

OVERVIEW REPORT

for

Dance field Study Programmes at Klaipėda University

This report is based on a Quality Assurance review undertaken in one institution (KU) in the field of Dance. It was conducted by an international panel of experts in February 2014. In total, three programmes were evaluated representing the disciplines of Choreography and Dance Sport. The programmes comprised two bachelor's and one master's programme.

Methodology

The expert panel followed the 'Methodological Guidelines' provided by SKVC. In addition, the experts drew on their collective professional experience gained from the work they have undertaken internationally in a range of universities, conservatoires and performance contexts.

Each programme was allocated one full day for review, which was adequate. A good range of assessment materials and examples of students work were made available which was helpful.

The panel had an opportunity to meet a range of groups (senior administration, SER, teachers, employers and graduates) and individuals who represented a broad range of roles, responsibilities and experiences. The meetings with the social partners/employers, graduates and students were useful, but in some cases the numbers of attendees were so small (less than five), that they cannot be considered representative of that particular group or sector. Thus whilst these meetings were useful in providing a perspective, as a quality assurance method they are not robust. Moreover, as noted in the last review in 2011, in some meetings particular individuals dominated the discussion, and did not always allow space for other individuals to contribute. This was particularly noticeable in some of the graduate and employers meetings. Whilst it is the responsibility of the panel chairperson to manage this, it would be useful to remind the institutions in advance that a range of voices need to be heard and it is important that stakeholders are aware of the aims and objectives of the process and their role within it.

International Comparability

In general, the panel found that the institution makes a satisfactory effort to offer stimulating programmes and there has been genuine progress in a range of areas since the last review. Some over-arching issues for consideration are:

- The issue of translation - not only in a literal sense, but also in a disciplinary and conceptual sense. For example, words which we might assume are relatively universal within a discipline or field may be interpreted very differently (e.g. Choreography).
- The issue of language is significant. There is a particular complexity related to international partners for whom English is not their second language for pedagogy or research. This will impact upon the availability of, and circulation of, literature and resources, and means that they do not all have equal access to all material in all contexts.

- In some contexts there will be a period of transition, heightened by the availability of online resources and virtual engagement, whereby up and coming scholars and students may have made the transition to English as a second spoken language, but institutions and long-standing staff and academics may not have done so, for example, some materials only being available in Russian.
- Linked to this, there is potentially a risk of losing valuable material /archives that exist in languages other than English if there is no conscious strategy in place to preserve them and/or render them accessible.

Programme Aims and Learning Outcomes

All three programmes have made improvements since the last review, and specific recommendations either have been, or are in the process of being addressed. The panel noted in feedback to the University that many of the recommendations from the review in 2011 were longer-term, thus we fully expected that some of them would take longer to address.

The programmes are all in varying degrees, addressing their aims and objectives with regard to producing employable graduates. However as noted in 2011, the aims, learning outcomes and related curriculum design of the programmes should afford equal attention to the academic aims of higher education, as well as employability. In some areas there is still a lack of sufficient emphasis on the critical, theoretical and methodological approaches expected.

In relation to the Choreography programmes, there is still some degree of confusion created by the title as the use of the word 'Choreography' is not automatically comparable to the use of the word Choreography in the international field of dance and consequently there is a degree of mismatch between the title, the aims and learning outcomes and the resulting curriculum design. This could be an obstacle to mobility. However it must be noted that in terms of the current Lithuanian student experience, there is far better understanding of the aims and objectives of the course in practice than there was in 2011.

Curriculum Design

All three courses appear to have revisited the values espoused by the Bologna process, with regard to the way in which the relationship between teaching and learning is conceptualised and a broader range of learning approaches, including autonomous learning by the students, appear to be in place. This is positive as this was a significant area of concern in the last review.

There are still some residual issues regarding students' achievement. As noted in 2011, "a hermetic approach to design and delivery means that resultant grades are not comparable internationally because they aren't assessing the full range of areas that other MA and BA programmes do. In short, many students graduating with a BA or MA from Lithuania will not possess the breadth and

depth of theoretical knowledge, authorial voice and reflective/ critical thinking skills that graduates from other universities will have.”

