

Agricultural Evaluations May 2014

This report refers to the external evaluation of five agricultural study programmes in two higher education institutions in Lithuania by international evaluation team in May 2014.

May 2014 Agricultural Evaluations

Evaluation Team:

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Programmes Evaluated:

Renewable Energy Resources Engineering (Bachelor), Aleksandras Stulginskis University

Biomass Engineering (Master), Aleksandras Stulginskis University

Agricultural Technologies and Management (Bachelor), Aleksandras Stulginskis University

Agronomy (Master), Aleksandras Stulginskis University

Recreation (Prof.Bachelor), Kaunas College of Forestry and Environmental Engineering

The evaluations were organized by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC). The evaluated higher education institutions undertook internal evaluations of the programmes and submitted Self Evaluation Reports (SER) and related documentation. The evaluation teams had the opportunity to study this documentation and subsequently conducted a site visits to the institutions and then discussed each study programme and arrived at final decisions.

The evaluations were conducted according to the following main areas:

- Programme Aims and Learning Outcomes
- Curriculum Design
- Staff
- Facilities and Learning Resources
- Study Process and Student Assessment
- Programme Management.

The programmes evaluated comprised of one professional bachelor degree programme, two university bachelor programmes and two university master programmes. All four Aleksandras Stulginskis University programmes were positively assessed with four programmes proposed for validation for six years. Professional Bachelor programme of Kaunas College of Forestry and Environmental Engineering was not accredited.

Programme Aims and Learning Outcomes

In general Programme Aims and Learning Outcomes were well defined, clear and corresponding to the title of the programme for all Aleksandras Stulginskis University programmes. Learning Outcomes included the needs of local market and internationalization of businesses across the Europe.

A serious shortcoming were detected for the program *Recreation* (Prof.Bachelor) of Kaunas College of Forestry and Environmental Engineering dealt with the inconsistency of the aims and objectives of the study program with the qualification (Professional Bachelor of Agriculture) and study area of Agriculture and Organic Farming study branch (D460). Also learning outcomes thus clearly defined, were not connected with organic farming and, in general, agriculture. This was the main reason for ET decision – not to recommend the accreditation of this study programme.

Curriculum Design

This area was rated good for all Aleksandras Stulginskis University study programmes and except *Agronomy*. These programmes were created together with local industry representatives and international partners from Hohenheim University (Germany) and a university in Austria.

The curriculum of the program *Recreation* (prof. Bachelor) of Kaunas College of Forestry and Environmental Engineering was divided between the courses in recreation and the courses in agriculture. As the qualification is in agriculture, the study courses in recreation did not comply with the qualification, but the courses in agriculture did not comply with the learning outcomes. Some of the titles of courses contained spelling mistakes and some, for example, „Game Management Essentials“ were misleading and should be called „Wildlife Management“ or similarly.

For most cases the review panel suggested to increase the number of subjects taught in English as well as to integrate agricultural production management software into the study subjects.

Most recommendations also included: increasing the number of electives, reviewing study literature to include more up-to date sources, references to e-resources and data-bases as well as literature in foreign languages, greater emphasis on ethics in business and constant improvement of the quality of the course works.

One of the weaknesses of the curriculum of *Agronomy* (Master) study programme was the lack of study subjects related with integrated weed, pest and disease management that were also suggested by the Self-evaluation Commission and should be taken in account further on. The programme should also encompass topics about Common Agriculture Policy of the European Union and other policy issues that students currently lack understanding in.

Staff

For most programmes the teaching staffs was identified as one of the main strengths with the strong commitment and contribution to the programme. In most cases teachers were really supportive to the students and assisting them in their studies and future career. The main areas for improvement were the English language of teachers both taught and spoken and low participation of teachers in the mobility programmes. For several HEIs the review panel also recommended to provide further encouragement to the international research activity of teachers and attracting more lecturers from social partners.

Facilities and Learning Resources

Aleksandras Stulginskis University have good and adequate facilities and learning resources (classrooms, laboratories and training rooms) which are used by the students according to their study programmes. Facilities concerning field research, preparation for processing etc. are modern. Practical classes are mostly arranged in smaller rooms. Most of the classrooms and laboratories are equipped with specialized video facilities and equipment, internet access, computerized workplaces for teachers, stands, models, and other visual aids. Teachers can use portable computers and projectors in other classrooms. Two large-scale EU projects were recently implemented to modernize the study infrastructure.

The Experimental Farm is located close to the university and offers very good opportunities for demonstration and also provides possibilities for students to participate in different research projects both in laboratory and in field experiments.

Kaunas College of Forestry and Environmental Engineering is working hard to update facilities, carrying out maintenance and repairs, so the quality will probably be improved in the coming years. ET agrees that there is enough space in auditoriums and laboratories and also the number of rooms is adequate for provision of this study programme. The teaching and learning equipment (laboratory and computer equipment, consumables) in labs and auditoriums are rather good.

The main areas for improvement include updating of computers' hardware according to the changing needs; updating accounting related textbooks in foreign languages in the library, using of modern technologies for enhancing study processes, and encouraging students to use electronic databases and videoconference system more actively.

Study Process and Student Assessment

This area was rated as good and systematically renewed and updated for all programmes. The review panel found that in all cases the admission requirements are well-founded and the student support system is adequate and the assessment system is clear, transparent and understandable for students in most cases. Equal rights are assured to all students, several grant mechanisms are available as well as social support system is developed for supporting socially vulnerable groups. However, in most cases the experts noted that greater emphasis should be placed on student mobility, particularly on widening geographical spread, and more encouragement be provided from the HEI side. In many cases the review panel also recommended expanding responsibilities of the Career Centre and making it more visible to the students. In some cases it was noted that a credit transfer system for Erasmus programme should be made more clear and transparent to students.

Programme Management

Programme management was considered to be generally good but in certain instances could be more flexible and visible to all stakeholders. Quality management systems are being implemented. HEIs have all the necessary organisation structures and mechanisms for the management of study programmes. It was obvious to the evaluation teams that there is stakeholder involvement in the management of the programmes, however in some cases this process can be made more transparent and visible to stakeholders. The experts also noted that in some cases more formal procedures for quality assurance should be established and improved. However, more efforts are needed to take into account the needs of social partners.