SKVC

COLLECTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION EVALUATION OVERVIEWS

Collection of Higher Education Evaluation Overviews

Content

Preface

Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereinafter - SKVC) assesses the quality of Higher Education Institutions' activities and study programmes, this way encouraging the enhancement of quality of Lithuanian higher education and promoting development of quality culture. The result of this type of assessment is evaluation reports – Higher Education Institutions undertake reform, development on their basis.

Wide range of information is collected during evaluations, which lets us look at Lithuanian higher education in a more systematic way. In its annual reports SKVC provides summarized data presenting situation in different study areas and fields. SKVC is obliged for this type and similar research by the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

Summarized data of recent years is collected and presented in this publication. When analyzing evaluation results, main focus was put on evaluations performed in 2010-2015 giving greatest attention to the aspects that emerged during this evaluation cycle.

One of the aspects is a boom of creating new study programmes which took place in the beginning of this evaluation cycle. After simplifying the evaluation procedure of new study programmes, the number of such programmes started growing in hundreds. Also, great attention was given to joint study programmes – in order to encourage creating them, European Union structural funds were used. That is why it was interesting to analyze the results of this process and find out if such study programmes were implemented successfully.

The quality of Lithuanian higher education is an ongoing discussion, and it is always being emphasized that it is not improving. This fact is also reflected in evaluation results. SKVC tried to look more closely at alarming study programmes which were accredited for 3 years twice in a row and are faced with danger as next evaluation might me crucial. However, it is pleasing that there are study programmes which were evaluated very positively by international review panels. Overview of such study programmes is also presented in this collection as well as the review of excellence quality pointed out by reviewers.

In 2011–2015, the first external institutional review of all higher education institutions was conducted in Lithuania. As it was the second review of this type for colleges, SKVC conducted comparative evaluation analysis of the periods 2004-2008 and 2011-2015. The results are presented in this publication.

We hope that overviews presented in this publication will be helpful for those who are interested in higher education quality. In the meantime, SKVC intends to present more overviews on various topics because study quality is a matter of all related parties.

We would like to express gratitude to all SKVC staff who contributed to creation of analysis and overviews.

COMPARISON OF THE RESULTS OF EXTERNAL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEWS OF COLLEGES CONDUCTED IN 2004–2009 AND 2011–2015

INTRODUCTION

In 2011–2015, the first external institutional review of all higher education institutions was conducted in Lithuania. However, colleges of higher education (hereinafter referred to as 'colleges') operating in Lithuania had already encountered external review after 2000, when post-secondary schools were reorganised into colleges. In accordance with the then effective legislation, external review had to be performed after four years of their functioning. The purpose of this review was to evaluate compliance with the conditions set for the college during its establishment.

The **analysis** performed by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education **aims** at examining the recommendations provided by experts during review rounds in 2004–2009 and 2011–2015 and at analysing the change in the results of external institutional reviews of colleges.

Both review rounds covered all colleges functioning at that time: 29 colleges (15 state and 14 non-state) in 2004–2009 and 23 colleges (13 state and 10 non-state) in 2011–2015. Thus, in certain cases, the second review round did not include some colleges from the first review round, since they no longer functioned, or new colleges were established which had not been evaluated during the first round. Therefore, this analysis summarises the review results of all colleges, without examining the change of institutional review results of specific institutions.

The reviews of 2004–2009 and 2011–2015 had different purposes. The first round aimed at evaluating the level of fulfilment of the conditions set for colleges during their establishment, whereas the second round was targeted at identifying
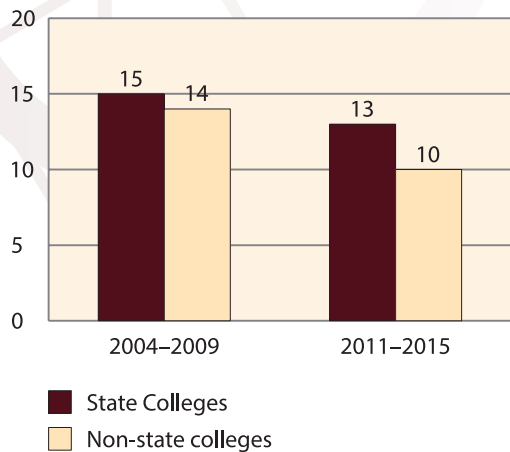
Fig. 1. The number of colleges evaluated in 2004–2009 and 2011–2015

the weaknesses and strengths of performance of higher education institutions, providing recommendations for the improvement of performance and accrediting colleges on the basis of review results. Moreover, reviews were conducted following different legislation and evaluation criteria; the first reviews were conducted by expert teams from Lithuania, whereas the second review round involved mixed teams of experts from Lithuania and abroad. However, despite all differences, the analysis of evaluation areas of both rounds reveals quite a number of similarities.

The reviews conducted in 2004–2009 cover the following nine evaluation areas:

- management,
- planning and implementation of academic studies,
- applied research and relations with partners in Lithuania,
- international relations,
- management of material and financial resources,
- staff,
- the system of internal performance quality assurance,
- the system of graduates' qualification assessment,
- demand for trained specialists.

The reviews conducted in 2011–2015 cover the following four evaluation areas:

- strategic management,
- academic studies and life-long learning,
- research and/or art activities,
- impact on regional and national development.
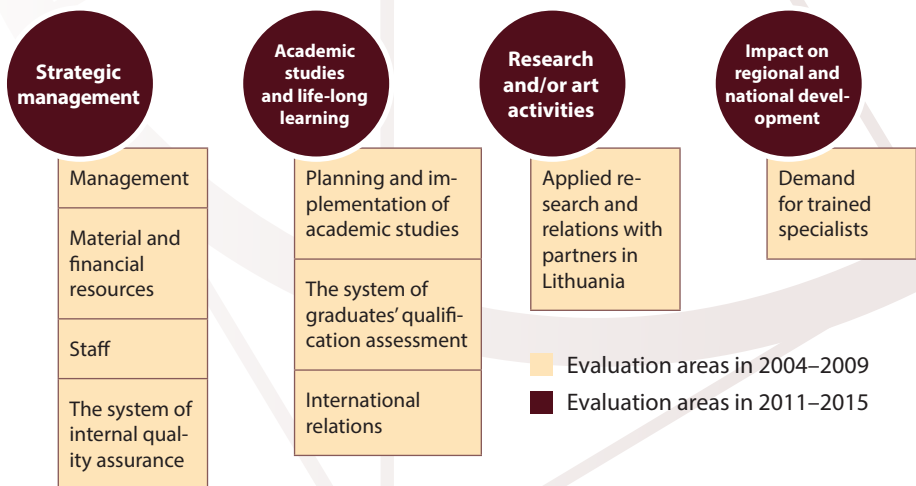
Fig. 2. Attribution of the evaluation areas of 2004–2009 to the areas of 2011–2015

In order to systematise the results of both review conclusions, they were analysed through the prism of evaluation areas listed in the methodology of reviews conducted in 2011–2015, i.e. strategic management, academic studies and life-long learning, research and/or art activities, and impact on regional and national development. The scheme below shows how the evaluation areas of the first review round are attributed to the evaluation areas of 2011–2015.

It should also be noted that in 2004–2009 certain colleges were reviewed for several times – the organised repeat evaluation aimed at ascertaining how these colleges managed to remedy identified shortcomings in their perfor- mance. Repeat evaluations of certain colleges have already been conducted after institutional reviews of 2011–2015 at the time of carrying out this analy- sis. However, in all cases this analysis uses the findings and results of the first reviews conducted in 2004–2009 and 2011–2015.

OVERVIEW OF THE RESULTS OF REVIEWS CONDUCTED IN 2004–2009 AND 2011–2015

The comparison of the results of institutional reviews of colleges conducted in 2004–2009 and 2011–2015 reveals that a bigger share of colleges received a positive evaluation during the first review round (93 per cent, compared to 83 per cent during the second round). However, this comparison is relative since, as has already been mentioned, the purposes of reviews of different periods differed.

Experts who conducted reviews in 2004–2009 could formulate overall evalu- ation as positive despite the fact that any one of the college's evaluation areas re- ceived a negative evaluation. A positive evaluation of the first round meant that experts recommended to provide a col- lege with an authorisation to adopt the statute and form self-government bod- ies, whereas a negative evaluation was considered to be a recommendation to withdraw an authorisation issued to the college for the purpose of conducting studies or initiate reorganisation of the college.

The second review round differed in this respect: if any evaluation area re- ceived a negative evaluation, the final de-
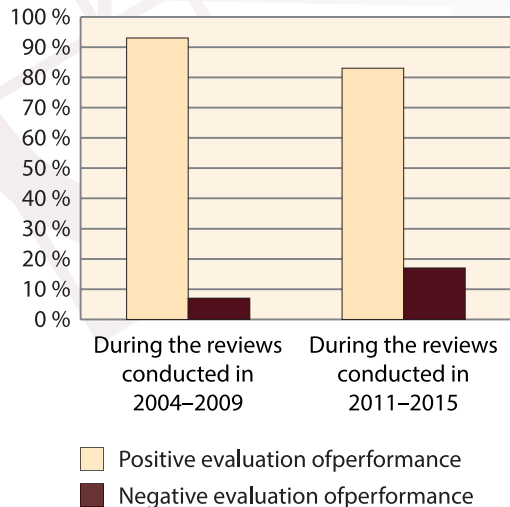
Fig. 3. Results of reviews conducted in 2004–2009 and 2011–2015

cision of institutional review of the college was negative. It should also be noted that Resolution No. 550 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania was amended on 18 June 2014 to stipulate that the results of evaluation of learning
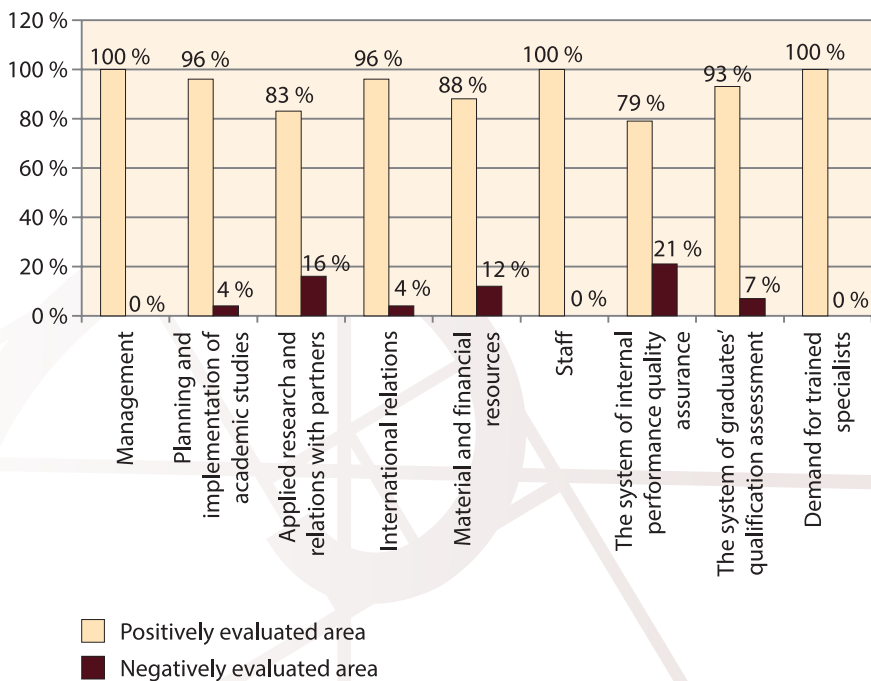
Fig. 4. Review results by evaluation areas, 2004–2009
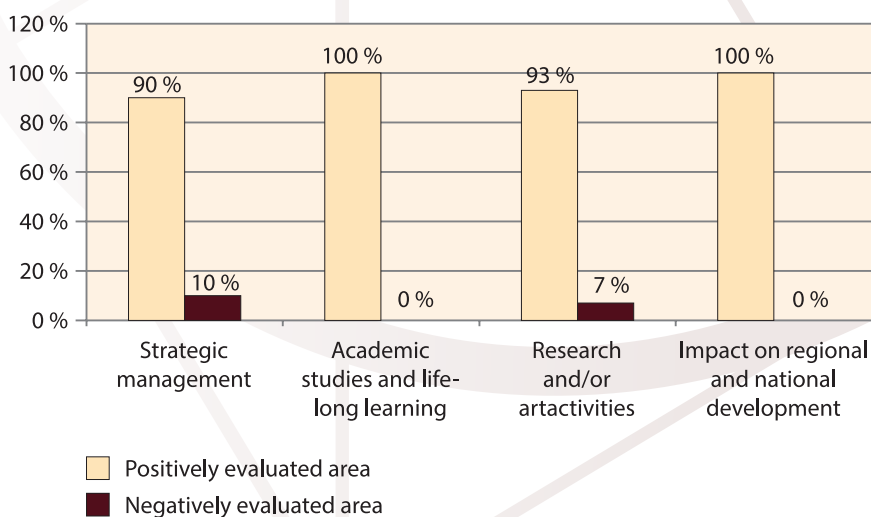
Fig. 5. Review results by evaluation areas, 2011–2015

resources presented by the Research and Higher Education Monitoring and Analysis Centre (MOSTA) are no longer the determining criterion for passing a higher education institution evaluation decision. Prior to coming into force of this amendment, colleges that received a negative evaluation conclusion with respect to learning resources by MOSTA received an overall negative evaluation even if all external evaluation areas were evaluated positively.

A detailed analysis of the results of each review shows that three evaluation areas – management, staff and demand for trained specialists – were evaluated positively in all colleges by experts who conducted reviews in 2004–2009. Negative evaluations of the areas of planning and implementation of academic studies and international relations were received by one college each. The biggest number of negative evaluations was recorded in the following areas: the system of internal quality assurance (5 colleges), applied research and relations with partners (4 colleges), material and financial resources (3 colleges) and the system of graduates' qualification assessment (2 colleges).

During the reviews conducted in 2011–2015 the biggest number of colleges (3) received negative evaluations for strategic management and two colleges were negatively evaluated for research and/or art activities. The other two areas were evaluated positively in all colleges.

COMPARISON OF INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF EXPERTS OF REVIEWS CONDUCTED IN 2004–2009 AND 2011–2015

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

In 2011–2015, three colleges (one state and two non-state) received a negative evaluation of the strategic management area. The evaluation areas of 2004–2009 which are attributed to strategic management in this analysis received a negative evaluation in five state colleges and five non-state colleges. It should be noted that during the first round none college received a negative evaluation of management, unlike the areas of staff, material and financial resources, and the system of internal quality assurance.

State colleges
Non-state colleges
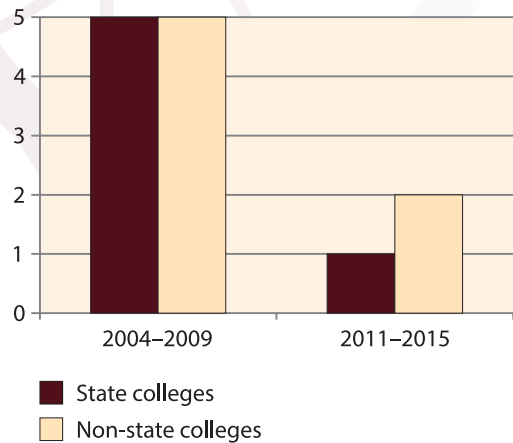
Fig. 6. The number of negative evaluations of strategic management

Experts' observations regarding strategic management during the reviews of 2004–2009 and 2011–2015

In 2004–2009, in terms of strategic management, colleges were mainly commended for:

- matching their mission and vision and the needs of the national labour market, a positive influence of self-government bodies on management, rational organisational structure and good regulation of functioning by strategic development and internal management documents;

- sufficient material resources to conduct studies, envisaged mechanisms of adequate allocation of college's funds and the efficient system of control of finances;

- consistent planning of the development of academic staff, systematic, rational and efficient supervision of staff's work, orientation of the staff's professional development system according to college development directions, the volume and quality of methodical material produced by teachers;

- actions in regulating quality management, quality assurance documents drawn up in accordance with the ISO 9001 standard, as well as efforts to transpose international experience in the system of internal quality assurance.

