

Joint Study Programmes and their Assessment, 2010-2015

Quality Assurance of Joint Study Programmes in Europe

Joint Study Programmes¹ are a hallmark of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). They are set up to enhance the mobility of students and staff, to facilitate mutual learning, and to open up wider opportunities for cooperation. The main purpose of joint degree programmes is to create opportunities for students to acquire more knowledge, skills and experience than a study programme offered by a single institution could. Programmes of this type are implemented in order to provide an opportunity for students and teachers from different countries to study and teach in a different cultural and academic environment, to adopt academic good practice from different countries or institutions of higher education, to promote international inter-institutional cooperation, and to expand employment opportunities for graduates.² However, the implementation, quality assurance and recognition of joint study programmes is not an easy task, so efforts are being made in Europe to agree on common provisions for external quality assurance that are acceptable to everyone. In order to implement this, the Bologna Follow-up Group has developed principles which should be followed in the development, implementation and assessment of joint study programmes without applying additional national criteria. Quality assurance agencies and stakeholders also worked together to develop and test different models which would make the recognition and quality assurance of joint study programmes easier. At the initiative of all of these working groups, the [European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes](#) was created; this document was approved during a meeting of the European Higher Education Area ministers responsible for education that took place in Yerevan on 14-15 May 2015.

The new European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, which is based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), establishes:

- **Application in different systems of quality assurance (part A).** Quality assurance for joint study programmes should be based on the provisions set forth in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (Part B). If external quality assurance at programme level is mandatory in one or more of the states implementing the programme, the institutions of higher education must select one agency from the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).
- **Provision for quality assurance of joint study programmes (part A).** Emphasis is placed on the validation of joint programmes in all of the countries where they are being implemented. Study programmes should be designed to correspond with the intended learning outcomes, which should align with the corresponding level in the Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area. The programme's implementation, resources and internal quality assurance should be sufficient to achieve the learning outcomes.
- **A procedure for external quality assurance of joint programmes (part C).** The quality assurance agency must follow the procedures set out in this part (ESG 2), and must evaluate the programme in accordance with the provisions described in Part B. It should be noted that an international panel of experts should be appointed to carry out the assessment; the panel should include members from at least two countries involved in the consortium providing the joint study programme. Joint

¹ **Joint study programmes** are understood as study programmes developed and implemented jointly by different institutions of higher education belonging to European Higher Education Area (EHEA) member countries, upon completion of which a double or joint degree is conferred.

² The General Requirements of Joint Study Programmes approved by Order No. V-65 of the Minister of Education and Science of 3 February 2014.

study programmes are evaluated as a whole; although the site visit should normally be restricted to one study location, implementation of the programme should be discussed with representatives of all cooperating institutions.

Application of these new provisions and principles for joint study programmes will be relevant both within the European Higher Education Area and beyond its borders.

Joint study programmes in Lithuania

There are currently **42 joint study programmes**³ registered and accredited in Lithuania, of which 88 per cent (37 study programmes) are carried out with *foreign higher education institutions* and 12 per cent (five study programmes) are carried out between *Lithuanian higher education institutions*. The majority of the joint study programmes – 79 per cent (33 study programmes) – are conducted at *universities*, while the remaining 21 per cent (nine programmes) are offered at *colleges of higher education*. The distribution of the joint study programmes according to type and cycle is as follows: the majority, i.e. 64 per cent (27 study programmes) are offered as *second cycle programmes (master's studies)*, while 36 per cent are *first cycle programmes*, of which 22 per cent (nine study programmes) are professional bachelor's programmes and the remaining 14 per cent (six study programmes) are bachelor's programmes (see Fig. 1).

