

SELF-ANALYSIS DOCUMENT OF LITHUANIA

THE CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION (LITHUANIA)

Executive Summary

1. Lithuanian higher education system consists of university and non-university sectors. In both sectors, there are state and non-state higher education institutions.
2. National responsibility for quality policy lies with the Ministry of Education and Science, for quality evaluation with the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (CQAHE), while quality assurance on the institutional level is the responsibility of higher education institutions themselves.
3. Evaluation and accreditation are considered to be two sides of the same coin. Responsibility for evaluation lies on the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education, responsibility for accreditation on the Ministry of Education and Science.
4. Institutional autonomy is very high. In particular cases it becomes a problem of the whole society. Institutions of higher education and research are free to choose the type and way of implementation of their internal quality assurance systems.
5. Creation and implementation of study field benchmarks for undergraduate studies (university and non-university) have begun. Benchmarks are very useful in external evaluation, by preparing new study programmes.
6. Participation of student representatives by preparing self-evaluation reports is compulsory. When visiting higher education institutions, experts' team always meets with students separately. There are discussions to involve student representatives in peer review, Experts' Board and preparation of independent self-evaluation report.
7. There are difficulties with recruitment of teachers, as the teacher's placement system is very restrictive. Age structure of teachers is a matter of great concern.
8. There is a great number of study programmes in Lithuania. The current structure of duration of university studies (4 + 2 + 4) is under discussion. Duration of university-type undergraduate studies (four years as a rule) is too long.
9. Successful implementation of the Bologna Process requires more clear conception on Master's studies. There is a need to describe more precisely the requirements for entrance into Master's studies.
10. Number of study fields, where evaluation is made by international peer reviews, is growing. Representatives of higher education institutions treat international peer reviews quite positively.

1. OVERVIEW OF HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

1.1. Higher Education System

Lithuania has a binary higher education system – non-university studies and university type studies. Non-university studies – one cycle (undergraduate) professional studies intended for the preparation (training) for practical-professional activity. After the professional studies are completed a diploma of higher education testifying the obtained professional qualification is awarded. Duration of daytime non-university studies is from 3 till 4 years.

University studies – higher education studies based on acquiring theoretical background and scientific investigation leading to a qualification, academic and/or research degree (after defending a thesis). University studies are organised in three cycles:

- First cycle (undergraduate Bachelor) studies;
- Second cycle (graduate Master's or specialised professional) studies;
- Third cycle (post-graduate residency, doctoral or post-graduate art) studies.

The first cycle (Bachelor) studies form the basic knowledge in the chosen study field and sometimes combine it with professional activity studies. The Bachelor degree and/or professional qualification are awarded after those studies are completed. Duration of Bachelor studies is from 3,5 till 4,5 years.

The second cycle studies offer deeper knowledge of the subject, form competences necessary for independent research or provide with special skills for independent professional activity. The Master degree and/or professional qualification can be awarded to individuals after the master studies are completed. Professional qualification is acquired after specialised professional studies are completed. Duration of Master's studies is from 1,5 till 2 years. Duration of specialised professional studies is from one till two years.

The third cycle of studies is aimed at preparing (training) researchers (doctoral studies), art teachers or artists (post-graduate art studies) and medical practitioners. The Doctoral degree (PhD) is awarded after doctoral studies (duration till four years) are completed. Post-graduate art studies are devoted to the preparation of individuals for teaching at higher art institutions and specialised creative artistic activities. The post-graduate art studies take no longer than two years. Upon completing them, the degree of art licentiate is awarded. Those pursuing medical education at a university continue their study in the residency. This is a specific form of second level university education intended for training individuals to work as physicians and medical practitioners. The studies last from three to seven years.

There are two types of higher education institutions in Lithuania: universities and colleges. A university is a higher education institution where the university type studies dominate but students here can be taught under non-university type study programmes. A college is a higher education institution where non-university type

studies dominate. According to the Governmental decree a college may organise university type undergraduate studies.

Higher education institutions can be of two types: state and non-state. State universities are established by parliament (Seimas), state colleges – by government. Non-state higher education institutions have to acquire a licence issued by the Government to carry out (conduct) their practice in Lithuania.

Lithuania has 48 institutions of higher education – 21 university type higher education institutions (15 state and 6 non state) and 27 colleges – non-university type higher education institutions (16 state and 11 non state).

