

Overall Report on the visit of the expert team to Education courses in Klaipeda, Šiauliai, Kaunas and Vilnius Pedagogical Universities.

These comments are made as a result of our overall findings across all of our visits.

1. Programme aims and learning outcomes

1.1. Programme demand, purpose and aims

1.1.1 Uniqueness and rationale of the need for the programme

Comment

Aims need to be slimmed down and using bullet points to list them would make things clearer

The main problem here seems to be that there are very many of these programmes and as a result far too many aims. There is repetition of courses across the country but the regional nature of provision makes this to some extent understandable. However, it is clear that in many cases employment does not exist for the numbers of students produced.

1.1.1. Conformity of the programme purpose with the institutional, state and international directives

Comment

Very many claims are made for this but little actual analysis of how and why this is achieved is given, particularly in relation to European guidelines. There is a tendency to make statements rather than providing clear examples. There is a problem with the social pedagogue qualification and its relation to European laws related to teacher qualifications (see general points)

1.1.2. Relevance of the programme aims

Comment

On occasions these lack specificity often due to the large range of options put together in one programme and the modules provided seem to be largely content driven rather than intended to produce graduates who are cognitively working at Master's level. None of the programmes have been systematically assessed and evaluated in the work field.

Bullet points or numbers for programme aims would make it easier to relate them to the various modules.

1.2. Learning outcomes of the programme

1.2.1. The comprehensibility and attainability of the learning outcomes

Comment

Again these appear to be comprehensive but are not always related to meta-cognition or to the individual modules or to the assessments used in those modules. The picture needs to be made clear overall as to how all these areas are linked together to allow attainability of the stated aims.

There is repetition in Learning Outcomes between some modules with some very similar factual acquisition here. There appears to be a case for slimming down both the amount of modules and the amount of LOs covered.

1.2.2. Consistency of the intended learning outcomes

Comments

The links between programme Learning Outcomes and course Learning Outcomes needs to be made clearer in many cases. Many times a reference is made to the Dublin Descriptors, but the real relation is not put forward or justified using the Dublin Descriptors.

1.2.3. Transformation of the learning outcomes

Comment

There seem to be little change to module and Programme Learning Outcomes since previous reviews. How can this be undertaken between reviews? 6 years is a long time and things move on. If changes do occur what Quality Assurance processes are in place in the institutions is not altogether clear in the documents provided.

2. Curriculum design

2.1. Programme structure

2.1.1. Sufficiency of the study volume

Comment

In general this is correct

2.1.2. Consistency of the study subjects

Comment

Great lack of self analysis in the Self Assessment Reports (SAR) here.

It was good to see that some rationalisation of modules had occurred within programmes and that module order had been changed, often after comment from students. Use of an external examiner system would greatly help in this regard – see below under general comments.

2.2. Programme content

2.2.1. Compliance of the contents of the studies with legal acts

Comment

Generally this appears to be in place but the External Assessment Team (EAT) were concerned that in some cases universities were intending to give two awards for the same programme, which is not good practice or possible in other areas of Europe. At least twice we were left in the dark in the SAR about this in a very serious way.

2.2.2. Comprehensiveness and rationality of the programme content

Comment

There appears to be a great emphasis on content as opposed to developing thinking and critical analysis leading too very many general professional competences as opposed to specific ones related to the Masters level of the course.

This acquisition of more knowledge was stressed by staff and students as the main rationale for taking a Master's programme. Some overlap between modules is occurring and thus the numbers of modules could be reduced. Master's level qualifications do indeed deepen or broaden knowledge but the main aim is to encourage critical thinking at a meta-cognitive level and students should not be fed information but rather required to discover and critique it. Again the Dublin Descriptors could be used to distinguish between Bachelor and Master levels. This should really be taken much more seriously in particular in the need to relate to the European context.

3. Staff

3.1. Staff composition and turnover

3.1.1. Rationality of the staff composition

Comment

Staff appeared well qualified for their roles, but it is essential for the EAT to know the balance between full time staff and part time or visiting staff who contribute to the

programme. Very small programmes seem to have vast teams of staff which must make consistency of approach, marking etc. difficult even if it does provide variety. However staff student ratios seem in many cases non-viable and unsustainable. The SARs do lack in setting out clear staff-student ratios.

3.1.2. Turnover of teachers

Comment

No particular problems were detected.

3.2. Staff competence

3.2.1. Compliance of staff experience with the study programme

Comment

It appears that staff teams attempt to keep up to date with current practice through visits abroad and attendance at conferences and that they are well qualified for the areas they teach. However, the SARs could be much more specific about examples and effects of these visits and conferences.

