



CENTER FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

OVERVIEW REPORT FOR TRANSLATION STUDY FIELD

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I. INTRODUCTION

This report is based on the external quality evaluation of the Translation study field in Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions: at *Vilnius University*, at *Kaunas University of Technology*, at *Mykolas Romeris University*, at *Kauno Kolegija* and *Vilniaus Kolegija*.

The external evaluations were organised by the Lithuanian Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC).

Comprehensive external evaluation reports including strengths and weaknesses and concluding with some recommendations were prepared for Translation study field in each evaluated Higher education institution (separately for first and second cycle) and included evaluation marks. This overview focuses on the main findings of the external evaluation of the Translation study field from a general point of view.

Based on the findings of Translation study field evaluation, expert panel have come to a decision to give **positive** evaluation to HEIs: at *Vilnius University*, at *Kaunas University of Technology*, at *Mykolas Romeris University*, at *Kauno Kolegija* and *Vilniaus Kolegija* first study cycle and at *Vilnius University*, and *Kaunas University of Technology* second cycle.

On the basis of external evaluation report of the study field SKVC takes a decision to accredit study field and cycle for 7 years.

II. STUDY FIELD OVERVIEW BY EVALUATION AREAS

1. INTENDED AND ACHIEVED LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM

The Translation Studies programmes evaluated cover numerous areas of translation studies and translation-adjacent philological inquiry. Each programme has a distinctive curricular focus (e.g. 'Translation and Editing' or 'Business English,' etc.), permitting potential students a broad variety of enrolment choices based upon programme emphasis and student interest. It is the opinion of the external evaluation team that these programmes, and their learning outcomes, are congruent with similarly focused programmes in comparable European and North American universities. The subject sophistication and complexity is appropriate to the relevant cycle level.

The subjects addressed in these programmes are wide-ranging, with a thoughtful distribution of courses to be inclusive of theoretical instruction, practical application, language-skills building, and professional engagement (building market-related employment skills). It is particularly notable that these programmes, at least at the undergraduate level, also emphasise the acquisition of a second foreign language, which augments the linguistic skills and potentially the employability of successful programme graduates. All programmes considered here assume Lithuanian to be the student's first language, and English to be her or his second language.

Given the increasing importance of technology in the field of translation studies it is worthy of comment that all programmes here considered have made significant resource investment

(computers, subscriptions, etc.) and curricular structure to accommodate these trends and tendencies. Although several individual recommendations are made for technological products in the specific reports, none of the institutions surveyed is out of date or in danger of obsolescence.

There are perhaps three additional points to be made as generally applicable observations. The first is that much of the capstone work, or final theses, in these programmes are required to be done in English. Whilst recognizing the importance of English in contemporary scholarship, it is the finding of the external evaluation team that it would be beneficial to permit the possibility of such work to be submitted and defended in Lithuanian, as agreed on a case-by-case basis by the individual student and her or his project mentor. Secondly, it is observable that most of the programmes here surveyed presume a high level of Lithuanian language ability. As the act of translation often reveals gaps or imprecisions in one's native language ability, it would be beneficial to incorporate the possibility of formally improving and refining one's native Lithuanian language skills, specifically in writing. Finally, the 2nd cycle programmes here surveyed might productively increase the curricular focus upon translation itself, and perhaps reduce the more traditional philological elements, which are available in other philologically-orientated M.A. programmes.

*N.B. Throughout this report, comments in italics relate specifically to the programme **Lithuanian Sign Language Interpreting**.*

*The content of the Programme **Lithuanian Sign Language Interpreting** is exceptional, unique and addresses the needs of both the Vilnius region and the entirety of Lithuania. The learning outcomes are achievable, logically formulated, and the content of the Programme is relevant. However, the formulation of the aim lacks clarity and presentation of professional opportunities. The structure of the Programme could be further improved by reducing the number of subjects delivered, refining the content of the internship, general education and field of study subjects as well as maintaining a clearer balance between the teaching and interpreting of the Lithuanian Sign Language.*

2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENCE (ART) AND STUDIES

The links between science and the studies assessed are generally strong. The theoretical elements of these curricula are apposite and appropriate. The general field applicability of the skills being developed is supported by student and alumni testimony, and by encouragingly high employment data for programme graduates. There is a broad alignment between the work being done by the instructors as researchers and the general fields in which they teach.