In last year number of students rapidly increased and in 2002 year was 146 thousands (3,5 millions inhabitants in country). 5 percents students attend non-state higher education institutions only. Non-university sector is quite new and not large (18 percents of all higher education sector), it has potential to enlarge. Around 55 percents of Lithuanian school leavers enter higher education institutions at the moment. More than 30 percents of 18–23 years inhabitants are students.

The Law on Higher Education appeared in 2000, it has three amendments. This law introduced binary higher education system. Till this time the Law on Research and Higher Education (approved in 1991) regulated main principles of higher education system.

1.2. Quality assurance, evaluation and accreditation

National responsibility for quality policy lies with the Ministry of Education and Science, for quality evaluation with the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (CQAHE), while quality assurance on the institutional level is the responsibility of higher education institutions themselves. The Ministry of Education and Science established the CQAHE in 1995.

External evaluation of new and operating study programmes is compulsory. Accreditation of operating study programmes is compulsory. First cycle of evaluation and accreditation of the study programmes is in a final stage.

Evaluation of research and development was done on several occasions by ask of the Ministry of Education and Science, planned evaluation of research level in the institutions of higher education and research started in 2004.

Evaluation of applications for establishing new higher education institutions is compulsory. Not later than after four years evaluation of activities of new established higher education institutions is provided.

The external assessment of study programmes in particular study field is implemented. In eight years all study programmes (about 1200) included into the Register of Study Programmes are to be assessed. Within a year, about 130–170 study programmes are assessed.

Following the established procedures, all higher education institutions submit self-evaluation reports to the Centre, whereas the Centre has the assessment of each study programme of a higher education institution conducted – first, the expert group reads the self-evaluation report, afterwards experts go on a visit to the higher education institution to be able to objectively assess the study process, the students' achievements and material facilities of their studies. Then the expert group suggests that each study programme, which has gone through the assessment procedures, should be given one of the following evaluations:

- full accreditation,
- temporary accreditation,
- restricted accreditation,
- no accreditation.

After the Expert Council approves the conclusions drawn by the expert group, the Centre submits a proposal on accreditation to the Ministry of Education and Science, which afterwards takes the final decision. Temporary accreditation implies that the study programme is to undergo another external assessment earlier than in eight years, and the date is specified in the Order. Whenever the study programme is given restricted accreditation, students' enrolment to the first year of studies of the programme is suspended until a repeated assessment of the study programme takes place. When the study programme is not accredited, its implementation is terminated.

Approved by Expert Council final expert report is published in internet, decision of the Ministry of Education and Science is published in Official Gazette and internet.

In 1999, regular study programme assessment in particular study fields was started. In 2002, the practice of assessing programmes by inviting foreign experts was introduced.

Higher education institutions submit new study programmes to the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education as a request for evaluation. The Centre provides for their expert assessment and submits a proposal to the Ministry of Education and Science to include the new programme into the Register of Study Programmes. The Ministry takes final decision as to the inclusion of new programmes into the register. On late years about 50 per cent of new study programmes received a negative evaluation and were not recommended for registration. Usually, a programme is only registered if the assessment confirms that the higher education institution offering it is capable of implementing it (i. e., the institution has academic staff of sufficient qualification and sufficient facilities) and there is an explicit need for the specialists of the respective field. In some cases universities has right to register new study programmes without evaluation of the Centre.

Summary of section 1

- A binary higher education system – non-university studies and university type studies – exist;
- University studies consist from three cycles;
- Rapidly growth the number of students in last years;
- Compulsory evaluation and accreditation of running study programmes, compulsory evaluation of new study programmes (with one exception);
- Outspread practice of assessing programmes by inviting foreign experts.

2. LEVEL OF INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY

Universities are autonomous not only by choosing studies field, research areas, but also in finance (allocation of budget money by lump-sum), governance (election of rector does not depend on outside, no possibilities to influence into university inner structure). It is big problem for all society – Government, Ministry, social partners practically can't influence into universities development. This is one of the reasons, why number of student is so high in compare with financing.

According to the last amendment (in 2003) of the Law on Higher Education (2000) each degree study programme has to be included into the Register of Study Programmes and periodically evaluated by the Centre of Quality Assessment in Higher Education. Evaluation of study programmes is carrying out according evaluation plan, approved by the Ministry. Higher education institutions understand usefulness of external evaluation, especially done by foreign experts.

