

Joint Final Report

Pärnu College of the University of Tartu

Programs Assessed

5343914 Business Administration
5787216 Tourism and Hotel Management

Visit Dates

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Expert Team

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Part I

General Overview

THE ASSESSMENT OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

The Higher Education Quality Assessment Centre of Estonia has invited a team of experts to assess programs in Economics and Business Administration at the University of Tartu, Estonian Agricultural University, Pärnu College of the University of Tartu and Tallinn Technical University.

The expert team

- Prof. Heinrich Stremitzer, Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien, Austria;
- Prof. Ilkka Virtanen, University of Vaasa, Finland;
- Prof. Juris Kruminis, University of Latvia, Latvia;
- Prof. Kurt Pedersen, Aarhus School of Business, Denmark;
- Prof. Wim Meeusen, University of Antwerp, Belgium;
- Prof. Paavo Okko, Turku School of Economics and Business Administration, Finland;
- Prof. Denis Lucey, University College Cork, Ireland

The assessed programmes:

UNIVERSITY OF TARTU

6301216 *Bachelor in Social Sciences (in Economics and Business Administration)*

7301216 *Master in Economics and Business Administration*

8301200 *PhD (Economics)*

7345256 *Cultural Management*

ESTONIAN AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY

6343963 *Economics and Entrepreneurship*

6343263 *Accounting and Finance*

6343264 *Rural Entrepreneurship and Financial Management*

7343963 *Economics and Entrepreneurship*

7343263 *Accounting and Finance*

7343903 *Marketing and Management*

7343267 *Accounting and Financial Management*

7343957 *Economics and Entrepreneurship*

PÄRNU COLLEGE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TARTU

5343914 *Business Administration*

5787216 *Tourism and Hotel Management*

TALLINN TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

6345259 *Economics*

6345210 *Economics*

6343954 *Business Administration*

6343906 *Business Administration*

The programme of the visits

The assessments took place during the period March 14-21, 2004. Sunday evening 14 March, the Committee had a meeting with the member of Higher Education Quality Assessment Council and managing director of the Accreditation Centre. An outline was given of the task of the Committee and the general situation of Estonian Higher Education.

Monday 15 March and Tuesday 16 March the University of Tartu and Estonian Agricultural University were visited. Wednesday 17 March the Pärnu College of the University of Tartu was visited. Thursday 18 March the Committee visited the Tallinn Technical University.

The programme and working method

Prior to the beginning of the visits, the Committee had a general discussion about the task as seen by the Committee, about the standards, formulated by the Accreditation Centre and the frame of reference for the assessment as seen by the Committee. At the same time the self -evaluation reports were discussed.

The programmes of the visit had in general the same format:

- Meeting with the leaders/heads of the institutions
- Discussion with the writers of the self-evaluation reports
- Interviews with groups of students of the different programmes in small groups
- Interview with academic staff of the different programmes in small groups
- Interviews with important Committees
- On-site visits of facilities

During the one major part of each visit the Committee tried to assess especially the organisation of the programmes, the way the curricula had been designed, the way the quality is being assured, the qualification of the staff, the research activities and all other points the programmes had in common. The Committee formally had to report on 18 programmes.

What follows are the findings of the Team (Part II), its general recommendations (Part III), and its accreditation conclusions (Part IV). In Part II, the findings are relative to the "Requirements for accreditation of curricula of universities" and " Requirements for accreditation of curricula of institutions of applied higher education" (Approved by the regulation of the Government of the Republic of Estonia No 265 of 23 October 2003).

Part II

Findings

GENERAL FINDINGS AT THE PÄRNU COLLEGE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TARTU

Pärnu College (henceforth PC) plays the role of a change agent in relation to the local business community, as well as in relation to the region in general. The influence goes beyond business, e.g. in such areas as cultural development and demographics.

The college has a young and dedicated staff, but PC faces some difficulties recruiting sufficient faculty, particularly for the Tourist and Hotel Management specialisation where no expertise is easily available in the labour market. The difficulties are dealt with well by internal policies of upgrading young faculty members.

PC is in a period of strong growth and has ambitions of widening its academic scope, but a general warning of over-stretching its resources would be in place: the resources are currently strained and should not be watered-out.

I. MANAGEMENT OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY

1. Mission of the institution. Implementation of educational policy.

PC sees itself as a “driving force” in the regional development, and attempts to achieve this by developing such in various specialisations. The mission is reflected in the regional reception of CP while the implementation of it has a number of problems caused by the gap between ambitions and available competencies. In the medium term the tight co-operation with the University of Tartu may be a useful way to cover the gap.

