

Recommendations to the Higher Arts Education Institutions, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education and the Ministry of education and Science, Lithuania

Overview Report of the Applied Arts Accreditation Expert Group

1 Applied Arts Programmes

1.1 The subject displays a good level of craftsmanship and a significant focus on technical expertise.

1.2 The Experts found that there is some evidence that the Applied Arts sector is beginning to engage proactively with the developing needs of society and the dynamic needs of the consumer market place.

1.3 The Experts found that, generally, Applied Arts programmes are oriented towards the development of individual artists with a 'fine art' base; the profile aimed for seeks to combine the traditional concepts of a 'master of handicraft' and an 'artist', which is deeply rooted in art education in some parts of Europe. Yet it should be considered that present day European universities and HEI's are responsible for training graduates who are able to create and apply creative/artistic knowledge and problem solving skills not only in the state subsidised and commercially limited sector of (fine) arts but also in the rapidly developing adjacent fields of enterprise (or research). The likely forthcoming changes to the demands of the consumer market will mean that there is a need to relate Applied Arts education and training more to design education with the inclusion of the development of teamwork skills, project management and entrepreneurial, marketing and/or business skills. In light of this, the positioning of Applied Arts within Faculty structures should be very carefully considered and based on accurate research of future needs.

1.4 The establishment of colleges has resulted in a new competitive context in the area of higher education in Lithuania. The fact that colleges successfully centre on (traditional) handicraft skills and technical training should lead to a refocusing within the Universities towards developing the higher registers of cognitive and creative skills and a critical, research oriented mind set. The colleges on the other hand must similarly strive to focus on and incorporate current and developing trends in art and design crafts in order to prepare graduates who are able to produce and market artefacts of Lithuanian culture and tradition in a contemporary, and increasingly globalized, market.

1.5 The experts recommend that the higher education Applied Arts sector across Lithuania should undertake a self analysis of the current state of Applied Arts education and how their educational practices compare to those of the wider European context. This analysis should be undertaken by Art and Design Historians, critics and theoreticians as well as Applied Arts specialist teachers and practitioners. The results of the self analysis should feed into a national conference in which the results of the self

analysis and a programme for change and development is agreed. The experts recommend that such an initiative is fully and appropriately supported by the relevant ministry as well as the quality assurance agency.

1.6 The Experts recommend that the Applied Arts sector could be more systematic in the way they garner the experience of other educational cultures that has been provided by their individual involvement with Erasmus and other EU exchange programmes. Those Applied Arts educators and practitioners who have participated in Erasmus or other exchange programmes should use the information available to them, arising from their exchange experience, to critically analyse and evaluate their experiences. By noting the comparative strengths and weaknesses of the venues visited the results of the self analysis mentioned in 1.4 could be similarly evaluated. This information should be used as a basis for discussion on a national basis and be available and disseminated to all interested parties, perhaps on a website.

2 Higher Arts Education Institutions

2.1 In general there is a lack of coherence between the stated aims and the programmes provided. Better consideration at institutional level could be given to how the programme aims are reflected in the course elements, learning outcomes and assignments set.

2.2 There is an urgent need to develop meaningful Staff Professional Development processes at all Academies, Universities, Faculties and Departments to support and encourage teachers in the enhancement of their role as 'learning facilitators' rather than the present established, outmoded (and historical) 'master' teachers' role. In this way the true potential of the intrinsic talent that students possess, and bring with them to the study process, can be fully realised and made available to society on their graduation.

2.3 In the view of the experts the present ubiquitous practice of presenting the works of previous cohorts of students to new or current students as models of good practice is a highly questionable practice. It promotes an inward-looking culture, emphasises the achievements of the past as exemplary over the need for future innovations and inhibits incoming students from exploring opportunities for new creative processes and the development of ambitious new ideas that explore uncharted territory.

