



MARIJAMPOLĖS KOLEGIJOS

vadybos ir verslo administravimo krypties
studijų programų
išorinio išsamiojo

VERTINIMO IŠVADOS

Marijampole College

study field of management and business administration
external assessment of
study programmes

Final Report

Grupės vadovas:
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Title of study programme	Accountancy	Catering business administration	Business information systems	Business management
State code	65303S124	65303S128	65303S129	65303S130
Kind of study¹	Non-university	Non-university	Non-university	Non-university
Mode of study² (duration in years)	F (3), PX (4)	F (3)	F (3), PX (4)	F (3), PX (4)
Volume of study programme in credits	120 credits	120 credits	120 credits	120 credits
Degree and (or) professional qualification to be awarded	Accountant	Administrator	Administrator	Manager
Programme registration date, order No.	2001-08-28, Nr. 1234	2001-08-28, Nr. 1234	2001-08-28, Nr. 1234	2001-08-28, Nr. 1234

1. Introduction

Marijampole College was founded in 2001 from the former Marijampole College of Agriculture. It plays a significant role in the region, where it is highly regarded.

The College comprises two faculties, Education and Social work and Business and Technologies. The latter comprises seven departments and is home to the four programmes under review here.

The self-assessment group was led by the Dean and included two vice-deans, two heads of department, a lecturer, an administrator and a second year student. The resulting self assessment is well structured, includes extensive and supporting annexes, and is suitably reflective. It provided a sound basis for the assessment of programmes, and the site visit, which took place on Tuesday 18 November 2008.

2. Aims and goals of the study programmes

Non-university study programme in Accounting (F;PE)

The overriding aim of the programme is to educate future accountants who are able to utilise their knowledge of finance and farming in a constantly changing business environment to the benefit of their employing organisations.

The objectives are to provide students with the contextual understanding of the operation of a farming organisation, through its business functions, and to develop the necessary accounting skills for students to operate effectively in such an organisation.

¹ **NU** – Non-university studies; **U** – Undergraduate studies; **M** – Masters' studies; **SP** – Specialised Professional studies; **I** – Integrated studies;

² **F** – Full-time; **PE** – Part-time (Evening); **PX** – Part-time (Extramural).

The programme meets the updated *Professional Accountant trading standard* set by the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Social Security and Labour in 2007 and has taken cognisance of the Lithuanian bachelor programme in Agriculture Accountancy and Finances.

Non-university study programme in Catering Business Organisation (F;PE)

The aim of the programme is to provide qualifications for managers at degree level to enable the graduates to work in various catering businesses in managerial capacities in line with the Law of Higher Education and the mission of the college and its role in the South-west region.

The programme supports the aims of expanding higher education and professional education in the South-west region. The programme is also in alignment with regional employment opportunities in food production and food service companies.

Table 3 of the Self Assessment is a comprehensive analysis of the aims of the study programme and their linkages to professional competencies as well as the subjects delivering on these aims.

The aims and objectives of the programme are reasonable and appropriate.

Non-university study programme Business Management (F;PE)

Developing the human resource potential for SMEs in the agricultural sector has been set as one of the strategic priorities of the Marijampole region. The programme aims at training managers able to work in various business enterprises, to organise and manage its work.

The main goals of the programme are to give knowledge in general education, specialisation and economy subjects necessary for a manager; to expose students to effective, modern effective teaching and learning methods using modern facilities.

The programme aims to reflect the nature of the region and the needs of the college's social partners in Marijampole region as was demonstrated during the meeting with the employers and graduates. The content of the study programme is also backed by the recent research into the business environment in Marijampole County.

Non-university study programme in Business Information Systems (F; PE):

The Self-evaluation report states that the main aim of the programme is to educate future business information administrators who are able to install operate, and expand computer systems in state and private organisations and enterprises, to accept solutions independently and be responsible for them.

The aims of the study programme are comprehensive. The development of the study programme relies heavily on the regional role of the College (around 80 per cent of students come from the Marijampole region)..The study programme has been improved continuously, taking account of changes in the labour market, the suggestions of employers and social partners, students' feedback and

the previous report of experts. It is advisable to develop the programme further to take cognisance of the free movement of labour in the common European labour market.

