

REVIEW REPORT ON THE STUDY FIELD

ENGLISH PHILOLOGY

IN LITHUANIA

Preamble

The task of giving a fair judgment as to the overall state of the study field is hampered by the following factors:

- The external evaluators were expected to assess
 - (a) all programmes - i.e. their aims and goals, their structure, content, and study methods, the execution of studies and the support offered for students, the variation in the number of students, quantity and quality of the teaching staff - as well as
 - (b) the material conditions, the external relations, feedback, and the mode of internal quality assurance –i.e. factors that hold across programmes for each one of the Higher Education Institutions (henceforth HEIs) -.

- *On the one hand*, this assessment was expected to apply evaluation scales that internationally hold for the other (or at least, for the majority of the other) European Union countries.

- *On the other hand*, the international evaluators had to take into consideration the specific historical circumstances, i.e.
 - (a) the preconditions as regards the format of the juridical framework of the country and its educational policy

 - (b) the difficulties emanating from Lithuania having for a long period been a part of the Soviet Union, such as not having been actively involved in many academic and scholarly developments outside that formerly ‘Eastern’ sphere

 - (c) The endeavours –graspable in all institutions - to give primary emphasis in their self-assessment reports, their interviews, and their answers to the evaluators’ draft report to their minutely abiding to all governmental rules and administrative regulations

and to subject to that criterion possible endeavours to improve the study programmes in such a way as to make them globally competitive

(d) The equally graspable wavering of the HEIs between what they had been expected to do under the 'old' system and what they could –and, in many cases: even would like to - do under the auspices of the 'new' EU-system.

Remark: repeatedly, that abyss has become strikingly apparent in several group interviews, where the evaluators had been confronted with persons, who might well have got their degrees and positions in the 'old' times, and who would dominate in giving answers to the evaluators' questions, whereas teachers of the younger generation seemed to have difficulties in coming in edgewise.

- The evaluators had been confronted with references to a huge host of regulations from the governmental side, that were extensively quoted and referred to in *all* self-assessment reports and in the interviews - regulations which, after all, the foreign evaluators could not be expected to make themselves reliably familiar with.

What should be minded in evaluating this external evaluators' report to the government is that

- various international evaluators had served in that capacity for various EU- and non-EU (e.g. U.S.A.) countries
- they are experienced in not simply the study field concerned. They rather have served in politically essential functions such as
 - Heads/Rectors/Vice-Rectors of EU universities,
 - Minister of Science and Education,
 - Presidents of scholarly national associations in their field,
 - Executive Board Members of the World Association in the study field concerned, etc.
- the reason why the foreign evaluators had agreed to take over that function, had in all cases been a -serious- EU-commitment, i.e. to contribute towards easing the way of Lithuania to make its way into the EU (here: in educational policy).

Under the auspices of this stance in educational policy our report to the government will now minutely go into the general characteristics of the study field under evaluation, i.e. into the basic specificities, in order to indicate such issues in particular, which call for political action.

a) Weak or very weak aspects:

BA's and especially MA's in English Philology are philologically weak across the country (History of English hardly taught, modern theoretical linguistic theory-formation hardly exists, or only a couple of current orientations are barely represented, courses on literary theory and modern literary criticism are not substantial, descriptive/historical study of the literature is insufficient, the theoretical underpinnings of the study of English phonology, morphology and syntax is insufficient, etc., i.e., neither the linguistic nor the literary-theoretical training provided is really up-to-the standards of other developed countries, which should make it difficult for Lithuanian BA's and MA's in English Philology to transfer into MA's and PhD programmes in Britain or the USA.

To a considerable extent, study programmes are not as good as they could be because the general education subjects or other peripheral courses absorb too many credits.

Students and philological teachers alike agree that the weight of such courses should be reduced and that those that be preserved should be taught in English, instead of Lithuanian.

The external evaluators fully appreciate that students should be granted the opportunity of enhancing their general erudition during their years of study at Higher Education Institutions – in particular in cases where secondary school education might have been deficient in that respect. It had not been part of the evaluators' tasks to scrutinize the interface between secondary school education and HEI studies – though it would be worthwhile going into that issue, it seems to us).

Attending such courses (e.g. 'Physical Education'; 'Man and Environment' etc.etc.) – that in many cases have no relation to the study field at all - should,

therefore, well be granted, but on a *voluntary* basis. With a view to the global competition which future graduates will have to face, the absorption of credits for such courses will put them at a disadvantage as regards their prime field of study, here English Philology.- The U.S.-American ‘Audit’ might well be considered as one alternative (i.e. voluntary participation, but no credits).

Programmes tend to be multipurpose and “have it all”, including enough of basic language skills, a bit of English Language Teaching (ELT), a bit of English for Special Purposes (ESP), a bit of cultural studies, and translation or some translation in special domains; and, indeed, in Lithuania there seem to be three natural sources of employment for English Philology graduates, a) a substantial majority, perhaps two thirds of all graduates, are teachers or university teachers, b) about 20% or less end up doing translation, either free-lance or inside firms, and the rest work for the government, local authorities, businesses, or corporations in jobs that require good knowledge of English and English-speaking cultures and societies.

