

ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY PROGRAMMES WHICH RECEIVED THE HIGHEST EVALUATION (For the 2010-2015 period)

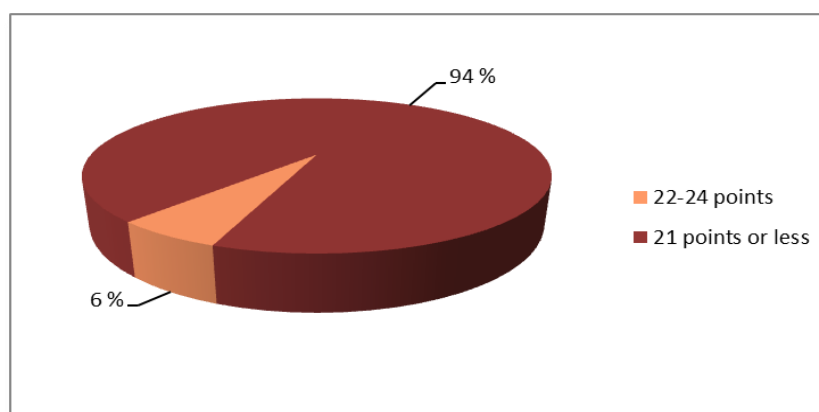
The study programmes which received the highest evaluation are the programmes which earned a total score of at least 22 points, and which were not given a score of one or two points in any given area of evaluation.

This analysis covers the 2010-2015 period and was compiled on the basis of the ongoing study programme evaluation carried out by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education.

GENERAL STATISTICAL DATA

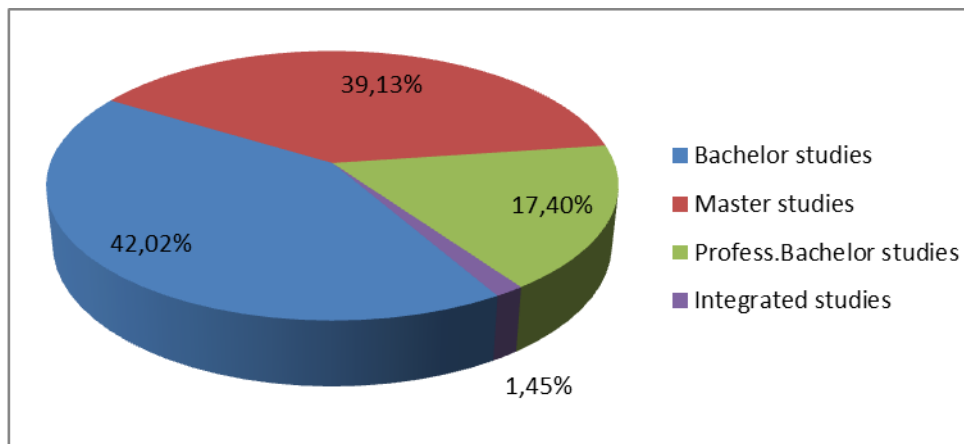
A total of 69 study programmes were evaluated during the 2010-2015 period which earned a total score of 22 points or more. The number of study programmes which received the highest evaluation accounted for six per cent of all the study programmes that were evaluated during the 2010-2015 period (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Highest rated study programmes vs other study programmes, 2010-2015.



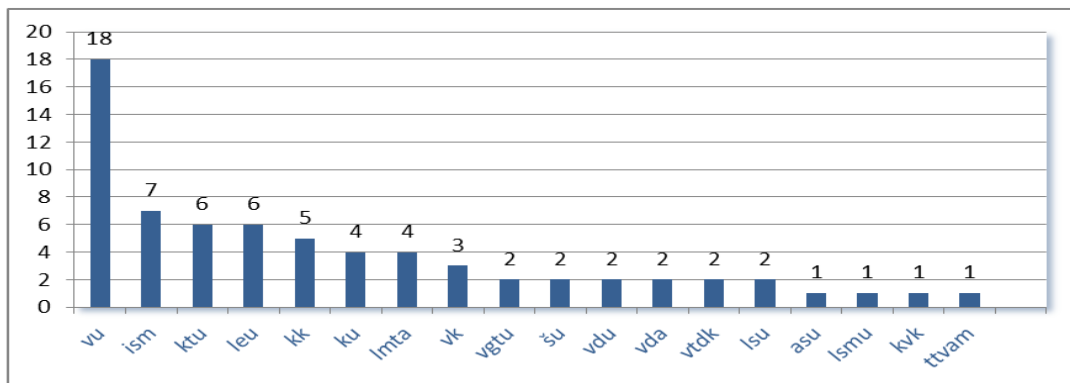
In terms of the type of study, first cycle university programmes were the most prominent, with 29 study programmes earning the highest evaluation; just slightly behind were second cycle programmes, with 27 receiving the highest evaluation. Also among the highest rated programmes were 12 college professional bachelor's study programmes and one integrated study programme (in the field of biomedical sciences). The second chart shows the breakdown of the study programmes which received the highest evaluation according to the type of study:

Fig. 2. Breakdown of the study programmes which received the highest evaluation, by type of study.