The following examples of good practice were mainly pointed out when evaluating strategic management in 2011–2015:

- maintaining close relations with social partners in the region and their evident impact on college performance;

- properly developed individual elements of strategic planning: the strategic plan meets national requirements, the vision of strategic goals is clear, and the relevant current issues of higher education are reflected;

- efforts to monitor the implementation of the strategy and select the procedures that allow properly evaluating management, closely relating internal strategic documents with external strategic documents and achieving the mission meeting the expectations of society. The vision and mission statements of colleges are often praised for being clearly formulated and in line with the strategic documents. There are colleges that have been commended by experts for perfect matching of the elements of the strategic plan, realistic and authoritative analysis of the internal obstacles to changes, and active posting of information about the implementation of the strategic plan;

- the efficient system of quality management – the establishment of the advisory council for quality, appointing a person responsible for the supervision of the creation and implementation of an appropriate system that corresponds to its goal or the establishment of a quality division, effective quality management processes;

- college cooperation with other institutions and strategic partners, ability to respond to novelties and undertake changes, as well as consideration of market changes;

- college efforts to ensure a stable process of professional development of the staff, good practice regarding invitation of guest lecturers to seminars on academic improvement, the establishment of a Development Study Centre, implementation of active measures in order to use constant professional development of the staff and increase the number of teachers able to contribute to applied research.

The main similarities and differences of strategic management established during both review rounds are discussed below.

Strategic planning

When analysing the strategic management of colleges in 2004–2009, experts noted that colleges should orientate towards the development of a long-term strategy and goals and encouraged colleges to conduct SWOT analyses and use their results for strategy development. During both review rounds colleges received experts' observations that strategy implementation should be improved – strategy implementation plans should be drawn up and activity priorities should be set. It should be noted that in comparison with institutional reviews of 2011–2015, experts of the first review round less often mentioned that the mission or vision of colleges did not reflect the exceptional features of a higher education institution or was not concrete. During the second round experts also more often criticised those strategic planning elements that were not distinguished as relevant in the methodology of the first review round, i.e. the clarity of strategic planning indicators, risk and change management. Colleges also received more recommendations to carry out operational cost-benefit analyses or search for the niche areas of activities.

Organisational structure

Several evaluation reports produced in 2004–2009 contain proposals to analyse the expedience of establishing a college council or use its influence to enhance efficiency of college performance. Approximately a quarter of state colleges reviewed in 2011–2015 were recommended to strengthen the role of

councils. This was also determined by the amendments to the Law on Higher Education and Research in 2009 whereby state colleges were obliged to establish a new management body, i.e. a council. Therefore, during the second review round all colleges had councils.

It should also be mentioned that during both review rounds colleges were often recommended to change or optimise organisational structure, establish new divisions or merge the existing divisions and allocate responsibilities.

Quality assurance system

During both review rounds experts paid considerable attention to the analysis of suitability and efficiency of internal quality assurance systems of colleges; however, the nature of observations and recommendations differs. During the first review round the majority of colleges did not have the internal quality assurance system; therefore, they were given recommendations to develop such a system, appoint a specific person or establish a division responsible for quality assurance, also to draw up or improve documents regulating quality assurance as well as to distinguish quantitative indicators enabling assessment of performance quality of the college. During the reviews of 2011–2015 the majority of colleges were commended for the fact that they had an in-house staff member responsible for quality and efficient quality management processes; however, they received many remarks stating that the internal quality assurance systems should be more related to the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (it should be noted that ESG were adopted in 2005, when the first review round had already commenced). The second review round recorded some new recommendations about fostering a quality culture in the organisation and the fact that quality assurance procedures and all collected data should be systematised and summarised and the results should be clearly presented to the staff, students and social partners.

It should also be pointed out that during the first review round colleges were often commended for the steps taken to regulate quality assurance management by documents drawn up in accordance with the ISO 9001 standard. During the second review round experts often remarked that colleges had implemented a quality assurance system based on the ISO 9001 standard and suggested colleges considering whether formalised quality management systems bring benefit to college activities, whether they do not become a burden and whether it is worthwhile to switch to another quality assurance model.

Management of human resources

Regarding college staff, certain areas could be distinguished which were indicated as requiring improvement during both review rounds. Although dur-

ing both rounds colleges were commended for the efforts to upgrade their employees' qualifications, the necessity for these institutions to carry out a study on the needs of professional development of the staff and define professional development directions as well as seek to increase the number of teachers working in the primary position in the reviewed institution was also pointed out. However, during the first review round the problem of college teachers not meeting legal requirements was more often mentioned and colleges were recommended to hire staff holding a higher degree than bachelor's and attract younger teachers. The analysis of review results does not show that these problems were very relevant in 2011–2015. During the second round experts more often noted the necessity for colleges to develop a comprehensive staff policy and implement staff self-evaluation, assessment, training and work planning systems. During the second review round a bigger emphasis was placed on the necessity to increase professionalism of the academic staff by developing their pedagogical competences.

Management of material and financial resources

The examples of good practice in most colleges reviewed in 2011–2015 included a good learning infrastructure and efficient use of assistance from the EU Structural Funds for the improvement of learning spaces, equipment and IT rooms. Thus, a conclusion could be drawn that colleges have significantly improved in this area since 2004, because during the first review round experts very often provided recommendations regarding the necessity to urgently upgrade teaching facilities or even ensure that they comply with hygiene standards, also improve the management of material and financial resources by applying state-of-the-art information technologies, and prepare projects for the EU funding of the replenishment and renovation of the facilities.

Cooperation with social partners

During the reviews of 2004–2009 colleges were encouraged to develop cooperation with social partners and try to replace abstract commitments of the parties laid down in cooperation agreements with more specific ones. The situation changed during the second review round – the majority of colleges were commended for close relations with local and regional social partners, evident impact of social partners on college performance and a valuable contribution of institutions to regional development. Experts of the second round observed that social partners could be more effectively informed about college activities and the results achieved, whereas these aspects were not mentioned during the first round.

Experts' observations regarding the evaluation area of strategic management are summarised in the table below:

Areas of improvement pointed out by experts, typical of colleges reviewed in 2004–2009	Areas of improvement pointed out by experts, typical of colleges reviewed in 2011–2015	Areas of improvement pointed out by experts, typical of colleges reviewed during both periods
• absence of a long-term strategy and goals; • no SWOT analysis is carried out; • absence of the internal quality assurance system; • staff does not meet legal requirements; elder teachers prevail; • insufficient quality of teaching facilities; • lack of cooperation with social partners.	• abstract mission and vision of colleges; • vague strategic planning indicators; • risk and change management is not ensured; • no cost-benefit analyses are carried out; • internal quality assurance systems are insufficiently related to the ESG; • quality culture should be more actively fostered; • a need to develop a comprehensive staff policy; • the necessity to upgrade employees' pedagogical competences; • information of social partners about college activities is to be improved.	• absence of detailed plans of strategy implementation; • no activity priorities are defined; • the necessity to reinforce the role of the council in management; • a need to optimise organisational structure; • undefined needs of professional development of the staff; • lack of teachers working in the primary position.

ACADEMIC STUDIES AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING

In 2011–2015, the area of academic studies and life-long learning was positively evaluated in all colleges. In 2004–2009, the evaluation areas attributed to the above area in this analysis were negatively evaluated in three state and one non-state college.

Experts' observations regarding academic studies and life-long learning during the reviews of 2004–2009 and 2011–2015

In 2004–2009, in terms of academic studies and life-long learning, colleges were mainly commended for:

- study programmes in demand, an increasing number of entrants and a high employment rate of graduates according to their speciality;

- a study process carried out in a planned manner, the development of study programmes with regard to regional needs;

- organisation of professional practical training and efficient ensuring of the formation of students' practical skills;

- a regulated system of preparation and evaluation of final theses and achieved high level of objectivity in the evaluation process;

- matching goals of ongoing international projects and study programme improvement, involvement in international projects, envisaging development of international relations in the strategic action plan, as well as the establishment of the International Relations Division.
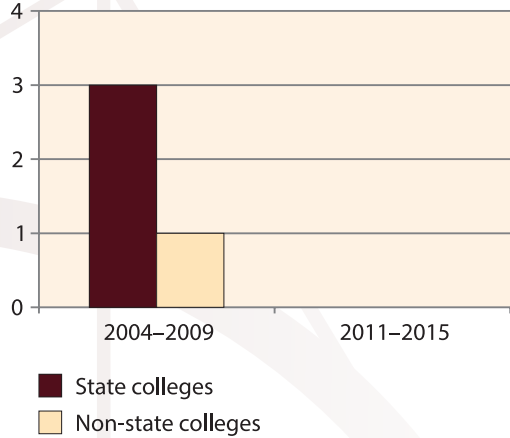
Fig. 7. The number of negative evaluations of academic studies and life-long learning

The following examples of good practice were mainly pointed out when evaluating academic studies and life-long learning in 2011–2015:

- staff's focus on the positive learning experience of students, a positive and conducive learning climate;

- a considerable attention paid to practical skills in study programmes, practical placements of students in companies, practice-oriented study programmes appreciated by employers;

- involvement of social partners in the improvement of study programmes and evaluation of final theses;

- unique and niche study programmes or study programmes adjusted according to national or regional needs;

- adherence to the principle of life-long learning, which provides a professional development opportunity to society;

- a good learning infrastructure, efficient use of assistance from the EU Structural Funds for the improvement of learning spaces, equipment and IT rooms;

- a diversity of learning possibilities and modes, efforts regarding distance learning.

The main similarities and differences of academic studies and life-long learning established during both review rounds are discussed below.

Organisation and content of studies

Experts of both review rounds provided a lot of recommendations to colleges with respect to the improvement of the content and organisation of studies. First of all, it should be noted that experts of both review rounds of 2004–2009 and 2011–2015 often indicated the problem of the failure to maintain an adequate balance between practical and theoretical elements of teaching in study programmes. The only difference is that during the first review round higher education institutions were more often reminded of the necessity to draft documents regulating practical training, whereas during the second round the major share of experts' remarks were related to the implementation of practical training.

The evaluation reports of both rounds pointed out similar problems associated with studies: the need to improve the processes of study programme development and improvement or the mechanisms of closing prospectless study programmes, the necessity to analyse market needs when designing new study programmes and improving ongoing study programmes as well as to draw up the plans of increasing attractiveness of study programmes in the region.

The main differences observed while examining evaluation reports have been determined by the application of amended legislation and the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). During the reviews of 2004–2009 experts provided recommendations regarding the necessity to immediately thoroughly revise and adjust all individual (bridging) higher non-university study programmes in order to eliminate the practice of unfounded inclusion of courses of outdated content in higher education study programmes, whereas in 2011–2015 experts highly focussed on those aspects that had not been highlighted previously, i.e. implementation of student-centred learning, follow-up when implementing recommendations of study programme and institutional review as well as publicity of review results, efficient involvement of students, graduates and employers in the study process, organisation of feedback and the use of results.

It has also been observed that during the first review round colleges often received advice to examine the possibilities to organise distance studies or deliver study programmes in both full-time and part-time (evening) modes. Similar remarks did not prevail in the evaluation reports of reviews conducted in 2011–2015. In some cases the diversity of learning possibilities and modes and efforts regarding distance learning were pointed out as the examples of good practice.

Internationalisation of studies

Experts of both review rounds identified the same problems of internalisation of studies: too low incoming and outgoing mobility of both teachers and students determined by the low level of foreign language knowledge of teachers and students as well as the lack of study modules instructed in English.

Therefore, during both review rounds colleges received similar recommendations related to the necessity to improve teachers' and students' competence in the English language, increase the number of study programmes instructed in a foreign language and participate in international projects.

However, one difference in recommendations could be distinguished: in 2004–2009 experts more focussed on the need for colleges to define internationalisation goals and policy, whereas experts of the second review round gave remarks more connected with the elements of implementation of internationalisation.

Student dropout rate

During both review rounds colleges had the problem of a considerable student dropout rate. In 2011–2015 experts also indicated the causes of this problem: absence of the system to motivate and support students, insufficient information of students about academic requirements, lack of academic support. The reviews conducted in 2011–2015 also often noted that colleges had to search for ways to fight a constantly decreasing number of students.

Final theses

Almost the majority of recommendations provided after reviews conducted in 2004–2009 concerned the improvement of the procedures for the preparation and evaluation of final theses. Experts provided observations to colleges regarding the absence of methodical guidelines for the preparation and evaluation of final theses and mentioned that final theses were not evaluated in accordance with the Regulations of the Final Evaluation of Learning Outcomes approved by the Ministry of Education and Science, no practical applicability of final theses existed, and the competences envisaged to be acquired during studies were not reflected in final theses. It should be noted that experts who conducted institutional reviews in 2011–2015 did not have substantive comments as to the preparation and evaluation of final theses; however, this could be partially determined by the fact that a greater attention to the quality of final theses is paid by experts who evaluate ongoing study programmes in accordance with the currently effective evaluation methodologies.

Cooperation with graduates and employers

Experts of both review rounds gave quite a number of remarks regarding the need for colleges to more efficiently communicate with graduates. The reviews conducted in 2004–2009 highlighted the need to create databases for the collection of graduates' career data, design the systems of monitoring graduates' employment and career, and regularly organise graduates' surveys. In 2011–2015 greater attention was paid to the fact that colleges did not take advantage of graduates as a means to establish relations with social partners,

did not have official alumni clubs or associations, did not use the data on graduates' career for publicity of college activities targeted at potential students.

During the first review round experts also observed that the involvement of employers in the study process needed improvement. Higher education institutions were suggested organising employers' surveys, involving them in market needs analysis, enhancing cooperation with supervisors of practical placements in companies in order to create better conditions for students to collect data for their final theses. Experts of the second review round often pointed out developed cooperation with employers while improving study programmes, evaluating final theses and organising practical placements of students as the examples of good practice.

