

Some Reflections upon Programme Evaluations for SKVC **March-April 2014**

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Two international evaluation teams of experts met, one in March and the other in April 2014, to evaluate a total of seven study programmes. Six are at professional bachelor level and one at master degree level. The programmes evaluated are the area of business and management studies, though there are specialisms, for example, **one on tourism** and another on **hotel** and restaurant management.

The following comments are an overview and do not necessarily apply to the same extent to each programme. Two further detailed overview reports have been prepared by two separate panels, one based on four professional bachelor programmes at one institution in Vilnius and the other on two professional bachelor and one master programme at three institutions including one at Kaunas.

Positive factors to emerge are :

- The legality of the programmes and their adherence to the basic structures advocated in the Bologna Declaration.
- A commitment by the respective higher education institutions to aiming for at least satisfactory to good standards. Currently, there is variability in standards attained, though approaching good in the best cases.

- The efforts being made to link theory and practice in the curriculum in order to help prepare future graduates for the challenges and opportunities likely to be encountered in the labour market.
- The organisation of practical work experience for students is particularly relevant and is highly valued by the students and employers.
- The qualifications and experience of academic staff members are sound in the best instances, with some undertaking research and using modern teaching methodology including e-learning.
- The apparent goodwill from all stakeholders towards the study programmes and the providing institutions. Some employers are involved in the programme committees and in improving the quality and relevance.
- A recognition that the introduction of the thesis component at an early stage, supported by initial modules on undertaking research and on writing an abstract in English, assists the student in preparing for the completion of this element of the curriculum.
- In the best programmes, the Head of Department or Faculty shows strong, effective leadership necessary for supporting on-going programme development and improvement as required.

Areas for Improvement

- There appears to be a certain lack of awareness of the scope, role and functions of learning outcomes and of the need to ensure that the assessment process is designed to measure their attainment. It is essential to develop the students' creative, analytical, evaluative, problem-solving and decision-making abilities, and this goal should be reflected in the terminology used to present learning

outcomes, which should be focused and kept to a realistic number. In this context, the use of 'soft' words such as 'understand' and 'describe' is considered to be inappropriate. Links between programme aims and learning outcomes and those established at module /subject level should be readily apparent.

- The overall assessment of student learning shows the need to develop a coherent and unified policy for an entire programme. Currently, there are examples of a somewhat fragmented and variable approaches to student assessment being adopted by some individual teachers. Some assessments are scheduled late in the module leaving little time for completion.
- The extent to which students are over-assessed might be counteracted, and the learning process enhanced, by the introduction of some integrated assignments designed to test learning across more than one subject/module.
- There is evidence of over-marking by some teaching staff. The allocation of comparatively high marks should be justified by the quality of student work produced. Sometimes, high marks are awarded work containing errors and lack of source material identified.
- Mechanism such as objective testing/multiple choice questions to measure the attainment of higher-level learning outcomes is not seen as best practice.
- The potential of modern technology (including the use of business simulations) is underused in many teaching staff. The Virtual Learning Environment, Moodle, is often used by staff merely to transfer teaching material to students and not for teaching and learning; not all members of academic staff are using Moodle (or similar). MOOC is now being tested in teaching short modules/courses and should now be considered as part of Cloud Computing.
- To help guarantee academic integrity, it is essential that quality standards are reflected in the adoption and implementation of a consistent, formal anti-

plagiarism policy. This helps ensure the honesty of the vast majority of students whose work should not be undermined by the actions of a comparative few who maybe inclined to cheat.

- The importance of Study Programme Committees in helping to ensure and maintain quality and standards in programme design, development and review warrants more recognition. A similar commitment towards establishing formal communication on a regular basis between members of academic staff is also recommended.
- The quality of teaching is too variable. Too often, teaching staff fail to engage their students in their learning and fail to reflect regularly on the content and methods of teaching used. More rigour and vibrancy are suggested here. This may also help reduce drop-out rates.
- Continuing professional development (CPD), while readily advocated by the respective higher education institutions, needs encouragement and action. Some teaching is perceived as dull or boring or tired by the students. The existing stimulus could be reinforced by the introduction of agreed staff development plans for individual teachers, based upon annual training needs.
- The enhancement of teachers' teaching competence and willingness to deliver subjects/pathways in English should be given more attention, particularly for promoting the internationalisation of these business study programmes. Staff mobility needs encouragement in most programmes, as does student exchange on a regular basis. Greater proficiency in English, or other appropriate and relevant languages, would help.
- There is too often a lack of research activity, both by teaching staff and their students. More is needed in the self-evaluation reports (SER) on how research affects the programme and programme development. Information about financing research activity is also often missing from the SERs.

- The weighting of certain subjects/modules might be reviewed to ensure that sufficient emphasis, in terms of ECTS credits, is given to core programme content. Some subjects deemed to be elective or alternative might be redesigned as mandatory, in line with the overall aims and objectives of the particular degree. Some subjects are considered irrelevant to the programme and should be reviewed. A necessary emphasis on business ethics should also present across the curriculum for today's business climate.
- An excessive volume of self-study hours assigned to students, the limited teaching hours available to deliver most subjects to the level required, and the necessity to expand and update some reading material represent other aspects worthy of consideration. A concentration on fewer syllabus topics, together with a more in-depth coverage of each, is recommended in such cases.
- Although databases are widely used to support student **learning** in libraries and at home, more hard copies of current international books, journals and newspapers are required in libraries to aid student research and support teaching and learning.
- A strengthening of links with employers could help to facilitate and enhance job prospects and career development opportunities for graduates. An example of such collaboration would be the provision of opportunities for more guest lecturers, both from Lithuania and internationally. Formal business committees are a much needed requirement to support the programmes and advise on curricular development, student theses, and student placements particularly.
- Plans to introduce a systematic **Accreditation of Prior Learning/Prior Experiential Learning (APL/APEL)** policy deserve encouragement as a means of identifying cases where certain learning outcomes associated with particular subjects/modules have already been achieved by the student. **APL/APEL** might also be used to

recruit more mature students with non-standard academic qualifications to the programmes but have relevant industrial/business/management experience.

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