Of the 45¹ institutions of higher education operating in the Republic of Lithuania, 18 have study programmes that received the highest evaluation. Vilnius University had the most such studies programmes during the analysis period – 18. Of the remaining 17 institutions of higher education, data is distributed with a larger gap from Vilnius University: the institution with the next most number of study programmes which received the highest evaluation was ISM University of Management and Economics, with seven such study programmes. Among these 17 higher education institutions, a more even distribution in the number of study programmes which received the highest evaluation can be observed (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. Number of study programmes that received the highest evaluation, by higher education institution.²



¹ As of September 2016, there will be 44 higher education institutions operating in Lithuania.

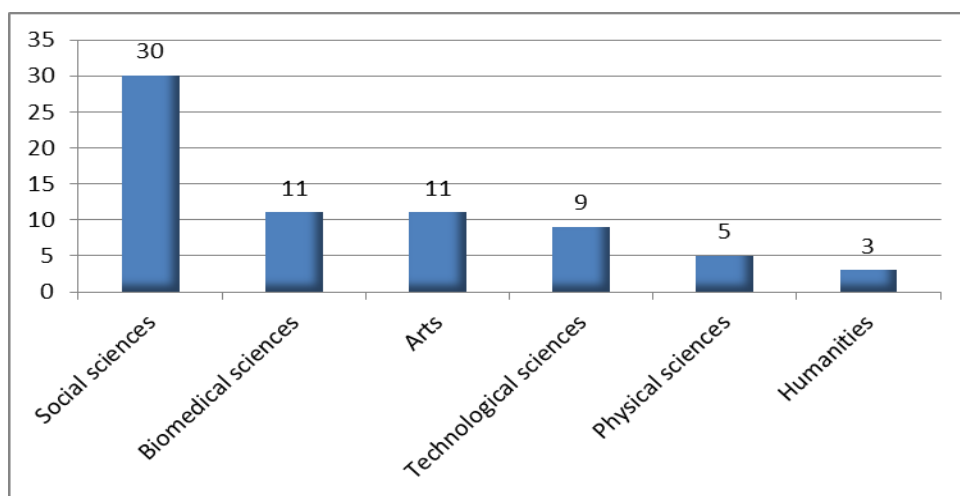
² Higher education institution abbreviations:

ASU – Aleksandras Stulginskis University
 ISM – International School of Management
 KK – Kaunas College
 KTU – Kaunas University of Technology
 KU – Klaipėda University
 KVK – Klaipėda State College
 LEU – Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences
 LMTA – Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre
 LSMU – Lithuanian University of Health Sciences

LSU – Lithuanian Sports University
 ŠU – Šiauliai University
 VK – Vilnius College
 TTVAM – International School of Law and Business
 VGTU – Vilnius Gediminas Technical University
 VDA – Vilnius Academy of Arts
 VTDK – Vilnius College of Technologies and Design
 VDU – Vytautas Magnus University
 VU – Vilnius University

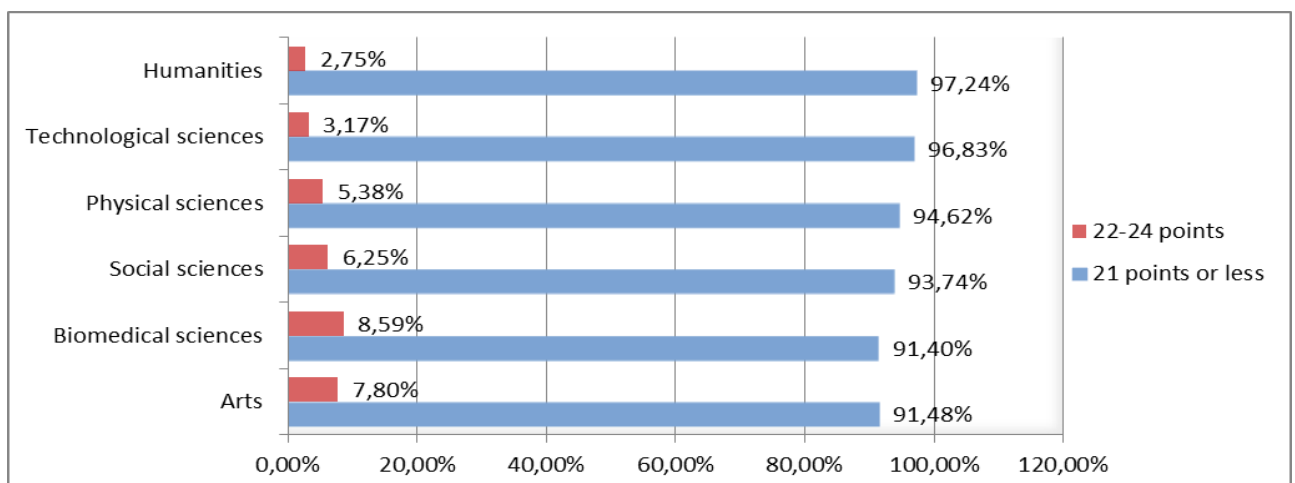
In terms of the study area, the most programmes that earned 22-24 evaluation points were in the social sciences – 30 programmes. This is significantly more than in other study areas: biomedical sciences and the arts each had 11 study programmes which received the highest evaluation. In other study areas – technological sciences and physical sciences – there were even fewer study programmes which received the highest evaluation, with nine and five respectively. The fewest programmes that earned 22-24 evaluation points were in the humanities – three programmes (see Fig. 4). However, the most study programmes overall are offered and evaluated in social sciences, which is why the number of study programmes in this study area is higher compared with programmes in other areas.