3. Analysis of the programmes

3.1. Study programme *Accountancy (non-university studies)*

3.1.1. Structure, contents and study methods

The curriculum comprises general subject (19.5 credits); study field core subjects (41.5 credits); accountancy core subjects (16 credits); specialisation subjects: either Trade Enterprises Accounting (12 credits) or Agriculture Accounting (12 credits) or Budgetary Enterprises Accounting (12 credits); Professional Studies Practice (21 credits); two electives (6 credits); plus the final examination (4 credits).

There is a well-structured process for curriculum development involving regular widespread consultation and discussion at departmental, faculty and academic council levels.

The new curriculum has sought to address perceived weaknesses identified by the previous experts panel and those identified within the college. Greater coherence and progression is evident in the revised curriculum and skills development is more explicit. Students are presented with a clearer sense of direction for career choice. Current and former students affirm that the curriculum meets their requirements; the latter reported that the revised curriculum addresses weaknesses they identified during their studies. Employers to whom the experts spoke valued student' practical skills.

3.1.2. Execution of studies and support for students

Student contact time has been reduced with greater emphasis on self-study and the increased use of IT. There remains scope for further reduction. Staff who have travelled abroad have brought back new ideas for course delivery. A virtual learning environment (VLE) is in its infancy but represents a valuable development in the modernisation of teaching and learning on the programme. Staff contact hours have been reduced but remain on the high side and, although the VLE offers opportunities to reduce these hours further, there will be a need for enhanced staff development opportunities before these gains can be realised. When the VLE is fully established and staff suitably trained to use it, it will serve to free staff time for research and other professional activities. IT provision has been enhanced considerably, both centrally and in student dormitories, and the library bookstock, especially in foreign languages, increased.

There is strong support for student learning from highly committed and approachable staff. However, students reported there was little preparation for the study of English and in meetings with the experts many demonstrated reluctance to engage with the language. The experts experienced a similar reluctance in meetings with staff, although in both cases those who were willing to communicate in English did it well. Staff provide feedback to students on their assessments, but this is

often oral. In their review of student work the experts saw little evidence of written feedback. Financial support for students is provided in cases of need and individual study schedules can be negotiated to meet students' special circumstances. The college and its students are well-supported by the local community.

3.1.3. Variation in the number of students

The college and programme are highly valued in the local community and some 80 percent of students are local. The college is the first priority for one-third of entrants. Entry numbers to the full-time programme have remained relatively constant which reflects college policy to consolidate rather than expand. However, demand for entry to the part-time programme has increased dramatically. Retention rates are relatively high, around 90 percent in each year although, understandably, rather lower for the part-time programme.

3.1.4. Teaching staff

Staff teaching the more specialised practical subjects are experienced in their fields, and many bring a good understanding of the profession. However, there are few senior staff with more academic backgrounds, including research degrees, to support the programme. There remains relatively little exchange of staff with foreign institutions, although in cases this has been undertaken there are recognised benefits. Lack of staff facility with the English language is a major inhibiting factor. This may be addressed by staff development opportunities for existing staff and the recruitment of younger staff more familiar and comfortable working in English.

3.1.5. Advantages and disadvantages of the programme

The main advantages of the programme include:

- the improved access to IT facilities
- improved library stock
- its standing in the local and regional community
- the sound employment opportunities it provides for its students
- the involvement of local organisations and the municipality in the programme
- the establishment of the VLE to support student learning
- the increasing popularity of the part-time programme
- formal and informal staff support for student learning
- the structured approach to curriculum development

The main disadvantages of the programme include:

- limited opportunities for staff development, partially due to continuing high contact hours

- limited staff and student ability in English serves to restrict opportunities to enhance learning though external contact such as international exchange programmes
- student contact hours remain relatively high

3.2. Study programme *Catering business administration (non-university studies)*

3.2.1. Structure, contents and study methods

The programme is of 3 years duration for full-time students and 4 years for part-time students.

The total volume of the programme is 120 credits.

Recent changes have seen a reduction of contact hours, an increase of self-study hours and the adoption of new delivery methods. Delivery and study methods vary according to the subjects being taught. Approaches include:

- Lectures
- Discussion
- Seminars and classes
- Situational modelling
- Analysis
- Teamwork
- Problem-solving
- Excursions

Students undertake:

- Report writing
- Seminar preparation
- Analysis of subject literature
- Problem-solving
- Research

The programme has a comprehensive list of management subjects as well as practical subjects and a final thesis.

