

Overview Report by Robert Baker

Arts and Applied Arts Programmes Accreditation March and April 2011

1. I was involved in the previous SKVC accreditation exercise of Applied and Fine Arts Programmes in 2008 as a team member and as a Chairperson. In March and April of 2011 and I was pleased to see that the general state of affairs in Lithuanian higher art education has improved. That sense of improvement was evident during my visits to all the institutions involved. The improvements were in some cases in physical resources and in others educational know how, programme design and operation and often a combination of the two. The ongoing process of development must continue and the complexities and demands of providing higher arts education are being met to a much higher standard in Lithuania.
2. It would be a fallacy to believe that there is any meaningful or comprehensive understanding of the use of 'learning outcomes' or 'learning education' based education in the programmes evaluated. Programmes remain staff dominated; staff led with only the thinnest veneer of improvement since 2008. There cannot be any strong and meaningful link between assessment criteria and learning outcomes so long as learning outcomes do not really exist. There is a real deficit of understanding here and it requires urgent attention.
3. It is essential for the institutions, faculties, departments and programmes to establish a regular formal and business like consultation process with external stakeholders. These meetings should include the introduction of regular briefings by the programmes and faculties of any new developments and the recorded collection of external stakeholder's responses to guide future developments and changes.
4. It is essential to establish a better understanding of the value, purpose, authorship and translation of self evaluation documents as a tool for both programme development and accreditation processes. These documents are generally being written for 'external consumption' i.e. the SKVC and the International Experts. They should be written as internal design tools for programme staff.
5. The universities and the Art Academy should establish a graduate tracking offices to aid the faculties and programmes with meaningfully data about the destinations, employment records and careers of graduates so that real worthwhile planning of future developments can be facilitated.
6. More comprehensive staff development programmes are urgently required to aid the academic staff in their understanding and their implementation of Bologna issues, in particular, learning outcomes, assessment criteria and assessment processes, student centred learning and quality assurance and enhancement.
7. The national admission system for BA programmes needs to be reconsidered as it is found to be quite inefficient and inappropriate for the needs of prospective students and arts programmes at University level. This system does not seem to encompass an equal opportunity for all potential applicants and is greatly inhibiting security of programme development nationally. The higher art education institutions should cooperate together to form a policy to submit to the Ministry. Ongoing development and improvement is being greatly threatened by the new centralised admissions system and its detrimental effects. (See attached letter to Minister)

8. An enhancement of independent or negotiated learning as an integrated part of all the programmes is required. Students have to be capable of learning independence of action and the taking of responsibility for their own actions not as an extra mural activity but as a necessary and established learning outcome. As with 'learning outcomes' above there is a real deficit of understanding here and it requires urgent attention.
9. Institutions. Faculties and departments need to develop methodologies to enhance the professional profile and image of graduates and to market their graduates in a more meaningful way. Graduates perceive that they do not have an equal respect and parity of esteem with the architectural and other design professions with which they regularly work.
10. The aims and outcomes of all the programmes reviewed require focus and enhancement to improve the learning of generic personal and transferable skills by students to replace some of the over emphasis on speciality craft skills. A BA or MA qualification implies a level of general knowledge, competence and skills in communication, teamwork, organisation and management. These qualities are often in short supply or completely overlooked and replaced with an obsessive concern for speciality and outmoded art and craft skills by the teaching staff who fail to appreciate that to obtain employment in a related field or even a completely different field does not represent a failure on their part or the graduates' part. Therefore the integration of business, teamwork, communication and entrepreneurial skills as an element within the programmes is essential.
11. There remains a lack of differentiation between BA and MA programmes and their levels and content. Generally MA programmes are more of the same. MA students are often under stimulated and under challenged. The general European trend is for BA programmes to provide general non-professional education in the field and for MA programmes to provide entrepreneurial, intellectual and management professional skills (not professional craft skills) that enable graduates to infiltrate the employment market. It is also an increasing trend for BA graduates to seek MA qualifications in subjects and fields different to the subject of their BA qualification. These developments do not seem to be appreciated in Lithuania and a huge area of potential development is being ignored by institutions and students and potential students are not being facilitated. The lack of the development and provision of MA education to an international standard is a large and seemingly growing deficit in Lithuanian Higher Arts Education.
12. The most disappointing aspect of the recent 2011 accreditations was that while developments had taken place they could be perceived to be as a direct result of the comments and recommendations made in 2008. The self development and skills of the academic staff to analyse their own programmes, self manage and know how to and which changes and developments to make seemed to be very lacking. They appeared to be totally dependent on external comment and direction. This is not an adequate response from professional teachers of higher education programmes. There has to be an understanding of the link between cause and effect educationally and an understanding of what students and society in general require from arts programmes and graduates and an ability to make the necessary changes to provide it. This is what is meant by Quality Assurance and Enhancement Management the real meaning of which is not understood by the staff of art institutions. They seem generally to be under the illusion that art objects made by students are the sole indicator of quality whereas it is their own ability to manage their own affairs that is the true indicator of quality.

13. The Expert teams that I led were very impressed with some of the new developments in physical resources and very gratified to see that such investment had been made. The new library at Šiauliai University was very impressive and can be compared to the best similar developments anywhere in Europe. The development of the Titanicus building and the older monastery buildings in Vilnius were likewise comparable and very impressive. The appreciation of the importance to quality education of the physical environment is also evident by the refurbishment of studios and workshops at the Kaunas Faculty and the Arts Faculty building at Šiauliai University. Hopefully these investments can continue and be extended to include the University of Klaipeda where the physical environment is in urgent need of attention.