Fig. 4. Number of study programmes which received the highest evaluation, by study area.



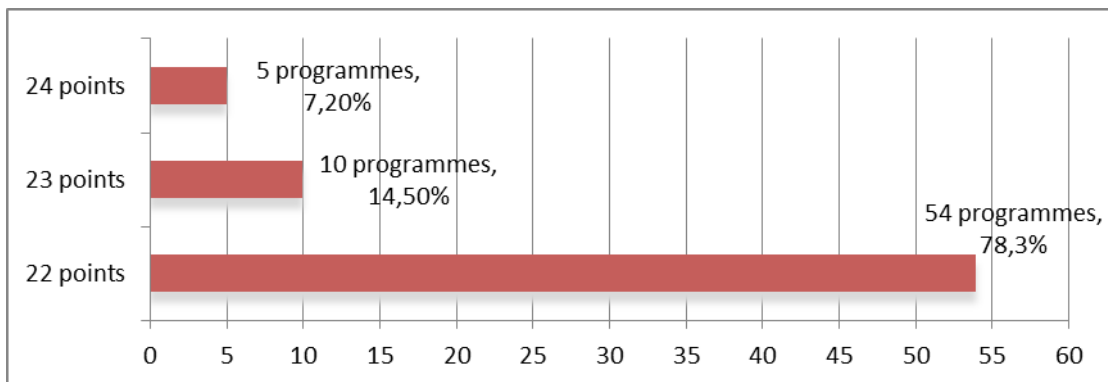
Comparing these figures with the total number of programmes in each study area that were evaluated in 2010-2015, **the portion of study programmes which received the highest evaluation in different study areas was under nine per cent.** Programmes which received 21 evaluation points or less (with seven as the lowest score) made up the majority of the study programmes that were evaluated (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5. Comparison of study programmes which received the highest evaluation vs study programmes which received lower evaluations (21 points or less).



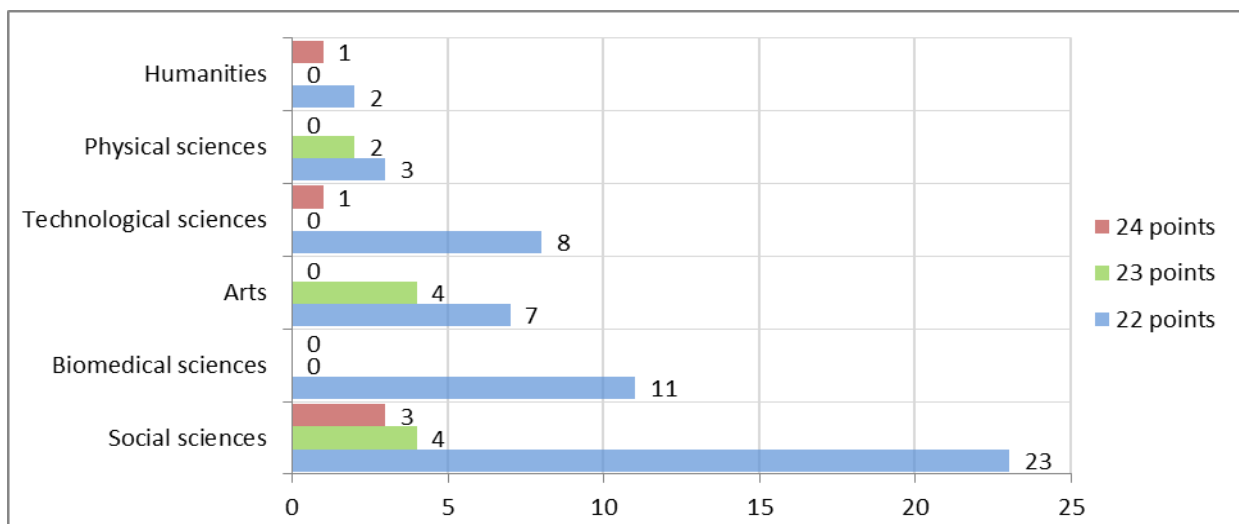
As can be seen from the data presented in the diagram, the most study programmes which received the highest evaluation are in the area of biomedical sciences and the fewest are in the humanities. However, it should be noted that the sample of study programmes which received the highest evaluation – from 22 to 24 points – is not homogeneous internally. **Of the 69 study programmes that received the highest evaluation, the majority – 54 programmes – received an overall assessment of 22 points.** Another 10 programmes received an overall assessment of 23 points. This represents, respectively, 78.3 per cent and 14.5 per cent of all the study programmes which received the highest evaluation. **The highest possible evaluation – 24 points – was awarded to five study programmes; this represents 7.2 per cent of all the study programmes which received the highest evaluation** (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6. Distribution of study programmes which received the highest evaluation within the sample.



