



OVERVIEW REPORT FOR BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT STUDY FIELD

2017

INTRODUCTION

This report is based on the external quality evaluation of the following study programmes in the study field of ***Business & Management*** in Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions: at *LCC INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY – International Management*; at *ŠIAULIAI STATE COLLEGE – Office Administration* at *UTENA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES – Business Management* at *VILNIUS UNIVERSITY – International Project 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 ***Business and Management*** field from a general point of view.

All programmes received ***positive*** evaluation.

OVERVIEW BY EVALUATION AREAS

Programme aims and learning outcomes

All reviewed programmes (at both 1st and 2nd level cycle) manage to maintain the proper balance between theory and practice, according to the corresponding study level. Several good practices such as: selecting lecturers with business experience, inviting business people to deliver lectures or workshops, engaging in case-study oriented teaching, using business simulations, incorporating practical training / internship in the curriculum, linking thesis with internship and engaging stakeholders in the thesis process, etc. are employed to achieve the proper theory to practice ratio.

It is worth noticing that universities have responded to the needs of skill in the globalized economy, offering programmes with a strong

international dimension (mainly Master's programmes) which is supported by the programme being delivered in English with English language teaching material, participation of foreign teachers, exchange of students and multicultural class environment, and networking with other foreign universities.

Programme aims are generally clear, transparent and give prospective students and other interested parties a good overview of the programme's profile.

Although all programmes include the development of entrepreneurial skill among their objectives, this objective in very few instances is justified by the content and the learning approach and methods used and needs to be further strengthened.

Curriculum design

Curriculum is developed based on the ECTS system and it comprises both compulsory and elective courses in most cases of 5 and 6 credits each. Students are given the flexibility of choosing subjects of their interests and the whole structure facilitates the student exchanges (inward and outward).

The concept of linking course's Learning Outcomes (LOs) to overall Programme LOs is well received by programme management and teaching staff, mapping schemes are devised, and detailed course descriptors are in place. Attention should be given to have all teaching staff actively involved in the review of this process continuously reviewing and updating the curriculum, as in certain cases seems that the whole process is driven by few individuals.

In cases where the whole curriculum is taught in English, the programmes the exchanges of students (especially incoming) is not facilitated and local students do not have an opportunity to further build the communications skills in English and to share experiences with students from other countries. Institutions have realized this weakness and think of teaching certain subjects in English.

Teaching staff

The delivery of the programme is supported by dedicated lecturers with strong academic and business experienced and is supplemented by visiting staff, in some cases from international universities who teach parts or whole courses.

The student to teacher's ratio is very highly rated according to international standards (mainly because of the low number of students), thus allowing teachers to use a variety of teaching methods that result in an effective learning process.

The Higher Education Institutions are concerned and support the professional development of their teachers both in didactics as well as in research.

Teachers are individually active in research, however no departmental or programme related research agenda seems to exist (especially in master's programmes) and as a consequence the student involvement in research in cooperation with their teachers is relatively low.

In many case the large number of part-time staff who also has teaching assignments to other institutions does not facilitate communication, neither the formation of a core-group of teachers who has a strong sense of programme ownership.

Facilities and learning resources

The premises are suitable, in some case excellent for delivering the programmes. All libraries are connected to the Lithuanian Academic Network of libraries providing students on and off-campus access to their catalogues and scientific databases including full-text articles, E-learning platforms are functioning and integrated in the learning process.

The HEI's have the right provisions for maintenance of the facilities and enrichment of the libraries stock based on the needs of the programmes.

Study process

Study processes are generally well organized and build on the principle of creating a student-centred learning, teaching and assessment environment as defined in European Standards and Guidelines. Approaches and degree of achievement vary among programmes. Good examples include the employment of variety of learning activities in taught subjects, field visits, publishing thesis papers, international mobility, and student social and academic support.

