



STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS

ALEKSANDRO STULGINSKIO UNIVERSITETO VEIKLOS VERTINIMO IŠVADOS

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW REPORT ALEKSANDRAS STULGINSKIS UNIVERSITY

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CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION	4
II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSTITUTION	5
III. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT	6
IV. ACADEMIC STUDIES AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING	9
V. RESEARCH.....	14
VI. IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.....	16
VII. GOOD PRACTICE AND ENHANCEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS	17
VIII. JUDGEMENT.....	20
Appendix A	21
ANNEX. ALEKSANDRAS STULGINSKIS UNIVERSITY RESPONSE TO REVIEW REPORT	23

ABBREVIATIONS

ASU	Aleksandras Stulginskis University
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EU	European Union
MES	Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania
MA	Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania
SA	Aleksandras Stulginskis University Students' representation
CQAHE	Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education
SKVC	Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education
SER	Self-Evaluation Report

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The institutional review of the **Aleksandras Stulginskis University** (referred to below as “**ASU**” or “**the University**”) was organised by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC), Lithuania, in its role as the Authorized Agency prescribed by Lithuanian law. The review was conducted in accordance with the prescribed methodology according to the Procedure for the External Review in Higher Education approved by Government Resolution No. 1317 of 22 September, 2010 and the Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Reivew, signed by the director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education on 25 October 2010, No 1-01-135.

2. The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education, Lithuania appointed the external assessment peer group composed of Prof. Bent Schmidt-Nielsen (Denmark) (Chair), Prof. Maris Klavins (Latvia), Prof. Frank van der Duyn Schouten (Netherlands), Prof. Carmen Fenoll (Spain), Arminas Varanauskas (Lithuania) (student representative), Kęstutis Ambrozaitis (employer representative) (Lithuania) and Dr. Norma Ryan (Ireland) (review secretary).

3. The initial basis for the evaluation report is the written Self-Evaluation Report and its annexes, which were submitted by ASU to SKVC. The expert group considered the Self-Evaluation Report, discussed its observations and formulated questions for the interviews to be held during the site visit.

4. The site visit took place from 9th to 11th October 2012. During the visit to Aleksandras Stulginskis University the expert group reviewed the organization of the university, its management system, strategic planning issues, organisation of studies, the way the quality was being assured, the qualifications of the staff, the facilities, the research activities and the impact of ASU on regional and national development. For these purposes, the expert group held discussions with members of the University’s administration, staff members who participated in the preparation of the self-evaluation report, teaching staff, researchers, students, graduates, employers and other external stakeholders including representatives of local and national government. The expert group had an extensive tour of the University to obtain personal impressions about the facilities. The site visit concluded with an oral presentation of the preliminary findings of the expert group to the senior officers of the University together with representatives of staff and students.

II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSTITUTION

5. Aleksandras Stulginskis University is a public university with its study programmes and research activities based on deeply rooted traditions of agricultural science and studies. The University was originally established as Higher Courses, founded in 1920 in Kaunas, and Lithuanian University, founded in 1924. In 1924 agronomy and forestry studies from Lithuanian University were transferred to the Academy of Agriculture established in Dotnuva in the same year. In 1946 it was transferred to Kaunas, and in 1964 to a special academic campus near the city of Kaunas. Following the regaining Lithuanian independence the management of the Academy was upgraded, a modern three levels education system (Bachelor, Master and PhD studies) was established, research based studies were developed, and study programs corresponding to market demands were offered. In 1996 the institution was granted university status and officially named the Lithuanian Agricultural University. In 2011 the University was re-named Aleksandras Stulginskis University after the first President of the Republic of Lithuania, by Decree of the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania.

6. In 2011 significant changes were made to the structure, management and status of the University when a new University Council and University Rector were elected; at that time the University was transferred from being a budget institution to public institution, and the mission statement was broadened to include a wider perspective of life sciences and environmental sciences.

7. In 2011 the number of students in the University was 5410; the total academic staff cohort was 469 with teachers (professors, associate professors, lecturers) numbering 385 and researchers 84.

