



CENTER FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

STUDY FIELD OVERVIEW REPORT

Management

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I. INTRODUCTION

This report is based on the external quality evaluation of the *Management* study field in Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs): *Marijampolės kolegija, Kauno kolegija, Šiaulių valstybinė kolegija, Panevėžio kolegija, Utenos kolegija*.

The external evaluation was organised by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC), Lithuania. Comprehensive external evaluation reports that include discovered strengths and weaknesses, as well as recommendations, were prepared for the Management study field for each evaluated HEI. Reports contain evaluation marks. This overview focuses on the main findings of the external evaluation of the Management study field from a general point of view.

Based on the findings of the Management study field evaluation, the expert panel has decided to give a positive evaluation to all evaluated HEIs and first cycles.

On the basis of the external evaluation reports of the study field, SKVC took a decision to accredit the study field either for 7 years or for 3 years.

II. STUDY FIELD OVERVIEW BY EVALUATION AREAS

This section of the Overview contains overall observations by the expert panels regarding the most positive aspects of the study field of Management in evaluated Lithuanian HEIs, as well as areas in need of improvement.

3.1. INTENDED AND ACHIEVED LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM

There is a considerable degree of institutional isomorphism among Lithuanian universities of applied sciences. With a particular focus on the evaluated study programmes, the issue is not that these universities do not deliver the intended learning outcomes (which normally they do reasonably well), but that there is little to no ambition to differentiate one's own programme structure or module portfolio from that of the other Lithuanian universities of applied sciences.

3.2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENCE (ART) AND STUDIES

The expert panel found that the level of research activities at several of the evaluated universities of applied sciences (colleges) is not internationally competitive. In some cases, this fact resulted in grades below the threshold of 3. In appealing to the expert panel's decision, two of the evaluated universities of applied sciences argued that Lithuanian universities of applied sciences are not required by law to conduct studies with international significance. The attitude and self-concept expressed by this argument is problematic in three regards:

1. Lithuanian universities of applied sciences grant bachelor's titles which, in principle, open up opportunities for the pursuit of a master's programme not only in Lithuania but also in every other European country. The quality standards of both research and teaching ought therefore to be benchmarked to European standards.
2. Lithuanian universities of applied sciences might soon be entitled to also grant professional master's titles. This privilege implies an increased focus on research quality already well in advance of the implementation of these new programmes. Lithuanian universities of applied sciences, too, must realise that a master's degree is the second-highest academic degree in most European countries and, more generally, a degree that certifies that the respective graduate has acquired literal mastery in (applied) research. This mastery can only be developed with the support of faculty members who are both competent and motivated to conduct internationally competitive (applied) research.
3. The fact that, like other European universities of applied sciences, their Lithuanian counterparts are not expected to engage in internationally competitive *basic* research does not imply that they are not expected to engage in *applied* research that is competitive at an international level.

Within the sample of universities of applied sciences evaluated by the expert panel, particularly Kaunas University of Applied Sciences is a case in point that it is indeed possible to perform solid-level, internationally competitive applied research at Lithuanian Universities of Applied Sciences.

3.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

Student admission procedures and support infrastructures are, by and large, adequate to the students' needs. The greatest potential for development would be an increasing focus on international student mobility, that is, both outgoing and incoming.

3.4. TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

Overall, the evaluated Lithuanian universities of applied science appear very successful in training students for their, typically local or regional, job market. In the future, this geographical scope might well be extended.

3.5. TEACHING STAFF

The majority of faculty members the expert panel met are well-qualified for teaching and, in principle, also for solid-level research. The institutional incentive structures, however, greatly privilege teaching and administrative tasks over research activities. One major issue in this context is that junior faculty members are typically assigned higher (!) teaching loads than older ones. From an international perspective, this is highly counterintuitive as in a great number of institutions of higher education worldwide it is the younger faculty members who benefit from

reduced teaching loads simply because these younger members still need to develop both their teaching content and their research profile or pipeline. Another great potential for development would be an increasing focus on particularly incoming international faculty mobility. A final issue expressed in more than one evaluated institutions is that sabbatical opportunities exist rather on paper than in real working life.

3.6. LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

By and large, the quality of learning facilities and resources has been a positive surprise to the expert panel. The only reservation in this field pertains to the institutional isomorphism already mentioned in section 3.1. Apparently, Lithuanian universities of applied sciences benchmark their infrastructure, with the result being that each institution tries to have what the others are having. The result is that more or less all of the evaluated institutions have more or less the same infrastructure (industry 4.0 lab, logistics simulation lab. etc.). This situation does not precisely help with differentiating one's institution from the other. A major issue for several institutions has been the lack of access to critical scientific databases.

