

EVALUATION REPORT
of
LAW PROGRAMMES IN LITHUANIA

There are eight programmes in Lithuania which were the subject of the current round of evaluation. The programmes were assessed by two international teams of experts on 24 - 28 February and 31 March – 3 April 2014. The programmes and teams were:

24 - 28 February

Programmes: European Union Business Law
a second study cycle programme leading to a Master of Law degree
Vilnius University

Lawyer
Law
an integrated study programme leading to a Master of Law and professional
qualification
Vytautas Magnus University

Law
an integrated study programme leading to a Master of Law degree
Kazimiero Simonavičiaus University

Law
a first study cycle programme leading to a professional Bachelor of Law degree
Kolping College

The Team: Dr Robert Lane (University of Edinburgh, Scotland, Team Leader)
Professor Mar Campins Eritja (Universitat de Barcelona, Catalunya)
Professor Tanel Kerikmäe (Tallinna Tehnikaülikooli õiguse, Estonia)
Dr. Raimundas Kalesnykas (International School of Law and Business,

Lithuania)
Ramūnas Kazlauskas (Advokatas, Lithuania, Social Partner)
Birutė Noreikaitė (Lithuania, Student)

The team was accompanied by Ms Eimantė Gečytė of the SKVC.

31 March – 3 April

Programmes: Law
a first study cycle programme leading to a professional Bachelor of Law degree
University of Applied Social Sciences, Klaipėda

Law

a first study cycle programme leading to a professional Bachelor of Law degree
Marijampolė College

Law

a first study cycle programme leading to a professional Bachelor of Law degree
University of Applied Social Sciences, Vilnius

Law

a first study cycle programme leading to a professional Bachelor of Law degree
Utena College

The Team: Professor Christopher Gale (University of Bradford, UK, Team Leader)
Assoc Professor Peter Gjørtler (Riga Graduate School of Law, Latvia)
Assoc Professor Francesco de Sanctis (University of Sarajevo, Bosnia &
Herzegovina)
Dr. Raimundas Kalesnykas (International School of Law and Business,
Lithuania)
Ramūnas Kazlauskas (Advokatas, Lithuania, Social Partner)
Andrius Zalitis (Lithuania, Student)

The team was accompanied by Ms Renata Grinaitė of the SKVC.

The majority of the programmes were ‘professional bachelors’ in nature, each of which had possible articulation onto ‘full’ Law degrees and then to Masters level study for those students who so aspired.

Of the eight programmes, all were given a positive evaluation. 4 study programmes were accredited for a six year period, the rest for a three year period.

This overview report has been drafted by the two team leaders, based upon the self-evaluation reports (SERs) prepared by the institutions, the interviews and discussions with staff and students during the on-site visits, and the ensuing deliberations of the visiting experts. It presents the findings of the evaluation teams under the headings suggested by the SKVC.

From the start we should like to note that each of the institutions assessed engaged seriously with the exercise. SERs were prepared thoroughly, and represented clearly the fruits of a good deal of time, care and effort. Throughout the on-site visits the institutions were welcoming, professional and courteous. Business was conducted in English. In most cases the standard of English of the participants, both staff and students, was adequate to the task or

better; where it was not, interpretation was provided by the institutions, and no communication difficulties were encountered.

We should also like to record our gratitude for the professionalism, patience and good grace afforded us in all our dealings with the SKVC.

1. Programme Aims and Learning Outcomes

The aims and learning outcomes of the programmes are shaped in some measure by legislation (the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework relating to the seventh level of the qualifications and the second cycle of studies) and the Inventory of Studies in the Field of Law, within which the institutions have some freedom of manoeuvre. Generally they set out to train justice administration and legal service professionals with a thorough and profound knowledge of law and legal regulation, including professional and ethical standards, in order to gain the analytical and critical skills necessary to work in public or private law institutions or the legal sectors generally.