In last years more than ten study programmes were accredited restricted, it means, that admission into these study programmes was forbidden. Accreditation is done by the Ministry in accordance suggestions of Experts Board running under the Centre.

In 2004 four study field benchmarks were approved, more than five are under preparation. Study field benchmarks are intend for undergraduate study programmes in both sectors – university and non-university. They involve general provisions for study field, requirements for study programmes, what knowledge and understanding, cognitive, practical and transferable skills has have graduate, structure of study programmes, requirements for possibility to run study programmes of given field. Study field benchmark is prepared by famous specialist of given study field, employers and approved by the Ministry. They are very useful in external evaluation, by preparing new study programmes. Understanding of higher education institutions grows in usefulness of study field benchmark.

Institutions of higher education and research are free to choose the type and way of implementation of their internal quality assurance systems. Necessity to introduce or adopt and continually improve own quality assurance system is growing.

Summary of section 2

- Level of institutional autonomy is very high, especially for universities;
- Evaluation of study programmes is foreseen in Law on Higher Education (2000);
- Higher education institutions understand usefulness of external evaluation of study programmes, especially done by foreign experts;
- Creation and implementation of study field benchmarks for undergraduate studies is begun;
- Growing role of institutional quality assurance systems;

3. THE PLACE OF STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND ROLE IN EVALUATION

- Inadequate representation in HEI senates (academic councils);
Students must comprise not less than 10 percent of the senate members (in universities) or of the academic council members (in colleges). University Senate is the supreme body of the academic self-government of a state university.
- Fitful evaluation of teachers by internal quality assurance;
In many HEI students are spreading questionnaire with the intention to make influence into quality of teaching and learning, institutional services. Participation of representative of student by preparing self-evaluation report is compulsory. Nevertheless influence of students for teaching of particular teachers is enough weak.
- Representative of the student organisations does not take part in experts' teams by external evaluation and by making proposals for accreditations in Experts Council. By the visit to HEI experts' team always meets with students separately and it happens that opinion of students is conditioned.
- In last years student organisations are very active in

4. TEACHING STAFF

- Recruitment difficulties;
Teachers' salary is not competitive with the salary that is offered in industry and business. Part of teachers is working at HEI and in industries or business offices simultaneously. Part of teachers is working at two or three HEI simultaneously.
- Age structure of teachers is a matter of great concern;
After 10–15 years will be a lack of teachers. Weak influence of young generation, many young researchers go abroad (brain drain).
- Very high contact hours load;
Due to the high contact hours load teachers haven't time for research. There is low scientific level in some field of studies.
- Very closed teachers' placement system;
Appointment of teachers is task of the faculty councils. Competition by appointment professors is very low, in some cases highest than one to one. Teacher can grows till professor, but quite difficult to win professor position from outside.

5. STUDY PROGRAMMES

- To great number of study programmes;
There are more than 1200 studies programmes in Lithuanian higher education sector. Some study programmes are narrow, overmuch specialised, especially undergraduate. The Lithuanian universities rectors' conference initiates to reduce number of university type undergraduate study programmes.
- Internal evaluation of study programmes is seldom in practice;

HEI's are encouraged to organise internal or external evaluation of study programmes, especially new prepared. Internal or external evaluation, organised not by CQAHE, is not yet widespread.

- To great amount of undergraduate university study programmes;
As a rule amount of university study programmes is 240 ECTS points (four years duration). According to the Law on Higher Education possibility to reduce amount exists, but HEI does not want to do this (it will reduce and budget allocation).
- There is no clear conception on Master's studies;
Suggestions to make to types of Master's studies: into depth and into width. There are needs more precisely describe requirements for entrance into Master's studies, especially when graduates are changing study field.

6. COUNTRY SPECIFIC ISSUES

- Rapid growing of university sector, sometimes quantity at the expense quality; just reformed non-university sector;
- Aspiration to start institutional evaluation; first institutional evaluation of Lithuanian HEI started in 2004 by European University Association; good practice experience will be absorbed by the Centre;
- Growing number of study fields, where evaluation is made by international peer reviews; quite positive standpoint to international peer reviews from representative of higher education institutions.