

General report of the evaluation team visiting Lithuania from November 1st, 2010 until November 6th, 2010 and from December 6th, 2010 until December 11th, 2010

1. Introduction

1.1

During these two visits 11 postgraduate programmes were assessed. These included 6 courses at Vilnius Pedagogical University (3 Bachelors and 3 Masters programmes). One Bachelors programme at Klaipeda University, another two Bachelors programmes at Siauliai University, a Professional Bachelors degree at Panevezys College and a Masters degree at Kaunas Technology University. Most of them had been previously evaluated by the same international expert group in 2008. The reports of those evaluations had led to four of the programmes receiving temporary accreditation until 2010.

1.2.

It is relevant to note that the external evaluation team comprises experts in aspects of education, philosophy and history, sport pedagogy, educational leadership and management, assessment and measurement, all related to the varied areas assessed. They were competent to evaluate the programmes in the light of their experience gained in their own countries and from accreditation processes in other EU countries (Belgium, Estonia, Latvia, Malta, Netherlands, and Portugal). In the evaluations, they assessed the progress the respective universities and colleges had made in responding to the 2008 reports, whilst evaluating the programmes following the new protocols introduced in 2009.

2. Summary Remarks

2.1 Positive developments

We would like to start off on a positive note as, in most cases, the expert group was greatly impressed by the extent and quality of the positive changes made to improve all the programmes, in what was effectively just under two years. In relation to a number of programmes there is already a strong focus on change and change management and this will have to be continued and strengthened for the next few years in order to address the various recommendations

made. From these living examples it goes a long way to show that where there is a will there is a way. When there is commitment at University level even small changes at the programme level can take place. In this respect little to no funding is necessary – only commitment, support and good will. Given that a number of us have been involved since 2003 we have seen that a number of the institutions visited have made major strides since then.

Suggested areas for development

2.2 The management of change

At the same time, there are still improvements to be made, as indicated by the recommendations in the evaluation reports submitted. A number of these recommendations cut across programmes and universities across Lithuania, bearing in mind that we visited 5 institutions in various parts of the country. The recommendations made are similar, in most cases, to ones made in the past. We do acknowledge that they are not meant to be seen as ‘quick fixes’. Change is incremental. Changes that probably require redeployment and/or retraining of staff need some time to implement. That is also true where taking up the recommendations might impact on structures and procedures beyond the departments/institutes responsible for delivering the programmes. The general assessments of a number of the programmes are such as to lead to accreditation for six years, time enough to make the significant improvements that the expert group recommends. Time enough for the university bodies to introduce a structured approach to a number of the developments that have been recommended the main ones here being again highlighted.

2.3 Content, Pedagogy, Implementation and Assessment

Another area that needs to be reviewed centres round the need to move from content-based to competence-based, from teaching-centred to learning-centred curriculum and study process. Alignment of goals, objectives, methodologies for students’ learning and assessment of students’ learning outcomes (competences) needs to be achieved. In this regard, when designing and planning the curriculum, theory and practice needs to be brought together, both at individual and collective level. In a teacher education programme, the curriculum should reflect that theory and practice are one. The expert team is aware that it takes time to move from a content-oriented to a competence-based programme. There is a clear need to link the

learning outcomes, content, methods and assessment over the duration of the whole programme. This needs to be articulated very clearly in the overall curriculum design, but also at the level of individual subjects in their relation to the whole programme.

2.4 Dissertation: Bachelors

The research level for Bachelor's papers should be redesigned in accordance with the European and the Lithuanian Qualification Frameworks for Cycle 1. The level of research and the methods used should meet the standards required at this level. Here the institutions noted are encouraged to review and redesign the current research component. Criteria need to be clearly spelt out. The papers themselves also need to develop a clear methodology chapter and a discussion chapter which are currently missing. The value of the research work, certainly in a European context, is at stake here. The Lithuanian authorities cannot afford to have students who may face difficulties to further their studies or engage in research work if they do not possess the research tools needed at this level or a higher level (see 2.5).

2.5 Dissertation: Masters

There appears still to be a proliferation of Master's courses based mainly on content and there is a serious need to consolidate and rationalise provision of Master's qualifications at both institutional level and across the country. Alternative methods of provision should be explored, including courses that bring a variety of degrees under an over-arching umbrella that would include a number of core components (such as the research methods). This would mean that less Masters programmes would be offered. Such provision would also affect student numbers attending at least particular credits and the financial costs currently incurred to run and manage such programmes.

Another issue related to the Masters programme is that all of them practically take on students who have just graduated from their first degree. It is our opinion that students, especially in some areas (e.g. leadership and management) do require some field experience or else the course delivery, development and eventual impact on the schools or institutions they form part of will be minimal.

As mentioned in previous reports there are serious concerns with the quality of the final theses and this has been so in practically all the programmes reviewed whether at Bachelors or Masters level. These do not, in most cases, satisfy the requirements for a Master's thesis in that they lack balance between the various sections, lack in many cases triangulation of methods used for investigation and in some reports make little use of international sources. Furthermore, the findings are not discussed against the theoretical underpinnings presented in the initial section. This final section is truncated and very limited in almost all cases whereas it should form a third of the presented work. This is the area that demonstrates the meta-cognitive thinking that is a requirement at this level. Grading for this work was consistently too high across all the institutions we visited and has not changed since our first visits despite several reports where this was recommended.

