, neither have visiting academic staff from abroad (according to the statistics in the self-evaluation report) given lectures in the programme. In some cases, there is also no explicit information of visiting staff from other Estonian universities.

Staff of this study programme group has various levels of internationalization in different programmes. In some programmes there is active, ongoing research projects with international collaborators and in some other programmes the staff takes actively part in congresses and or teacher exchange. In those programmes which lack posts of associate professors and/or professors and, especially, in which the teacher-student ratio is a challenging one there are not so many possibilities for research and internationalization. As an example of collaboration, there exists evidence of staff and student mobility within Estonian Primary school teacher education.

### Strengths

- Usually sufficient number of and high quality of teachers.
- Staff members use peer feedback in developing their skills.
- Regular staff development takes place in most cases.
- Teaching staff improves professional knowledge and, e.g. information technology competencies through training (mentor for IT is available, e.g., weekly crash courses are arranged for the staff members of some programmes).
- In some programmes, novice staff members are assisted in many programmes; new members of the teaching staff are appointed a mentor at least for one term, and novice teachers are offered possibilities for professional training.



- Good feedback on teaching from students; the teachers are highly appreciated by students.
- Close collaboration between the teachers.
- Research is conducted on teaching methods in some programmes.
- Some existing research projects that as topics seem to be very relevant to the current curriculum.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- In cases of low numbers of staff holding a PhD degree in a particular programme, a staff development plan is to be devised with the clear focus on increasing the number of staff with PhD's
- In order to be able to provide research-based teaching, at least some involvement in research of all the members of the staff is highly recommended (although high teaching load often makes it very difficult).
- Although the teaching staff are highly motivated to improve their skills, a written plan for staff development will be beneficial in the long-term.
- Time needs to be organized for research and the improvement of staff qualifications (doctoral studies) by, e.g., reduction of staff members teaching hours.
- To reserve time for research for the staff, the full-time and open university studies students of Special Education BA programme should, at least sometimes, take part in the same lectures and not always study separately.
- Forming of research groups is needed to stimulate and strengthen research activities.
- All programmes would benefit from having at least an associate professor in the staff to nurture research, for supporting research-based teaching and for the needs of, e.g., supervision of final theses.
- Staff mobility should be promoted (there are structural barriers why it is not popular at the moment) by good planning and explicit support from the management; secure life-long learning for staff members of all ages.
- A plan is needed to strengthen international activities of teachers regarding e.g. research, publications, and teaching and research mobility in the area of Early Childhood education.

- Increase the international contacts in teaching in the form of visiting foreign teachers (with the help of, e.g. bilateral ERASMUS teacher exchange).

## Students

### Comments

The students' (numerically rated) feedback on the organization of studies is usually very positive, and the students are satisfied with the support they have received in their studies. It seems that the feedback of the students have had a clear impact on changing the practices and solving their study problems; e.g., the programmes have been developed according to their needs and they have got tutorial help from the academic staff and the study organization specialists. Nevertheless, it seems to be difficult to get students to participate in the evaluation process.

According to the self-evaluation report, to support the graduation of the students, individual schedules have been drawn up, changes concerning single subjects have been implemented, co-supervision of the final thesis has been organized, and new subjects to aid the writing of the thesis have been added in some of the study programmes. However, there is hardly any explicit information in the self-evaluation report on the issue of dealing with students' special needs apart from the fact that the students with certain family and healthy circumstances do not have to pay for the missing ECTS credits.

As to the MA students, the satisfaction depends on the subject, the problem laying, e.g., in the foreign language material included in the subjects. For many students, reading texts in English is challenging and time consuming. Further, several students have found it difficult to organize their time for half-time MA studies after having been graduated in full-time BA programme.

Of the programmes, e.g. Primary school teacher programme, faces long study times (only about 40% graduate within the nominal time of five years), and in, e.g., the Early Years teacher BA programme, the number of dropouts (or interruption/postponing of the studies) has been high for a long time, owing to the difficulties of (especially the Open University) students to combine work, family and study. Another reason has been the students' employment as kindergarten teachers during their last study year. The biggest drop-out reason in some other programmes is the writing of the final paper, in spite of different measures that have been applied to make the process more effective.

Students have been offered plenty of possibilities for international mobility, e.g. through the Erasmus programme. However, only a few students have used this possibility. According to student feedback during the panel visit, they are not always encouraged to take on a student mobility option but to take courses that are tied to the Estonian language and context. There are many ways to learn; learning is not dependent on specific courses provided by only one university.

Broader views of thinking seem to be needed here. Additionally, all the programmes may not be very attractive to foreign exchange students (contents having emphasis in theory, courses are taught in Estonian). CLIL approach may be helpful for Estonian students to learn foreign languages and, at the same time, attract incoming foreign students.

### Strengths

- Motivated and suitable students are actively sought by marketing, e.g., the Special education (BA) programme.
- The admissions procedures in many of the programmes are clearly stated and the criteria are adequate as regards to the programme.
- Students are satisfied with the programmes, and their views have been listened to and taken into account in the programme development.
- Some programmes, like the Early Years teacher BA programme, are popular with motivated full-time students who have good employment prospects.
- Topics of many master's theses are integrated into test development (assessment materials for examining children with special needs) in, e.g., the Special Education and Speech Therapy programme.
- The Primary school teacher programme has exchange students regularly from abroad.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- One possibility in the recruitment of more MA students is to make greater use social media in the promotion of courses.
- Encourage and support the students to make connections to student organizations abroad.
- Motivate students to engage in international mobility and facilitate it in the programmes.
- Support foreign language (English) skills of students, increase foreign (English) literature in the study materials from the very beginning of their studies.
- Encourage students to give feedback (on supervision, for example).
- Involve students more in practical research conducted in the programmes.
- Support even more the Open university students to manage their time, graduate in time (Early Years teacher BA programme in Open university, Early Years educator MA programme) and not to drop out (Early years educator MA programme). For instance, by a close follow-up and by

arranging "hatchery activities" (extra thesis seminars for students with incomplete MA thesis).

- Attention needs to be paid on to how the MA students can be retained and encouraged to progress into doctoral studies.
- Although the main reasons for 40% of the students not graduating in nominal time are partly outside the possibilities of the university, continuous actions are needed to support writing of the MA theses, improving foreign language skills and finding different ways to combine studying and working.
- Encouragement and support is needed to increase even short-term student mobility.

### 1.3.2. Early Years Teacher in Multilingual Environment (BA), Narva College; Primary School Teacher in Multilingual School (INT BA+MA), Narva College; Humanities in Multilingual School (BA), Narva College

#### **Study programme and study programme development**

##### Comments

The aims of the Early Years Teacher in Multilingual Environment study programme (hereafter 'early years programme/curriculum'), the Primary School Teacher in Multilingual Environment study programme (hereafter 'primary school teacher programme/curriculum') as well as Humanities in Multilingual School (hereafter 'humanities programme/curriculum') are clearly stated and they are current and consistent with developments in society as confirmed by the Professional Qualifications Committee. Also the general learning outcomes presented in the study programmes are consistent with the societal needs.

The programmes seem to be developed in communication within the College, and also in communication with the colleagues from Tartu. Co-operation between programme heads and the teaching staff seems to be developing. Curricula are regularly developed on the basis of the feedback from students, staff, alumni, employers and the Programme Council. The students' participation in feedback has been scarce, though. The students told us in the interviews that they have not had a representative in the Programme Council for two years (due to their own passivity, as they admitted).

Theory and practice have been linked together by connecting the subjects of the base module to the practical training (pedagogical practice) in preschools and at

schools, and connecting theoretical aspects of individual subjects to home assignments, as well as to joint reflections of the students.

The structure and contents of the curricula seem to be coherent, and the contents (subjects) correspond to the outcomes. However, two thirds of the subjects in the early years teacher curriculum are subjects of the primary school teacher curriculum. Thus, the number of specific age-related subjects regarding teaching, learning and development of the younger children remains low.

Student feedback is used mainly for the evaluation of the individual courses/work of teachers. At the same time, students sometime expressed their opinion/wishes for more coordinated and more stable schedule, for instance.

The analysis of the feedback gathered has resulted in several changes both in structure and subjects of the curricula and decisions for new elaborations have been made concerning the next curriculum revisions. The general satisfaction with the different aspects of the study programmes is increasing due to student feedback over time. More systematic external evaluation (peer) of study programmes has not been carried out.

According to the feedback from the employers in preschools, as written in the self-evaluation report, the graduates use pedagogical methods based on creativity, take the age of a child into account in their pedagogical activity and are able to cooperate with colleagues, but they have a lack of knowledge and skills concerning children with Special Needs and Counselling within families.

In the interview with the employers, the employers expressed several concerns regarding the study programmes. They were concerned with the low student numbers (if there are not enough students, there will not be enough teachers, as they put it). The employers were also worried about students' insufficient Estonian language skills when employing teachers; even Russian language teachers might not have good enough language skills in Estonian.

In reaction to the general problem of a relatively low level of knowledge of Estonian language among many students, the College introduced recently some measures to improve this (for instance Support Center to help students with their written work, intensive courses, book-club, group studies, study trips into Estonian environments have been arranged and more). Students complain, however, that there is hardly any real opportunity to speak Estonian in the College and in Narva (the proportion of the Estonian speaking population is very low).

Employers are partly involved in programme development, too; their more direct say would be desirable in this case; they often seem to be on a receiving end when students practice in schools (internships) are organized but more involvement in the programme development was not evident. Employers expressed their the views about the programmes by pointing at some positive aspects but also indicating that more attention on special education needs and inclusive education would be welcome (College introduced some courses with this focus recently, for instance the Remedial Teacher course).

The statistics show that the Early Years teacher programme (both full-time and Open University) is the most popular teacher training programme of the Narva

College, and the study places have been filled for several years (three to five candidates per place). The situation has been worse in the primary school teacher programme, but has improved: in 2015/16 all the ten study places (and three additional places) were filled (competition being 2-5 candidates per place). However, alike with other teacher training programmes in the country, a major problem is the small number of nominal time graduates and a high number of dropouts, one of the main reasons being the difficulties of the students to complete the final thesis and to acquire the necessary level of Estonian, in spite of the different supports received for it, such as systematic psychological counselling and career counselling.

The programmes are unique in Estonia, since they are multilingual, they support multiculturalism and allow students to work in a multicultural study environment. However, according to the self-evaluation report and the interviews conducted, there is a wish for more cooperation with the programmes in the University of Tartu. According to the interview, multilingualism is a dilemma for the students: although they see its necessity and benefits, it is difficult for them to communicate in two, or even in three languages at the same time. Also many important subjects in the curricula are considered to be difficult to follow in Estonian.

### Strengths

- The programmes are filling a clear labour market need in multilingual Estonia and are practice-oriented.
- The programmes are unique in Estonia for being multilingual and supporting multiculturalism in many ways.
- The new Study Support Teacher specialty in the primary school programme is to enhance the students' skills to work with children with Special Needs.
- Students are increasingly satisfied with the programmes.
- Learning aims and outcomes are clearly presented on the level of curricula.
- Feedback from the students, staff, employers and alumni collected regularly and used to develop the curricula.
- Students who fall behind are constantly monitored.
- The Early Years teacher programme is popular, all study places are filled and the employment rate is high.

### Areas for improvement and recommendations

- To focus more clearly on early childhood education in the Early Years teacher programme by decreasing the number of joint subjects and courses with the primary school teacher programme and increasing the number of subjects and courses on early childhood education.
- To pay more attention to the education of the very young children in the Early Years teacher programme.
- To have Special Needs considered a compulsory element of study within the Early Years teacher programme.
- To seek more effective ways to help students in the acquisition of Estonian and writing the final thesis.
- To encourage teaching through English. Teaching through English would widen the attraction of Estonia as a destination to study, and contribute students with English language skills to participate in international mobility.
- To cooperate with Special Education and Speech Therapy programmes of the University of Tartu to improve student's knowledge and skills related to children with Special Needs.
- To encourage more students to give feedback regarding the curricula.
- To establish closer co-operation with similar programmes at the University of Tartu, e.g. of contents of the curriculum, joint distant learning courses.

## Resources

### Comments

The new college building was opened in 2012. The College has good infrastructure with excellent study premises and solid availability of study materials and equipment. The College is part of the Information technology consortium of the University of Tartu, which guarantees the software and its updating for all the units of the University of Tartu. According to feedback from the students, the study environment is conducive to learning. At the same time, the College serves as a community center of a certain kind and this dual role seems to be working well as it takes into account the broader mission of the College.

The recruitment of sufficient numbers for the study places at the College level guarantees the sustainability of the budget which then enables the College to plan and use its resources according to the changing needs. To prevent a possible decrease in student numbers (connected to the geographic and demographic situation in the country) in the Early Years teacher programme an Erasmus semester has been established and that programme will begin in 2017.

Narva College has its own budget which is mainly composed of three areas. If we understand correctly, these resources are split in the following way: teaching (pre-service – about 1 M EUR/year), in-service training (200 K EUR/year), research/development (less than 200 K EUR/year). The budget clearly demonstrates that support for research and development activities is not a priority, instruments to support research at the College are simply not sufficient. And internal resources to support research are also not explicitly and visibly used to encourage research activities.