3.2.2. Consistency of teachers' professional development

Comment

Generally this is an area of improvement in recent years though not all institutions provide the same opportunities for staff development. It was obvious that staff were supported with time for Doctoral studies and visits abroad were more common. Too much of staff development is devoted to deepening or widening knowledge, the EAT stresses that in modern day education staff needs to develop themselves in methods of teaching, ICT and other more general competences.

4. Facilities and learning resource

4.1. Facilities

4.1.1. Sufficiency and suitability of premises for studies

Comment

Generally classrooms were adequate, apart from odd instances mentioned in separate reports but some library facilities are poor though it is obvious that steps are being taken to address this.

4.1.2. Suitability and sufficiency of equipment for studies

Comment

This was generally adequate.

4.1.3. Suitability and accessibility of the resources for practical training

Comment

Practice is generally well provided for with the possibility of linking assessment to practice placements. However, several groups of student requested more and earlier practice, which the employers would like to support.

Teaching practice does not involve sufficient time in front of a class where the student is responsible for planning and teaching whole lessons. There is overlong time spent on observations and helping the teacher rather than taking full responsibility for lessons. By the end of the fourth year in many other European countries it would be expected that students are responsible for teaching a near full time table to prepare them for the role of a teacher.

4.2. Learning resources

4.2.1. Suitability and accessibility of books, textbooks and periodic publications

Comment

Journals and suitable websites are not included on book lists and some of these booklists are outdated and lack international sources.

4.2.2. Suitability and accessibility of learning materials

Comment

Access to databases is generally sufficient with some provision of international texts but in some cases the inability to work in another language inhibits the use of these materials. Some students requested that more English lessons be included in the curriculum.

1. Student admission

5.1.1. Rationality of requirements for admission to the studies

Comment

This was varied as in some cases there was high competition for places whilst in others applications had dropped so low that only entry every 2 years could be considered. This appears to be linked to the job market. Again most SARs seriously lack in providing clear information (in tables) on the numbers of students and drop out figures. Interpretation therefore is very hard for the EAT and questioning time is taken up with these enquiries, which could be avoided.

5.1.2. Efficiency of enhancing the motivation of applicants and new students

Comment

There does not seem to be a process for the accreditation of prior learning (APL). There is a need in Master's programmes to recognise the value of work based learning and find a way to award credit for that experiential learning.

5.2. Study process

5.2.1. Rationality of the programme schedule

Comment

These appeared well organised and students' needs for flexible programmes to enable them to continue working is taken into consideration.

5.2.2. Student academic performance

Comment

Difficult to judge without seeing more assessment procedures. There is a serious concern over the quality and balance of the final thesis – see general comments. The lack of an external examiner system also does not ensure that quality is maintained at the same level across the country (see general comments). This is serious in a modern day European context.

5.2.3. Mobility of teachers and students

Comment

The usefulness of staff visits overseas in relation to the programmes in question is not always clear. The SARs do not show enough examples of its effects on the programme. In general staff mobility was adequate but student mobility was very restricted as many of these students are employed or have family or other commitments. There was a general request for more visiting overseas tutors.

5.3. Student support

5.3.1. Usefulness of academic support

Comment

Students were in general satisfied with support provided by tutors as class sizes are very small and staff provide personal and email contact. A more comprehensive use of elearning platforms would enhance this.

5.3.2. Efficiency of social support

Comment

No adverse comments were received but for distance students the above comment about elearning platforms applies.

5.4. Achievement assessment

5.4.1. Suitability of assessment criteria and their publicity

Comment

Students were generally well aware of assessment criteria but it was not always clear how these were applied in the marking of their work.

5.4.2. Feedback efficiency

Comment

In several cases this was inconsistent in that some tutors provided clear written feedback, where as others had to be contacted with a request to provide it. Students seemed to think if they got a high mark feedback was not necessary. This is not the case, they need to understand clearly why the mark was good and how they had met the set criteria. Clear marking against criteria was not always self-evident and the double marking practice is casual rather than embedded into the assessment process as it appears to be related to the fact that more than one tutor is involved with teaching a module. See general comments regarding the need for external examiners.

5.4.3. Efficiency of graduation papers' assessment

Comment

Marking here according to the EAT is consistently too high and not in line with European procedures. See general comments below

5.4.4. Functionality of the system for assessment and recognition of achievements acquired in a non-formal and self-study way.

Comment

See previous comments regarding the need for the Accreditation of Prior Learning. The control of assessment needs embedding into general practice across courses.

5.5 Graduate placement

5.5.1 Expediency of graduate placement

Comment

Generally students are in work but a variety of placements would be useful and timings of placements needs more consideration. Employers asked for placements to be earlier.

