

General overview about public health study programmes in Lithuania

Programme aims and learning outcomes

The study field defined as public health is very heterogeneous in Lithuania.

The BSc in Public Health program is inherently belongs to the field, and it is almost obvious that veterinary food safety programme also belongs to it. Biomedical diagnostics has certain link to public health, if we consider the importance of laboratory and radiography tools and methodological arsenal in the public health screening programmes, but it would be more appropriate to put it into other health science field. As far as the external committee members know, cosmetology does not belong to the public health study field in any other country. Consequently the aims and learning outcomes of the programmes are very versatile, the main aim of improving health of the population is definitively stated only in case of the BSc in Public Health and BSc in Veterinary Food Safety.

Continuous improvement of learning outcomes is defined as goal of the faculties, but they seem to manage rather renewal needs defined by relevant authorities than that of societal ones.

Curriculum design

The curriculum of studies varies in a wide range – obviously in their content, but not obviously in their quality. Concerning quality, there is a significant gap between the university bachelor and the professional bachelor courses. It is fully acceptable that the professional bachelor courses are much more practice oriented, but it does not exclude the possibility of high level training in the framework of „Basics of studies”. It has to be mentioned that in the non-university public health programs the most severe problems can be observed in case of public health subjects. The general finding is that the old-fashioned “hygienic” approach dominates over the modern concepts of public health. The misinterpretation of the term “epidemiology” is a general problem in college courses, and the epidemiology of non-communicable diseases in their programs is severely underrepresented. The unique (solely Lithuanian) course on veterinary food safety needs special attention; international comparison can not be done, so the curriculum design and the content of study subjects need frequent and through revision on the basis of market’ needs and emerging new pieces of information. International comparison has to be made regarding naming and the content of subjects in both university and non-university courses. Some of the subject names are short description of the content and not internationally known and accepted subject-names.

Staff

The quality gap between the university and non-university levels can also be observed in case of the composition of staffs. While these gaps exist in the quality of training in basic disciplines and in that of staff’ qualification the frequently repeated request of students for creating possibilities to enter into master trainings at university level (after completing college studies and absolving certain short bridging course) can not be realistically fulfilled.

The changes in the staff of non-university courses are not significant; teachers feel secure and valued as specialists what promotes their motivation to work in the program, but nevertheless,

higher turnover would have a good influence on the motivation of teachers to present better performance – among others - in the field of research.

Involvement in the international exchange programs have to be facilitated both at university and non-university levels.

Facilities and learning resources

In general, there are sufficient amount of premises for the execution of the study programs. Laboratories for training, as well as teaching rooms are generally well-equipped, although they have to be up-dated on a regular basis. Improvement is most needed in the libraries. There is a lack of books, periodicals in the field of public health; the development of the library has essential importance. The present collection of student handbooks should be changed for internationally recognized items.

Practical training is an important part of the curriculum of the professional bachelor trainings. Accreditation criteria of the practical training sites are not fully defined, and sometimes the influence of certain companies on defining the curriculum and sites of practical trainings are over dimensioned (see cosmetology training).

Study process and student assessment

Admission of students is done in accordance with the relevant rules and regulations.

Enhancing the motivation of applicants and new students is efficient, in general. The number of the main textbooks, books, publications available for students is not always sufficient, and the majority of books is in native language. Many learning materials are written by the college teachers, thus they meet the objectives of the study program, and they include self-control questions and tasks.

It is a new trend, that several teachers use internet for distribution learning materials and consulting students. The development of e-learning website is also commendable.

The practice that students having a final average score over the limit defined may decide between writing thesis or absolving a final exam needs reconsideration, because it seems to be in conflict with “Regulation of the Study Field of Public Health Care” Article 19.

Regular system for monitoring graduates is implemented in the majority of training sites, but the associations of alumni are frequently missing. Their formation and actuation would be a positive development; so it should be encouraged.

Programme management

The study programmes are managed through different functional bodies; their structure and functions are clearly stated and in harmony with the relevant regulations. In addition to the delegated members of the professional and managerial staff members students are also included in the committees responsible for provision of student opinion and comments on the study programme. The employers are also regular or invited members of the bodies responsible for provision of external information on the programme.

Internal quality assurance system operates in the training institutions, which includes also the annual assessment of the study programs.

The present structure and content of public health training in Lithuania is in accordance with the developments connected to the Bologna process throughout the European Higher

Education Area. The ambition to follow the proposals described in the communiqués of the ministerial conferences is evident. The problems explored by the external committee are specific, separate problems of defined training programs, but not of the field of training in general.