In consequence, a way to strengthen the profiles would be for HEIs to specialize. E.g. perhaps some BAs should be more adequate to those aiming at teaching, maybe one should be specifically oriented to satisfy the needs of the future academics (MAs, PhDs in Eng Phil), others could cater more adequately to the needs of future translators, by providing special attention to certain types of lexical competence, terminology, ESP, etc. Nevertheless, in general, no attempt should be made *on the part of English Philology Departments*, to directly train translators/interpreters, since that requires intensive, specialized expertise, installations, and means (booths, etc.) that English Philology departments do not have, therefore they should not attempt to compete with Translation Studies Departments which do have the expertise, the specific full-fledged translator/interpreter curricula and the material resources.

In general, keeping the same kind of curriculum once and again in geographically close HEIs may be counterproductive. In certain cases (e.g., two very similar MAs in English Linguistics programmes at Vilnius University and Kaunas Faculty of Humanities, respectively) the result is two *weak* programmes, with hardly a sufficient number of students each; in such cases, combining them

would make sense, as certain content gaps in either of them might be filled and the resulting offer of courses to students would be better, and more competitive.

Curricular content /profile and title of some programmes should be reconsidered, e.g. ‘Pedagogy of the English/French/German/Russian Languages’. The load of all too often very general and descriptive (vs. explanatory) courses within the triad ‘pedagogy – psychology- philosophy’ (plus ‘satellite’ disciplines) consumes a considerable amount of credits; courses, that as a rule are not even taught in the respective foreign language.

The evaluators’ basis of judgment:

- (a) the course descriptions,
- (b) their set textbooks, and –amazingly-
- (c) the (as to our experience EU-wide unique) necessity that in various cases evaluators’ questions had to be translated into Lithuanian in order to make communication possible with Higher Education teachers, who, after all, teach compulsory (mainly ped.-psy-philos etc.) courses within foreign language programmes

To be minded: The evaluators are aware of the fact, that this study block and its extent are a ‘must’, due to current Lithuanian law. The evaluators are aware, too, of the high standard and the ongoing tradition (subject matter, staff) of these very disciplines in Eastern Europe in former times. Finally, the evaluators are aware of the fact, that due to prevailing law and regulations the HEIs are not allowed to achieve a curricular change for the better in that respect on their own.

Ergo: it is the country’s educational legislation that is called upon to achieve changes/progress.

One alternative, with which Lithuanian educational policy might well make itself familiar with in this matter is the curricular structure of ‘Teaching English/French/... as a Second /Foreign Language’ programmes outside Lithuania, e.g. renowned TESL or MATESL (=MA Teaching English as a Second Language) programmes in Anglo-Saxon countries, e.g. in the U.S.A.

General recommendation: in case Lithuania wants to enable its graduates to internationally/globally compete, more emphasis must –legally- be granted to the study of the very professional field (here ‘English Philology; Teaching English...as a Foreign/Second Language, TESL) -at the expense of marginal

so-called ‘general subjects’ and to a certain extent at the expense of ped.-psy.-philos (etc.) mere survey courses, too.

Quality of research (BA theses, MA theses, even term papers) is also relatively low, in general, and, apparently, as a consequence of the lack of appropriately qualified supervisors (see below) and adequately endowed libraries (see below).

Libraries are consistently poor in journals and even books in this study field, and in some cases they are clearly inadequate for any sort of moderately serious and up-to-date research. Online access to databases cannot compensate that lack completely.

The English Philology staff’s research and publication record is also rather poor in comparison with those of similar teachers in other EU countries. This may be a consequence of the conditions under which Higher Education Institutions’ teachers have to work in Lithuania:

- The lower rank (lecturers, assistants) staff’s teaching load is too high (sometimes as high as 20-24 hours per week)
- The staff’s salaries are hardly stimulating, and clearly make it difficult for HEIs to attract qualified teachers from other countries.

It was repeatedly brought to the external evaluators’ attention that in many cases junior staff members have to take two or even more jobs to be able to make a living for their families. As a consequence, they cannot devote sufficient time and energy to keep abreast with the most recent developments in their field, let alone to do sufficient research on their own.

This unfortunate situation causes a chain-reaction, which, ultimately cannot but **cause devastating repercussions on Lithuania’s national economy**:

deficits of Higher Education academic staff (that are, as to the evaluators’ (perhaps limited?) experience *caused by deficits/in the long run fatal negligence (?) on the side of the government*, not, however on the side of the HEIs; please, see above) → ***insufficient competence of***

their graduates → deficits of the quality of their later work in the professions → negative effects on the country's national economy.

The foreign evaluators strongly advise the government to break up that vicious circle by significantly improving the working conditions of academic staff.

Full professors of English Philology are desperately needed in most departments in order to boost advanced research and provide adequate supervision of the Ph Ds and other research of the younger staff.

