

## Higher Education Institutions' External Evaluation Conclusions Publicity Overview

### ***Publicity of Conclusions of Study Programmes' External Evaluation in Lithuania***

In July – August 2015, the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereinafter referred to as the 'Centre') gathered information on the methods of publicity used by higher education institutions for the results of their study programmes' external quality evaluation and accreditation. In the data gathering process, websites of all the higher education institutions have been reviewed and enquiries have been sent asking to specify where and by what methods the information on the publicity of external evaluation conclusions was publicised<sup>1</sup>. The Centre had gathered analogous information on the publicity of external evaluation conclusions in 2011 and 2013. An overview presented below analyses changes in the publicity of the external evaluation results over the past five years in Lithuania and identifies European trends in this area.

According to the [Law on Higher Education and Research](#), a higher education institution must inform its founders, members of a legal entity, and the public about the results of the quality assessment and accreditation of its study programmes. The [Procedure for the External Evaluation and Accreditation of Study Programmes](#) also states that a higher education institution or its branch must publish, on its website or by other appropriate methods, the results of a study programme's external evaluation received from the Centre or another higher education quality assessment agency included in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (i. e. an evaluation conclusion or its summary with recommendations) and a decision on the accreditation of the study programme within 10 days from the date of receipt of the results.

**A higher education institution must publish the received results of a study programme's external evaluation (i. e. an evaluation conclusion or its summary with recommendations) and a decision on the accreditation of the study programme within 10 days from the date of receipt of the results, on its website or by other appropriate methods.**

The expert evaluation conclusions must be clearly formulated, published and available to the academic community, external partners and other stakeholders as this information is useful for both future and current students as well as graduates and the public at large. Where an official decision on accreditation has been adopted on the basis of the external evaluation conclusions, such decision must also be published together with the evaluation conclusions as stated in the updated [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(ESG\)](#) approved by the EHEA Ministerial Conference in Yerevan in 2015.

It has been established, upon a review of the websites of all the higher education institutions in 2015, that **8 higher education institutions** (Lithuanian Sports University, Lithuanian University of Health Sciences, Aleksandras Stulginskis University, Vilnius Academy of Arts, Lithuanian Maritime Academy, Vilnius College, International School of Law and Business, and Vilnius Design College) **published the evaluation conclusions or a conclusions' summary with recommendations and the decision on accreditation** (in 2011: 5; in 2013: 10 higher education institutions had properly published the evaluation results). Mention should be made of the following higher education institutions the evaluation results of which are readily accessible and clearly presented: Lithuanian Sports University ('LSU'), Lithuanian University of Health Sciences ('LUS'), Vilnius College ('VC'),

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<sup>1</sup> Enquiries were sent only to those higher education institutions the websites of which do not contain information about the external evaluation results.

International School of Law and Business ('ISLB') and Vilnius Design College ('VDC'). The external evaluation conclusions and accreditation terms can be found on these institutions' websites upon passing two or three levels of links from the homepage, for example, upon selecting *Studies – Quality of Studies – External Evaluation* (ASU), *Quality Assurance – Study Programmes Accreditation Terms* (VC) or *Studies – Quality of Studies – External Evaluation of Study Programmes* (VDC). Descriptions of the internal quality assurance systems, results of students' feedback, and documents useful for employees, students and candidates are also published on the websites of these higher education institutions.

While both national and international documents obligate higher education institutions to publish external evaluation results, the information gathered by the Centre in 2015 shows that not all the institutions comply with this publishing requirement. An analysis of the information gathered has shown that in 2015 **14 higher education institutions did not publish** any, or published very little information on the external evaluation results even though, according to the results of the survey conducted by the Centre<sup>2</sup>, as many as 70 % of the higher education institutions stated that the evaluation results and the proposals and recommendations received were useful in the improvement of their study programmes. **23 higher education institutions publish the results in part**, i. e. either only part of the conclusions (e. g. the summary score of the programme areas under evaluation or the recommendations) or only information about the accreditation of the study programmes. Often such higher education institutions' websites contain links to the Centre's website or the Open Information, Consulting and Guidance System ('AIKOS') or information notices of past or future evaluations.