Implementation of life-long learning

The implementation of the principle of life-long learning and provision of opportunities for society to upgrade qualifications were often mentioned among the examples of good practice indicated during the reviews of 2011–2015. However, during the first review round colleges had not successfully implemented this principle because experts often commented on the absence of informal learning opportunities, promotion of life-long learning and efforts to seek efficiency.
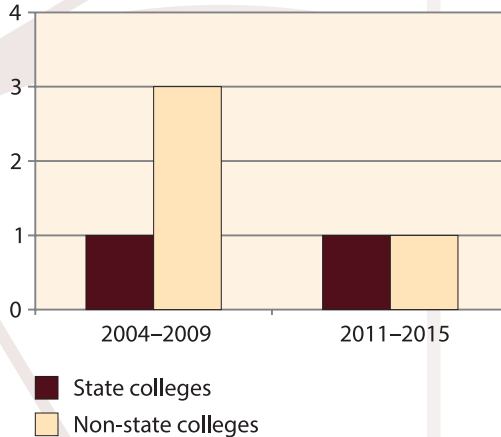
Experts' observations regarding the evaluation area of academic studies and life-long learning are summarised in the table below:

Areas of improvement pointed out by experts, typical of colleges reviewed in 2004–2009	Areas of improvement pointed out by experts, typical of colleges reviewed in 2011–2015	Areas of improvement pointed out by experts, typical of colleges reviewed during both periods
• unfounded inclusion of courses of outdated content in higher education study programmes; • lack of distance, full-time and part-time (evening)[1] studies; • unsuitable procedures for the preparation and evaluation of final theses; • absence of the system for monitoring graduates' career; • lack of involvement of employers in the study process; • lack of life-long learning forms.	• improvement of the implementation of student-centred learning; • improvement of follow-up after review and publicity of review results; • improvement of involvement of students, graduates and employers in the study process; • improvement of organisation of feedback and the use of results; • student support; • lack of involvement of graduates in publicity of college activities.	• lack of balance between practical and theoretical elements of teaching; • a need to improve the processes of design, improvement and closing of study programmes; • the necessity to analyse market needs when designing new study programmes; • low internationalisation of studies; • high student dropout rate.

[1] During the reviews of 2011–2015 – full-time and part-time studies

RESEARCH AND/OR ART ACTIVITIES

During the reviews of 2004–2009, research activities were negatively evaluated in four colleges (one state and three non-state), whereas in 2011–2015 this area was given a negative evaluation in two colleges (one state and one non-state).

Fig. 8. The number of negative evaluations of research and/or art activities

Experts' observations regarding research and/or art activities during the reviews of 2004–2009 and 2011–2015

In 2004–2009, in terms of research and/or art activities, colleges were mainly commended for:

- systematic research carried out in accordance with the established directions and organised consultancy activities, close cooperation with national research and higher education institutions;
- cooperation with social partners in the region;
- the use of research results for the planning, design and improvement of study programmes.

The following examples of good practice were mainly pointed out when evaluating research and/or art activities in 2011–2015:

- compliance of research and/or art activities with national and regional priorities in economy, culture and social development;
- the impact of scientific projects on regional development;
- active development of applied research.

The main similarities and differences of research activities established during both review rounds are discussed below.

Matching regional needs

The main difference between evaluations of research and/or art activities of colleges in 2004–2009 and in 2011–2015 lies in the fact that experts of the first review round particularly often stressed the necessity to carry out the feasibility studies of consultancy activities and development of applied research significant for the region and to orientate research and/or art activities towards regional needs, while during the second round as many as two thirds of colleges were commended for matching research and/or art activities and national and/or regional priorities in economy, culture and social development.

Strategic planning of research and/or art activities

During both review rounds experts mentioned that colleges did not plan research and/or art activities, a formal research policy was missing and the lack of funding of research and/or art activities determined the low quality of results. During the first review round experts gave a lot of recommendations to colleges to draw up documents that promote applied research, start college-wide coordination of research and consultations, appoint responsible persons or units and develop teachers' research competences, whereas during the second round experts more often mentioned that research activities should become an important part of strategic planning. It should also be noted that experts of the second review round very often questioned the appropriate use of the definition of research and/or art activities in colleges.

Publications

The evaluation reports produced by experts during both review rounds mention that colleges lack internationalisation of research and/or art activities. Experts encouraged colleges to enhance applied research productivity of teachers by publishing articles in international reviewed publications and avoid the tendency to publish articles mainly in Lithuanian publications published by higher education institutions in most cases.

Researchers

Experts of both review rounds noted that colleges had to exert efforts to attract more teachers with a doctoral degree, thus ensuring the volume and quality of research activities. They also stressed the importance to develop teachers' methodical competences and create motivation measures that encourage them to engage in research.

Experts' observations regarding the evaluation area of research and/or art activities are summarised in the table below:

Areas of improvement pointed out by experts, typical of colleges reviewed in 2004–2009	Areas of improvement pointed out by experts, typical of colleges reviewed in 2011–2015	Areas of improvement pointed out by experts, typical of colleges reviewed during both periods
• insufficient planning of the development of applied research and orientation towards regional needs	• the necessity to adequately define and use the definition of research and/or art activities	• research and/or art activities are not planned and a formal research policy or strategy is missing; • lack of funding determines the low quality of research output; • lack of international publications; • lack of teachers in possession of a doctoral degree; • lack of promotion to engage in research.

IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Experts' observations regarding the impact on regional and national development during the reviews of 2004–2009 and 2011–2015

In 2004–2009, in terms of the impact on regional and national development, colleges were mainly commended for:

- objective studies of the demand for specialists and graduates' employment;
- a big number of persons who have accomplished continuous training programmes and their demand in the labour market, as well as an active response to labour market needs.

The following examples of good practice were mainly pointed out when evaluating the impact on regional and national development in 2011–2015:

- a positive impact of colleges on the regional and national demographic, social, economic and cultural development;
- good relations with social partners and response to their needs, matching students' final theses and regional and national needs and employers' interests.

Planning and implementation of impact on regional and national development

It should be noted that although experts of both review rounds often mentioned that college activities were important for the region, during the first round of institutional review experts barely focussed on the analysis of the impact. A greater emphasis on this area was placed during the reviews in 2011, yet even then experts often remarked that this area was not systematically planned, monitored and assessed in colleges. During both review rounds colleges were recommended to establish closer relations with social partners when identifying relevant measures of the impact on regional needs, whereas during the second review round experts suggested involving graduates in this planning and noted that one of the obstacles to increase regional and national impact was non-provision of funding of applied research in colleges.

Experts' observations regarding the evaluation area of the impact on regional and national development are summarised in the table below:

Areas of improvement pointed out by experts, typical of colleges reviewed in 2004–2009	Areas of improvement pointed out by experts, typical of colleges reviewed in 2011–2015	Areas of improvement pointed out by experts, typical of colleges reviewed during both periods
	• the impact made is not systematically planned, monitored and assessed	• lack of cooperation with social partners when identifying relevant measures of the impact on regional needs

CONCLUSIONS

The comparison of conclusions of both review rounds shows that some weaknesses observed during the reviews of colleges in 2004–2009 were also identified in 2011–2015, although the areas of activities with a significant improvement could also be distinguished. The comparison also reveals that during the second review round experts highlighted the aspects that had not been mentioned during the first round: implementation of student-centred learning, involvement of social partners, students and employees in the activities of the institution, information about performance results, and follow-up after study programme and institutional reviews. The importance of these aspects in Lithuania came to light just before the start of the first institutional reviews in 2011 when the Law on Higher Education and Research adopted in 2009 established that higher education provided by higher education institutions must be based on the principles of compatibility with the provisions of the European Higher Education Area.

To sum up the area of strategic management, the following conclusions could be drawn:

- the first review round stated that the developed strategic plans were weak, and this remark, in a slightly more concretised form, has remained in 2011–2015;

- during both reviews colleges received recommendations regarding optimisation of organisational structure, the establishment of new units or the merger of existing units, allocation of responsibilities;

- during the second review round a greater attention was paid to the examination of efficiency of college council work;

- during the first review round colleges did not have formalised quality assurance policies, whereas during the second round they were commended for implemented quality policy and encouraged to relate it more to the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), and foster a quality culture in the institution;

- during both review rounds the importance of policy on professional development of the staff was pointed out and higher education institutions were commended for the efforts to develop staff's competences. Colleges were also encouraged to try to increase the number of teachers working in the primary position. During the first review round the problem of teachers not meeting legal requirements was more emphasised, whereas during the second round higher education institutions were urged to develop a comprehensive staff management policy;

- during the first review round colleges were remarked about insufficient quality of facilities and learning resources, whereas during the second round experts often commended higher education institutions for high quality facilities;

- during the first review round colleges were recommended to improve cooperation with social partners, whereas efficient cooperation with social partners was welcomed during the second round.

To sum up the area of academic studies and life-long learning, the following conclusions could be drawn:

- the situation of entrants significantly differed in both reference periods – during the first review round colleges were commended for delivering study programmes in demand and an increasing number of entrants, whereas during the second review colleges were urged to search for efficient ways to deal with the problem of a decreasing number of students;

- experts of both rounds commended colleges for the provision of practical placement opportunities to students; however, they also recommended to establish an adequate balance between practical and theoretical teaching;

- during both review rounds colleges were remarked about the improvement of processes of design, implementation, improvement and closing of study programmes;

- during the second review a great emphasis was placed on the implementation of student-centred learning and other aspects stipulated in the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and the National Qualifications Framework, whereas these aspects received no attention during the first round since the requirements formulated in the ESG were not applied at that time;

- during the first review round colleges were often encouraged to conduct part-time studies and organise distance studies, whereas during the second round colleges were often commended for the implementation of the above proposals;

- during both review rounds the same problems of internationalisation of studies were observed: a low level of foreign language competences of both teachers and students, low student and teacher mobility, a small number of foreign guest lecturers as well as the lack of study modules instructed in English;

- during both review rounds colleges had the problem of a considerable student dropout rate;

- during the first review round experts very often criticised the absence of processes for the preparation and evaluation of final theses, whereas during the second round such comments were rare;

- during both first and second review rounds experts gave a lot of remarks concerning the need for colleges to more efficiently cooperate with graduates; during the first round emphasis was placed on the importance of collection of data on graduates' career, whereas during the second round focus was shifted on taking advantage of the relations with graduates to improve college performance;

- during the first review round colleges were encouraged to search for ways to intensify cooperation with employers, whereas during the second round such cooperation was often mentioned among the examples of good practice.

To sum up the area of research and/or art activities, the following conclusions could be drawn:

- experts of the first review round particularly often stressed the necessity to carry out the feasibility studies of consultancy activities and development of applied research significant for the region and to orientate research and/or art activities towards regional needs, while during the second round as many as two thirds of colleges were commended for matching research and/or art activities and national and/or regional priorities in economy, culture and social development;

- during both review rounds experts mentioned that colleges did not plan research and/or art activities, a formal research policy or strategy was missing and the lack of funding of research and/or art activities determined the low quality of results;

- during both evaluations colleges were urged to increase the number of articles published in international publications;

- during both review rounds colleges were urged to attract more teachers in possession of a doctoral or higher degree, thus ensuring the volume and quality of research activities, as well as to search for ways how to motivate teachers to become involved in research.

To sum up the area of impact on regional and national development, the following conclusions could be drawn:

- although experts of both review rounds mentioned that college activities were important for the region, during the first round experts did not focus on the analysis of impact of colleges on the regional and national development;

- during the second round experts often observed that colleges did not systematically plan and assess the activities of impact on regional and national development;

- during both review rounds colleges were recommended to establish closer relations with social partners when identifying relevant measures of the impact on regional needs.

The results of college reviews conducted in 2004–2009

The results of state college reviews

	Management	Planning and implementation of academic studies	Applied research and relations with partners in Lithuania	International relations	Material and financial resources	Staff	The system of internal performance quality assurance	The system of graduates' qualification assessment	Demand for trained specialists	Overall evaluation*
Alytus College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Kaunas College of Higher Education	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Kaunas College of Forestry and Environmental Engineering	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Kaunas Technical College	positive	positive	positive	positive	negative	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Klaipėda State College	positive	positive	negative	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Lithuanian Maritime College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Marijampolė College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Panevėžys College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
College of Religious Studies	positive	negative	positive	negative	positive	positive	negative	negative	positive	negative
Šiauliai State College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Utena College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Vilnius College of Higher Education	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Vilnius College of Construction and Design	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Vilnius Technical College	positive	positive	positive	positive	negative	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Žemaitija College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive

*positive – a recommendation to provide a college with an authorisation to adopt the statute and form self-government bodies

negative – a recommendation to withdraw an authorisation issued to the college for the purpose of conducting studies or initiate reorganisation of the college

The results of non-state college reviews

	Management	Planning and implementation of academic studies	Applied research and relations with partners in Lithuania	International relations	Material and financial resources	Staff	The system of internal performance quality assurance	The system of graduates' qualification assessment	Demand for trained specialists	Overall evaluation
Kaunas Business College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Klaipėda University of Applied Social Sciences	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	negative	positive	positive	positive
Klaipėda Business and Technology College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Klaipėda Business College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Kolping College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	negative	positive	positive	positive
University of Applied Social Sciences	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	negative	positive	positive	positive
College of Management, Law and Languages of Šiauliai Region	positive	positive	negative	positive	negative	positive	negative	negative	positive	negative
Northern Lithuanian College of Higher Education	positive	positive	negative	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
West Lithuania Business College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Vilnius College of Design	positive	positive	negative	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Vilnius Cooperative College of Higher Education	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Vilnius Law and Business College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Vilnius Higher School of Management	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Vilnius Business College of Higher Education	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive

*positive – a recommendation to provide a college with an authorisation to adopt the statute and form self-government bodies
negative – a recommendation to withdraw an authorisation issued to the college for the purpose of conducting studies or initiate reorganisation of the college

The results of college reviews conducted in 2011–2015

The results of state college reviews

	Strategic management	Academic studies and life-long learning	Research and/or art activities	Impact on regional and national development	Evaluation of learning resources by MOSTA	Overall evaluation
Alytus College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Kaunas College of Higher Education	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Kaunas College of Forestry and Environmental Engineering	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Kaunas Technical College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Klaipėda State College	positive	positive	negative	positive	positive	negative
Lithuanian Maritime Academy	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Marijampolė College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Panevėžys College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Šiauliai State College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Utena College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Vilnius College of Higher Education	positive	positive	positive	positive	evaluation results*	positive
Vilnius College of Technologies and Design	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Žemaitija College	negative	positive	positive	positive	positive	negative

*After Resolution No. 550 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania was adopted on 18 June 2014, the results of evaluation of learning resources provided to the expert team as additional information have no longer been considered as the criterion for passing a higher education institution evaluation decision.

The results of non-state college reviews

	Strategic management	Academic studies and life-long learning	Research and/or art activities	Impact on regional and national development	Evaluation of learning resources by MOSTA	Overall evaluation
Kolping College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Lithuanian Business College	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
University of Applied Social Sciences	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Northern Lithuanian College of Higher Education	negative	positive	negative	positive	evaluation results*	negative
St. Ignatius of Loyola College	negative	positive	positive	positive	negative	negative
International School of Law and Business	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
V. A. Graičiūnas School of Management	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Vilnius College of Design	positive	positive	positive	positive	evaluation results*	positive
Vilnius Cooperative College of Higher Education	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive
Vilnius Business College of Higher Education	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive

*After Resolution No. 550 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania was adopted on 18 June 2014, the results of evaluation of learning resources provided to the expert team as additional information have no longer been considered as the criterion for passing a higher education institution evaluation decision.

ANALYSIS OF NEW STUDY PROGRAMMES SUBMITTED TO SKVC IN 2010-2015

GENERAL STATISTICS

From 2010 to 30 September 2015, a total of 1,109 new study programmes were submitted to SKVC, of which SKVC accredited slightly more than half – 654 (59 per cent). Of all of the new study programmes that were accredited, more than half – 348 (53 per cent) – were registered in the study area of social sciences. There were 117 programmes registered in the study area of technology (18 per cent), 65 in biomedicine (10 per cent), 53 in the humanities (eight per cent), 31 in natural sciences (five per cent) and 40 in the arts (six per cent).

