

## **Assessment Report**

### **Lääne-Viru College (LVC)**

Institutional accreditation and assessment of  
study programme groups:  
Social Services; Business and Administration

2018

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## Introduction

Institutional accreditation is external evaluation which assesses the conformity of a University or higher education institution's management, work procedures, study and research activities and study and research environment to legislation and the goals and development plan of the higher education institution. This is feedback-based evaluation in which an international assessment committee analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the institution of higher education based on the self-assessment report of the institution and on information obtained during the assessment visit, providing recommendations for improvement and ways of implementing them. The goal of the process is to support the development of strategic management and quality culture in institutions of higher education.

Educational institutions must undergo institutional accreditation at least once every seven years based on the regulation approved by EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education [Conditions and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation](#).

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 as 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 aim of this Assessment Team was to conduct the institutional accreditation and assessment of the Study Programme Groups (SPG) of Social Services and Business and Administration at Lääne-Viru College (LVC).

The following persons formed the Assessment Team:

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<b>Britt Järvet</b>	Student member; Tallinn University; Chairperson of the Estonian Federation of Student Unions (Estonia)

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

After the preparation phase, the work of the Assessment Team in Estonia started on Monday, 14 May 2018, with an introduction to the Higher Education System as well as the assessment procedures by EKKA, the Estonian quality assurance agency for higher and vocational education. The members of the team agreed the overall questions and areas to discuss with each group during the site visit to LVC. The distribution of tasks between the members of the Assessment Team was organised and the detailed schedule of the visit agreed.

During the following days, meetings were held with the representatives of Lääne-Viru College (LVC) (Tuesday 15, Wednesday 16 and Thursday 17 May).

On Friday, May 18, 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.

The present report has 3 parts: report on institutional accreditation; report on quality assessment of Social Services SPG; report on quality assessment of Business and Administration SPG.

**Aggregated data of students by study programmes in Lääne-Viru College**

	<b>Business and Administration SPG</b>	Business Administration	Commercial Economics	Assistant Manager	Accounting	Management of Business Information Systems	<b>Social Services SPG</b> (Social Work)	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>Total number of students</b> (as of 10.11)								
2013	<b>604</b>	151	152	60	226	15	<b>246</b>	<b>850</b>
2014	<b>552</b>	153	116	58	193	32	<b>207</b>	<b>759</b>
2015	<b>628</b>	169	129	68	205	57	<b>234</b>	<b>862</b>
2016	<b>707</b>	192	136	91	222	66	<b>244</b>	<b>951</b>
2017	<b>720</b>	187	132	108	224	69	<b>228</b>	<b>948</b>
<b>Number of admitted students</b> (as of 10.11)								
2013	<b>288</b>	47	70	38	118	15	<b>78</b>	<b>366</b>
2014	<b>248</b>	51	55	36	86	20	<b>76</b>	<b>324</b>
2015	<b>307</b>	67	64	46	101	29	<b>81</b>	<b>388</b>
2016	<b>273</b>	73	45	45	88	22	<b>81</b>	<b>354</b>
2017	<b>250</b>	50	50	45	80	25	<b>70</b>	<b>320</b>
<b>Number of graduates</b>								
2013	<b>183</b>	30	43	18	92		<b>74</b>	<b>257</b>
2014	<b>216</b>	31	65	31	89		<b>81</b>	<b>297</b>
2015	<b>170</b>	37	35	29	69		<b>43</b>	<b>213</b>
2016	<b>139</b>	35	24	19	54	7	<b>49</b>	<b>188</b>
2017	<b>141</b>	25	32	16	55	13	<b>58</b>	<b>199</b>
<b>Number of dropouts</b>								
2012/2013	<b>98</b>	36	26	7	29		<b>58</b>	<b>156</b>

2013/2014	<b>86</b>	21	24	9	29	3	<b>41</b>	<b>127</b>
2014/2015	<b>76</b>	15	19	11	26	5	<b>11</b>	<b>87</b>
2015/2016	<b>62</b>	15	14	7	19	7	<b>26</b>	<b>88</b>
2016/2017	<b>103</b>	34	24	13	23	9	<b>26</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>Student mobility</b>								
2012/2013	<b>13</b>	5		3	5		<b>3</b>	<b>16</b>
2013/2014	<b>12</b>		1	4	5	2	<b>2</b>	<b>14</b>
2014/2015	<b>17</b>	10	1	2	3	1	<b>6</b>	<b>23</b>
2015/2016	<b>30</b>	4	14	7	5		<b>8</b>	<b>38</b>
2016/2017	<b>20</b>	11	7	1	1		<b>3</b>	<b>23</b>

# 1. Institutional Accreditation

## Summary of the institutional accreditation

mark with 'X'

	conforms to requirements	partially conforms to requirements	does not conform to requirements	worthy of recognition
Organisational management and performance	<b>x</b>			
Teaching and learning	<b>x</b>			
RDC		<b>x</b>		
Service to society	<b>x</b>			

### Background and Comments

Founded in 1927 and located in Mõdriku, Vinni municipality, LVC is a small state institution under the overall jurisdiction of the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research. Its stated mission is to offer students the skills and knowledge in the areas of economics, management and social affairs that they need in their life and work in order to increase their personal competitiveness and to support the development of Estonia.

LVC has **61 FTE staff** in the following positions: academic staff 22.15; support staff 14.0; administrative and other staff 24.6 positions. Thirty-eight part-time staff contribute annually approximately 2,700 sessions to academic teaching and other activity as Visiting Lecturers. In the academic year 2016-17, the College had six higher education curricula (in two study programme groups) and six vocational education curricula (in six study programme groups); from the academic year 2017-18 instruction is being delivered only in the higher education curricula. **Programmes** are mainly offered via a model of blended learning, involving periodic structured blocks of attendance on campus.

The total number of learners was 1,057 as at November 2017, of whom 948 were higher education students. The number of **higher education students** increased in 2017 by 10% to 948 students (as compared with 2015). The closure of vocational education curricula has led to a corresponding small fall in total College student numbers. The proportion of student dropouts (12.6% in 2017) is within national norms and within the planning limits established by the College for itself (objective 13% in 2017). In 2017 the international mobility of students was lower than planned at 2.4% (target 4.0%). Eighty percent of graduates work in their field of specialisation (target 72% in 2017). In 2015-2017 in-service training was provided for 1,552 people through 9,722 training hours and 1,070 hours of counselling services (psychological, debt, financial and entrepreneurial counselling). The revenues received from provision of in-service training have increased by 55% compared with 2015. The level of personal attention shown to students was greatly valued by those who met the Team and much attention is paid by the College to the quality of the overall 'student experience'.

Forty-three **applied research studies** were conducted during the last three years (including 15 commissioned by companies/agencies (the target was 14), and 60 publications were released. Thirty-five employees have undertaken various forms of further training over the same period.

The College works closely with a number of **stakeholders** including the Ministry of Education and Research (MER) and other state agencies, local municipalities, employers, professional associations, foreign partners, and graduates. Key partners include MER, the Institute for Health Development (TAI), the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (EUIF), the Association of Estonian Accountants (AEA), the Estonian Traders Association, the Estonian Assistants Society, the Estonian Social Workers Association (ESTA), the Association of Estonian Adult Educators (AEAE), the Estonian Qualifications Authority (Andras), the Federation of Estonian Student Unions (EÜL), the Town of Rakvere, Vinni Municipality, major employers of and internship companies/agencies in all of the curricula, Estonian institutions of professional higher education, and cooperation partners from abroad. During the current Development Planning period, the College has been awarded a number of civic regional awards in recognition of various successful local initiatives.

Over the 3-year period 2015-2017, the College's **budget** has declined by a cumulative 14%; there is however evidence that the College's policy of diversifying its future sources of income, particularly through external income generation, is beginning to yield results.

The main **College campus** is housed in a stunning rural manor house with adjacent buildings in spacious grounds. It is well-maintained and has been successfully adapted for teaching and student use. There is ongoing investment in **IT** to support teaching, learning and administrative processes. **Sustainability** underpins current projects relating to buildings and estate development.



### **Update on action in areas for improvement and recommendations from 2015 Institutional Accreditation panel:**

The College has responded positively to the recommendations made in the last Assessment. The three principal recommendations were:

- 1) *The College should ensure that its Development Planning process, future Development Plans, and follow-up action plans has included expansion of the various types forms of study used at the College, such as connective internships and blended learning.*

The College is well experienced in workplace-based training and is extending this model into the curricula of Accounting, Social Work, and Commercial Economics. The Operational Plan for the College outlines the steps being taken to further enhance its higher education programmes through, for example, the improvement of students' and lecturers' digital skills, the further development of e-courses and e-study objects, the making of lecture recordings and a more thorough review of Moodle use.

- 2) *It is necessary to strengthen the College's marketing and external communications because of the anticipated future drop in the numbers of potential students. Through its marketing strategy, the College must raise awareness across Estonia of the studies it offers, including blended learning.*

In 2016 the College refreshed its marketing strategy with an action plan in which it specified the communication channels by age group in order to adjust marketing activities so as to better meet the target groups' needs. The College is implementing Facebook content marketing and is planning to carry out further digital marketing campaigns in Facebook and Google.

- 3) *The College should set more ambitious goals for its employees in its Development Plan.*

Arising from the objectives set in the Development Plan, College managers have in recent years sought to engage teaching staff in acquiring more international experience. For example, staff have taken part in teaching in institutions of higher education abroad, taken part in external projects, organised (and also participated) in international weeks, etc.

The College supports its staff wishing to undertake a PhD degree and doctoral students in the study activities and in carrying out applied research.

The Team is satisfied that the College is making realistic progress with all recommendations from 2015, although more remains to be done in regard to PhD study and applied research.

The current **Self-Evaluation Report (SER)** presented a detailed picture of the College and its activities and confirmed that the College had followed up the recommendations from the last EKKA institutional review (2015) in a purposeful and co-ordinated way. Although it is a small institution, the College has a clear view of its mission and is greatly valued by stakeholders.

## **Institutional Accreditation 2018**

The Team's principal Commendations and Recommendations arising from the current assessment are summarised below.

### **Commendations:**

- The very positive regard in which the College is held by students, alumni, employers and key stakeholders. The College continues to be esteemed by its students, employers and other stakeholders in its locality and further afield. Employers benefit from the training the College provides for their employees and students have confidence that professional qualifications acquired at the College will give them an advantage in the labour market.
- An effective and inclusive style of management and a well-functioning process for all aspects of College life. The Development Plan and the Strategy are well structured, giving a good overview of plans and performance indicators. Staff and student questionnaires confirm a consistently high level of satisfaction with College management.
- The College's commitment to the adoption of information systems in both academic delivery and in administration. It has continued wisely to invest in learning and administrative technologies; Moodle appears to be used very effectively as the College learning platform; the College has also more recently developed its administrative IT systems better to support the management of the major student processes, such as admissions. It seems that the quality assurance system is implemented and is efficient.
- The College is committed to the continuous modernisation of the learning environment in support of the development of curricula and the students' needs. The College's commitment to an environmentally-friendly campus, for example through geothermal heating and use of solar energy is exemplary.
- The College implements highly effective measures to support the development of staff, including industry internships, international mobility and their participation in conferences, workshops, and RDC-related training programmes.
- The College has systematically implemented employee, student and other satisfaction surveys across all areas of its business and actively analyses and acts upon the results in a structured manner as a tool for monitoring and improving its performance.
- The College has continued successfully to develop "blended learning" – distance learning combined with intensive face-to-face tuition – and the "connective internship" model.
- There is a well-organized internship programme for all students.
- The dropout rate is lower than the average dropout rate amongst Higher Education Institutions in Estonia, which reflects that the students are well-

supported in their studies. The College is focusing on the student experience so as to deliver further improvement in the dropout rate, including: the use of a diagnostic, interview during the admission process; provision of an introduction course for all students; counselling support for students, (including legal advice) and support for those with special needs.

- Flexible study opportunities have been created for adult students. As the College is mainly training distance students this can be regarded as a profile that makes them different from other Higher Education Institutions.
- The College is to be commended for the strong presence and contribution it has in the local community and business life offering customer-oriented training. The College has achieved a very high involvement in the local community in its activities and the impact of the College compared to its resources is clearly above average in Estonia

### **Recommendations:**

- Agreement should be reached amongst the interested parties as soon as possible in regard to the possible merger of the College. Continuing uncertainty does not support robust development planning.
- Given the changes which the College is going through, continued close monitoring and control of the College budget is recommended.
- An increase in the number of lecturers with a PhD remains a top priority. The College should also aim for a higher level of publications from its academic staff and seek to involve more students in research publications (independent or co-authored with supervisor).
- The College should further review its internationalisation policy, so as to achieve further embedding and growth. Elements of the review should include:
  - further steps to encourage student and staff mobility, including the appointment of more international (non-Estonian) teaching staff;
  - more opportunities for staff to raise their competence in English, with a view to their offering more taught modules in English;
  - increased on-site teaching in English on modules/programmes attractive to international (fee paying) students;
  - reviewing the scope for joint teaching programme delivery opportunities in English with partner international HE institutions;
  - further development of student mobility, so as to involve a greater number of students. The possibilities of mobility should be promoted more amongst students. In addition, more flexible ways to take part in an exchange should be promoted because of the characteristics of the students in LVC (exchange including families, going abroad with a group, shorter exchange projects etc.).
  - in order to deliver a more profound understanding of the international competence requirements of the professions represented in the College, it is recommended that there should be more studies in English in those study programmes and wider use of English language literature and teaching. At the moment there

seems to be only one programme adopting this approach (Business and Administration).