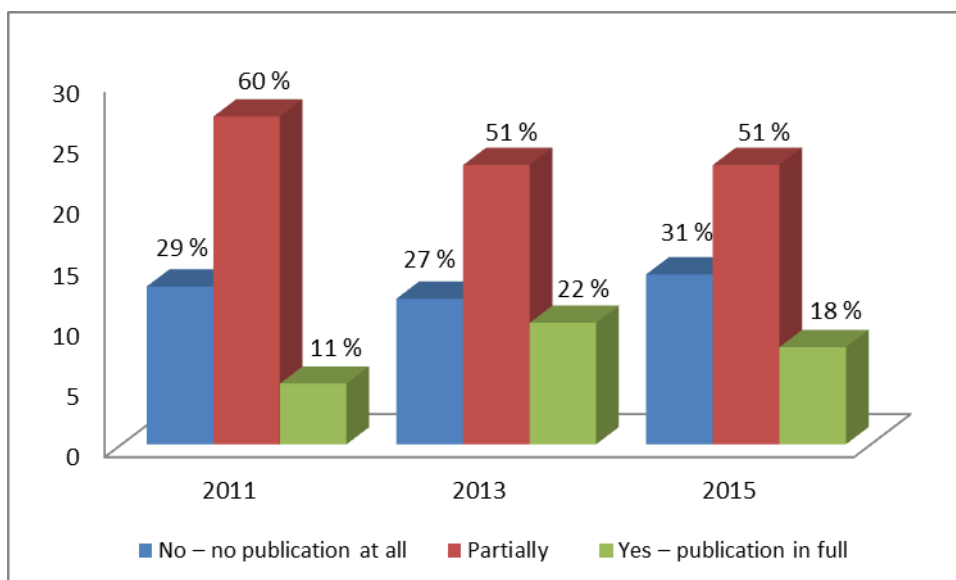
**In 2015, 8 higher education institutions published evaluation conclusions or a conclusions' summary with recommendations and accreditation decisions. 14 higher education institutions published no (or almost no) information about the external evaluation results.**

Upon sending of the afore-mentioned enquiries, the majority of higher education institutions updated information on the evaluation results' publicity on their websites or published the results (either full text of conclusions or a summary with recommendations) if such information had not been published before. Out of the 14 higher education institutions that, prior to the enquiry, had not published information about the external evaluation results, or published very little information, only a few have not published the evaluation results: only the accreditation decision is published on their websites but no evaluation conclusions or their summary with recommendations.

The situation in terms of publicity of evaluation results in 2015 has remained quite similar to that observed in 2011 and 2013 (Figure 1). It has been found, upon analysis of the information provided by and the websites of the higher education institutions, that about **one-third of the higher education institutions had not published the evaluation results** either this year or two or four years ago (13 in 2011; 12 in 2013; and 14 in 2015). The majority of the higher education institutions have been publishing only part of the conclusions or an accreditation decision, i. e. just partial information, since 2011 (27 in 2011, and 23 in 2013 and 2015). The remaining higher education institutions publish the evaluation conclusions in their entirety or the conclusions' summary with recommendations and the accreditation decisions (5 in 2011, 10 in 2013, and 8 in 2015).