Similarly to Tartu, there seems to be no resources available to support student mobility.

### Strengths

- Good premises (fairly new buildings) and good learning and teaching environment as a whole.
- Very good access to learning resources.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- To support student mobility, perhaps by using money paid by students who exceed the nominal length of their studies.
- To seek ways of recruiting more students from abroad thus helping to contribute to the overall budget.
- To seek to develop a better research culture and to ensure that all teaching and learning is research informed.

### Comments

Narva College's top representative is a member of the board of Pedagogicum. This can be a means of maintaining continuity as for the overall coordination of teacher education programmes.

The staff interview confirmed that an important part of the Narva studies is integrated subject- and language learning and using methods of active learning to support students' learning and self-reflection, but also methods of group and team work that develop students' communication competences and social development. Teaching is integrated into events for children at the College organized and analysed by the students as well as to the practical training and regular visits to different educational establishments around the country.

According to the self-evaluation report, in their feedback the students are generally content with the organization of studies. As a shortcoming, there is an overlap in the content of some subjects as reflected in the timetable that has been published.



In the interview with the students (hereafter: 'student interview'), the students told of the last minutes' changes in the timetable. As described in the self-evaluation report, the college tries to be as flexible as possible regarding the organization of studies, but with the limitations on time of guest lecturers makes this flexibility difficult. E-courses and e-support are offered to make the studies more flexible, and the Open university students make use of this possibility, which the students interviewed confirmed.

Practical training takes place simultaneously with the subjects of the base module, continuous internship and trainee practice in teaching. Students whose mother tongue is Russian have a possibility to conduct one part of their practice in an Estonian environment in Ida-Viru County or outside of it. The practice system is new in some programmes, and according to the self-evaluation report much attention is paid to the development of the system and making it more efficient.

Based on the interviews, both the students and the employers are rather content with the organization and contents of the practical training. The practice training is updated and developed by joint meetings of the mentors, practice supervisors and employers from the preschools and schools, and according to the feedback of the students. However, going forward, developing practice is seen as a challenge for the future.

As mentioned earlier, the general problem at Narva College is getting Russian speaking students to learn sufficiently the Estonian language. There are some measures taken to reduce this problem, such as the developing bilingual courses (partly in Estonian, partly in Russian) – this is demanding but possibly a productive way, although the feedback from students often pointed out that since majority of students are Russian native speakers, the discussion often turns into their mother tongue.

According to the self-evaluation report, students get adequate information and support during the studies, such as an induction course at the beginning of their studies, individual tutorials from the Programme Director (face-to-face-communication and electronically), College information screens, Office of Academic Affairs, RLP committee, tutors (senior students) and student group leaders - group leaders are chosen in the first year of studies and they maintain the flow of information.

Another challenge seems to be connected with the specific characteristics of Russian schools in Estonia. While they seem to be relatively good in academic achievements, development of soft skills is a weaker aspect of their performance. This is explained by the Narva College management who say it is due to cultural differences (preferences Russian schools traditionally make/have). Narva College strives to foster the enlightened approaches of its graduates to support the change in Russian schools, and emphasize the importance of developing soft skills in education.

The self-evaluation report also states that support is offered by the Programme Director to the students regarding the BA and MA theses, e.g. of the available topics and the choice of the supervisor, which the interviewed students confirmed. The staff introduces research areas and topics within their expertise,

and the students have the right to choose the supervisor from outside the Narva College. However, many students prefer the MA examination instead of completing the MA thesis.

The extent, role and nature of the supervision of independent work by students is not explicitly described in the self-evaluation report, but in the interview the students told the panel that independent work is suitable to many of them and that they do not need any specific supervision. The students did not raise any further issues.

According to the self-evaluation report the staff is active in involving students in their research, creative, and development activities. Students take part in research projects as interviewers, they are involved in the elaboration process of methodological materials and student research is used as examples during study activities. The student interview did not support this information, though. On the contrary, students do not seem to be effectively involved in research, teaching is not interlinked with research.

Mobility is not really considered part of the study programme/experience. Quite a few people at the College acknowledged this – similarly to some from Tartu – their belief that mobility for teacher education students is not possible, but also perhaps not required. This opinion according to the panel is hard to accept.

Mobility is also somewhat restricted by the rather strict rules in relation to the recognition of credits gained abroad, and financial penalties related to situations when not a full number of credits (30) is gained by the student during his/her study stay abroad. On the other hand, students use short study stays in Pskov (Russia) which is seen as a positive practice.

### Strengths

- The students are generally content with the organization of studies.
- The work of the RPL Committee is transparent and student-friendly.
- High number of guest lectures provide a wide range of information and views.
- E-support and e-courses are available.
- Staff members supervise theses within their own research areas.
- Well-thought through system of integrating theory, pedagogical skills and practice.
- There is involvement of and collaboration with the students in different activities (seminars etc).

### Areas for improvement and recommendations

- To increase possibilities of face-to-face communication between teachers and students regarding course organization and methods of learning.
- To further elaborate the new practice placement system.
- The teachers to be exposed more to the benefits of e-study.
- To encourage also full-time students to utilize e-courses and e-support.
- To extend the Moodle-support for all courses.
- To strengthen partnership between the college and schools.
- To involve students more visibly in teaching, research and development.
- To encourage students to make use of international mobility opportunities.

## Teaching staff

### Comments

According to the self-evaluation report the number of teaching staff is sufficient and they are qualified to teach within the study programme. There have been both constant and short-term guest lectures, mainly teaching English courses. Also employers are involved in teaching by supervising students' final papers. However, the teachers in the staff interview talked about the overload of work in all teacher education programmes, and wished for a change to have more time for research and study in their specific area.

Internal training is offered to the teaching staff with the aim to improve their teaching skills. Staff also uses collegial feedback as discussed in the staff interview: they sometimes visit each other's lectures and seminars. They discuss their experiences and make conclusions monthly. A conference is organized yearly around the pedagogy of good teaching. However, participating in collegial feedback is voluntary. Staff development activities are partly connected with the developments in Tartu, the same can be said about research-related activities at the College

There are no Professors at the College (no PhD programme), the College provides only one programme on at masters level. This is reflected in the profile of the staff – they are mostly focused on teaching and also on community-related activities, research is considered as secondary.

Yet some teachers are very active in producing study material and in publishing RDC articles, which are also used in their own teaching, as described in the staff interview. The self-evaluation report as well as the teachers in the staff interview

highlight the role of the staff members in participating in projects that mainly serve the community and thus contribute to the service of society. Some teaching staff members also seem to be active in international research activities, research mobility and international networks, as listed in the overview of the international co-operation and stated in the staff interview.

According to student feedback in SIS in relation to the effectiveness and teaching skills in different subjects - the teaching has been year on year rated highly. The feedback is analysed at the end of each term by the Programme Director, and discussed with the teachers. If the scores in the subjects taught by a teacher have been low of an extended period and no improvement in the teaching has taken place, the situation results in sanctions such as not renewing the short-time contracts. This issue was also referred during the student interview.

### Strengths

- Staff sufficient in number and of high quality in teaching.
- Internal training and professional development of the teachers.
- Employers participating in teaching.
- Notably active production of study and teacher guiding materials and publications on curriculum development.
- Teachers highly appreciated by students.
- Active conference participation abroad and international collaboration (working, training or research).

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- To seek ways to reduce teacher workload – to articulate a more balanced approach with clearer expectations.
- To encourage teachers to participate in collegial feedback.

## **Students**

### Comments

Admissions criteria are the standard average and involve a professional aptitude exam (interview), the latter aiming to find out the candidates who are motivated to study, have communication skills and ability to express themselves in the

language of the exam. However, the dropout rate is high, and the number of students graduating in nominal time is low.

As indicated in the self-evaluation report and stated in the staff interview a major reason for dropping out or not being able to graduate with nominal time is their inability to fulfil the requirement of being able to speak the Estonian language, in spite of active support of the College. The student interview revealed three main reasons why students drop-out and do not graduate in the nominal time: work, family, and regarding the delay of their studies due to parental leave. The specific reason for dropping out during the first year is the unsuitability of the specialty, indicated by the self-evaluation report and confirmed by the staff interview.

The vast majority of students are Russian native speakers, and there is a very limited number of Estonian native speakers at the College. Russian students claim they have limited possibilities to practice Estonian. This makes it difficult to master the Estonian language for many students (one of the preconditions for graduates).

In the latest feedback from the final year students, the students expressed their satisfaction with the amount of general skills they had acquired during their studies and with the study programme in general, as well as with support systems and counselling services of the College. A variety of study materials and forms of study, individual study options and schedule as well as counselling have been offered to the students to support their learning in accordance with their special needs, as stated in the staff interview.

According to the representatives in the employers' interview, the students are skilled in modern technology (although not all preschools and schools are provided with it), theoretical knowledge and in using up-to-date teaching methods with the children. Students are self-reflective in their activities, motivated and active in their work. More knowledge is needed in gender issues and inclusive pedagogy in preschools and at schools, and finding a good balance between modern and classical teaching methods at schools.

The internal mobility occurs through study trips, and taking part in national conferences, funded by the College. International mobility is scarce. The management of the College pointed out that there are several reasons for that, e.g. the Erasmus exchange is too expensive as the university cannot participate due to the costs. In the interview, the students expressed their interest in exchange programmes, but family or work reasons inhibit longer periods abroad. The students that had participated in short-time visits outside, were very content with their experiences and felt that they had learned a lot which they can use in their studies and future work with children. The participation of foreign students in the study programme has been rare, but the situation will change in spring 2017 when a group of students from e.g. Ukraine and Georgia will begin an Erasmus semester in the College.

### Strengths

- The entrance procedures are clearly stated and the criteria adequate as regards to the programme.

- The programme is attractive and study places have been filled each year.
- The employment rate for graduates is high.
- Systematic monitoring of students who have fallen behind - counselling is provided on how to cope with their studies and career planning is also offered.
- Much is done to improve the students' skills in Estonian language .
- To motivate student exchanges, Erasmus-semester will be offered from 2017 to foreign students with Russian as their native language.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Decrease dropouts and increase the number of students graduating in nominal time – this calls for urgent and firm actions to be taken if the situation is to improve.
- Better identification of those potential students in the entrance examination who most probably would not drop-out but would graduate in nominal time.
- To improve the possibilities for students to engage in international mobility opportunities e.g. by scholarships to motivate students and enable them to study abroad.
- Organizing meetings with students to inform of the different possibilities for mobility.
- Students numbers in certain programmes are rather small which calls for the possible amalgamation of some of the programmes.

1.3.3. Teaching Humanities and Social Subjects in Basic School (BA); Educational Science (Sciences) (BA); Educational Science (Math and Sciences) (BA); Teacher of Several Subjects in Basic School (MA); Teacher of History and Civics (MA); Teacher of Estonian Language and Literature (MA); Teacher of Estonian Language and Literature in Non-Estonian School (MA); Secondary School Science Teacher (MA); Teacher of Mathematics and Informatics (MA); Teacher of Arts, Handicraft and Home Economics (MA)

## **Study programme and study programme development**

### Comments

These are successful and coherent programmes with good feedback from students and employers and good systems for review and development. The new shared base programme on pedagogy seems to be effective and appreciated. The Network of Innovative Schools is successful and works closely with the University on the development of programmes.

The curriculum at both BA and MA level has recently been revised in response to reviews that included feedback from a range of parties.

There seems to be problem with recruiting enough good quality students in some areas. Some programmes have small numbers.

Many students seem to work full-time at the same time as they study full-time. This must be difficult for both students, and staff.

### Strengths

- One strength is the coherence of the programmes that results from recent extensive reforms based on feedback from a range of stakeholders including employers and students.
- The Pedagogicum unites representatives from all the faculties that have teaching programmes and provides a forum for coordination and joint improvement of pedagogical approaches.
- Strong and effective leadership is provided by the head of the Pedagogicum and the head of the Institute. The Vice-Rector is very aware of pedagogical issues and is committed to supporting the continual evolution of the teacher training and educational science programme.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- We recommend that there are more robust formal systems of quality assurance of courses with an annual review of the feedback with suggestions for improvement including input from an external assessor – an experienced academic in the area at another institution – who comments on the coherence of the course and the quality of the marking.
- The study programme leaders could show greater academic leadership over the content and the pedagogical development of their programmes. We would

have liked to see greater sense of responsibility and vision from these individuals.

- There are uneven workloads for students in different subjects – this should be looked at carefully in order to relate this more closely to the credits. For example in history there is a very large amount of reading and assignment required for a 6 credit module and lot of lessons with numerous broad topics are covered.
- Credits for working abroad on Erasmus scholarships are not being recognized. – although this is perhaps an issue for a higher level, we point out the need for reconsideration.
- Again in relation to the issue of mobility and Erasmus scholarships there is too much inflexibility within programmes and its 'windows' in a way that makes it difficult for students to travel to other universities so University of Tartu should try to be creative to support possible opportunities.
- There may be too much observation in some programmes and not enough authentic teaching experiences in schools in the first year. Students need to experience teaching in several schools. Internship or teaching practice needs to be re-thought carefully – especially the proportion of observation in relation to actual teaching practice.
- Some consolidation of programmes is needed as there seems to be too many programmes with very few students which is not an efficient use of time and resources.
- Some students are interviewed but not all at the masters levels. All students should be interviewed to determine their suitability for teacher education. This might then help reduce the high number of drop-outs in the first semester.