- The College should continue and expand its benchmarking activities against comparable European HEIs for competence orientation in the design of programmes. It could make more use of scenario work and mega trend management in developing new offerings to clientele.
- The College's explicit commitment to diversifying its sources of income, primarily by expanding the volume of its applied research and by increasing the sales revenue received from in-service training and retraining and advisory services is welcomed. Further expansion of the in-service Training and Retraining Centre should be undertaken as an important regional Centre and as a source of additional revenue through offering in-service training, retraining and counselling services, providing life-long learning and counselling services for different target groups. The closure of the vocational education curricula will give some additional capacity to focus on staff research activities and also on in-service training, which should increase research revenue. This will also require some re-organisation of the College's senior management structure, as already recognised by the College. The College should consider the management structure as a whole in the light of the College's current strategies and accelerate the development of the matrix structure.
- To put a revised Research and Development strategy in place which focuses on specific areas of applied research and pursue development opportunities in RDC activities more actively and more ambitiously. The College has put in place some first moves in this direction through adoption of a priority to develop research fields in social work, commercial economics and accounting. Three subject managers have been designated who will have an important role in redesigning RDC activities taking into account the needs of the entrepreneurs and society and also to set objectives for applied research, make proposals as regards training, practical work and assignments abroad and involve experts. This should support the College in developing and implementing an urgent and vigorous strategy.
- To achieve a better understanding with local authorities and businesses based on agreements to deliver applied research work, attracting additional financial resources for the institution. The Team notes that the largest volume of applied research currently commissioned by employers has been carried out in the field of trade. The Team welcomes the model of an RD package for companies as an Assessment of Clients Service based on "Mystery Shopper method". This has then formed the basis for carrying out in-service training for the store in question. This has been supplemented by income-generating and tailor made in-service training and counselling in that field. The same model is being adopted in the field of personnel management.
- The College should consider how to achieve more focus in its popularisation activities so that scarce resources bring the highest benefit. Create a specified written model and a strategy on the division of for profit and for service courses and other training activity. Make sure there are

enough resources for the basic task of education, while increasing the volume of in-service training.

- More country-wide attention can be achieved using the College's location for example, for different events of high culture in summer time.

## 1.1. Organisational management and performance

**mark with 'X'**

<b>Area 1</b>	conforms to requirements	partially conforms to requirements	does not conform to requirements	worthy of recognition
General management	<b>x</b>			
Personnel management	<b>x</b>			
Management of financial resources and infrastructure	<b>x</b>			

### **General comments**

The College is well managed and makes good use of technology. It is well aware of the need to develop new income streams and is making progress with this strategy. The College has demonstrated well-developed HR strategies and policies and is very committed to investment in staff development. The College has taken steps to increase the number of staff with PhDs and thereby enhance its research output. The need to develop internationalisation presents the College with some challenges across most areas of its business.

There have been intermittent discussions in recent months about whether the College should merge with a cognate higher education institution. This uncertainty places a degree of 'planning blight' over the College's plans for the future; the Team would urge the parties to the discussion to reach a clear decision as soon as possible.

### **1.1.1 General Management**

#### **Requirements**

- ✓ A higher education institution has defined its role in the Estonian society.
- ✓ The development plan and the related action plans of a higher education institution arise from the concrete purposes that are built on its mission, vision and core values, and that consider the country's priorities and society's expectations.
- ✓ Key results of a higher education institution have been defined.
- ✓ The leadership of a higher education institution conducts the preparation

- and implementation of development and action plans and includes the members and other stakeholders in this work.
- ✓ Liability at all management levels has been defined and described, and it supports the achievement of institutional purposes and the coherent performance of core processes.
  - ✓ Internal and external communications of a higher education institution (including marketing and image building) are purposeful and managed.

### **Comments**

The role of the College in Estonian society has been defined in article 4 of its Statutes. **The goal of the College is to be a nationally and internationally recognised educational institution** with a contemporary learning environment that offers instruction in the areas of economics, management, entrepreneurship, services and social affairs and helps raise the population's awareness of entrepreneurship and innovation, provides lifelong learning opportunities and carries out applied research and development activities in the specialities it teaches. The Development Plan and Operational Plan are based on the results of stakeholder feedback, proposals from experts (including those by the Curriculum Councils and the Advisory Council), recommendations given by external evaluators and on comparisons with other institutes of higher education. The Development Plan takes into account national laws, regulations, strategies and standards; in the Team's view, the College has responded appropriately to these drivers.

The College's **Development Plan 2014-2018** describes the objectives, vision and mission over a five-year time frame; the current Development Plan is due to be reviewed in 2018.

*Success factors confirmed by the Team for the Development Plan include:*

- the College is the **only educational institution** in Estonia in which students can acquire professional higher education in the curricula of Commercial Economics, Business Information Systems Management, Assistant Manager training and Accounting
- although the total **number of students** has decreased (through closure of vocational education curricula in 2017), the remaining core number of HE students has increased by about 10% compared with 2015, without any reduction in entry standards. The average number of students by curriculum is 158 (objective in 2017 was 140);
- the **number of students** and graduates has been relatively stable over 2015-2017 and as such ensures the future sustainability of the College;
- 600 economics and social work specialists have entered the **labour market** and their three-year-average speciality employment was 77%
- **admission criteria** conform to the mission and objectives of the College and enhance the development of a motivated body of students;
- the **proportion of student dropouts**, which was 12.6% in 2017, was within the target maximum established (target max 13% in

2017; max 13% in 2018) and the College is putting measures in place to improve this further

- eighty percent of **graduates work** in their field of specialisation (objective 72% in 2017; 78% in 2018);
- in 2015-2017 **in-service training** was provided for 1,552 people in the amount of 9,722 training hours and 1,070 hours of counselling services (psychological, debt, financial and entrepreneurial counselling). The revenues received from in-service training have increased by 55% compared to the base year; the plan is to increase this in 2018 by a further 5%;
- in 2017 the **international mobility** of students was 2.4% (objective 4.0%) (an increase to the level of at least 4.2% in 2018) with plans to further improve this level of participation
- 43 **applied research studies** commissioned by companies/agencies were conducted during the last three years and 60 publications were released; most graduation theses are also of a practical nature, targeted at solving the problems of companies/agencies;
- The **in-service Training and Retraining Centre** has become an important regional Centre that offers in-service training, retraining and counselling services, providing life-long learning and counselling services for different target groups.
- the College is a **significant partner** for the Association of Estonian Accountants (AEA) and the Estonian Assistants Society, both in the field of employee training and the development of the field, as well as in carrying out vocational exams;
- an active member of **Estonian Rectors' Conference of Universities of Applied Sciences (RKRN)** and participation in many external assessments, including higher education quality and co-operation projects and affiliation to the sector Agreement on Good Practice in the Internationalization of Estonia's Higher Education Institutions

The **leadership and management** of the College appears to the Team to be carried out in a transparent, inclusive, democratic and purposeful way; it supports and leads members of the College and is underpinned by development planning. The drafting of the Development Plan and Operational Plan is launched by the Rector's Office and the process is managed by the Rector and the Vice Rector for Development; it is subject to widespread internal debate and consideration. The draft Development Plan and Operational Plan will be submitted to the Advisory Council and the Ministry of Education and Research for making proposals. The Development Plan will be approved by the College Council. Compliance with the Operational Plan of the development will be analysed twice a year in the Rector's Office (in January and August), in Chair meetings (in June and December) and once a year in the College Council and Advisory Council. Students (including members of the Student Council and members of Curriculum Councils) confirmed to the Team their involvement in the development planning process.

The highest collegial decision-making body of the College is the **College Council** which is elected for a term of three years. The members of the Council include:



Vice Rectors, Financial and Administrative Director, Head of Chair, lecturers (3) and student representatives (2). The Council is led by the Rector. The Rector's advisory body is the Rector's Office, which consists of the following: Vice Rectors, the Financial and Administrative Director, the Head of Chair, the Head of Academic Service, the Quality and Human Resources Manager and the Head of the Centre for In-service Training and Retraining. The advisory body of the College is the **Advisory Council**, which supports the linkage between the College and society. The Rector appoints Vice Rectors to manage different fields of activity and specifies their area of responsibility, rights and duties, and accountability. Vice-Rectors act as the Rector's substitute under authorisation of the Rector.

The **College management structure** is clearly articulated. The Rector is responsible for the general state and development of the College and the use of its funds. The structure of studies is managed by the **Vice Rector for Academic Affairs**, who ensures the conformity of academic affairs to statutes, laws and other legal acts. The position of the Vice Rector for Academic Affairs has temporarily been combined with the position of the Quality and Human Resources Manager. The delivery of programmes is managed through 'the Chair' and the academic supporting services. The Chair is a structural unit which organises the implementation and development of six curricula of higher education and six curricula of vocational education. A Chair is led by the **Head of Chair**. The leading lecturers arrange the implementation and development of curricula, cooperation with stakeholders and the work of the Curriculum Council. The **Head of Academic Service** supports delivery of high-quality academic work in the College. The Development function is headed by the **Vice Rector for Development**, whose responsibilities involve work on the Development Plan, internationalisation, external communication, cooperation relations with partners and project work. The Structure for Development is formed by the **Centre for In-Service Training and Retraining**, the library and the chair. The administrative structure is headed by the **Administration and Finance Director**, whose main tasks involve budget drafting and supervision, cost accounting.

The representative body of the students that is responsible for and organises the activities for students is the **Student Council**; the Student Council represents the students in their relations with the College, international organisations in Estonia and abroad, and agencies and individuals. The Student Council nominates student representatives to the College Council and other decision-making and advisory bodies.

The Team formed the view that the Rector provides "hands-on" and decisive leadership. **The College management is purposeful; it supports the achievement of set objectives and key results;** the Rector and other members of the management take part in and lead all College activities and working groups and implement structural amendments.

**Student recruitment publicity** is described in a **marketing strategy** that was created following the last Institutional Accreditation Report in response to the College's development requirement, and in particular intensive competition in

student recruitment in higher education and demographic trends. The College has significantly increased its use of social media.

For **internal communication**, the College uses several electronic information channels to forward information and receive documents, for example the EKIS document management system, the intranet, e-mail lists, homepages, Skype, SIS, Moodle, etc. Information is also exchanged in information hours, working group consultations, internal training, and the meetings of the chair, Rector's Office, College Council and Advisory Council. The staff and students of the College have e-mail addresses and use lists for communication. The study buildings and student homes are equipped with free-of-charge wireless internet connection and the A-block is equipped with the ability to hold video conferences. **Employee surveys** over the period 2015-2017 show increasing satisfaction with internal communication arrangements. Staff and students met by the Team confirmed their satisfaction with communication. Moodle was a particularly helpful tool from the student perspective.

### **Commendations**

- Effective and inclusive style of management and well-functioning processes for all aspects of College life.
- A commitment to maintaining a contemporary and unique learning environment, including information systems.

### **Recommendations**

- For its size the College has on paper what appears to be a rather "heavy" organizational structure. The current review of Vice-Rector and other roles and the move towards a matrix structure should be used to provide infrastructure for supporting growth in commercial activities.

## **1.1.2 Personnel Management**

### **Requirements**

- ✓ The principles and procedures for employee recruitment and development arise from the objectives of the development plan of a higher education institution, and ensure academic sustainability.
- ✓ When selecting, appointing and evaluating members of the academic staff, their past activities (teaching, RDC, student feedback, etc.) are taken into account in a balanced way.
- ✓ The principles of remuneration and motivation of employees are clearly defined, available to all employees, and implemented.
- ✓ Employee satisfaction with the management, working conditions, flow of information, etc., is regularly surveyed and the results used in improvement activities.
- ✓ Employees participate in international mobility programmes, cooperation projects, networks, etc.

✓ Employees base their activities on principles of academic ethics.

### **Comments**

The College's **HR strategy** reflects the objectives of its Development Plan. Among its academic staff, 3 have qualifications at PhD level and 84 per cent of the academic staff hold qualifications at Master's level. The average age of the academic staff is stated in the Self-Evaluation Report as 49.5 years and the average age of members of the support and administrative staff is 52.5 years. Among the academic staff, more than 50 per cent are over 50. Staff turnover is low at 6.9% over the last three years. The College employs some 35 visiting lecturers, many of whom have been essential to the development of new areas of provision. Visiting lecturers are brought into general College activities insofar as their other commitments allow and they are encouraged to participate in the staff development activities, which the College offers on the same basis as for full-time members of the academic staff. This is **commended as good practice**.