2.4 There is an urgent need to review the established methodological basis of the teaching as the experts advise that it is outmoded (and historical). It is highly improbable that the methodology presently employed is capable of producing programmes that can sufficiently meet the 'Key Parameters of Study Quality'¹, as defined by the agency. A greater focus on contemporary practice and on contemporary theory must be instigated urgently in some institutions. Where it already exists it should be increased in quantity and enhanced in quality. The designing of programmes that

¹ Page 2 External Assessment of Study Programmes, STUDIJU KOKYBES VERTINIMO CENTRAS

allow the student time and space for independent study and personal development is viewed as an urgent need.

2.5 Students should be encouraged to be autonomous and life-long learners. Serious consideration should be given to reducing teaching contact time in favour of structured learning time. More self study needs to be introduced into the programmes. This would have the positive effect of aiding students to become more responsible for their own learning and adopt a more positive approach to life long learning. This would allow teaching staff more time to involve themselves in professional development as teachers of higher education studies and to engage as researchers in the pedagogies of their disciplines.

2.6 Most HEIs visited are in the process of restructuring their programmes according to the new guidelines of the Ministry (7(BA) or 5 (MA) subjects per semester, 2 credit minimum). This restructuring effectively puts an end to the comprehensive, almost encyclopaedic approach to skills and knowledge that is still prevalent in many of the programmes visited. Most of the changes that were presented to the experts did not seem to embrace this restructuring and were not based on an acceptance of the fact that an encyclopaedic approach to skills and knowledge was no longer possible or appropriate. Programme teams had attempted to work around the restructuring with cosmetic or superficial changes. Within faculties and departments the challenging effects of these guidelines should be discussed on the deeper level that arises when considering different modes of teaching and not focussing on 'inputs' but on outputs in the form of competencies and learning outcomes.

2.7 The Higher Education sector and Applied Arts in particular should define and clearly delineate the borderline between Bachelor and Masters study - defining more clearly the distinct and stand alone quality of the Bachelor and emphasising the research element at MA level and the development of the capacity for conceptual and critical thinking. Using Applied Arts as an example, the research element should not necessarily be limited to History of Art or Artistic Theory but should be broadened to include marketing research, design research, manufacturing and production research, materials and processes research.

2.8 At institutional level consideration should be given to the nomenclature of the Masters programmes considering the use of umbrella titles rather than individual free standing study specialisations. This will lead to rationalisations of study at MA level that would promote horizontal learning and interdisciplinary studies, and the conceptual and creative development of students and hence the profession. It would provide essential broadening as well as deepening which is somewhat overemphasised at present. Very rarely do student numbers studying under the present range of nomenclature attain the critical mass that is crucial to provide the student numbers necessary for a rich varied and stimulating learning environment. The experience and value of horizontal learning (students learning from each other) in institutes of art and design is considered to be hugely significant and recognised internationally. Horizontal learning is an internationally appreciated factor that all the best institutions not only strive to

encourage but actively seek to achieve when designing programmes and when organising departmental/faculty and institutional structures. In this way the synergy and interdisciplinary nature of art and design study and practices can be exploited and provided for and the rich diversity of student talent can be utilised to achieve programme and institutional aims. The experts found that the prevalent institutional structure of small scale divisions and departments does not enhance but instead limits the students learning experience as it maintains artificial boundaries between practices and forms of artistic expression and application that no longer exist in the world the graduates are entering.

2.9 The experts recommend that a clearer definition of the niche study specialisms within MA and BA programmes is required. These are potentially and inherently available within the existing programmes. These study pathways should be clearly defined made available to students as options within a programme and could purposely link practical and theoretical competences more explicitly to defined career opportunities within a discipline. The recurring prevalence to aim for the 'universal specialist' is not feasible in the long term and is a false premise. It is ill informed and not properly grounded in market research or an accurate analysis of future requirements. It is also highly ill-advised as it lacks integrity of purpose both in the Experts' experience and knowledge and in considering the 'Key Parameters'² of study quality.