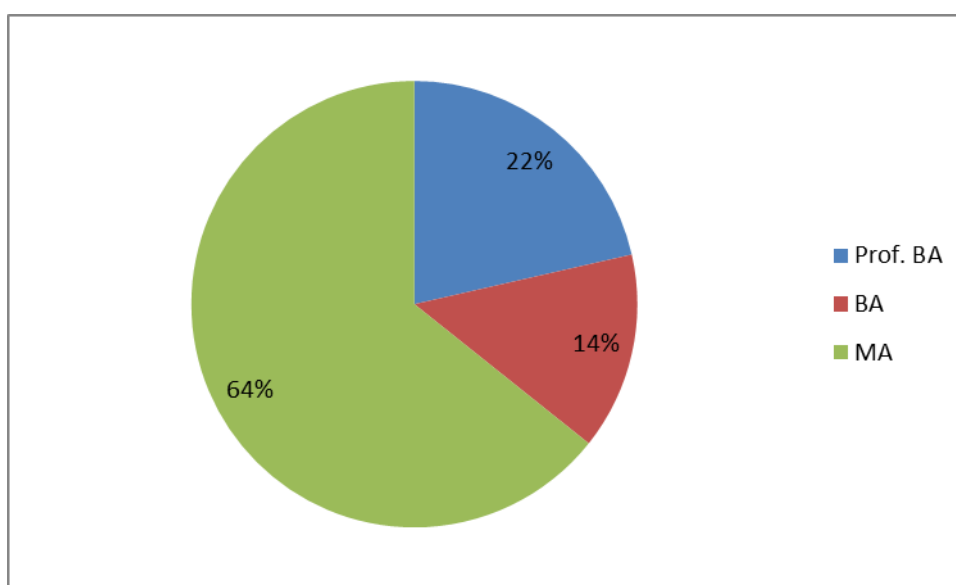


Fig. 1. Distribution of joint study programmes by type

The majority of joint study programmes are registered and delivered in the **area of social sciences** (67 per cent – 28 study programmes). Within the area of social sciences, joint study programmes are most often registered in fields such as *Law, Economics, Business and Management* and *Social Work*.⁴ Compared with the remaining areas, there are slightly more joint study programmes registered in the **area of biomedicine** (14 per cent – 6 study programmes) than in areas such as **natural sciences** (7 per cent – 3 study programmes) and **technological sciences** (7 per cent – 3 study programmes). There is only one study programme each registered in the areas of **humanities** and **arts** (see Fig. 2).

³ Based on data collected by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education in January 2016.

⁴ At least two study programmes are registered in each of the fields listed.

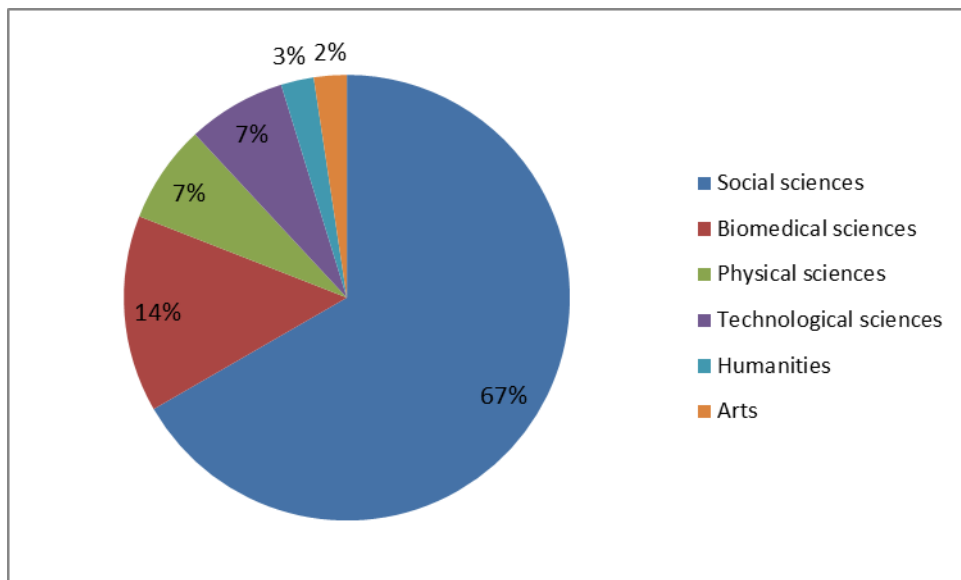


Fig. 2. Distribution of joint study programmes by study area

A review of higher education institutions which offer joint study programmes shows that the greater part of these programmes are delivered at the following universities: Mykolas Romeris University (12 study programmes), Vilnius Gediminas Technical University (6 study programmes), Šiauliai University (5 study programmes) and Vytautas Magnus University (3 study programmes). Among colleges, the most joint study programmes are currently being offered by the College of Social Sciences (three study programmes) and the International School of Law and Business (two study programmes). The remaining universities and colleges where these study programmes are offered have one or two joint programmes each (see Fig. 3).⁵

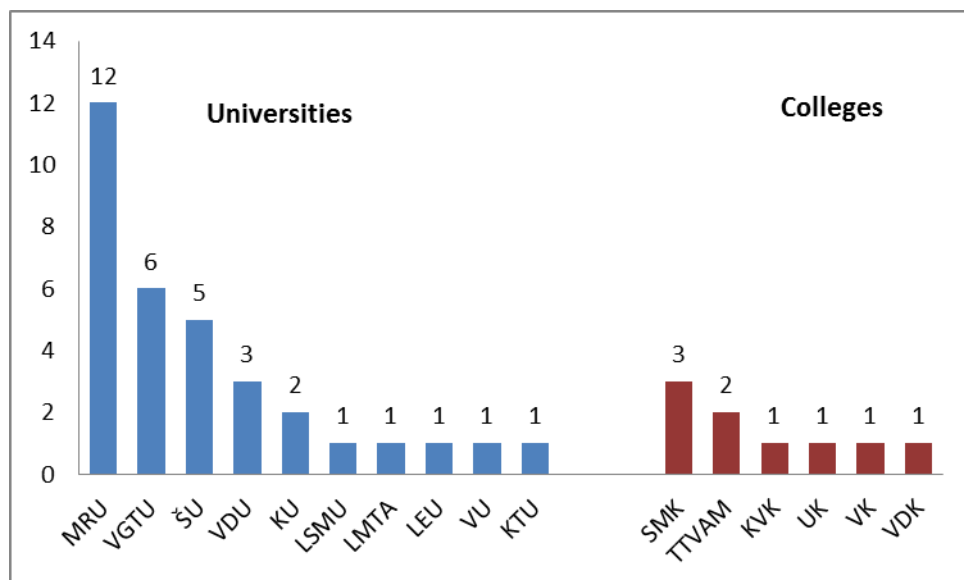


Fig. 3. Distribution of joint study programmes by institution

⁵ It should be noted that higher education institutions which conduct joint study programmes with Lithuanian higher education institutions assign the same programme to their own institution, but in collecting statistical data for this survey, said was counted as a single joint studies programme and assigned to the institution which provided, as the primary institution, the description of the joint studies programme for assessment and accreditation.