Three more lecturers are currently undertaking **doctoral studies**. The number of lecturers with PhD is slowly increasing and the College is fully committed to further increasing this number, both to improve the quality of studies and applied research (aim: 10% of the number of lecturers with PhD). **The Team would strongly encourage further progress in this area**. This will help the College to achieve enhanced levels of research and applied research and to support its capacity to teach final year degree students, supervise their dissertations and provide research and consultancy support to its stakeholders.

The College's **recruitment, interview and appointment procedures** conform to the requirements of national law and to the College Statutes. These are set out in the following documents:

- The positions and qualification requirements of College teaching staff
- The procedure for the selection of teaching staff based on competition
- The conditions and procedure for the attestation of teaching staff and the self-evaluation of teaching staff in vocational education.
- The employee recruitment and selection principles and associated processes are outlined in the College's Human Resources Policy. **In the selection of teaching staff** (also during the attestation process at least once every five years) the College operates defined policies and processes and maintains **clear remuneration principles** which are set out in the "Remuneration Regulation" The College seeks additionally to recognise different kinds of achievement through a system of non-monetary forms of recognition.

The recruitment process uses different communication channels – web homepage, national newspapers, employment portals and communication networks. The recruitment of academic staff also includes finding candidates from among successful visiting lecturers (who were given positive feedback by the students) and amongst graduates. The lecturers are selected by the College Council and other staff by a committee appointed by the Rector. The Student Council is involved in the selection of teachers - they listen to a sample lecture delivered by the candidates and present their opinion to the Rector.

**Performance appraisal interviews** are conducted with the line manager once a year; achievements are assessed objectives and activities are set for the next academic year; and training needs are agreed upon and these will be taken into account as input for the training plan.

The Team noted that the College attaches great importance to staff development and that development priorities reflected the priorities of the College Development Plan. Some 96% of academic staff undertook vocational training in 2017. The College supports the improvement of the employee's level of education by giving paid time off for learning (e.g. the teaching staff have the right to 200 paid hours for doctoral studies, 80 paid hours for self-development, different study-related costs are compensated, etc.). The teaching staff has the opportunity to take one free semester every five years for creative activities. All employees have the opportunity to have internship in companies/agencies; the process is governed by the "Procedure for the employee internship" and performance appraisal interviews.

A high proportion of the full-time permanent teaching staff have participated in **international mobility programmes**. The College has continued to invest in internationalization of its staff and that those staff who have participated in international mobility schemes bring back good practice and ideas for new developments that are benefiting the College. Eleven lecturers have had internship abroad and 15 in Estonian companies/agencies in 2015–2017. The College has acquired additional resources from different programmes (Erasmus+, Interreg, Nordplus) to increase the international mobility of employees. The College provides generic staff training relating to handling emergencies; first aid; identifying dyslexia and special needs.

The College operates **staff satisfaction surveys** across a suite of topics and across a wide range of subjects. The studies map satisfaction for example with work load, development opportunities, access to information, management and working environment. Employees are able to comment on their ratings and make proposals for improvement. The proposals are forwarded to the managers of structural units. The survey results are available on the intranet. The improvements that can be applied quickly are implemented immediately, while the activities that require more time are included in the next year's Operational Plan. Employee satisfaction with the opportunity to take part in in-service training is relatively high, and during the last three years it has been on the increase, remaining in the range of 4.00–4.60 (on a 5-point scale).

The College has agreed **core values** that the employees should adhere to. The College has defined academic malpractice and fraud, together with the requirement to follow the principles of academic ethics in the following documents:

- Human resources policy
- The College rules for the organisation of work
- Employee contracts and job descriptions.
- The graduation thesis supervisors are guided by "The Good Practice of the Supervisors and Students" (which helps to ensure adherence to the principles of academic ethics in the supervision process).

### **Commendation**

- Careful attention to staff development, including Visiting Lecturers

### **Recommendations**

- To continue to increase the number of staff with PhDs
- As part of its priority for increasing internationalisation, the College should provide more opportunities to staff to raise their competence in English with a view to offering more taught modules in English
- Consider international (non-Estonian) teaching staff

### **1.1.3 Management of financial resources and infrastructure**

#### **Requirements**

- ✓ The allocation of financial resources of a higher education institution as well as the administration and development of infrastructure are economically feasible and are based on the objectives of the development plan of an institution of higher education and national priorities (except private institutions).
- ✓ A higher education institution uses information systems that support its management and the coherent performance of its core processes.
- ✓ The working conditions of the staff, and the learning and RDC conditions of students (library, studios, workshops, laboratories, etc.) meet the needs arising from the specifics of an institution of higher education and the expectations of members.

### **Comments**

The College distributes its **funds** as required by its Statutes and by the legal framework within which it operates. In practice the main financial driver is the annual Operational Plan derived from the Development Plan. Spending decisions are also guided by the principles of nature-friendly and sustainable management. The College has invested substantially in energy-saving geothermal plant. Spending is analysed on a regular basis at the meetings of the Rector's Office and budget implementation is approved by the College Council at the end of the year. Revenue is received from different sources of financing; this helps to mitigate risk and supports fulfilment of the tasks arising from the statutes as well as the Operational Plan. Compared with 2015, budget revenue has decreased by 13.9% as state-commissioned vocational education funding is no longer provided. In 2018 the higher education budget will increase by c.2% per cent due to an improvement in College performance indicators. The allocation of EU funding was smaller in 2016 because the ESF had not yet opened its new calls for proposals. The longer-term objective is to increase sales revenue received from in-service training and retraining and advisory services annually by 5% and thereby further

to diversify sources of income against the projected final in-year loss of 20% funding following withdrawal from vocational programmes.

Overall, the Assessment Team was satisfied that the College distributed its revenues in line with its needs and the duties laid on it by law and its own Statutes. Given the changes which the College is going through, continued **close monitoring** of the College budget is recommended.

The College has continued to develop the application of **IT systems**. The ongoing adoption and enhancement of Moodle to support the learning environment of distance/blended learning was particularly valued by staff and students alike. The College Website and associated analytics were under continual development and improvement. Good use was being made of information systems such as the Student Admissions System (SAIS) for admissions and a Study Information System (SIS) (due for full upgrade in 2019) to support student administration. The full capabilities of both the EKIS document management system and of the WordPress content management system are progressively being rolled out.

The Assessment Team heard from students of the College's recent investment in providing a counselling service for students; this had been greatly welcomed by the student body.

College buildings are located in Mõdriku and Rakvere: there are three academic buildings, a dormitory, a gym and auxiliary buildings in Mõdriku, and an academic and dormitory building in Rakvere that houses a student dormitory and the In-Service Training and Retraining Centre; some rooms have been leased. The total area of the College buildings is 8,607 m<sup>2</sup>, of which the area suitable for studies is 4,351 m<sup>2</sup> and the area of dormitory is 3,527 m<sup>2</sup>, which is sufficient for the implementation of all curricula, RDC activities and in-service training and retraining. The College has a modern secure IT system. The College has modern study laboratories. Student dormitories provide a total number of 350 places; the rooms in the dormitory are being renovated as resources permit. Student satisfaction with the study environment has been relatively good and the College states that it has the best library for economic and social-related literature in the region.

The College monitors the effectiveness of property use. The learning and working environments are updated according to curricula development needs, the needs of students and employees (on the basis of membership satisfaction surveys) and occupational health requirements. The proposals and comments given in feedback have been discussed at the annual meetings of the work environment council and the College Council has been submitted proposals as regards the improvement of study and work environment.

The Team accepts that the College manages its buildings and facilities to ensure that they fit with its educational and other objectives and that staff and students are satisfied with the learning environment that the College provides. Student satisfaction survey for 2017 shows a score of 3.5 and above (4-point scale) for five core aspects of the study environment.

### **Commendations**

- The College's explicit commitment to diversifying its sources of income, primarily by expanding the volume of its applied research and by increasing the sales revenue received from in-service training and retraining and advisory services
- The continuous modernisation of the learning environment in support of the development of curricula and the students' needs
- The College's commitment to the adoption of information systems in both academic delivery and in administration
- The College's commitment to an environment-friendly campus, through for example geothermal heating and use of solar energy

### **Recommendations**

- The College should consider significant further expansion of the in-service Training and Retraining Centre as an important regional Centre and as a source of additional revenue through offering in-service training, retraining and counselling services, providing life-long learning and counselling services for different target groups.
- Given the changes which the College is going through continued close monitoring of the College budget is recommended.

## 1.2. Teaching and learning

**mark with 'X'**

<b>Area 2</b>	conforms to requirements	partially conforms to requirements	does not conform to requirements	worthy of recognition
Effectiveness of teaching and learning, and formation of the student body	<b>x</b>			
Study programme development	<b>x</b>			
Student academic progress and student assessment	<b>x</b>			
Support processes for learning	<b>x</b>			

### **General comments**

The areas for improvement and recommendations from the 2015 Institutional Accreditation have been taken seriously and the changes and improvements have yielded results: as the College has chosen now to concentrate on higher education, the academic education and the learning outcomes and assessment tasks are now clearly linked to the Descriptor for Level 6 of the Estonian Qualifications Framework and the requirements of the Standard of Higher Education. The admissions procedures for applicants seeking to enter the College through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) have been corrected.



### **1.2.1 Effectiveness of teaching and learning, and formation of the student body**

#### **Requirements**

- ✓ A higher education institution has defined its educational objectives and measures their implementation.
- ✓ A higher education institution educates students so they are nationally and internationally competitive.
- ✓ The number of student places is planned in accordance with the social need and the potentials and purposes of an institution of higher education.
- ✓ The admission rules are consistent with the mission and purposes of an institution of higher education and support the formation of a motivated student body.
- ✓ Students are provided with opportunities to study at a higher education institution regardless of any special needs.

#### **Comments**

The College clearly conforms to the requirements in the area of Effectiveness of teaching and learning, and formation of the student body. in the area of Effectiveness of teaching and learning, and formation of the student body. The Lääne-Viru College's Development plan 2014-18 designed in 2014 sets out the educational objectives of the College: "The objectives of the learning activities are a continuous and sustainable curriculum development considerate of the interested parties using the best practices, including international best practices. The College as an organization is flexible and learner-centred. The graduates are competitive in the labour market and they have the prerequisites for lifelong learning." The College sets annually an implementation plan where the key results are defined. The implementation plan for 2018 is relevant and the objectives contain indicators that the College is measuring (for example employment percentage, number of trained tutors).

The study programmes of the College are based on the standard of higher education and legislation, OSKA report and on existing professional standards. In order to ensure national and international competitiveness, the College has used outside expert evaluations and curricula comparison (SER p 36). In addition to the information provided in the SER on the satisfaction of students and employers with the curriculum, during the interviews the alumni and the national and local stakeholders gave positive feedback to the College on the competitiveness of its curricula. However, it seems that the national professional standards are regarded as somewhat binding. The College could use more its autonomy to follow international developments on competency requirements and be proactive with newly arising areas that could give them and future professionals an added value. Wider international collaboration and the utilization of the English language could also support the international competitiveness of the College.

The College plans its study places based on its resources and objectives, students' employment figures and the needs of the labour market. The Assessment Team received supporting information during the site visit on the changes in the study places based on society's needs. The results of all the efforts for teaching and learning are finally 'positive': the graduation rates are high as well as the alumni employment in the area linked to the study profile.

The admission criteria are transparent and annually reviewed based on the laws as well as on feedback from the previous year. The admission of students is based on the grades achieved in secondary education, as well as on an admission test. Part of the admission test is an admission interview, that overall gives an opportunity to choose a motivated body of students. According to the SER (p 34) the average grade of the students enrolled was 4.1 in 2017 and the competition for one study place was 2.7. A SAIS admission information system is used. The College has made corrections to the admission procedures based on the feedback of the previous accreditation visit and now there are no problems with the procedures for recognition of prior learning.

Equal opportunities for studying in the College have been created for all students admitted. A counselling system has been created and the physical environment takes into account special needs. Based on the feedback from the previous accreditation, over half of the lecturers have completed training to be able to notice dyslexia and dyscalculia. The students who were interviewed confirmed that the teachers actively identify students who need assistance with their studies.

### **Commendations**

- The use of an interview during the admission process supports recognition of the student's motivation as well as language skills. It also helps to understand the base level that the student is starting with, turning more focus onto the personal development of the student.
- A counselling system has been created for students with special needs as well.
- Flexible study opportunities have been created for adult students. As the College is mainly training distance students this can be regarded as a profile that makes them different from other Higher Education Institutions. Also, the system of seven one-week contact periods per year is a best practice.

### **Recommendation**

In order to develop deeper understanding of the international competence requirements of the professions within the College's scope, it is recommended that the College benchmark against relevant European HEIs for competence orientation.