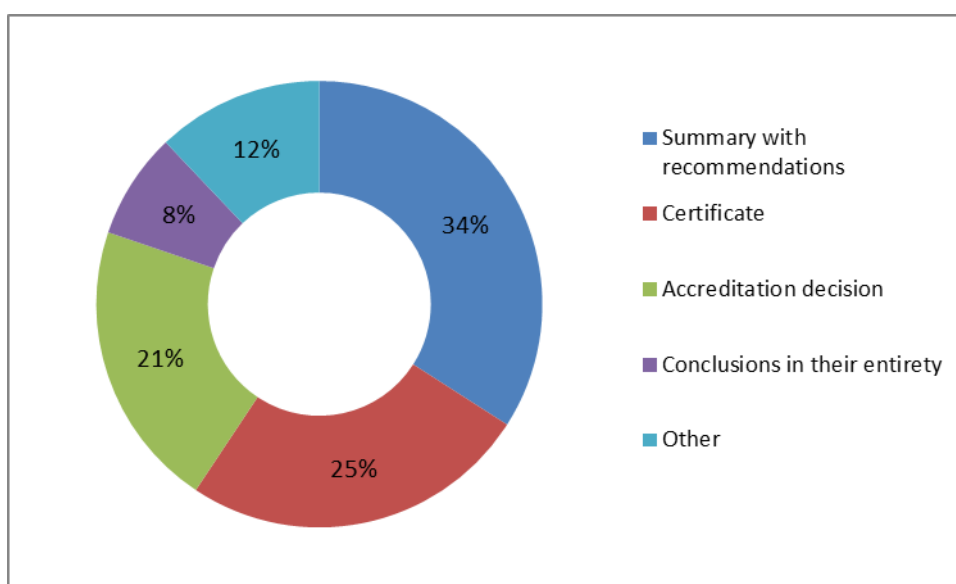
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<sup>2</sup> Every year the Centre conducts a survey the purpose of which is to improve the external evaluation of study programmes. The questionnaire is sent to representatives of higher education institutions the study programmes of which had been subjected to evaluation, asking for their opinions about the process of preparation of the self-assessment summary, areas under evaluation, evaluation criteria and evaluation conclusions and their proposals for the improvement of the Centre's work in the field of evaluation of study programmes.



**Figure 1. Publicity of results of the external evaluation of the higher education institutions' study programmes in 2011, 2013 and 2015**

In publishing the evaluation results, the higher education institutions usually provide the information by the following methods: publishing of the entire text of the conclusions, accreditation orders, certificates of external evaluation of study programmes, information notices of past or future evaluations etc. A review of the higher education institutions' websites made in July and August 2015 has led to a conclusion that the higher education institutions usually publish **summaries of conclusions including recommendations** (such information was found on the websites of 31 higher education institutions). Many higher education institutions publish **certificates** of external evaluation of study programmes (23 higher education institutions) and **accreditation decisions** (19 higher education institutions). Relatively small part of the higher education institutions publish **evaluation conclusions in their entirety** (7 higher education institutions). Websites of 11 higher education institutions contain **other information** such as links to the Centre's website or AIKOS, or information notices of past or future evaluations (Figure 2).



**Figure 2. Publicity of results of the external evaluation of the higher education institutions' study programmes by publishing method (July – August 2015)**

It was hard to find the information on the evaluation results in the websites of some higher education institutions as it has been posted at the institution's documents, operating information etc. Sometimes there is no access to the published information at all (the links are not working; a message saying that the information is under preparation). An analysis of the institutions' websites has also revealed a lack of uniformity in the publication of the evaluation results: there is a full text of conclusions at some study programmes, just a summary at others, and some study programmes have no evaluation information attached. Part of the higher education institutions that had responded to the Centre's enquiry stated that all interested parties may familiarise themselves with the evaluation conclusions at the relevant departments or upon logging in to the website of the institution.

It should be noted that each higher education institution has the right to decide where and in what form the information on evaluation results will be provided, however, the information should be readily accessible and understandable to all interested parties. Higher education institutions normally publish the study programmes' evaluation results under such headings as *Studies, Quality of Studies, Studies Quality Assurance, Evaluation and Accreditation of Study Programmes, Study Programmes, Accreditation, or Results of External Evaluation of Study Programmes*. It is **recommended** that higher education institutions should publish the external quality evaluation results on their websites and not just in the departments or in the intranet so that the information is readily accessible to all. It is also proposed that higher education institutions should publish the information on evaluation results under the headings of *Studies Quality Assurance, Quality of Studies, or External Quality Evaluation* and not at documents or operating information, which makes the search difficult. The institutions should also make sure that the information is updated on a regular basis, the links work, and the information is complete, i. e. access to both the evaluation conclusions or a summary thereof with recommendations and the decision on the accreditation of the study programme has to be ensured. Attention is also required for the explanations of the terms of the external evaluation and accreditation and information on the length of accreditation of the study programmes in place.