Analysis of the specifics of joint study programme implementation reveals that for the most part, programmes that are carried out in conjunction with foreign higher education institutions are conducted in *English* (76 per cent – 32 study programmes). The rest of the programmes that are carried out in conjunction with foreign higher education institutions are taught in two languages: *English and Lithuanian* (7 per cent – 3 study programmes) or *English and Russian* (7 per cent – 3 study programmes). Almost all of the joint study programmes that are developed and implemented with other Lithuanian higher education institutions are conducted in *Lithuanian* (10 per cent – 4 study programmes) (see Fig. 4).

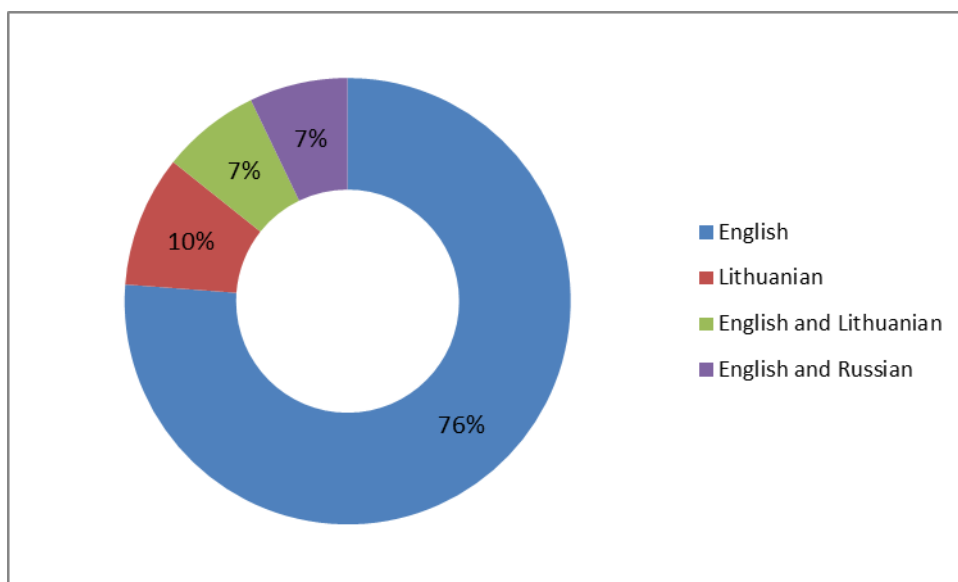


Fig. 4. Distribution of joint study programmes by language of instruction

As already mentioned above, the majority of joint study programmes are delivered in conjunction with foreign higher education institutions. The Lithuanian higher education institutions currently offering joint study programmes cooperate with higher education institutions in 20 different countries (see Fig. 5). The greater part of the joint study programmes are developed and implemented with partners from neighbouring countries: there are 9 joint study programmes being implemented with higher education institutions in Latvia, 5 each with institutions in Ukraine and Portugal, and 4 each with institutions in Estonia and Poland.⁶

⁶ Joint study programmes can be developed and implemented with more than one cooperating institution.