8. The University comprises of 5 faculties –
- a. Faculty of Agronomy
 - b. Faculty of Economics and Management
 - c. Faculty of Forestry and Ecology
 - d. Faculty of Water and Land Management
 - e. Faculty of Agricultural Engineering

The University has 16 Academic Departments (reduced from 32 with the implementation of the new Strategic plan) offering 15 study programmes at Bachelor level and 17 Masters programmes together with 2 University research institutes and others associated with faculties and aimed at promotion of research activity.

9. The Self-Evaluation Report prepared by the University covered the activities and developments for the period 2006-2011 – a period of very significant change for

the University, including external factors as legislative changes by the Republic of Lithuania. To reflect some of these very recent changes the SER also covered the first eight months of 2012.

10. The revised Mission of the University, approved in late 2011 states:

WE, UNIVERSITY'S COMMUNITY, WILL ASPIRE TO CREATE AND DISSEMINATE THE SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE AND STRIVE SINCERELY FOR SAFE AND HEALTHY FOOD AND FULL-FLEDGED LIVING ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL PEOPLE OF LITHUANIA.

III. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

11. The Review Team explored the strategic management of ASU with reference to the criteria set out in the Methodology and Guidelines provided by SKVC and considered the strategic plan's fitness for purpose, arrangements for the plan's publicity and its availability to stakeholders and the public at large, together with the guarantees for its implementation, and management effectiveness.

12. The Review Team had been sent copies of both the previous Strategic Plan which was guiding the institution up to 2010/11 and the new revised Strategic Plan for the period 2012 – 2020. These documents were very useful in providing the review team with an excellent overview of ASU, its vision and its ambitions for the future. The Review Team was fully informed about the recent national legislative changes as well as the organizational and management changes within the university. While cognizant that the review period is from 2006 – 2011, the team focused its interviews and discussions on the ambitions and evidence contained in the new Strategic Plan together with an understanding of the situation pertaining previously within the institution.

13. ASU holds a unique position among universities in Lithuania in that all its education and research activities are focused on agriculture in the broadest sense. Lithuania also has a number of colleges which offer qualification courses and study programmes related to agricultural studies but none of these is a university and thus cannot offer Masters and PhD study programmes in these fields. However the expert team received the impression that, for a classical agricultural university, the position of ASU in Lithuania is not sufficiently strong and that new directions and initiatives in research and educational programmes must be pursued. Thus, at the present, the University is continuing to search for its appropriate place in the Lithuanian educational market and is seeking to actively and successfully compete at

national level. At one and the same time this presents opportunities and challenges for ASU and the fulfillment of its strategic goals and objectives.

14. The review team was very impressed with the quality and clarity of the Strategic Plan 2012-2020. The team found the Mission Statement to be very focused and directive, with a clear vision as to the directions that the University would wish to develop in over this period. The mission is very clearly aligned with the national imperatives with respect to agriculture, forestry and rural development.

15. During meetings with the Rector and other members of the senior management team of the University it was very evident that there is full support for the Plan, the vision for the future and the strategic aims and goals described within. It was made clear to the team that the Plan had been developed in full consultation with all stakeholders – both internal and external – and that it was not finalised until views had been sought and recommendations considered.

16. The aims and goals described within the Plan are aligned with the National Development Plans in place in Lithuania. Currently Lithuania has no comprehensive National Development Plan incorporating all areas of focus for the Republic, but there are a number of individual Plans relating to specific areas and national agendas. Three of these include the Rural Development Plan, the Forestry Development Plan and the Bioenergetics Development Plan. The Strategic Plan for ASU is very much aligned to these three national strategic plans and there is clear evidence that the institution is both cognisant of the national objectives in these areas and willing to engage with these in the education and training of professionals capable of working in these areas. The one limiting factor in the National Plans, from the perspective of ASU, is the desire to restrict the number of graduates in forestry programmes to 100 per year. This is also in line with the institution's aims. The National Plans also indicate a national shortage of engineering professionals and ASU is committed to increasing the number of engineering graduates, especially at Masters level.