Further enhancement of the integration between Learning Outcomes, Teaching, Learning activities (workshops, teamwork, and project-work), Independent study, and Assessment methods will help strengthen the student-centred learning approach and the achievement of intended LOs.

Part-time delivery of study programmes does address the needs of working-students. However there are some concerns as to replacing contact hours with independent work. Intensified support using ICT (e.g. Videoed lectures) and bringing students work experience in the classroom can effectively account for the reduction of the contact hours, but the whole process of student's independent work should be monitored by the teaching staff to make sure that LOs are achieved.

The continuously decreasing number of students it is a real threat not only to the sustainability of the programmes (especially for bachelor programmes) but to the quality of teaching. In some cases, the number of students in class marginally meets the level for having an appropriate and fertile learning environment for students. Demographics is indeed a cause, as institutions assert, but given that no planning (i.e. marketing, reorientation, identity building, etc.) from the institutions' side have been noticed.

Management

The European Standards and Guidelines model for Internal Quality Assurance, is generally followed in all programmes, although the way of implementation varies depending on the size, academic structure, and culture of the institution. Overall the existing QA systems and academic regulations are sufficient to control the quality of the studies and the smooth delivery of the study programmes.

In most case recommendations and suggestions from previous external reviews were discussed, analysed and certain actions were taken. Assessment of the teaching and learning is carried on by students, teaching staff and graduates, and results are discussed at programme or departmental level and actions are taken.

Stakeholders are involved in many ways both in programme delivery (business visits, invited lectures, sponsored internships, thesis work, etc.) and also in the development of the programme. Generally, institutions have not fully exploited the potential contribution of their social partners. This concerns programmes offered by regional HEIs where local social partners are willing to work and support the institution, but also with Master programmes where no involvement of representatives of corporate businesses have been noticed.

In most cases no benchmarking of the programme against similar ones nationally or internationally has been taken, neither a programme marketing strategy was developed.

MAIN STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF STUDY PROGRAMMES IN “*BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT*” STUDY FIELD

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

Management functions at programme level must be strengthened and focus to achieve broader and more active participation of all academic staff teaching in the programme, so that matters that have to do with curriculum design and study process are continuously reviewed and addressed in a holistic way at the programme level, thus promoting a sense of “programme ownership” instead of “subject ownership” among academic staff, which contributes to building a stronger quality culture.

Social partners’ involvement is much stronger in aspects relating to the delivery of the study programme (internships, thesis committees, guest lectures, etc.), while it appears much weaker - sometimes just to meet QA requirements - in matters that relate to its development. The management of the programmes should consider wider and more active participation of Social Partners in programme development. Good international practices such as the establishment of industry advisory boards, could be used to formalise external stakeholder input.

Research is usually taking place according to specific research interests of individuals. Establishing an agenda of “Research Themes” will enhance research synergies among professors, increase student participation in research, eventually could lead to network with other research teams internationally and will give a research identity to the programme. Overall upgrading the research profile of the programmes (moreover for University Master level) should become a priority.

Given the decreasing number of students in the country, programmes should look into their long term sustainability in a proactive manner and develop strategic plans regarding the programme development and its target market.

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

The decreasing number of students observed in many programmes is a threat not only for the financial sustainability of the programmes but mainly the quality of education. It may eventually impair basic elements of the study process that are based on the interaction among students (e.g. less of team work, limited sharing of experiences, low diversity of viewpoints, etc.), and lead to a non- fertile learning environment for students. Perhaps a minimum threshold in admissions should be considered.

As, because of the economic conditions, many bachelor students work during their studies institutions tend to offer part-time delivery. 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. Perhaps a part-time delivery mode should just extend over longer time (twice as much) with half the ECTS credit load per term (semester), or use the summer term for teaching, so study conditions stay similar to those for full-time students.

The trend of offering international programmes may lead double-degree or joint degree awards, as it is happening in universities in other countries in EU. Quality assessment mechanism should involve the evaluation of the cooperation as well.

Prepared by the leader of the Review Team: Pandelis Ipsilandis