SKVC assesses new programmes in two ways: 1. Simplified evaluation, when the documents submitted by the higher education institution that are required for registration of a new study programme are analysed. In this case, expert evaluation of the programme curriculum is not carried out. Only compliance of the study programme with the set requirements is evaluated. 2. External evaluation, which came into effect in August 2011 and allowed SKVC to organise external evaluation with expert visits to higher education institutions. The latter evaluation method is applicable when a higher education institution does not have accredited study programmes in the same group of fields, when a study programme in the respective field and cycle was not

Fig. 1. New study programmes accredited by SKVC in 2010-2015, by study area.

Fig. 2. New study programmes accredited by SKVC in 2010-2015.

accredited, when the higher education institution is not accredited, etc. Of the 654 new study programmes that were accredited by SKVC from the beginning of 2010 to 30 September 2015, 79 programmes (12 per cent) were accredited after external evaluation and 575 (88 per cent) were accredited according to the simplified procedure. Since 2011, the number of programmes which required external expert evaluation grew. Only in 2015 did this figure decrease (it should be noted that this report provides data up to 30 September 2015).

The number of new study programmes being submitted is declining; this decline began in 2011. The downward trend from the second half of 2011 to 2012 was conditional, since up until July 2011, programmes were

Fig. 3. Results of the new study programmes received by SKVC in 2010-2015.

not accredited if any non-compliance was established at all. There were situations where the same programme was not accredited several times in a row. Changes took place in the evaluation of new study programmes in the second half of 2011 – a portion of new study programmes began to be accredited according to a simplified procedure, and in the presence of shortcomings, the accreditation procedure was stopped and the programme organisers were given the chance to correct the shortcomings that had been identified. As the number of programmes submitted decreases, so does the number of accredited study programmes. In analysing the evaluation results, the number of programmes which were not accredited stands out, as these decreased significantly after 2011. This shows that higher education institutions are submitting documents that have been completed properly (though not always the first time around) for the accreditation of new study programmes; in 2012-2015, the majority of programmes which were not accredited are those which underwent external evaluation and were negatively evaluated by the experts.

Fig. 4. New study programmes accredited by SKVC in 2010-2015, by study cycle.
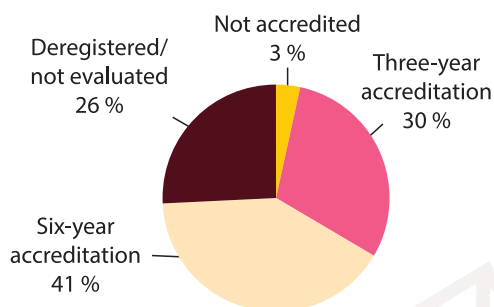
Fig. 5. External international evaluation results for new study programmes accredited by SKVC in 2010-2015.

Of the 654 new study programmes that were accredited in total, 193 (29 per cent) were professional bachelor's programmes, 236 (36 per cent) were bachelor's programmes, 201 (30 per cent) were master's programmes, six (0.9 per cent) were integrated study programmes, seven (1 per cent) were non-degree programmes, and 10 (1.5 per cent) were residency programmes (Fig. 4).

Of the 654 programmes that were accredited as new since 2010, 173 (35.8 per cent) were evaluated as implementing study programmes. Of these study programmes, 8 (3 per cent) were not accredited, 70 (30 per cent) were accredited for three years, and 95 (41 per cent) were accredited for six years. A total of 60 programmes (26 per cent) were deregistered or not submitted for evaluation. The remaining 419 programmes (64.1 per cent) were not evaluated as study programmes already being implemented.

The most new study programmes were accredited at the following institutions of higher education:

Universities	Sub-mitted since 20101	Number of new study programmes accredited since 2010	Colleges	Sub-mitted since 2010	Number of new study programmes accredited since 2010
Mykolas Rom-eris University	120	59	Vilnius College	38	22
Vilnius University	77	55	Utena College	27	18
Kaunas University of Technology	81	53	Marijampolė College	44	18
Vilnius Gedimi-nas Technical University	66	52	SMK College of Applied Social Sciences	24	15
Vytautas Mag-nus University	74	40	Vilnius College of Technologies and Design	20	14
Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences	75	40	International School of Law and Business	18	13

The fewest new study programmes were accredited at the following institutions of higher education:

Universities	Sub-mitted since 2010[1]	Number of new study programmes accredited since 2010	Colleges	Sub-mitted since 2010	Number of new study programmes accredited since 2010
Lithu-anian Sports University	5	2	Lithuanian Mari-time Academy	3	2
General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania	7	3	Lithuanian Busi-ness College	6	3
LCC Internation-al University	3	3	Kaunas College of Applied Engi-neering Sciences	3	3
ISM University of Management and Economics	7	5	Northern Lithu-ania College	4	3
Lithuanian Academy of Mu-sic and Theatre	8	5	V. A. Graičiūnas School of Management	7	3
European Humanities University	18	10	Kolping College	7	4

EXTERNAL EXPERT EVALUATION RESULTS

Since August 2011, when the new Description of the Procedure for External Evaluation and Accreditation of Study Programmes came into force (when organising external evaluations with visits to the higher education institutions began), 108 programmes underwent external evaluation. Of these, 79 study programmes were accredited after in-depth external evaluation, and 29 study programmes were given a negative evaluation.

Of the 79 study programmes that were accredited after external expert evaluation (Fig. 6), more than half – 52 (67 per cent) – were registered in the study area of social sciences, and 10 study programmes (12 per cent) were registered in the study area of technology. Five programmes (six per cent) were accredited in both natural sciences and biomedicine. Four new study programmes (five per cent) were accredited in the humanities, and three (four per cent) were accredited in the arts.

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[1] Including programmes that were submitted a second time after rectifying the short-comings established by SKVC.
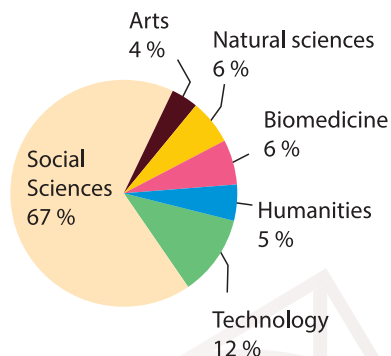
Fig. 6. New study programmes accredited by SKVC in 2010-2015 after in-depth expert evaluation, by study area.
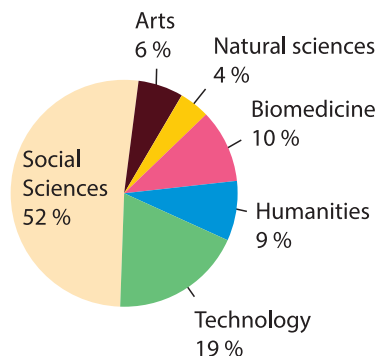
Fig. 7. New study programmes accredited by SKVC in 2010-2015 after simplified evaluation, by study area.

The breakdown of simplified evaluation results in terms of study areas (Fig. 7) is very similar to that of in-depth external evaluation. More than half of the programmes – 296 (52 per cent) – were registered in the study area of social sciences, and 108 study programmes (19 per cent) were registered in the study area of technology. A total of 60 study programmes (10 per cent) were accredited in the area of biomedicine; 49 new programmes (nine per cent) were accredited in the humanities, and 37 (six per cent) were accredited in the arts. The fewest programmes – 25 (four per cent) – were accredited in the field of natural sciences.
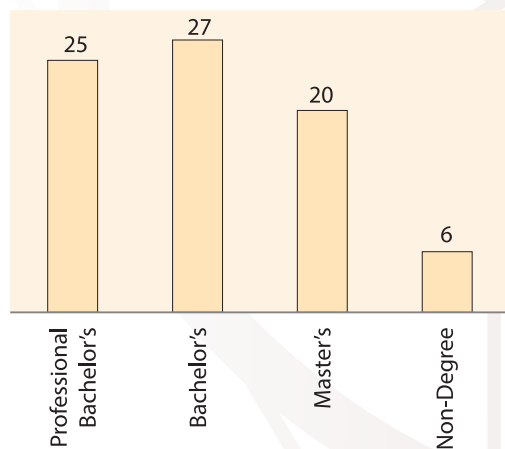
Distribution of the accredited programmes according to study cycle was fairly uniform (Fig. 8): 25 (32 per cent) were professional bachelor's programmes, 27 (35 per cent) were university bachelor's programmes, 20 (25 per cent) were master's programmes, and six (eight per cent) were non-degree programmes.

The statistics for the 29 programmes that were not accredited are as follows (Fig. 9): social sciences – 19 (66 per cent), natural sciences – three (10 per cent), humanities – three (10 per cent), technology – two (seven per cent), biomedicine – two (seven per cent).

The distribution of non-accredited programmes according to study cycle is as follows (Fig. 10): 13 (45 per cent) were professional bachelor's programmes,

Fig. 8. New study programmes accredited by SKVC in 2010-2015 after external expert evaluation, by study cycle.

seven (24 per cent) were bachelor's pro-grammes, eight (28 per cent) were master's programmes, and one (three per cent) was a minor study programme.

The decision not to accredit a programme was usually due to an unsatisfactory evalu-ation in the field of programme aims and outcomes. Evaluation in this field was nega-tive in 23 (70 per cent) of the 29 cases where programmes were not accredited. The area of programme structure was evaluated with an unsatisfactory score in 16 cases (55 per cent). Unsatisfactory scores in the other areas of evaluation were significantly less common than in these two areas. It is also worth point-ing out that both these areas are strongly linked and are often evaluated with an unsatisfactory score in the same programme. The evaluation results are il-lustrated in the following table.
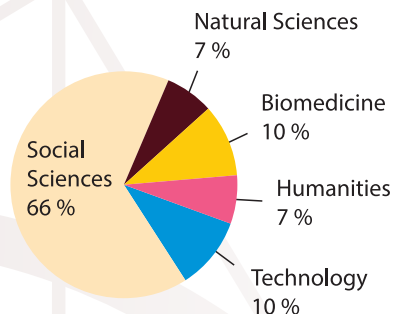
Fig. 9. New study programmes that were not accredited by SKVC in 2010-2015 after external expert evaluation, by study area.

Evaluation areas \ Evaluation points	1 - Unsatisfactory (there are major shortcomings that must be rectified)	2 - Satisfactory (meets the minimum require-ments, but needs to be improved)	3 – Good (a system-atically developed area that has dis-tinctive features)	4 – Very good (the area is excep-tional)
Programme aims and learning outcomes	29/**23**	29/**5**	29/**1**	-
Programme structure	29/**16**	29/**11**	29/**2**	-
Staff	29/**4**	29/**16**	29/**9**	-
Material resources	29/**5**	29/**12**	29/**11**	29/**1**
Course of studies and its assessment	29/**1**	29/**18**	29/**10**	-
Programme management	29/**2**	29/**16**	29/**10**	29/**1**

Note: *The first number in the table shows the total number of negatively evaluated study programmes, while the second number shows the number of cases evaluated with the re-spective score.*

None of the programmes that underwent in-depth external evaluation are currently considered ongoing study programmes. The first positive decision on an in-depth external evaluation was made in May 2012. The accreditation date for these programmes is by 2015, but their accreditation period was extended for one year to 2016 for study field evaluation.
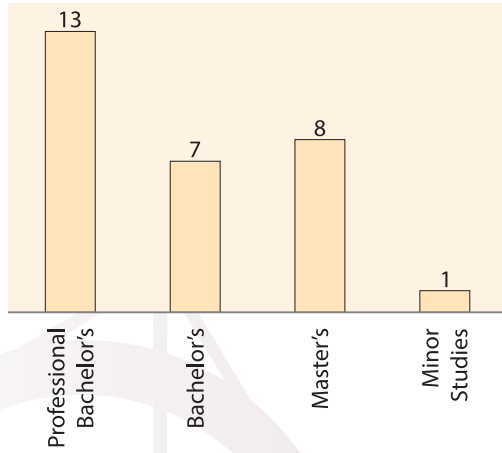
Fig. 10. New study programmes that were not accredited by SKVC in 2010-2015 after external expert evaluation, by study cycle.

JOINT STUDY PROGRAMMES AND THEIR ASSESSMENT, 2010-2015

QUALITY ASSURANCE OF JOINT STUDY PROGRAMMES IN EUROPE

Joint Study Programmes[1] are a hallmark of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). They are set up to enhance the mobility of students and staff, to facilitate mutual learning, and to open up wider opportunities for cooperation. The main purpose of joint degree programmes is to create opportunities for students to acquire more knowledge, skills and experience than a study programme offered by a single institution could. Programmes of this type are implemented in order to provide an opportunity for students and teachers from different countries to study and teach in a different cultural and academic environment, to adopt academic good practice from different countries or institutions of higher education, to promote international inter-institutional cooperation, and to expand employment opportunities for graduates.[2] However, the implementation, quality assurance and recognition of joint study programmes is not an easy task, so efforts are being made in Europe to agree on common provisions for external quality assurance that are acceptable to everyone. In order to implement this, the Bologna Follow-up Group has developed principles which should be followed in the development, implementation and assessment of joint study programmes without applying additional national criteria. Quality assurance agencies and stakeholders also worked together to develop and test different models which would make the recognition and quality assurance of joint study programmes easier. At the initiative of all of these working groups, the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes was created; this document was approved during a meeting of the European Higher Education Area ministers responsible for education that took place in Yerevan on 14-15 May 2015.

The new European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, which is based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), establishes:

- **Application in different systems of quality assurance (part A).** Quality assurance for joint study programmes should be based on the

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[1] **Joint study programmes** are understood as study programmes developed and implemented jointly by different institutions of higher education belonging to European Higher Education Area (EHEA) member countries, upon completion of which a double or joint degree is conferred.

[2] The General Requirements of Joint Study Programmes approved by Order No. V-65 of the Minister of Education and Science of 3 February 2014.

provisions set forth in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (Part B). If external quality assurance at programme level is mandatory in one or more of the states implementing the programme, the institutions of higher education must select one agency from the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).

- **Provision for quality assurance of joint study programmes (part A).** Emphasis is placed on the validation of joint programmes in all of the countries where they are being implemented. Study programmes should be designed to correspond with the intended learning outcomes, which should align with the corresponding level in the Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area. The programme's implementation, resources and internal quality assurance should be sufficient to achieve the learning outcomes.

- **A procedure for external quality assurance of joint programmes (part C).** The quality assurance agency must follow the procedures set out in this part (ESG 2), and must evaluate the programme in accordance with the provisions described in Part B. It should be noted that an international panel of experts should be appointed to carry out the assessment; the panel should include members from at least two countries involved in the consortium providing the joint study programme. Joint study programmes are evaluated as a whole; although the site visit should normally be restricted to one study location, implementation of the programme should be discussed with representatives of all cooperating institutions.

Application of these new provisions and principles for joint study programmes will be relevant both within the European Higher Education Area and beyond its borders.

JOINT STUDY PROGRAMMES IN LITHUANIA

There a currently **42 joint study programmes**[3] registered and accredited in Lithuania, of which 88 per cent (37 study programmes) are carried out with *foreign higher education institutions* and 12 per cent (five study programmes) are carried out between *Lithuanian higher education institutions*. The majority of the joint study programmes – 79 per cent (33 study programmes) – are conducted at *universities*, while the remaining 21 per cent (nine programmes) are offered at *colleges of higher education*. The distribution of the joint study programmes according to type and cycle is as follows: the majority, i.e. 64 per

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[3] Based on data collected by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education in January 2016.

cent (27 study programmes) are offered as *second cy-cle programmes (master's studies),* while 36 per cent are *first cycle programmes*, of which 22 per cent (nine study programmes) are professional bachelor's pro-grammes and the remaining 14 per cent (six study programmes) are bachelor's programmes (see Fig. 1).