17. Prior to adoption of the Plan by the University Council extensive discussions took place both within ASU and with groupings of external stakeholders, including alumni, local and national government representatives and employers. This has resulted in an acceptance and understanding of the Plan within the University community. The ambitions of the University were clearly understood and endorsed by senior management, by staff and students and by representatives of industry and business. The team met with members of the University Council who all expressed their support for and identification with the strategic goals.

18. The review team found that, not only was the strategy for the next eight years for ASU clearly described but that the key performance indicators identified by the Management are appropriate tools for the monitoring of the implementation of the Plan. The indicators are described in the Plan but are monitored using a database available electronically. The team was shown the programme and was also provided with a hard copy of the indicators, the monitoring plan and the progress achieved to date. The monitoring plan was very clear and specific, with tasks assigned to named personnel, dates, actions to be taken and a clear understanding of the outcomes to be achieved all detailed. The review team was satisfied with the evidence provided and confirmed in the interviews. ASU Strategic Plan is aligned to international objectives too, including the development of the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area.

19. The team found the procedures in place for monitoring the implementation of the actions in the Strategic Plan to be appropriate and fit for purpose. Both the written evidence provided in advance of the review site visit and the discussions held with staff and management representatives confirmed this.

20. The Plan for the future activities of the University is available in printed form. All key stakeholders were found to be familiar with the Plan and its objectives. It was very evident that not only is the plan for the University well publicized within the university but that staff are very supportive and willing to engage with management in implementing the planned actions.

21. The Team read in the SER and heard evidence during the interviews and discussions concerning the recent changes in the organisation of the academic units and of the senior management team. The team discussed these in some detail with members of the newly formed Council, and members of Senate as well as representatives of senior management. The reviewers found that the changes in academic organisation are very much in line with the strategy of the University and very much focused towards supporting the needs of the continued development of the delivery of education and the research agenda of the institution.

22. There is definitive evidence of the willingness of ASU to engage with external stakeholders, and also on the part of external stakeholders to engage with ASU. Those representatives that the Team met with were very supportive of the aims of ASU and expressed clearly the need within Lithuania for the types of graduates produced in ASU and for the research areas to be further enhanced. The external stakeholders confirmed that, in their view, it is essential for the continued development of Lithuania, that ASU continue to focus on 'agricultural' education and research – in all cases using the term 'agriculture' in its broadest sense.

23. The team was very impressed with the commitment of external stakeholders and recommends to the University that it establishes an Advisory Board, comprised of external members, to offer advice and guidance to the University, especially in relation to future directions and planning.

24. It is evident that some consideration of the developmental needs of academic staff, particularly in the area of research, is in place. There is a significant focus on the encouragement of staff to engage in research and to ensure publication of results in national and international journals. ASU is developing the infrastructure necessary to allow research to be undertaken, especially within the Nemunas Valley Project – a partnership of industry with ASU. This is still in the early stages of development with the laboratories almost completed but not yet operational.

25. Overview of strategic management:

a. The review team found the main strengths of the strategic management process in ASU to include

i. Top down and bottom up approach to development of the current strategic plan;

ii. Engagement and support of external stakeholders for the plan;

iii. The use of clearly defined and measurable key performance indicators for the monitoring of the implementation of the actions identified in the plan.

b. The review team found the main weaknesses of the strategic management process to include

i. A tendency towards a bureaucratic and centralized decision-making structure.

ii. Risks related to the management system of ASU (and in general in Lithuania) including parallel functions of University Senate, University Council and Rector as top level executive authority.

26. Strategic Management are is given a positive evaluation.

IV. ACADEMIC STUDIES AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING

27. ASU offers a wide range of study programmes at both undergraduate (Bachelor) and postgraduate (Master and PhD) in the fields identified in the strategic plan of the university as the primary focus for both education and research. The range extends from

engineering programmes to business and economics with all programmes having a particular focus on applications and relevance to agriculture. Both the evidence presented in the SER and the discussions held with both internal and external stakeholders made it very clear that this focus of ASU is very highly regarded and deemed appropriate and suitable for the needs of the regional and national economy.