2. Conformity of the curriculum with professional standard and requirements and international trends. Tasks and activities of academic unit.

The curriculum of the Business Administration program does not reflect a penetrating process of ex ante analysis. The specialisation in small business, which is emphasised in the study program, is a misnomer, as the curriculum contains a one-digit number of credit points related to SMEs. The BA program should rather be seen as a general and more conventional applied higher education one. It meets local business requirements for labour with a combination of theoretical background and hands-on experience.

The Tourism and Hotel Management program is highly specialised and particularly adapted to the business structure of the local community.

3. Curriculum council. Analysis and improvement of academic quality of curriculum

The faculty is conscious about necessary and continuous upgrading and adaptation of modules in the program. The sub-ordinance of PC to Tartu University tends to produce slow and complicated paths to adaptation of the curriculum structure. At the same time, the dependency on the university gives a security and a number of obstacles for fitting the programs to demand.

4. A supervisory system to monitor the performance of faculty and students

Questionnaires are produced for the assessment of teachers in their individual courses. There is only vague evidence that student inputs are used effectively for monitoring faculty members.

The ÕIS system appears to function well on the student assessment side.

CONCLUSION RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Instalment of a system for assessing teacher performance
2. Setting up more flexible routines for program adjustments
3. Using local business even more for defining relevant curricula

II. STUDENTS

1. Size and structure of student intake; average admission level; deficiencies of pre-university education

Student intake is increasing, but modestly so. The intake covers all of Estonia, with some emphasis on the local area. No observations were made in terms of pre-university deficiencies. In this relation knowledge of mathematics was emphasised as not constituting any problems.

2. Students' motivation, expectations, guidance, counselling services, progress level.

It appears that students were highly motivated and had high expectations to their future carriers. Teachers have fixed hours for consulting students, but a general student consultancy function has been abandoned. The communication between students and teachers seems to be free and open. The logic of the education is frequently towards practice, and this functions well.

3. Monitoring of student achievements. Study load and learning conditions.

In agreement with the opinion of the team, learning conditions were repetitively emphasised by students as being excellent. Study load appears to be suitable, and examination procedures follow international standards and rules.

4. Possibilities for student mobility and credit transfer

These rules are based on the standards of the University of Tartu and follow general rules. International mobility is low due to a lack of an internationalisation policy in the history of PC. This gap is now being filled, as an internationalisation officer has been employed and currently develops a strategy for PC internationalisation.

CONCLUSION RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In order to further increase students' motivation, internationalisation should be pushed both in studies at similar institutions as well as in organising internships abroad.
2. While study load in general appears to be reasonable, more literature in English should be employed across the topics. In the longer run some courses should be taught in English (or other languages such as Finnish).
3. Even more emphasise should be put on the link between theory and practice.

III. THE CURRICULUM

1. Curriculum conformity with requirements of the Standard of Higher Education, a professional standard and international legislation

In general curriculum corresponds to standards for applied higher education. As mentioned above, more original texts in English should be introduced – teachers and students alike were stressing this point.

2. Aims and objectives of the curriculum, their correspondence to the institution goals and educational policy and graduation requirements.

The aim and objectives of the BA program corresponds to the goals of the institution. However, graduation requests may be too weak in the sense that curriculum has not been developed in a cohesive way. Besides the periods of internships, there should be some activities uniting the very many topics that are being taught.

These reflections do not apply to the Tourism and Hotel Management program.

3. Curriculum design, accomplishment and development. The role of various structural units.

The team gets the impression that the program has been piled up by whatever the rather small academic staff is able to teach. Ideally the program should be based on integrated modules, and each module separately designed in order to fulfil the specific role it takes in the program. It might be useful to have fewer and larger subjects, and to carefully monitor the links between them. The appearance of “international business” as part of the SME specialisation, and “sales” as part of the general topics may be just one point in case.

The team has no objectives of the kind in relation of the Tourism and Hotel Management program.

Subject structure, group balance, options and diversity of curriculum.

The BA program is based on a specialisation in SMEs. However, only a few credit points relate to small businesses in particular (maybe only 2 points). The SME “specialisation” is questionable, and should be reconsidered in a not too distant future. Due to limited capacity, the total number of courses in business administration is just enough to fill the obligatory parts of the program, and “electives” are predominantly courses in languages.

4. Correspondence to international standards and labour market.

An attempt to research alumni has been undertaken, but there seems to be no systematised attempts to capture the local or national demand structure. Still, the graduates have found occupation in predominantly local companies.

The team noted students’ demand for more foreign (content) instruction as well as more theoretically based subjects as a basis for the applied subjects.

5. Intake and graduation requirements.

Follow accepted standards, guaranteed by the linkage to Tartu University.