The majority of joint study programmes are reg-istered and delivered in the **area of social sciences** (67 per cent – 28 study programmes). Within the area of social sciences, joint study programmes are most often registered in fields such as *Law*, *Economics*, *Business and Manage-ment* and *Social* Work.[4] Compared with the remaining areas, there are slightly more joint study programmes regis-tered in the **area of biomedicine** (14 per cent – 6 study programmes) than in areas such as **natural sciences** (7 per cent – 3 study programmes) and **technological sciences** (7 per cent – 3 study programmes). There is only one study programme each registered in the areas of **humanities** and **arts** (see Fig. 2).

Fig. 1. Distribution of joint study pro-grammes by type
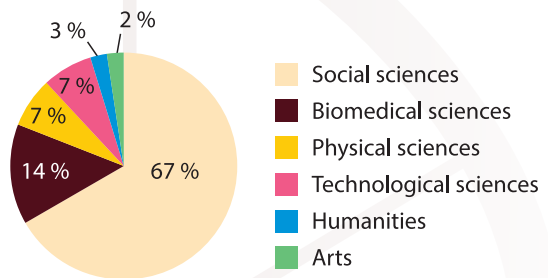
Fig. 2. Distribution of joint study programmes by study area

A review of higher education institutions which offer joint study pro-grammes shows that the greater part of these programmes are delivered at the following universities: Mykolas Romeris University (12 study programmes), Vil-nius Gediminas Technical University (6 study programmes), Šiauliai University (5 study programmes) and Vytautas Magnus University (3 study programmes). Among colleges, the most joint study programmes are currently being offered by the College of Social Sciences (three study programmes) and the Interna-tional School of Law and Business (two study programmes). The remaining uni-versities and colleges where these study programmes are offered have one or two joint programmes each (see Fig. 3).[5]

Analysis of the specifics of joint study programme implementation reveals that for the most part, programmes that are carried out in conjunction with for-

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[4] At least two study programmes are registered in each of the fields listed.

[5] It should be noted that higher education institutions which conduct joint study pro-grammes with Lithuanian higher education institutions assign the same programme to their own institution, but in collecting statistical data for this survey, said was count-ed as a single joint studies programme and assigned to the institution which provided, as the primary institution, the description of the joint studies programme for assess-ment and accreditation.
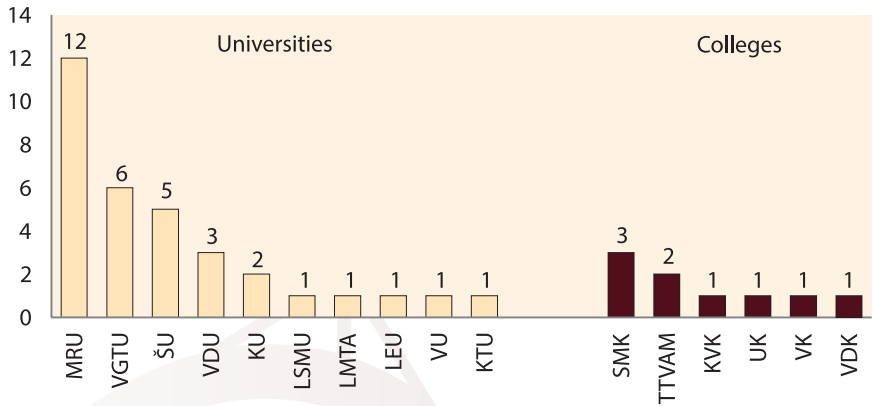
Fig. 3. Distribution of joint study programmes by institution
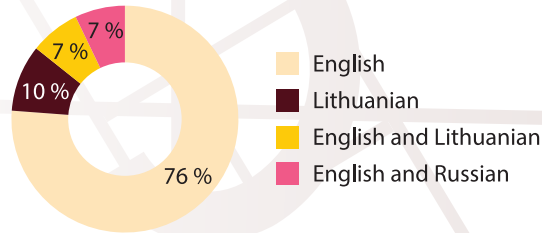
Fig. 4. Distribution of joint study programmes by language of instruction
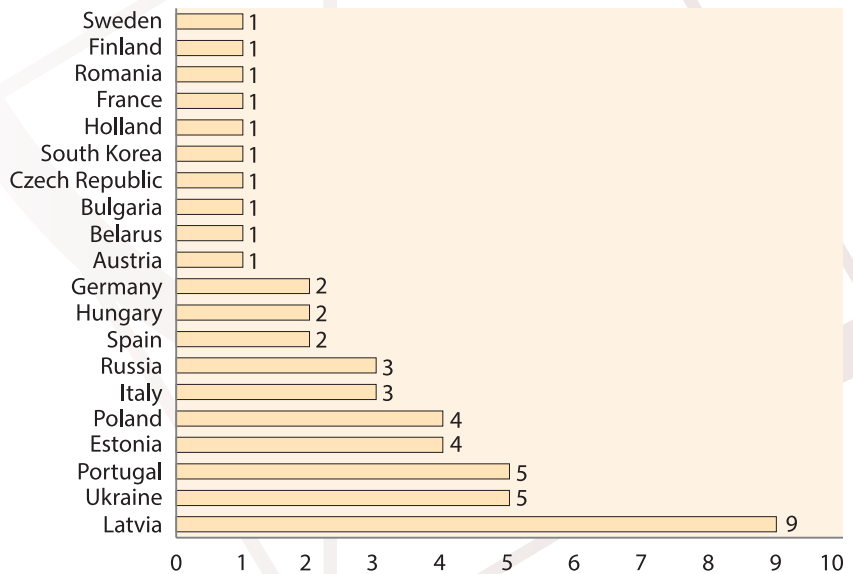
Fig. 5. Distribution of joint study programmes by partner country

eign higher education institutions are conducted in *English* (76 per cent – 32 study programmes). The rest of the programmes that are carried out in conjunction with foreign higher education institutions are taught in two languages: *English and Lithuanian* (7 per cent – 3 study programmes) or *English and Russian* (7 per cent – 3 study programmes). Almost all of the joint study programmes that are developed and implemented with other Lithuanian higher education institutions are conducted in *Lithuanian* (10 per cent – 4 study programmes) (see Fig. 4).

As already mentioned above, the majority of joint study programmes are delivered in conjunction with foreign higher education institutions. The Lithuanian higher education institutions currently offering joint study programmes cooperate with higher education institutions in 20 different countries (see Fig. 5). The greater part of the joint study programmes are developed and implemented with partners from neighbouring countries: there are 9 joint study programmes being implemented with higher education institutions in Latvia, 5 each with institutions in Ukraine and Portugal, and 4 each with institutions in Estonia and Poland.[6]

EVALUATION AND ACCREDITATION OF JOINT STUDY PROGRAMMES

According to the General Requirements of Joint Study Programmes (Order No. V-65 of 3 February 2014), joint study programmes shall be developed, evaluated and/or accredited, validated and carried out according to the procedures established in the national legislation of the partner higher education institutions. A joint study programme shall be launched once it is validated in all of the countries where partner institutions will deliver the joint study programme.

Joint study programmes began being evaluated and accredited in our country in 2008. The table below (Table 1) provides accreditation statistics for **new joint study programmes** according to the year they were evaluated by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereinafter – the Centre). The table shows that the number of programmes increased each year, reaching a high in 2014, when 20 new joint programmes were accredited.

Table 1. Number of new study programmes submitted for evaluation, 2008-2015

Year of evaluation	2008-2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Number of new study programmes submitted for evaluation	3	1	3	0	7	20	8

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[6] Joint study programmes can be developed and implemented with more than one cooperating institution.

Prior to August 2011, all newly developed study programmes and their compliance with general and special requirements were evaluated with the help of external experts. Depending on whether or not the programme was in line with legal requirements, a decision was made whether or not to accredit the programme. If it was decided not to accredit the programme, the institution of higher education had the option of correcting the programme description and re-submitting it to the Centre for repeat evaluation. During this period, 7 joint study programmes were received and accredited: 3 joint study programmes were accredited in 2008-2009, 1 joint study programme was accredited in 2010, and 3 were accredited in 2011.

As of August 2011, all newly developed study programmes are evaluated and accredited according to the procedure approved by the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania in July 2011.[7] Decisions on the accreditation of newly developed study programmes are made after carrying out a simplified evaluation of the programme or after carrying out an in-depth evaluation of the programme with the help of experts. In 2013-2014, the vast majority of new joint study programmes were accredited after carrying out a simplified evaluation and establishing that all of the documents submitted were completed properly, that the scope of the programme complies with legal requirements, that the qualification to be awarded is in line with the List of Qualification Degrees, and that the area, field and branch (if any) of studies that the programme is attributed to is in keeping with the List of Study Areas and Fields in which Studies are Offered at Schools of Higher Education. In 2015, 5 newly developed joint study programmes were accredited after carrying out in-depth external evaluation, and the remaining 3 programmes were accredited without external evaluation (see Fig. 6). The most common reason that newly developed joint study programmes required external evaluation was that over the past three years, the cooperating higher education institutions had offered study programmes in the same field and cycle as the newly developed study programmes, and these programmes were assessed negatively, not accredited or not submitted for evaluation.

■ Without external evaluation
□ With external evaluation

Fig. 6. Evaluation of new joint study programmes, 2013-2015

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[7] Description of the Procedure for External Evaluation and Accreditation of Study Programmes approved by Order No. V-1487 of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania of 29 July 2011 (Official Gazette, 2011, no. 100-4702)

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Of all the **existing joint study programmes**, 6 underwent external evaluation by the end of 2015, and the accreditation period for 1 programme was extended for evaluation of the fields.[8] 1 existing joint study programme was accredited in 2012, 3 were accredited in 2013, and 2 were accredited in 2014. Assessment of programmes of this type that underwent external evaluation was as follows: two joint study programmes were accredited for *six years*, three programmes were accredited for *three years*, and one programme was *not accredited*. Evaluation of the remaining programmes is planned for this year or next, since the majority of them are accredited until 2016-2018.

It should be noted that in organising evaluation of existing joint study programmes, the Centre relied on the experience of the JOQAR project[9] and always appealed to foreign quality assurance agencies, offering to cooperate and carry out external evaluation of the programme together; however, these agencies did not once express a desire to contribute to an evaluation. In some cases, the agencies did offer experts from their countries who could participate in evaluation of the respective programme. After carrying out external evaluation of a joint programme, foreign quality assurance agencies were always familiarised with the assessment findings prepared by experts, leaving them the right to make a decision regarding accreditation of the programme that was assessed. The Centre does not have more detailed information on whether quality agencies made use of the aforementioned joint study programme assessment findings.

International panels of experts were appointed for assessment of joint study programmes. Each panel of experts included specialists from all of the countries in which the higher education institutions implementing the joint study programme as a partner are located. This ensured that the national context of each country in implementing the joint study programme was taken into account.

Analysis of the joint study programme assessment findings leads to the conclusion that programmes of this type are needed and evaluated well by international experts, since they promote cooperation among higher education institutions both domestically and internationally; furthermore, students who select joint study programmes are offered greater opportunities and prospects than those who study at a single higher education institution. According to the experts, joint study programmes are a chance for students to acquire deeper knowledge and more varied experience, and for teachers and

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[8] According to Article 25.5 of the Description of the Procedure for External Evaluation and Accreditation of Study Programmes approved by Order No. ISAK-1652 of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania of 24 July 2009, the accreditation period for a study programme can be extended when it is necessary to extend the accreditation period for the programme so that it can be evaluated together with other study programmes in the same field (or group of fields).

[9] http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Assessment_Framework_for_Joint_Programmes_in_ Single_Accreditation_Procedures

researchers to explore their area of interest on a broader basis. Studying in this type of programme also ensures greater student and teacher mobility, leads to improved foreign language skills among students, and provides access to greater library and other educational resources. The fact that foreign teachers lecture in joint study programmes increases the internationalisation of the study programmes.

Regardless of how well experts evaluate joint study programme, certain criticism was nevertheless expressed in implementing these types of programmes. In summarising the expert findings, the most frequently mentioned problem areas include failure to ensure compliance with legal requirements, insufficient information about the assessment methods and systems for assessing learning achievements used in other countries, problems in the administration of study programmes of this type, vague relationships with partners, insufficient student mobility, lack of housing and support for students, high dropout rates, unequal professional development opportunities for teachers, and inconsistent coordination of study programme goals, expected learning outcomes and programme curriculum. The experts also raised the question of the sustainability of joint study programmes: many programmes of this type were developed using European Union support funds in implementing various projects, but when these projects end, the higher education institutions experience difficulties implementing joint study programmes due to high financial demands that they are not able to compensate for.

There were cases when, during evaluation of an existing study programme, it came to light that the study programme was not validated as a joint programme in all of the countries where the higher education institutions with which the joint programme agreement was signed are located. As it later turned out, the main reason was that a legal opportunity to carry out joint study programmes with foreign higher education institutions is not provided for in all countries. In addition, it was observed that academic regulations established in different countries, different accreditation periods for study programmes, and established traditions sometimes made it difficult for the programme to comply with the set requirements. It can thus be stated that in some cases, higher education institutions rush to agree on the implementation of study programmes without first clarifying in detail all of the legal possibilities and other aspects.

The experts who assessed the joint study programmes recommended that remote communication of all levels be ensured between the cooperating higher education institutions, that financial questions of these study programmes be given better consideration in order to ensure support for all students, and that the requirements for acceptance into a joint study programme be reviewed. All higher education institutions that offer joint degree programmes are advised to have a single, functioning internal quality assurance system that encompasses implementation of the entire programme and which is revised

and improved regularly. Institutions are also encouraged to actively involve social partners in management of the programme. The experts advise higher education institutions that are considering introducing a joint study programme to first carry out a detailed analysis of the need for such studies, and to collect other information which demonstrates that the study programme is necessary.

Although there is no doubt that joint study programmes are an opportunity for both students and teachers to acquire new knowledge and share their experiences at other higher education institutions, experts pointed out and repeatedly mentioned that greater student and teacher mobility should be ensured. The experts stress that these types of programmes cannot only be taught remotely.

JOINT STUDY PROGRAMMES IN THE EYES OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

On 11-27 January 2016, in an effort to ascertain the attitude of higher education institutions towards the development and implementation of joint study programmes, the difficulties that are encountered, and the aspects that should be taken into account in developing and implementing joint study programmes, the Centre sent a questionnaire to all of the higher education institutions offering studies in Lithuania. Of the 45 recipients, replies were received from 18 higher education institutions, some of which offer joint study programmes. Since not all of the higher education institutions responded to the questionnaire on joint study programmes sent by the Centre, an overview of the opinions of all of the Lithuanian higher education institutions offering joint study programmes is not possible; the overview below is based only on the aggregate responses of the higher education institutions that participated in the survey.

When asked to indicate **how many joint study programmes are offered** at their institution as well as their type and state programme code, all of the higher education institutions provided the information requested. It should be noted that the Centre does not evaluate doctoral studies, so information about joint doctoral studies were not included or analysed, even though the higher education institutions provided this information as part of the questionnaire. Another trend that was observed was that the higher education institutions conducting joint study programmes with other Lithuanian higher education institutions tended to ascribe the same study programme to their own institution; however, in collecting statistical information for this overview, the number of joint study programmes was calculated according to which higher education institution submitted the joint study programme description for assessment and accreditation, as the primary institution. Several higher education institutions indicated that they do not conduct joint study programmes, but

information collected by the Centre reveals that such programmes are registered and accredited.