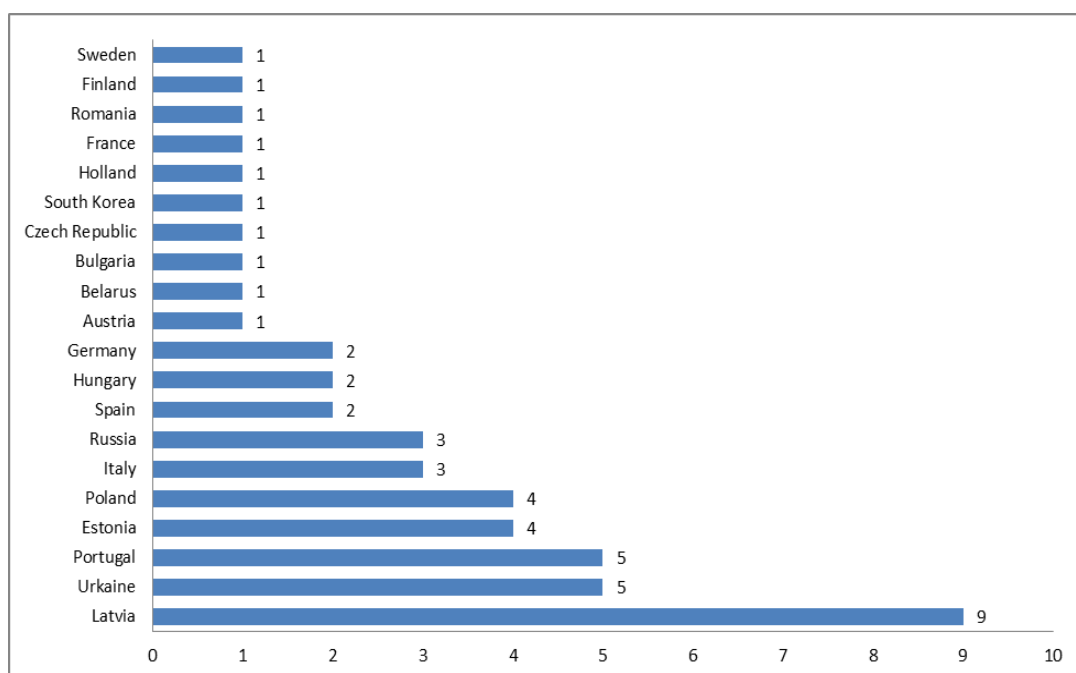


Fig. 5. Distribution of joint study programmes by partner country

Evaluation and accreditation of joint study programmes

According to the General Requirements of Joint Study Programmes (Order No. V-65 of 3 February 2014), joint study programmes shall be developed, evaluated and/or accredited, validated and carried out according to the procedures established in the national legislation of the partner higher education institutions. A joint study programme shall be launched once it is validated in all of the countries where partner institutions will deliver the joint study programme.

Joint study programmes began being evaluated and accredited in our country in 2008. The table below (Table 1) provides accreditation statistics for **new joint study programmes** according to the year they were evaluated by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereinafter – the Centre). The table shows that the number of programmes increased each year, reaching a high in 2014, when 20 new joint programmes were accredited.

Year of evaluation	2008-2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Number of new study programmes submitted for evaluation	3	1	3	0	7	20	8

Table 1. Number of new study programmes submitted for evaluation, 2008-2015

Prior to August 2011, all newly developed study programmes and their compliance with general and special requirements were evaluated with the help of external experts. Depending on whether or not the programme was in line with legal requirements, a decision was made whether or not to accredit the programme. If it was decided not to accredit the programme, the institution of higher education had the option of correcting the programme description and re-submitting it to the Centre for repeat evaluation.

During this period, 7 joint study programmes were received and accredited: 3 joint study programmes were accredited in 2008-2009, 1 joint study programme was accredited in 2010, and 3 were accredited in 2011.

As of August 2011, all newly developed study programmes are evaluated and accredited according to the procedure approved by the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania in July 2011.⁷ Decisions on the accreditation of newly developed study programmes are made after carrying out a simplified evaluation of the programme or after carrying out an in-depth evaluation of the programme with the help of experts. In 2013-2014, the vast majority of new joint study programmes were accredited after carrying out a simplified evaluation and establishing that all of the documents submitted were completed properly, that the scope of the programme complies with legal requirements, that the qualification to be awarded is in line with the List of Qualification Degrees, and that the area, field and branch (if any) of studies that the programme is attributed to is in keeping with the List of Study Areas and Fields in which Studies are Offered at Schools of Higher Education. In 2015, 5 newly developed joint study programmes were accredited after carrying out in-depth external evaluation, and the remaining 3 programmes were accredited without external evaluation (see Fig. 6). The most common reason that newly developed joint study programmes required external evaluation was that over the past three years, the cooperating higher education institutions had offered study programmes in the same field and cycle as the newly developed study programmes, and these programmes were assessed negatively, not accredited or not submitted for evaluation.

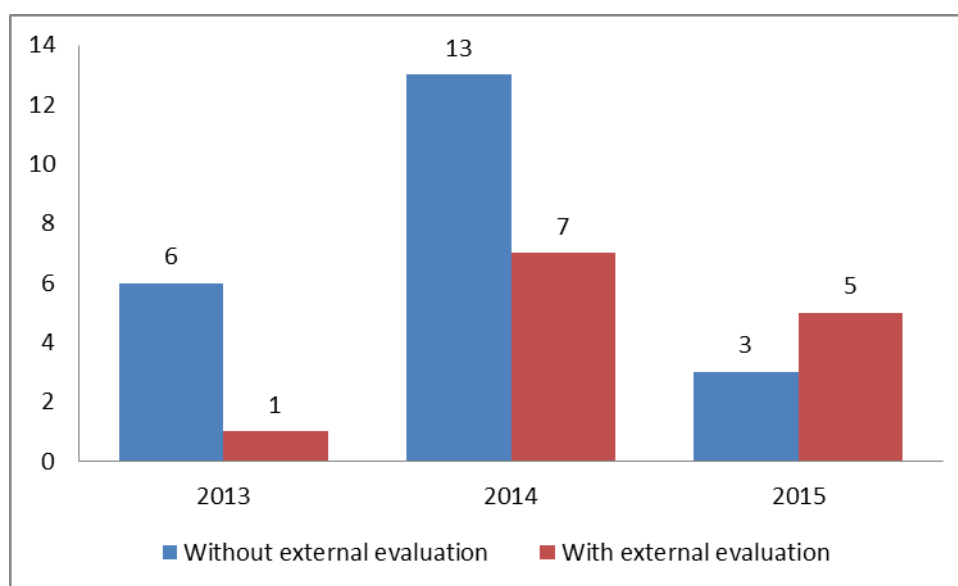


Fig. 6. Evaluation of new joint study programmes, 2013-2015

Of all the **existing joint study programmes**, 6 underwent external evaluation by the end of 2015, and the accreditation period for 1 programme was extended for evaluation of the fields.⁸ 1 existing joint study programme was accredited in 2012, 3 were accredited in 2013, and 2 were accredited in 2014. Assessment of programmes of this type that underwent external evaluation was as follows: two joint study

⁷ Description of the Procedure for External Evaluation and Accreditation of Study Programmes approved by Order No. V-1487 of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania of 29 July 2011 (Official Gazette, 2011, no. 100-4702)

⁸ According to Article 25.5 of the Description of the Procedure for External Evaluation and Accreditation of Study Programmes approved by Order No. ISAK-1652 of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania of 24 July 2009, the accreditation period for a study programme can be extended when it is necessary to extend the accreditation period for the programme so that it can be evaluated together with other study programmes in the same field (or group of fields).

programmes were accredited for *six years*, three programmes were accredited for *three years*, and one programme was *not accredited*. Evaluation of the remaining programmes is planned for this year or next, since the majority of them are accredited until 2016-2018.