Further evaluation of the distribution of 22-24 points within each study area revealed that **some study areas do not have study programmes that have earned 24 overall evaluation points. Study programmes which received an overall evaluation of 22-23 points are indeed predominant.** The distribution of the data sample for study programmes which received the highest evaluation among all of the study areas is presented in Figure 7.

Fig. 7. Distribution of 22-24 point evaluations within each study area.



The five programmes that earned the maximum overall number of points – 24 – were evaluated in 2010, 2013 and 2014. One of these study programmes is in the area of technological sciences, one is in the humanities, and three are in social sciences. In terms of the type of study, two are bachelor’s study programmes, two are master’s study programmes, and one is a professional bachelor’s study programme. Full information about these programmes is presented in the table below.

Table 1. Study programmes with an overall evaluation of 24 points.

Study area	Study field	Study programme (state code)	Type of study	Institution	Year of evaluation
Technological sciences	General Engineering	<i>Geodesy</i> (653H14003)	PB	Kaunas College	2013
Social Sciences	Pedagogy	<i>Music Pedagogy</i> (612X14003)	BA	Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences	2010
	Education sciences	<i>Educational Technology</i> (621X20003)	MA	Kaunas University of Technology	2014
	Management	<i>Management</i> (621N20001)	MA	International School of Management	2013
Humanities	Regional cultural studies	<i>Asian Studies</i> (612U71001)	BA	Vilnius University	2013

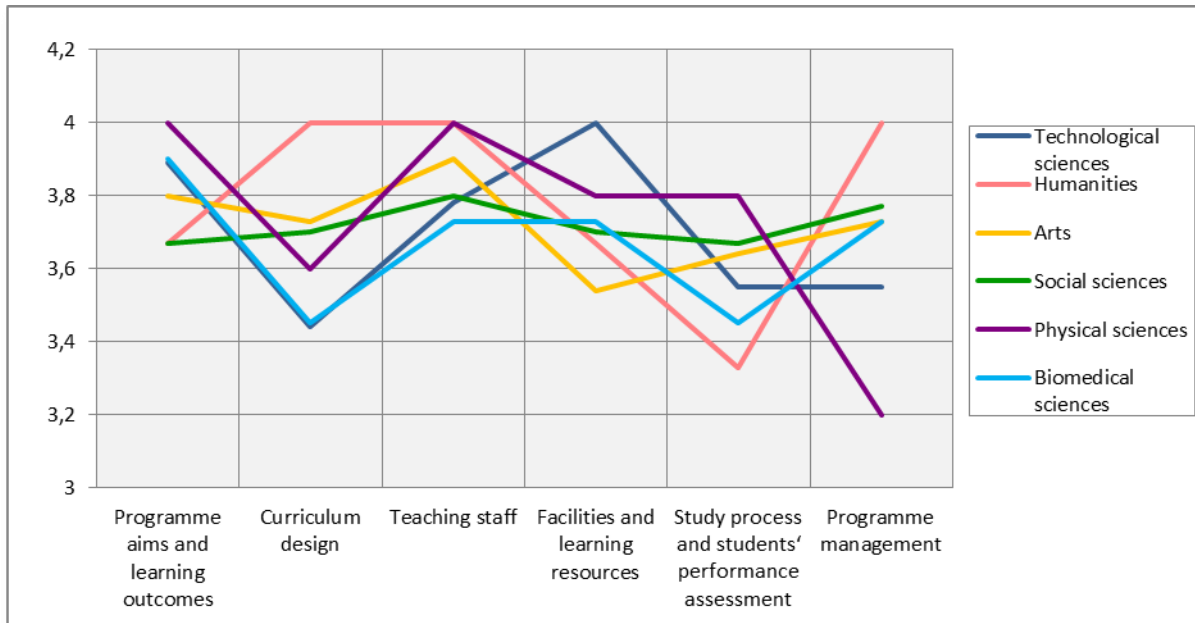
Analysis of the data according to the areas of evaluation³ shows that the overall average performance of the study programmes in all of the study areas is spread between the lowest (3.57 – Study process and students’ performance assessment) and the highest (3.87 – Teaching staff) scores. **Upon breaking down the averages for the areas of evaluation according to individual study areas**, it was found that the averages range from 3.2 to 4 points (Fig. 8).

³ Six areas of evaluation are singled out:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Programme aims and learning outcomes | 4. Facilities and learning resources |
| 2. Curriculum design | 5. Study process and students’ performance assessment |
| 3. Teaching staff | 6. Programme management |

Each of these areas is evaluated on a scale of 1 to 4 (1 – unsatisfactory, i.e. there are essential shortcomings that must be eliminated; 4 – very good, i.e. the field is exceptionally good).

Fig. 8. Distribution of average scores by area of evaluation among study areas.



