



OVERVIEW REPORT FOR *RELIGIOUS STUDIES* STUDY FIELD

2015

INTRODUCTION

This report is based on the external quality evaluation of the following study programmes in the study field of *Religious Studies, Theology and Pedagogy* in Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions: at *Vytautas Magnus University – Religion Pedagogy (BA) and Religious Education (MA)*; at *LCC International University – Evangelical Theology (BA)*; at *Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences – Christian Anthropological Pedagogy (MA)*.

The external evaluation was organised by the Lithuanian Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC).

The external evaluations were performed according to the evaluation areas and criteria: (1) Programme aims and learning outcomes, (2) Curriculum design, (3) Teaching staff, (4) Facilities and learning resources, (5) Study process and students' performance assessment, and (6) Programme management.

Comprehensive external evaluation reports including strengths and weaknesses and concluding with some recommendations were prepared for each evaluated programme and included evaluation marks. This overview focuses on the main findings of the external evaluation of the *Religious Studies* fields from a general point of view.

All programmes received *positive* evaluation.

OVERVIEW BY EVALUATION AREAS

Positive aspects

- All programmes fulfil the legal requirements of the Lithuanian ministry of education as to the curriculum design, the content and level of the subjects taught, and the composition of the teaching staff.
- The overall quality of the study-programmes is in most cases good and only in one case satisfactory.
- All four programmes have a good and in some cases even excellent infrastructure.
- In all programmes, students are well taken care of. This regards their study-performances as well as their personal growth. Their formal and informal feedback on the contents and the quality of the study-programmes is taken into account by the programme management and the individual teachers.
- The teachers who are responsible for the study-programme, are collaborating well and discuss the content of their courses with their colleagues. Hence, the study-programmes show a good degree of cohesion.
- Most programmes (with one exception) have a very good programme management.
- All programmes fulfil a clear need of the labour market, especially in the fields of religious education in secondary schools, and, to a lesser degree, in non-formal religious education in the church. At present and in the near future, the number of vacancies in schools will be much higher than the number of graduates from these programmes, so that it will be relatively easy for the graduates to find a job that is in line with their degree. The HEIs have

good formal and informal contacts with the stakeholders of the church and schools, and the latter value the study-programmes.

Areas in need of improvement

- In most of the HEI under evaluation (with the exception of LCC, which presents a special case), the teaching load is very high and hardly leaves room for research. However, it is obvious that this area cannot be improved by the individual HEIs, but needs to be addressed on a national level.
- There is hardly any cooperation between the HEIs funded by the Lithuanian government, in particular between LUES and VMU. In their self-evaluation reports, both HEIs stress their uniqueness, but the team of experts notes that there is a considerable overlap between their MA-programmes.
- With the exception of LCC, which educates students for positions in various countries, the other three HEIs should pay more attention in their programmes to important new developments in Lithuanian society, in particular secularization and growing religious diversity. They should train students more explicitly in adopting a dialogical attitude when it comes to discussing issues of faith and morals in secondary schools and in non-formal programs for religious education in ecclesial settings.
- Again with the exception of LCC, which has a number of graduates who have successfully applied for phd-positions in West-European universities, the MA-students of the other HEIs hardly qualify for research-positions. The quality of their MA-theses is (at best) average, and their language skills (especially English) are rather poor. For the viability of these study-programmes in the long run it is essential that the HEIs pay closer attention to the education and training of their own future staff.

MAIN STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF STUDY PROGRAMMES IN *RELIGIOUS STUDIES* STUDY FIELD

➤ Strategic recommendations at institutional level (for Higher Education Institutions):

Since the strategic positions of the four HEIs varies considerably, strategic recommendations at the institutional level are included in section III of each evaluation report.

➤ Strategic recommendations at national level (for the Ministry of Education and Science):

- More cooperation between, and possibly even merger of the HEIs in this field and even of theology in general is urgently needed because of the low student numbers in all the HEIs. A good start in this respect would be to organize a joint research-master in the field of religious education and/or theology.
- More collaboration between the HEIs could also at least partially solve the general problem of the high teaching load and the lack of research time.
- It will be a challenge to keep the infrastructure (especially library facilities) up to date, and keep it in accordance with the changing needs of the students (more learning in small working-groups) and the professional field (i.c. secondary schools).