28. The University has a comprehensive policy towards the evaluation of programmes by students, both while the students are pursuing the programmes and also after graduation. Both the management and staff of ASU demonstrated a clear commitment to improving all aspects of the programmes offered and it is evident that steps are taken as a consequence of the evaluations by students. However it is not always evident to the students that this is the case. The students did appear to be aware of some actions taken by the University but the knowledge came from informal communications rather than via any formal mechanism. The University is encouraged to ensure that student representation is based on full engagement of the student population. The University is recommended to ensure that students are aware that their views expressed in surveys and elsewhere are carefully considered and are acted upon where necessary. It is not surprising that feedback to students on the results of surveys conducted and of actions taken to rectify deficiencies is not as systematic as it might be. This is a problem observed in many universities worldwide. However the review team recommends that ASU addresses the issue and ensures that there is a formal mechanism to give feedback to student on evaluations. This will encourage students in the future to participate in surveys and other evaluation processes.

29. The reviewers, in examining the detail of the undergraduate programmes, were concerned at the small numbers in some of the undergraduate programmes, especially in engineering sciences. This is reflective of a trend world-wide and not confined to ASU. Nonetheless it is an issue that the University must make efforts to rectify as soon as possible. The cost to the University of supporting undergraduate programmes with small numbers is high and will continue to grow unless steps are taken to reverse the trend. The use of models in place in other universities nationally and internationally, for example, increasing the modularisation of course offerings, could lead to a maximisation of the use of resources efficiently while allowing a relatively wide range of choices to the students. The Review team did observe examples where modules were offered to a number of programmes and students from different programmes attend the same classes, thus maximising efficiency of delivery, especially in first year programmes. Some of these steps are already being taken by ASU, including a commendable school liaison programme, open days twice yearly when the

public are invited to ASU to meet with staff and students and view the developments taking place and the quality of the facilities and education.

30. ASU has, in addition to the undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes, a comprehensive programme of offerings in the areas of both continuing professional development (CPD) and lifelong learning. A variety of programmes aimed at personal and professional development is to be commended as is the commitment of the staff of the University to continuing to develop and enhance these programmes. The external stakeholders interviewed, coming from both the public and private sectors in Lithuania, all endorsed and supported the approach of ASU to these programmes. The programmes offered are usually developed in consultation with the relevant sector which may be interested in the programmes, both from the perspective of personal as well as professional development. Criteria for entry to the programmes vary depending on the individual programme, allowing entry of both graduates and those without prior qualifications in the field. This flexible policy towards access to such programmes is highly commendable and in line with the institutional and national strategy with respect to inclusion and access to education by all.

31. The Review Team considered the programmes on offer and the numbers of students enrolled in each. It was evident that some of them have low numbers and this is a threat to the sustainability of the programmes. The University has recently reviewed all its programmes and some are in the process of being phased out as they are replaced by others which have been designed to better meet the market demand and student needs. A concern that might be raised is the relatively large number of study programmes, which did not receive high evaluation by external reviewers due to issues identified during the evaluation process. The redesign of the programmes following consultation with students and also with external stakeholders is very commendable. It will take a few years before the benefits of this approach will be measurable.

32. Many of the CPD and lifelong learning programmes are not certified or aligned with other accredited programmes. This could prove to be a disadvantage to those taking these programmes, especially if the graduates wish to move abroad where employers might not be so well informed as to the quality and standard of the programmes as those in Lithuania. The review team strongly recommends that all programmes offered are accredited and that the students, once they have successfully completed the programmes are awarded with a certificate, titled as appropriate for the level and standard of the programme. Such a step would also facilitate the acceptance of international students into these programmes.

33. The students that were interviewed by the expert panel did not seem to have a high awareness of the use of modern information technology. The team were informed by

staff that modern technology is in place, and includes the use of a virtual learning environment, vodcasts podcasts, etc. The use of such technology greatly enhances the opportunities for learners to engage in lifelong learning and for the University to reach out to all parts of Lithuania with its programmes. This provides excellent scope for both income generation and delivering on the strategic objectives and goals both of ASU and of the country.