A greater difference between study areas can be observed in the evaluation of study programme management: programmes in the area of physical sciences earned an average of 3.2 points in this area of evaluation, while the average in the humanities is 4 points. Higher rates can be observed in the area of staff evaluation.

The qualitative analysis of the most characteristic features of the study programmes that received the highest evaluation was constructed: 1) by including all six evaluation areas of study programme, and 2) by combing all study areas: biomedicine, natural sciences, humanities, social sciences, technology and arts.

Overview of the most characteristic features of the study programmes that were given 22-24 evaluation points

In order to determine the most characteristic features of the study programmes that received the highest evaluation, a qualitative analysis of the content of expert evaluation reports was carried out. The analysis is broken down according to the areas of evaluation for the study programmes combining all of the study areas, as no significant difference was found between the various study areas (i.e. the specifics of the study areas did not have any significant impact on the evaluation of the study programmes). In analysing the expert evaluation reports, efforts were made to identify the outstanding features of the evaluated study programmes which determined the choice of the highest scores for the areas of evaluation. In order to identify these features, **only the areas of evaluation that received four points were analysed.**

Upon performing a qualitative analysis of the study programmes that received the highest evaluation, the two main traits of the evaluation reports were established, which also

determined the content of this analysis:

First, it was found that there are two different perspectives in interpreting what, in a specific evaluated study programme, can be considered to be a very good or exceptional feature, i.e. what corresponds to a score of four in the area of evaluation – *very good (the area is exceptional)*. Some experts were inclined to interpret the concept of exceptionality as complete compliance of the study programmes with legislation. In their reports, these experts mentioned that the study programme 1) completely fulfils the requirements of national legislation, and 2) positively responds to the criteria of the specific area of evaluation. Other experts, by contrast, were inclined to see compliance of the evaluated studies programmes with regulatory requirements as the norm rather than something exceptional. These experts commended the programmes which not only complied with the formal requirements for study programmes, but also exceeded them in terms of quality assurance and improvement. Upon establishing precisely these facts during the evaluation, the experts tended to regard them as exceptionally good programme features worthy of the highest evaluation of four points.

Second, in analysing the evaluation reports, it was noticed that there was sometimes a lack of arguments to support the choice of the highest score, i.e. it was not always clear why the experts decided to grant four points for the specific field of evaluation. Furthermore, alongside the description of the positive features of the study programme (in the field of evaluation), some of the experts also mentioned shortcomings and provided observations regarding the quality of the programme in their reports, but still gave the highest possible score for this evaluation area.

It might be assumed that nuances like these depend not only and not so much on the outstanding features of study programmes that were noted in an objective manner, but rather – on the experts' personal subjective experience, writing style and writing skills, as well as on their experience evaluating study programmes at other quality assurance agencies according to the standards and methodology of these agencies. Experts evaluate programmes according to different assessment perspectives and traditions. However, there were nevertheless a considerable number of evaluation reports in which a high programme evaluation was substantiated in an analytical and systematic manner, providing a detailed description and analysis of the programme's quality parameters.

1. Programme aims and expected learning outcomes

The study programmes which received the highest evaluation in this area first and foremost stood out for clear and very well formulated aims and expected learning outcomes directly related to the vision and mission of the higher education institution. The aims and outcomes are built according to a holistic principle; they fully meet the academic field of the faculty and organically suit the mission and vision of the entire higher education institution.

The programme aims reflect comprehensively the complexity of the discipline being studied at both a theoretical and practical level, and are perfectly in tune with the expected learning outcomes, implementing them in a coherent and comprehensive manner. The aims and learning outcomes are based on an interdisciplinary approach, which reflects the latest trends in science and in practice, and is not limited to a narrow approach of a single discipline. For example, the aims and expected learning outcomes of some study

programmes in the arts received the highest evaluation because in addition to the arts, they also combine historical, social and political perspectives. The experts commended the programmes where the study aims were clearly divided into the following categories: knowledge and its application, research skills, special abilities, and social and personal skills and competences. The convergence of study programme aims, expected learning outcomes and study subjects are presented in fine detail in the self-evaluation report – they are logical and complete. Special note was taken of the prospect for adequately preparing graduates for studies in the next cycle – master’s or doctoral studies.

Another irrefutable factor which predetermined the highest score for this area was a (self-)critical approach among the study programme organisers towards the soundness of their programme aims and expected outcomes, as well as their correspondence to labour market needs and even the socio-cultural context of the country. The need for study programmes is based on labour market research. Research is conducted periodically in order to obtain the most recent data and update the aims and expected learning outcomes of the programmes accordingly. The ability to take the socio-cultural context into account, an understanding of ethical challenges, and strong moral development were noted as an additional strong point for programmes aims and expected learning outcomes.

The experts observed that a less formal and more (self-)reflective and exploratory method to the preparation of the entire self-analysis discloses a more responsible and mature approach among the organisers of programmes programmes – teachers and administrative staff – towards the quality of the study programmes. The experts also mentioned that a high-quality, detailed and unambiguous description of the aims and expected learning outcomes for the study programmes is one of the key quality criteria in conducting an expert evaluation of a study programme. The experts allot a considerable amount of time to becoming familiar with the self-assessment reports, so the study programmes where the description of the aims, learning outcomes and connections thereof was clear, comprehensive and coherent were evaluated very highly.