## Resources

### Comments

Staff of University of Tartu are resourceful and have a 'can do' attitude to their work; engaging their students in very many aspects such as research and lab assistants.

They have adequate resources in which to support and teach the range of courses on offer.

### Strengths

- In general, the teaching facilities are good with exception of some buildings and auditoriums which are in need of refurbishment.



- Financial problems are rarely mentioned, perhaps because of various externally funded projects (EU structural funding...).
- Cooperation between departments and Open university improves the availability of courses to student teachers (both full-time and especially part-time students). This promotes also the development of more flexible or new teaching-learning methods. The role of Tartu Youth Academy (see p. 86 of the Self-assessment report) may be also be important although it is not mentioned in the subject-based study programmes.
- Network of Innovation Schools. Excellent commitment to these. There is a desire to be in the network. Trust between schools and university is impressive.
- Science education lab and the Tartu University Nature Museum.
- PhD students involved in research projects and work – part of staff projects. Strong teamwork in evidence.
- They are beginning to generate e-courses (ie Moocs) – this development could allow greater access to learning from beyond Estonia and might help enable students to go-abroad for study periods.
- There is not reliance on technical staff to run and maintain labs in Science Education as all students are included into these aspects when they study at Tartu.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The role of separate IT-resources (didactic centre, learning laboratory, Center for educational innovation) needs to be thought through carefully: how they help various students and teachers at the moment, or would some decentralised system be worth considering? At least in the self-assessment report, references to these resources remain vague.
- There is a pressing need to invest in technology for the recording of teaching in all teaching spaces not just the main lecture theatres.

## **Teaching and learning**

#### Comments

It is visible that efforts have been made to change teaching into being more practical and student friendly, using relevant modern methods and technology, to be more personalised and flexible as well as collaborative. Resourcefulness is impressive – in a relatively short period with quite a little a lot has been done. It

is good practice that the university is acknowledging good teaching and also looking for a defined good teaching practice model to further develop and maintain the quality of teaching throughout the faculties. Learning outcomes have been clearly set, and modern versatile assessment methods seem to be used, although a clearer overall picture for purposeful students' learning still requires some further mutual communication. Finding and keeping a balance between diversity and uniformity is an ongoing challenge.

### Strengths

- Network of practise schools is used. Annual conference between innovation schools and university staff as a way to share good practice.
- Elective and optional courses are available in many study programmes to support students' needs and interests.
- Basic approach and practices support connections between theory and practice and students appreciate practical training in particular. Early beginning of practical teaching experience supports well the theoretical knowledge gained.
- ICT and e-learning. 'Open University' courses support distance learners.
- Good that students bring their own devices and can use social media.
- Subject teaching in faculties gives strong preparation for students specifically in their study field and allows to personalise the learning material.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The physical study environment does not always display student ownership – some classes have no pedagogical displays or evidence of students' work – no colour, nor study aids. There seems to be a need to invest in the refurbishment of Salme street.
- Mobility of students can be further supported whether financially or by creating windows in study time which will allow this, taken that this time abroad will be taken into account – possible collaboration with universities to unify course requirements and learning outcomes.
- There is a need to integrate more the main teaching and the in-service teaching. In addition, there is a need to support collaborative learning in all curriculum areas in order to make sure that team-learning skills are taught and learnt.
- Special Needs teaching remains unclear: It needs to be taken into consideration in all the study programmes. Network schools need more support for this as well – this could a good bilateral school-university collaboration programme. Also, there is a need not so much for a separate

Special Needs course, as there is for Special Needs teaching to be embedded within subject teaching in each area e.g. mathematics, history etc.

- Students need more support for their thesis writing, ongoing from day one. Possible options are to include some small parts already in learning outcomes in courses throughout studies or encouraging students to create peer to peer support groups for thesis writing.
- It is recommended to further encourage staff collaboration and critical observation from heads of study programmes (not only courses but also suggestions for reading materials) to avoid possible work overload in some courses. Further interdisciplinary collaboration to support trust and deep immersive learning through longer, even year-long tasks is encouraged.
- Receiving feedback from students is clearly an important source of information about the programmes, yet this also means retaining anonymity of students in giving feedback when in small groups.
- While it is positive that students are encouraged to do further reading for assignments in a foreign language, most of these seem to be in English which might disadvantage those students whose first foreign language is something other.

## Teaching staff

### Comments

The self-assessment report and discussions with staff members indicate that general knowledge of current strategic expectations regarding quality of teaching and teachers professional development is good. The staff has established collaborative relationships in their areas of expertise and has aimed at finding reasonable ways to cope with various administrative and curricular changes. Gradual annual steps to improve pedagogical activities are taken individually in many subjects.

### Strengths

- Teachers' content knowledge in their own subject areas is strong.
- Regarding subject teacher education, staff are committed to their work as teacher educators both in educational sciences and in faculties of other sciences.
- Staff members have improved their understanding of current trends in comprehensive schools to develop the prospective teachers' skills in meeting the needs of heterogeneous pupils and schools' developmental work.

- University's new initiative to design portfolio-based recognition of teachers' pedagogical expertise and its continuous development is relevant and can be expected to be motivating for the staff.
- Examples of PhD students involvement in research and development work are increasing and this brings benefit both to senior researchers, and PhD students themselves.
- The number of the staff members holding a PhD degree is increasing gradually which promotes the quality of research and teaching especially when the topics of dissertations are pedagogically oriented, and not just only based on "pure sciences".
- As far as international cooperation and teacher mobility is concerned, some subject teachers (e.g. history and civics) have various good contacts.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- At least part of teachers' struggle with integrating teaching and research work is trying to invest more time for their research activities. In these efforts they need support from the heads of their home institutions and study programmes. The improvement in strategic leadership would strengthen the continuum of research work between the sabbatical periods (every fifth year).
- The in-service education of the staff is realised in teachers' numerous activities in participating in developmental projects, in conferences and in short-term in-service courses. Whilst this is good, it could be better systematised and supported by means of personal developmental plans (e.g. three years' period).
- It would be beneficial for staff members and the organisation as well to give attention to uneven workloads between various subjects and study programmes. It is not possible to indicate concrete examples of different subjects but this was mentioned both in the self-assessment report and during site visit interviews.
- Study programmes could improve their weekly or monthly practises of sharing teachers' knowledge on lectures and practicums to enable learning from each other and recognising 'good practice' and to avoid overlaps and deficiencies in curriculum content.
- Various subjects and their study programmes may benefit from a more systematic anticipation of future's needs in terms of recruitment of new personnel, professors included.

## **Students**

### Comments

Students of the Tartu university (as in Tallinn as well) often both work (either as unqualified teachers or in other jobs) and study at the same time. It may jeopardise their opportunities to finish the studies in the nominal time and increase the dropout rates.

### Strengths

- Good relationships and reciprocal interaction between the staff and the students are possible because the student groups are very small. Students' individual needs can be well taken into consideration when they try to successfully combine various sectors of their life (studies, family and full-time work).
- Students of different ages and levels of motivation gain from interaction within a group. This diversity can be a valuable resource in encouraging each other to finish their studies, complete assignments, write thesis etc.
- Students are greatly involved (and in some cases employed) during their doctoral, as well as in their master's studies.
- Students seem to be quite satisfied with the quality of teaching based on the statistics of feedback surveys and based on interviews during the site visit.
- Thesis work seems to be one of the key factors in finishing successfully their studies. Various supporting ideas of writing processes are in use and also the option to take the exam instead of more comprehensive thesis (15 ECTS, 30 ECTS) is available.
- The new combined study programme "Teaching Natural and Exact Sciences at Lower Secondary School" may solve some of the previous problems concerning the number of students and their motivation.
- Students that have had an experience in studying abroad stand out among their peers as more enthusiastic, communicative as well as motivated and are able to view things in perspective.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- According to the statistics, dropout rates are quite high (16.4 %) during the first year of Masters studies. It may be worth considering how the entrance tests could be developed to assess better the candidates' suitability to the teaching profession.
- It might be useful to open short periods of internships (observation, teaching assistance) at partnership schools during the BA-studies to "test" whether a teacher's work could truly be interesting and manageable.

- The efforts to market the programmes by means of student fairs, flyers and social media and with the help of alumni must be continued and greater coordination is required to make the advertisements more effective.
- Improvements to career guidance and counselling, if possible, may be helpful.
- In some cases student dropouts are only temporary until students find proper solutions for their study career. From the university's side it might be useful to check that there are not unnecessary obstacles for "safe exits".
- Students' own positive experiences in foreign universities could be better used to encourage more students to participate in exchange programmes and study abroad.
- While most students already work as teachers, not everybody does, which according to the interviews with the students, left an impression that in some assignments the students without a current teaching experience are more discouraged in doing these time-consuming tasks – possible room here for further encouragement for collaboration, group work or shadowing among students.

### 1.3.4. Teacher of Vocational Training (BA)

#### **Study programme and study programme development**

##### Comments

Based on the self-evaluation report (SER) and interviews good pedagogical development work has been done in the Teacher of Vocational Training Programme when trying to get more qualified vocational teachers into the vocational-technical schools. We also evidenced a respectful and cooperative relationship between teachers and students and acknowledge that there is also a very good relationship with external partners.

Still the drop-out rates in the programme are quite high. A high level of dropouts, postponement or interruption of studies is an area of concern on which teaching staff is very aware of. It seems that the reasons for high drop-out rates are not only pedagogical. They are strongly connected with demographic changes in society, public attitudes to vocational education and the structures of education.

In vocational teacher education the student body is very heterogeneous with different ages and professional background and experiences. The teaching staff as well as the students valued this diversity of experiences in the classroom very

much. Still it also appears to be a big challenge for teaching that caters for the needs and personal circumstances of everyone.

### Strengths

- Curriculum analyses has been made from the aspects of coherence and overlapping courses.
- Many changes in the curriculum have been made to minimize overlapping based on the student feedback.
- Students and alumni were asked about the coherence of the programme; changes made have been sensible and reactive to feedback.
- Curriculum has been developed together with different companies and other stakeholders.
- Changes in the topics have been done to make them more appropriate, a good example was the course 'Principles of Entrepreneurship'.
- The volume of the practice and practical sessions has been increased and now there is quite a good balance of practice (20 ECTS) in the programme.
- In 2014/2015 the bachelor's thesis had been divided into two parts to help students to get the thesis completed.
- The co-operation with the Tartu Vocational Education Centre is smooth and complementary.
- The programme has research projects that support developing vocational education.
- The Educational Council has a wide constituency including three members from outside the university.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

The needs of the students are very diverse within the study programme. Some students do not have any teaching experience, and some have been teaching for many years. Students without teaching experience indicated a challenging overload with the theoretical part of the basic pedagogical module as they were unable to connect this to any previous practice.

- We recommend paying more attention to students' heterogeneity and try to find new practices for individual learning paths both in theoretical studies as well in the practical parts of the programme.

Students were very satisfied with many pedagogical solutions and applications in the programme. However, they indicated that the year when they are mainly observing teaching in schools during the practicum time should be reconsidered. It could be a more active and meaningful period allowing the students more opportunities to have authentic teaching experiences.

- We recommend that the time of the first year practicum should be redesigned.

During the interviews, students indicated that they are not offered the opportunity to gain practical experience at different schools. Also employers hoped working teachers could have at least one week practical experience in another vocational school.

- We recommend the provision of different school practice opportunities for the students.
- We also recommend that more vocational schools could be included in the Network of Innovative Schools.

Based on the self-evaluation reports and interviews vocational student teachers have very little opportunities to take part in the university's international student exchange programmes because of the intense workload when studying and working at the same time.

- We recommend the use of different options for internationalization within the study programme. In spite of language difficulties it could be useful to include more international staff in the courses, provide short term mobility opportunities (e.g. internships and projects) as part of the curriculum and develop virtual mobility opportunities through joint courses with international partner universities already in place. Vocational institutes in which many students are working have good international mobility programmes. These options could be integrated with their studies. Also recent opportunities to enable an internship in a foreign countries could also provide a useful option to some students.

Based on the information in the self-evaluation reports in Estonian vocational schools there are 490 teachers who are 60 years or older. There will be big retirement boom very rapidly among the vocational teachers. The annual intake of the Teacher of Vocational Training programme in Tartu has been about 20 students per year. The number of graduates have been quite low in 2011-2015 (from 5 in 2011 to 12 in 2015).

- We recommend increasing the student numbers in to Vocational Teacher Education programmes as this could help meet the needs of qualified vocational teachers in the next coming years.
- We recommend greater cooperation with Tallinn University to design and implement new types of joint Vocational Teacher Education programmes that put all possible expertise together to find innovative solutions on a national level for Vocational Teacher Education.