34. ASU enunciated both in the SER and during discussions and interviews the importance of the internalisation strategy. One key element of this strategy is to increase significantly the number of international students studying fulltime in ASU. There is a clear realisation that to achieve this aim programmes must be offered in English language and that supports need to be put in place for the international students which may be different to those needed for national students. The acceptance of international students onto the Bachelor programmes commenced two years ago. The expert team did not meet any of these students but listened to the concerns expressed both by staff and Lithuanian students. These concerns focussed in particular around the quality of the student experience, the integration into the community within ASU and also the region. There was a growing awareness of the need to support these students in a dedicated way.

35. With respect to the courses and programmes the language of tuition for international students is English. Not all the academic staff are fluent in English and this has the potential to be limiting in terms of what the institution can offer. Incentives, especially in terms of additional salary, are offered to teachers who deliver courses in English. On the one hand this can lead to a stimulation of the internationalisation process for Lithuanian students who, on the other hand may not be fluent enough in English to be able to benefit from the courses. In some instances this means that the courses must be delivered twice – once in Lithuanian and once in English. This doubles the workload of teachers and potentially reduces the time available for research and other scholarly activities. This is unlikely to remain sustainable as financial resources are reduced and a solution must be found in close collaboration between the University, students and stakeholders. The review team was cognisant of the legal requirement that Lithuanian students are entitled to have all programmes delivered in the national language unless the content of studies or programme internationalisation aspects require the course to be delivered in English. This is an issue for the Lithuanian government if a change is to be made to this requirement.

36. ASU's strategy highlights the need to increase the number of postgraduates – both Masters and PhD students. This is in line with the national agenda and also international trends. In particular in the professional areas such as engineering the

international trend is for recognition and accreditation of the Masters Degrees as the engineering qualification rather than the Bachelor. However in most other fields (with the exception of the healthcare professions) the Bachelor degree provides a useful education and should not only lead to postgraduate education but also to employment in the work force at the present stage of development. It is possible that in the future advanced activities in agriculture will require some level of postgraduate qualification. The concept of the Masters Degree as a professional development tool, following a couple of years in the work place, is one which has significant merit and should be considered actively for all programmes.

37. ASU monitors the employment opportunities for its graduates. It has established a database and keeps a record of the employment of its graduates and attempts, through its Alumni Club, to ensure that the University remains in contact with its alumni. Some alumni are members of Council and help ensure that the views of alumni are taken into consideration both in strategy development and also in the monitoring of the operational plan developed subsequent to the strategy as a means of ensuring appropriate actions are taken.

38. Overview of Academic Studies and Life-Long Learning:

a. The expert team considers the main strengths of ASU in the area of academic studies and lifelong learning to include:

i. A very strong commitment among the academic staff of the institution to teaching and education;

ii. Institutional strategies aimed at continuing staff support in the development of student-centred learning, including teacher development programmes with visits abroad to gain experience from other international institutions on active teaching pedagogies.

iii. Good programmes relevant to the institutional mission and strategic goals;

iv. Provision of programmes relevant to the employment market and desired by employers;

v. Close and positive liaisons with industry and social partners ;

vi. Willingness to engage with external partners to develop lifelong learning and continuing professional development programmes appropriate to the needs of industry within Lithuania and, by extension, internationally;

vii. A flexible policy towards access to programmes by employing criteria appropriate to each situation.

b. The expert team consider the main weaknesses of ASU in the area of academic studies and lifelong learning to include:

i. Many of the CPD and Lifelong learning programmes are not certified or aligned with other accredited programmes. This could prove to be a disadvantage to those

taking these programmes especially if the graduates wish to move abroad where employers might not be so well informed as to the quality and standard of the programmes as those in Lithuania.

- ii. The lack of integration of the international students because of language barriers – both with respect to students and also to some of the staff.
- iii. Improvement of the feedback system of student evaluation.
- iv. Further efforts are needed to improve the integration of research-led education and student involvement in research activities from an early point in their studies.
- v. The difficulty in trying to compensate for a low national student intake by increasing the intake of international students.
- vi. Lack of formal system for forming a democratic based student representation.

