



OVERVIEW REPORT FOR FORESTRY STUDY FIELD

Evaluations of October 2014

INTRODUCTION

This overview report is based on the evaluations of three forestry degree programmes by an international review team. The evaluations were organised by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) and were coordinated by Ms Austra Rostlund. The international review team comprised Professor José Antonio Bonet, Professor Jan-Erik Hallgren, Professor Hardi Tullus, Dr Kęstutis Armolaitis, Mr Justinas Staugaitis and team leader Mr Brian O'Connor.

The evaluations were conducted during the week beginning Monday October 20th 2014 and were conducted according to the methodology approved by SKVC for the evaluation of higher education programmes.

The evaluation process consists of the following stages:

- The undertaking of a self-evaluation and the preparation of a self-evaluation report by the higher education institution for each study programme
- Visit of the review team to the higher education institutions
- Production of an evaluation report for each study programme by the review team, and its publication
- Follow-up activities by SKVC.

The study programmes were evaluated by the international evaluation team under the following main evaluation areas:

1. Programme aims and learning outcomes
2. Curriculum design
3. Staff
4. Facilities and learning resources
5. Study process and student assessment
6. Programme management.

A specific external evaluation was provided for each study programme including statements of particular strengths and weaknesses as well as recommendations for improvement where relevant.

The programmes reviewed were:

- Master Degree in Forestry at Alekasandras Stulginskis University
- Bachelor Degree in Forestry at Alekasandras Stulginskis University
- Professional Bachelor in Forestry at Kaunas Forestry and Environmental Engineering College of Higher Education.

All of the programmes received positive evaluations with proposals to award accreditation for 6 years.

These programmes are the only higher education programmes in forestry in Lithuania.

This overview report is going to remark on the main findings of the forestry studies programme evaluations from a general point of view.

The scores awarded for each study programme by the evaluation team were according to the following table.

Forestry Programmes Evaluation October 2014 - Score Summary

Evaluation Area		Evaluation of an area in points*		
		ASU MA	ASU BA	KMAIK PBA
1	Programme aims and learning outcomes	4	3	4
2	Curriculum design	3	3	3
3	Teaching staff	3	3	3
4	Facilities and learning resources	3	3	4
5	Study process and students' performance assessment	4	3	3
6	Programme management	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>

Total:	20	18	20
Evaluation	Positive	Positive	Positive
Accreditation Years Proposed	6	6	6
<p>*1 (unsatisfactory) - there are essential shortcomings that must be eliminated; 2 (satisfactory) - meets the established minimum requirements, needs improvement; 3 (good) - the field develops systematically, has distinctive features; 4 (very good) - the field is exceptionally good.</p>			

It can be seen from this table that the forestry study programmes scored consistently at the higher end of the scale.

1. Programme Aims and Learning Outcomes

In this area, the evaluation team considered that all of the programmes met the requirements at a good or very good level. Two of the programmes demonstrated very good aims and learning outcomes that were particularly well-suited to the nature of the programmes and the needs of society. They were very well defined and clearly communicated to stakeholders. The evaluation team concluded that there was also expressed in these aims and learning outcomes an appropriate balance between the practical, professional, technical, and theoretical elements. The aims and objectives of two of the programmes were considered by the evaluation team to offer examples of excellence and best practice. The evaluation team were of the view that the aims of the bachelor programme were somewhat over ambitious and also that there should be more emphasis on aims and learning outcomes emphasising practical skills.

2. Curriculum Design

All the programmes were rated as having good curriculum design. In all cases, the curriculum design met the requirements in terms of the spread of subjects. And the content of subjects and modules was consistent with the levels of the studies. Modules and subjects were well documented and were appropriate. The spread of subjects was even and the themes were not repeating. The contents of the curriculum were generally up-to-

date. The experts would have preferred if more English texts were recommended and used and if more subjects were taught in English. The adoption of more innovative teaching methods was recommended. It was recommended that there be a continuing focus on the further development of programme curricula and that attention be given to the facilitation of internationalisation via the curricula. The servicing of the life-long learning sector should also be prioritised.

3. Teaching Staff

The review panel was satisfied that the teaching staff of all the programmes were good. Staff had the appropriate academic qualifications and work experience and met all the legal requirements. The strong cooperation between the higher education institutions and the Institute of Forestry of LRCAF was seen by the review team as a positive feature. Appropriate arrangements are in place by the institutions for the recruitment, ongoing development and evaluation of the staff.

In the College, the teaching staff members are engaged in applied research and produce a number of publications each year. However, further intensification of research was recommended and in particular in focussing the research more on the forestry sector. The review panel were in agreement with the findings of the internal review team which suggest that the College could improve this area and the international review team noted the plans of the College for this.

The teaching staff members of the University for both programmes are actively engaged in research and this area is considered to be a strong point for the programmes. The participation of the University's teaching staff in international research projects was seen as a positive development.