The instructors in these programmes are clearly committed educators and researchers; it is notable, however, that there is an observable divergence in (particularly research) specialisation between academics who focus particularly upon translation and cognate disciplines, and those of a more traditional philological focus. There is certainly room for both emphases, yet future hiring decisions might usefully privilege the hiring of specialists particularly in translation specialisations.

The publication records of the instructional staffs are impressive. The researchers are probably pursuing thoughtful research lines of inquiry, and routinely publish those works in peer-reviewed academic journals, or present their research in international conferences of scholars. It is the finding of the external evaluation team, however, that it would be beneficial to both the academics themselves, and to the institutions for which they work, to attempt to publish their work in the most internationally prominent and respected journals in the field. Translation studies have a broad interest around the world, and even Lithuanian-specific translation questions could valuably be published and read by people interested in translation but who may not themselves be specialists in Lithuanian. There is a genuine enthusiasm amongst translation studies researchers and scholars to read about 'lesser spoken' languages outside of the Anglocentric focus of much modern academic publication.

*The lecturers of the **Lithuanian Sign Language Interpreting** Programme have written a number of applied scientific research papers, but more of them could have been produced during the evaluation period. A lack of involvement in research project activities and a lack of participation in scientific events could be noted as well, and students should too be involved in research and/or project activities.*

3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

Student admission and support are generally strong in all institutions surveyed. Admission to these programmes is ordered by specific university policies instituted and approved on an institutional level. There were no programmes surveyed by the external evaluation team that appeared to have dubious or illegitimate admissions procedures.

It may, however, be noted that there is in most cases, a heavy imbalance in programme acceptances (that is, applicants who are accepted, and who agree to begin their studies) between those with state-funded positions, and those without. The external evaluation team fully understands that the institutions themselves do not control state funding of applicants, yet the team observes that it would be a beneficial development were the institutions able to identify ways to increase financial support for applicants who may not have state-funded positions. It should be noted, with approval, that once admitted, students are generally eligible for valuable support initiatives, notably merit-based and need-based scholarships, grants, or loans.

The admissions data for these programmes are broadly encouraging, given the population of Lithuania and the potential employment market for graduates. Employability data for these programmes are also promising. The team notes slight decreases in programme applications and admissions, but believes that much of this is likely attributable to the educational convulsions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the crisis management it imposed upon educational delivery.

All of the universities assessed in these programme reviews had strong and relevant student support. The academic staff representing the programmes surveyed expressed conviction that, in sum, education is a partnership requiring the provision of useful and specific feedback

a view with which the external evaluation team concurs. Expected academic support and advisory systems are established, operative, and widely publicised and promoted. Financial aid is available, with institutionally varying criteria, for both short-term crises and longer-term financial difficulty. Student psychological and pastoral care is available and, when necessary, is available anonymously. There is strong infrastructure and resource support for students with physical difficulties or impairments.

*The criteria for student selection and admission are made public, and admission is transparent. Students have access to a wide range of support, information about which is published on the website of the Vilniaus kolegija. Not all students enrolled are well motivated, therefore, the dropout is observed. Enrolment numbers could be higher as the need for the **Lithuanian Sign Language** interpreters is increasing.*

4. TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

These programmes seem, by recent data, to be sustainably popular, and student performance is admirably high. The students with whom the external evaluation team spoke were eloquent, articulate, and offered thoughtful assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of their programmes. They appeared genuinely motivated both by the subject of translation studies itself, and by the general structures of their respective programmes. Many expressed appreciation for the opportunity to pursue a second foreign language.