3.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

The majority of evaluated institutions of higher education are successful in integrating social partners in their study quality management efforts. The expert panel has been positively surprised by these institutions' capacity to mobilise a broad scope and, at times, a high level of social partners. In most cases, these social partners have appeared to be very loyal, appreciative, and supportive of their institution. The greatest potential in this domain would be a more strategic approach to alumni management.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

MAIN STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENTS IN MANAGEMENT STUDY FIELD

Strategic recommendations at an institutional level (for Higher Education Institutions):

Lithuanian universities of applied sciences ought to stop benchmarking other Lithuanian universities of their type. Rather, their ambition ought to be to differentiate themselves from their national "competitors". Paradoxically, this differentiation strategy implies that Lithuanian universities of applied sciences benchmark themselves against similar types of institutions of higher education in countries such as Finland, Scandinavia, the Netherlands, or Germany. In comparing themselves to those institutions, Lithuanian universities of applied sciences will find that most of these institutions already offer master's studies. Lithuanian institutions might therefore benefit from international exchanges of experience with those institutions first of all

with regard to the pending implementation of applied master's programmes at Lithuanian universities of applied sciences.

In benchmarking themselves against the standards of European universities of applied sciences, their Lithuanian counterparts will also find that a focus on applied sciences does not contradict the ambition for or impede the pursuit of research excellence. A great many of European universities of applied sciences conduct internationally competitive (applied) research, and there is, by default, no reason whatsoever why Lithuanian universities of applied sciences should not perform equally well in the near future. What currently seems to be preventing the required leap in research quality are the following institutional aspects or issues:

1. Lack of a systematic research incentive system where faculty members are personally rewarded for excellent research outcomes (indexed journal articles, monographs with internationally renowned publishers, etc.). Currently, the reward structure seems to be limited to the allocation of more research funds (typically conference travel funds) to research-active faculty members. The paradox here is that funding of travels to high-calibre conferences etc. is a prerequisite for the production of high-calibre research outcomes. In other words: a prerequisite for success is being sold as a reward for the very success it is supposed to bring about. Note that this principle of distributing resources necessary for the kick-start and maintenance of a successful research career mainly to those who already have been successful implies a considerable disadvantage for early- and mid-career scholars. In the future, there ought to be a clear distinction between research funding and research incentives. Whereas the former ought to take the form of an individual research budget, the latter ought to take the form of an individual financial bonus for high-level research outcomes that translates not into an increased research budget but rather into an additional salary component.
2. Though with varying degrees of intensity, the majority of evaluated Lithuanian universities of applied sciences appear to be organised top-down. The resulting hierarchical organisational structures and cultures seem to curb a considerable amount of creativity and initiative required for a transition to an internationally competitive teaching and research culture. Note that this top-down mentality is also in sharp contrast to quality management as a faculty-driven process (see, e.g., evaluation criteria of AACSB and similar accreditation bodies).

Strategic recommendations at the national level (for the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport):

Lithuanian universities of applied sciences operate in an international environment of institutions of higher education. In the last decades, this environment has been changing insofar as in many European countries (such as Germany, Scandinavian countries, Finland, Netherlands, Switzerland, etc.) universities of applied sciences are not being considered mainly as tertiary teaching factories, but also as hubs for high-level and -impact (applied) research. Moreover, if Lithuanian universities of applied sciences truly embark to the mission of

awarding master's titles and thus what is, in many national contexts, the second highest *academic* degree, then the Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport is bound to invest in these "applied" universities' capacity to engage in research-based teaching and international-level applied research. As mentioned above (3.2.3.), the fact that Lithuanian universities of applied sciences are currently not expected to engage in internationally competitive *basic* research does not imply that they cannot be expected to engage in excellent *applied* research that is competitive at an international level.

During the expert visits, it has become clear that the majority of institutions treat research time and funding as a privilege of senior faculty members (see III, institutional recommendations, number 2.). The result of this habit is an organisational structure that systematically disadvantages early- and mid-career scholars who in a great many of other European countries (or US federal states) are granted reduced teaching loads during their first years because these younger scholars still need to develop both their teaching content and their research profile and expertise. It is therefore strongly recommended that the organisational structures of Lithuanian universities of higher education are scrutinised in a bid to overcome such forms of structural discrimination of younger faculty members.

Recommendations on the evaluation process for SKVC

It has been perceived negatively by some members of the expert panel that SKVC does not organise and pay for the expert panel members' accommodation.