### 1.2.2 Study programme development

#### Requirements

- ✓ A higher education institution bases its new study programmes on its purposes and the needs of the labour market, and takes into account the strategies of the country and expectations of the society.
- ✓ Development activities related to study programmes are systematic and regular, and different stakeholders are involved in the development of study programmes.
- ✓ Graduate satisfaction with the quality of instruction and employer satisfaction with the quality and suitability to the requirements of the labour market of graduates are surveyed and analysed; the results are considered in the development of study programmes.

#### Comments

The College clearly conforms to the requirements in the area of Study programme development. The study programmes of Social Work as well as Study Programme Group of Business and Administration programmes are based on the standards of higher education and legislation, OSKA report and on existing professional standards. According to the SER (p 34), the most recent curriculum was launched due to the needs of the working world in 2013 (Business Information Systems Management). Curriculum Council's work is described in the SER (p 35) and the students, alumni, teachers and the stakeholders described the genuine dialogue maintained in those meetings. The College has developed all the programmes' learning outcomes to correspond to NQF level 6, based on the suggestions of institutional accreditation experts as well as competences and content of the SPG accreditation of Social Work programme and taking into account the requirements of the environment and developments in the labour market. The College seems to have paid close attention to previous accreditation comments.

In addition to the information provided in the SER on the satisfaction of students and employers with the curriculum, during interviews the alumni as well as the national and local stakeholders gave positive feedback on the competitiveness of the curricula. The site visit confirmed that the inclusion of interest groups (e.g. the employers, students and the alumni) into the development of study programmes is systematic. However, it seems that the national professional standards are regarded as somewhat binding. The College could use more its autonomy to follow the international developments on competency requirements and be proactive with new arising areas that could give them and future professionals an added value.

The College has an organized internship programme for all students, which is done with the co-operation of employers. The Internship model is their own innovation and called the connective internship model, meaning the framework of trilateral cooperation (the College, internship company and student). In addition

to that there are annual training seminars with employers and the College has trained 187 internship supervisors within the last three years. During the site visit the students expressed their great satisfaction with the organized internship programme.

The College has systematic procedures for collecting and analysing employer and student feedback on the curriculum. Concerning professional competences, the College approach is to train very practically oriented professionals with abilities to reflect. According to the SER (p 38) and based on the College graduates' 2015 general survey, the respondents are most satisfied with specialised theoretical knowledge, independent work skills and acquisition of practical skills. Concerning the generic competences, some of the new emerging competence areas have been incorporated like digitalization; however, the approach could be even more proactive as there is robotization and other more flexible platforms for student communication than Moodle or Facebook. More emphasis should be placed on English language use throughout the programmes in materials, assignments and teaching.

### **Commendation**

- There is a well-organized internship programme for all students.

### **Recommendation**

- There should be more studies in English and wider use of English language literature and teaching. At the moment there seems to be only two subjects in Business and Administration and for Social Work there is one 'stand-by' module in English '**Insight into Social Work with Children**'.

## **1.2.3 Student academic progress and student assessment**

### **Requirements**

- ✓ Student academic progress is monitored and supported.
- ✓ Student assessment supports learning and is in line with learning outcomes.
- ✓ A higher education institution has an effective system for taking account of prior learning and work experience.

### **Comments**

The College clearly conforms to the requirements in the area of student academic progress and student assessment. The College is supporting students to complete their studies within the nominal study period by means of monitoring student academic progress and supporting their progress. The monitoring is conducted by Academic Services twice a year by using SIS. In addition, the administrators and the teaching staff proactively analyse and identify possible problems and offer solutions. The Accreditation Team received confirmation from the students

interviewed about the processes and actions described in the SER. The dropout rate is lower (last year 12.6%) than the average dropout rate amongst higher education institutions in Estonia (14.6%) in 2016/17. However, Table 12 in SER shows that the average dropout rate in the College is not decreasing and the Estonian average is decreasing. The effectiveness of graduation is a bit higher than the average effectiveness of graduation of Estonian higher education institutions (LVC 53% vs Estonian average 50%).

The College describes the assessment of students in detail in the SER. The assessment criteria are transparently available for all students in Moodle. The methods described show that the College implements competence-based assessment. Also, the examples of the subjects made available for the Accreditation Team show that versatile methods are used for assessment. During the site visit, the students expressed their view that the assessment system was transparent, understandable and fair. Students generally get good qualitative feedback from lecturers, but it is not always of the same standard across all teachers. It can be concluded that in the College the student assessment supports learning and is in line with the learning outcomes of the subjects and the modules.

There is a functioning system for the recognition of prior learning that is implemented through electronic application in SIS. This ensures systematic individual procedures and documentation. Improvements to the recognition of prior learning have been made following the previous assessment. Students evaluate the process of RPL as fair and understandable. However, most of the students do not use the RPL, even though they would possess the competences, since the College is not permitted to count the subject's credits into the amount of credits studied in the academic year, which influences the student's chances of getting a scholarship or can affect the chance to study free of charge if the student does not meet the 30 ECTS requirement per semester. An administration fee is also collected on those credits that are recognized.

### **Commendation**

- The dropout rate is lower than the average dropout rate amongst Higher Education Institutions in Estonia, which reflects that the students are well-supported in their studies.

### **Recommendation**

Under the Estonian Universities Act it is stated that students should study free of charge when certain requirements have been met by the student. Thus, the administration fees for recognition of prior learning applications should be reviewed in this context.

## **1.2.4 Support processes for learning**

### **Requirements**

- ✓ The organisation of studies creates an opportunity for students to

- complete their studies within the standard period.
- ✓ A higher education institution provides students with counselling related to their studies and career.
- ✓ A higher education institution supports student international mobility.
- ✓ Modern technical and educational technology resources are used to organise educational activities.
- ✓ Students are periodically asked for feedback on learning and support processes (the organisation of studies, assessment, counselling, etc.); the results of surveys are considered in improvement activities.

### **Comments**

The College clearly conforms to the requirements in the area of support processes for learning. The College has organized the studies in different programmes so that the overall burden of academic work is evenly distributed. The weekly study load of the students is 40 hours, which consists of contact studies and independent work. Contact learning covers 50% of credit points in daytime study and at least 25% in cycle study. The studies are organized for distance studies in seven week contact periods per year to ensure the completion of study within the nominal period of study.

There is an introduction course for all students that helps the students navigate during their studies in a higher education institution. It gives the students an overall understanding about the purpose/outcome of their studies.

The student counselling services available in the College cover not only careers counselling, but also psychological and legal counselling. As most of the curricula are planned and implemented in distance mode there is also IT support available. The College has trained 34 tutors to support the new students. There is evidence of the impact of the enhanced support system for the students that is reflected in the dropout rates and the counselling system that takes into account the diversity of students.

There is a very restricted choice of subjects that are taught in English to support the international mobility of the students. Thus there is not much opportunity for international students to study in the College. The Estonian students of the College stated a wish that there should be more subjects taught in English. Both the number of international students who are incoming and the proportion of students who are going out with an exchange programme are modest. The College has strived for improvements in international mobility by joining international networks and projects.

The College has invested in the technical environment during the last years. There are modern facilities to practice skills in a Social work laboratory, as well as for accounting and marketing. The e-learning platform Moodle and new ICT software are in daily 24/7 use. The Team was happy to observe how well heritage has been respected in the historical mansion and combined with the latest technology and successfully created an excellent atmosphere for learning.

The feedback system of the College covers the learning and support processes as described in the SER. The systematic nature of its functions was supported by the alumni and students. Examples of using the results of surveys are taken into account in improvement activities were received. SIS was demonstrated during the site visit.

### **Commendations**

- The introduction course for all students which supports them very effectively in embarking on their studies.
- The College provides a needs-based legal counselling facility for students which is unusual for HEIs in Estonia. In addition, a counselling system has been created for students with special needs.

### **Recommendations**

- Make the satisfaction surveys of participants and thus the results of the surveys totally transparent by redesigning the form used and by making sure that students fully understand how to use the full range of choices contained within the rating scales.
- There should be more subjects/curricula in English to make it more open for international students.
- To continue to develop student mobility, so as to involve a greater number of students. The possibilities of mobility should be promoted more amongst students. In addition, more flexible ways to take part in an exchange should be promoted because of the characteristics of the students in LVC (exchange including families, going abroad with a group, shorter exchange projects etc).

### 1.3. Research, development and/or other creative activity

**mark with 'X'**

<b>Area 3</b>	conforms to requirements	partially conforms to requirements	does not conform to requirements	worthy of recognition
RDC effectiveness		<b>x</b>		
RDC resources and support processes		<b>x</b>		
Student research supervision	<b>x</b>			

#### **General comments**

The objectives for RDC activities are set out clearly in the Development Plan 2014–2018 of Lääne-Viru College (DP, p. 11) and specified in the Strategy for Research, Development and Creative Activities (RDC) of Lääne-Viru College in 2016-2018 (SRDC). Compared to the previous evaluation, the College has gone through extensive development and the planning of RDC activities has generally improved. However, while the list of objectives is fairly extensive, the aims lack higher ambition. For example, the primary task for membership and interested parties is to be “involved” in RDC (DP, p. 11), the area is set to “support the specialties taught at the College” (SRDC), and the College sets almost no development objectives for the existing competencies in RDC (“applied research is based on the existing competencies ...”, DP, p. 11).

The College has planned and carried out a number of activities to improve the output of RDC. For example, in the Operational Action Plan 2018, 2 seminars, 2 meetings of the task force, 8 applied research projects were performed, 10 publications, and 2 projects financed by firms are planned to be carried out.

The number of high level publications is low. According to ETIS, only three high level papers have been published by the College’s academic staff.

The College has done remarkable work in the area of student research supervision. The institution successfully includes students in research and creative activity; it systematically surveys students’ satisfaction with their supervision. Obviously, professionalism, effectiveness and workload of supervisors are reasonably balanced, which ensures the quality of graduation



theses and mini research papers and influences the positive graduation rates. Students are guided to recognize plagiarism and to avoid it using URKUD plagiarism prevention software.

### 1.3.1 RDC effectiveness

#### Requirements

- ✓ A higher education institution has defined its RDC objectives and measures their implementation.
- ✓ A higher education institution monitors the needs of society and the labour market and considers them in planning its RDC activities.

#### Comments

The College has drawn up a strategy for RDC activities [Development Plan 2014 – 2018 of Lääne-Viru College, Strategy for Research, Development and Creative Activities (RDC) of Lääne-Viru College in 2016-2018]. Also, an Operational Action Plan for 2018 has been put in place. The plans look realistic, with enough ambition to improve many shortcomings observed in 2015 and serious initiatives have been taken (stimuli to PhD, international platforms, publications, library). However, there is still a way to go to achieve the level that would fully comply with the requirements.

Objectives are set with not high enough ambition even when the low level of financing is taken into account. First, the membership is expected to be only “involved” in development activities and applied research. Second, in the Strategy the main aims are “to support the development of specialties”, to take part in ... networks” and “to support the professional development of members”. No research-related objectives have been set, except in the development plan, where the aim for the College is “to become a centre of competencies in the field of social work, nursing, accountancy and commerce”. The aim to improve cooperation with companies, schools and universities will influence the development of RDC in future, if fulfilled.

The Operational Action Plan 2018 gives an overview of improvement activities: 2 seminars, 2 meetings of the task force, 8 applied research projects planned to be performed, 10 publications, 2 projects financed by firms. Expected results in the development plan (p. 12) support this direction of development: eight research papers and ten publications per year, at least 30 research papers in cooperation with employers and professional bodies. The number of international cooperation and applied research projects is in correlation with the resources of the College. All this will most probably enhance the RDC activities in the College.

However, the existing level of publications needs to be improved. The academic staff of the College have only 2 high level ETIS 1.1 publications (WoS or Scopus) and only one ETIS 1.2 publication (international pre-reviewed). No papers in the

classes 2.1 and 3.1 have been published. Despite the fact that the overall number of publications has increased, extensive work remains to be done to improve the level of publications.

### **Commendations**

- There has been a noticeable shift in RDC activities since 2015 and also, the planning of RDC has been much more detailed compared to the previous evaluation
- The College has clearly defined its core activities in the 2016-2018 Strategy for Research, Development and Creative Activities of Lääne-Viru College
- The Development Plan and the Strategy are structured very well, giving a good overview of the plans, expected implementation targets and monitoring indicators.

### **Recommendations**

- As it prepares its new institutional Development Plan, including future strategy for Research, Development and Creative Activities (RDC), the College should focus more directly on specific areas of applied research, within a more focused RD strategy
- All statements in the RD Strategy should be described in a form that is measurable.
- The College should pursue development and results in RDC activities more actively and ambitiously
- More attention should be paid to the development of RDC competencies
- The College should aim for a higher level of publications from its academic staff

## **1.3.2 RDC resources and support processes**

### **Requirements**

- ✓ A higher education institution has an effective RDC support system.
- ✓ A higher education institution has financial resources needed for RDC development and a strategy that supports their acquisition.
- ✓ A higher education institution participates in different RDC networks.
- ✓ RDC infrastructure is being updated and used effectively.