It should perhaps be noted—although this is outside the strict parameters of each individual report—that there is apparently no 3rd cycle option for particularly motivated students to pursue doctoral studies. This may have a long-term consequence on high-level academic study of translation studies in Lithuania, as the students best positioned to contribute to scholarship will need to obtain their terminal degrees abroad. It is to be presumed that some of the students who pursue doctoral degrees abroad may choose not to return to Lithuania.

Graduate employment and employer satisfaction are anecdotally good. There seems, however, to be a common discontinuity between the institutions' desire to maintain contact with graduates, and the precise means utilised to do this. Too often alumni are kept in contact with their programmes either by sporadic telephone messages and social media posts, or else maintain involvement with their programmes by informal personal friendships with the instructors. It was the finding of the external evaluation team that all the programmes evaluated would benefit from more formal and systematic alumni contact and graduate career tracking. This is particularly important for obtaining reliable data regarding freelance translators.

*Opportunities are available for working students. The graduate employment rate of the of the **Lithuanian Sign Language Interpreting Programme** is very high. More emphasis should be placed on student-centred learning.*

5. TEACHING STAFF

The teaching staff for these programmes are well suited to their academic duties and are, in general terms, popular and admired by their students. Most of the programmes surveyed had a sustainable distribution of specialisations and academic titles, suggesting long-term forward planning for staffing needs. The instructors themselves were also positive in their assessments of their institutions and their programmes, at least in conversation with the external evaluation team.

The general assessment offered by the students was favourable; the instructors were praised as being on the whole informed, responsive, and being ready to provide useful feedback.

As noted previously, the engaged staff are productive researchers, publishing their work in academic journals and presenting it in scholarly conferences. This is laudable and is commended.

It should be noted to the credit of the teachers that the maintenance of contact with programme graduates seems largely to be sustained by these instructors. It is encouraging that the academic staff remain in personal and professional communication with programme alumni; as has been mentioned previously, it is the recommendation of the external evaluation team that a more systematic data collection process be devised by each institution. Yet at present this contact with programme alumni is largely maintained socially by the instructors, and this deserves acknowledgment.

The teaching staff have a number of opportunities to participate in a variety of mobility activities, both physical and virtual. Despite the pandemic and the workload, the teaching staff use mobility opportunities extensively, mainly for teaching, academic and project activities, training and internships, which helps to enrich the teaching of the course units to students. Incoming mobility should be encouraged by focusing on joint research and/or project activities and organising international conferences, which could help to attract more visiting lecturers to the study programmes.

*Teachers of the **Lithuanian Sign Language Interpreting Programme** are experts in their field, dedicated to their work, liked and well-regarded by students, alumni and social partners; yet, they should improve their didactic competences, make the content of the subjects more research-based and use more of the opportunities for academic mobility available to them.*

6. LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

The Learning Facilities were generally highlights of these evaluations. All of the institutions evaluated had appropriate infrastructure for 1st and 2nd cycle study of translation studies. The physical locations—which the external evaluation team was unfortunately unable to visit, because of pandemic conditions—are appropriate to the expected class sizes and activities, as assessed by the data and photographs (or videos) provided.

The library resources—physical holdings and digital subscriptions—are strong, and appropriately broad and curated. In all of the evaluation team’s discussions with the various programmes’ management, students, teachers, and alumni, there was never an adverse comment made about library holdings, or about the helpfulness of the library staff.

There is a strong technological component to modern translation study, given the ever increasing applicability of electronic capabilities to translation. In all cases surveyed by the evaluators there is appropriate technological investment and support provided by the institutions. Although individual reports make specific suggestions regarding potentially desirable acquisitions/licences, it is nonetheless encouraging to note that the costly burden of technological upkeep is being maintained. It is worth noting, however, that the proportion of emphasis given to technological elements in the programmes vary significantly from programme to programme. To be particular, it might be worthwhile to see more in-class familiarisation with the most common technologies (i.e. Trados Studio), as well as related areas of anticipated development (e.g. post-editing).

