

TO: Ministry of Science and Education

**CC: Lithuanian Center for Quality Assessment in Higher Education
Lithuanian Science Council**

FROM: Expert Panel for Review of Sociology Programs

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RE: Concerns over Granting of Ph.D. Programs in Sociology in Lithuania

During our formal evaluation of Sociology Bachelors and Masters programs at Kaunas Technological University, Vytautas Magnus University, Vilnius Pedagogical University and Vilnius University, we had the opportunity to hear about Ph.D. training. Although the Lithuanian sociology community is young, it has clearly reached considerable maturity. The Expert Panel is impressed with the overall level of training, scholarship, research, and international connections of sociologists at these Universities. In just a little more than a decade, sociology as a discipline has flourished and is poised to make a significant positive impact on the future of the nation.

From our collective international perspective, we believe that to be a truly high-quality sociology program at the university level this must include strong and vital Ph.D. training. Therefore we are concerned that at the present only one of the universities we reviewed (KTU) had the right to grant the Ph.D. In Western Europe there could not be Bachelors and Masters programs without the Ph.D. at the same institution. And this is generally true among American universities as well. The sociological faculty at all of the reviewed Lithuanian universities share our perspective of the significant importance of a Ph.D. program for the overall quality of all other programs, as well as for the production of state-of-the-art research and scholarship. All three Universities that currently do not have the right to grant the Ph.D. very much want to have this right. In two particular cases, the VU and the VMU, it is in our opinion that there is clear faculty quality and capacity to grant the Ph.D. now, and the VPU is fast developing this capacity. The fact that these faculty do not have more control of the process is a failing of the larger system of higher education in the nation that needs to be addressed immediately.

We find that there is considerable frustration on the part of faculty with the current process by which Ph.D. programs are granted. We share these frustrations and have several recommendations to consider. There appears to be two related problems.

First, the process by having the Lithuanian Science Council make the final decision on which institutions can grant a Ph.D. is inconsistent with current Western European and American practices, as well as inconsistent with historical traditions of academic freedom of Universities. We would recommend that the faculty of each University decide which Ph.D. programs to develop and how they will ensure academic quality in these programs. These programs should then be evaluated on the basis of disciplinary and international standards. If a program is deemed by outside sociological peers not to be of high enough quality, then it can be put on probation and given specific ways to improve. Again ultimately this has to be a process controlled by faculty with peer review input. The point is, the process should be one by which sociology faculty are responsible for developing and maintain academic quality of Ph.D. programs, with considerable freedom to begin new programs and retire old ones as they become too weak.

Second, although we recommend that eventually the Lithuania Science Council should have no influence on the establishment of Ph.D. programs in Sociology, we realize that it may continue to have influence for the immediate future. In this case we strongly recommend that sociologists be represented on the Council. Not including representation of faculty from specific disciplines on any such board breaks major academic norms of faculty development of the University, as is the practice in Western European and American Universities

We strongly believe that immediate changes are needed in the process by which Lithuanian establishes Ph.D. programs. This will ensure growth of science and academic development for the nation in the future.