- We recommend that you give consideration to looking into the option if the major or all parts of Teacher of Vocational Training Programme could be organized as online studies. Good examples already exist but the development work requires extra resources and a very close co-operation between University of Tartu and Tallinn University.
- We recommend that based on the shortage of qualified teachers in vocational education, the University of Tartu would take an active role with other Estonian universities and work with the Ministry of Education and stakeholders in vocational education to create a strategic plan with different scenarios on how to solve a difficult situation in vocational teacher education. The existing part-time studies route do not appear to be sufficient in meeting the urgent needs in VET.
- We recommend that based on the shortage of qualified teachers in vocational education the Ministry of Education and universities could consider, if the Higher Education Act could be more flexible for part-time studies and academic leave.

## Resources

### Comments

The university has allocated resources for modern technology and infrastructure. Contemporary IT solutions provide support for the everyday work arrangements, and there is a sufficient number of computers and computer classrooms, availability of video equipment, open lectures and e-learning environment. In addition, the Library of the University of Tartu and the Institute's library serves both the academic staff, students and employees. It is possible therefore to consider extending the use of the internet and well-functioning e-library to teachers and students. Despite some wishes for additional resources the overall view was very positive. Both teachers and students were very satisfied with learning resources and learning environments.

### Strengths

- The availability of learning material is good as well as the access to it.
- Online learning materials are widely used.
- The possibility to use labs and facilities of Tartu Vocational Education Centre and University of Life Sciences is much appreciated.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

Although much has been done to progress the online learning environment, there is still more to be done such as providing options for tutoring and mentoring using new technology (e.g. videos, social media, networking nationally and internationally) that could help students to integrate better their studies and work.

In the self-evaluation reports there is a desire for the modernizing of the auditoria with better possibilities with respect to the web-based teaching and learning materials. Based on the teachers' interview, more funding for new books including multiply copies of some key texts (including ebooks) is needed in order to reform the programme.

- We recommend that all resources be reviewed from the perspective of the 'future needs' of new learning environments and materials in vocational education.
- We recommend that the teaching staff and students discuss and develop a list of the most topical resources needed in the programme.
- Given the special difficulties experienced in Vocational Teacher Education in terms of connecting work and studies, we recommend all resources could be reviewed also from that perspective as technology may help provide a solution.

## Teaching and learning

### Comments

Both the self-evaluation reports and the interviews gave convincing indicators that reflection on teaching methods is part of the teaching culture. Many examples of good practice, as well as a good level of criticality of own practice could be seen. The collaboration with Tartu VEC is a strength. Students knew the process of 'Recognition of Prior Learning' and gave examples of it being used.

### Strengths

- Based on the interviews there is a very positive, supportive atmosphere between lecturers, students and school network partners.
- Lecturers are very willing to continuously develop the programme and very aware of new teaching trends and theories.
- A good variety of different teaching methods is in use: collaborative methods, web-based learning and peer support. A lot of emphasis is put on reflection.
- The programme has many good international partners.

- Teachers from the different structural units and from the Tartu Vocational Education Centre are used as lecturers on the programme. Students appreciated this and find learning about the practical aspects of the work very important, too.
- There is good use of online technology in the programme.
- Based on the teachers' interview the workload of the studies is estimated through feedback from students in a variety of ways.
- Vocational school partners appreciated the collaboration with the university and provided evidence that their voices were heard in the study programme development.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- During the interviews working students asked for even more e-learning opportunities. Valuing the strong digital environment already existing at the University of Tartu we recommend an increase in the number of online courses available in the study programme.
- Based on the self-evaluation report and interviews, the writing of the thesis is one of the most challenging part of the programme. A lot of work has been done to make the process easier. BA thesis has been divided into two parts so that the seminar paper has to be finished by the second year. We recommend the lecturers to consider if it could be possible to facilitate thesis writing from the first year.
- One of university's main focus is to increase the internationalization including the involvement of international lecturers. The programme has many good international partners, but the challenge is how to co-operate with them in terms of a visiting scholar programme . We recommend to develop this kind of co-operation in the programme despite the language challenges discussed during the interviews.

## **Teaching staff**

### Comments

Based on the self-evaluation reports and interviews we have a lot of evidence that teaching staff have been very active in developing their teaching skills and they are very aware of the criteria for achieving the highest quality of learning outcomes in higher education. Teachers have identified in the self-evaluation reports some areas which also reviewers see as important. Cooperation with other higher education institutions and especially foreign higher education institutions could be greater. So far no members of foreign higher education

institutions have taught on the programme.  
Also research related to vocational education and pedagogy could be embedded more widely in the work of teachers who teach on the programme.

### Strengths

- The teaching staff has a very strong commitment to the programme and its development.
- They have good contacts with practitioners and employers in their fields.
- The curriculum has been developed together with different companies and employers.
- Based on the interviews the feedback from the students has been collected in different ways and it has been very good.
- The quality of academic staff teaching is assessed on a regular basis especially when renewing teaching contracts.
- Teaching staff can participate in the continuing education courses provided across the university.
- Teaching staffs' knowledge in English is very good. They have good international partners and possibilities to take part in international seminars and conferences.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

The programme has very many good international partners, but no international teaching staff.

- We recommend the development of teacher exchange possibilities with international partners.  
It would be also important to invite international experts as short term scholars for expanding international cooperation.

In the Centre of Excellence UT has ten research groups with all key persons involved. Anyhow based on the interviews lecturers have a lot of pressure to get funding for the research. At the same time they have a high pressure teaching workloads in the programme and also in the in-service training. There is a danger that research in vocational education will diminish if it is not seen to have an impact in further developing vocational education in Estonia.

- We recommend to consider the creation of a national research programme on vocational education and pedagogy that would gather teachers, researchers and other stakeholders in Estonia to further develop vocational education and VET.
- Vocational education is a high priority developmental concern for Estonia as well as for many other countries. It would be important to work with

international VET researchers to find new ways to progress and promote vocational education in conjunction with partners and companies.

## **Students**

### Comments

The student body is very heterogeneous with different ages and professional backgrounds and experiences. The teaching staff as well as the students values this diversity of experiences in the classroom. It also appears to be a challenge for teaching as teaching needs to take into account the individual needs of everyone.

The students were very motivated and they gave very positive feedback on the programme. However, they work in circumstances that are very demanding. Sometimes they could not participate in university lecture sessions because they were the only teachers in their own field in the institutions in which they worked and could therefore not be released to attend university.

### Strengths

- Students appreciated very much the possibility to study for an academic qualification.
- They have very good and well respected relationships with their teachers.
- Teachers and students are seeking together new possibilities to complete the degree, as one good example is providing more support for the bachelor's thesis.
- Most students had a lot of work experience which is a remarkable resource for their studies.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

From the self-evaluation reports we got the impression that most of the students are teachers and the programme is designed according to their previous experience and professional environment. During student interviews the challenge was raised, though, that in some cohorts only a minority of students actually are teachers (5 out of 20) and expectations for students who have not been teaching before their studies might be too high. In teachers interview it was said that 30% of students are not working in vocational schools and this was seen as problematic.

- We recommend that the teaching staff gather information about their students' work experience at the very beginning of their studies and based

on this information they should develop 'Personal Learning Plans' for use with every student.

It was not clear in the report as well as during the student interviews if there were clear procedures for students to compensate for missing parts of their studies if they cannot attend face-to-face classes.

- We recommend you to generate procedures for that and the different options available and be more transparent across different courses. This should help to agree on common principles and make programme responsibilities more visible to the students.

As indicated during the interviews with students, there still is room for improvement regarding the link between work and study.

- We therefore recommend that Personal Learning Plans are an integrated part of the studies. This could also help to achieve stronger connection of the Bachelor thesis with the working environment of the students.
- Internationalisation is an important part of UT's development programme. Teachers in vocational education already have many opportunities to take part in international mobility at their own schools. We recommend that these possibilities could be connected to their studies.
- We also recommend that there should be a clear strategy on including the many international contacts to establish regular mobility opportunities that do not interfere with the students personal/professional environment.
- We also recommend to put more emphasis on short-time mobility and virtual mobility and that there should be a clear and transparent procedure with regards to the recognition of credit points during the mobility programmes.

Students were mainly satisfied with the theory-practice relationship. But as indicated during the interviews by students, the practice parts during the first year focused too much on observation only.

- As mentioned earlier, we recommend to ensure more active participation and authentic teaching experiences during the first year internship time to the students.

### 1.3.5. Educational Sciences (MA)

#### **Study programme and study programme development**

##### Comments

Educational Sciences (MA) programme is going to be merged with two other programmes in the near future and plans have already almost been finalized. Given these circumstances we therefore focus on the strengths of the current programme that should be considered an integral part in the new study programme to come.

The review team agree with the merging of three programmes. The small number of students in each separate programme is a reality that has been taken into account. There is also an opportunity to provide more synergy between earlier programmes when they are combined into a new one.

### Strengths

- Educational Sciences (MA) programme shows good compliance with standards. The programme appears coherent, feedback is acted upon and programme goals are quite clear.
- Very high commitment of students and staff.
- The essence of the curriculum has been very wide and open, which students emphasized as unique.
- Teaching methods are very learner-centred.
- Flexibility and personal learning paths were very much appreciated by students.
- Based on the self-evaluation reports and student interviews the practice period integrating theoretical knowledge and practical skills is very well supported and organized and can be closely related to students' everyday work and their career planning.
- Feedback given to the subjects has throughout the years been very good and there was also excellent feedback results from the specialization modules.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- There are a lot of rapid and much needed changes going on at the university, the current study programme development being a very clear example for that. It became clear during the interviews, that these developments do not reach everyone at every level but are more organized from the top down. We therefore recommend that for future study programme developments, students' and teachers' input should be included more.
- Courses in the programme are generally well connected and build on each other. As indicated during the interviews, students missed this connectivity and harmonisation with courses from other faculties. We therefore recommend that you support lecturers from other faculties to

interact with each other when planning their courses for the study programme.

- In the curriculum as well as during the interviews the experts sensed that in some modules the workload is too high. There can be many regular assignments for small courses in modules which can lead to a high workload. We recommend the reduction of many small learning assignments when planning the new merged programme.
- More visiting scholars is needed.

## **Resources**

### Comments

Based on the interviews infrastructure and facilities fulfil high quality standards.

### Strengths

- There is a sufficient number of available study materials and equipment that is technologically innovative and of good quality.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

The new integrated programme will need new learning materials. We recommend to update teaching and learning material to meet the newest international research literature.

## **Teaching and learning**

### Comments

The interviewed students did give comments on the programme that does not exist any longer. However, their feedback is useful to the new programme.

### Strengths

- The programme has had a very mixed student population. The process of teaching and learning has supported learners' individual and social development; each student has been supported, counselled and monitored taking into account his/her abilities, study needs and possibilities.



- The programme has been very flexible. This was very much appreciated by students because as it has given them an opportunity to combine work and study as well as develop a career plan.
- Research groups are more common than doing research alone. Still research work is supported individually.
- Qualitative methods have been used and a research module has been added to the programme.
- There have been five English courses available to support internationalization and international contacts.
- Teaching methods are student centred and modern, for example they can do group work over the internet, self-analysis and –reflection are used lot. Modern teaching and learning methods are very much appreciated by students, they also offer possibilities to economize on workload and improve study results as a consequence.
- Some modules have been web-based.
- The Procedure of Recognition of Previous Study and Professional Experience has been in use.
- During the interviews the use of team teaching and planning was mentioned.
- Based on the interview the programme has been a remarkable basis for PhD studies in Education. 1/3 of PhDs in the Institute of Education has come from this programme.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

No recommendation.

### **Teaching staff**

#### Comments

The teaching staff is well prepared for the job that they are doing..

#### Strengths

- A small but highly qualified teaching staff with 84% having a PhD and 16% having an MA. This should be continued given the recent developments.

- The programme manager and teaching staff have very deep understanding of modern teaching and learning theories and methods and willingness to develop the education.
- A very strong, respectful and cooperative relationship between teachers and students.
- Good international network; several foreign lecturers have been involved in the teaching of the curriculum.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Courses were first taught to a small number of students and later merging them in larger groups has created some tensions and a drop in the positive feedback for some of the teaching staff. We recommend the use of good teaching resources that have been developed to maintain the best practices experienced in the earlier programme and make sure that students continue to be exposed to high quality learning experiences in the future.
- We recommend to develop different kinds of active and meaningful learning methods.
- International lecturers have been involved in the programme in previous years but have since declined. We therefore recommend that you get international lecturers back in to the new programme.

## **Students**

#### Comments

Based on the self-evaluation reports and interviews the overall impression is that students in the programme are very capable and motivated.

#### Strengths

- Students appear to support each other very collaboratively (perhaps because this is a very small study programme).
- Students were very satisfied with the possibility to join research groups while writing up their thesis.
- Students have a very high employment rate in different fields. It shows the general suitability of the programme to the labour market.

- The teachers' interviews suggest that short-term mobility exchanges have been more popular than long-term mobility exchanges but after graduation some of the students have gone aboard.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- There were no clear measures of any aspect of internationalization of the study programme. We recommend to consider this as an integral part of the further study programme development and that students with families are supported so that they can have short term international experiences.
- We also recommend the use of other possibilities such as virtual mobility opportunities through joint courses or projects with existing international partner universities.