39. Academic Studies and Life-Long Learning are is given a positive evaluation.

V. RESEARCH AND (OR) ART

40. The review team reviewed the research strategy and agenda for the University. It was evident that the University is very focussed on improving the level and quality of research activity and there is active encouragement for all staff to engage in research. The research strategy includes the pursuit of both basic and fundamental research in addition to applied research. The evident aim of the research strategy is to overcome existing problems in research activities, including the low number of papers published in high impact scientific journals, the low level of funding for research projects, the relatively high drop-out rate of PhD students and the relatively low number of PhD graduates. The University, in developing its new strategy, decided to concentrate on key strategic directions in both fundamental, applied and experimental (social and cultural) developmental research in the following areas:

- a. Development of agrobiotechnologies,
- b. Assessment of genetic potential of plants;
- c. Climate change and improving environmental conditions;
- d. Bioenergy, Chemical and Biotechnological processes;
- e. Sustainable agriculture and rural development;

- f. Food safety and security;
- g. Sustainable use of land, forest, water and energy resources.

41. In reviewing the research outputs and discussing the research themes with staff the review team observed a commitment to enhancing and developing the research especially in forestry and agriculture. However there was little evidence of activity in the food technology area. There were many statements about the importance of food technology but it seemed to the team that the reality is there is little being achieved as yet. Much of what was indicated about the research agenda, both in the SER and during interviews and discussions, was aspirational rather than a reality as yet. In assuring the mission statement on healthy food, the expert team observed that the main focus was on the quality of raw materials and not on developments within the field of food technology. Close collaboration with the Kaunas University of Technology should be further developed.

42. ASU has appointed a new vice-rector for Research and the commitment of the institution towards acquiring the skills and competency in research is very evident. Of importance for the advancement of research in the future are the ongoing investments in the research infrastructure by the University in collaboration with the state and private industry. The University is putting in place incentives and rewards for staff based on measurable achievements in research, including publications in peer reviewed journals, supervision of PhD students, etc. However the team did not find evidence of actions aimed at supporting the development of excellent researchers, for example, short or medium-term staff mobility programs for enhancing research skills and facilitating the establishment of strategic international collaborations.

43. The development of the new research facilities as part of the Nemunas Valley Project is a major step towards the provision of appropriate and modern facilities for the conduct of both basic and applied research. The Nemunas Valley Project is an outcome of collaboration with industry partners, aiming at the creation of an open access integrated center for research, study and business ("Nemunas Valley"). Creation of this center is provided by the Program of the Integrated Center for Research, Study and Business approved by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania. This strategic direction also conforms to the Joint research program "Joint program of the research of natural resources and agriculture" approved by the MES. The Project has resulted in the provision of an excellent space for research and collaborations with industry together with the potential for industry to locate specific projects within the Centre, allowing close liaison with the research community in ASU. The construction component of the Centre is almost completed and is in the process of being fitted out with basic laboratory facilities and equipment. The potential of the Centre is

excellent and the commitment of the senior management and staff of ASU to ensuring the success of the Project was very evident.

44. Overview of the research area:

a. The review team considers the main strengths of ASU in the area of research to include:

i. National significance of applied research in the fields of agriculture, forestry, etc.

ii. Research conducted on topics ranging from the field to the table.

iii. Good facilities for field experiments.

iv. Good field study experience and a strong focus on solving of problems related to the continued development of Lithuanian agriculture; applied research with a strong focus on real problem-solving.

v. Very significant ongoing efforts to improve the infrastructure for research.

vi. Clear vision and emphasis on the strengthening of research – industry relations.

vii. Creation of Nemunas Valley center.

b. The review team considers the main weaknesses of ASU in the area of research to include:

i. The low record of research performance indicators to date.

ii. High drop-out rate of students at PhD study level.

iii. Poor involvement in international research projects, international collaborations and international visibility.

iv. Excessive teaching hours for academic staff that jeopardises the ability of staff to commit as much time to research as is desirable.

v. An imbalance between activities related to basic research versus applied research, with a strong bias towards the latter at the present.