It should be noted that in organising evaluation of existing joint study programmes, the Centre relied on the experience of the JOQAR project⁹ and always appealed to foreign quality assurance agencies, offering to cooperate and carry out external evaluation of the programme together; however, these agencies did not once express a desire to contribute to an evaluation. In some cases, the agencies did offer experts from their countries who could participate in evaluation of the respective programme. After carrying out external evaluation of a joint programme, foreign quality assurance agencies were always familiarised with the assessment findings prepared by experts, leaving them the right to make a decision regarding accreditation of the programme that was assessed. The Centre does not have more detailed information on whether quality agencies made use of the aforementioned joint study programme assessment findings.

International panels of experts were appointed for assessment of joint study programmes. Each panel of experts included specialists from all of the countries in which the higher education institutions implementing the joint study programme as a partner are located. This ensured that the national context of each country in implementing the joint study programme was taken into account.

Analysis of the joint study programme assessment findings leads to the conclusion that programmes of this type are needed and evaluated well by international experts, since they promote cooperation among higher education institutions both domestically and internationally; furthermore, students who select joint study programmes are offered greater opportunities and prospects than those who study at a single higher education institution. According to the experts, joint study programmes are a chance for students to acquire deeper knowledge and more varied experience, and for teachers and researchers to explore their area of interest on a broader basis. Studying in this type of programme also ensures greater student and teacher mobility, leads to improved foreign language skills among students, and provides access to greater library and other educational resources. The fact that foreign teachers lecture in joint study programmes increases the internationalisation of the study programmes.

Regardless of how well experts evaluate joint study programme, certain criticism was nevertheless expressed in implementing these types of programmes. In summarising the expert findings, the most frequently mentioned problem areas include failure to ensure compliance with legal requirements, insufficient information about the assessment methods and systems for assessing learning achievements used in other countries, problems in the administration of study programmes of this type, vague relationships with partners, insufficient student mobility, lack of housing and support for students, high dropout rates, unequal professional development opportunities for teachers, and inconsistent coordination of study programme goals, expected learning outcomes and programme curriculum. The experts also raised the question of the sustainability of joint study programmes: many programmes of this type were developed using European Union support funds in implementing various projects, but when these projects end, the higher education institutions experience difficulties implementing joint study programmes due to high financial demands that they are not able to compensate for.

There were cases when, during evaluation of an existing study programme, it came to light that the study programme was not validated as a joint programme in all of the countries where the higher education institutions with which the joint programme agreement was signed are located. As it later turned out, the main reason was that a legal opportunity to carry out joint study programmes with foreign higher

⁹ http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Assessment_Framework_for_Joint_Programmes_in_Single_Accreditation_Procedures

education institutions is not provided for in all countries. In addition, it was observed that academic regulations established in different countries, different accreditation periods for study programmes, and established traditions sometimes made it difficult for the programme to comply with the set requirements. It can thus be stated that in some cases, higher education institutions rush to agree on the implementation of study programmes without first clarifying in detail all of the legal possibilities and other aspects.

The experts who assessed the joint study programmes recommended that remote communication of all levels be ensured between the cooperating higher education institutions, that financial questions of these study programmes be given better consideration in order to ensure support for all students, and that the requirements for acceptance into a joint study programme be reviewed. All higher education institutions that offer joint degree programmes are advised to have a single, functioning internal quality assurance system that encompasses implementation of the entire programme and which is revised and improved regularly. Institutions are also encouraged to actively involve social partners in management of the programme. The experts advise higher education institutions that are considering introducing a joint study programme to first carry out a detailed analysis of the need for such studies, and to collect other information which demonstrates that the study programme is necessary.

Although there is no doubt that joint study programmes are an opportunity for both students and teachers to acquire new knowledge and share their experiences at other higher education institutions, experts pointed out and repeatedly mentioned that greater student and teacher mobility should be ensured. The experts stress that these types of programmes cannot only be taught remotely.

Joint study programmes in the eyes of higher education institutions

On 11-27 January 2016, in an effort to ascertain the attitude of higher education institutions towards the development and implementation of joint study programmes, the difficulties that are encountered, and the aspects that should be taken into account in developing and implementing joint study programmes, the Centre sent a questionnaire to all of the higher education institutions offering studies in Lithuania. Of the 45 recipients, replies were received from 18 higher education institutions, some of which offer joint study programmes. Since not all of the higher education institutions responded to the questionnaire on joint study programmes sent by the Centre, an overview of the opinions of all of the Lithuanian higher education institutions offering joint study programmes is not possible; the overview below is based only on the aggregate responses of the higher education institutions that participated in the survey.