6. Quality assurance system covering the curricula and the provision of education

This question basically covers two sub-questions,

1. Are the courses taught well?
2. Are the right (combination of) courses being offered?

The team has confidence in the quality of the teaching, but has some doubts as to the second point. Again this is based on the dependence of the Economics Faculty at the University of Tartu, as well as a lack of efficient mechanism in PC to reallocate teaching. There is some concern that more effort should be taken to organise particularly the BA program.

CONCLUSION RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A more systematic and integrated approach to curriculum construction should be adopted.
2. More English texts should be adopted in compulsory reading lists.
3. More co-operation with local business in order to shape curriculum.
4. If possible, less tight reins to the University of Tartu should be created in order to adapt the programs to the needs of PC.

IV THE EDUCATIONAL (TEACHING) PROCESS

1. Teaching methods used. Classroom and individual study organisation. Developments of teaching methods.

There is no doubt that PC is very up-date in terms of teaching methods, and that the predominantly young faculty members are quite innovative in this respect. The team finds that in spite of the students' wishes for more class teaching, the workload in the classrooms should be diminished relatively to individual learning. We at this point refer to *Lucey's Law of Teaching and Learning* (see appendix).

2. Computers and licensed software used in teaching and learning.

PC is well equipped with PCs and adopts up-date and relevant software.

3. Development of practical skills of students

The team finds that PC has invested much effort in the design of an elaborate and pedagogically useful sequence of steps in building practical skills. The "ladder" of internships gradually leads the student to more responsible functions in the companies where they work. The process is well described and documented, and a network of tight contacts is set up with the participating companies.

4. Assessment of student achievements and examination methods.

Examination procedures are in agreement with international standards and fully acceptable. While PC would be well advised to push for a slightly higher theoretical level, this should not be a threat to the overall favourable balance between theory and practice which currently exists.

CONCLUSION RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The team suggests a (gradual) reduction of classroom hours.
2. The team suggests an increased emphasis on learning and learning processes.
3. PC should re-think procedures for dealing with student complaints.

V. ORGANISATION OF STUDIES

1. Rationality of study organisation. Academic calendar.

The team has no comments. The academic calendar and the study organisation appears to be in good shape.

2. Attainability and quality of information about studies' organisation. Counselling and registration for studies and examinations.

PC has taken the necessary steps to make these points transparent. Registration timing gives teachers very short notices for planning the teaching, but is no real concern.

3. Students study loads and independent work

The construction of the program implies a gradual change of weight from theory towards practical skills over the three years. It is the understanding of the team that the total work load is rather evenly distributed over the six terms, and that "independent" and "practical" student work to some degree corresponds in the program.

4. The improvement of study organisation. Analysis of student success and failures.

PC has made major changes in 2002. The new curriculum is different from the older (diploma) one, and the two programs have a common core of subjects. The ÕIS system traces student performance, and grades are scrutinised. It is not clear to the team whether the registration gives rise to more elaborate research into this topic, but we believe that such efforts are somewhat rudimentary.

5. System for analysing and evaluating student progress, study loads and results.

The students' progress is followed in a systematic way. Students are eager to have more classes. Study loads are a topic of concern to the management and the faculty members, and a regular item on the agenda when PC and the University of Tartu negotiate.

6. Technology to register and to monitor students study results.

This functions well.

7. Co-operation relationships to organise practical training

The team finds that much effort is taken to relate students to (local) business in a positive way. This appears from the documents and procedures, and was confirmed by members of the Pärnu business community.

CONCLUSION RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.** Further reduction in class hours, but without any reduction in study load.
- 2.** Re-introduction of a student supervisor.

VI. TEACHING STAFF

Quantity, qualification and experience of academic staff and conformity to the requirements of the Institutions of Applied Higher Education Act and the Standard of Higher Education. Full-time and part-time personnel rate. Teaching workload. Sufficiency of teaching staff for curriculum accomplishment and development. Adequacy of complementary staff.

Faculty members are young and in general highly motivated. A number of them study for Master or Doctoral degrees. In general requirements are met. The teaching load is high, particularly because research funding is minimal. If given the right conditions, the teaching staff is able not only to run the programs, but also to develop it further. On this particular point special attention should be paid to the development of the more general BA program. Complementary staff appears to function efficiently and seems adequate to fulfil its functions.

Qualification enhancement. Research and other scholarly activities of academic staff.

It is obvious that the composition and youth of staff, as well as the teaching workload, has so far set tight limits for research in the college. PC takes efforts to promote the staff by way of further education. This is a way to meet future requirements in a rather adverse labour market. These efforts are highly appreciated by the young staff members.

