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General statement on the strengths and weaknesses of business studies programmes in Lithuania

Preliminary remark: This general assessment is based on two missions of peer-review assessments of business studies and business-related study programmes in Lithuania in September-October 2015.

Strengths:

The main strength of business studies and business-related study programmes in Lithuania is the very strong link between theoretical and practical training. It extends to all programme-relevant areas from lecturers' often excellent practical experience, their often very good personal links to the business community (at least at the local level), the participation of invited lecturers from industry, the number of practical trainings/internships, as well as the option for students of engaging business simulations.

Another clear strength is the very comprehensive methodological background of most students. This included their good knowledge of highly relevant mathematics and statistics skills in general and quantitative methods in particular; this includes strong application know-how with respect to solving real-world business problems. Furthermore, during their studies, students are guided to develop their research skills.

A strong point is also the student to teacher's ratio which is very highly rated according to international standards, thus allowing teachers to use a variety of teaching methods that result in an effective learning process.

Finally it is positive that a paradigm shift is happening in all study programmes that have moved away from being centred only on the teachers' expertise and gradually are being oriented and structured around the principle of achieving specific learning outcomes for students.

Weaknesses:

The main weakness overall is the often very limited systematic integration of international (i.e. Western and Russian) business aspects into the curriculum. This shortcoming – which may be one of the reasons for many internationally-minded young Lithuanians to study abroad - can be observed at all levels of the education process. It could, however, be addressed through a variety of programme improvements such as mandatory international internships, mandatory bilingual language training for both students (throughout the entire study programme) and teaching staff, a comprehensive internationalisation strategy for business faculties – i.e. through cooperation agreements with foreign universities which, e.g., allow for mandatory student and staff exchange programmes, dual or joint degrees, joint lectures through videoconferencing.

Another widespread weakness is the lack of formal consultation and coordination procedures among lecturers, between programme management and lecturers, and, most importantly and most frequently, between programme management and external stakeholders. Much (too much!) seems to rely on personal relationships, with the risk that such ties may not only not be sustainable, but that, most of all, they may be non-transparent. In turn, this is likely to render an effective and efficient programme management, including the systematic evaluation of stakeholder feedback, unnecessarily hard to achieve. Although informal communications foster a sense of programme ownership among staff the need of formal internal Quality Assurance procedures are necessary in the long term. Establishment of industry advisory boards could be used to formalise external stakeholder input in programme development.

The proliferation of part-time study programmes may harm the overall quality of higher education. Although similar in curriculum, many of the part-time programmes are delivered with much less contact hours than the associated full-time ones, and students do not have the same opportunities to participate in learning activities necessary for business skills development, thus making the achievement of learning outcomes difficult if not doubtful. The learning strategy around part time studies has to be developed giving stronger support to students for ensuring achievement of desired learning outcomes. A similar threat to quality comes from programmes with very low (single digit) enrolment where it is difficult to create the proper academic interaction among students.