When asked to indicate **how many joint study programmes are offered** at their institution as well as their type and state programme code, all of the higher education institutions provided the information requested. It should be noted that the Centre does not evaluate doctoral studies, so information about joint doctoral studies were not included or analysed, even though the higher education institutions provided this information as part of the questionnaire. Another trend that was observed was that the higher education institutions conducting joint study programmes with other Lithuanian higher education institutions tended to ascribe the same study programme to their own institution; however, in collecting statistical information for this overview, the number of joint study programmes was calculated according to which higher education institution submitted the joint study programme description for assessment and accreditation, as the primary institution. Several higher education institutions indicated that they do not conduct joint study programmes, but information collected by the Centre reveals that such programmes are registered and accredited.

Since not all the of the higher education institutions which participated in the survey are currently conducting joint study programmes, the Centre asked **whether they plan to develop joint study programmes in 2016**. Most of the institutions – both those which are currently conducting joint study programmes and those which do not offer this type of programme – are planning to do so in 2016 and beyond. Of all the institutions which participated in the survey, nine are planning on developing joint programmes, but six are not, because these types of programmes are very complicated and disadvantageous to implement. Three institutions did not to indicate their plans, since they are currently conducting joint study programmes. The higher education institutions which are planning joint programmes are currently in the preparation phase: they either have a concept for the programme and are coordinating an action plan with partners (foreign universities), or are still looking for opportunities to develop and implement joint programmes. There are discussions about developing an international collaborative programme or a twinning study programme rather than a joint study programme. Some higher education institutions are not planning joint study programmes with foreign universities, but are considering the option of developing joint programmes with other Lithuanian higher education institutions.

The Centre asked the higher education institutions **what**, in their opinion, **encourages the development of joint study programmes**. According to the higher education institutions, joint degree programmes give graduates better employment and career opportunities, and give teachers the opportunity to collaborate with specialists in their own or other fields and share experiences and ideas. These types of programmes are also more attractive and more competitive among students compared to regular programmes because the need for joint study programmes is emphasised by employers. In addition, joint programmes provide a greater opportunity to learn a foreign language and gain communication skills by studying in a multicultural environment and interning at foreign companies. Joint programmes are also unique for the fact that students are given the opportunity to acquire a broader education and earn two or more diplomas, awarded by Lithuanian and foreign institutions of higher education. The institutions are pleased with the positive feedback received from both employers and international partners about the need for the programme and its implementation. Cooperation with other institutions of higher education, which helps strengthen ties and increase the visibility and internationality of the respective institutions (prestige and reputation), was also mentioned, as was the opportunity to take advantage of EU mobility funding for joint degree programmes. Increasing competition among higher education institutions and the desire to attract students from both Lithuania and abroad also contributes to the development of programmes like this. It is generally recognised that joint study programmes boost the quality of studies and provide clear benefits for students, teachers, the administration and the entire higher education institution in general, since knowledge, skills and other resources are pooled together.

Since not all of the higher education institutions offer joint study programmes, the questionnaire asked what the **mains reasons are for not implementing programmes of this type**. The higher education institutions feel that it is a complicated administrative process requiring significant investment and knowledge (coordination of actions and interests with partners, validation of the programme in each partner country, organisation of the work of an international joint study programme committee, monitoring the quality of studies in different countries, organisation of a joint thesis committee, and so on). The implementation of such programmes leads to additional costs related to cooperation with partners (significant funds are needed to ensure programme mobility and student housing, state financing is not sufficient, and so on). The lack of guarantees regarding continuity was also emphasised, since student and teacher mobility creates additional costs, so the viability of joint study programmes is highly dependent on external financing. Many higher education institutions mentioned problems related to the coordination of different national legislation to establish and implement programmes, as well as the fact that it is difficult to develop study programmes which meet the requirements of several higher education institutions

without undermining the profitability of existing programmes. According to the higher education institutions, another motive not to offer joint study programmes is that their locations are not attractive to foreign partners and students. Other higher education institutions feel that they are simply not ready to develop and implement joint programmes due to their lack of experience in this area, but they would like to in the future.

When asked **what are the main advantages of offering joint study programmes**, the higher education institutions often gave the same answers as to the question of what encourages the development of joint study programmes. According to representatives of higher education institutions, the main advantages of offering joint study programmes include experience-sharing and cooperation (where one higher education institution is unable to implement a high-level programme and prepare professionals with specific “niche” skills due to a lack of human or material resources, such as when an institution cannot afford all of the latest equipment, it is possible to cooperate and share available resources); the growing internationality of studies and the acquisition of intercultural competences (students have the opportunity to study at different institutions, to gain a broader range of knowledge and practical experience from the practices of different countries, and to acquire intercultural experience); the opportunity for teachers to expand their professional network (teachers cooperate in the fields of science and research); the opportunity for both students and teachers to learn or improve their foreign language skills; interdisciplinary cooperation (e.g. social science and technology); better satisfaction of Lithuanian and international labour market needs; the opportunity for a higher education institution to attract more students and be more competitive in the range of study programmes; and added value for students, since they earn joint diplomas. Higher education institutions often indicated that student and teacher mobility is a big advantage, but this mobility is also listed as one of the difficulties that the institutions encounter in implementing joint study programmes.