3.2.2. Execution of studies and support for students

The approach to programme delivery by lecturers is a collegiate one that involves departmental discussion and the ratification by the head of department.

Students and teachers have assigned consultation times as well as being able to consult via email. The weekly class contact for students is 32 hours. Students participate in research projects undertaken by department staff, some of which have been published and presented at conferences.

A variety of assessment approaches is undertaken including:

- Continuous assessment
- Examinations
- Papers
- Practicals
- Thesis and defence of thesis

A Careers Centre has been established by the College to support the students and graduates.

3.2.3. Variation in the number of students

Competition for admission to the full time study programme exists but has a tended to decrease. One third of entrants have chosen the study programme as a first priority. The remainder of entrants chose it by first – sixth priority.

Number of students in 2005-2007

Year	Number of students					
	All years of studies			The last year of studies		
	M	F	Total:	M	F	Total:
2007-2008	17	45	62	2	16	18
2006-2007	13	53	66	2	16	18
2005-2006	10	55	65	2	13	15

Student dropout is high and is concentrated primarily in the 1st and 2nd semesters. The college undertakes research to identify causes of this which include:

- Low marks in general education subjects
- Non-completion of self study tasks
- Lack of motivation
- Financial problems

The department is making efforts to reduce dropout and failure by:

- Providing arrangements for repeating subjects
- Providing academic loans
- Providing an introduction to the study programme
- Holding careers days

- Introducing support for students' self study

Students in general are supported by a number of further arrangements including:

- Individual study schedules for students with special needs
- Appeal arrangements for students who disagree with grades awarded
- Allowing part payment of fees and payment of allowances
- Provision of study rooms
- Scholarships

3.2.4. Teaching staff

There are 29 teaching staff on the programme including 27 full time staff. None of the staff has a PhD qualification, although one is currently studying for a PhD and the two members of staff who do not have a masters degree or equivalent are currently studying for their masters. All teachers have 3 years or more experience.

3.2.5. Advantages and disadvantages of the programme

The programme satisfies the formal requirements for such programmes. It satisfies regional labour market needs. The professional subjects of the programme are taught by competitive specialists. The programme has strong support in the region from students, graduates, employers and the municipal authorities.

Weaknesses include the high dropout rates and the lack of teachers with research masters degrees.

3.3. Study programme *Business information systems (non-university studies)*

3.3.1. Structure, contents and study methods

The Study programme in *Business Information Systems* is prepared under the guidance of training regulations of non-university study programmes and standard documents taking into account also following materials: Study programme 2000 – 2001. KTU, 2000; Bachelor of Information Technology BIT. Honour <http://www.cs.flinders.edu.au>; Bachelor of Science in Computer Science (<http://www.aiccs.edu>); KSU Graduate School Catalogue (Computing & Information Sciences), (<http://www.ksu.edu>); The Curriculum 1998 – 1999. University of North London: School of Informatics and Multimedia Technology, Faculty of Science, Computers and Engineering (<http://www.unl.ac.uk>).

The programme in *Business Information System* consists of 120 credits having following parts (see also LR Ministry of Education and Science, 22nd July, 2005 order No. ISAK – 1551):

- General subjects – 16 credits, (13,33% the whole programme volume)
- Basics of Study Field – 48 credits, (40,0%);
- Specialised Professional subjects – 12 credits, (10,0 %)
- Professional Activities Practice – 20 credits, (16,67%)
- Elective Study Subjects - 6 credits, (5%);
- Specialised Professional subjects – 12 credits (10 %);
- Final thesis – 6 credits (5, 0%).

According to the information presented in the self-assessment report, the division of the students work load is as follows: 1) Class contact hours: 1068 (22,25%); practical work: 1881 hours (39,19%); professional practice: 800 hours (16,67%); self-study work: 1851 hours (38,56%); preparation of final thesis: 240 hours (5%). The total number of hours in the programme is 4800. Thus, more than half of students' work load is focused on practice (practical work and professional practice). Student choice of electives is rather narrow and electives comprise only 5% of the whole study programme (6 credits). At the end of the 4th semester, students choose one from two subjects: Enterprises Book-keeping and Managing Systems Organisation or Publishing Systems Administration. In developing its curricular provision, the college feels constrained by regulations.