45. Research or (and) art area is given a positive evaluation.

VI. IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

46. ASU occupies a unique position in Lithuania in that it is the only university specialising in agriculture studies in the country. There are a number of colleges offering programmes in agricultural studies but only ASU has the authority and the capability to offer students programmes to PhD level in fields related to agriculture.

47. In discussions with both internal and external stakeholders it is evident that ASU takes its responsibilities very seriously. The University consults very widely with external stakeholders, including government, employers and local industry. ASU has decided to specialise in three specific areas – agriculture, forestry and bio-resources with a focus on renewable energy – and this approach was widely endorsed by all. There was a general recognition of the need for well educated graduates in these fields, with a more widely based education for the Bachelors programmes and specialisation at the Masters level. The PhD programme focuses, as is proper, on research.

48. Everyone the review team met with endorsed the strategic approach taken by ASU. All supported the aims and strategic goals and all expressed their willingness to assist the University in all possible ways to achieve the goals. This includes the provision of advice with respect to business practices as well as in curriculum reform.

49. The leadership of ASU plays an active role in organisations related to agriculture.

50. Evidence was also provided of the role alumni play in assisting with school liaison activities and with examination of research theses.

51. Overview of the impact on regional and national development area:

a. The review team considers the main strengths of ASU in the area of the impact of ASU on regional and national development to include:

i. Provision of appropriately trained graduates in key areas identified by the State as important for the development of the region and of the country.

ii. A willingness to engage and collaborate with external stakeholders in the development of professional development and CPD programmes.

52. Impact on Regional and National Development area is given a positive evaluation.

VII. GOOD PRACTICE AND ENHANCEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Commendations of examples of good practice

The Team found many examples of good practice within ASU. The Team commends in particular the following:

- Exhibition/Open days organised by the University twice a year and the encouragement of the participation of current students in these events;

- The cooperation with industry partners in the Nemunas Valley Project;
- The cooperation with industry partners and other stakeholders in provision of lifelong learning and continuing professional development programmes appropriate to the needs of the region and of the country;
- A strong and committed leadership, supported by the staff.

Recommendations for improvement

The Review Team, having considered its findings and following the discussions with the management, staff, students and external stakeholders of the University, recommend the following for consideration by the University, that it:

1. considers re-structuring the study programmes offered so as to maximise efficiencies and optimise student choice;
2. increases the quality and level of its public relations activities, including the marketing of the study programmes, so as to ensure all stakeholders (internal and external) are fully aware of the mission, agenda and activities of the University;
3. ensures all courses, including those offered in continuing professional development and life long learning, are accredited and recognised formally both by the University and also on the National Framework of Qualifications;
4. reviews the process by which students are selected for positions on University bodies and study programme committees with a view to amending the process in line with international good practice;
5. closely involves the elected Students Union in discussions and activities at both university and faculty levels;
6. establishes a graduate school for doctoral students;
7. reviews its organisational structures with the objective of reducing the level of complexity and bureaucratic systems for staff and students;
8. establishes an Advisory Board for the University;
9. concentrates initially on development of Masters programmes of study for international students, to be followed by development of Bachelor programmes;
10. increases the offerings of internship and work placement opportunities for all students;
11. increases participation in Erasmus, Socrates and other such programmes for both staff and students;
12. encourages students to increase their participation in international clubs and societies;

13. continues to move towards description of study programmes in terms of competence based outcomes rather than inputs;
14. continues to strive to raise the level and quality of research and to aspire to be recognised nationally and internationally in research;
15. considers new actions to enhance academic staff engagement in internationalisation and development of excellence of research.

VIII. JUDGEMENT

Aleksandro Stulginskio universitetas is given a positive evaluation.

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Appendix A

Comment on MOSTA evaluation Process by Review team

Evaluation of minimum requirements for learning resources.