The external evaluators were informed that 'a requirement for the staff-member re-election on the job position is a necessity to write at least one teaching aid for students every five year [sic]'. Nothing can be objected to that requirement as such. However, it seems to the evaluators that the fact of its being pointed out so specifically is a relic of the 'old' system, i.e. from a period, where internationally recognized textbooks and further teaching materials had hardly been available in some parts of the world.

At EU- universities of today, however, *it goes without saying*, that a university teacher will produce adequate teaching materials supplementing the ones available at the market or adapting them to the specific format of her/his course.- The evaluators hold that beyond the production of teaching materials the quality of all research done should be the decisive criterion

Lack of sufficient offices hampers the staff's possibilities of privacy, study, and even paying adequate tutorial attention. If ten or sometimes more people must be in the same room when not teaching during a great deal of their time, it is not reasonable to expect them to be able to make the best of their free time for research, etc. More offices must be provided.

Immediate action has to be taken in order not to exclude physically handicapped students from the study field under review.

None of the institutions that the evaluators visited had sufficient facilities (like e.g. ramps to get access to the ground floor or even to the building itself, let alone elevators to get to lecture rooms and offices in upper floors) to allow e.g. wheelchair-dependent students to study that field. The evaluators were alarmed

by one answer they got from a study field representative: “ We have not had any student like that yet. Therefore, no action is required”. (No wonder why!). This will by no means do within the EU! The evaluators, therefore, advise the government in cooperation with all HEIs concerned, to take *immediate* action, because that state of affairs is incompatible with all EU-policy, that explicitly aims at non-discrimination – and, unfortunately, handicapped persons are discriminated in Lithuania with respect to what the evaluators had to witness.- Urgent governmental action is required to prevent damage for Lithuania within its EU-political framework.

There is a general shortage of native speakers to teach English at the more advanced levels. Sometimes Fulbright scholars or other teachers join the staff on a temporary basis, but that is not enough; many institutions do not have native speakers of English teaching on a permanent basis.

It was brought to the external evaluators’ attention, that in not infrequent cases, only one half of the financial means earmarked / allocated by the government for a HEI, actually, “arrives” there, the rest : ‘evaporating’ somewhere.. The external evaluators had not been under an obligation to try to verify or falsify such information. Actually, porosity / leakiness of financial transmissions to such an incredible extent would surpass any dimension evaluators used to be exposed to even in *third-world* countries!

Therefore:

independent governmental financial control action has immediately to be taken in cooperation between the two Ministries concerned in order to prevent serious damage Lithuania might face with respect to not being a developmental country but by now being an EU member, that has to abide to EU-regulations.

Next to these above-mentioned general recommendations, which should be given priority of political attention the foreign evaluators would like to give the following specific recommendations with respect to the study field under evaluation

- (1) more money need be invested in higher education, especially in the remuneration and promotion of the staff, the hiring of qualified foreign

teachers, and the provision of adequate research means to HEIs (libraries, language laboratories, electronic subscriptions, institutional software licenses, etc.) and more political endeavours have to be taken to train /reeducate (?) HEI members to dare to take a critical stance to governmental over-regulations in the well acknowledged interest of overcoming (historically determined) ‘old’-style permeating stagnancy

- (2) Irrespective of the specific study field under evaluation, the government should seriously reconsider the seemingly necessary distinction between that traditional typically Eastern European/and still Lithuanian distinction between Higher Non-University-Education Institutions with no research obligation (but what kind of antiquated teaching can result in the long run without constant feedback between teaching and *research*?) and University Education -a distinction, after all, that many EU countries had overcome decades ago.

It is not the present evaluators’ task to submit viable and proven proposals, but they probably will lend themselves to give a hand to how to manage such intrinsic (EU-necessary?) educational changes. We strongly advise the government to reconsider that traditional, inveterate distinction.

b) Positive aspects:

- (1) The ratio of students/teacher is usually very, even extremely favorable as compared to other EU countries (around 16-18/1 at worst).
- (2) The ratio of theoretical vs. Seminar style/practical teaching is generally favorable.
- (3) English language tuition (practical skills) is generally adequate, and students apparently perform rather well, up to the standards usual in other EU countries or better.
- (4) The implementation of teaching is generally very sensible, conscientious, and successful.

(5) The attitude of teachers is generally very positive, in spite of adverse circumstances.

(6) The attitude of students is also extremely receptive and cooperative. Those students deserve to have more opportunities (for proposals, please, see above).

Concluding address to the Minister:

As to the Evaluators' international knowledge, the acting Lithuanian Minister for the area under concern is on a good way to cope with the deficiencies outlined above, which, after all, do not hold for that specific study field of English Philology alone.

Therefore, we most strongly support the Minister's endeavors to enable Lithuania and the Lithuanian graduates to in future successfully compete with their EU- and their World competitors.

With special regard to the most salient ones among the above-mentioned flaws that urgently call for political action (e.g. the overemphasis of that multitude of non-special-field credit-bearing courses), the international evaluators await an answer from the Minister - to whom foreign experts might offer supportive international advisory assistance if asked for.

In case the international evaluators should not receive a ministerial answer, they have to assume that their report to the government might have got stuck within some subordinate administrative ministerial level, i.e. that it will not yet have been brought to the attention of the Minister.