

Assessment of Music Programmes at Klaipeda and Siauliai Universities November 2010

Overview Report

At the invitation of the SKVC, an international panel of experts undertook an evaluation of six music programmes in November 2010, as follows:

Klaipeda University:	Folk Music	(Masters level)
	Choral Conducting	(Masters level)
	Music Pedagogy	(Bachelor level)
	Music Pedagogy	(Masters level)
Siauliai University:	Music Pedagogy	(Bachelor level)
	Music Pedagogy	(Masters level)

The evaluation of each programme took the form of reading a self-assessment and related documentation, supported by a site-visit at which panel members were able to speak with a range of academic and managerial staff, students, graduates and employers. In total, these enabled the panel to form a comprehensive view of the strengths and weaknesses of the programmes under consideration, and offered valuable insights into the role of music and music education within the institutions, and more generally, at a national level. Whilst the self-assessment documents provided a useful introduction to the institution and its programmes, the quality of the written assessments was rather variable and also, at times, repetitive. They could also be shorter and more focused. Schedules for the visits were very tightly packed, and the panel members would have welcomed more time between meetings with stakeholders for reflection and the testing of hypotheses within the group.

Lithuania is indeed fortunate to have a rich and varied musical tradition embracing not only its own indigenous folk music, but also a thriving choral culture and a tradition of music education that is highly-prized by the educators whom the panel met.

The evident pride among academics in their local and national traditions was seen as a clear strength by panel members. There is, however, a counter-balancing weakness in over-emphasis on traditions of the past and a consequent danger of ignoring developments in higher education internationally, both within the rest of Europe, and more widely. This was evident, to a degree, in both institutions visited, but particularly marked in the programmes at Klaipeda. Greater encouragement to engage with the musical, artistic and academic worlds beyond the region and beyond the nation has the potential to offer dramatic opportunities for change in programme design, content and approach that, if carefully managed alongside the strong national traditions, will offer hugely expanded scope for the employment prospects of the nation's young people in a global world of work. In this context, the relatively limited mobility of staff and students, despite the existence of EU grants to facilitate such activities, was noted by panel members. Often, language was cited as a barrier to participation. The panel found it hard to gauge the truth of this assertion.

Even a discipline such as Folk Music that, superficially, appears to be naturally 'rooted' in the national tradition, has much to offer – especially at Masters level – if contextualised within the broader international study of ethnomusicology. Such broader views were generally lacking, with the focus instead tending to the local and provincial.

Examination of the Music Pedagogy programmes inevitably raised questions about the balance between theory and practice, in both purely musical, and pedagogic

disciplines. Every nation will come to its own conclusions and will issue regulations and guidelines in these areas, and every institution will interpret the regulations and guidelines in its own unique way – and it is healthy that this should be so. Once again, it was clear to the panel that the best pedagogy programmes, such as evident in Siauliai, had the widest mix of genres and optional studies, and drew from an eclectic international approach to pedagogic method, with a predominantly younger mix of staff.

It was also clear to the panel that funding is a major issue both in terms of student support and in terms of investment in facilities and learning resources. This is as much a national issue as an institutional one, and each institution has to manage as best it can. In general, the response of staff to the financial constraints faced by their institutions, was encouraging in that there appeared to be a real commitment to their students that often overcame poor working conditions and shortage of facilities. One major exception to the generally stretched resources evident was the magnificent new library building in Siauliai whose impact went far beyond the library itself, seemingly boosting morale across the entire institution.

In terms of quality assurance and enhancement – one of the key areas where the Bologna agreement has sought to bring a more unified approach across the EU – it is clear that a good start has been made. In Siauliai in particular, there seemed to be a grasp of the main elements, and it was clear that a culture of quality awareness was being developed. This was less marked at Klaipeda. This is not to say that it was absent, but that there was little in the way of an embedded culture of quality assurance and enhancement, and a lack of a formalised, systematic approach.

A general point that emerged in the examination of programmes in Klaipeda in particular, is the low numbers of students enrolled on programmes. In many other institutions, failure to recruit strongly might lead to rationalisation of the programmes on offer. This is an area which needs to be monitored by the institution as it considers its future strategic direction.

In conclusion, the panel would like to thank the institutions visited for their hospitality and their open engagement with the process of assessment. Our thanks also go to the SKVC and especially to Daiva Buivydiene, for her invaluable help before, during and after the assessment visit to Lithuania. I would also like to thank all the members of the international assessment team for their diligence, support and professionalism at all stages in the process.

Dr Colin Beeson
[Panel Chair]

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