Since not all the of the higher education institutions which participated in the survey are currently conducting joint study programmes, the Centre asked **whether they plan to develop joint study programmes in 2016**. Most of the institutions – both those which are currently conducting joint study programmes and those which do not offer this type of programme – are planning to do so in 2016 and beyond. Of all the institutions which participated in the survey, nine are planning on developing joint programmes, but six are not, because these types of programmes are very complicated and disadvantageous to implement. Three institutions did not to indicate their plans, since they are currently conducting joint study programmes. The higher education institutions which are planning joint programmes are currently in the preparation phase: they either have a concept for the programme and are coordinating an action plan with partners (foreign universities), or are still looking for opportunities to develop and implement joint programmes. There are discussions about developing an international collaborative programme or a twinning study programme rather than a joint study programme. Some higher education institutions are not planning joint study programmes with foreign universities, but are considering the option of developing joint programmes with other Lithuanian higher education institutions.

The Centre asked the higher education institutions **what**, in their opinion, **encourages the development of joint study programmes**. According to the higher education institutions, joint degree programmes give graduates better employment and career opportunities, and give teachers the opportunity to collaborate with specialists in their own or other fields and share experiences and ideas. These types of programmes are also more attractive and more competitive among students compared to regular programmes because the need for joint study programmes is emphasised by employers. In addition, joint programmes provide a greater opportunity to learn a foreign language and gain communication skills by studying in a multicultural environment and interning at foreign companies. Joint programmes are also unique for the fact that students are given the opportunity to acquire a broader education and earn two or more diplomas, awarded by Lithuanian and foreign institutions of higher education. The institutions are pleased with the positive feedback received from both employers and international partners about the need for the programme and its implementation. Cooperation with other institutions of higher education, which helps strengthen ties and increase the visibility and internationality of the respective institutions (prestige and reputation), was also mentioned, as was the opportunity to take advantage of EU mobility funding for joint degree programmes. Increasing competition among higher education institutions and the desire to attract students from both Lithuania and abroad also contributes to the development of programmes like this. It is

generally recognised that joint study programmes boost the quality of studies and provide clear benefits for students, teachers, the administration and the entire higher education institution in general, since knowledge, skills and other resources are pooled together.

Since not all of the higher education institutions offer joint study programmes, the questionnaire asked what the **mains reasons are for not implementing programmes of this type**. The higher education institutions feel that it is a complicated administrative process requiring significant investment and knowledge (coordination of actions and interests with partners, validation of the programme in each partner country, organisation of the work of an international joint study programme committee, monitoring the quality of studies in different countries, organisation of a joint thesis committee, and so on). The implementation of such programmes leads to additional costs related to cooperation with partners (significant funds are needed to ensure programme mobility and student housing, state financing is not sufficient, and so on). The lack of guarantees regarding continuity was also emphasised, since student and teacher mobility creates additional costs, so the viability of joint study programmes is highly dependent on external financing. Many higher education institutions mentioned problems related to the coordination of different national legislation to establish and implement programmes, as well as the fact that it is difficult to develop study programmes which meet the requirements of several higher education institutions without undermining the profitableness of existing programmes. According to the higher education institutions, another motive not to offer joint study programmes is that their locations are not attractive to foreign partners and students. Other higher education institutions feel that they are simply not ready to develop and implement joint programmes due to their lack of experience in this area, but they would like to in the future.

When asked **what are the main advantages of offering joint study programmes**, the higher education institutions often gave the same answers as to the question of what encourages the development of joint study programmes. According to representatives of higher education institutions, the main advantages of offering joint study programmes include experience-sharing and cooperation (where one higher education institution is unable to implement a high-level programme and prepare professionals with specific "niche" skills due to a lack of human or material resources, such as when an institution cannot afford all of the latest equipment, it is possible to cooperate and share available resources); the growing internationality of studies and the acquisition of intercultural competences (students have the opportunity to study at different institutions, to gain a broader range of knowledge and practical experience from the practices of different countries, and to acquire intercultural experience); the opportunity for teachers to expand their professional network (teachers cooperate in the fields of science and research); the opportunity for

both students and teachers to learn or improve their foreign language skills; interdisciplinary cooperation (e.g. social science and technology); better satisfaction of Lithuanian and international labour market needs; the opportunity for a higher education institution to attract more students and be more competitive in the range of study programmes; and added value for students, since they earn joint diplomas. Higher education institutions often indicated that student and teacher mobility is a big advantage, but this mobility is also listed as one of the difficulties that the institutions encounter in implementing joint study programmes.

Although the higher education institutions listed quite a few advantages related to offering joint study programmes, most admitted that they also **faced difficulties in developing joint study programmes**. In their replies, higher education institutions mentioned that the regulation of joint study programmes is particularly complicated, and the inconsistencies and differences in educational systems and legal framework hinder the development and implementation of joint study programmes. Quite a few higher education institutions have also noted that it is difficult to register a joint study programme due to the different registration procedures that currently exist in EU countries; furthermore, it is hard to coordinate the procedure for implementing the study process of higher education institutions in different countries as well as the organisation of internships. Higher education institutions lack systematic information about the development process for joint programmes as well as clarity of methodologies (joint study programme development and implementation is insufficiently defined); there is not enough written guidance and training on this topic, and in general there is not much national best practice in terms of joint study programmes. Difficulties have also been encountered in selecting partners for a joint study programme (differences that exist between partner countries on how a degree is conferred, ECTS study volumes, the professional qualification that is awarded, the volume of practical training in study programmes, the system for evaluating studies and so on). Furthermore, the search for "good" partners is also difficult – higher education institutions would prefer to conduct studies like these with reputable partners, but the latter are often reluctant to cooperate with Lithuanian institutions. Therefore, the development of such programmes is only possible through the use of personal networks (e.g. professors who have a wide circle of international contacts). In selecting partners for a joint study programme, it is particularly important to pay attention to the type of higher education institution, i.e. the higher education institution must have the right to offer studies of the same cycle and type. The Centre has come across cases where partners were selected which did not have the right or the capacity to carry out the same type and level of study programmes, or where programmes were validated in different countries as different types of study programmes which conferred different rights to the students who completed them. For these reasons, the graduates of these pro-

grammes can later be faced with difficulties if they decide to continue their studies or take up certain professional activities. Another factor of no less importance that makes it difficult to offer joint study programmes is inadequate funding, since the development and maintenance of these programmes as well as student and faculty mobility require additional resources. Most higher education schools acknowledged that starting a joint study programme is extremely time-consuming and coordination takes quite a while; good foreign language and academic planning and administration skills are also a requisite.

With regard to the **difficulties encountered in implementing joint study programmes**, the higher education institutions also mentioned that coordination and administration of programmes like these is complicated, since each institution has its own set procedures (academic record-keeping, academic information systems, assurance of quality monitoring and so on). In addition, the majority of joint study programmes were prepared within project framework, and the problem of funding arises once the project is over. The particularly high cost of carrying out joint study programmes requires institutions to search for additional forms of financing and hinders programme implementation (mobility costs for students – i.e. travel and subsistence expenses – limit opportunities for students from less affluent families to choose a joint study programme, and mobility is a mandatory element of joint study programmes). Evaluation of joint study programme costs, the standard of living in different countries, travel options and the socio-cultural environment leads to the conclusion that joint study programmes are much more expensive for both the institution and the student than other programmes. Another difficulty that was mentioned was the integration of foreign students and disagreements (!) between students from different countries (it is hard to ensure that students will adapt fast enough to the academic rules at different institutions due to the existence of cross-cultural differences, different levels of language knowledge and skills, as well as motivation). In both developing and implementing joint study programmes, it is difficult for higher education institutions to organise the study process and ensure equal academic quality at both of the cooperating institutions, since the institutions have different resources available, in terms of both learning materials and faculty competencies. It is also worth mentioning that in conducting joint study programmes, higher education institutions are faced with the dropout problem (in joint programmes, students experience more financial difficulties and other challenges, so the dropout rate is higher than usual in these programmes), a more complicated selection process (students apply from very different countries with very different educational and evaluations systems. In assessing the applicants, considerable professional help is required in order to convert grades to the Lithuanian system, calculate averages and so on), and difficulties coordinating deadlines and dates (the school year often differs at cooperating institutions, as does the examination timeta-

ble and deadlines for submitting papers, and this creates problems entering information in the university systems and issuing certificates to students).

According to the higher education institutions, in developing and implementing joint study programmes, **it is worth paying attention** to the academic regulations, national legislation and rules and options for academic funding in different countries. Close, constant interaction between academic and administrative staff (in the development and implementation phases) is also crucial. Another aspect of no less importance is the responsible selection of a partner institution, since the popularity of the joint study programme is also influenced by the country where the partner institution is located, as well as its opportunities (available intellectual and material resources) and vested interest in implementing such a programme. Attention should also be paid to detailed preparation of the agreement, distribution of responsibilities among the institutions, creation of a student mobility plan and provision of funding sources, the organisation of internships, the procedure for thesis defence in the committee, and academic quality assurance. According to the higher education institutions, it is important to formalise all of the aspects of implementation of the joint study programme in detail and in advance: to clarify academic, administrative and financial matters and involve more than one foreign country in the development of the joint study programme (e.g. develop a tripartite joint study programme), since the nature of a trilateral joint study programme creates greater internationality and makes the study programme more attractive to applicants; it also means that there is less dependence on a single foreign country.

The Centre asked the higher education institutions **what specific methodological or consultative support they would like for the development and implementation of joint study programmes**. It would be useful for the higher education institutions to receive more methodical recommendations and consultations on joint study programme development, validation, accreditation, implementation and funding. The institutions would also like to see methodology seminars for the development and initiation of joint study programmes, training for administrative staff and faculty, methodical help in converting grades, registering learning outcomes, preparing theses and conferring diplomas and diploma supplements, and in general more communication of best practice. According to the institutions, it would also be useful to become acquainted with the diversity of international educational programmes (franchise, twinning, etc.), including their advantages and disadvantages. This would help them evaluate their own capabilities and find the optimal option for their respective institutions.

The last part of the survey focused on general **observations**, **comments** and **suggestions** on joint study programmes that the higher education institutions might have. The higher education institutions expressed the following:

- There is a lack of clear legal regulation in the context of programme implementation, as well as regarding the conferral of joint degrees.

- In order to better align studies with the needs of the labour market and society while increasing international visibility of Lithuanian higher education institutions and the popularity of studies in Lithuania, opportunities to receive funding should be sought out for both the development of new study programmes and the realisation of existing ones.

- Since there are questions at the moment as to whether it makes sense to create new study programmes when there is open talk about their reduction, it is currently crucial that joint study programmes be developed with foreign higher education institutions, thus increasing internationality and the visibility of the respective institution abroad.

- Problems with the implementation of joint study programmes can arise when the study programme accreditation periods differ in the different partner countries. For this reason, it would be nice if there was a single joint study programme assessment committee which would prepare conclusions for all of the partner countries on the basis of which decisions would be made in all of the countries where higher education institutions are implementing the study programme.

- Efforts should be taken to achieve greater compatibility for the implementation and accreditation of legislation on joint study programmes across the EU.

- It would be nice to have flexibility in the regulation of joint study programmes in Lithuania, but also clarity, because today this type of study is regulated by the procedure for joint study programmes, which essentially only outlines one model – the joint degree – but does not touch upon double or triple degrees; there is a lack of methodological assistance regarding both the development of joint study programmes and the realisation of the course of studies. Information on preparation for things such as external evaluation is also insufficient.

- The general promotion and explanation of these types of programmes in Lithuania is too weak. Graduates do not understand the concept of the joint programme. Funding per student is inadequate – it should be considerably higher than for domestic study programmes.

- Diversity of forms of international mobility is worth discussing.

- The explanation of physical mobility and direct contact in the General Requirements of Joint Study Programmes is insufficient.

- In order to implement joint study programmes, additional human resources must be provided for to work with students in these study programmes (on issues regarding their studies as well as their adaptation and mentoring).

SUMMARY

Joint degree programmes have recently been attracting more and more attention from higher education institutions, students and employers because they provide the opportunity for students and teachers from different countries to study and teach in a different cultural and academic environments and to adopt best practices from different countries or higher education institutions; furthermore, they promote international inter-institutional cooperation and help expand employment opportunities for graduates. However, the implementation, quality assurance and recognition of joint study programmes is not an easy task, so efforts are being made in Europe to agree on common provisions for external quality assurance that are acceptable to everyone.

There a currently 42 joint study programmes registered and accredited in Lithuania, of which 88 per cent are carried out with foreign higher education institutions and 12 per cent are carried out between Lithuanian higher education institutions. The majority of joint study programmes – 79 per cent – are conducted at universities, while the rest – 21 per cent – are offered at colleges of higher education. As far as how the joint study programmes are distributed according to area, the majority of these programmes are registered in the area of social sciences (67 per cent); there is a small portion in the area of biomedicine (14 per cent), a few each in areas such as natural sciences (7 per cent) and technological sciences (7 per cent), and 1 each in the areas of humanities and arts. The Lithuanian higher education institutions currently offering joint study programmes cooperate with higher education institutions in 20 different countries, usually selecting partners from neighbouring countries.

Joint study programmes began being evaluated and accredited in our country in 2008, and since then, the number of programmes increased each year, reaching a high in 2014, when 20 new joint programmes were accredited. Of all the joint study programmes that are currently being offered, 6 underwent external evaluation by the end of 2015 (2 programmes were accredited for six years, 3 programmes were accredited for three years, and 1 programme was not accredited). Analysis of the joint study programme assessment findings leads to the conclusion that programmes of this type are needed and evaluated well by international experts; however, certain criticism was also expressed regarding implementation of these types of programmes. In general, the experts noticed problems with carrying out joint study programmes, such as the fact that compliance with legal requirements is not ensured, implementation and administration of these programmes is complicated, student mobility is insufficient and there is a high dropout rate.

In order to ascertain the attitude of higher education institutions towards the development and implementation of joint study programmes, the difficulties that are encountered, and other relevant aspects, the Centre sent a questionnaire to all of the higher education institutions offering studies in Lithuania

in January 2016. In summarising the data that was collected during the survey, the conclusion can be made that most of the institutions – both those which are currently conducting joint study programmes and those which do not offer this type of programme – are planning to do so in 2016 and beyond, since knowledge, skills and other resources are pooled together, thus allowing joint study programmes to provide greater opportunities for students, teachers, the administration and the entire institution of higher education in general. Although the higher education institutions listed quite a few advantages of offering joint study programmes, most admitted that they also faced difficulties in developing joint study programmes (complicated joint study programme regulation, differences in educational systems and legal framework, difficulties in coordinating the procedure for implementing the study process of higher education institutions in different countries, etc.). Since the development and implementation of joint study programmes is not simple, the higher education institutions feel that it is worth paying attention to the academic regulations, national legislation and rules and options for academic funding in different countries. Close, constant interaction between academic and administrative staff is also crucial.

ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY PROGRAMMES WHICH RECEIVED THE HIGHEST EVALUATION (FOR THE 2010-2015 PERIOD)

The study programmes which received the highest evaluation are the programmes which earned a total score of at least 22 points, and which were not given a score of one or two points in any given area of evaluation.

This analysis covers the 2010-2015 period and was compiled on the basis of the ongoing study programme evaluation carried out by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education.

GENERAL STATISTICAL DATA

A total of 69 study programmes were evaluated during the 2010-2015 period which earned a total score of 22 points or more. The number of study programmes which received the highest evaluation accounted for six per cent of all the study programmes that were evaluated during the 2010-2015 period (Fig. 1).

