

Overview Report of Sport and Exercise and Teachers Training study programmes

Overview Comment

All 7 programmes were positively evaluated, the strongest recommendations being given to Sports Psychology (LSU).

Aims, Learning Outcomes and Curriculum Design

The six-member international team conducted onsite evaluations of the above areas of Sport at first-and second-cycle as outlined, and found the Aims and Learning Outcomes of good standard, yet variable. The subject learning outcomes are progressive and well graduated across semesters. For LUES and KU, it would be beneficial for the programme teams to survey those in the earlier semesters in terms of levelness and demands made on students.

Otherwise all programmes are highly specialised in their aims and learning outcomes and seek to address professional markets. Demand for programmes remains either high, or steady, but not altogether without examples of diminution in student numbers; however, demographic changes are influential where such trends are apparent.

Standards were generally found to be high and students were receiving a very positive rounded education which was in evidence in the quality of their work and preparation for future careers as teachers, coaches and sports psychologists. Preparation for teaching was found to be equally thorough in the pedagogic programmes; teaching practice is well organised and appreciated by students.

Training students more systematically in competitive sports is a curricular and pedagogic recommendation which has implications for all programmes, as is training in coaching and refereeing. Sport

Aims and Learning Outcomes are generally well situated for all programmes and are consistent with the type and level of studies (first cycle and second cycle). However, the most convincing aims and learning outcomes cannot influence the national problem in that the Lithuanian market finds too many institutions offering similar programmes. Both in achievement sports and other sports, politicians need to be pushed to create opportunities, as the requirements of society are not being met. LSU makes the point that 'athletization' is still a prevailing culture in some schools and through multidimensional knowledge and management of ideas the university is helping to modernise the subject, raise its importance profile and broaden its appeal.

Continuous review and updating of intended learning outcomes is in evidence for all programmes. However, processes and sources informing such changes were generally not in illustration. For the curricula of all programmes, The Evaluation Team recommends a more international orientation to qualify graduates more readily for international opportunities and careers. A more immediate possibility involves the developing of more international double Bachelor and Master programmes, with the selection of partners at the appropriate competitive level. Concerning the coaching programmes, the tradition of elite sports coaching emphasises the young and the gifted, while the fitness industry favours older persons. It seems to be necessary to add these two aspects in the course, as since 2012, the whole coaching market is to be included and not the top layer.

Disciplines such as pedagogics and didactics are subjects important to include for coaches who may gain positions in schools. For the Sports Psychology programme, the modules do not contain many applied sports psychology subjects; an overall estimate would be 50 credits out of 120, which the Evaluation Team believe to be short of what might be expected from a behaviourist programme at Master level.

Staff

In all programmes the staff meet the legal requirements and were found to be active nationally, and not infrequently internationally, as athletes, teachers and conference attendees. Teaching staff in all programmes are generally enthusiastic and highly committed and there is a dedicated attitude to pass on the preservation and continuance of these values to future teachers and schools. The Evaluation Team also believe it is an advantage educationally to locate wider audiences within the aging population, both in terms of research interest and research-informed teaching.

In Klaipeda, there is much for colleagues to be achieved, locally especially in relation to the European Healthy Cities Network, of which Klaipėda is the only Lithuanian member. There are opportunities for this university to become a national leader in sport education. A very strong civic leadership embraces sport in this city and together with stakeholders they keenly support this Bachelor programme.

There is evidence of loyalty and stability in staffing across the programmes in the respective higher education institutions, though the Evaluation Team, in camera, discussing the interview findings, worried a little about programme team spirit in Sports Psychology, internal cooperation and the overall state of current contentment, one to another. This may have been an impression only and not correlate entirely with actuality.

Programmes generally are strongly supported by scholarly research in the biomedical sciences, though social science areas and qualitative methods are developing and growing. The staff seem to be at the highest level in Lithuania for Sport and Coaching Sciences and the aim of at least one good publication per year is realistic. International high-level research is well in evidence, though the aim should be to concentrate on this and less on national publication outlets. The Evaluation Team believes that being at high levels of prominence nationally and regionally carries some obligation for teachers and managers and it should not lead to complacency.

Facilities and Learning Resources

In terms of infrastructure, all programmes are very well supported. The 3 institutions undergoing reaccreditation, prospectively have the larger vision concerning the plans for new buildings and resources. In relation to teaching materials (textbooks, books, periodical publications and databases), resources are good generally, across the programmes, though international journals could be increased respectively. It should be aimed to have the best in the world for a given sport. Pedagogic literature is generally strong.

A new, capacious and impressive library is currently under construction for LUES and should be ready for occupancy within the next twelve months. Elsewhere, students reported that they use laboratories and other University's facilities like dance or sport halls and that they are generally satisfied with the quality of them. State of the Art sports facilities are part of the future vision of all 3 HE institutions.