The experts favourably evaluated the opportunity for social partners (employers) to contribute to the formulation of the aims and expected learning outcomes for the study programmes – not just formally, but actually involving them in the process. Programmes where not one, but several social partners (employers) participate in the formation of aims and expected learning outcomes were particularly commended.

2. Curriculum

In evaluating the area of programme structure (curriculum), the experts emphasised internationality and interdisciplinary of the structure. In their opinion, higher education institutions should first and foremost promote interdisciplinary projects, since the latest scientific development trends are focused on multi- and interdisciplinary research development. Programmes where this challenge is accepted and the curriculum is constructed by applying an interdisciplinary dimension demonstrate a higher level of integration and more firmly ensure their sustainability in the context of continuous change. Secondly, the experts gave the highest score for this area when, in order to improve study programme internationality, some subjects or even modules taught in English, and subjects or individual lectures (topics) taught by visiting professors are incorporated into the

integral whole. Some programmes in the field of management were particularly commended for their correspondence to analogous Western university study programme structures, which even more firmly substantiated their conformity to the corresponding European Qualifications Framework level.

Other advantages of this evaluative field mentioned by the experts sound a bit more conservative and are limited to conformity of the programme structure with legal regulations and the normal study programme quality management process: complete mutual coordination of study programme outcomes and the curriculum of individual subjects; study subject volume which is completely sufficient in order to achieve the study aims, and the rational and expedient use of subject credits; and logical, consistent and progressive allocation of subjects, beginning with theoretical and methodological subjects designed to develop general competencies, then introducing subjects designed to develop key professional competencies in later semesters, and finishing with the most complicated subjects, which are usually oriented towards practical work and/or research and are designed to form special professional competences.

The study programmes that were evaluated very well stand out for a good balance of theoretical and practical subjects, integrity of science and practice, and inclusion of the latest scientific and technological achievements in the curriculum. Furthermore, the reading lists for the subjects are constantly being updated to include the latest and most relevant publications.

3. Staff

This area of evaluation received the relatively highest average score of all the areas. In terms of the most characteristic features of this area, the professionalism and competence of the teaching staff received considerable compliment. The experts noted that the teachers are both excellent scientists in their field as well as very good educators. The teachers' participation in professional activities was also evaluated highly. In general, some experts expressed a certain sense of surprise and admiration for the study programme teachers for their exceptional ability to combine three key factors in their activities: scientific research, pedagogical practice and practical (and sometime even social) activities.

The experts noted that the staff assembled for implementation of the programme not only meets legal requirements, but exceeds them, and their qualification is adequate to achieve the planned learning outcomes. The scholarly activities of the teachers are meaningful and related to the subjects taught. The teachers' integration of their research results into the subjects they teach was evaluated highly by the experts. A very good balance between research activities, teaching workload and time allotted for professional development allow the teachers to actively engage in scholarly activity.

The practical work and experience of the majority of teachers is directly related to the subjects they teach. The experts noticed that in order to maintain high study programme quality, it is very important for teachers to participate in practical work in the labour market, integrating the knowledge acquired there into the academic sphere.

The experts also took into account the opportunity for teachers to acquire and/or develop their pedagogical competencies. The improvement of teachers' qualifications as educators is an integral part of their academic career which has the potential to significantly improve the quality of the study programmes. The experts also noticed that

evaluation of educational achievements and awards for the best teachers of the year are an excellent practice in higher education institutions.

According to the experts, one of the strongest factors that determine the quality of study programmes is the ability of the teachers to maintain balance in combining high-level research activities in international teams with their teaching activities, incorporating advanced teaching methods and technology as well as programme development. A relatively high proportion of teachers participate in international exchange programmes. The teachers are members of professional associations and communities and have a close relationship with the world of practical work. In addition, the teachers prepare and publish scientific articles, work on improving their skills and engage in professional-social activities. In the opinion of some experts, these are truly overwhelming staff achievements. The teachers are not only active in their own subject field. Their interests also include a wide range of related sister disciplines. The experts noted that the broad field of faculty interests provides all the prerequisites for ensuring integrity in the structure of the programme and greater study programme sustainability in the future, as well as for expanding the range of applied teaching techniques (for example, the competences of teachers in the field of social science education also include sociological knowledge, semiotics, aesthetics, phenomenology, social theory and policy, civic movements and human rights, intercultural education theory, education reform, as well as technology, media and bioethics).

4. Material resources

In evaluating material resources of the study programmes, some experts tended to emphasise whether they were sufficient to achieve the learning outcomes – if the premises provided for studies were adequate and sufficient; if the equipment necessary for the study programme was appropriate enough; and if the methodical resources were accessible and regularly updated. Meanwhile, other experts noted the efforts of the higher education institutions not only to ensure the minimum material resources needed to achieve the expected learning outcomes, but also to do this in the best and most convenient way, by improving available resources as much as possible and investing in their development. According to this perspective, material resources should facilitate, promote and strengthen implementation of the study programme's aims and learning outcomes. For example, not only is the environment adequate – it is also aesthetically appealing and promotes a positive attitude and creativity; the premises are spacious, modern, well maintained, regularly repaired, well-ventilated and well-heated during the cold season.