In terms of the type of study, first cycle university programmes were the most prominent, with 29 study programmes earning the highest evaluation; just slightly behind were second cycle programmes, with 27 receiving the highest evaluation. Also among the highest rated programmes were 12 college professional bachelor's study programmes and one integrated study programme (in the field of biomedical sciences). The second chart shows the breakdown of the study programmes which received the highest evaluation according to the type of study:

Of the 45[1] institutions of higher education operating in the Republic of Lithuania, 18 have study programmes that received the highest evaluation. Vilnius University had the

94 %

■ 22–24 points
□ 21 points or less

6 %
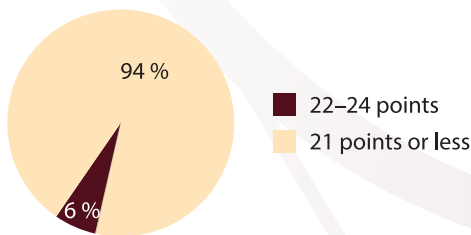
Fig. 1. Highest rated study programmes vs other study programmes, 2010-2015.

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[1] As of September 2016, there will be 44 higher education institutions operating in Lithuania.

most such studies programmes during the analysis period – 18. Of the remaining 17 institutions of higher education, data is distributed with a larger gap from Vilnius University: the institution with the next most number of study programmes which received the highest evaluation was ISM University of Management and Economics, with seven such study programmes. Among these 17 higher education institutions, a more even distribution in the number of study programmes which received the highest evaluation can be observed (Fig. 3).

In terms of the study area, the most programmes that earned 22-24 evaluation points were in the social sciences – 30 programmes. This is significantly more than in other study areas: biomedical sciences and the arts each had 11 study programmes which received the highest evaluation. In other study areas – technological sciences and physical sciences – there were even fewer study programmes

Fig. 2. Breakdown of the study programmes which received the highest evaluation, by type of study.
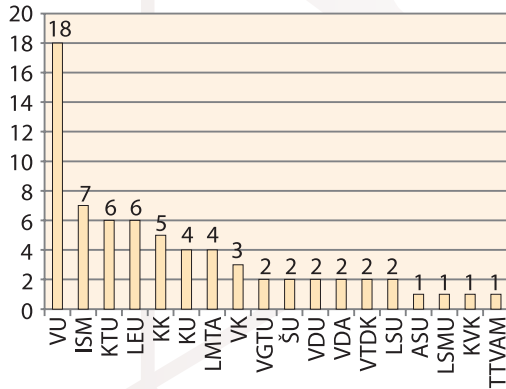
Fig. 3. Number of study programmes that received the highest evaluation, by higher education institution.[2]

which received the highest evaluation, with nine and five respectively. The fewest programmes that earned 22-24 evaluation points were in the humanities – three programmes (see Fig. 4). However, the most study programmes overall are offered and evaluated in social sciences, which is why the number

[2] Higher education institution abbreviations:

ASU – Aleksandras Stulginskis University
ISM – International School of
    Management
KK – Kaunas College
KTU – Kaunas University of Technology
KU – Klaipėda University
KVK – Klaipėda State College
LEU – Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences
LMTA – Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre
LSMU – Lithuanian University of Health Sciences

LSU – Lithuanian Sports University
ŠU – Šiauliai University
VK – Vilnius College
TTVAM – International School of Law and Business
VGTU – Vilnius Gediminas Technical University
VDA – Vilnius Academy of Arts
VTDK – Vilnius College of Technologies and Design
VDU – Vytautas Magnus University
VU – Vilnius University

of study programmes in this study area is higher compared with programmes in other areas.

Comparing these figures with the total number of programmes in each study area that were evaluated in 2010-2015, **the portion of study programmes which received the highest evaluation in different study areas was under nine per cent**. Programmes which received 21 evaluation points or less (with seven as the lowest score) made up the majority of the study programmes that were evaluated (Fig. 5).
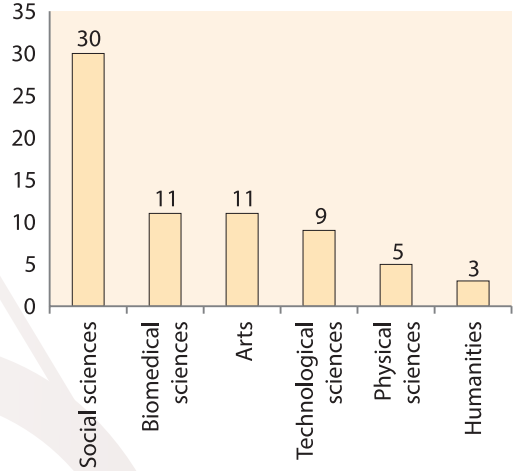
Fig. 4. Number of study programmes which received the highest evaluation, by study area.

As can be seen from the data presented in the diagram, the most study programmes which received the highest evaluation are in the area of biomedical sciences and the fewest are in the humanities. However, it should be noted that the sample of study programmes which received the highest evaluation – from 22 to 24 points – is not homogeneous internally. **Of the 69 study programmes that received the highest evaluation, the majority – 54 programmes – received an overall assessment of 22 points**. Another 10 programmes received an overall assessment of 23 points. This represents, respectively, 78.3
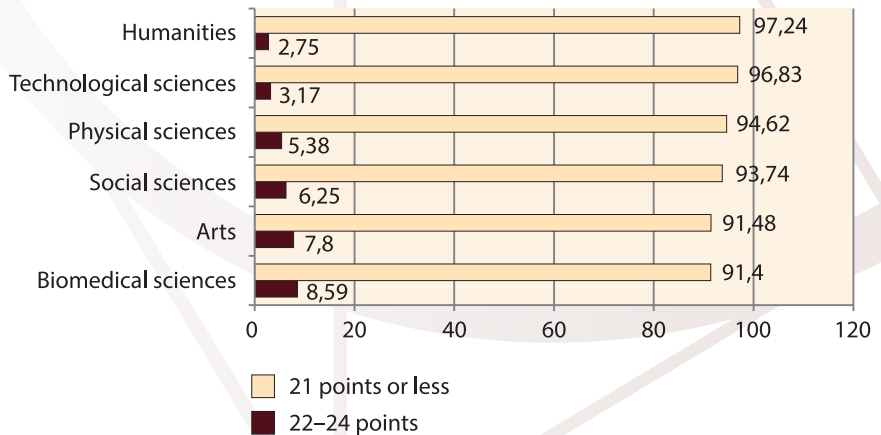
Fig. 5. Comparison of study programmes which received the highest evaluation vs study programmes which received lower evaluations (21 points or less).

per cent and 14.5 per cent of all the study programmes which received the highest evaluation. **The highest possible evaluation – 24 points – was awarded to five study programmes; this represents 7.2 per cent of all the study programmes which received the highest evaluation** (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6. Distribution of study programmes which received the highest evaluation within the sample.

Further evaluation of the distribution of 22-24 points within each study area revealed that **some study areas do not have study programmes that have earned 24 overall evaluation points**. **Study programmes which received an overall evaluation of 22-23 points are indeed predominant.** The distribution of the data sample for study programmes which received the highest evaluation among all of the study areas is presented in Figure 7.

The five programmes that earned the maximum overall number of points – 24 – were evaluated in 2010, 2013 and 2014. One of these study programmes is in the area of technological sciences, one is in the humanities, and three are in social sciences. In terms of the type of study, two are bachelor's study programmes, two are master's study programmes, and one is a professional bachelor's study programme. Full information about these programmes is presented in the table below.

Table 1. Study programmes with an overall evaluation of 24 points.

Study area	Study field	Study programme (state code)	Type of study	Institution	Year of evaluation
Techno-logical sciences	General Engineering	*Geodesy* (653H14003)	PB	Kaunas College	2013
Social Sciences	Pedagogy	*Music Pedagogy* (612X14003)	BA	Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences	2010
	Education sciences	*Educational Technology* (621X20003)	MA	Kaunas University of Technology	2014
	Manage-ment	*Management* (621N20001)	MA	International School of Management	2013
Humanities	Regional cultural studies	*Asian Studies* (612U71001)	BA	Vilnius University	2013

Fig. 7. Distribution of 22-24 point evaluations within each study area.
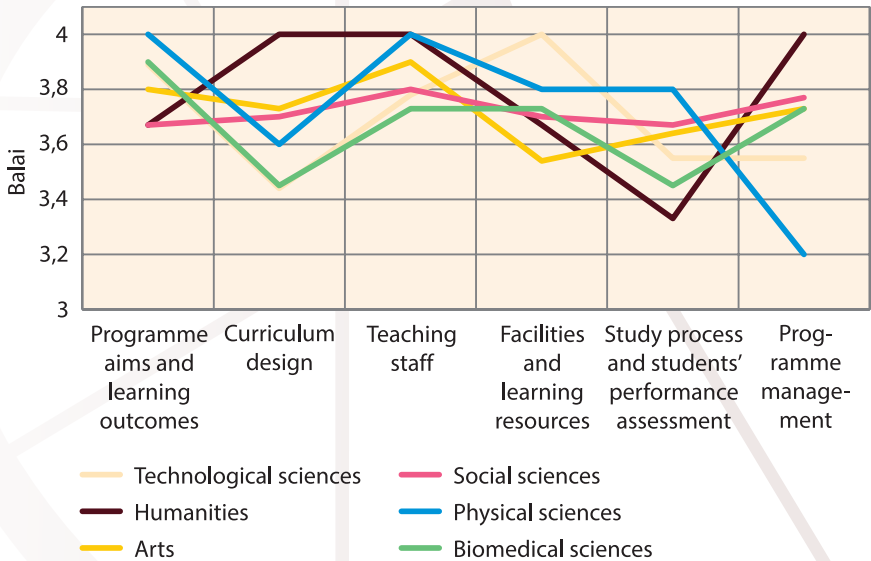
Fig. 8. Distribution of average scores by area of evaluation among study areas.

Analysis of the data according to the areas of evaluation[3] shows that the overall average performance of the study programmes in all of the study areas is spread between the lowest (3.57 – Study process and students' per-

[3] Six areas of evaluation are singled out:

1. Programme aims and learning outcomes
2. Curriculum design
3. Teaching staff
4. Facilities and learning resources
5. Study process and students' performance assessment
6. Programme management

Each of these areas is evaluated on a scale of 1 to 4 (1 – unsatisfactory, i.e. there are essential shortcomings that must be eliminated; 4 – very good, i.e. the field is exceptionally good).

formance assessment) and the highest (3.87 – Teaching staff) scores. **Upon breaking down the averages for the areas of evaluation according to individual study areas**, it was found that the averages range from 3.2 to 4 points (Fig. 8).

A greater difference between study areas can be observed in the evaluation of study programme management: programmes in the area of physical sciences earned an average of 3.2 points in this area of evaluation, while the average in the humanities is 4 points. Higher rates can be observed in the area of staff evaluation.

The qualitative analysis of the most characteristic features of the study programmes that received the highest evaluation was constructed: 1) by including all six evaluation areas of study programme, and 2) by combing all study areas: biomedicine, natural sciences, humanities, social sciences, technology and arts.

OVERVIEW OF THE MOST CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF THE STUDY PROGRAMMES THAT WERE GIVEN 22-24 EVALUATION POINTS

In order to determine the most characteristic features of the study programmes that received the highest evaluation, a qualitative analysis of the content of expert evaluation reports was carried out. The analysis is broken down according to the areas of evaluation for the study programmes combining all of the study areas, as no significant difference was found between the various study areas (i.e. the specifics of the study areas did not have any significant impact on the evaluation of the study programmes). In analysing the expert evaluation reports, efforts were made to identity the outstanding features of the evaluated study programmes which determined the choice of the highest scores for the areas of evaluation. In order to identify these features, **only the areas of evaluation that received four points were analysed**.

Upon performing a qualitative analysis of the study programmes that received the highest evaluation, the two main traits of the evaluation reports were established, which also determined the content of this analysis:

First, it was found that there are two different perspectives in interpreting what, in a specific evaluated study programme, can be considered to be a very good or exceptional feature, i.e. what corresponds to a score of four in the area of evaluation – *very good (the area is exceptional)*. Some experts were inclined to interpret the concept of exceptionality as complete compliance of the study programmes with legislation. In their reports, these experts mentioned that the study programme 1) completely fulfils the requirements of national legislation, and 2) positively responds to the criteria of the specific area of evaluation.

Other experts, by contrast, were inclined to see compliance of the evaluated studies programmes with regulatory requirements as the norm rather than something exceptional. These experts commended the programmes which not only complied with the formal requirements for study programmes, but also exceeded them in terms of quality assurance and improvement. Upon establishing precisely these facts during the evaluation, the experts tended to regard them as exceptionally good programme features worthy of the highest evaluation of four points.

Second, in analysing the evaluation reports, it was noticed that there was sometimes a lack of arguments to support the choice of the highest score, i.e. it was not always clear why the experts decided to grant four points for the specific field of evaluation. Furthermore, alongside the description of the positive features of the study programme (in the field of evaluation), some of the experts also mentioned shortcomings and provided observations regarding the quality of the programme in their reports, but still gave the highest possible score for this evaluation area.

It might be assumed that nuances like these depend not only and not so much on the outstanding features of study programmes that were noted in an objective manner, but rather – on the experts' personal subjective experience, writing style and writing skills, as well as on their experience evaluating study programmes at other quality assurance agencies according to the standards and methodology of these agencies. Experts evaluate programmes according to different assessment perspectives and traditions. However, there were nevertheless a considerable number of evaluation reports in which a high programme evaluation was substantiated in an analytical and systematic manner, providing a detailed description and analysis of the programme's quality parameters.

1. Programme aims and expected learning outcomes

The study programmes which received the highest evaluation in this area first and foremost stood out for clear and very well formulated aims and expected learning outcomes directly related to the vision and mission of the higher education institution. The aims and outcomes are built according to a holistic principle; they fully meet the academic field of the faculty and organically suit the mission and vision of the entire higher education institution.

The programme aims reflect comprehensively the complexity of the discipline being studied at both a theoretical and practical level, and are perfectly in tune with the expected learning outcomes, implementing them in a coherent and comprehensive manner. The aims and learning outcomes are based on an interdisciplinary approach, which reflects the latest trends in science and in practice, and is not limited to a narrow approach of a single discipline. For example, the aims and expected learning outcomes of some study pro-

grammes in the arts received the highest evaluation because in addition to the arts, they also combine historical, social and political perspectives. The experts commended the programmes where the study aims were clearly divided into the following categories: knowledge and its application, research skills, special abilities, and social and personal skills and competences. The convergence of study programme aims, expected learning outcomes and study subjects are presented in fine detail in the self-evaluation report – they are logical and complete. Special note was taken of the prospect for adequately preparing graduates for studies in the next cycle – master's or doctoral studies.

Another irrefutable factor which predetermined the highest score for this area was a (self-)critical approach among the study programme organisers towards the soundness of their programme aims and expected outcomes, as well as their correspondence to labour market needs and even the socio-cultural context of the country. The need for study programmes is based on labour market research. Research is conducted periodically in order to obtain the most recent data and update the aims and expected learning outcomes of the programmes accordingly. The ability to take the socio-cultural context into account, an understanding of ethical challenges, and strong moral development were noted as an additional strong point for programmes aims and expected learning outcomes.

