

**EVAUATIONS OF 8 PROGRAMMES (POST GRADUATION TEACHER PREPARATION
AND ONE MASTER'S PROGRAMME) IN LITHUANIA (21.05.2012 – 25.05.2012)**

GENERAL REPORT

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Before giving the general overall comments the External Evaluation Team EET) wishes to make clear the following points:

The team are pleased to see that Lithuania is now attempting to ensure that all teachers in schools are properly prepared before taking up employment and is attempting to address the problem of so many teachers in schools not having the correct specific preparation for teaching. The expert team applauds this and realises that the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are responding to a known national need to educate the untrained teachers (according to the latest figures there are still it appears 194 teachers working in Lithuanian schools who have only a secondary school diploma and many others with a degree but no specific education for teaching). However, the diversity of programmes in content, level and approach (demonstrated by the diversity of the titles) gives us some cause for concern as to assuring national quality standards. There is an unaccepted level of variation in what is provided and though teacher standards are mentioned there does not seem to be adequate guidance of what is required on a basic level to train a teacher. The variation in professed levels of the programmes provided is one instance of this confusion, especially as in some cases it appears that undergraduates are following Master's level courses or a Master's degree including courses set at Level 6 which is undergraduate level. Names of the programmes are varied, yet they appear to be aiming at the same outcome. It would be good to see one title used nationally to prevent confusion unless the programmes are very different. However, is a massive difference wise in the education of teachers?

The team too is very concerned about the overall title of these programmes. *Non-degree* gives, at least in English, a very negative connotation and we think that efforts should be made to change this to a more positive award for example a professional diploma.

As a means of introducing our concerns about the programmes (in particular) those designed to prepare untrained teachers for work in schools the team wishes to express its deep anxiety over the lack of information given to the institutions visited and to the team as to the **level** of the non-degree programmes. We have serious concerns over the lack of a Bologna 'level' at which this non-degree programme is targeted. This makes preparing correct programme Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) as specified by the Bologna agreement impossible. Many institutions (staff clearly admitted they too were confused) were guessing as to the level at which to prepare their programme and although the

programme was aimed at post graduates, with bachelor's qualifications, some had decided it was to be at Level 6, which is undergraduate. However, some institutions are teaching the same programme to undergraduates, post graduates and Master's students with the same ILOs. This confusion is not acceptable and has made the task of both programme design and programme evaluation extremely problematic. It was also clear that some institutions had not really considered what the level of the programme should be and had not made as yet any attempt to produce ILOs for the programme. As institutions were using ILOs at the time of a visit made by some of the team in 2010, we found this astonishing. It is essential that the Ministry urgently addresses this confusion and establishes a level or levels at which this programme should be planned and insist that all programmes are planned to the correct Bologna levels of ILOs, using specific terminology in addition to producing a more positive title.

1. In addition to the above, the expert team **has serious concerns with regard to the teaching practice element of all the programmes** which qualify successful students to be teachers anywhere in the EU. These concerns are divided into worries over the choice of candidates, the type of placement, the variety of schools experienced by students, the training of mentors, quality and amount of feedback given by mentors, university staff's involvement in practice, assessment of practice, quality assurance of that practice, over high marking and lack of any failures.
 - a) Choice of candidates. At present it appears that almost anyone who requests training is accepted (many HEIs give figures of 100% acceptance onto programmes). There are plans for some central evaluation but if students themselves pay for the programmes universities appear to accept all comers. This is not acceptable. Experienced school staff should be involved in selection procedures provided by the Ministry of Education and Science's Motivation Test and all candidates for teaching qualifications should be interviewed alone, or in groups, so their suitability for the teaching profession can be, initially at least, assessed. Just because some students have already had experience of teaching does not mean they should automatically be accepted onto the programme.
 - b) School placement should be at the heart of all the programmes and though many students have experience as teachers it is essential that all those trained should experience a variety of school cultures. It would be good to see at least, all students visiting other schools and at least observing lessons in order to see the different approaches. Ideally the school placement should take place in a variety of settings and incorporate a variety of teaching situations and school contexts: different age groups of students; different sectors, (primary/post-primary/FE), as appropriate; various socio-economic and cultural environments; multi-class and mixed ability teaching situations and team teaching/co-teaching situations. In all of these contexts, the school placement should if possible afford student teachers the opportunity to plan and implement lessons and receive constructive feedback.
 - c) The expert team were very disappointed to find that in many cases mentors are untrained and in some cases do not even have the same subject expertise as the student. Lesson observations varied drastically in number and quality, some students having frequent observations with feedback, whilst others (often those employed in schools as opposed to just having a practice placement) having only 4-5 observations of their lessons over a year and being left alone to cope, even if they had no prior experience of teaching. This variation is totally unacceptable. Mentors should give regular feedback on most lessons taught by the students and grades should demonstrate improvement as the practice proceeds. Mentor feedback varies widely, not only in amount but in quality. Tick boxes

against criteria, with one line of written assessment are not acceptable and the lack, in many cases, of critical analysis of lessons by mentors was of great concern to the team. As a result student self-critiques/reflections were generally very poor being in the main descriptive with no questioning as to why things worked or containing any links to learning theories. This coupled with rare or no visits by university staff, resulted in mentors often making judgements themselves without guidance or consultation. In some cases it appeared that universities washed their hands of the practice arrangements (schools are in most cases not paid for mentoring) and the general picture was that teaching practice was of a lower importance to the universities who had more interest in theoretical input. Practice should be at the heart of the programmes, a point that has been clearly signalled by the Ministry who have greatly increased the amount of credits awarded to practice in these programmes.