## **Comments**

The College has created RDC support and a monitoring system. According to the Strategy for Research, Development and Creative Activities (RDC) of Lääne-Viru College in 2016-2018, the implementation of RDC strategy is coordinated and the main outcomes are monitored by the management and by the steering group (SER, p. 49). Responsible persons are nominated and the tasks distributed for the main areas and activities of research and development. The process itself is based on the result of the annual operating plan of the Development Plan. However, supporting curriculum development is still seen as one of the main objectives of the RDC activity.

The College takes part in various networks (including international networks), as indicated below. Networking enhances the competitiveness of programmes and ensures the quality and comparability of curricula in the fields taught by the College.

- **AGEFA PME Mobilite** (an Erasmus consortium);
- **European Association of Schools of Social Work** (social work education);
- **Council of International Fellowship** (international study and exchange);
- **Casa Mare** (advancement of social work);
- **Network for the enhancement of children's mental health policy** of the Ministry of Social Affairs;
- **MEET** (Management E-learning Experience for Training Business Administration students);
- **ETNA network** development of small and medium-sized enterprises led by women;
- **WINNET Baltic Sea Region**; (partnership with Women Resource Centres);
- **NEET** (network with Swedish entrepreneurship teachers);
- **European Accounting Association** (community of accounting scholars in Europe);
- **Euro Commerce** (national commerce federations in 31 countries);
- **IATEFL** (International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language);
- **EATE** The Estonian Association of Teachers of English;
- **RKRN** the Estonian Rectors' Conference of Universities of Applied Sciences;
- **EKEÜ**, the Estonian Association for Advancement of Vocational Education;
- **EURASHE** the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education;
- **TET** A network of health-promoting workplaces in Estonia;
- **Project "Regional initiatives to improve employment and entrepreneurship"**, Local project to improve young people's entrepreneurship skills.

Many of these links contribute effectively to curriculum development and other activity, but in its SER the College itself accepts that expertise acquired in networks could be applied to a greater extent in the planning and conducting of applied research.

RDC activities are financed by at least 8% from the College cost budget. The main sources are state budget funds and income from economic activities, targeted financing, including programmes and projects, and funds received from companies/institutions for applied research. A number of decisions have been made to support RDC (SER, pp. 52-53): 11.8% of working time of the teaching staff is allocated to research, the College supports doctoral and master's degree studies of employees, the College

has implemented a sabbatical system and has created an award for the best research in the year. The close ties of the College with its local and regional environment (should) make it possible to acquire assignments with sufficient financial compensation.

However, the overall level of RDC financing is still low, with too few high-level publications, and the number of academic staff with PhD still low.

### **Commendation**

- Planning and monitoring of the RDC activities has improved considerably since the previous evaluation.

### **Recommendations**

- The College should target more company-funded research on areas needing development
- The College should have ready RD packages for companies in need of research activity
- The College should cooperate with local authorities and businesses based on agreements to achieve ordered applied research work, attracting additional financial resources for the institution

### **1.3.3 Student research supervision**

#### **Requirements**

- ✓ A higher education institution includes students of all academic cycles in research, creative or project activity; and systematically surveys student satisfaction with their supervision.
- ✓ Professionalism, effectiveness and the workload of supervisors are reasonably balanced, which ensures the quality of research papers and positive graduation rates.
- ✓ Students are guided to recognize plagiarism and to avoid it.

### **Comments**

The institution successfully includes students in research and creative activity; it systematically surveys students' satisfaction with their supervision. The feedback as regards the graduation theses supervision and the defence process is quite high: on a 4-point scale the ratings are mainly above 3.5. With the goal of improving the students' research skills, the subject of Research Methodology is implemented in all curricula; however, for graduation the student may choose whether to write a graduation thesis or take a final exam.

The responsibilities of supervisors and students are regulated by the "Good Practice for Supervisor and Trainee" guide; the compilation of the graduation thesis is supported by the regularly updated document "Guidelines for Written Student Papers". In order to motivate the students to start preparing their course

papers on time, interim assessments of course papers were introduced in 2016. Striving to support application-based graduation research, the institution prepared guidelines for IT models and methods in 2017. Obviously, professionalism, effectiveness and workload of supervisors are reasonably balanced, which ensures the quality of graduation thesis and mini research papers and influences the positive graduation rates. The fact that research papers are also supervised or consulted by the representatives of the employers plays a remarkable role in the quality of students' research results.

As was mentioned in the previous SER (2015), the institution collects the best research papers and publishes them (about 10-15% of graduation theses). According to the Strategy and Development Plan supported by the Operational Action Plan 2018, students are involved in 3 research projects and the student feedback monitoring is conducted annually.

The institution pays a lot of attention to and takes care in training the supervision staff. It is noteworthy that training courses that support supervision (The Development of Lecturers' Educational Technological Competence; Student Supervision and Provision of Feedback) are organised regularly for the graduation theses supervisors. To organize students' research, the teaching staff and student cooperation network has been established as well and works quite efficiently.

Students are guided to recognize plagiarism and to avoid it using URKUND plagiarism prevention software. The quite high rate (13%) of recent graduates receiving diplomas *cum laude* proves that the institution develops students' systemic and analytic thinking and high learning competencies.

### **Commendations**

- The Estonian Rectors' Conference of Universities of Applied Sciences has been awarding an annual scholarship to the best graduation thesis and the students of LVC are usually among the winners.
- Every year students take part in the national competition for accounting-related research papers to develop accounting related themes that have an interesting or innovative approach.

### **Recommendations**

- Deliver more student research publications (independent and co-authored with supervisors)
- Attract PhD staff striving to activate combined students and teachers research activities

## 1.4. Service to the society

**mark with 'X'**

<b>Area 4</b>	conforms to requirements	partially conforms to requirements	does not conform to requirements	worthy of recognition
Popularization of its activities and involvement in social development	<b>x</b>			
In-service training and other educational activities for general public	<b>x</b>			
Other public-oriented activities	<b>x</b>			

### **General comments**

The College uses almost all means in its possession to popularize its activities. The College has acted on the previous recommendations for more active participation in marketing activities as stated in the previous accreditation. The number of media publications and articles has risen considerably. The College is systematic in its marketing activities, especially in the domestic market.

The offer of a variety of training content is secured by the clear distribution of responsibilities in the organisation's structure. In-service training is executed in accordance with the needs of the target groups. Participant satisfaction is surveyed regularly, and the achievements are analysed twice a year. The offering seems to be attractive, varied and well-coordinated with the interested stakeholders. The satisfaction of the participants with the training programmes is high and is to be commended.

The College is firmly rooted in the local and regional community, being very active in organizing events in and for the society. There were 33 academic events last year, including international weeks, lectures, courses and events for various interest groups. While this has created a large volume of goodwill and networking in the society, a proper analysis of the impact (cost/benefit) of the events might be advisable. Furthermore, it appears that the Social Work programme, while

constituting a minority of the College's students, has been overwhelmingly active in this arena, while the Business and Administration had a much smaller input.

#### **1.4.1 Popularization of its activities and involvement in social development**

##### **Requirements**

- ✓ A higher education institution has a system for popularising its core activities.
- ✓ Employees of an institution of higher education participate in the activities of professional associations, and as experts, in other social supervisory boards and decision-making bodies.

##### **Comments**

The College clearly conforms to the requirements in the area of popularization of its activities. Mainly, the popularization activities are planned and described in the Development Plan 2014-2018 of Lääne-Viru College where it sets objectives and describes activities for the area of Serving Society. The College has contributed to the community through popularization of its main activities and it has defined the marketing principles and directions to keep and promote the image and the position of the College in the Estonian academic area. The College has annually taken part in Estonian (3) and local (4) fairs and information days. Specialty promotion days have been organized and schools visited; an admissions campaign has been carried out in media and social media, concentrating on the needs of target groups. A marketing message has been defined, acknowledged by the membership and forwarded to the target groups through the means of communication media and marketing research has been carried out regularly and according to the needs. The choice of the communication media depends on the target groups.

The College has acted on the recommendations on more active participation in marketing activities stated in the previous accreditation, for example by promoting specialties to students from other schools. The number of media publications and articles has risen considerably (3 articles per year in media, 50 by employees). The College is systematic in its marketing activities, especially in the domestic market. International presence and activity is still in its first phases of development. The language versions on the College web pages, other than Estonian, are very basic and are based on giving the fundamental facts on the College only.

According to the SER, activities are planned in the Development Plan and in the Operational Plan. The College runs a special centre in Rakvere and is active through Mõdriku Arendusselts, Ettevõtlusteater and the Adult Educators Club.

### **Commendations**

- The College has achieved a very high involvement in the local community in its activities;
- The presence of the College compared to its resources is clearly above average in Estonia

### **Recommendation**

- The College should consider how to achieve more focus in its popularisation activities so that scarce resources can bring the highest benefit.

## **1.4.2 In-service training and other educational activities for general public**

### **Requirements**

- A higher education institution has defined the objectives regarding in-service training and measures their implementation.
- In-service training is planned in accordance with the needs of target groups as well as with the potentials and purposes of an institution of higher education.
- Participant satisfaction with the quality of in-service training is regularly surveyed and the results are used in planning improvement activities.

### **Comments**

The College has a Centre for In-Service Training and Retraining; its activity has risen considerably during the past 3 years (2015-2017); the number of courses realized as well as the number of participants has doubled during that period. The total sales revenue (134 720 € in 2017) is considerable, considering the size of the College. It is also worth noting that 2/3 of the academic staff participate in the training. This helps in promoting the College in the area, improves the qualifications of the staff and creates a positive contribution in the locality. This activity is also part of the College being socially responsible and an integrated part of the local community. The College has clearly defined its objectives regarding the training. It is not totally clear, though, to the Assessment Team, which part of the courses and training activity is for profit and which is serving the society *bona fide*. It is advised that the College creates a written model and a strategy on the division of for profit and for service courses and other training activity. It was not evident, whether the Training Centre is yet fully profitable.

In-service training is executed in accordance with the needs of the target groups. Participant satisfaction is surveyed regularly and the achievements are analysed twice a year. The offering seems to be attractive, varied and well-coordinated with the interested stakeholders. The satisfaction of the participants with the



training is high and is to be commended. The recommendations of the participants have also been used in developing new curricula for the College. While this is very customer-oriented, there is a threat that curricula are based predominantly or to a great extent on (individual) participant comments, not on deeper competencies nor trend management and scenario work.

### **Commendations**

- The College is to be commended for the strong presence and contribution it has in the local community and business life offering customer-oriented training.
- The College is also to be commended for the high proportion of teachers (2/3) involved in in-service training in businesses and organizations.

### **Recommendations**

- Make sure there are enough resources for the basic task of education, while increasing the volume of in-service trainings
- Create a specified written model and a strategy on the division of for profit and for service courses and other training activity
- Make the satisfaction surveys of participants and thus the results of the surveys totally transparent by redesigning the form used and removing ready-given options from the alternatives
- Take use of scenario work and mega trend management in developing new offering to the clientele.

## **1.4.3 Other public-oriented activities**

### **Requirements**

- Public-oriented activities are purposeful, the results of the activities are periodically evaluated, and improvements are introduced based on those evaluations.
- A higher education institution contributes to the enhancement of community welfare by sharing its resources (library, museums, sports facilities, etc.) and/or by organising concerts, exhibitions, performances, conferences, fairs and other events.

### **Comments**

The College clearly conforms to requirements in the field of public-oriented activities. The College and its staff is very active in professional associations and various decision-making bodies. Considering the size of the College, it could even be argued that there is need for focusing on the most relevant and useful

organizations only, making sure the use of staff on its core functions is adequate and sufficient.

An external cooperation network exists that facilitates research interaction between College and stakeholders. Also, the capabilities of the digital laboratory have been used for the benefit of the region's companies. The College is very active in organizing events in and for the society even providing the rooms for these events. There have been 33 academic events annually, international weeks, lectures, courses and events for various interest groups. 14 business plan/idea competitions have been carried out.

While this has created a large volume of goodwill and networking in the society, a proper analysis of the events might be advisable. Furthermore, it appears that the Social Work programme, while constituting a minority of the College's students, has been overwhelmingly active in this arena, while the Business and Administration has been less active. It may be possible to achieve better balance between core activities and serving society activities.

### **Commendation**

- The College clearly wants to implement an open-door policy and deserves all credits for doing so.

### **Recommendations**

- The College should consider how to achieve more focus in its popularisation activities so that scarce resources would bring highest benefit.
- More country-wide attention can be achieved using the College's location for example, for different events of high culture in summer time.

## 2. Assessment report for SPG of Social Services

### 2.1. Introduction

The study programme group of Social Services in LVC includes one professional higher education programme – Social Work – which was launched in September 2001. The nominal period of study is 3 years. *(See above for statistical data about the study programme)*

All European countries pass through profound socio-economic and socio-cultural changes. Due to processes such as individualization, ageing, migration and liberalization of the labour market, new social inequalities arise, causing individuals and groups to get into difficulty. Opposing interests and poverty, discrimination, loneliness and alienation often are the result.