Although the higher education institutions listed quite a few advantages related to offering joint study programmes, most admitted that they also **faced difficulties in developing joint study programmes**. In their replies, higher education institutions mentioned that the regulation of joint study programmes is particularly complicated, and the inconsistencies and differences in educational systems and legal framework hinder the development and implementation of joint study programmes. Quite a few higher education institutions have also noted that it is difficult to register a joint study programme due to the different registration procedures that currently exist in EU countries; furthermore, it is hard to coordinate the procedure for implementing the study process of higher education institutions in different countries as well as the organisation of internships. Higher education institutions lack systematic information about the development process for joint programmes as well as clarity of methodologies (joint study programme development and implementation is insufficiently defined); there is not enough written guidance and training on this topic, and in general there is not much national best practice in terms of joint study programmes. Difficulties have also been encountered in selecting partners for a joint study programme (differences that exist between partner countries on how a degree is conferred, ECTS study volumes, the professional qualification that is awarded, the volume of practical training in study programmes, the system for evaluating studies and so on). Furthermore, the search for “good” partners is also difficult – higher education institutions would prefer to conduct studies like these with reputable partners, but the latter are often reluctant to cooperate with Lithuanian institutions. Therefore, the development of such programmes is only possible through the use of personal networks (e.g. professors who have a wide circle of international contacts). In selecting partners for a joint study programme, it is particularly important to pay attention to the type of higher education institution, i.e. the higher education institution must have the right to offer studies of the same cycle and type. The Centre has come across cases where partners were selected which did not have the right or the capacity to carry out the same type and level of study programmes, or where programmes were validated in different countries as different types of study

programmes which conferred different rights to the students who completed them. For these reasons, the graduates of these programmes can later be faced with difficulties if they decide to continue their studies or take up certain professional activities. Another factor of no less importance that makes it difficult to offer joint study programmes is inadequate funding, since the development and maintenance of these programmes as well as student and faculty mobility require additional resources. Most higher education schools acknowledged that starting a joint study programme is extremely time-consuming and coordination takes quite a while; good foreign language and academic planning and administration skills are also a requisite.

With regard to the **difficulties encountered in implementing joint study programmes**, the higher education institutions also mentioned that coordination and administration of programmes like these is complicated, since each institution has its own set procedures (academic record-keeping, academic information systems, assurance of quality monitoring and so on). In addition, the majority of joint study programmes were prepared within project framework, and the problem of funding arises once the project is over. The particularly high cost of carrying out joint study programmes requires institutions to search for additional forms of financing and hinders programme implementation (mobility costs for students – i.e. travel and subsistence expenses – limit opportunities for students from less affluent families to choose a joint study programme, and mobility is a mandatory element of joint study programmes). Evaluation of joint study programme costs, the standard of living in different countries, travel options and the socio-cultural environment leads to the conclusion that joint study programmes are much more expensive for both the institution and the student than other programmes. Another difficulty that was mentioned was the integration of foreign students and disagreements (!) between students from different countries (it is hard to ensure that students will adapt fast enough to the academic rules at different institutions due to the existence of cross-cultural differences, different levels of language knowledge and skills, as well as motivation). In both developing and implementing joint study programmes, it is difficult for higher education institutions to organise the study process and ensure equal academic quality at both of the cooperating institutions, since the institutions have different resources available, in terms of both learning materials and faculty competencies. It is also worth mentioning that in conducting joint study programmes, higher education institutions are faced with the dropout problem (in joint programmes, students experience more financial difficulties and other challenges, so the dropout rate is higher than usual in these programmes), a more complicated selection process (students apply from very different countries with very different educational and evaluations systems. In assessing the applicants, considerable professional help is required in order to convert grades to the Lithuanian system, calculate averages and so on), and difficulties coordinating deadlines and dates (the school year often differs at cooperating institutions, as does the examination timetable and deadlines for submitting papers, and this creates problems entering information in the university systems and issuing certificates to students).

According to the higher education institutions, in developing and implementing joint study programmes, **it is worth paying attention** to the academic regulations, national legislation and rules and options for academic funding in different countries. Close, constant interaction between academic and administrative staff (in the development and implementation phases) is also crucial. Another aspect of no less importance is the responsible selection of a partner institution, since the popularity of the joint study programme is also influenced by the country where the partner institution is located, as well as its opportunities (available intellectual and material resources) and vested interest in implementing such a programme. Attention should also be paid to detailed preparation of the agreement, distribution of responsibilities among the institutions, creation of a student mobility plan and provision of funding sources, the organisation of internships, the procedure for thesis defence in the committee, and academic quality assurance. According to the higher education institutions, it is important to formalise all of the aspects of

implementation of the joint study programme in detail and in advance: to clarify academic, administrative and financial matters and involve more than one foreign country in the development of the joint study programme (e.g. develop a tripartite joint study programme), since the nature of a trilateral joint study programme creates greater internationality and makes the study programme more attractive to applicants; it also means that there is less dependence on a single foreign country.

The Centre asked the higher education institutions **what specific methodological or consultative support they would like for the development and implementation of joint study programmes**. It would be useful for the higher education institutions to receive more methodical recommendations and consultations on joint study programme development, validation, accreditation, implementation and funding. The institutions would also like to see methodology seminars for the development and initiation of joint study programmes, training for administrative staff and faculty, methodical help in converting grades, registering learning outcomes, preparing theses and conferring diplomas and diploma supplements, and in general more communication of best practice. According to the institutions, it would also be useful to become acquainted with the diversity of international educational programmes (franchise, twinning, etc.), including their advantages and disadvantages. This would help them evaluate their own capabilities and find the optimal option for their respective institutions.