In the evaluation of ASU carried out in accordance with the methodology laid down in the description given in 'Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education' . The Team was provided with data on learning resources given by MOSTA. These data are listed in the paper: 'THE EVALUATION OF LEARNING RESOURCES OF A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION ACCORDING TO THE ASSESSED AREAS'

The data for ASU concluded that, considering the indicators of the assessed areas for 2008-2010, the learning resources of the higher education institution was assessed **positively**.

The Team found the data valuable as background information both for the analysis of the self-evaluation report and for the interviews carried out at the university.

The team feels obliged to add comments to the procedure and the use of the quantitative data in combination with the qualitative evaluation carried out by the team.

The Team observed that the basis for deciding on a 3 or 6 year accreditation requires a positive assessment of the learning resources **and** a positive evaluation of the 4 areas included in the methodology for the qualitative evaluation.

The Team observed that the quantitative evaluation is based on indicators covering the period 2008-2010.

The Team also observed that outcome of the quantitative evaluation was known to the university prior to the site visit by the review team.

The team wishes to point to a couple of indicators that could have had crucial negative consequences for the final result of the combined accreditation procedure:

Indicator 1.4: Number of study places in the library; (Should read: Number of students per study place in the library.)

For ASU this indicator showed an average of 19.3 with an acceptable minimum of 18.1. Three year old data based on a previous larger student mass could have influenced the total accreditation process negatively.

Considering that the aim of the assessment criteria is to compare universities with a significantly differing profile, it could be important to consider the availability and characteristics of facilities and infrastructure specifically needed for study and research work.

Indicator 4.4: The proportion of science (art) doctors with state-funded tuition to third degree entrants with state-funded tuition.

For ASU this indicator fluctuates strongly with a final average well below the acceptable minimum level. The Team finds it important that the university takes notice of this discrepancy. The Team is also aware that the indicator is based on a very low total number and fluctuations with just one PhD degree completed could strongly influence the data. The team would be concerned that the low number of PhD students and the consequences for a positive or negative assessment could put a heavy pressure on both the individual student and the student's supervisor and influence the procedure for conducting a relevant PhD programme and examination.

Conclusion: As was previously stated the Team found the indicators interesting and valuable as background for its evaluation. The Team recommends to SKVC that the double-evaluation procedure should be reconsidered and an integration of the two procedures should be discussed.

**ANNEX. ALEKSANDRAS STULGINSKIS UNIVERSITY RESPONSE TO
REVIEW REPORT**



ALEKSANDRAS STULGINSKIS UNIVERSITY

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To Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher
Education

2012-11-21 Nr. 08-05-2649

To Peer Group members of Aleksandras
Stulginskis University external assessment

CONCERNING PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS OF ASU EXTERNAL EVALUATION

We are very grateful to Peer Group leader prof. Bent Schmidt-Nielsen and all group members for great job done ascertaining Aleksandras Stulginskis University activities and features, revealing University's strengths and weaknesses. Recommendations for improvement of University activities and their management are valuable indeed.

We would like to respond on these inaccuracies in the conclusions:

1. It is stated in point 38, that University is concentrating on three primary research areas: Food Technology, Forestry and Agriculture/Food Production. According to the „ASU Strategy 2020“ (p.11), List of the main research projects of University (Annex 13 of Self-evaluation Report), Main strategic directions of fundamental, applied and experimental (social, cultural) development approved by University Senate (Annex 13, table 1 of Self-evaluation Report), University is concentrating on these areas: Development of agrobiotechnologies, assessment of plants genetic potential; Climate change and improving of environment condition; Bioenergy, chemical and biotechnological processes; Sustainable agriculture and rural development; Food safety and security; Sustainable use of land, forest, water and energy resources.

2. We also provide an explanation on the point 34 where duplication of the same studies in Lithuanian and English languages are mentioned. The University leadership agrees that the same studies dubbing in English and Lithuanian languages are not rational. Unfortunately it is determined by the National laws, which determine that the language of instruction to local students is Lithuanian language. Local students can study in another language only voluntary. Because of the rapidly increasing importance and scale of the international dimension the proposal of experts to Lithuanian politicians on English language validation in study process would be desirable. In the absence of legislative changes the University will not avoid the parallel instruction in two languages.

Rector

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