- d) As a result of the above points the team have grave concerns over the quality of the assessment of practice. In a few cases university staff do visit schools and discuss student performance with mentors, but in most cases this does not occur and assessment is limited to mentors and possibly head teachers or deputies. There is no quality assurance of the grades, though some attempts have been made to assess against criteria and in some institutions token meetings to discuss grading do occur. Grades in all cases were extremely high with no failures due to poor performance on practice. Grades assessed on a 10 point scale were mostly in the range of 8-10 many being 10 across the board. Within some universities some discussions do occur in relation to the school practice assessments but often the programmes put together the final practice grade with other marks, such as the final thesis/research, making it difficult to determine the level of the practice grade. In addition there is no systematic quality assurance of the grading overall for all students to ensure that grades given by schools are consistent i.e. is an 8 awarded in one school or by the individual assessors equal to an eight elsewhere? There is an alarming lack of standardisation of marking. Requests made in every general report written by this chair since 2003 for the use of external examiners within the country has brought no results and as a result there is no consistency of assessment grading country wide. In other EU countries where the placement/practice aspect of teacher education is given far more importance, the visits of staff from other national universities or even from other countries, to see a sample of students teaching in classrooms, enables standardisation of grading across the nation.

The expert team wish to bring this above point urgently to the attention of The Ministry. At present these programmes are not meeting acceptable standards in relation to others in the EU.

2. Some programmes seem to produce a fairly high level of graduates who are not employed as teachers, or are unemployed at the end of the programme. Due to demographic changes and the closure of some schools it may be more useful for the Ministry to control the numbers of teachers trained in specific subjects or for specific age ranges in order to prevent producing graduates for whom there are no jobs. Institutions should keep and make public the employment statistics of their graduates from year to year. This is difficult but should be attempted. Not all universities give an indication in the Self Assessment Report (SAR) as to the employment of graduates from these programmes and it would be very useful to have specific numbers of students who are in post when beginning the programme and those who are not, with figures as to final employment of the two groups. Some institutions have done this others have not making comparisons difficult.

3. It is essential that figures are given in the SAR for the numbers in each programme for 3 years to date (where appropriate) and the numbers following specific subject areas within the programme. In most cases this is not given so making it difficult to judge if the programmes truly address the varying needs of the different subject areas. In some cases HEIs do give lists of the subject areas they cover but then the team discovered that students from other subjects were also accepted onto the programme, raising concerns over subject didactic provision.
4. The small numbers in some programmes, particularly in some subject areas, raise questions as to the financial status of those programmes. We asked for staff/student ratios but HEIs did not seem to be able to manage to provide these figures which are essential for discussing the financial status of programmes. The chair would be happy to issue guidelines on how to calculate these figures for programmes that use a variety of staff from different areas.
5. The inclusion of preparation for social pedagogues in some programmes is again a cause for concern. They are not qualified as teachers in the EU and this should be made very clear in the programme aims.
6. It would be advisable for some of the introductions in the SARs to be made briefer and to the point. This is especially true where more than one programme is being evaluated; a brief similar introduction to all the programmes in their relation to the university would be useful and avoid repetition.
7. Far too often in the SARs wider university and faculty material is included, which is of no specific relevance to the programme being evaluated. This includes staff and student exchanges and research of students and staff not involved with the specific programme. Though giving some background information it is not relevant to the quality assurance process for the programme. Therefore SARs should confine themselves to specific figures for the programme not for the department faculty or university.
8. SARs are often descriptive and although it is good to see some attempt to define strengths and weaknesses the team would like to see comments on how those weaknesses will be addressed
9. Credits should be expressed in the ECTS format in some cases Lithuanian credits are being used.
10. The need for teachers is not well documented and stated by the institutions who seem to in some cases be grasping at training anyone for teaching, in some cases training undergraduate and graduates together to the same ILOs which is not possible. National and local needs for subjects and ages/stages need to be available to the assessment teams and used as a partial justification for the programme. In some cases it became clear that these figures are not available to the HEIs as local data is not recorded.
11. As a result of the wide variety of school subjects covered by these programmes subject didactics are often not taught, but left to schools to cover. This gives the team very serious concerns. How can HEIs ensure good practice is taught in ALL schools including specific use of modern methods, ICT pedagogical approaches etc. when schools are not vetted as to their suitability to train teachers? It is essential that those who have had experience themselves as school teachers, but also have good theoretical knowledge of specific subject didactics teach this area of the programme.
12. Not all tutors in HEIs are modelling the modern teaching methods required in schools. There are some good examples but this is not consistent either in or between universities. HEI staff should model the use of themed and project work in their own teaching to allow all students to experience it themselves. In some HEIs there too much stress on lectures as a method of imparting information.
13. The team were disappointed in some cases to see no stakeholders or students on some Self Assessment teams. This does not demonstrate an inclusive approach and should be addressed.