In sum, the new curriculum has sought to address perceived weaknesses identified by the previous expert panel and those identified within the college. Greater coherence and progression is evident in the revised curriculum and skills development is more explicit.

3.3.2. Execution of studies and support for students

The teaching strategy of the College is determined by the study programme and its objectives, which are directed to the training of competencies. In response to the experts' conclusions in the previous external assessment, the number of contact hours was reduced and self-study hours increased. Class lessons, practice and students' self-study form the basis of student learning. Lessons are given to the whole group, practice continues in sub-groups. There is an appropriate number of classrooms; every student has his/her own work place during practices. Self-study written work is included in every study subject. Self-study tasks are renewed every year to combat the risk of plagiarism.. Students write papers, consult teachers, prepare projects, prepare term papers, prepare themselves for the seminars, analyse literature and solve individual tasks. Four different professional practices are incorporated in the programme: information technologies (1-2th sem.), computer architecture and IS practice (4th sem.), practice of speciality skills in simulative business practical teaching in a firm 'Ratas' (4th sem.), final practice (5-6th sem.). The practices give an opportunity to gain deeper professional competencies. Preparation, defending and assessment of a final thesis is the final assessment in the study programme. The topic of a final thesis should correspond to the chosen branch and include not less than three business information systems spheres of an administrator's activities. Final theses are assessed by a supervisor, reviewer and state qualification commission. The defence of a final thesis is made according to the general assessing guidelines for non-university study, ratified by the Lithuanian

Minister for Education and Science. The final thesis criteria are presented to a student at the beginning of writing the thesis.

In sum, there is strong support for student learning from highly committed and approachable staff. During the meeting with experts, students reported there was little preparation for the study of English and many demonstrated a reluctance to engage with the language. The experts experienced a similar reluctance in meetings with staff. Improvement in English language skills in order to work individually with internationally accepted textbooks is necessary.

3.3.3. Variation in the number of students

The College and programme are highly valued in the local community and some 80 percent of students are local. The college is the first priority for one-third of entrants. Entry numbers to the full-time programme have remained relatively constant which reflects college policy to consolidate rather than expand. However, demand for entry to the part-time programme has increased dramatically. Retention rates are relatively high, around 90 percent in each year although, understandably, rather lower for the part-time programme.

3.3.4. Teaching staff

The teaching staff is mainly specialised in practical subjects and they are well experienced in their professions. However, there are few senior staff with more academic backgrounds, including research degrees, to support the programme. There remains relatively little exchange of staff with foreign institutions, although where this has been undertaken there are recognised benefits. Lack of staff facility with the English language is a major inhibiting factor. This may be addressed by staff development opportunities for existing staff and the recruitment of younger staff more familiar and comfortable working in English.

3.3.5. Advantages and disadvantages of the programme

The main advantages of the programme include:

- The study programme is in accordance with the professional and educational standards and legislation of Lithuania
- The programme reflects the college's regional niche in the Lithuanian education market. The implementation and development of the programme is well supported by the local and regional community
- The study process is supported by good infrastructure (library, computers, infosystem), which is being developed continuously. The first steps in developing a virtual learning environment have been taken.

The main disadvantages of the programme include:

- The international aspects of the programme, while valuable, are limited and appear to lack coherence or direction
- The literature recommended in the syllabuses often seems to be chosen rather arbitrarily and does not always correspond to the level of the study programme.
- Limited opportunities for staff development, due in part to continuing high contact hours
- Student contact hours remain relatively high
- The possibilities for internationalisation have not been grasped as enthusiastically as one might have anticipated. Limited staff and student ability in English serves to restrict opportunities to enhance learning through external contact such as international exchange programmes
- The programme does not include courses provided by foreign teachers.
- The possibilities for cooperation with the national professional networks in the field of business information system are not fully developed.