It is also worthy of commendation that the institutions surveyed have made significant efforts to accommodate students with physical difficulties or impairments. These include, but are not limited to, ramps and lifts; adjustable height tables; screen magnification tools for the visually impaired; and other usefully modifiable resources. These investments, whilst not commonly required, are vitally necessary to those who need them, and the provision of these instruments deserves mention and praise here.

*Conditions are suitable to conduct studies in the field of translation studies, material resources are planned regularly and adequately, but their consistent use in the **Lithuanian Sign Language Interpreting Programme** study process should be ensured as well.*

7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

All programmes evaluated had strong centralised Quality Assurance mechanisms. The most common of these is student surveys, anonymously administered and aggregated, and conducted on a semesterly basis, with the results given both to the individual instructors and the line-managers (i.e. Deans). It was also the testimony of both staff and students that teachers commonly conduct course-specific surveys at the end of each term, to identify strengths and weaknesses of their own classes. By common assent, most programme representatives affirmed that these student survey processes are taken seriously, but also acknowledged that participation in such surveys is below a desirable level.

Other Quality Assurance policies and procedures common to all institutions were strong and public commitments to quality assurance in institutional Missions and rules in force; regular performance assessment meetings of staff with their direct academic managers; consultations with graduates and employers about market needs and employment opportunities; and these processes of preparing for accreditation and re-accreditation, which all institutions admitted requires a great deal of work, but allows the programme organisers a full-spectrum overview of what their programme is doing, or intends to do.

All institutions have easily accessible information on their websites. This information includes institutional policies and rules; application and enrolment policies and procedures; programme descriptions and course details; explanations of academic and personal resources available to students; and other useful or potentially necessary information for students.

It is also worthy of observation in the specific field of translation studies that several institutions evaluated have attained the EMT (European Masters in Translation) accreditation. This is a prestigious and rigorous accreditation, and requires both a commitment to quality maintenance and a provable standard of excellence already attained. To possess the EMT accreditation is to have demonstrated to outside experts that one's programme meets recognized high standards, which is a high accomplishment in quality assurance.

*The internal quality assurance system is effective and regular feedback on the quality of studies is obtained. The Study Programme Committee should be more independent and focused on the implementation of the Programme's aim and the achievement of results. Students should be encouraged to become more involved in the development of the of the **Lithuanian Sign Language Interpreting Programme**. More detailed information on study subjects, their descriptions or summaries should be provided on the website of the University of Applied Sciences. Solutions should be sought on how to improve the publicity of the study Programme and attract more applicants*

III. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

Please give examples of excellence (if any) discovered while conducting the Translation study field evaluation.

Core definition: Excellence means exhibiting characteristics that are very good and, implicitly, not achievable by all.

- Those institutions which have obtained the European Masters in Translation (EMT) have achieved in their 2nd cycle programmes a significant, and internationally respected, level of excellence.
- All institutions evaluated have made significant and appropriate technological investments.
- Accommodation of students with disabilities is consistently evidenced.
- Policies and procedures impacting student studies and life are published and easily accessible.
- Student enrolment appears to be run along fair and open conditions.
- Student surveys are conducted and, by common testimony of students and staff, are taken seriously by the academic staff.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

MAIN STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT IN TRANSLATION STUDY FIELD

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

- Strive to establish more systematic and formalised contact with alumni, particularly in regard to employability and market-required skills.
- Attempt to identify ways to assist those applicants who may be interested in enrolling but who do not obtain state-funded positions.
- If possible without influencing the process, try to incentivise participation in student survey processes.
- Allow, where agreed between the student and the mentor, the submission and defence of theses in the Lithuanian language, if the student so desires and the subject is appropriate.
- Academic staff are collegially urged to target high-level, prestigious international journals for the publication of their research.

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

- If possible, given understandable budgetary pressures, increase the number of available state-funded positions.
- Encourage Lithuanian universities to contemplate how—and indeed if—they could effectively formulate a 3rd Cycle translation studies programme, so that the most promising and accomplished students do not need to leave Lithuania to obtain doctoral degrees.