The Team is well aware that these historical processes of a changing society will have their own characteristic dynamics in the Estonian context. These dynamics determine the circumstances in which Social Workers must practise their profession and Institutions of Higher Education have to offer adequate training to new generations of social work professionals.

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

The SPG of Social Services at LVC was last assessed in 2015, together with the SPGs of Social Sciences at the Universities of Tallinn and Tartu.

As a general comment on the SPGs of Social Services at all three institutions, the assessment report stated at the time that:

"... a stronger emphasis on theoretical training would make students more analytically accessible to approach not only social problems as they appear. That, we believe, will also give students a more firm and coherent social work identity."  
(Assessment Report 2015, p.4)

In line with this more general advice, the following recommendation was made more specifically to the College LVC: "... to give more weight to contextual and theoretical definition of social work." (Assessment Report 2015, p.51) and to "strengthen the theoretical foundations of social work in the development of the programme." (Assessment Report 2015, p.53)

The College has taken these recommendations very seriously and immediately started with actions for improvement. It is with pleasure that the Team has been able to observe that subsequently significant progress has been made in all relevant areas.

### **Summary of Strengths**

- The programme comprises strong core modules that safeguard the professional training of social workers at a higher professional level. The content of the core modules provides a solid theoretical foundation for a more generic profile of the social worker.
- The curriculum is coherent and has an adequate link between theory and practice throughout the programme /curriculum. The content of the modules in the curriculum has been designed in such a way that the formulated learning outcomes can be achieved within the nominal study period.
- The practical training of the students is structured by a model of 'Connective Internship' in which the various responsibilities of the student, the supervisor of the internship institution and the supervisor of the College, are clearly defined.
- The College seeks to adjust the content of the curriculum to reflect developments in society.
- The College has a very active and well-structured policy towards the integration of feedback from the different stakeholders involved.
- Despite the limited number of international contacts, the College is receptive to opportunities for working with more international partners.
- The housing of the staff is organized in such a way that the lecturers who have to consult regularly with each other, are actually at close distance to each other.
- The College offers a skills-lab for social work students where they can follow a basic training in recognizing specific needs which should be addressed to doctors or physiotherapists. Having these other professionals not directly at hand in remote places, social workers sometimes need to master additional basic skills, like first aid and ergonomics, in order to meet the immediate needs.
- The provided IT learning environment takes into account the specific needs of the social work profession, such as client registration and e-health tools and methods.
- During the meeting of the Team with the social work students, they explicitly mentioned the benefits of studying at a rural campus. Most distance learning students stay at the campus during a week seven times a year. Students stated that there is a unique atmosphere that stimulates concentration on study.
- The Team was able to observe on site that the relatively small but well-kept library with a helpful staff, has more than enough copies of textbooks that are used as compulsory literature. Furthermore, the most important titles from the current international social work literature are present plus on-line access to important journals such as the European Journal of Social Work.
- The College has invested to the development of e-learning platform (Moodle) in order to facilitate distance learning. During the site visit the

Team observed Moodle and was impressed by the amount of content and learning materials available in the form of both documents and videos that was available for students. The strategic decision to invest in distance learning has made the College Social Work programme attractive for adult students and students from other regions of Estonia, as it allows the combining of work with studies.

- There is flexibility for individual planning of the study pathway.
- The programme links module-content to internships.
- The programme provides attractive cross-connections with the Business programme, as in the case of 'social entrepreneurship'.
- The College has drawn up clear and reasonable procedures for academic misconduct and RPL, of which social work students confirmed they were aware.
- The staff of social work consists of well-motivated and qualified professionals. Staff are accessible and highly appreciated by the students. Students appreciate the academic qualities of the staff. Students highly appreciate the personal attention and level of feedback they receive from the lecturers.
- Staff members keep up their teaching and practical qualifications by participating in (international) seminars and practical internships. The College management encourages and facilitates these initiatives. The performance of lecturers is being rewarded in accordance with a clear and well-accepted regulation of remuneration. (Appendix 7, SER p.100)
- The College is able to attract a specific group of social work students who make a focused choice because of the reputation and unique atmosphere of this institution. Very motivated students with realistic and nuanced ideas about the profession of social worker. Students feel a strong relationship with the College. Students and alumni express high satisfaction about the content of the social work programme and the personalized approach by the staff.
- Students have different options for participation in international activities, although the level of participation could be improved.

### **Summary of Areas of improvement and recommendations**

- It is recommended that in the programme of social work more clarity and uniformity is used in the terminology for describing the different elements of the programme. The terms 'modules - courses - subjects' now seem to be used interchangeably. It appears to the Team that currently where the programme speaks about modules, there could be greater clarity in describing how the subjects are interlinked in the modules. The Team suggests adoption of element descriptors more in line with internationally accepted concepts. This is an issue of presentation rather than of content.
- As the College is autonomous in its programme development the Team encourages them to take a more leading role to adopt new international competences and content areas into their social work curriculum in addition to fulfilling the national requirements set in professional standard.

Its work with three international partners can help identify possible areas for development.

- The English module 'Insight into Social Work with Children', primarily developed for incoming international students, could be used more generally in order to offer all students an opportunity to practice the English language and more generally to support an institutional policy for 'internationalisation at home'. Creating an international classroom with for example video conferencing facilities, allows students who cannot participate in exchange programmes, to still have an international experience.
- The Team would suggest that the College should not only look for new international Social Work partners with similar programmes, but also for partners with different approaches to challenge their own perspective, especially with regard to the integration of applied research skills into the curriculum.
- The Team would like to encourage the College to aim at becoming a centre of expertise as the College itself already indicates as an ambition. (SER p.74) In the opinion of the Team this centre should preferably focus on Community Work as its distinctive feature. Based on the qualifications of the social work staff, the unique position of the College in the region and the strong support of external stakeholders, all the required conditions seem to be available for founding such a centre of expertise that can equip social workers with the specific knowledge and skills, needed to adequately respond to the specific needs of people in rural areas.
- Considering the uncertainty around a possible future merger, the Team has a concern regarding the sustainability of the financial resources and consequently also the resource development.
- It was not always clear to the Team why differentiated assessments are being used in certain modules, while in others non-differentiated assessments. The College has explained that differentiated assessment is used more in main modules in specialized subjects, where it is important for the students to receive more exact feedback for their performance. Non-differentiated assessment is used more in subjects where it is more important to take part of the process, to receive the experience (for example, communication skills, language studies, creative methods etc.), all internships are also assessed non-differentiatedly. Nevertheless, the Team believes that it would support transparency if the reasons for these differences were more fully explained to students.
- Some external stakeholders expressed their concern about the workload of the lecturers. The Team suggests that the management gauge this possible problem within the staff and discuss the concern in the meeting with the stakeholders.
- The team recommends staying vigilant regarding possible specific reasons for dropout for second and third year social work students.
- It is to be recommended to consult with the external stakeholders how specific obstacles for the employment of graduating daytime students could be overcome. The College is reviewing this issue.

- Students indicated in the meeting with the Team, that English language skills should be improved. They are still somewhat hesitant to speak the language. For this reason, the Team refers to its earlier recommendation about starting an international classroom.

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

### 2.3.1. Social Work (ProfHE)

#### **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.

##### **Comments**

The overall volume of the three-year programme is 180 ECTS credit points. Students have different options for participation in international activities, although the level of participation could be improved.

The Team is of the opinion that the SPG has succeeded in including all relevant reference criteria for the development of a coherent revised Social Work programme, such as: national and international professional standards, new legislation for higher education and labour market developments. In order to achieve this improved study programme, the staff have taken various actions, such as internal training on contemporary trends in social work in order to build a stronger theoretical basis. They have also made their objectives more in line with the international definition of Social Work and have integrated social work theories into the specialized modules and into the internships. (SER p.69)

The Team noted some friction between the, relatively static, national Estonian Standard for Social Work and the common European Standards as reference points for defining the relevant learning outcomes in the curriculum. Learning outcomes, being the end stage of the training, must derive their justification from the required qualifications or competences of a starting social worker in practice. In this sense, these required competences form the ultimate reference framework for setting up a curriculum.



Whilst the College is meeting national requirements, the framework could with great benefit be reviewed in accordance with professional **standards** at European level. The Team is of the opinion that an elaborated set of competences offers a more appropriate frame of reference for defining learning outcomes in a curriculum than a list of somewhat formal job descriptions. The Team understands that the College is not in the position to neglect the national Professional Standard, but suggests a consultation with social work colleagues at national and European level about this issue.

The modules, grouped as 'Basic modules' and 'Main modules', have clear learning outcomes which, according to our conversations with students, are explained further at the start of the module. The learning outcomes are relevant to the profession of social worker and are in line with the level of higher professional education.

All Social Work students follow four internships throughout the entire programme. Through these internships, students get a reasonable picture of different groups of clients that have to rely on Social Work. There is an option to undertake an extra internship in a domain of the student's own choice in the third year. The compulsory internships are preceded by theoretical modules, which include the most relevant academic disciplines. The Team concludes that as a result students go into practice with sufficient knowledge about relevant academic and social work theories. The practical component in the Social Work programme, based on the four compulsory internships, comprises 31 credits, which is equal to a total of 17% of the programme (SER p.73). If the student opts for an extra internship of 6 credits in the final year, the total of the practical component will therefore be almost 21%.

In the European debate about the profile of the social worker, the concept of the 'reflective practitioner' is often cited. Following this concept, the Team does not only emphasize the importance of theory and practice being in balance, but also that students have to be stimulated to critical thinking and self-reflection. In the meetings with students the Team observed that the students' answers showed sufficient evidence of reflection.

There are a few particular modifications which have been made to the curriculum that the Team considers as crucial for the improvement of the programme and consequently meeting the recommendations of the assessment in 2015 as well. It is stated in the SER that "in order to deepen the basic theoretical knowledge of the subject "Introduction to Social Work" (3 ECTS) was created for first year students and "Civil Society and Activation of Community" (2 ECTS) for third year students, and the volume of the subject "Social Work Theories and Methods" was increased (4 ECTS)" (SER p.70). The module 'Introduction to Social Work' offers students a first overview of the theories of social work that form the foundation of the profession. In the second year the extended module 'Social Work Theories and Methods' is a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of the theoretical and methodical foundations of social work. It is a very interesting and demanding module that is well in line with the common European debate about the profession. Also, the module about 'Civil Society and Activation of Community'

reflects the current themes in the European debate about the future of the profession. By positioning these modules as 'leading' in the programme, the SPG meets the recommendation to give the curriculum a firmer theoretical foundation and thereby offering the professional identity of the social worker a more autonomous and distinctive profile.

The Team carefully looked into the content of the core modules and spoke with the responsible lecturers during the on-site visit. Based on these explanations, the Team is confident that there is adequate expertise (one lecturer is doing a PhD-degree in an area that is meaningful for the SPG) for making this 'backbone' of the programme well secured.

The Team also concludes that, by linking the academic modules to the social work core modules mentioned above, both the coherence and the professional orientation of the curriculum have been improved.

In an additional meeting with responsible members of the staff, the Team got a good insight into how the different academic and practical perspectives come together in the module of 'Project Work' in the last year. In this module students have to identify by themselves specific social problems within Estonian society. They have already acquired knowledge on the main social problems in the years before, but in this module new types of social problems, like domestic violence or refugees, are explored in terms of analysis as well as for possible solutions. For successful completion of the module, students have to show how they have integrated theoretical knowledge, research skills and the ability to define the implications for the profession of the social worker. The Team appreciates this explorative method of studying in which different skills come together.

In order to improve the research skills of the social work students, the modules related to the theories on social work on the one hand and research methodologies on the other hand, were more closely linked (SER p.70).

Based on reviewing the formulated learning objectives, the quality of study assignments and the literature used, the Team has been able to conclude that also the academic modules meet the requirements set for level 6 of the Estonian Qualifications Framework.

One of the relevant strengths for an up-to-date programme is that the College maintains an intensive and well-structured cooperation with the practice institutions as well as with their alumni. This takes a number of forms. At least twice a year a broad consultation is held with the professionals in the field on curriculum development. Besides that, two representatives sit on the social work curriculum board. In addition to their involvement in the internships, practice organisations are also involved in supporting students with their theses and invited to thesis defence sessions. In the meeting of the Team with the stakeholders, the concept of partnership was mentioned as a key characteristic of the relationship. Alumni told the Team that on the annual alumni day, former students usually provided presentations on the most recent developments in their field. Students also indicated that the formal consultation meetings with the management are actually followed by adjustments to important issues for them.

In the interviews with the various stakeholders the Team was pleased to experience a strong unanimity in their appreciation of the educational and organizational functioning of the College.

For the benefit of curriculum development, the College has compared the curriculum with three (inter-)national partners (SER p.75). This comparison was ultimately also leading to more international activities and the creation of new modules (like: 'Social Work with Children' SER p.76) that could be used within the exchange programmes.