Another concern related to the Masters programmes is the issue of parochialism. This was extremely strong when a number of us were involved in the initial external reviews. Mobility of lecturers from one university to another is currently minimal and whilst there are moves for institutions to come together on various issues we believe more effort needs to be made – maybe to develop joint programmes – that would bring institutions from across say two universities together and offer joint degrees. This would encourage and support the mobility of Lithuanian graduates within the country since students tend to be, in the main, regionally bound. Such movements are necessary even to enrich the programme input and intake. This would help to bring about the proliferation of ideas rather than contain existing ideas.

The procedure for the assessment of bachelor and master thesis is, in our opinion, far too complicated and bureaucratic. It is far more important that the faculty of each university defines a well defined evaluation procedure based on two university experts preferably one of them being a full professor much engaged in active research work. In the case of the masters thesis it is imperative that there is always an external examiner.

2.6 Teaching Practice

Another aspect that deserves attention is how teaching practicum is being organized. We acknowledge the excellent drive by the Ministry of Education in Lithuania that has lengthened the period for teaching practice in those courses that require that students are attached to

schools or other learning institutions. This is indeed a laudable move since teaching practice needs to be considered as an essential component of any course leading to a teaching qualification. What is and remains critical is that the respective University Faculties and Colleges develop a sound programme spread over the duration of the course. From a number of courses that we have reviewed it is evidently clear that there is still an evident lack of the educational principles that need to form the basis of what the students engage with when in schools. More work in relation to curriculum design, development and implementation at the school level needs to be central to the teaching practicum. Furthermore, the principles for an adequate supervision process needs to be based on research on teacher education.

2.7 Technical Education

Another area that we feel needs to be reviewed potentially at a national level is the area described by Vilnius Pedagogical University – Educology of technologies. It is our opinion that some of the areas being covered are more in line with trades rather than vocational education as it is viewed today. We recommend that the Faculty establishes close links with other countries/institutes/bodies that have such an orientation such as Finland, Germany and Great Britain, as to adequately review their Bachelor's (and Master's) programme in line with international developments.

2.8 Language Policy

The language issue is a critical one for the future development of the programme in order to increase staff and student mobility. A clear language policy needs to be formulated with visible effects at the level of staff, students and exchanges of both groups. Of course, the evaluation team is aware of the institution's and country's history, but a serious effort in this area is unavoidable. Both staff and students need more exposure and challenges to speak, use and write in English.

2.8 Continuing Professional Development

An area that needs to be more prominent and identified as a major feature within the development of the academic programmes entails ongoing opportunities for the academic and administrative staff to develop. The professional development of the staff should be competence-based and aligned with the needs of the students' learning-centred approach.

Furthermore, staff need to be provided with opportunities to work with and exchange ideas not only within the country but also participate in staff exchange programmes and conferences within the region and Europe in particular.

The international exchange of staff members (and students) should be substantially increased. The administrative staff is responsible for the establishment of reliable and strong contacts to other preferably European universities. Naturally, such links need to be initiated by the academic staff. The exchange programmes must work in both directions i.e. incoming and outgoing activities.

Furthermore, and linked to points 2.4 and 2.5 the academic staff should be provided with opportunities to develop their research skills. This would help them not only carry out their own research skills but also provide superior support to graduate and postgraduate students under their tutelage.

3. Structural Issues

3.1 Financial developments

The most significant structural issue was considered to be the need to improve the financing of university education and research. The international financial crisis and its effects on the national economy have not helped the addressing of this issue. Institutions are currently suffering reductions in funding of 25-40 per cent from 2009 levels (have we got this information?). Within this context it is encouraging to find a number of companies that are supporting Universities and providing investments in the universities infrastructure (e.g. financing the completion of the University Library at Vilnius Pedagogical University) and or directly the research work being done.

3.2 Time

As experienced in past visits, there are concerns within the group that when programmes present us with serious problems the time factor becomes an issue. A one- day site visit in such cases is insufficient to explore the problems in depth. Concerns need to be addressed, often on site, and therefore even the Faculty/ Institution itself need time to react and provide the evidence. It is to be noted that at times we have had to ask for clarifications and brought to us at end of day. This may not always be possible.

3.3 Assessment Criteria

On the new accreditation scoring system details of serious concern get lost in the multiplicity of items which have to be averaged.

In this new scoring system marks are being awarded for more or less no effort as institutions cannot be awarded lower than a one. There should be the opportunity for external evaluators to award a 0 which would make assessments much more just and marks would record and reward effort. There is also a problem with giving equal weighting to some of the very varied categories such as *consistency of the study subjects* or *efficiency of social support* student as against *student achievement and assessment* which should have a far higher importance in the assessment process.

Concluding Remarks

We are confident that you will receive these comment in the way in which we intend to give them, that is a serious concern and our commitment to help foster improvement and growth in Lithuania.

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