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### ***Publicity of External Evaluation Results in Other Countries***

The importance of publication of external evaluation results is widely recognised in other European countries. In 2013 - 2014, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) implemented, jointly with other quality assurance agencies, a project under the title *Transparency of European higher education through public quality assurance reports (EQarep)*<sup>3</sup>, the main objective of which was to improve conclusions of external evaluations and to

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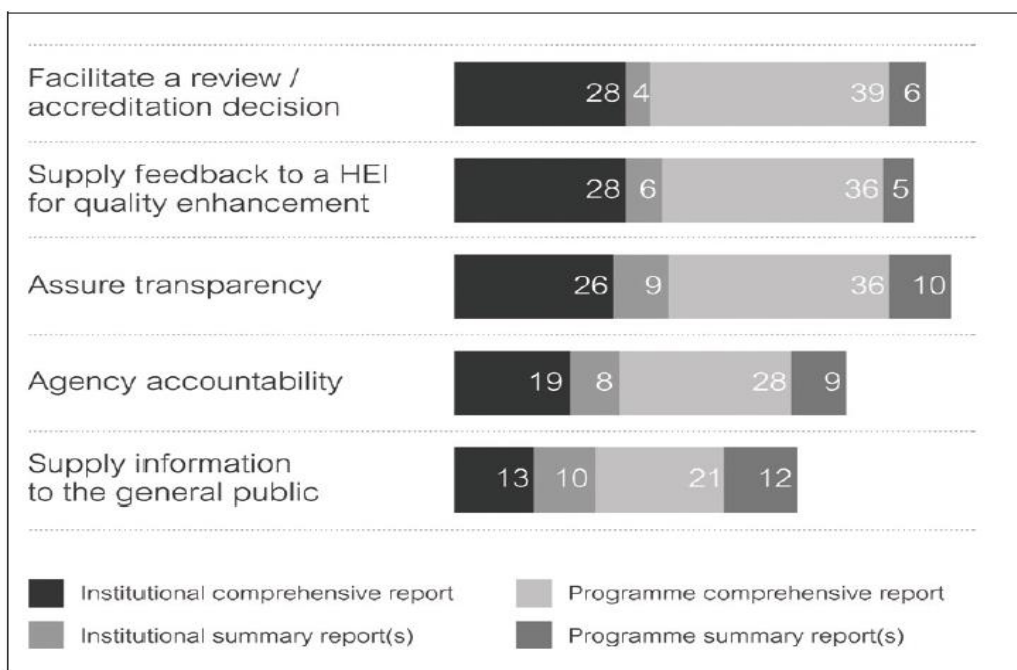
<sup>3</sup> For more details on the results of the project please visit ENQA website:  
<http://www.enqa.eu/index.php/transparency-of-european-higher-education-through-public-quality-assurance-reports-eqarep/>

identify the needs of the readers of the conclusions as, along with an increasing interest in higher educational institutions' activities, insufficient dissemination of information has become a challenge across Europe. Thus conclusions of external evaluation as one of the main transparency tools under the Bologna process contribute to both the transparency of higher education in Europe and the reliability of information provided to stakeholders. The project has revealed a considerable need for an increase in the visibility of and access to the evaluation conclusions. While the majority of target groups such as in higher educational institutions, students, quality assurance agencies and government authorities have expressed similar opinions on the benefits provided by evaluation conclusions, some doubts have been raised by employers. In their opinion, external evaluation conclusions is an undoubtedly valuable information source, however, due to their large scope they become 'unsurmountable'. One of the key proposals made by employers is that the external evaluation conclusions should consist of easily understandable and comparable information which must be published on the websites of both higher educational institutions and quality assurance agencies.

Thus higher educational institutions should be encouraged to publish evaluation conclusions, doing this in a way that ensures easy access for and understanding by all stakeholders.