2.10 Whilst recognising the efficiency gains and pragmatism of the policy of designing all programmes on a Block A, B, C structure, it is possible that it maybe leading to over prescriptive and fragmented programmes and maybe counter productive. This methodology is seen by the Experts as producing a uniformity of provision. Also, the focus on defining the input of study programmes should be reconsidered in the light of European developments which instead define levels of achievement and sets of competencies³. Presently the policy of designing all programmes on a Block A, B, C structure, is also inhibiting the development of the varied and rich set of distinctive programmes that could be available to applicants. Arts programmes have the potential to play an essential part in the cultural profile of the nation and in fully contributing to the future needs and aspirations of the nation, not only cultural but financially, commercially and in the design industry and consumer market.

2.11 The Experts advise that, not only the Applied Arts sector but, the universities, academies, faculties and departments take a much more formal approach to gathering feedback from students/graduates/employers. This recorded information gathered according to a formal recorded process and where the information is properly analysed is invaluable to develop a strategic view of the development of these, or any other arts programmes

² ibid

³ see the Qualification Framework for Higher Education Institutions
http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/BASIC/050520_Framework_qualifications.pdf

3 Quality Assurance

3.1 Whilst appreciating and applauding the aims of the process employed by the Agency we feel that these would be best achieved through a developmental approach to the implementation of QA systems

3.2 We fear that the approach that has been adopted risks undermining the goodwill and potential 'buy in' capacity of those managing and teaching the programmes across the sector. The processes presently adopted have the potential, if this has not already been realised, to alienate the teaching staff and professional practitioners responsible for developing and providing the programmes, now and in the future is, very great.

3.3 The perception of the Experts has been that the Applied Arts sector has been insufficiently prepared and supported for their engagement with the accreditation process. The experts found that any genuine understanding of the mechanisms necessary to provide for accreditation, quality assurance and programme enhancement was lacking and the need for such processes was rarely appreciated or understood by those involved at Academy, University, Faculty and Departmental level.

3.4 There is an urgent need to develop meaningful staff and particularly managerial Professional Development processes at all Academies, Universities, Faculties and Departments to support and develop institutional management practices and encourage the embedding of quality assurance practices. All teaching staff but particularly institutional managers also require complete understanding of the Bologna Declaration and its implications.

3.5 It is obvious to this expert group that the development of Quality Assurance is in its infancy. However, it is also obvious that whilst in some institutions, most notably the colleges, the systems are becoming embedded, in others, most notably the Academy of Fine Arts, even basic information and understanding is missing. This disparity of information, understanding, knowledge and practices amongst institutions needs to be addressed nationally as matter of urgency.

3.6 Although finding the practice questionable we had been previously assured that English would be the language employed during the accreditation process.

3.7 The visit of this team of experts was complicated and hampered by the use of some interpreters and translators who did not use the English language fluently enough or could not perform accurately and quickly enough. Communication between team members and some of the groups of staff, students and employers and graduates was adversely affected by these problems and caused concerns that full understanding of the questions the teams asked, the answers provided and the verbal recommendations made by the experts were not fully or accurately communicated. This added to the

workload of team members, when reading and trying to understand the Self Evaluation Reports and heightened stress unnecessarily during the visit.

3.8 The visit of this team of experts was also complicated and hampered by the presence of one assessor who had little or no understanding of Quality assurance methodology or the Bologna Process, did not use the English language fluently enough and together with another team member had close associations with some of the teaching staff met by the team. Communication between team members and co-operation were adversely affected by these problems and caused concerns that full understanding and agreement over decisions could be compromised. This would not be the fault of any particular team member but a problem that arose with the initial forming of the expert team. This added to the workload of team members, particularly in the initial writing of reports and in a heightening of stress.

3.9 On a return visit it is highly recommended that as many as possible of the same team members are used. This enables the experts to have a realistic conception of what changes have been made, what progress has occurred and where innovation is still to be undertaken. Starting afresh with a new team defeats the object of the exercise which is to look for change and development.

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