Across the institutions the aims and learning outcomes were spelled out in some detail, clear and well defined. It was stressed consistently in the evaluation process, and especially in the professional bachelor's programmes, that there was an emphasis on practical learning and developing skills of an applied nature, which is wholly appropriate to such a programme, with due consideration given to academic goals. The higher degree programmes (at Vilnius and Vytautas Magnus Universities) were given accordingly significantly greater academic weighting. In varying degrees, but in all cases satisfactorily (although it could be noted that one institution was only just on the correct side of the line in the compulsory minimum law component of the programme), the programme aims and learning outcomes met the required criteria. They were clear and publicly accessible, and generally the programmes were found to deliver what they promised.

2. Curriculum Design

The design and structure of the programmes are also pre-determined in some measure by rules set out in public legislation and in university/college regulations. Generally the curriculum was set out clearly in the SERs in terms of programme requirements, course

description and weighting. The panels encountered no evidence which would seriously contradict what was described therein. Legal requirements were met across the board, and generally the syllabus were appropriate and balanced.

Particularly in the Masters programmes there was some course choice in the syllabus, but with no sacrifice of coherence. With the professional bachelors programmes this was less so, the syllabus generally narrower with a view to employment directly upon graduation. This is the strength of such programmes. But there was a slight concern encountered by one panel of this very narrowness, whether a student who, for example, was on placement with the police, would necessarily graduate with the skills required to be employed in some other area of the justice system.

At some colleges there seemed to be a will to develop, if possible, a 'professional masters' programme. This would remove the need to 'top up' the present qualification to a full law degree and one panel was led to believe that there were discussions ongoing at government level about possible development of this type of programme. Here the two panels parted company slightly. One would support such development if it were to happen. The other was more cautious: a need for such programmes, providing graduates with practical skills for lower level legal posts upon graduation, seems established. A college may be best suited to provide this type of education and training, and to seek to move into the different market, in competition with the Vilnius universities, may destroy what they are good at. This happened in the 1990s in the United Kingdom, with the rush of polytechnics to 'graduate' to university status. Given the demographics, it is not clear that there are sufficient numbers of (potential) students to maintain such a programme. This is particularly so in the provincial colleges.

There was a general acknowledgment of the attractions of 'internationalising' the programmes. To this end both panels would recommend a greater emphasis upon European and international law, whilst seeking always to maintain proper emphasis upon Lithuanian law (which could in some areas be more closely married to its – now - European context). One panel saw an advantage in having more courses taught in the medium of English; this would not only broaden the qualification of the current type of student, but also make the courses potentially more attractive to non-Lithuanian students.

3. Staff

The legal requirements as to staff qualifications/numbers were met in all cases. Generally the enthusiasm and commitment of the staff to their programmes was evident and admirable, in many cases marking a real strength of the programme, This was implicit in the panels' meetings with staff and made express by student support for them.

Most of the staff teach part-time. Many are qualified lawyers (*advocatai*) and continue to work in private practice, a few in public service posts. This brings the advantage of propinquity to 'real' law, of especial importance to the professional bachelors programmes. Certainly the students had universal praise for the involvement of practitioners - who frequently represented the social partners who form the students' ultimate employment destination. And there was equal praise for their ready availability notwithstanding professional commitments. But it can be injurious to the coherence of a given course. The institutions were urged to keep a close eye on this aspect. There is the added issue of integration of outside professionals into the life of the institution, and each was advised to take care that full time, fractional and sessional staff who teach on the programmes are fully conversant with the institution's policies and development, that for best practice there are systems in place to cope with the eventuality that a practitioner may have to postpone classes because of the very professional commitments which make them valuable to the institution. It should be emphasised that there was no indication this did not happen.

Staff evaluation was conducted regularly and taken seriously.

In some instances the panels could wish for a better publications record from some staff, although it is recognised that part-time staff in particular may have little time to devote to it. Yet it is an important aspect of the job, both for the intellectual development of the staff member and for the reputation of the institution. There was some evidence of publications in languages other than Lithuanian, and this is something which could be encouraged. The institutions were urged to encourage and make available as far as budgets and resources allow the opportunity for members of staff to pursue publication. To this end they ought also to encourage and support staff participation in international conferences.