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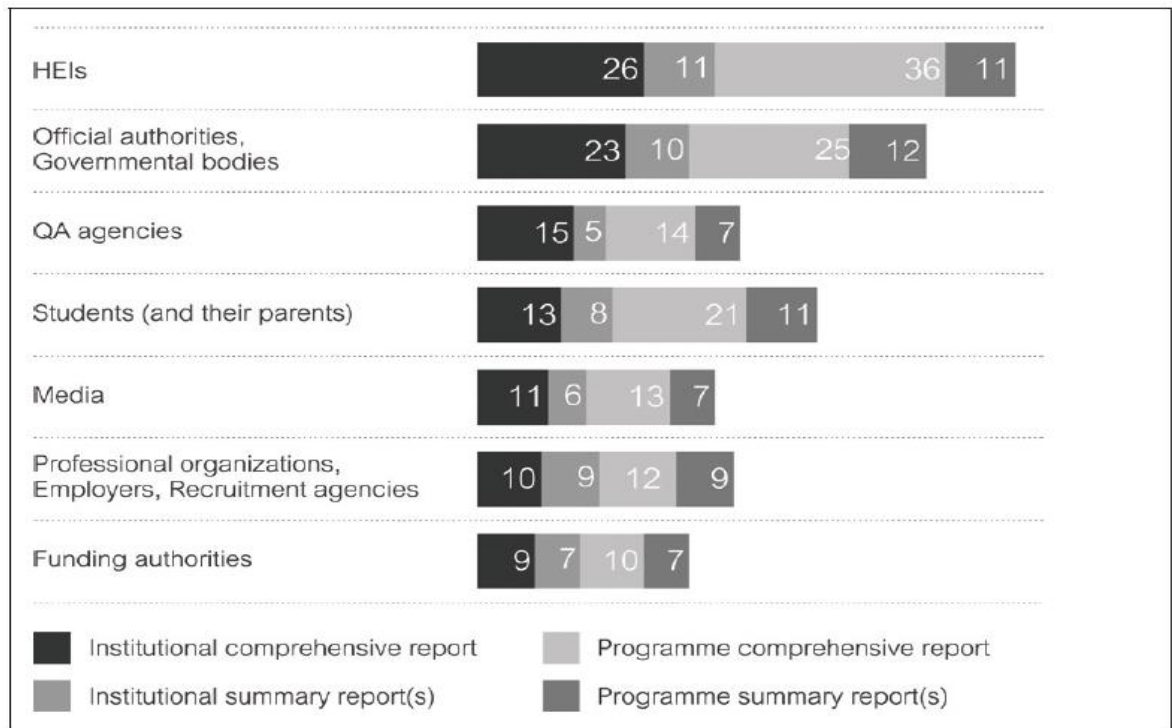
Nearly 50 quality assurance agencies were surveyed during a project implemented by ENQA, asking them about publicity, purpose, structure and contents of external evaluation conclusions. An analysis of the survey results have shown that the agencies carryout both institutional and study programme evaluations. On completion of evaluations, experts or representatives of the agencies prepare evaluation conclusions either in detail or in a summary format. Obviously, the conclusions are prepared for various purposes, however, the prevailing purpose is to use the conclusions as a basis for the making of an accreditation decision (see Figure 3). In the agencies' view, it is also very important to inform the public and to ensure transparency, therefore, evaluation conclusions are published.



**Figure 3. What is the main purpose of evaluation reports?<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>4</sup> Source: "Transparency of European Higher Education through Public Quality Assurance Reports (EQArep)", 2014