3.4. Study programme *Business management (non-university studies)*

3.4.1. Structure, contents and study methods

The programme comprises 120 credits and may be taken full-time over three years or part-time over four. General Higher Education Subjects comprise 19,5 credits, Basics subjects related to the field 41,0 credits, Subjects of Professional Specialisation 23,5 credits, Practical Work 22 credits and Final Work Writing (Diploma) 6 credits.

There are three possible specialisations: Organisation of Business Trade, Management of Finances or Business Organisation of Transportation on Wheels. Students also can choose 6 credits from electives. Practical skills are formed in series, from the initial skills in a simulated practice firm to an independent employee in a company.

Following the recommendations of the external experts who assessed the programme previously, the content of some courses have been revised, contact hours reduced and self-study hours increased and new study methods added to the subject programmes.

The coherence and progression of the revised curriculum has become more explicit. There is appropriate emphasis on practical work and on 'active-learning', and the scheduling of subjects is intended to ensure that student have the necessary theoretical underpinning to gain maximum benefit from their practical experience.

3.4.2. Execution of studies and support for students

The student workload is evenly spread across the years of study. Lectures comprise 32 hours in the first, second and third semesters, 33 hours in the fourth and fifth and 31 hours in the sixth semester. However, in spite of a recent reduction, the weekly contact hours are still very high at 32. The College may wish to consider reducing this further.

Students receive continuous feedback on their progress, continuous assessment forms are combined with end-of-semester examinations and there is a re-sit facility for failed examinations. The schedule for examinations is adjusted to the needs of the students. Students may appeal in the event of dissatisfaction with the assessment outcome. Students have the option of pursuing an individual schedule of studies to accommodate personal circumstances.

There is a heavy reliance on final examinations and they constitute between 50 and 60 per cent of the overall assessment. This distribution is not necessarily appropriate for all subjects being studied and the College may wish to consider wider implementation of more varied and appropriate assessment tools.

The process of preparation, defending and assessment of a final thesis is made according to general guidelines of non-university studies, Methodological instructions for thesis writing were prepared by the Faculty and the privilege to prepare and present a final thesis is given to students who have fulfilled all the necessary criteria.. To ensure consistency in assessment, clear, written assessment criteria are issued to reviewers and members of the state qualification commission.

The Self-assessment provides considerable detail of the various kinds of support given to students, including a number of scholarships.

3.4.3. Variation in the number of students

Admission to the programmes has been relatively constant for the past three year, just below 30 to the full-time programme and about 60 to the part-time programme. A significant number of students (above 15%) have, for various reasons, withdrawn from both programmes. The SAR points to lack of motivation, family commitments and health as the main reasons for withdrawals. However, the College may wish to adopt a more proactive approach to the relatively high ‘wastage’ rate.

3.4.4. Teaching staff

There are no professors or docents teaching on the programme, and no teacher has a Doctor’s degree. Thirteen (44,83%) of the 29 teachers have Masters degrees, the remainder have acquired higher qualification equal to Masters degrees. 26 teachers (89,65%) have at least 3 years of practical experience in the field of teaching subjects.

There is clearly a relatively low level of academic standing and experience of staff, although student feedback suggests that they are generally happy with the standard of teaching they receive.

The College is well aware of the need to invest in staff development and recruitment in order to further support the programme and the learning of its students. Their efforts during the last two years have met with limited success.

3.4.5. Advantages and disadvantages of the Programme

Advantages:

- widespread consultation with social and business partners

- appropriate emphasis on skills development
- feedback to students on their progress
- the improved access to IT facilities
- improved library stock
- the employment opportunities provided for its students

Disadvantages:

- limited opportunities to take electives
- relatively high contact hours
- limited opportunities for staff development, partially due to continuing high contact hours
- limited staff and students ability to communicate in English serves to restricted opportunities to enhance learning though external contacts such as international exchange programmes
- wastage rates are high
- IT provision needs further modernisation and expansion

4. Material conditions

The college has undergone refurbishment. Teaching rooms have been upgraded. The library stock in foreign languages has been enhanced and suitable mechanisms exist for augmentation of library stock to meet developing needs. IT provision continues to improve and students now have widespread access to the internet, including in the dormitories. There remains room for further enhancement, but the development of the VLE represents a significant improvement in the material conditions underpinning student learning. Efforts should be made to accelerate the full implementation of the system.