4. Facilities and learning resources

In all cases the accommodation was spacious, bright, clean and well kept. The institutions clearly take care with the physical environment and are to be commended for it; it can only enhance the quality of programme delivery.

There was variation in the availability of teaching/study accommodation, but was in all cases at least adequate for programme delivery. All institutions boasted lecture theatres, medium-sized classrooms and a number of smallest classrooms with work places. There were a reasonable number of workstations, many with computer facility. Most auditoria had stationery multimedia equipment with the Internet connection; where they did not, portable equipment was used. Students had access to a wireless Internet network within student premises. Space was available on electronic resources to keep files in servers.

The greatest disappointment was library facilities. A library is of course core to the study of law. Each institution had some legal publications (books, journals, textbooks), most in Lithuanian and some (but not many) in other languages. But, and in some institutions more than others, holdings were disappointingly sparse and in some cases not wholly up to date. And in some the 'library' was less a library than a circulation desk. Of course the availability of legal data bases (which were in evidence) makes a law library less vital than it was. And of course budget constraints and the quickly growing cost of legal books and periodicals is a universal problem and complaint. Yet the institutions were urged to keep library (and electronic) resources under constant review and to do the best they possibly could in admittedly straightened circumstances.

5. Study process and student assessment

The quality of students admitted to the programmes ranged from reasonable to high. Admission criteria were not always clear, but where they were not the institutions seemed to be looking more seriously at the issues with a view to future planning. Some were alive to the issue of a decrease in student numbers and the threat this constitutes to the viability of a programme, which may be, and ought to be, a serious concern for some..

The student experience was in all cases a good one; few, and no serious, complaints were voiced. There was clear admiration for the staff and the support they provide. Social support through cultural, sporting and social facilities was also available. In most cases there was a tangible and healthy *esprit de corps* amongst programme participants.

Study methods include lectures, seminars and individual work. This is a blend of classical teaching methods with additional emphasis placed upon practical application of theoretical knowledge, which is appropriate to and compatible with the practical, professional orientation pursued by the programmes. Significant attention is given to individual work, which makes up a significant percentage of the course unit and is front and centre in the thesis, which appears to be a well supervised and accurately assessed exercise. In most cases assessment criteria were made clear from the beginning, and no students reported uncertainty or lack of clarity.

The level of engagement with social partners was good. Students were for the most part content in the placements they received as part of the course, with these frequently leading directly to employment upon graduation.

Student mobility was disappointing. It appears not to be greatly encouraged, and there appeared to be no great enthusiasm for it amongst the students. Yet it is perhaps neither surprising nor worthy of criticism: the masters programmes are coherent, concentrated (1-1½ years) and specialist programmes, and the professional bachelors programmes require, or at least encourage, local placements. But it is something which merits greater consideration.

6. Programme management

All institutions have in place machinery for management of the programmes, with clear lines of responsibility and delegation. Generally the systems in place were balanced, fair, transparent and robust. There was also in place machinery for monitoring programme quality.

Stakeholders (who showed up for panel sessions in good numbers and evinced strong support for the programmes), and particularly potential employers, worked closely with the institutions, fed actively into programme development, and their contribution was valued and taken seriously.

Students are consulted actively, through questionnaires and, in some cases, surveys. Results/feedback are disseminated openly, machinery is in place for response and discussion, and their input appears to be taken seriously. Student support for the programmes and the response to their concerns was high.

Conclusion

The panels encountered, and reported, a number of concerns to the institutions under review. Generally our views were favourable, in some cases very much so. We were happy to evaluate positively all of the programmes, hope that our reports will assist them in their planning and development, and wish them luck in their efforts.

Robert Lane, Edinburgh

Christopher Gale, Bradford