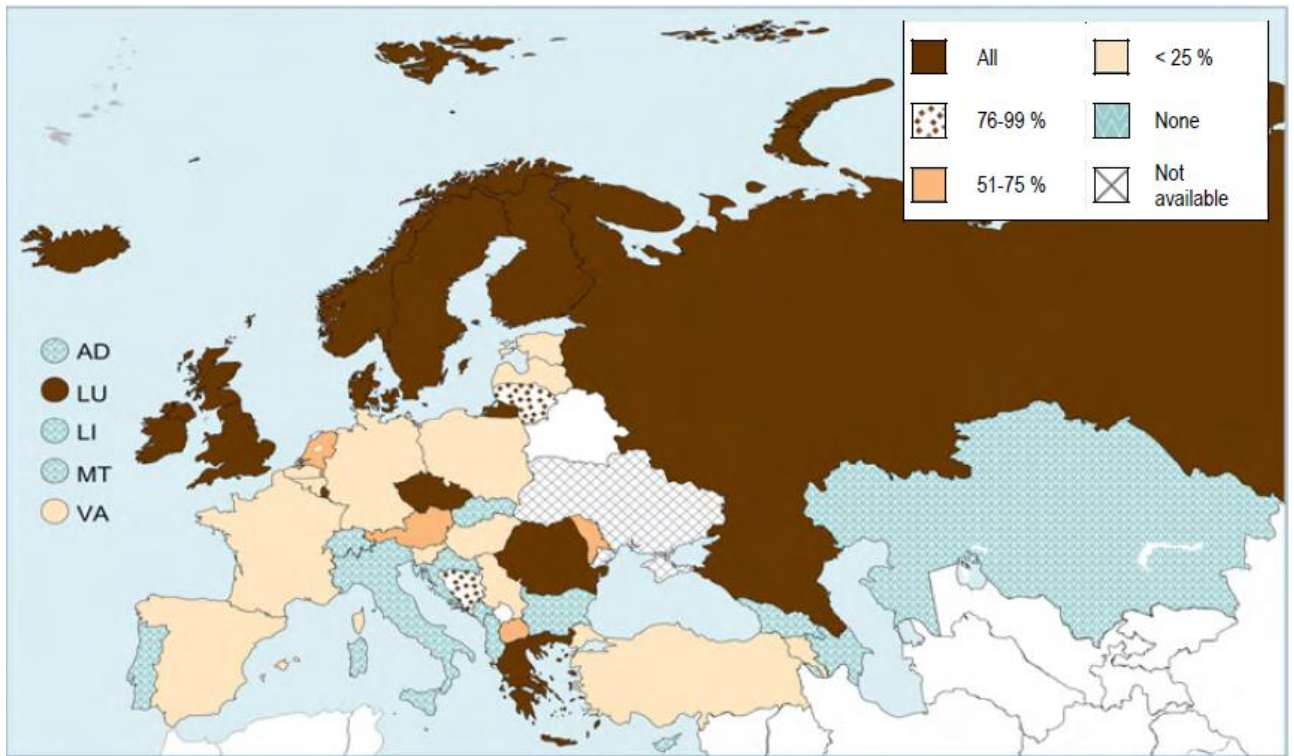
The majority of the surveyed agencies agree that evaluation conclusions should be available for use to all stakeholders, i. e. higher education institutions, students, employers, quality agencies etc. The results of the survey show that higher education institutions, government authorities and quality agencies are parties most interested in the evaluation conclusions (see Figure 4).



**Figure 4. Stakeholders that use evaluation reports<sup>5</sup>**

Publicity of evaluation results plays an important role also in the context of monitoring of the Bologna process implementation. It is stated in [The European Higher Education Area in 2015: Bologna Process Implementation Report](#) that increasing transparency and accountability is one of the main aspects of quality assurance, therefore, publicity of evaluation results (both positive and negative) is becoming increasingly significant along with changes in the quality assurance systems requirements. According to the report, publishing of positive evaluation results is simpler and most higher education institutions do this, however, a tendency toward more frequent publication of critical and negative results is observed. Figure 5 shows the publication of negative and critical results by higher education institutions in 2013-2014. Only a small part of them publicised such results in 2012, and now the number of such institutions has doubled.

<sup>5</sup> Source: "Transparency of European Higher Education through Public Quality Assurance Reports (EQArep)", 2014



**Figure 5. Publication of critical and negative results by higher education institutions, 2013/14<sup>6</sup>**

To sum up the information collected by the Centre and the results of the ENQA project, one may conclude that dissemination and publicity of external evaluation results is gaining importance, and this trend will continue as the results are used by increasingly larger numbers of stakeholders: from higher education institutions, quality assurance agencies and students to the mass media, employers and professional organisations. In addition, external evaluation results are not just the basis for the making of an accreditation decision; they are also one of the means to ensure greater transparency and to increase public awareness.

<sup>6</sup> Source: *The European Higher Education Area in 2015: Bologna Process Implementation Report*