## **2. Assessment report of SPG at Tallinn University**

### **2.1. Introduction**

Tallinn University is the largest university of humanities in Tallinn and the third biggest public university in Estonia. A parliamentary decision merged several universities and institutes of Tallinn into a single institution which resulted in the founding of Tallinn University as a public university on 18 March 2005. In the past 10 years, Tallinn University has merged a number of study and research institutions. This has significantly widened the scope of the responsibilities the university holds.

The mission of the University is to support sustainable development of Estonia through high quality research and study, promotion of intellectual growth and development, public discussions and promotion of academic partnerships. In its activities, the university adheres to the following basic values - openness, quality, professionalism and unity.

There are 25 programmes of teacher education and educational sciences at Tallinn University: Primary School Teacher (INT BA+MA), Special Education (BA), Consultant in Special Education (MA), Early Childhood Education (BA), Early Childhood Education (MA), Teacher of Several Subjects (MA), Teacher of Foreign Language (MA), Teacher of Russian language and Literature (MA), Teacher of History and Civics (MA), Teacher of Estonian Language and Literature (MA), Teacher of Estonian as a Second Language (MA), Teacher of Natural Sciences in Secondary Schools (MA), Teacher of Physical Education (MA), Education (BA), Teacher of Mathematics (MA), Teacher of Handicraft and Home Economics (MA), Arts Teacher (MA), Music Teacher (MA), Vocational Pedagogy (BA), Vocational Teacher (MA), Adult Education (BA), Educational Sciences (MA), Educational

Management (MA), Adult Education (MA), Teacher of Craft and Technology Education (MA).

## 2.2. General findings and recommendations at study programme group level

### Comments

In general, Tallinn university has done excellent work in supporting high quality teacher education and education science programmes. The self-evaluation report of Tallinn University is reflective and analytical and it provides evidence that there is a clear vision for the development the programmes in the near future.

It also seems evident that Tallinn University has undergone a number of changes in the effort to reform the programmes in the recent past and still some more changes (coordination measures) are planned. We can see the impact of these changes in some of the results already achieved and we saw also a desire for some more measures to be developed and implemented in the future. While welcoming reform we want to point out that achieving the most constructive balance between change and stability is always a challenge and this is obviously the case here, too. The panelists have tried to be sensitive to the current turbulent situation of being in the midst of change. The more critical comments should be read in the spirit of offering suggestions about how it might be possible to improve in the future.

### Strengths

- The leadership of the university seem to understand the situation well and they are supportive of the reform process.
- There is a very good conceptual basis to the programmes. Programmes are well thought out and in general they form a coherent whole and achieve good results.
- Programmes respond well to the labour market needs and they are in principle viewed positively by the relevant public.
- There is a good awareness of current education discourses. People have a good understanding of current trends in teacher education and education sciences and make efforts to implement this in the programmes (aims, learning outcomes, methods, forms, content, support).
- There is a good potential for development and a successful continuing process of improvement on the basis of reflection, analysis and with the use of feedback.

- There are good prospects for realizing interdisciplinarity and for relating theory and practice. There is good collaboration amongst teachers, good student-teacher relations and collaboration with key stakeholders.
- There is good potential for experimentation and developmental (and hopefully also research) work across the programmes. Efforts are being made to be flexible in a number of approaches across the programmes.
- Programmes are benchmarked in a relevant way.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- More attention needs to be paid to change management strategies so that people at different levels understand the changes that are happening, their role in them, and, if possible, so that they can feel ownership and appreciate their involvement.
- There are several "chronic" problems related to study programmes (for instance, high drop-out, low mobility, unclear teaching-research nexus). Although a lot has been already done, these problems need permanent specific attention and further concrete improvement measures.
- The development and implementation of a quality manual for all study programmes was repeatedly mentioned during the visit. We strongly support this and encourage the university to finalize this manual as soon as possible.
- Such a manual would also be useful for research. We recommend that the quality manual should define the main guidelines for research work, including the process and responsibilities following a detection of potential plagiarism. The university is actively promoting the Estonian system for plagiarism detection that is widely used by staff and students (KRATT). In the report as well as during the visit we were told that this process is not clear and in individual cases teachers felt left alone with plagiarism. We also recommend the implementation of an ethical board as part of this development.
- In many of the programmes reviewed, Tallinn University seems to have very good practice in terms of the co-operation with relevant stakeholders (students, employers, alumni, other institutions). This is a very promising basis for further developments. Although we observed some examples of collaboration also with the University of Tartu, more efforts in this respect is advisable. The implementation of measures to encourage more intensive international collaboration is also recommended.
- Regular external assessment is recommended. For instance, an appropriately experienced academic in another external institution (in this case Tallinn or Tartu) is appointed and sent all the course documents and a sample of marked papers (eg 10% including the highest and the lowest) and invited to visit once a year to talk to students and staff and to report on whether or not the course meets its aims, how it could be improved and if the marking is

consistent and fair. This is a way to share good practice and to integrate the education system of the country.

## Study programme and study programme development

### Comments

The development of the programmes seems to be a broad process based on the analysis of the societal situation and general trends as well as on evidence about the existing programmes.

### Strengths

- The programmes support the educational innovation goals that have been set for the whole university: student-centered, self-regulating deep-learning also using different kinds of digital learning possibilities.
- There are very good signs of independent studies being diverse in methodology and focused on the learning process, not only the final product.
- Very good work has been done for a better combination of work and studies regarding curricula, teaching and research.
- Student admission procedures are relatively complex.
- Programmes usually contain the obligation for the student to pass one course in English.
- Very good relations between the Tallinn University and schools are reflected in a good balance between theory and practice in the study programmes.
- Feedback from students and also other stakeholders is used for improvement of the programs.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The self-evaluation report has identified several targets for the further development. There are also well-reflected action plans with timelines for the implementation. We recommend that these are put into action. The suggested efforts for decreasing drop-out rates are particularly important.
- Some students claimed it is hard to register for the obligatory courses in English. If this is so, then improvement of their accessibility is recommended.

- Various modes of thesis are recommended for consideration.
- We suggest that more optional elective courses are offered in a number of programmes.
- Student feedback seems to be an important source of information. Low participation of students of the feedback and some problems of anonymity should be looked at, too.

## Resources

### Comments

Premises of the Tallinn University are very good and they support teaching and learning. Explicit attention to the funding of research should be paid in order to encourage research potential of the staff.

### Strengths

- Very good learning environments.
- Excellent library and e-resources.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- In some programmes/courses more materials in Estonian are needed.

## Teaching and learning

### Comments

A modern and relevant variety of methods and forms are used. There is a growing tendency to pay more attention to student research (mainly within the supervisory process of writing the final thesis).

### Strengths

- Theory and practice are often well interconnected.
- Growing efforts to relate teaching and student research.
- In many cases the students internships are well thought out (supervised jointly by people from TU and from a school).
- There is joint involvement of TU staff and people from the outside in some teaching activities.

- The Basic Module for teacher training programmes is very well designed.
- The Educational Innovation Centre has a potential for combining teaching, research and development and it has joined both students and staff members into common collaborations in various projects.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- It seems to be advisable to put more explicit emphasis on the themes of inclusive education and work with pupils/students with special education needs in a number of programmes reviewed.
- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL): Studies and Practice Abroad. A process and responsibilities were described to us during the visit and they appear appropriate. However, there was no clear process on the recognition of learning outcomes during student mobility periods evident. We recommend that all aspects of RPL should be included in the manual to be published. We also recommend that there is a clear procedure how to do a personal learning plan for the mobility period and how to make the “mobility credits” fit to the TE curricula.
- Many students claimed they cannot take part in mobility exchange programmes (those offering 3-10 months study stays abroad). It might be therefore wise to focus, alternatively, on opportunities of short study visits (1-2 weeks) instead in case of students unable to leave for a longer period of time.
- Student internships require complex funding (incl. of travel costs of TU staff to schools).
- In many programmes a lot of space is provided to students’ independent work. This requires a large amount of informative as well as formative feedback. We recommend to pay attention to this challenge.

### Teaching staff

#### Comments

The teaching staff are mostly very competent and they keep in touch with developments in schools and in school education. More internationalization of the staff and more emphasis on academic growth (PhDs) are both recommended.

Teachers seem to have in general very good relations with students.

Staff development activities are taking place (mostly focused on teaching, work with IT).

While part of the staff has been effectively involved in relevant research, some other staff members were not. The teaching-research nexus seems to be a challenge.



Encouragement of the staff to participate more in international projects is recommended.

### Strengths

- The programme managers and lecturers showed a good understanding of recent trends, societal developments and challenges for their study programmes.
- We found evidence of strong, respectful and cooperative relationships between teachers and students. Teachers appear to be very open to input from their students and committed to creating and sustaining a participatory and innovative atmosphere.
- As indicated during the interviews, peer support is very much encouraged and obviously helps in preventing drop outs.
- Teachers are putting a lot of effort in catering to all the different needs and backgrounds of the students and showing appropriate flexibility, e.g. with deadlines and different assignments.
- Mentoring is available to new staff.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The teaching-research nexus needs to be more clearly defined and accompanying measures should be taken. Some teachers reported they have uneven workload which makes it difficult to be more involved in research, for instance.
- More research competence development is needed and measures to promote this should be developed and implemented across the programmes.
- The Innovative Education Centre could be more of a link between education research and development.
- More involvement of visiting academics from abroad could enrich the programmes.
- Clear and systematic development plans for the staff are recommended.

### Students

### Comments

The students' interest in the programmes differs. While in some cases, competition for study places is relatively high, in some other cases (math and science) the number of those who want to enroll is low.

Many students study and work at the same time, also their life/work experience differs a lot. This creates a number of challenges for the organization of studies. At the same time, such a heterogeneity within the student groups might also bring some learning opportunities.

Student numbers in some programmes are very low.

### Strengths

- Students were typically very satisfied with their study programmes equally on BA and MA level.
- Students are committed and ambitious.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Although a number of steps have already been undertaken student drop out remains a problem. Two key moments can be isolated: the beginning phase of studies and the final thesis completion. More specific counselling might probably still be needed, as well as more flexible and individualized approach to supervision.
- Very low numbers of students in some programmes suggests that there ought to be some more coordination across the programmes uniting the small programmes into larger programmes. Universities could develop 'shared modules' across programmes rather than each programme developing its own, for example, a 'research methods' module.
- Students in some programs reported that workload was uneven – we recommend to look at this issue.
- Student mobility should be encouraged.

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

### 2.3.1. Early Childhood Education (BA); Early Childhood Education (MA); Primary School Teacher (INT BA+MA); Special Education (BA); Consultant in Special Education (MA)

#### **Study programme and study programme development**

##### Comments

The employers clearly mentioned that the profile of graduates from the currently assessed Tallinn study programmes is very strong. They are impressed by the good communication skills, both in relation to children and in relation to their parents. The graduates have good didactical knowledge, are willing to share that knowledge and have an open mind. At the same time, one cannot expect that the profile of the graduates is complete and all-round. It is typical for the teacher profession that further professional development will always be necessary. Important areas for further development are multiculturalism, teaching in English and Russian, life of children in rainbow families, how to work with SEN-children in kindergarten, counselling skills. Visits to SEN-kindergartens and SEN-schools are recommended (SEN = children with special needs).

This last point deserves extra attention: the overall attention for inclusive education needs to increase in the Estonian education system. This is in the first place the case for the current teacher working force (via in-service training). But also in the current teaching programmes, more and better preparation for student teachers on how to function in a more inclusive context is necessary. In the Tallinn programmes, it would be interesting to bring students from different programmes together around a course focusing on inclusive education: early childhood education student teachers, subject student teachers, base education and special education student teachers can all benefit from such an approach.

The teacher programmes have gained recognition from the teachers' professional body, because they meet the requirements and standards of the teacher profession. Both employees and university have a clear view on the final aim of the different programmes that are assessed. The evaluation team observed that university staff is well aware about what happens in the daily reality at school and pre-school, and vice-versa: schools and pre-schools are aware of what happens with the students at the university.

The Early Childhood Education Bachelor's and Master's study programmes are relevant on the labour market and in accordance with its needs. According to the data (2015) provided by the Ministry of Education and Research, 66 % of pre-school child care institution teachers have higher education degrees and 27% have vocational secondary education. Thus there is a need for early childhood education teachers (and also for other early childhood education experts) with speciality higher education, which no doubt justifies the programmes.

The Special Education (Bachelor's studies) and Consultant in Special Education (Master's studies) study programmes have been aligned with the occupational standards. There is a process of continuous improvement, in a systematic way feedback from students and employers is taken into account.

The Primary School Teacher study programme has been changed significantly since 2010. Recent surveys (2013, 2016) have shown that the changes do meet societal needs and expectations.

More general, based on developments in the society, changes have been done in the different programmes, e.g. by adding courses on educational technology in the programmes. The needs of labour market and societal developments have also been taken into account in, e.g., the Early Childhood Education programmes by adding (also from international perspective) highly topical issues in the programmes about leadership in children's institutions, environmental pedagogy, and physical education.