Staff election policy and regulations. Assessment of teaching staff. Staff review arrangement.

PC faces problems of recruitment, particularly in the Tourism and Hotel Management specialisation. As mentioned, management and staff co-operates in an effort to internally recruit and develop teachers. The limited size of teaching staff has the effect that there is little overlap between teachers' teaching activities. The individual teachers feel a little "isolated". At the same time, teachers are forced by circumstances to cover a number of (related) fields, and in consequence lose the advantage of professional specialisation in one topic. Implementation of e-learning may be a way to loosen the constraints on teachers.

CONCLUSION RECOMMENDATIONS1.

1. More internal and/or external networking to break teachers "professional isolation"
2. More emphasis on teachers' competencies in curriculum development.
3. (More) e-learning to reduce constraints on teachers' time.
4. A reduction in the number of courses could be a way to a better match of staff competencies and curricula.
5. Leadership in the BA program could find inspiration in the way the Tourism and Hotel Management program is managed (knowledge sharing).

VII PRACTICAL TRAINING

The organisation of practical training.

Excellently organised – several members of the local business community expressed a high degree of satisfaction with students-in-practice.

The supervision of practical training.

Well organised, with an emphasis on reporting.

Accordance of the content of practical training with objectives and professional requirements.

A good fit.

CONCLUSION RECOMMENDATIONS

This is a strong part of the curriculum. The team has no suggestions for improvement.

VIII LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND RESOURCES

Adequacy of the number of study rooms, and amount of inventory, equipment and learning resources. Conformity with health-protection and safety requirements

PC is located in beautiful and well-kept buildings. Inventory and equipment is in a very good condition, and the learning environment is most attractive.

Adequacy of number of laboratories, training rooms and bases for practical training.

Indisputably sufficient.

Library organisation and usage. Availability of textbooks, learning materials, scientific literature, special (professional) issues. Access of students to information networks.

The library possesses a good selection of up-dated standard literature, including recent English books. There is some concern over the limited number of computers in the library with on-line search facilities.

Existence of recreational facilities and other non-educational services (food, housing, mental, medical et al). Access of students to information technology resources.

In general PC is blessed with high standards. Some students ask for sport facilities, such as a basketball field. They opt for “mens sana in corpore sano”.

Facilities for teaching staff.

Sufficient and well-equipped offices.

Internal data network and connections with non-institutional networks.

Sufficient.

Facilities to photocopy study materials

Such facilities exist. Students ask for centralised copying of study materials rather than having to do the copying individually.

Resource management efficiency and long-term development plan to improve the condition of learning environment.

Such plans exist, and appear sufficiently attractive.

CONCLUSION RECOMMENDATIONS

1. An increase of on-line search facilities in the library.
2. Setting-up of some sport facilities after consulting the student body.
3. Reconsidering of the “production procedures” of study materials.

IX. FEEDBACK AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

Existence of quality assurance system and its efficiency. Role of student feedback.

It is far from clear if students produce much feedback, and to which extent the feedback comes to use. Questionnaires are used for individual courses, but the team is not convinced that the feedback is put to use. No indicators of student influence on the composition of the curriculum. The communication between University of Tartu and PC seems a little strained. This may be an obstacle to improvements in the PC programs. The root of the problem may be a lack of understanding at the university of the nature of applied studies and the balances between theoretical subjects, applied subjects and practice that they imply.

Contacts with potential employers representatives and professional associations. Contacts with alumni. Analysis of obtained information. Investigation of public opinion about institution and study programme.

There seems to be excellent contacts with local business, the Chamber of Commerce (which is hosted at the PC premises), and with local government. PC enjoys enthusiastic backing from the local community and appears to handle relations in a competent and progressive manner.

Relationships with foreign educational institutions.

Recently a new position has been set up to handle international relations. The list of co-operative partners is quite long, but in reality the co-operation is weak. There is a strong student demand for participation in international programs, and some demand for courses in English.

CONCLUSION RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Better use of student responses.
2. Developing an active set of international partnerships based on a careful selection, of partners of co-operation as well as organisations at high levels.

Part III

Accreditation Conclusions

1. Both programs function well.
2. The BA program is advised to improve leadership.
3. New procedures for curriculum development should be considered.
4. If possible, the relationship with the University of Tartu should be developed in a way that the needs of applied students are managed better.

Part IV

Accreditation Recommendations

ADVICE ABOUT ACCREDITATION

The Committee assessed two programmes at the Pärnu College of the University of Tartu. In the opinion of the Committee the following accreditation advice is given:

5343914 Business Administration: full accreditation

5787216 Tourism and Hotel Management: full accreditation