In addition to the adequacy of resources, the experts also evaluated how their availability is ensured in the study programmes as well as the conditions to utilise them. For example, whether the environment is adapted for people with special needs, and whether means are widely used for students with various learning requirements, when some need more visual material while audio contact is important for others. It is the application of measures like these that creates an environment which cultivates equal opportunities for all students. Students should be guaranteed access to equipment and other resources required by their studies at the time that is most convenient for them – such as in the evening, on weekends, or for a longer period of time – and in the manner that is most convenient – for example, being able to take resources home is particularly pertinent for

students in some technology programmes (especially in those cases when the equipment is quite expensive and students are not able to buy it themselves). In their reports on study programmes in the field of technology, the experts tended to emphasise compliance of learning equipment with standards as well as its innovation and quality. The more innovative the equipment available to students enrolled in the programme was, the better the material resources were evaluated.

Libraries should be equipped with individual workplaces, and have small enclosed spaces where students can work without interference. Library hours are extended during exam sessions, and the libraries of other departments of the higher education institution are freely accessible. Wireless internet is available from various premises of the higher education institution, as well as in the dormitories. A virtual learning environment – especially the Moodle system – is used in a purposive and rational manner.

5. The course of studies and student assessment

Similar to the evaluation of material resources, some experts, in analysing the course of studies and student assessment, tended to put more stress on the things that not only meet the minimum requirements in this area and adequately contribute to achieving the expected learning outcomes, but also motivate students to engage in their studies and self-learning, improve their adaptation during the first year of studies, and contribute to the formation of self-identification with the selected profession and a sense of community. According to the experts, this helps achieve learning outcomes in the best manner, but also has great potential in developing a student's personality and even his or her social-civic position.

The experts commended the very well-developed academic support system for students. The students have the opportunity to make extensive use of the advantages of Moodle and other virtual learning systems; they are provided with relevant information about their assessment deadlines, schedules and teacher hours. The subjects are distributed in the study schedules evenly, providing the students with a relatively consistent workload over the course of the semesters. When students experience academic difficulty, teacher support is freely accessible. Students of Master level are given the opportunity to combine studies with a job related to their studies. Individual studies are organised for these students, as well as for those who have special needs or have children to look after. International student exchange programmes are organised very well – there is a system which provides information about opportunities to study at foreign higher education institutions, and transfer of credits acquired abroad is guaranteed for students upon their return. Students are constantly motivated to take advantage of international student exchange programmes. One of the main services that students can expect from a well-functioning support system are career centres where assistance is provided to students in becoming employed, and further monitoring of their professional career takes place. All of these measures promote student motivation and protect study programmes from higher drop-out rates.

In analysing the students evaluation system, the experts favourably assessed well-functioning feedback systems, based on which detailed individual and group discussions on typical mistakes in papers are organised at the end of each semester, and comprehensive examination assessments are presented. According to the experts, this is one of the most important factors for increasing motivation among students to strive for even better

learning outcomes.

As an additional factor that encourages student motivation, the experts singled out the promotion of student participation in applied research, either with their teachers or at companies, as well as support from the department in publishing their final research results in scientific periodicals. In terms of relevance to practical development activities, the experts did not pass up on the chance to describe in their reports (mainly in the fields of arts and humanities) that students have an excellent opportunity to meet and interact with their study programme social partners/employers, arrange professional training at their companies, and even become employed there once they complete their studies.

Another motivating factor that makes it possible to better achieve the aims of the studies is various social support provided to students. The experts mentioned well-developed psychological counselling services: stress management and conflict management courses, self-awareness classes and self-help support group meetings. The opportunity to enrich one's cultural life and participate in the creative activities of the higher education institution – attend theatre clubs, choirs, literary evenings, concerts and so on – was also noted by the experts and evaluated as a strong and positive means of student support.

6. Programme management

The most characteristic features of the programmes that received the highest evaluation in the field of programme management combine an entire complex of well-functioning and developed measures aimed at the continuous improvement of study programmes by uniting all of stakeholders of this process. Firstly, the higher education institution bases its quality policy on a collection of certain formal documents: the study programme quality guide, rules, code of ethics (which regulates things such as the policy on academic ethics and plagiarism and the rights and responsibilities of students and teachers), descriptions of internal quality assessment procedures, descriptions of training practice organisation and evaluation procedures, etc. Secondly, a well-developed structure exists where each constituent element is assigned, according to the principle of subsidiarity, with a respective role acting in the corresponding levels of the structure – the study programme committee, the department, the study quality division (committee) or the academic council. A systematic approach is followed which combines opportunities to solve problems in a decentralised manner and avoid the tactic of a single, random and episodic response to a momentary situation. All of the quality management links operate harmoniously, as a unified mechanism, and react to situations in an operative and flexible manner. Communication between the links is transparent; none of them are burdened with unnecessary bureaucracy and none of the actions that they carry out are an end in itself – rather, they are based on principles of quality management and focused on the implementation of a specific task in an effort to improve programme quality. The experts evaluated programme management systems like this very highly and called them impressive.