In order to ensure consistency between the programmes, an analysis of source documents has been conducted and feedback from students and lecturers collected. Based on the analysis, several changes have been made to cover all learning outcomes and to eliminate overlaps in the programmes. For instance, some courses are now taught jointly to early childhood education and primary school students.

Development of the study programmes has been routine and based on regularly collected feedback from different interest groups (students, lecturers, employers, professional placement supervisors, alumni). According the latest survey of employers and the Early Childhood Education BA programme alumni, teacher preparation at the university was rated to be good. The main suggestions made by employers related to combining theory and practice, teacher's skills in counselling parents and working with children with special needs. Alumni suggested that they needed more information about children with special needs as well as more experience conducting appraisals. The alumni survey of the Early Childhood Education MA programme revealed satisfaction with the specialty preparation in most areas. On the basis of the surveys significant changes have been made in both programmes.

The Early Childhood Education programmes have been compared with equivalent programmes of the University of Helsinki. The structure and fields of the Early Childhood Education BA and MA programmes are proved to be similar, but the volume of professional placement is bigger in Tallinn University.

To ensure the participation of international students, elective courses of the Early Childhood Education BA programme have been made available in foreign languages.

### Strengths

- The study programmes are relevant for the labour market and in accordance with its developments and needs.

- Development of programmes are based on continuous collaboration with and feedback from students, lecturers, employers, alumni.
- The programmes have been regularly analysed and feedback from students, employers and other stakeholders have been taken into account. Programmes are regularly modified.
- The co-operation with the stakeholders in the Estonian educational system is very good.
- Collaboration with University of Tartu in analysing and coordinating the curriculum (EDUKO project 2012–2015), during which also the teachers were trained as supervisors. The current mentoring of students has got benefit from this investment.
- The Primary School Teacher programme has an integrated bachelor and master structure, which makes it unique and offers relevant opportunities.
- Elective study modules of the Early Childhood Education programmes are developed in collaboration with University of Tartu.
- The Early Childhood Education programmes are compared with several European study programmes for further development e.g. benchmarking takes place with University of Helsinki.
- Collaboration between the different programmes avoids overlap and stimulates interdisciplinary thinking and opportunities to learn from each other.
- An International Early Childhood Education MA programme is in planning phase and promises to be fruitful.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Possibilities for international collaboration need to be strengthened (develop a policy with regard to internationalisation@home, courses in English, actively promote student and staff mobility, co-operation with colleagues from abroad).
- More and better preparation is required to make student teachers learn how to function in an inclusive context is necessary. It would be interesting (and feasible) to bring students from different programmes together around a course focusing on inclusive education: subject student teachers, base education and special education student teachers can all benefit from such an approach.
- The timing of practice needs some adjusting: for the Special Education programme students need to observe or work with SEN children earlier than during their 3<sup>rd</sup> study year (it is recommended to organize intertwined theory and practice).

- In the Special Education BA programme there is only observation of children, more practice is needed already at the BA level.
- Some critical points in the Primary School Teacher programme with respect to the pedagogical practice need further attention: more feedback on completed work, more frequent school visits from the university staff, more input on how to teach in-depth.
- Important areas for further developments in the programmes are multiculturalism, teaching in English and Russian, life of children in rainbow families, how to work with SEN-children in kindergarten, counseling skills.

## Resources

### Comments

The learning and teaching environment can be evaluated as good, convenient and up-to-date regarding premises and equipment.

Teaching and learning takes place also at schools and early childhood education institutions, where it is possible to use different methodological means and to become familiar with specific teaching environments.

Study materials are located and available in the university library as well as in the Study Centre. According to the students' feedback, the availability of study materials is excellent. Materials for all courses are supported electronically by the use of web-based systems. The library is up to date and staff and students have access to all relevant data bases and e-journals. A point of attention is the availability of books for BA students (due to the large number of students).

### Strengths

- A modern learning environment with good e-learning resources
- Up-to date and sufficient amount of literature: the library is an inviting environment
- Staff and students have access to relevant journals and databases.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The collection of textbooks for bachelor students' needs to grow, given the number of students.
- The use of different e-learning environments causes frustration and loss of study time for the students, so a reduction would be welcomed.

## Teaching and learning

### Comments

ICT is fully implemented in the curriculum and has become a natural part of the different programmes.

The students are pleased with the wide range of teaching methods that are used. To give a few examples: in early childhood there are education games, webpages, educational technology is used (e.g. how to make games) and in special education, role play and case studies are used, as well as group work and other cooperative teaching methods.

The flexibility of studying and the availability of materials for all courses is supported electronically by the use of web-based study systems.

General, subject-specific and elective courses help to develop the general competences of students. The development of students' information-gathering skills, critical thinking and research competence is supported by courses which concentrate on research. To develop the students' foreign language skills, at least one English course has to be selected from the elective courses (admission 2016). The programmes also include courses regarding educational technology.

To make the teaching and learning processes more effective, the lecturers have shared practical experience and examples from their lectures with one another. They have also participated in ICT training and use more and more different e-environments in their work.

Theory and practice are interconnected in teaching and learning in general, as described in the self-evaluation report, and especially in pedagogical professional placement in the programmes. The professional placement seems to be well arranged, mentored and assessed in many programmes, taking professional demands and occupational qualifications into account. In general, the students are satisfied with the content and organizational side of professional placements.

Supervision of research papers is aided by research courses, in which topical themes and directions of research are introduced to the students, and research is further supported by seminars. Students are free to choose their supervisor. According to student feedback collaboration with research supervisors has been good.

The organisation of studies in the programmes is handled by study specialists, documentary information is exchanged in the SIS, student counselling is carried out by the study programme counsellor and programme administrator. The information flow and student support seems to be well-arranged and also acknowledged by the students. According to the lecturers, collaboration between the study programme counsellor and study specialists has been very good.

To avoid academic misconduct, research courses address research ethics and the university utilizes the plagiarism detection system KRATT, which is also introduced to students.

Students are involved in research and development activities by the lecturers. Students take part in the organization of conferences, help to conduct surveys and are involved in the writing of articles together with lecturers.

In some programmes, students have, on average, rated the programme and its management between very good and excellent. For instance, the Early Childhood Education BA students gave high ratings to didactics and professional placement courses, whereas the MA students gave high ratings to teachers' skills in combining theory with practice and the organization of professional placements.

### Strengths

- ICT is adequately used in the different programmes, e-support is guaranteed for all courses.
- The resources for the preparation of the Master's thesis are very good: students get access to all the relevant databases and international journals.
- The balance between theory and practice seems to be good and the students are satisfied with the practice periods (except for special education, where there is 24 hours practice, which are not much) and theory and practice are intertwined, especially in professional placement. The placements are preceded by and ended with seminars.
- Diverse teaching and assessment methods in use.
- Versatile learning environment with up to date information technology.
- Supervision conducted simultaneously by the university staff and teachers from schools and day-care centres.
- Good feedback on teaching and learning process from students.
- Students are, in a variety of ways, participating in research and development activities by lecturers.
- Students have, on average, rated the programme and its management between very good and excellent.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- One of the problems mentioned in the feedback of the Early Childhood Education MA students was that compiling the portfolio is very time-consuming.



- The supporting process of finding supervisors can be optimized, especially for the Early Childhood Education BA students, due to the larger number of students.
- In the student feedback it was mentioned that the amount of independent work was found to be too much. Lecturers are recommended to explain the expected amount and to display this information in the course programme.
- In the Primary School Teacher programme it was mentioned that more informative and adequate formative feedback on independent work is necessary.
- Some Early Childhood Education MA students suggested that professional placements should be more extensive and divided over a longer period of time.
- In special education the amount of practice should increase. Further attention is needed to give transparent information on the possible placement organisations (in Estonia and abroad). Students should not be used as substitutes for absent employees.

## Teaching staff

### Comments

The hiring and evaluation process of lecturers is based on the Employment Relations Rules of the university. New lecturers are supported by a particular mentor programme. The cooperation of lecturers in the programme is coordinated by the study programme administrator through meetings, seminars and study trips.

The study programme administrator has an important role with regard to the evaluation of the lecturer's performance and (s)he also organizes feedback discussions for teaching staff.

Lecturers regularly work on self-improvement, regarding e.g. research and teaching competences. The staff also participated in thematic training programmes in Estonia and abroad.

Lecturers participate in international scientific conferences, they publish in national and international journals and are members of editorial boards of international journals; the participation in international research projects is scarce.

There should be a clear policy to hire staff with PhD qualifications especially in educational sciences. In recruiting new staff members scientific competence (PhD

degree) should be highly valued and a policy needs to be created to have it as an important recruiting basis.

Based on their contacts with colleagues abroad as well as on international mobility programmes, international experts have given lectures and seminars

Staff development is needed in order to further optimize the quality of the programmes. Relevant areas are the improvement of ICT-skills, courses in English and education in a multicultural context.

The students' feedback regarding lecturers is positive. The students stipulate that the lecturers follow the course programme and teach courses in a clear and understandable manner, and that it is easy to contact the lecturers.

In the Primary School Teacher programme not all teachers (outside the university) seem to be willing to use modern teaching methods.

### Strengths

- The heads of study programmes have a clear view on their roles and responsibilities (e.g. contact with students, cooperation with staff, collection of feedback from employees and other partners, time-scheduling, development of programmes, organization of seminars, development of programmes that are relevant both from the perspective of the teacher and the learner, response to the requirements of the society, monitoring of changes in the curriculum etc.).
- The students are satisfied with the guidance for the master thesis. They feel supported when going through the whole process.
- Staff have received quality labels for several courses.
- A significant number of the teachers hold a PhD degree, though further work can be done.
- Active research and research related activities, research supports teaching.
- Teachers develop their skills continuously and teach abroad.
- Good student feedback on teaching.
- Mentoring is available for new staff members.
- Foreign lecturers teach at the programmes.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Staff development is needed in order to further optimize the quality of the programmes. Relevant areas are the improvement of ICT-skills, courses in English and education in a multicultural context.
- Further investment in research competencies is desirable. By default all staff should be involved in research activities (given the teaching-research nexus). This can go hand in hand with the development of a policy to increase the number of staff members with PhD.
- Staff mobility needs to be promoted (outgoing and incoming); the involvement of foreign lecturers needs to be further used, as an easy to reach aim for internationalisation at home.

## **Students**

### Comments

Student admission to, e.g. the Early Childhood Education BA and MA programmes is based on the results of professional qualification tests. As to the BA programme, results of the national Estonian exam are also considered, and the candidates write an essay which describes their motivation, argumentation skills and written self-expression. Competition for places is the same compared to other teacher education programmes. The places are highly competed. The admission exam regarding the MA programme consists of a presentation of the candidate's MA thesis project, an oral defence and a professional qualification interview. By these the motivation for studying and research aptitude of the candidate are judged.

Drop out remains a problem in many programmes, despite the efforts; most dropouts fail to write a BA or MA thesis. To reduce the number of dropouts, the academic counsellor contacts students when they request deletion from the matriculation register or when the student encounters problems completing their studies. If necessary, the counsellor also consults the study programme administrator.

In the case of students with special needs, physical aspects have been taken into consideration. Students are offered the option of choosing between tasks of varying levels of difficulty during courses; additional literature is also offered. For their final thesis, students can choose a subject which interests them. Academic counselling supports the studying and graduation of students in the nominal period of studies throughout their study.

Students regularly receive information about student mobility and study trip opportunities. Courses done at other universities can be recognized as part of the study programme. Students, e.g. from the Early Childhood Education

programmes are encouraged to carry out their professional placement abroad; several BA programme students have completed their professional placement in Helsinki or carried other studies abroad. Students from the MA programme have not used any study mobility options.

The success of alumni on the labour market is reflected in their work-related achievements. Many graduates of, e.g., the Early Childhood Education BA programme have received Teacher of the Year awards at local or national levels, and several BA graduates have become local or national education leaders. Some MA graduates have proceeded to work on doctoral degrees.

The students would like to get more practical experience during the studies, since employers stress the importance and select on the basis of experience people have.

The Early Childhood Education students have to be prepared better to meet a number of challenges in the current educational system. They have to learn to work with children with another mother tongue language, and how to integrate Estonian as a second language for these children.

### Strengths

- The entrance procedures are clearly stated and the criteria adequate as regards both Early Childhood Education BA and MA programmes.
- There is high competition in student admission.
- The Early Childhood Education BA students participate to some extent in international student mobility.
- Graduates are successful in the labour market, many being employed in high positions and employers are satisfied with graduated students.
- The students mention that they feel heard by the university and they notice that their feedback is taken into account.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- BA and MA graduation rates need to increase, drop out should decrease.
- Student supervision in writing the thesis is a bottleneck and systematic support must be provided.
- Students must be encouraged for international mobility through both counselling and scholarships, this must be facilitated in the programmes.