### **Strengths**

- The programme comprises strong core modules that safeguard the professional training of social workers at a higher professional level.
- The content of the core modules provides a solid theoretical foundation for a more generic profile of the social worker.
- The curriculum is coherent and has an adequate link between theory and practice throughout the programme /curriculum.
- The content of the modules in the curriculum has been designed in such a way that the formulated learning outcomes can be achieved within the nominal study period.
- The practical training of the students is structured by a model of 'Connective Internship' in which the various responsibilities of the student, the supervisor of the internship institution and the supervisor of the College, are clearly defined.
- The College seeks to adjust the content of the curriculum to reflect developments in society.
- The College has a very active and well-structured policy towards the integration of feedback from the different stakeholders involved.
- Despite the limited number of international contacts, the College is receptive to opportunities for working with more international partners.

### **Areas of improvement and recommendations**

- It is recommended that in the programme of social work more clarity and uniformity is used in the terminology for describing the different elements of the programme. The terms 'modules - courses - subjects' now seem to be used interchangeably. It appears to the Team that currently where the programme speaks about modules, it is in fact just a label for a group (domain) of subjects. The Team suggests adoption of element descriptors more in line with internationally accepted concepts. This is an issue of presentation rather than of content.
- As the College is autonomous in its programme development the Team encourages them to take a more leading role to adopt new international competences and content areas into their social work curriculum in addition to fulfilling the national requirements set in professional standard. Its work with its international partners can help identify possible areas for development.

- The English module 'Insight into Social Work with Children', primarily developed for incoming international students, could be used more generally in order to offer all students an opportunity to practice the English language and more generally to support an institutional policy for 'internationalisation at home'. Creating an international classroom with for example video conferencing facilities, allows students who cannot participate in exchange programmes, to still have an international experience.
- The Team would suggest that the College should not only look for new international Social Work partners with similar programmes, but also for partners with different approaches to challenge their own perspective, especially with regard to the integration of applied research skills into the curriculum.
- The Team would like to encourage the College to aim at becoming a centre of expertise as the College itself already indicates as an ambition. (SER p.74) In the opinion of the Team this centre should preferably focus on Community Work as its distinctive feature. Based on the qualifications of the social work staff, the unique position of the College in the region and the strong support of external stakeholders, all the required conditions seem to be available for founding such a centre of expertise that can equip social workers with the specific knowledge and skills, needed to adequately respond to the specific needs of people in rural areas.

## 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.

### **Comments**

The SER shows already that the College attaches great importance to offering a modern and well-equipped learning environment, which was confirmed by the visit on the premises.

The College should be complimented on its efforts to secure the buildings and the green environment for the future through sustainable investments. The quality of the environment is mentioned here once more in relation to the social work programme because the staff identifies the importance of a green environment

for the well-being of people. In line with this vision the members of the Social Work staff participate in the Nordplus programme of 'Healing Greenery'.

### **Strengths**

- The housing of the staff is organized in such a way that the lecturers who have to consult regularly with each other, are actually at close distance to each other.
- The College offers a skills-lab for social work students where they can follow a basic training in recognizing specific needs which should be addressed to doctors or physiotherapists. Having these other professionals not directly at hand in remote places, social workers sometimes need to master additional basic skills, like first aid and ergonomics, in order to meet the immediate needs.
- The provided IT learning environment takes into account the specific needs of the social work profession, such as client registration and e-health tools and methods.
- During the meeting of the Team with the social work students, they explicitly mentioned the benefits of studying at a rural campus. Most distance learning students stay at the campus during a week seven times a year. Students stated that there is a unique atmosphere that stimulates concentration on study.
- The Team was able to observe on site that the relatively small but well-kept library with a helpful staff, has more than enough copies of textbooks that are used as compulsory literature. Furthermore, the most important titles from the current international social work literature are present plus on-line access to important journals such as the European Journal of Social Work.
- The College has invested to the development of e-learning platform (Moodle) in order to facilitate distance learning. During the site visit the Team observed Moodle and was impressed by the amount of content and learning materials available in the form of both documents and videos that was available for students. The strategic decision to invest in distance learning has made the College SW programme attractive for adult students and students from other regions of Estonia, as it allows the combining of work with studies.

### **Area of improvement and recommendation**

- Considering the uncertainty around a possible future merger, the Team has a concern regarding the sustainability of the financial resources and consequently also the resource development.

### **Teaching and learning**

<u>Standards</u>
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- ✓ 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.

### **Comments**

The content of the modules that the Team has examined, have been thoroughly elaborated in terms of content and didactical approach and offer a reasonable opportunity for students to achieve the formulated learning outcomes effectively within the designated period. The lecturers have structural meetings about the connection of the different modules in relation to each other, both as regard the relationship between disciplines and the follow-up in time. The meeting with students confirmed that teachers are aware of the content of each other's modules and are also referring to them.

The concept of the internship is that of the 'Connective internship model'. It is a 'home-invented' model which includes a clear division of responsibilities between the student, the practice organization and the College. During the meetings with the Team, students stated that the model of the Connective internship provided sufficient clarity about what was expected of them in terms of the formulated learning outcomes.

The staff of Social Work have a flexible approach to the needs of the, mostly, distance learning students in order to prevent obstacles to the progress of study. The College offers different modules for the development of more general competences, such as language modules, communication technology, writing research papers and career-planning.

At this moment lecturers are free to decide which didactical approach they will use in their modules, with the restriction that they need approval of the leading lecturer. Leaving the value of variety unaffected, the Team recommends nevertheless making the used implicit didactical concepts (such as knowledge oriented, problem oriented, etc.) more explicit and to strive for more uniformity in order to achieve a programme with a clearer didactical concept and more transparent structure.

The Team greatly appreciates the efforts that are being made in order to find solutions for overcoming difficulties for social work students to attend contact weeks, because of commitments to family and work. Even additional housing for children plus their babysitter can be arranged. Students express their great satisfaction.

At the request of the Team, the students confirmed that the stated workload of the modules was mostly in balance with the actual workload. Students are satisfied about the feedback they receive from the lecturers. Also, with regard to the suitability of the teaching methods and active participation in lessons, students expressed their satisfaction. (Appendix 8, SER p.101)

### **Strengths**

- There is flexibility for individual planning of the study pathway.
- The programme links module-content to internships.
- The programme provides attractive cross-connections with the Business programme, as in the case of 'social entrepreneurship'.
- The College has drawn up clear and reasonable procedures for academic misconduct and RPL, of which social work students confirmed they were aware.

### **Areas of improvement and recommendations**

- It was not always clear to the Team why differentiated assessments are being used in certain modules, while in others non-differentiated assessments. It would support transparency if the reasons for these differences were explained.

### **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).
- ✓ Recognised 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.

## **Comments**

During the visit, the Team met strongly motivated lecturers who are proud of their College. The staff of social work did manifest itself as a small interconnected community with an enthusiastic and work-driven culture. Staff are involved in a number of European social work networks which support both curriculum and staff development.

The overview of the social work staff shows a group of experienced and highly qualified lecturers. There is a relatively small number of colleagues with PhD, but most have Master's level qualifications. In line with the previous Institutional Review the College has set a policy objective for social work staff to increase the number of PhDs over time. The motivation of lecturers to start a PhD study is supported by offering appropriate facilities and practical support. (SER p.28 & p.76)

The social work staff is well aware of the uncertain future for the College that already has been discussed in this report. Nevertheless, or perhaps exactly because of this, the social work staff wanted to express to the Team a deeply felt social responsibility for offering young people in this rural region the opportunity to follow higher education in the social sector. The conviction of the staff was emphatically underlined to the Team by the external stakeholders. It is feared that professionals trained at universities in the big cities, would not be sufficiently familiar with the specific culture and social needs of the rural regions of Estonia.

## **Strengths**

- The staff of social work consists of well-motivated and qualified professionals. Staff are accessible and highly appreciated by the students.
- Students appreciate the academic qualities of the staff.
- Students highly appreciate the personal attention and level of feedback they receive from the lecturers.
- Staff members keep up their teaching and practical qualifications by participating in (international) seminars and practical internships. The College management encourages and facilitates these initiatives.
- The performance of lecturers is being rewarded in accordance with a clear and well-accepted regulation of remuneration. (Appendix 7, SER p.100)



### Area of improvement and recommendation

- Some external stakeholders expressed their concern about the workload of the lecturers. The Team suggests that the management gauge this possible problem within the staff and discuss the concern in the meeting with the stakeholders.

### 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.

### Comments

The social work students the Team was able to meet, appeared to be determined young people with a focused motivation to become social workers. For the somewhat older distance students, their determined choice for social work was even more striking as they accepted the consequences of a radical turn in their professional orientation.

Although the numbers for dropout of social work students have increased during the last few years, they are still relatively low compared to the College average and certainly compared to the Estonian average. (SER p.40)

The Team has the impression that a combination of reasons leads to a very low figure for drop-out. It is not only the strongly focused motivation for social work in general, but probably also their choice for this specific institution that urges them to keep going.

Employment, after graduation, in the area of social work differs between students of the different study cycles, with one group often already working in the sector, and students of daytime studies who are just about to start their professional careers. (SER p.74)

### Strengths

- Very motivated students with realistic and nuanced ideas about the profession of social worker.

- The College is able to attract a specific group of social work students who make a focused choice because of the reputation and unique atmosphere of this institution.
- Students feel a strong relationship with the College.
- Students have different options for participation in international activities, although the level of participation could be improved.
- Students and alumni express high satisfaction about the content of the social work programme and the personalized approach by the staff.

### **Areas of improvement and recommendations**

- The team recommends staying vigilant regarding possible specific reasons for dropout for second and third year social work students, although the Team recognises that the College continues to improve the support structure it offers to students in difficulty.
- It is to be recommended to consult with the external stakeholders how specific obstacles for the employment of graduating daytime students could be overcome.
- Students indicated in the meeting with the Team, that English language skills should be improved. They are still somewhat hesitant to speak the language. For this reason, the Team refers to its earlier recommendation about starting an international classroom.

## **3. Assessment report for SPG of Business and Administration**

### **3.1. Introduction**

The study programme group Business and Administration comprises 76% of all students in the College, thus making it the major contributor to the volume of all areas of activity in the HEI. Two of the programmes are long-term developments; two of the programmes have been developed in the current decade. Four programmes are 3-year and 180 ECTS programmes, while the Business Administration programme is 3.5 years and 210 ECTS; the characteristics of this difference in length had not been immediately clear to the Assessment Team.

### **3.2. General findings and recommendations at study programme group level**

The activities of the SPG have been focussed on becoming a regional centre of expertise in the fields of accounting and trade. Based on the uniqueness of the programmes offered in the Estonian market, it should be advised to "think big" and aim for national domination in selected and specialized fields of study.

The available resources reflect the financial stability of the College. On the one hand the College has lost 16% of its annual revenue; on the other hand, it seems to compensate for this in other areas (for example ending of vocational education and increased activity in in-service training).

As a shortcoming the very uneven distribution of subject sizes (from 1 to 10, 12, and 20 ECTS credit points per subject) should be noted. This will clearly be an obstacle if the College attempts to use traditional business education subjects and to use same subjects in different programmes for efficiency purposes.

#### **Summary of Strengths**

- It is very much appreciated that there is an introductory course for Studies in the Business Administration Curriculum. It helps the students to orientate and gives an overall understanding about the purpose/outcome of their studies.
- The College provides a well-diversified portfolio of programmes in this study programme group.
- The library is constantly developing its stock of study materials, both traditional and virtual
- The subject areas are well-established and enjoy high recognition in the job arena

- Teachers use various teaching methods in varying situations.
- The procedures for recognition for prior learning have been well established and are readily in use and there is a clear process for that.
- The College is taking firm action to diminish academic fraud. This was confirmed during interviews.
- New teachers are well inducted into the community of the College, and they receive a mentor teacher partner.
- Teachers on the whole are very satisfied with their work and their ability to influence curriculum development in the subject matter.
- The teaching staff are able to use the new skills acquired in R&D and in-service training in their own career and in their own subject matter
- The overall satisfaction with the organisation of the internship by the College is quite high.
- Student feedback about teaching in the Business and Administration study programme group seems to continue to improve (comparing 2014/2015 and 2016/2017).
- The students seem to be satisfied with most actions the College takes to continuously improve teaching and student life on campus.