Staffing

Teachers meet legal requirements and possess relevant knowledge and skills, and there was evidence of significant development by individual members of staff, although this was not always so evident at team level.

Staff continue to undertake professional development in their fields of expertise and disseminate their work via publications and at conferences or professional contexts including competitions. In comparison to 2011, some staff were clearly more secure with international debates in dance and, as a result, areas of the provision have been reviewed and developed, although this is not yet consistent across all staff.

Staff workloads continue to be demanding which can be a restriction to additional engagement in high level research and other professional development activities. There is still a tendency for many staff to work within spheres of knowledge and expertise that are familiar to them, even when disseminating their work internationally. However the recruitment of younger teachers and integration of experienced teachers from related fields (e.g. music, pedagogy) within the university helps to provide perspectives that resonate with broader debates.

Facilities and learning resources

There have been improvements in both facilities and learning resources since the last review and there are plans for further upgrades. Students are better at using the internet, and many have personal computers and equipment that they use for their study. It must also be noted that the teachers take great care of the resources that they have.

Study process and student assessment

The difference in level between bachelors and masters degrees was clearer than it was in 2011 which is pleasing. The examples of practical artistic work are strong and we are confident that students are meeting the requirements laid down by Lithuanian standards. In terms of standards the teachers are clear about what is required by a student in terms of the legal requirements. However it is important to make sure academic challenges are not forgotten in an emphasis on dealing with practical challenges.

The dance department need to maintain energy in developing the Higher Education aspects of the course. At present the theoretical approaches are still primarily about describing and analysing practical work - mainly via the lenses of pedagogy and history. With regard to research, and in particular scientific research, the panel saw some discrepancies in the way in which the dance team understand this in comparison to international standards. A good example would be the thesis. Topics are varied, and well-structured. However international standards emphasise a deeper level of scientific research and the current format does not require students to engage with complex

methodological approaches in comparison to other international universities. Similarly a higher degree of reflection and consideration of alternative viewpoints drawn from alternative theories could be good. At present this could be an obstacle to progression into a PhD and/or to mobility which needs to be considered.

Programme Management

In the last review in 2011, the panel noted that “It is imperative that all academic staff develop the necessary knowledge and skills in quality assurance to analyse their own programmes and implement changes as appropriate”. It was therefore pleasing to note that there is improved consistency of understanding of systems and processes between the SER group, teachers group and students group. Some of the systems and processes still need to function more effectively and the information that is produced could be shared more widely. Because the university are undertaking development at all levels (e.g. the seminar administration are developing quality assurance frameworks whilst the programme teams are developing curriculum) not everything is connected yet. There is a need to share progress at all levels and look at where local level operational discussions are engaging with broader strategic discussions. Nonetheless there is a greater sense of confidence in engaging with quality assurance processes.

As noted in 2011, the institutions could still employ methods that enable them to directly compare and evaluate their programmes against a range of international programmes. This might include appointment of an external examiner, increased exchange (e.g. Erasmus) or use of the quality benchmark statements employed by different countries in terms of identifying the expected standards of both first and second cycles of study. For example, the QAA for Higher Education subject benchmark statements or Dublin descriptors.

At times there appears to be a disconnection between the university and the dance departments, and the social partners and alumni, who are primarily engaging at departmental level. The social partners do not seem to be formally involved in quality assurance processes at institutional level. As the panel noted in 2011, it is important to recognise some of the potential shortfalls in drawing solely upon the recommendations of social partners. “These stakeholders represent the labour market, but not the advancement of the academic discipline. They also clearly want to ensure sustainability of their own institutions or activities, thus there is a tendency to want to maintain a status quo and not take risks. It is important to recognise that each stakeholder represents a particular agenda, and the individual institutions have a broader responsibility as providers of Higher Education to the advancement of the discipline.”

We would still recommend that records regarding graduate destinations are more detailed, and it might be useful to provide more systematic forecasts regarding the availability of jobs. For example, some records suggested that a high proportion of students gained employment in dance, but as in 2011, it became evident from some of the meetings, that for some graduates this only amounted to part-time work. Some students also raised a concern regarding the longer term availability of jobs.