The last part of the survey focused on general **observations, comments and suggestions** on joint study programmes that the higher education institutions might have. The higher education institutions expressed the following:

- There is a lack of clear legal regulation in the context of programme implementation, as well as regarding the conferral of joint degrees.
- In order to better align studies with the needs of the labour market and society while increasing international visibility of Lithuanian higher education institutions and the popularity of studies in Lithuania, opportunities to receive funding should be sought out for both the development of new study programmes and the realisation of existing ones.
- Since there are questions at the moment as to whether it makes sense to create new study programmes when there is open talk about their reduction, it is currently crucial that joint study programmes be developed with foreign higher education institutions, thus increasing internationality and the visibility of the respective institution abroad.
- Problems with the implementation of joint study programmes can arise when the study programme accreditation periods differ in the different partner countries. For this reason, it would be nice if there was a single joint study programme assessment committee which would prepare conclusions for all of the partner countries on the basis of which decisions would be made in all of the countries where higher education institutions are implementing the study programme.
- Efforts should be taken to achieve greater compatibility for the implementation and accreditation of legislation on joint study programmes across the EU.
- It would be nice to have flexibility in the regulation of joint study programmes in Lithuania, but also clarity, because today this type of study is regulated by the procedure for joint study programmes, which essentially only outlines one model – the joint degree – but does not touch upon double or triple degrees; there is a lack of methodological assistance regarding both the development of joint study programmes and the realisation of the course of studies. Information on preparation for things such as external evaluation is also insufficient.
- The general promotion and explanation of these types of programmes in Lithuania is too weak. Graduates do not understand the concept of the joint programme. Funding per student is inadequate – it should be considerably higher than for domestic study programmes.
- Diversity of forms of international mobility is worth discussing.
- The explanation of physical mobility and direct contact in the General Requirements of Joint Study Programmes is insufficient.

- In order to implement joint study programmes, additional human resources must be provided for to work with students in these study programmes (on issues regarding their studies as well as their adaptation and mentoring).

Summary

Joint degree programmes have recently been attracting more and more attention from higher education institutions, students and employers because they provide the opportunity for students and teachers from different countries to study and teach in a different cultural and academic environments and to adopt best practices from different countries or higher education institutions; furthermore, they promote international inter-institutional cooperation and help expand employment opportunities for graduates. However, the implementation, quality assurance and recognition of joint study programmes is not an easy task, so efforts are being made in Europe to agree on common provisions for external quality assurance that are acceptable to everyone.

There are currently 42 joint study programmes registered and accredited in Lithuania, of which 88 per cent are carried out with foreign higher education institutions and 12 per cent are carried out between Lithuanian higher education institutions. The majority of joint study programmes – 79 per cent – are conducted at universities, while the rest – 21 per cent – are offered at colleges of higher education. As far as how the joint study programmes are distributed according to area, the majority of these programmes are registered in the area of social sciences (67 per cent); there is a small portion in the area of biomedicine (14 per cent), a few each in areas such as natural sciences (7 per cent) and technological sciences (7 per cent), and 1 each in the areas of humanities and arts. The Lithuanian higher education institutions currently offering joint study programmes cooperate with higher education institutions in 20 different countries, usually selecting partners from neighbouring countries.

Joint study programmes began being evaluated and accredited in our country in 2008, and since then, the number of programmes increased each year, reaching a high in 2014, when 20 new joint programmes were accredited. Of all the joint study programmes that are currently being offered, 6 underwent external evaluation by the end of 2015 (2 programmes were accredited for six years, 3 programmes were accredited for three years, and 1 programme was not accredited). Analysis of the joint study programme assessment findings leads to the conclusion that programmes of this type are needed and evaluated well by international experts; however, certain criticism was also expressed regarding implementation of these types of programmes. In general, the experts noticed problems with carrying out joint study programmes, such as the fact that compliance with legal requirements is not ensured, implementation and administration of these programmes is complicated, student mobility is insufficient and there is a high dropout rate.

In order to ascertain the attitude of higher education institutions towards the development and implementation of joint study programmes, the difficulties that are encountered, and other relevant aspects, the Centre sent a questionnaire to all of the higher education institutions offering studies in Lithuania in January 2016. In summarising the data that was collected during the survey, the conclusion can be made that most of the institutions – both those which are currently conducting joint study programmes and those which do not offer this type of programme – are planning to do so in 2016 and beyond, since knowledge, skills and other resources are pooled together, thus allowing joint study programmes to provide greater opportunities for students, teachers, the administration and the entire institution of higher education in general. Although the higher education institutions listed quite a few advantages of offering joint study programmes, most admitted that they also faced difficulties in developing joint study programmes (complicated joint study programme regulation, differences in educational systems and legal

framework, difficulties in coordinating the procedure for implementing the study process of higher education institutions in different countries, etc.). Since the development and implementation of joint study programmes is not simple, the higher education institutions feel that it is worth paying attention to the academic regulations, national legislation and rules and options for academic funding in different countries. Close, constant interaction between academic and administrative staff is also crucial.