### **Summary of Areas of improvement and recommendations**

- The Personnel Management Internship and Seminar and Financial Reporting and Analysis Internship and Seminar programmes should have a "Contact hours/Independent work" description as well to help the students to plan their studies.
- There are very few opportunities for international students to participate in the study programme. The only subjects that seem to be in English is Development of Business Model and an Accountancy module which are part of the Electives Modules. The study opportunities with delivery in English could be widened.
- In the Personnel Management Internship and Seminar & Financial Reporting and Analysis Internship and Seminar the assessment criteria and the criteria of the internship are too vague – they state the same thing and should be more closely defined.
- It is strongly recommended that more emphasis should be placed on the desired competences to be acquired by students from these study programmes; this will allow the College to evaluate the competences and competitiveness of their graduates in the global market
- The College should make more explicit the reasons for different sizes of courses, internships and programmes and reconsider this matter in some cases.
- Consider the amount of study materials other than Estonian
- Consider the need in future for virtual classrooms and game-based material for teaching. Consider the need for Business Simulation games

- The College does not seem to have one unified learning strategy, learning philosophy, or pedagogical approach. On the other hand, this may to some extent also be considered a strength.
- The College should continue to develop its own areas of expertise and make them its 'selling points' overall. 'Be best in something, not good at everything'.
- Student (and staff) mobility is low by international standards. The College should consider increasing the amount of studies carried out with international partner schools also in the subject areas of Business and Administration. Attention should be paid to international mobility opportunities for students and to how students access related information.
- Consider increasing the amount of teaching carried out in the English language, in order to increase the competitiveness of alumni in international markets.
- The College should wherever possible ensure that teachers have teacher qualifications and industrial experience.
- Make sure the teachers are regularly updated in their areas of specialization.
- The College should reconsider the clarity of the system of the student feedback screen used when students evaluate their teachers.
- The number of dropouts has increased in the Business and Administration study programme group (SPG). An improvement strategy should be put in place to address this issue.

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

#### 3.3.1. Business Administration (ProfHE); Accounting (ProfHE); Commercial Economics (ProfHE); Assistant Manager (ProfHE); Business Information Systems Management (ProfHE)

#### **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.

## Comments

The study programmes are based on the Standard of Higher Education and on legislation, development plans, and professional standards. According to the SER (p. 77), the College has developed the programmes and programme group based on the suggestions of institutional accreditation experts and taking into account the requirements of the environment, including labour market developments and the new standards. The OSKA reports have also been one of the sources for the development. The admission procedure has been changed (the role of RPL clarified), improvements have been made in curricula, intended learning outcomes have been clarified and the curricula comply with new standards; these are the main changes.

The study programmes' development takes into account feedback from students, employers, alumni and other stakeholders. The College maintains a very tight relationship with its stakeholders. Feedback from the participants in the Team's meetings with representative groups demonstrated once more that the statements in the SER correspond to reality. Because of its short time of existence (registered in 2012), the stakeholders' influence seems to be less developed in the case of the Business Information Systems Management programme.

The Programme Councils work with relevant topics in all programmes.

### *Business Administration*

The overall size of the programme is 210 ECTS. The aims of the programme are to develop the student's lifelong learning skills, critical analysis capability, independent decision-making ability and the ability to work as a financial management specialist, personnel management specialist, and as an entrepreneur. Preconditions to achieve almost all aims set in the programme description are present except the aim connected to the entrepreneurship. The programme does not contain a separate subject on this matter (but it is included in the programme of accounting and another one in commercial economics) and the aims of modules do not mention the word. At the same time, the courses in the programme cover most of the knowledge and skills which are needed for entrepreneurial activities.

The aims and intended learning outcomes are coherent. The relative allocation for the topics supports this also. For example, the course of economics (Economic

Theory and Economic Environment) is three times bigger compared to Economic Policy; that is very suitable for such a programme. However, the economics should precede economic policy. The College could consider whether teaching financial management and personnel management as majors in the same programme is the best way to achieve their common learning outcomes. Also no financial positions are mentioned among the graduates' employment destinations, which may give a wrong impression about the programme's focus.

The programme includes practical training, the content and scope of which is based on the planned learning outcomes. The volume of internship is 56 ECTS. The materials that were provided to the Team (reports) certified that the content of the internship is planned very carefully and that the feedback to all parties is thorough.

#### *Accounting*

The overall size of the programme is 180 ECTS. The programme seems to be very focused and its objective is to form accounting specialists. Learning outcomes form a coherent set with the objective(s), and the programme is the most extensive among the 1<sup>st</sup> level accounting programmes in Estonia.

The internship volume in the programme is 40 ECTS credit points and it follows very clearly the contents of the programme, providing a very good basis for the development of students' skills. As became evident from the meetings with stakeholders and from the SER, study programme development takes into account feedback from students, employers, alumni and other stakeholders.

#### *Commercial economics*

The size of the programme is 180 ECTS credit points. The main objective of the programme is to develop specialists or managers in purchasing, sales and marketing, and it is a unique programme in Estonia. The learning outcomes and objectives are coherent with each other and with the set of courses provided in the programme. The communication module contains a set of languages that are certainly necessary in the everyday life of commercial enterprises. However, the College should reconsider the title of the programme in English, so as to better reflect possible career opportunities.

The internship volume in the programme is 31 ECTS credit points and it follows very clearly the contents of the programme providing a very good basis for the development of students' skills in customer service and sales, including the basics of management.

According to the stakeholders (including Estonian Trade Association), the study programme and its development takes into account feedback from students, employers, alumni and other stakeholders. The contacts with stakeholders are regular and topical.

#### *Assistant manager*

The overall volume of the programme is 180 ECTS credit points. The main objective is to give knowledge and skills for administrative specialists. The objectives and intended learning outcomes form a coherent base for the courses included in the programme. The College should reconsider the current rather confusing title of the programme in English (i.e. currently linked to a personal role rather than to an activity)

The internship volume in the programme is 32 ECTS credit points and it follows very clearly the contents of the programme, providing a solid basis for the development of students' skills in assisting the management and performing independent work when needed.

The study programme and its development takes into account feedback from students, employers, alumni and other stakeholders, but perhaps in a relatively less extensive way when compared to other programmes because of graduates working in very different positions and environments.

#### *Management of Business Information Systems*

The overall volume of the programme is 180 ECTS credit points. The main objective is to prepare students to work in positions involving management and development of information systems supporting business processes. Intended learning outcomes and subjects form a coherent set that provide students with targeted knowledge and skills.

The internship volume in the programme is 28 ECTS credit points, which is in compliance with requirements.

The study programme and its development takes into account feedback from students, employers, alumni and other stakeholders, but perhaps in a relatively less extensive way when compared to other programmes because of the shorter period of existence of the programme.

### **Strengths**

- It is very much appreciated that there is an introductory course for Studies in the Business Administration Curriculum. It helps the students to orientate and gives an overall understanding about the purpose/outcome of their studies.
- The College provides a well-diversified portfolio of programmes in this study programme group.

### **Areas of improvement and recommendations**

- The Personnel Management Internship and Seminar and Financial Reporting and Analysis Internship and Seminar programmes should have a "Contact hours/Independent work" description as well to help the students to plan their studies.



- There are very few opportunities for international students to participate in the study programme. The only subject that seems to be in English is Development of Business Model and it is part of the Electives Module. The study opportunities with delivery in English could be widened
- In the Personnel Management Internship and Seminar & Financial Reporting and Analysis Internship and Seminar the assessment criteria and the criteria of the internship are too vague – they state the same thing and should be more closely defined.
- It is strongly recommended that more emphasis should be placed on the desired competences to be acquired by students from these study programmes; this will allow the College to evaluate the competences and competitiveness of their graduates in the global market
- The College should make more explicit the reasons for different sizes of courses, internships and programmes and reconsider this matter in some cases.

## 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.

### **Comments**

College teaching is predominantly carried out via distance learning, which in turn diminishes the need for classrooms and the like. On the other hand, the College has to invest in IT and virtual learning opportunities. The basic (teaching) infrastructure is adequate and study materials are in good supply

According to the findings and interviews by the Assessment Team, the teaching and learning environments are up-to-date and sufficient. The SPG uses both a study laboratory of commerce and a digital laboratory in education. The physical premises are traditional, but functional and fit for the purpose. The teachers and students give positive feedback on the (use of) resources. No major deficiencies were reported.

The library is well stocked with study materials, both traditional and e-material, which are all readily available. Most of the material is still in Estonian; it might be advisable to consider the proportion of international materials, especially in the area of business studies, where English is the dominant language of research and education.

### **Strength**

- The library is constantly developing its stock of study materials, both traditional and virtual

### **Areas of improvement and recommendations**

- Consider the amount of study materials other than Estonian
- Consider the need in future for virtual classrooms and game-based material for teaching
- Consider the need for Business Simulation games

## **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.

### **Comments**

The College is a major player (in Estonia) especially in the fields of Accounting, Commercial Economics and Assistant Manager/Management Assistant education.

The alumni find employment in their own areas of specialization and receive a solid start to their career path from the College education.

The College is praised by alumni and employers on the quality of the outcome, that is, the relevance of the subject matter taught and the competencies of the alumni for the challenges in the job market.

Teachers use varying teaching methods and react to changing classroom circumstances swiftly.

Teaching, curricula and competencies were mentioned repeatedly in the SER. There are perhaps fewer references to competencies than to courses, syllabus and course content. On the one hand, it is to be commended that the College has a close ear to industry and instigates new courses when the industry so states, but if unchecked this could lead to a never-ending cycle of new courses being developed each time something interesting comes up.

The College is well-established; so are the curricula in this subject-specific area. There might be some lack of trend spotting and reacting to forthcoming major changes in society which impact on the programme as a whole; this should be kept in mind.

Practical training and internships are an integral part of the Business and Administration subject matter, which also helps to ensure the integration of theory and practice, and academic and practical parts of the curricula.

Student mobility is low (20 outgoing students in 2016-17)

### **Strengths**

- The subject areas are well-established and enjoy high recognition in the job arena
- Teachers use various teaching methods in varying situations.
- The procedures for recognition for prior learning have been well established and are readily in use and there is a clear process for that.
- The College is taking firm action to diminish academic fraud. This was confirmed during interviews.

### **Areas of improvement and recommendations**

- The College does not seem to have one unified learning strategy, learning philosophy, or pedagogical approach. On the other hand, this may to some extent also be considered a strength.
- The College should continue to develop its own areas of expertise and make them its 'selling points' overall. 'Be best in something, not good at everything'.
- Student (and staff) mobility is low by international standards. The College should consider increasing the amount of studies carried out with international partner schools also in the subject areas of Business and Administration.

- Consider increasing the amount of teaching carried out in the English language, in order to increase the competitiveness of alumni in international markets.

## 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).
- ✓ Recognised 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.

### **Comments**

Most lecturers possess proper qualifications in their field of expertise; some of them work part time in their respective field, and visiting lecturers from industry are used frequently, to ensure the up-to-date status of teaching matter. The students give very high recognition to the teaching and teachers in course evaluations.

Lecturers work closely and repeatedly with industry, also to ensure getting real-life projects and cases for the students.

Visiting, including foreign, lecturers are used frequently. The teaching staff are actively engaged in developing the curricula.

Teachers have different workloads in the sense that some teach more, some do more research and development or in-service training. Even though at times the lecturer workload might be very high, on the whole they are satisfied with their work and their own annual workload.

The College automated student feedback system defaults to the highest score. The College should reconsider the design of the student feedback system so that the default value of the interactive screen is set at zero.

### **Strengths**

- New teachers are well inducted into the community of the College, and they receive a mentor teacher partner.
- Teachers on the whole are very satisfied with their work and their ability to influence curriculum development in the subject matter.
- The teaching staff are able to use the new skills acquired in R&D and in-service training in their own career and in their own subject matter

### **Areas of improvement and recommendations**

- Make sure the teachers are regularly updated in their areas of specialization.
- The College should wherever possible ensure that teachers have teacher qualifications and industrial experience
- The College should reconsider the design of the system of the student feedback screen used when students evaluate their teachers.

### **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.

### **Comments**

The College and the SPG Business and Administration is still able to choose the most suitable and motivated candidates, since the ratio is roughly 3 applicants

for one study place. The application process seems to be robust and able to ensure that the most suitable candidates will be selected. The SPG does not use alumni or even existing students in the application process; the College might consider starting to include the student body and alumni in the process.

The Alumni of the College, overall, find it relatively easy to find employment in their respective areas of study.

The (inter)national mobility of students is low. It is advisable for the College to pay attention to increasing the opportunities it has for associating and collaborating with international companies and associations in order to test the Estonian skill set against equivalent international ones and to put Estonian expertise on the global map.

On the HEI's webpage it says "During the studies, it is possible to study abroad as part of the ERASMUS programme". It is not evident, though, how the curricula support student mobility.

Employers overall are satisfied with the competencies and the skill set of the graduating students, including the SPG Business and Administration.

It seems that students needing special attention, guidance or specified help do receive it in due time. Student counselling received positive remarks from students interviewed.

### **Strengths**

- The overall satisfaction with the organisation of the internship by the College is quite high.
- Student feedback about teaching in Business and Administration study programme group (SPG) seems to continue to improve (comparing 2014/2015 and 2016/2017).
- The students seem to be satisfied with most actions the College takes to continuously improve teaching and student life on campus.

### **Areas of improvement and recommendations**

- The number of dropouts has increased in the Business and Administration study programme group (SPG). An improvement strategy should be put in place to address this issue.
- Attention should be paid to international mobility opportunities for students and to how students access information.