4. Facilities and Learning Resources

The facilities and learning resources for all of the programmes were rated by the review team as very good, or good. The facilities and resources for the College Professional Bachelor programme were considered to be particularly good. These facilities are uniquely suited to the programme and reflect the many years of their development by the College. The arrangement for the students practical experience were very suitable and include the facilities developed by the College as well as those made available to the college by the forestry industry.

The University programmes have good facilities and learning resources available to them. Buildings are renovated, classrooms are modern and specialist spaces are well designed for studies.

Overall, facilities and learning resources for the programmes was very satisfactory with good teaching materials available for all programmes. Libraries were in good premises and were well stocked. The review team however suggested some improvements such as providing more texts in English, access for disabled persons and opening hours.

5. Study Process and Students' Performance Assessment

The Study Process and Students' Assessment were rated as good or very good.

For the master programme, this area was considered to be particularly good. The University provided for a clear and very well organised programme which excellently guided and encouraged students to research, mobility and social activities. The students' studies and assessments were very well organised. There was a close and professional interaction with stakeholders and this was considered by the review team to be a particular strength.

In general, admission to the programmes was well founded and used standard rules and procedures. There appears to be good demand from students for the programmes. The view of the international review team was that admission numbers should be closely monitored to ensure an appropriate balance between graduate numbers and the demand level in the economy.

The organisation of the study process was very satisfactory and ensured the good provision of the programmes and the achievement of the relevant learning outcomes.

Students were encouraged to participate in research – particularly so for the master programme. For the professional bachelor programme, the review team suggested that greater involvement in applied research by the students should be encouraged.

For the master programme there were very good levels of student participation in international mobility. For the bachelor and professional bachelor programmes, good arrangements for internationalisation were observed but the review panel recommended further intensification in this area and in some cases, students' English/ foreign language skills could be improved.

Appropriate arrangements are in place for the assessment of the students' performance including thesis assessment.

Strong support for all the programmes was indicated by the students, the staff, alumni and all the social partners. Ongoing demand for the programmes appears to be good.

6. Programme Management

Management for all the programmes was on a good level and followed the normal procedures.

The parties involved in the management of the programmes have clearly specified roles and responsibilities.

Procedures are in place for the regular gathering and analysis of information from students and other stakeholders on the implementation of the programmes and evidence was provided that the feedback was being used to ensure the improvement of the programmes. The evaluation team suggested that feedback could be on a more systematic basis in some cases.

Quality assurance systems were in place and were functioning satisfactorily.

General

While these programmes have been given high ratings by the international evaluation team, the team had a number of recommendations for further improvement. While the details are in the individual reports, the following gives an indication of the areas pointed out by the panel where improvement is possible and recommended:

- Continuous updating of the programmes was recommended to ensure that the evolving conditions and practices of the forestry industry are reflected
- Ensuring balance between student intake and societal needs was recommended
- Recommendations were made for the addition, deletion and modification of subjects
- Recommended to consider again the introduction of innovative teaching approaches such as block subjects/teaching and further emphasis in eLearning
- More information for students on platforms such as Moodle including information in English to facilitate internationalisation was recommended
- Keeping international practice in mind when deciding on specialization branches was recommended
- Recommended that English summaries of theses could be more comprehensive
- Recommendations that theses could have more literature references particularly international references
- Recommended that feedback on programmes could be more systematised
- Better access for disabled persons was recommended

- Greater participation of students in research/applied research was recommended in some cases
- Further efforts at internationalisation were recommended including efforts to ensure the compatibility of the programmes with those abroad. This may be particularly important if a common forest policy is developed by the European Union
- Consideration of further exchanges of teaching staff internationally was recommended
- Consideration of development of short courses for alumni was recommended
- Provision of further staff development opportunities in pedagogy was recommended
- Continued improvement of facilities and ensuring the appropriate level of technical support for laboratories and associated facilities was recommended.

Feedback from Experts on the Evaluation Process

Feedback from the experts (based on comments provided by two experts) on the evaluation process included the following:

Participation on the review panel was seen as a good experience.

All arrangements for the visit to Lithuania were very good.

Instructions were good but it took some time to fully understand them all.

The time schedule in Lithuania was tight. The days were full, there was only limited time to see facilities and there was little time for reflection between the meetings.

The experts would have liked more time to deliberate on the final scores.

The 4 point scale for the evaluation areas presented a difficulty and should be reconsidered. A 5 point scale would offer more flexibility and would give the experts the opportunity to give more constructive criticism on programmes. As it stands only for a grade 3 can there be critical but constructive comments for programmes getting accreditation for the full period.

There was a view that the university bachelor programme may be at a disadvantage in the job market in forestry as its graduates have less practical skills than those of the professional bachelor and are less qualified than the master's graduates.

There is a suggestion that the evaluation process could have a greater emphasis on a more in-depth evaluation of research including the budget arrangements for the support of research.