2.3.2. Education (BA); Teacher of Several Subjects (MA) Teacher of Foreign Languages (MA); Teacher of Russian Language and Literature (MA); Teacher of History and Civic (MA); Teacher of Estonian Language and Literature (MA); Teacher of Estonian as a Second Language (MA); Teacher of Natural Sciences in Secondary School (MA); Teacher of Physical Education (MA); Teacher of Mathematics (MA); Teacher of Handicraft and Home Economics (MA); Teacher of Craft and Technology Education (MA); Art Teacher (MA); Music Teacher (MA)

### **Study programme and study programme development**

#### Comments

It is not an easy task to evaluate so many subject teacher education (TE) programmes which have similarities as well as differences. Giving detailed feedback for each programme individually is not the most relevant way to respond and not possible. On the other hand generalisations might be dangerous. We have therefore tried to find the proper middle way in between these two extremes.

The study programmes have been revised recently in response to feedback from a range of stakeholders. They form a coherent whole and achieve good results. There is some concern about drop-out rates, the poor quality of recruitment in some subject areas such as mathematics and science and the high average age of teachers.

#### Strengths

- It is very positive that the programme leaders are continuously reforming the programmes in response to feedback from a range of stakeholders including students and employers. In general the staff are active and engaged.
- The Educational Innovation unit is doing an excellent job at promoting ideas for good pedagogy across the curriculum.
- There is good leadership in promoting educational reform and innovation from the vice-rectors who are themselves engaged educational researchers.
- The students are satisfied with their studies. Their positive feedback suggests that the components of some study programmes are coherent – it is important to maintain and improve this.

- The practicum is well organized.
- It is positive that the expressive arts and crafts are protected and supported even though these subjects can sometimes attract smaller numbers.
- The basic module is excellent and promotes interdisciplinarity across a range of subject areas. This represents a good direction for development that could be extended.
- There is a good use of partnerships with external organizations such as Art and Music academies (although we are aware in these cases it is a matter of joint programme). These collaborations have enabled the university to increase numbers on some courses.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The workload of students in many programmes might need re-assessment. If part-time students are to have enough time to reflect on their learning it might be necessary to focus in on the most key content.
- The amount of work and other difficulties in thesis writing are mentioned in many programmes – not only from the students' perspective but also from the point of view of limited range of staff expertise and the amount of extra workload required.
- Although all programmes refer to student feedback, it is not said clearly how the results are used, what has been the response rate and what are the weaknesses of (e-systems of) student feedback.
- Although many reports talk about versatile teaching and learning methods (incl. IT-applications and devices), there might be a need to promote them in more programmes. At the moment they seem targeted mainly at the natural sciences where it is said that understanding of modern research methods is not good enough among some members of the staff.
- It might be worth considering that students could take more responsibility in professional placements during the first year of their MA studies. Observation is an important tool to understand teaching-learning processes but many students have previous teaching experience and would be ready to teach lessons either independently or cooperatively with their student mates. Those students who hesitate whether their career choice is the right one could test their motivation to become a teacher by means of "real" teaching experience in lessons from the very beginning of their studies.
- There may be a need for more flexibility in the programmes. There could be more flexibility in the type of theses required with options for more practical theses in some subject areas where this would be appropriate. Students do not always find it easy to get on the compulsory language courses so their

availability and timing could be made more flexible. Flexibility is also needed in the recognition of credits for work abroad from Erasmus exchanges.

- The student feedback tends to be positive but it is not always really anonymous when there are small number of students on a module and these students depend on the teacher for grading.
- That there only a very small number of students on some programmes suggests a need for further consolidation. Some programmes seem to have only 3, 4 or 5 students which suggests a need for more cooperation and inter-disciplinarity bringing students together in larger teaching groups.

## Resources

### Comments

Overall the situation seems to be quite good: the majority of buildings are in proper condition, textbooks are available and digitalization is in progress.

We acknowledge and commend the substantial financial investment in 'resource heavy' disciplines such as the Physical Education research facility and the Handicraft and Home Economics facilities on the Raagu Campus. These up-to-date facilities are world class and have already attracted research activity from National Sports organisations. The nurturing of 'indigenous' handicrafts and the provision of facilities around this is commendable. Innovative use of 3D printing was also in evidence.

### Strengths

- Very good infrastructure and resources, especially library and labs.
- Excellent well-lit spaces for group work.
- Evidence of strong partnership with the Academies of Music and Art.
- Strong evidence of interdisciplinary learning with examples given in Music and Physics such as the Mayday-Mayday Project. These projects demonstrate further string School-University partnership working.
- The involvement of schools in the production of methodological Teacher Training manuals is commendable and helps ensure that programmes of study are relevant and up-to-date.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- It was slightly surprising – regarding research and practical evidence from various European countries – that lack of technical support in ICT was

explicitly mentioned only in craft and technology. ICT was mentioned in Tallinn only on a quite general level, i.e. without many concrete examples of teaching-learning practise.

- In history and civics, some lack of traditional textbooks were mentioned.
- Innovation Education Centre has a very good potential to promote teaching and development and should be continuously and increasingly linked to more staff and programmes.
- Not much explicit university investment in research.
- Not much explicit university investment in mobility.
- How to ensure sustainability, e.g. the smart board in the didactics classroom that stopped working once the EU funded project ended because it needed updating and support. Much seems to depend on EU structural funds. There need to be a funding package put in place to ensure the technology is kept updated for when EU funding ends.
- E-learning systems – eDidacticum, moodle and ois – need more functional integration into teaching and its link research.
- Partnerships with Schools need to be formalised and some responsibility for Teacher Training should be written into university teachers' as well as school teachers' employment contracts (recommendation for National government).
- Staff need to be financially compensated for cost of travel to schools for the assessment of students on placement.

## Teaching and learning

### Comments

Many recent changes have been made to encourage collaborative teaching and encourage student learning. Efforts have been made to communicate and gain mutual understanding of the goals for changes in programmes to meet the needs of the society and prepare the students well for working in schools. Interdisciplinary study modules help to support a wholesome approach in student development. Regular communication practice is encouraged to be continued.

### Strengths

- Efforts to invest in student centered learning and deep learning is positive at the university and offers interesting opportunities.
- Tools are usually modern and used to support teaching and learning in modern ways.



- The idea of Education Innovation Center is very good, and seems to increasingly serve the need of both students and teachers.
- The teachers academy both for teachers and staff is excellent.
- Good partnerships with schools and kindergartens allow various collaborative projects, provide regular feedback on study programmes, and support university-school interaction.
- Efforts to integrate theory and practice are good. These efforts need to continue to be open to the range of needs for different programmes.
- Peer support for alleviating thesis writing stress in student initiated groups is something to be encouraged and supported as one of the possible ways to decrease drop-out rates.
- Various methods are used in teaching including, for example, outdoor studies for geography and interesting partnerships.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Students as well as teachers have uneven workload which might cause stress and loss of motivation in some cases.
- Clear systematic professional development plans for teachers are recommended to also support the self-analysis and evaluation practices of students.
- Various modes of thesis are encouraged to be considered in order to help students finish their studies in nominal time as well as to increase interest and supporting various study and performance skills.
- More optional electives are encouraged to be offered to facilitate deeper learning.
- Regular external assessment is recommended.
- During the visit and through the interviews there came apparent the insufficient means to reimburse travel costs for school visits. Teachers should not only be encouraged to support their students in school practice but also be supported themselves.
- According to the interviews with the students it is hard to get into the compulsory English language courses because there are so many who would like to take the course.
- Foreign students are encouraged to come and study in Tallinn University while often they do not have enough courses in English to take. In addition to English/foreign language courses, more subject courses in English would help

meet the need of both local as well as foreign students, as well as help integrate both student bodies.

- Leaders are encouraged to support their staff to take more ownership of programme development as well as realising their important role in the current change process.

## Teaching staff

### Comments

The self-assessment report and discussions with staff members indicate that general knowledge of current strategic expectations regarding quality of teaching and teachers professional development is good. The staff has established collaborative relationships in their areas of expertise and has aimed at finding reasonable ways to cope with various administrative and curricular changes. Gradual annual steps to improve pedagogical activities are taken individually in many subjects

### Strengths

- Teachers are interested in updating their expertise as academicians and are well-committed to their work being open-minded to new pedagogical ideas arising from the school field or research results.
- Students' feedback concerning their teachers' contribution is encouraging.
- Teachers expressed their satisfaction and proud of being able to contribute strongly to the development of national curriculum for comprehensive schools and they saw themselves as important in providing their students (prospective teachers) with knowledge and skills that guarantee their good reputation and employment.
- Teachers had found some reasonable solutions to cope with their needs and personal desires to be more active and productive in research work: sabbatical periods, negotiations with heads to give research time, students' involvement in research activities, periodisation of teaching, and new forms of collegial work were all mentioned during the interviews.
- The staff of the School of Educational Sciences has done good work in establishing a new base module in pedagogics which provides all students of different school subjects with a similar didactical basis to be applied across all programmes but in a way that is varied depending on the subject's needs.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- In order to enhance the research-led teacher education, it might be beneficial to strengthen strategic research planning and support on the level of the Schools and Institutes/Departments. Sensitivity to different needs of different subject groups (e.g. arts, music, craft versus mathematics, natural sciences) is needed when prerequisites for research and development are planned.
- Teachers' well-being in the middle of constant changes may deserve more attention in order to empower the staff in its pedagogical work and to strengthen experiences of mental ownership and agency in working. It may require also sensitivity to different age groups of the staff.
- Long work weeks in various activities based on the cyclical model of teaching are quite demanding not only for the students but also for the staff. It would be useful to try to find some practical solutions to lighten the burden collaboratively in discussions with heads and teacher educators.
- Based on students' feedback during the site visit interviews, awareness of contemporary practises and modern challenges of schools and pupils could be raised among teaching staff. It can be successfully done for example by means of common projects and seminars that are already used in some subjects and schools of professional placement and/or teaching practise.

## Students

### Comments

Students of the Tallinn university often both work and study at the same time. It may jeopardise their opportunities to finish the studies in the nominal time and increase the dropout rates. Although the most effective solutions may be beyond the students' or university's reach, this should be taken into account and turned into an asset by using close theory-practice application and evaluation. Despite the relatively small numbers the student body is very diverse in both age and background. This provides an excellent learning environment to all involved and could be used as a basis for innovative solutions and learning from best practices.

### Strengths

- Students find the cyclical model of studies just as useful for those who are full-time workers and part-time students. Being a full-time teacher during the studies gives the students opportunities to see theory connected to practise and to bring rich examples of subject teaching to become analysed during the university lessons.
- Some students see that the periods of teaching practise (+professional placements) are good and the scope of them is big enough.
- Students appreciated the opportunity to give feedback about study modules/courses and their teachers if the anonymity of responses is

secured also in the subjects where there are very small groups and anonymity might be an issue.

- The reflective culture supports student development.
- Students with studying abroad experience can use their example to encourage others. This is a good resource to use further.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Students find it difficult to work and study at the same time. When workload increases they can get a feeling that their studies are not appreciated. More guidance and counselling, as well as using their valuable work experience in meaningful long-term tasks can help increase their dropping motivation.
- There is a high drop out in the first semester when students realize they do not want to be on the course or do not want to be teachers. This could be addressed by taster sessions and more counselling before they start.
- Regarding dropouts and challenges in thesis writing; increased and improved guidance and counselling may be the only solution which truly is in the hands of teaching staff. New ideas for "writing clinics" or peer-group support (as in physical education) are needed. The exam as an option to lighten the burden of thesis work is perhaps not enough but various alternative ways to write and publish the thesis (e.g. systematic development of teaching and learning materials based on a certain concept or theory of learning) may be worth considering.
- International mobility of students based on mutual exchange programmes should be promoted although it is challenging in the cases when students study, work and have family simultaneously. Students had several examples of cases when their completed courses abroad – following the rules of Erasmus requirements – had not been fully accepted in their own university. More flexibility is needed here not only for encouraging students to have studying abroad experience but also for valuing the time spent and effort put in there.
- Students would like more optional and elective courses in their curricula to enhance or to deepen their expertise based on their major studies and personal working experience and/or background. Possibly offering courses in foreign languages can help improve student language skills, which is a requirement, help the situation of overbooked English classes as well as integrate foreign students better.
- Students working at school sometimes feel that the information given in courses is too far from reality at schools. Further collaboration between schools and university is needed as well as finding meaningful ways for didactics to be involved in school life should be a priority to keep motivation and maintain quality.

### 2.3.3. Vocational Pedagogy (BA); Vocational Teacher (MA)

#### **Study programme and study programme development**

##### Comments

The self-evaluation reports and interviews gave convincing indications that both programmes of Vocational Pedagogy (BA) and Vocational Teacher (MA) fulfill high academic standards. The developmental processes have promoted both the vertical and horizontal coherence of the programmes.

