



OVERVIEW REPORT FOR TOURISM AND RECREATION STUDY FIELD

2017

INTRODUCTION

This report is based on the external quality evaluation of the following study programmes in the study field of Tourism and Recreation in Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions: at SILK – Hospitality Management; at SVK-Tourism and Hotels and UTENA -Hospitality Management.

The external evaluation (-s) was/were organised by the Lithuanian Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC).

The external evaluations were performed according to the evaluation areas and criteria: (1) Programme aims and learning outcomes, (2) Curriculum design, (3) Teaching staff, (4) Facilities and learning resources, (5) Study process and students' performance assessment, and (6) Programme management.

Comprehensive external evaluation reports including strengths and weaknesses and concluding with some recommendations were prepared for each evaluated programme and included evaluation marks. This overview focuses on the main findings of the external evaluation of the Tourism and Recreation field from a general point of view.

Three programmes received positive evaluation with some reservations on one programme.

OVERVIEW BY EVALUATION AREAS

The following comments are an overview and do not necessarily apply to the same extent to each programme.

MAIN STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF STUDY PROGRAMMES IN TOURISM AND RECREATION STUDY FIELD

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

- Study Programme Committees continue to ensure and maintain quality and standards in programme design, development and review and when they are not working well, this reflect significantly in the education delivered. Well established study programme committees ensure that the subject matter of the programme is continually reinforced and not subjugated to other needs of the institution. They continue to seek out and reinforce industry links to refresh and update programme input.
- In the main, programmes kept track of thesis topic and script development from very early stages and gave strong and continuous guided input on methodology.
- The qualifications and experience of academic staff members are reasonable although research activity is somewhat limited. In the regional institutions great industry contacts were not being exploited for research opportunities and in general much more emphasis should be put on developing the expertise to increase international peer reviewed publications. Continuing professional development seems to be widely accepted and implemented although in one institution professional development was almost exclusively in the direction of ideological pedagogical education with little emphasis on industry updating or research expertise. Teaching quality is generally good but there is a tendency in most institutions to drop teachers when early student feedback is unfavourable rather than attempting to support and educate these teachers in up to date classroom practice.
- Teachers' competence in and willingness to deliver subjects/pathways in English appears to vary from very competent to barely adequate. It was often the case that students English was very good in comparison. This in turn leads to international reading resources not being properly utilised for a student group well able to manage the material. In addition, there was patchy provision of information in English about the programmes on institutional websites and this should be tackled so that all students and prospective students have access to programme information and policies.
- The weighting of certain subjects/modules might be reviewed to ensure that sufficient emphasis, in terms of ECTS credits, is given to core programme content.
- On this visit, physical materials on library stacks were not always present, particularly books in English. There is evidence that databases are widely available to support student learning in libraries and institutions provided students with good remote access to materials. However, these resources rarely made the jump into student reading material on official documents. There is a need to expand and update reading material on

some courses in programmes. It was significant that in quite a number of cases, even on very good programmes, internal quality checks did not pick up out of date reading lists. There was also a focus on using textbooks rather than up to date international articles from peer reviewed journals and other texts. For many programmes written lists for courses were updated on the online learning platform so this may be a systemic issue that needs review.

- Programmes have similarity programmes and other measures in place to help counteract plagiarism and academic fraud, though policies on what to do when academic fraud is detected are not always properly fashioned.
- In all institutions visited, student research activity and international exposure needs attention to varying degrees. Some programmes encouraged incoming Erasmus students although this varied significantly from institution to institution.
- Timing of the review visit was very important as one visit was carried out early. It is to be emphasized that there must be sufficient final theses available to check on delivery concerns and an early review of a course may not be fair to either the institution or prospective students.
- Shortcomings in one programme on this visit appeared to reflect a failure to get certain basics correct, including the relationship of institutional values to academic rigor and this team were concerned that is an issue that should have been picked up at the first review of the programme as failure to do so deprived the institution of guidance prior to the implementation of the programme. Where there is a strong ideological basis to an institution the SKVR has a role to map the ideological influence on the programme under initial review and advise appropriately.
- Learning outcomes on programmes seen by this team were somewhat mixed in competence. Those seen in state run institutions are reasonably well drawn and linked to the assessment process. Some programmes worked with too many programme outcomes, which were unrealistic and over-ambitious. It is suggested that training on writing learning outcomes should be available in all institutions. There was some evidence in one institution that insufficient attention was being given to developing the critical thought required at Bachelors level and well formulated learning outcomes are at the heart of this educational practice.

➤ **Strategic recommendations at national level (for the Ministry of Education and Science):**

- Onsite Facilities seen on this visit varied significantly between institutions. The state run institutions were mostly well equipped for industry practice. Less advantageous conditions were encountered in the private institution visited. All programmes were able to make reasonable links between theory and practice in the curriculum in order to help prepare future graduates for the challenges and opportunities likely to be encountered in the labour market.

- Programmes mostly conformed to legal requirements and their adherence to the basic structures advocated in the Bologna Declaration. Higher institutions especially with a state run background demonstrated a commitment to both comply with existing standards and in most cases, to build guidelines to inform best practice. Many institutions now have access to departments that guide educational quality assurance within institutions and such initiatives are influencing internal and external quality audits within and between institutions. It could be argued that all institutions, including those in the private sector, should participate on a mandatory basis in one of the quality assurance centres of excellence that are maturing in key institutions over the country.

- The organisation of practical work experience for students seems to have been well arranged and highly appreciated by both students and employers. One institution had one particularly good resource that could not be used to its full potential because of an inability to secure a constant rate of student enrolment. This is once again a good example of how the failure to concentrate student enrolment in strong institutions compromises education offered. Prospective students are not being guided to the best study experiences. Regional centres of excellence can raise applied research funding from the market, and operate sponsored places, but a first step is to ensure premium programmes are given strong support in a crowded recruitment market. It is perhaps inappropriate that state sponsored students are supported in attendance at rather poorly equipped and professionally questionable private institutions while well-established state institutions struggle with enrolment.

- In most programmes there was evidence of informal business contact to support the programmes and advise on curricular development, student theses, and student placements. The team noted in some regional centres there was quite high internal competition with other programmes for contact with local employers. This tended to mean that institutions with a mandate to develop regional expertise were still constant pulled back to Kaunas and Vilnius for visits and industry contacts. It appeared there was not enough attention paid to local

entrepreneurial hospitality ventures, perhaps because lecturers were also often brought in from the main centres. This needs attention, and lecturers brought in must be encouraged to extend their research interests and focus to address regional issues. It seems that the best efforts to bring expertise and regional attention to stimulate growth in an area is undermined by the use of contract staff from the major centres. Thought should be given to linking regional institutions to local enterprise centres and linked incentives for community development to ensure the university programmes are able to contribute properly to development in the neighbourhood and it is important that locally based institutional faculty play a part in such developments.

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