Study Processes and Assessment

Generally, support for students institutionally is favourable; admissions criteria are clear and there is a range of structures for the benefit of student life, including psychological and careers services, scholarship availability and clear guidance on learning outcomes for assessment purposes. The taught subject modules, are in all cases, particularly well detailed in specifications and in assessment requirements. Student mobility tends to be more embryonic rather than fully flown, though there are justifiable reasons (*inter-alia*, financing, part-time employment restrictions and limited Erasmus funding) as to why mobility is still developing. Staff mobility is however more seasoned and demonstrates keen national and international participation.

All programmes have strong partnerships with social partners and the labour market. The LUES programme has become influential University wide with such events as the recent *Movement Makes You Happy* initiative. At Klaipeda, students and alumni expressed their admiration for the new programme infrastructure; the other programmes received similar endorsements. All programmes provide graduates who continue to meet particular stakeholder needs at a high level, despite that some explainable non-specialist employment is evident. Concerning Sports Psychology, the Evaluation Team believes that until the specialist (practice) qualification issues receive proper formal attention and support, the programme will not achieve its fullest potential in respect of the student provision and the labour market.

The Evaluation Team recommends that programme teams should continue towards developing autonomous learning in students, and bespoke documents should also be written covering methodologies for preparing students with disabilities for teaching. Concerning the study process and student assessment, the Evaluation Team, found there to be copious evidence of high-level information, processes, support and care, which are testimony to the operation of higher-order programmes.

There currently is a level of stagnation in the Lithuanian labour market, but students, according to Alumni, nevertheless meet the more attenuated market opportunities, in being skilled, 'creative and more daring' in their understanding of the need to be personally proactive. Notwithstanding this cutting-edge preparedness and awareness, the Evaluation Team believes there is a need for stronger background training in Entrepreneurship, particularly at Master level.

From the interview discussions with staff, it became obvious that they are proactive towards preventative methods in terms of unethical examination behaviour in students. An increasingly worrying problem with regard to research, which also refers to the students, is the growing market of "predatory publishers" and the difficulties to distinguish between dependable information and publications which do not meet the standard of scientific reliability. It is recommended that students should be guarded and be taught to identify reliable sources.

In a wider educational context, all institutions engage in Third-age education.

Programme Management

There are structures for management, though not all operate at the same level of scrutiny and pace. Some immediate strategy should be found towards the releasing of more time for

research purposes, though reductions in student numbers have aided this, together with some financial incentives being made available. However, the teaching commitments in all 3 institutions are generally not excessively onerous. All programmes operate structures and methodologies for the collection, analysis, interpretation and action planning associated with data returns; and all programmes operate some form of evaluation, appraisal, or attestation for teaching staff. Equally, all programmes involve stakeholders as participants in the evaluation process. However, the management for all 7 programmes should variously focus much more on strategic planning across all areas: set concrete goals, develop a more carefully targeted mission and vision, supported with specific action plans.

There are a number of statutes and regulations which deal with quality management, including engagement with the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. Although there is some inevitable regulation and control in quality-assurance, commendably there is also evidence of a developing sense of quality culture in terms of free-flowing personal accountability and a focus on continuous programme improvement. The Evaluation Team learnt that programme improvement is a constant question, though that some improvements could be made to statistics on destination returns. At Klaipeda there are several strategic plans that remain undocumented which should be actioned as soon as possible.

At LSU, the document: *LSU Regulations for Study Quality Assurance* was made available. As it is declared in the document, the regulations were prepared in line with the Republican law of Higher Education and Science, University Statute and *The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG).

The Evaluation Team experienced the presence of good management structures, procedures and relations, although they were not wholly confident about the *status quo* in Sports Psychology, believing that some reorganisation and a specialist sports psychological 'practice qualification' built into the programme might help to strengthen its national standing and applicability. This innovation would require negotiation with the Ministry of Education concerning the qualification requirements for psychologists.

The Evaluation Process

SKVC is a seasoned and experienced Agency which has accumulated a high level of evaluation experience over many years. Expectations from professional participants are high. Hence, the evaluation work, which is fast-paced and demanding, requires time, energy and a high-level of commitment from evaluators, whose judgements need to be reached via copious reading, critical assimilation and care. Only the highest skilled and experienced evaluators will best meet the demands of quality-assurance evaluation in Lithuania, particularly where there are as many as 7 programmes (as was the case on this occasion) to tackle over a limited period of time. Such demands, combined with short-stay travel over not inconsiderable distances, calls for stamina and quick, flexible thinking.

The Coordinator for this very demanding commission covering the above-stated Sport programmes, was Dovile Stonkute, a highly experienced and comprehensively equipped professional for the role. She was carefully prepared and supportive to the Evaluation Team. The student member, Meda Keleckaite, demonstrated maturity and confidence in the work she undertook. The whole Team were enthusiastic, very effective and thorough in the on-site reviews. They received some support in the final report-writing procedure.

Terence Clifford-Amos Team Leader in Klaipeda, Kaunas and Vilnius, Lithuania, May 2014.