6. Programme management

6.1. Programme administration

6.1.1. Efficiency of the programme management activities

Comment

This was highly variable between programmes, some demonstrating good practice with relationships between management and the teaching teams good whilst others showed clear evidence of poor relationships and a lack of co-operation between management and teaching staff. Some good practice was observed with programme committees involving employers in the running of programmes. However there was some inconsistency of practice here.

6.2. Internal quality assurance

6.2.1. Suitability of the programme quality assessment

Comment

There was a lack of clear evidence presented in all the SARs for this and practice across the courses was inconsistent. There was some evidence of loop closing and that student complaints were listened to. Often teaching quality was not commented on only other areas such as resources, the programme content etc. There were opportunities to discuss concerns about teaching quality with senior staff but this

process was not always formalised in the system. Some good practice in involving stakeholders in quality assessment was observed.

On the whole this area was poorly reported upon in the SAR, lacking evidence. Not using the quality cycle of Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA) is the cause of this problem. The EAT strongly advises that every chapter in the SAR should be closed with the weaknesses and the actions to deal with them.

6.2.2. Efficiency of the programme quality improvement

Comment

Again in the SAR more evidence with regard to loop closing needed to be recorded (PDCA). Verbal evidence was provided by students and tutors in meetings.

6.2.3. Efficiency of stakeholders' participation

Comment

This was in general good with some excellent practice of involvement with SAR writing and membership of programme committees. This should be consistent practice across all the country. Validation of programmes within the work field is becoming common practice in Europe.

- General comments

1. Self assessment reports (SAR) In most cases there is a serious lack of self evaluation in the provided documents, no real critique of what is presented with regard to strengths and weaknesses and very few actual examples are given to back up claims. Too many vague statements such as satisfactory or optimal are used without justification. This demonstrates a possible complacency or an unwillingness to be self-critical due to previous experiences that such self-criticism results in poor responses by assessment teams of staff who have attempted to examine weaknesses in programmes and suggest improvements. Each chapter should be closed with weaknesses and the actions to be deal with them.
2. The EAT found difficulties with the mismatch between the guidelines with gradings of 1-5 and the final grades 1-4. These should be brought into line and 1-4 gradings should be used in all documents. The use of two different numbering systems gives rise to confusion and a lack of clarity.

3. The SAGs do not see the difference between the chapters 1 to 4 and the chapters 5 and 6. The chapters 1-4 should give evidence of the programme and the chapters 5 and 6 should give the results of the programme. Because this structure is not clear to them, they often repeat texts in which they give plans and actions and they do not give clear results in chapter 5 and 6.
4. There are problems with the numbering across documents provided to the team and this needs to be corrected e.g. the numbering in the sample content of the EAT report did not match the numbering of the assessment tool. There are mismatches in numbering between the proposed Table of Contents listing and that found in Table 1 of the Guidelines which actually matches the numbering of the Assessment Form.
5. The structure and detail of the assessment form used by the EAT is not identical to the structure and details of the evaluation areas sub areas criteria and indicators which are presented in the centre guidelines. There is also a difference in some wording e.g. programme and curriculum are interchanged in 2 documents and this use of terminology needs to be made consistent. Consistency across documents is essential. It is recommended that the Centre examine the differences between both and consider the problems arising from these differences, in format and detail, for Lithuanian institutions in preparing Self-Assessment Reports. Institutions should be provided with the clearest possible guidelines on how to structure their Self Assessment Reports so as to meet the criteria being applied by the EATs.
6. Little information is given in the SARs about previous assessment reports and actions taken. In some it appears as if these reviews never happened. Actions for improvement should be detailed in reports, based on previous assessment requirements.
7. Reports in some cases lack overviews but instead concentrate on following the specifics of the detailed guidelines. More training needs to be provided by the agency and individual institutions to help staff report in a holistic way in a self-critical manner and we suggest that the guidelines should **include after each section an obligatory comment on the strengths and weaknesses of each area and what actions are being undertaken to overcome these.**
8. In some cases the SARs are written to a formula making wide spread general remarks rather than dealing with required specifics. This makes the work of EAT

difficult. Too often we had to spend time obtaining information that could have easily be presented in the reports (numbers of students, drop out rates and the structure of the departments are examples of this).