In singling out more specific positive features in the field of programme management, the experts mentioned that the study programme aims and expected learning outcomes are reviewed on an annual basis by faculty boards and study programme committees, including social partners, student representatives and graduates in the

meetings. Quantitative and qualitative data are collected by way of surveys, and round-table discussions and consultations take place. In assessing the programme at the end of each semester, students and teachers are asked to submit their views on teaching methods, the level of difficulty of subject content and its consistency with the programme aims, and the need for innovations. Later, the students and teachers receive feedback about their impact on programme development. As a rule, a high level of student participation in surveys is characteristic of highly rated programmes; this may indicate their vested interest in participating in the programme management process and a high level of motivation to improve the study programmes. Further programme development actions are carefully planned by allocating time and responsible departments and individuals.

The higher education institution's study quality centre or other divisions (career centres) conduct research on the employability and professional careers of graduates as well as the opinion of employers on how well graduates' knowledge and skills meet labour market needs, including this data in the general programme management system. Monitoring of the labour market is conducted on a regular basis in order to clarify the expectations of employers and ensure that study programmes are updated in accordance with the most pertinent needs of the labour market. Close contact is kept with graduates; their opinion about the study programmes is meaningful and acts as a basis in improving the programmes.

The experts tended to give very high scores for any actions, concepts and initiatives which promote more intensive relationships with stakeholders in the wider perspective as well. For example, cases where the principle of comparison with analogous programmes from other – often prestigious – foreign universities is used for study programme improvement. Another example, in an effort to ensure sustainability in the future, a closer mutual relationship between faculty members is promoted and teams are formed from members of the department to achieve a common goal. In general, the experts welcomed any strong strategy for the development of a vision for the future which facilitates the positive evolution of study programmes.

Summary

The results of the analysis of the study programmes that were evaluated in 2010-2015 reveal that the study programmes which received the highest evaluation (22-24 points) made up a relatively small portion of all of the study programmes that were evaluated during this period – there were 69 such programmes in all, or six per cent of the total. The majority of these study programmes are in university first or second cycle courses of study. In terms of the quantity of study programmes which were given 22-24 points, Vilnius University (with 18 such study programmes) has a lead on the other higher education institutions. In separate areas of study (technological, biomedical, social and physical sciences, humanities, and the arts), the number of programmes which received the highest score made up less than nine per cent of the total number of study programmes that were evaluated in each area: compared to the total number of study programmes that were evaluated, the number of these programmes was the highest in the area of biomedical sciences – 8.59 per cent; the lowest percentage compared to the total number of study

programmes that were evaluated was in the humanities – 2.75 per cent. However, it should be noted that the sample of the study programmes which received the highest evaluation is not internally homogeneous– of the 69 study programmes, 54 (78.3 per cent) received 22 points, 10 (14.5 per cent) earned 23 points, and only five (7.2 per cent) of the study programmes were given 24 points.

Analysis of the data according to the areas of evaluation of study programme reveals that the overall average scores for study programmes in all of the study areas were distributed between 3.87 points (Teaching staff) and 3.57 (Study process and students' performance assessment).

In an effort to determine the most characteristic features of the study programmes which received the highest evaluation, a qualitative content analysis of the experts' reports on study programmes was carried out. Only the areas of evaluation that received four points were analysed. The analysis revealed that in assessing what, in the specific area of evaluation, is exceptionally good and worth four points, two different perspectives were prevalent. According to the first perspective, study programmes were interpreted as distinct for complete fulfilment of and compliance with legal requirements and the evaluative criteria of the specific area of evaluation. The second perspective interprets the compliance of study programmes with legal requirements more as the norm rather than exceptional features of the study programmes worth four points. According to this perspective, only the study programme features which exceed the minimum requirements are exceptional and worth the highest number of points. The following generalised examples of exceptional programme features can be singled out: the programme aims and learning outcomes reflect the complexity of the discipline on both theoretical and practical levels, are based on a multidisciplinary approach and unite the perspectives of adjacent disciplines, and fully meet the needs of the labour market and the socio-cultural context of the country; the learning outcomes and the content of different subjects are completely coordinated, and the programme structure is constructed in an effort to achieve high theoretical and practical integrity while incorporating the latest scientific and technological achievements; in addition to being active scholars in their respective fields, the teachers are also highly qualified educators, experienced practitioners, and even public figures; the student information system functions effectively and students are provided with broad opportunities to be active in the higher education institution's community; material resources are not only completely sufficient, but also promote, facilitate and optimise the ways to achieve the best learning outcomes; and the study programme management is effective and systematic, involving all interested parties in the improvement of study programme quality and focusing on broader inter-institutional cooperation and closer ties with the stakeholders in order to ensure sustainability of the study programme in the future.