Resources to support practical training are provided where appropriate, such as business and catering simulations. Students are generally satisfied with the material conditions supporting their study although some extension and modernisation of facilities, such as those in catering is necessary.

5. External relations

The College has established links both within the region, and nation-wide, to address employers' needs, give information about curriculum renewal and provide opportunities for students to progress to further studies at universities. Efficient arrangements are also made for students to gain work experience in local and regional businesses relevant to their programme of study. While the college is keen to extend its links beyond Lithuania and has made some progress in this regard, there remains considerable scope for extending international links, so that students and staff may be exposed to modern business practice. A necessary prerequisite for this is the enhancement of staff and students competence in the English language.

6. Feedback

The College is active in the region and there is a mutually beneficial two-way flow of information and cooperation. Many activities of the college, such as thesis defence commissions and curricular developments, are informed by input from local and regional businesses and public organisations, such as the Marijampole Municipality, and from alumni.

Internal processes include student questionnaires and the work of the Quality Assurance and Innovation Section. Appropriate importance is given to the views of third year students on completion of their work placement. Issues, whenever they may arise, are taken seriously and, where possible, actions are taken to address them. In the event of a disagreement between a teacher and a student, the student may appeal to the Faculty's Appeal Committee.

There is evidence of informal discussions between staff aimed at improving the provision. The composition of the self-assessment team and widespread consultative process which led to the self-assessment document demonstrates the inclusivity of the approach within the college. The result is a clear sense of 'community' within the college.

7. Internal assurance of study quality

The Innovation and Quality Assurance Section (IQAS) was established in 2001 and a guide produced in 2005. It has set out a framework for assurance and enhancement of the College's provisions. Its activities are appropriately focused and it has set clearly thought-out priorities. Performance indicators include student achievement and progression, quality of teaching materials, organisation of the study process, development of material conditions, work placement practice and graduate employment.

Reflective self-assessment occurs at various levels. Discussions at departmental level are taken to faculty level and then to Academic Council which meets every month. Students' views are given appropriate prominence. The quality of programmes is assessed at the end of each semester. The questionnaires used at the various stages are comprehensive and well-focused on key issues. Students pointed to improvements made as a result of their comments.

8. General assessment of the programmes within the study field

The programme meets local and regional needs and is well-regarded in the area. The college operates as an inclusive, supportive community and is highly valued by its students and graduates. Staffing remains limited in quantity and there is a need to continue the process of updating and upgrading staff qualifications. Although considerable improvements have been made in learning resources, further development is necessary.

8.1 Recommendation to the higher education institution

The college has made considerable strides in its modernisation programme and is to be commended. However, work remains to be done if the college is to continue to play a significant role in the region and to equip its students for personal and professional development and lifelong learning, as the international dimension becomes more important. In particular, we would propose the following for consideration:

- Language abilities, particularly in English, of both students and staff should be improved to enable them to be self-confident and proactive in performing in an international setting.
- Expansion of the international dimension of the college through increased, and extended period, foreign exchange opportunities for exchange for staff and students.
- Support for staff upgrading of academic qualifications should be reinforced.
- Further opportunities for staff to observe professional practice in their subject areas, nationally and internationally, should be enhanced.
- Students should be encouraged and supported to read beyond the basic literature for their subject and to practise independent, self-study, particularly for those who wish to pursue further qualifications.
- Extension and formalisation of arrangements with other higher education institutions, in Lithuania and beyond, to facilitate student progression to further study.
- Further enhancement of library resources should continue, particularly in relation to internationally-recognised texts.
- A further reduction in staff contact hours to encourage and facilitate more staff scholarship and research and enhancement of foreign language abilities.
- A continued reduction in student contact hours to foster increased independent self-study.
- Creation of more formal alumni and external speaker arrangements and explicit integration of these, particularly the latter, into the student learning experience

8.2. Proposal on accreditation

Marijampolė College:

- Non-university study programme *Accounting* (state code 65303S124) is given **full accreditation**
- Non-university study programme *Catering Business Management* (state code 65303S128) is given **full accreditation**

- Non-university study programme *Business Information Systems* (state code 65303S129) is given **full accreditation**
- Non-university study programme *Business Management* (state code 65303S130) is given **full accreditation**

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