14. In some HEIs the final teaching practice is used as a research activity for some credits as opposed to teaching. We believe that this practise is questionable, they should be separate.
15. Some HEIs are not following the guidelines for the credits allotted to the final thesis, which should be 3. It is also of concern that in some cases research is undertaken without specific training in suitable methodologies for use in classrooms, such as an action research approach.
16. The team would question as to why some work is not credited at MA level for the students who have already received bachelor's degrees? However, we are also concerned that some HEIs are offering this qualification at Master's level with insufficient credits at Master's level (half being at bachelor's level which is not acceptable in Europe). We once again here direct questions to the writing of specific levels of differentiated ILOs in relation to the level of the programmes and modules within them
17. It was good to see that in many HEIs a good proportion of the staff teaching on the programme, were experienced school teachers and it would be encouraging to see a national effort to stress the need for prospective teachers to be educated by those with classroom experience. This is especially important in pedagogy, both general and subject specific, but is also needed in psychology so learning theories can be closely related to real classroom issues with examples. Years of experience in research or theoretical input are not a substitute for face to face experience in a school classroom and putting theory into practice.
18. In some cases there was a lack of clarity over the stages of teaching practice as described in the SARs as to whether it is observation, real teaching or research in some cases. More clarity in the SARs is required as to exactly how much teaching the students do, as opposed to observation and the support of other teachers. Having some national standard as to the hours student teachers expected to do as a 'real' teacher responsible for everything from planning through execution and the completion of assessment would be a useful guide. Also there are concerns that students with previous teaching experience appear to be treated in a similar fashion to those who are new to the profession. Some differentiation of the teaching practice assignments and time spent observing would be preferable.
19. There are some cases where the study times are insufficient with one year for what are part time programmes, giving students no time to reflect on their learning. The team is also concerned about the very high level of credits given, in some cases, to the students' independent work. We feel that this is out of proportion especially as grading is so high.
20. The team are concerned that there seems to be little control over the schools from which the students who are working come from and that students can select their own schools. How are these assessed as suitable for practice and for student learning? Some HEIs have partner schools which is an excellent idea and this needs to be extended as training teachers is a joint effort between schools and HEIs
21. Some HEIs are sensibly including preparation for teaching children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in their programmes but this is by no means universal. It is essential that all programmes address this in a practical manner not just in psychology and prepare students to differentiate planning and also consider diversity in their lesson preparation.
22. Critical thinking and reflection are not sufficiently emphasised in most programmes and as stated above the reflection of students on practice is not of a high standard.
23. There is some overlap in courses in the programmes which needs to be addressed and the team are concerned with low incidence of the use of foreign texts in the final works or in course booklists. This needs to be improved. Some students urgently need help to improve their ability to read and use English and students should be offered the opportunity to do this whilst they study.

24. Some students (those already in post) are prevented from attending classes as they lose money when they are not in school. This is not acceptable in any way. Students should not be penalised for attending classes and schools should be obliged to allow them to attend without financial penalty.
25. It is very difficult for many of these students to undertake exchanges to see what is happening elsewhere in Europe, because they are employed and the programmes are short. It would be good to see therefore HEIs making stronger efforts to bring in lecturers from abroad or make use of ICT conference facilities to bring new ideas from other countries into the programmes. Some staff said they were unable to travel due to financial restrictions in their HEIs but there is European funding for this purpose for which staff should be encouraged to apply.
26. In the final thesis there needs to be a much better control of the titles used by students which are over ambitious and not reflective, in many cases not reflecting the true contents of the study. In fact some sound as if they are for presentation for a Doctoral degree. There is an over emphasis on the use of questionnaires and a lack of any real critical analysis of the findings in contrast to ideas presented in the literature used. The discussion sections need to be much longer. Some research studies seem to be mixed in with parts of the teaching portfolio making distinctions unclear. More input on research methods is required in some places, in particular approaches such as action research. Some HEIs are putting far too much emphasis on the use of quantitative methods and training students in the use of SPSS (or other statistical programs) which is not really required in such a small study. As the thesis has been understandably reduced to 3 credits possible a substantial literature search with a truly critical evaluation would be a better approach.

As a last thought: the status of the profession seems to be declining in the country which is to be regretted as these students, if accredited, will be teaching for many years to come which is a point of real concern to the panel. The country needs highly trained and supported teachers and it would be preferable to see that a separate department in the Ministry is established to ensure quality and standardisation of preparation for the profession and admission to it.

Gillian L. S. Hilton on behalf of the expert team