##### Strengths

- The university respects and really listens to its external partners.
- Employers are very satisfied with general cooperation with Tallinn University and their involvement in the study programme development.
- Employers are involved in the programme councils.
- Employers are willing to help students to get data for their thesis.
- The modifications made in 14/15 to the BA are sensible, and the same is true for the 2016 modifications to the MA.
- The programmes have good IT resources in use.
- Programmes are linked to the national standards.
- Programmes adapted based on student feedback.
- Professional placements are a strength of the programmes.
- During the interviews all stakeholders showed a very high satisfaction regarding the joint MA with Tallinn University of Technology. We encourage to continue this cooperation and even use it as an example of a good practice for more cooperation in other study programmes of teacher training and educational sciences.
- When the joint MA programme started, they had 11 students from technical side, now in 2016 the number increased.
- Expanding placements to fit in with work requirements of students is a good idea.
- There is very good cooperation with VET schools.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Employers would like to have more information about the bachelor and master thesis written at the university in order to benefit from the outcomes. We recommend to establish a system to share theses with all interested stakeholders. This could also help having better quality educational material for vocational education and vocational teacher education in Estonia.
- During the interviews some students expressed a wish to have more options to learn about professions in a recent and future society in the courses of the BA study programmes. We recommend to take the students' suggestions into account and collect feedback regarding the needs of the students' and their professions.
- We recommend that, based on the shortage of qualified teachers in vocational education, the Tallin University would take an active role with other Estonian universities and work with the Ministry of Education and stakeholders in vocational education for creating a strategic plan with different scenarios how to solve a difficult situation in vocational teacher education. The existing part-time studies and recent pedagogical methods do not appear to be sufficient in meeting the urgent problems in VET.

## **Resources**

### Comments

The university had allocated resources for modern technology and infrastructure. E-library is well-functioning and provides high quality services to students and teachers.

### Strengths

- Good availability of electronic resources.
- Very well-functioning teaching spaces.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- In the report a lack of Estonian language materials was mentioned. Students agreed on that regarding more specific literature on the particular sub-field of vocational pedagogy. However, they are satisfied with general literature on educational sciences.

## Teaching and learning

### Comments

Teaching methods are very student centered. Both teachers and students were aware about deep learning processes and importance of reflection for advancing high quality learning outcomes and professional competences.

### Strengths

- Mapping the tasks to student's prior knowledge and experience at the start of the year is a clear strength.
- Students can do their internship as a part of their job.
- In-service training for the supervisors in the schools.
- Students can write their thesis based on their internships.
- Involvement of VET school staff as supervisors of placements.
- During the interviews we got a lot of evidence of use of innovative teaching approaches.
- The feedback from the students was very positive.
- During the interview students expressed a high satisfaction with the sensitivity of teachers to the students' needs. Teaching methods are chosen accordingly.
- The programmes are very flexible.
- Lecturers are very sensitive to the students' needs.
- Good use of ICT in the programmes.
- Programme adapts to student feedback.
- Formative assessment.
- In the Vocational Teacher (MA) programme one of the methodologies they use is action research. Based on the interviews it is quite nicely integrated in the field work and a very fine way to do evidence-based research work.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- In major courses the amount of independent work has been 'huge' as one of the students expressed it but at the same time students are supported and encouraged with their work. We recommend continuously to follow the workload of independent studies.
- Students hope they could have more possibilities to learn a large variety of different professional fields in optional studies. Now they seem to focus on service professions.
- Teaching staff expressed the wish to assess learning outcomes more on a module level rather than on a course level. We strongly support this desire and recommend to develop general standards for module based assessments reducing the number of assessments during the studies.

## Teaching staff

### Comments

Teachers were very committed and had a strong drive to develop their teaching. They valued very much the sabbatical period. Teachers had also very ambitious views for research work but they also indicated that the time for research is very limited.

### Strengths

- Lecturers are specialized vocational teachers who are very sensitive to students' needs.
- The programmes have involved practitioners from VET schools and enterprises to develop the curricula and give lecturers to the students.
- There are diverse opportunities for lecturers to develop professional skills.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Teaching staff expressed the wish to have more opportunities to visit each other's lectures and thus provide collegial feedback. We recommend to find time and space for that kind of professional learning.
- We recommend to strengthen research opportunities for advancing pedagogy of vocational education and VET.



## Students

### Comments

As a programme for people in work, there are difficulties to find time both studies and work. The programme leaders have generally done a good job for promoting distance learning and flexibility.

### Strengths

- On the MA level students showed high satisfaction with the curricula helping them to widen their perspectives and further developing at a personal level.
- Teachers who were sent by their institutions to the study programme are very motivated: "There are many success stories when we have given possibilities to study pedagogics for our working teachers".
- Decent levels of recruitment overall, high number of applicants.
- Recruitment of a right type of students.
- Students with special needs were able to study and appropriate measures have been implemented.
- Students are very satisfied with the professional practice elements of the curricula.
- MA students have three courses related to master thesis.
- Teachers help students to find supervisors.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- A lot of work has been already done to solve the drop out problem. Yet, there are still developments possible. We recommend to continue designing ways to fit courses around the students' working life.
- Low student mobility is repeatedly raised with a focus on "studying abroad". We recommend to put stronger emphasis on short term exchange and/or job shadowing programmes and/or web-based joint study modules with the international university partners.
- The reason for joining the study programmes appears to be very different. Some students study voluntarily, some because they have been required by law or their employers. This is a huge challenge for organization of the studies. We recommend to evaluate these reasons at the very beginning of the study programme in depth.

## 2.3.4. Adult Education (BA); Adult Education (MA); Educational Management (MA)

### **Study programme and study programme development**

#### Comments

These are the only Educational Management and Adult Education BA and MA programmes in Estonia, which makes them very important. The self-evaluation report is comprehensive and thoughtful.

The report appears to have been written in a very participatory way using research based self-evaluation methodology, which is outstanding. In general, there appears to be a very strong collegial and collaborative atmosphere that is setting high standards also for the study programmes.

#### Strengths

- A good model is used for self-evaluation and programme development; the approach is systematic and research-based, there is a strong quality assurance culture that is an example of best practice even for all reports.
- The only Educational Management programme in Estonia.
- Digital literacy is encouraged.
- Strong international links and very strong EU research projects.
- To complete the programmes students need to speak a foreign language and to be prepared to be social and to collaborate and study in groups. For example, courses often assign tasks in which foreign language, communication and team work skills are necessary.
- The programme incorporates several courses in English which are also taken by international students.
- There is a form of national co-operation with Tartu University.

## Resources

### Comments

Resources seem to be on a similar level as in most other programmes reviewed.

### Strengths

- The Centre of Innovation in Education offers the newest technical resources and flexible learning environment for the students.
- Good availability of electronic materials.
- Students are generally satisfied with the learning spaces.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- As indicated during the interview with lecturers, more flexible spaces fulfilling the needs of modern teaching methods are needed. The existing (class)rooms and labs are too often not available.

## Teaching and learning

### Comments

Based on the interviews the relationships between students, teachers and other stakeholders are very strong, interactive and respectful. The atmosphere is very enthusiastic and innovative. Excellent work has been done in developing programmes.

### Strengths

- Students indicated during the interview, that teachers are really encouraging them to connect theory and practice in their studies. Students were also very satisfied with the interactive methods being used.
- Teaching staff are developing and testing new teaching methods. Group teaching is in use.
- Research-based thinking is very much appreciated.
- If you are a full-time student with full time job, it is sometimes difficult to combine your work and studies, but teachers appear to be flexible with the deadlines and study organization in general.

- There is a good use of ICT and focus on digital literacy.
- Overall grades are good, and course leaders have to be commended for their thoughtful analysis of student outcomes.

#### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Lecturers should develop the assessment system more at module level, not subject level.
- During the interviews students emphasized that even more individualized supervision is needed for the master thesis. We recommend to appoint a supervisor for every student as early as possible. Another option could also be research groups of students to be continuously coordinated by a lecturer.
- Students were not satisfied with the high student numbers in the introductory course for research as this did not allow them to focus on their individual needs. There were also some other courses with the same problem. We recommend to further develop this course and also create a more participatory didactical design.
- The amount of independent study can be challenging for working learners. We recommend to guide students facing challenges with this even more.

### **Teaching staff**

#### Comments

Based on the self-evaluation reports and interviews it seems that teaching staff have a very strong commitment to the programmes and they are very active and innovative in developing them. They know very well the modern teaching and learning theories and how to apply them.

#### Strengths

- There are good possibilities to take part in professional development activities, a very good example were three months pedagogical studies for the university teachers mentioned during the interviews.
- The involvement of practitioners in the teaching teams is a very beneficial approach for teaching and learning.
- Lecturers want to find new ideas for the independent work: combine different subjects, learning assignments etc. We encourage them to continue this kind of development work.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Cooperation on course preparation was identified as an area for improvement during the interviews. We recommend to provide clear guidelines on joint course preparations for teaching staff.
- Lecturers indicated during the interview that they needed a better balance between research and teaching. This includes teaching merits being recognized in the same way as research merits. We recommend to put more emphasis on research for keeping the programme at a high standard. But also it is important that teaching merits are valued at the university.

## **Students**

### Comments

- As indicated during the interviews, students feel privileged and thankful to the university and their studies for opening up their minds and being supported in personal development.
- There are diverse needs, for example some want to get skills for a new profession, which is also covered.

### Strengths

- Students appeared to be very broadly skilled and supported in the development of their professional identity.
- Feedback from students is directly taken into account.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- A hindering factor is that the students also need to work. This affects the submission of required school work when due. We recommend to be flexible on submission deadlines according to the students' diverse working backgrounds.
- Students expressed a need for more internationalization at home. We recommend to offer more opportunities for language learning, English language courses and virtual mobility based on common courses and/or projects with international university partners.

- For other student mobility, for example internships abroad, students as well as employers recommended to make better use of the existing partnerships at schools and integrate these in the study programme development.

### 2.3.5. Educational Sciences (MA)

#### **Study programme and study programme development**

##### Comments

The study programme is undergoing profound changes during the time of the assessment. Admission has therefore been closed for 2016 and 2017. There seem to be some major challenges in further developing the programme into an up to date, competitive study programme catering the needs of the students as well as the needs of the educational system. We appreciate that the report therefore was very open and appropriately self-reflective.

##### Strengths

- The self-evaluation report provides a profound plan to develop the programme. We see they have the vision of the future and action plan gives excellent guidelines to the future development.

##### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Core challenges in the programme have been identified and first measures have been implemented. We encourage the study programme coordinators to continue this difficult yet very promising work.
- We also recommend participatory approaches including more stakeholders in the future, as done in other study programme groups.
- The study programme has a strong theoretical focus and needs continuous development of research methodologies and other theoretical studies in order to maintain high quality scientific standards, but simultaneously the programme has to meet competences that educational experts need in society. We recommend to find a balance between these high requirements together with all partners and stakeholders of the programme.
- Foreign lecturers do not participate in the teaching directly. Students are invited to listen to international conferences. We recommend to develop more participatory approaches.

- Currently there are no learning opportunities in English in the study programme. We recommend to provide also courses and studies in English.
- Graduates and their employers' satisfaction with professional training and social competences have not been investigated. We recommend to establish systematic procedures for achieving this kind of knowledge and feedback.
- Some graduates would have liked some more specific professional preparation. We recommend to explore if and how this could be possible.
- Because of the small number of students in educational sciences in Estonia we recommend to have as much as possible cooperation with the University of Tartu.

## Resources

### Comments

The revised programme needs new resources for teaching and learning. It is important that also English learning material will be available.

### Strengths

- Tallinn University provides good resources for teaching and learning in digital environments to educational programmes.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The study programme currently being fully taught in Estonian appears to be one of the main reasons for the lack of more resources, as there is not too much teaching and research material available. We recommend to put a much bigger focus on English language teaching and learning within the new study programme.

## Teaching and learning

### Comments

### Strengths

- As indicated during the interview with students, there is a very open and practice oriented approach towards assignments during the classes (e.g. videos, essays...).

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- As indicated during the interviews, the quality and competence level of courses varies. Students were not satisfied with this variation and wanted to be clearer about the expectations and levels related to a Master's degree programme. It was also mentioned, that within some courses there was no interaction possible as too many students from different programmes had to participate. We recommend to develop the future curriculum with a strong focus on the actual competency levels required for a Master's degree programme ensuring a coherent level and content setup throughout the programme.

## **Teaching staff**

### Comments

The study programme core team appeared to be very small, but changes were made already and are expected to continue with the development of the new programme. Students were still very satisfied with the teachers' support during their studies.

### Strengths

- As indicated during the interviews, feedback regarding the supervision of students was directly taken into account and used to improve challenges identified.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- As indicated in the report as well as during the interviews, there appears to be little participation in in-house professional development. The plans on lecturers participating in new higher education didactics courses by 12/16 were not further elaborated upon during the interviews. We strongly recommend to further support lecturers in using the courses available for professional development.

## **Students**

### Comments



The students present during the visit showed general satisfaction with the study programme and the reflection supported by the programme. The more generic approach of the current study programme was emphasized as a strength that explicitly supported the students' choice. The programme still being in Estonian also showed some advantages, as there are some older students in the programme who are not capable of speaking English and would not be able to join the new programme.

### Strengths

- Very ambitious and bright students with diverse backgrounds are participating in the current programme.
- During the visit, the student were very satisfied with the open approach and the increase of knowledge. The students' expectations were met.
- School based counselling network.

### Areas of improvement and recommendations

- There appears to be no systematic review of the students' employment. We recommend to implement such a system after the revision of the study programme.
- There were no mobility numbers indicated in the report. Also the students interviewed did not use opportunities for mobility. We encourage the study programme developers to continue to work on increasing mobility with publicity and counselling. We recommend to make international mobility opportunities an integral part of the revised study programme.