9. In general there was a lack of up to date and specific figures related to the course as regards intake, drop out rates and failure rates, as opposed to those who do not complete for other reasons. Accurate data is essential for the teams to complete their work. It is also to be noted that employers used in the meetings are often not actually engaged with the students or graduates from the specific courses under consideration but have relationships to other programmes and section of the faculty or department. Graduates on occasions are also not working in the areas that the course intends to prepare them for and although this demonstrates the wider employability of those students it does not clearly demonstrate the need for the programme or its relation to available employment in the specific field.
10. The EAT suggest that action plans for improvement after the agreement of the report should be prepared by the institutions involved and approved by the Agency. **These can then be reported on at the next review.**
11. EAT suggests that the agency and the universities seriously consider the necessity for more training by the agency for university representatives and for EATS to ensure consistency and an **emphasis on critical self-analysis** in the reports. This aspect has deteriorated from previous visits and evidence from the universities seems to indicate that some assessment teams (internal or external) appear not to value information on areas of weakness identified by SAR writing teams, even where evidence is presented as to how problems are being addressed.
12. The duality of the intentions of many of these programmes in attempting to train specialists for a wide variety of areas has given us cause for concern e.g. teacher or educator which are not inter-changeable as regards the qualification or even a license of a teacher. In the same manner attempting to produce a Master's qualification which prepares that students for the needs of coaches and teachers of physical education is also difficult.
13. EAT has serious concerns that students with qualifications in social pedagogy, distance learning, education management etc. are accepted as qualified teachers and licensed in Lithuania. Such study areas do not provide a license to teach across Europe. These graduates, without the requisite professional experience, knowledge and practice could travel and insist on the right to be considered

qualified as teachers in the EU. In most countries the qualification of social pedagogue does not exist and is not acceptable as a route into teaching and we suggest that this problem should be addressed a government level so it comes into line with common EU practice of specialist qualifications for teachers which include content and specific preparation for working with a named age range of school students. Failure to follow common practice could eventually lead to difficulties for fully qualified Lithuanian teachers in attempts to find employment across Europe as their preparation for teaching could be questioned.

14. The Dublin descriptors of the second cycle though mentioned in reports are not really applied in that requirements for second cycle level qualifications are not strictly adhered to.
15. There appears still to be a proliferation of courses based on mainly on content and there is a serious need to consolidate and rationalise provision of Master's qualifications within each institute and across the country. Numbers on courses are falling due to a variety of reasons and alternative methods of provision should be explored including generic courses that bring a variety of degrees under an over-arching umbrella of a group of generic modules which are flexible enough to allow the exploration of the content required for specialist degrees. Alternatively courses could be run on an entry basis of once every two years.
16. Internationalisation of courses is better than on previous visits but more encouragement in the use of foreign sources particularly in dissertations and the support for students' language learning is to be encouraged much more.
17. The way in which programmes can be adapted in between the possible 6 years of approval needs to be made clearer and encouraged. Review teams need to be informed of what practice is encouraged.
18. The teams need to be provided with staff full time equivalents rather than long lists of staff who may in fact be only delivering a module or the odd lecture and a clear list of the staff who are responsible for the delivery of the main areas of programme.
19. In some cases there is little evidence of concern that the work completed is at Master's level but seems to be based on the acquisition of further knowledge. Too many general competences are focussed upon rather than the higher level skills of critical analysis and meta-cognition. The English QAA level 4 descriptors of what constitutes Master's level work could be of use here. Little evidence is provided

for the almost universal claims that the courses meet all requirements of country and EU with regard to Masters. The EAT certainly is of the opinion that the European claim here at least is not justified.

20. In several cases the team discovered that students were being educated for what the institutions described as a real need in the country but when students and graduates and employers were interviewed the lack of available employment in the field became obvious. We therefore question the viability of these courses. Students expressed concerns that they had been encouraged to follow studies that may not lead to employment. Many claims in the SARs that reports demonstrated the need for such qualifications was not supported by evidence that employment was available. Universities should be encouraged to validate their programmes in the work field.
21. The EAT is concerned that they were asked to approve courses for a possible 6 year duration when approval had already been granted until 2012. This would mean that the courses would not again be assessed until 2018, far too long an interval in such a changing society. The EAT has considerable ethical problems with this.
22. Evidence presented appears to demonstrate an improvement in assessment practices and feedback to students on their work, although this is still not always totally consistent. There is also evidence of a wider use of active learning techniques by most teachers and we were pleased to see the development of some elearning platforms.
23. As mentioned in previous reports there are serious concerns with the quality of the final theses. 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 some cases triangulation of methods used for investigation and in some reports make little use of international resources. The main problem appears to be the lack of a comprehensive discussion of the findings of the research presented against the theoretical sources presented in the initial section. This third section is truncated and very limited in almost all cases. This is the area that demonstrates the meta-cognitive thinking that is a requirement of the Master's thesis. Gradings for this work were consistently too high in the various courses we assessed.
24. Quality assurance as mentioned in previous reports would be greatly enhanced across the country by the introduction of the use of external examiners to assess

the levels of marking and ensure consistency across the country. This is common practice in other areas of Europe and is a way of regulating grading and assuring consistency in marking.