

Overview report: Psychology programmes in Lithuania

This is an overview of the Psychology field study programmes carried out for SKVC in 2014. 2 international expert teams consisted of:

1. Prof. Stephen Newstead (University of Plymouth, UK, group leader), Dr. Lena Adamson (Stockholm University, Sweden), Prof. Peter van Koppen (VU University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands), Dr. Junona Almonaitiene (Kaunas University of Technology) and Domas Burkauskas (Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, student representative).
2. Prof. Reinhold Stipsits (University of Vienna, Austria, group leader), Prof. Anthony R. Beech, (University of Birmingham, United Kingdom), Prof. Mati Heidmets, (Tallinn University, Estonia), Dr. Kevin Lalor, (Dublin Institute of Technology, Ireland), Assoc. prof. Dalia Nasvytienė, (Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences, Lithuania), and Mirela I. Bilc, (Babes-Bolyai University study programme Psychology, Romania, student representative).

All in all 3 Bachelor degree and 4 Master degree study programmes were evaluated in 2014.

The arrangements for the visits worked well overall. Expert teams received the self-evaluation reports in good time, and each member was able to prepare a preliminary report on each of the programmes. The teams worked well together, both during the visits and in preparing the final reports.

In the opinion of the expert teams, the programmes all filled a labour need. Indeed, two of the programmes are, to the best of the team's knowledge, unique within Lithuania. Forensic (Legal) Psychology is an important and developing area of employment in Europe, and hence the Masters programme in Forensic Psychology at Vilnius University is in a key development area. While there is a need for forensic psychologists in Lithuania, it is possible that there may be a delay before the job market becomes aware of what these students have to offer and the full range of job opportunities becomes available.

The Bachelors programme in Didactics and Psychology at LUES is also unique in Lithuania, and indeed programmes of this kind, which prepare students to teach psychology, are unusual elsewhere in the world. Not all the students from this programme find employment in the area for which they are trained, i.e. teaching psychology, and those that do are mostly in part-time posts, but there is great potential here as the need for psychologists grows and as psychology develops at both school and university level.

The BA programme at the LCC in Klaipeda is distinct and has special merits in the connection to liberal arts. The management and the organizers of the Programme in Psychology at LCC have been successful in developing a thoroughly integrated study programme. The students are often successful in continuing national/international post-graduate studies. The team of experts expressed some concerns about the danger of isolation within an apparently well-organized 'island of study'.

The two programmes were in educational psychology (in one case combined with health psychology). There is an obvious need for educational psychologists in schools and colleges in Lithuania and most of the students find employment in related areas. The need for health psychologists is less well established and it may be necessary to differentiate this area more clearly from clinical and educational psychology.

Mykolas Romeris study programmes: The BA programme in psychology appeared well organized, a solid base for the purpose of training ongoing psychologists. The decrease of students seems to be an overall issue, in general explained by the nation's economic situation. Psychology can rather be seen as a relatively well-off exception to the trend.

The curriculum design of MRU business Psychology meets main legal requirements and recently was evaluated to verify the correspondence of EuroPsy standards. All teachers adhere to the procedure, principles and the criteria of the assessment of study outcomes established at MRU.

MRU Legal Psychology: It is well noted from the expert team that there is a strong need for the programme, still we suggested to think of rebranding the programme to 'Legal and Criminological Psychology'. The facilities were found to be in a spacious and inviting condition. The psychology laboratory in particular is organized in high standard.

Overall the expert teams found considerable strengths in the programmes we inspected. Some of the programmes had been inspected previously and granted three-year approval. The universities had responded appropriately to the recommendations made and all three were now awarded the full five-year approval. Perhaps most impressive was the major improvement in the effectiveness with which the universities had addressed the definition of programme aims and outcomes and had ensured that these pervaded all aspects of the programmes under consideration. The lengths to which the staff at LUES had gone to respond to the recommendations was especially noteworthy. The fourth programme (the Masters in Health and Educational Psychology at VU) was new and was given three-year approval, but if the recommendations are acted upon it should hopefully be eligible for five-year approval next time round.

The expert teams were impressed by the enthusiasm of the staff and the open spirit with which they entered into discussions and responded to our comments. The programmes all appeared to meet recognised legal and professional standards, and the quality assurance processes all seemed effective, with good involvement of students and outside partners where appropriate. The visiting team would recommend that in future the legal requirements relating to the programmes are checked by SKVC prior to the visits since it is difficult for the external experts to make these judgements.

Most of the weaknesses that were found are attributable to the recency with which psychology programmes have been introduced in Lithuania. The programmes aim to be fully consistent with European (and international) standards and have made excellent steps in this direction. However, there are still weaknesses in the qualifications of some of the staff, which the visiting team believed could be improved by greater staff mobility. Furthermore, the facilities are still at an early stage of development, meaning that the laboratories, equipment, test libraries and the stock of periodicals and journals are still behind what might be desirable. Having said that, the universities have made

great efforts to ensure that the limited resources are available to students, and in no case did these weaknesses lead the expert team to withhold approval.

Group leaders Stephen Edward Newstead and Reinhold Stipsits