The experts observed that a less formal and more (self-)reflective and exploratory method to the preparation of the entire self-analysis discloses a more responsible and mature approach among the organisers of programmes programmes – teachers and administrative staff – towards the quality of the study programmes. The experts also mentioned that a high-quality, detailed and unambiguous description of the aims and expected learning outcomes for the study programmes is one of the key quality criteria in conducting an expert evaluation of a study programme. The experts allot a considerable amount of time to becoming familiar with the self-assessment reports, so the study programmes where the description of the aims, learning outcomes and connections thereof was clear, comprehensive and coherent were evaluated very highly.

The experts favourably evaluated the opportunity for social partners (employers) to contribute to the formulation of the aims and expected learning outcomes for the study programmes – not just formally, but actually involving them in the process. Programmes where not one, but several social partners (employers) participate in the formation of aims and expected learning outcomes were particularly commended.

2. Curriculum

In evaluating the area of programme structure (curriculum), the experts emphasised internationality and interdisciplinary of the structure. In their opinion, higher education institutions should first and foremost promote inter-disciplinary projects, since the latest scientific development trends are focused on multi- and interdisciplinary research development. Programmes where this challenge is accepted and the curriculum is constructed by applying an inter-disciplinary dimension demonstrate a higher level of integration and more firmly ensure their sustainability in the context of continuous change. Second-ly, the experts gave the highest score for this area when, in order to improve study programme internationality, some subjects or even modules taught in English, and subjects or individual lectures (topics) taught by visiting profes-sors are incorporated into the integral whole. Some programmes in the field of management were particularly commended for their correspondence to analogous Western university study programme structures, which even more firmly substantiated their conformity to the corresponding European Qualifi-cations Framework level.

Other advantages of this evaluative field mentioned by the experts sound a bit more conservative and are limited to conformity of the programme struc-ture with legal regulations and the normal study programme quality manage-ment process: complete mutual coordination of study programme outcomes and the curriculum of individual subjects; study subject volume which is com-pletely sufficient in order to achieve the study aims, and the rational and expe-dient use of subject credits; and logical, consistent and progressive allocation of subjects, beginning with theoretical and methodological subjects designed to develop general competencies, then introducing subjects designed to de-velop key professional competencies in later semesters, and finishing with the most complicated subjects, which are usually oriented towards practical work and/or research and are designed to form special professional competences.

The study programmes that were evaluated very well stand out for a good balance of theoretical and practical subjects, integrity of science and practice, and inclusion of the latest scientific and technological achievements in the cur-riculum. Furthermore, the reading lists for the subjects are constantly being updated to include the latest and most relevant publications.

3. Staff

This area of evaluation received the relatively highest average score of all the areas. In terms of the most characteristic features of this area, the professional-ism and competence of the teaching staff received considerable compliment. The experts noted that the teachers are both excellent scientists in their field as well as very good educators. The teachers' participation in professional activities

was also evaluated highly. In general, some experts expressed a certain sense of surprise and admiration for the study programme teachers for their exceptional ability to combine three key factors in their activities: scientific research, pedagogical practice and practical (and sometime even social) activities.

The experts noted that the staff assembled for implementation of the programme not only meets legal requirements, but exceeds them, and their qualification is adequate to achieve the planned learning outcomes. The scholarly activities of the teachers are meaningful and related to the subjects taught. The teachers' integration of their research results into the subjects they teach was evaluated highly by the experts. A very good balance between research activities, teaching workload and time allotted for professional development allow the teachers to actively engage in scholarly activity.

The practical work and experience of the majority of teachers is directly related to the subjects they teach. The experts noticed that in order to maintain high study programme quality, it is very important for teachers to participate in practical work in the labour market, integrating the knowledge acquired there into the academic sphere.

The experts also took into account the opportunity for teachers to acquire and/or develop their pedagogical competencies. The improvement of teachers' qualifications as educators is an integral part of their academic career which has the potential to significantly improve the quality of the study programmes. The experts also noticed that evaluation of educational achievements and awards for the best teachers of the year are an excellent practice in higher education institutions.

According to the experts, one of the strongest factors that determine the quality of study programmes is the ability of the teachers to maintain balance in combining high-level research activities in international teams with their teaching activities, incorporating advanced teaching methods and technology as well as programme development. A relatively high proportion of teachers participate in international exchange programmes. The teachers are members of professional associations and communities and have a close relationship with the world of practical work. In addition, the teachers prepare and publish scientific articles, work on improving their skills and engage in professional-social activities. In the opinion of some experts, these are truly overwhelming staff achievements. The teachers are not only active in their own subject field. Their interests also include a wide range of related sister disciplines. The experts noted that the broad field of faculty interests provides all the prerequisites for ensuring integrity in the structure of the programme and greater study programme sustainability in the future, as well as for expanding the range of applied teaching techniques (for example, the competences of teachers in the field of social science education also include sociological knowledge, semiotics, aesthetics, phenomenology, social theory and policy, civic movements and human rights, intercultural education theory, education reform, as well as technology, media and bioethics).

4. Material resources

In evaluating material resources of the study programmes, some experts tended to emphasise whether they were sufficient to achieve the learning outcomes – if the premises provided for studies were adequate and sufficient; if the equipment necessary for the study programme was appropriate enough; and if the methodical resources were accessible and regularly updated. Meanwhile, other experts noted the efforts of the higher education institutions not only to ensure the minimum material resources needed to achieve the expected learning outcomes, but also to do this in the best and most convenient way, by improving available resources as much as possible and investing in their development. According to this perspective, material resources should facilitate, promote and strengthen implementation of the study programme's aims and learning outcomes. For example, not only is the environment adequate – it is also aesthetically appealing and promotes a positive attitude and creativity; the premises are spacious, modern, well maintained, regularly repaired, well-ventilated and well-heated during the cold season.

In addition to the adequacy of resources, the experts also evaluated how their availability is ensured in the study programmes as well as the conditions to utilise them. For example, whether the environment is adapted for people with special needs, and whether means are widely used for students with various learning requirements, when some need more visual material while audio contact is important for others. It is the application of measures like these that creates an environment which cultivates equal opportunities for all students. Students should be guaranteed access to equipment and other resources required by their studies at the time that is most convenient for them – such as in the evening, on weekends, or for a longer period of time – and in the manner that is most convenient – for example, being able to take resources home is particularly pertinent for students in some technology programmes (especially in those cases when the equipment is quite expensive and students are not able to buy it themselves). In their reports on study programmes in the field of technology, the experts tended to emphasise compliance of learning equipment with standards as well as its innovation and quality. The more innovative the equipment available to students enrolled in the programme was, the better the material resources were evaluated.

Libraries should be equipped with individual workplaces, and have small enclosed spaces where students can work without interference. Library hours are extended during exam sessions, and the libraries of other departments of the higher education institution are freely accessible. Wireless internet is available from various premises of the higher education institution, as well as in the dormitories. A virtual learning environment – especially the Moodle system – is used in a purposive and rational manner.

5. The course of studies and student assessment

Similar to the evaluation of material resources, some experts, in analysing the course of studies and student assessment, tended to put more stress on the things that not only meet the minimum requirements in this area and adequately contribute to achieving the expected learning outcomes, but also motivate students to engage in their studies and self-learning, improve their adaptation during the first year of studies, and contribute to the formation of self-identification with the selected profession and a sense of community. According to the experts, this helps achieve learning outcomes in the best manner, but also has great potential in developing a student's personality and even his or her social-civic position.

The experts commended the very well-developed academic support system for students. The students have the opportunity to make extensive use of the advantages of Moodle and other virtual learning systems; they are provided with relevant information about their assessment deadlines, schedules and teacher hours. The subjects are distributed in the study schedules evenly, providing the students with a relatively consistent workload over the course of the semesters. When students experience academic difficulty, teacher support is freely accessible. Students of Master level are given the opportunity to combine studies with a job related to their studies. Individual studies are organised for these students, as well as for those who have special needs or have children to look after. International student exchange programmes are organised very well – there is a system which provides information about opportunities to study at foreign higher education institutions, and transfer of credits acquired abroad is guaranteed for students upon their return. Students are constantly motivated to take advantage of international student exchange programmes. One of the main services that students can expect from a well-functioning support system are career centres where assistance is provided to students in becoming employed, and further monitoring of their professional career takes place. All of these measures promote student motivation and protect study programmes from higher drop-out rates.

In analysing the students evaluation system, the experts favourably assessed well-functioning feedback systems, based on which detailed individual and group discussions on typical mistakes in papers are organised at the end of each semester, and comprehensive examination assessments are presented. According to the experts, this is one of the most important factors for increasing motivation among students to strive for even better learning outcomes.

As an additional factor that encourages student motivation, the experts singled out the promotion of student participation in applied research, either with their teachers or at companies, as well as support from the department in publishing their final research results in scientific periodicals. In terms of relevance to practical development activities, the experts did not pass up on the

chance to describe in their reports (mainly in the fields of arts and humanities) that students have an excellent opportunity to meet and interact with their study programme social partners/employers, arrange professional training at their companies, and even become employed there once they complete their studies.

Another motivating factor that makes it possible to better achieve the aims of the studies is various social support provided to students. The experts mentioned well-developed psychological counselling services: stress management and conflict management courses, self-awareness classes and self-help support group meetings. The opportunity to enrich one's cultural life and participate in the creative activities of the higher education institution – attend theatre clubs, choirs, literary evenings, concerts and so on – was also noted by the experts and evaluated as a strong and positive means of student support.

6. Programme management

The most characteristic features of the programmes that received the highest evaluation in the field of programme management combine an entire complex of well-functioning and developed measures aimed at the continuous improvement of study programmes by uniting all of stakeholders of this process. Firstly, the higher education institution bases its quality policy on a collection of certain formal documents: the study programme quality guide, rules, code of ethics (which regulates things such as the policy on academic ethics and plagiarism and the rights and responsibilities of students and teachers), descriptions of internal quality assessment procedures, descriptions of training practice organisation and evaluation procedures, etc. Secondly, a well-developed structure exists where each constituent element is assigned, according to the principle of subsidiarity, with a respective role acting in the corresponding levels of the structure – the study programme committee, the department, the study quality division (committee) or the academic council. A systematic approach is followed which combines opportunities to solve problems in a decentralised manner and avoid the tactic of a single, random and episodic response to a momentary situation. All of the quality management links operate harmoniously, as a unified mechanism, and react to situations in an operative and flexible manner. Communication between the links is transparent; none of them are burdened with unnecessary bureaucracy and none of the actions that they carry out are an end in itself – rather, they are based on principles of quality management and focused on the implementation of a specific task in an effort to improve programme quality. The experts evaluated programme management systems like this very highly and called them impressive.

In singling out more specific positive features in the field of programme management, the experts mentioned that the study programme aims and expected learning outcomes are reviewed on an annual basis by faculty boards

and study programme committees, including social partners, student representatives and graduates in the meetings. Quantitative and qualitative data are collected by way of surveys, and round-table discussions and consultations take place. In assessing the programme at the end of each semester, students and teachers are asked to submit their views on teaching methods, the level of difficulty of subject content and its consistency with the programme aims, and the need for innovations. Later, the students and teachers receive feedback about their impact on programme development. As a rule, a high level of student participation in surveys is characteristic of highly rated programmes; this may indicate their vested interest in participating in the programme management process and a high level of motivation to improve the study programmes. Further programme development actions are carefully planned by allocating time and responsible departments and individuals.

The higher education institution's study quality centre or other divisions (career centres) conduct research on the employability and professional careers of graduates as well as the opinion of employers on how well graduates' knowledge and skills meet labour market needs, including this data in the general programme management system. Monitoring of the labour market is conducted on a regular basis in order to clarify the expectations of employers and ensure that study programmes are updated in accordance with the most pertinent needs of the labour market. Close contact is kept with graduates; their opinion about the study programmes is meaningful and acts as a basis in improving the programmes.

The experts tended to give very high scores for any actions, concepts and initiatives which promote more intensive relationships with stakeholders in the wider perspective as well. For example, cases where the principle of comparison with analogous programmes from other – often prestigious – foreign universities is used for study programme improvement. Another example, in an effort to ensure sustainability in the future, a closer mutual relationship between faculty members is promoted and teams are formed from members of the department to achieve a common goal. In general, the experts welcomed any strong strategy for the development of a vision for the future which facilitates the positive evolution of study programmes.

SUMMARY

The results of the analysis of the study programmes that were evaluated in 2010-2015 reveal that the study programmes which received the highest evaluation (22-24 points) made up a relatively small portion of all of the study programmes that were evaluated during this period – there were 69 such programmes in all, or six per cent of the total. The majority of these study programmes are in university first or second cycle courses of study. In terms of the

quantity of study programmes which were given 22-24 points, Vilnius University (with 18 such study programmes) has a lead on the other higher education institutions. In separate areas of study (technological, biomedical, social and physical sciences, humanities, and the arts), the number of programmes which received the highest score made up less than nine per cent of the total number of study programmes that were evaluated in each area: compared to the total number of study programmes that were evaluated, the number of these programmes was the highest in the area of biomedical sciences – 8.59 per cent; the lowest percentage compared to the total number of study programmes that were evaluated was in the humanities – 2.75 per cent. However, it should be noted that the sample of the study programmes which received the highest evaluation is not internally homogeneous– of the 69 study programmes, 54 (78.3 per cent) received 22 points, 10 (14.5 per cent) earned 23 points, and only five (7.2 per cent) of the study programmes were given 24 points.

Analysis of the data according to the areas of evaluation of study programme reveals that the overall average scores for study programmes in all of the study areas were distributed between 3.87 points (Teaching staff) and 3.57 (Study process and students' performance assessment). Upon breaking down the averages for the areas of evaluation according to study area, no difference of any significance was found between them.

In an effort to determine the most characteristic features of the study programmes which received the highest evaluation, a qualitative content analysis of the experts' reports on study programmes was carried out. Only the areas of evaluation that received four points were analysed. The analysis revealed that in assessing what, in the specific area of evaluation, is exceptionally good and worth four points, two different perspectives were prevalent. According to the first perspective, study programmes were interpreted as distinct for complete fulfilment of and compliance with legal requirements and the evaluative criteria of the specific area of evaluation. The second perspective interprets the compliance of study programmes with legal requirements more as the norm rather than exceptional features of the study programmes worth four points. According to this perspective, only the study programme features which exceed the minimum requirements are exceptional and worth the highest number of points. The following generalised examples of exceptional programme features can be singled out: the programme aims and learning outcomes reflect the complexity of the discipline on both theoretical and practical levels, are based on a multidisciplinary approach and unite the perspectives of adjacent disciplines, and fully meet the needs of the labour market and the socio-cultural context of the country; the learning outcomes and the content of different subjects are completely coordinated, and the programme structure is constructed in an effort to achieve high theoretical and practical integrity while incorporating the latest scientific and technological achievements; in addition to being active scholars in their respective fields, the teachers are

also highly qualified educators, experienced practitioners, and even public figures; the student information system functions effectively and students are provided with broad opportunities to be active in the higher education institution's community; material resources are not only completely sufficient, but also promote, facilitate and optimise the ways to achieve the best learning outcomes; and the study programme management is effective and systematic, involving all interested parties in the improvement of study programme quality and focusing on broader inter-institutional cooperation and closer ties with the stakeholders in order to ensure sustainability of the study programme in the future.

REVIEW OF EXCELLENCE AT THE LEVEL OF INDIVIDUAL SUBJECT DISCIPLINES

THE CONCEPT OF EXCELLENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The concept of *excellence* is no longer a new phenomenon in higher education. This concept is used to define something that is exceptionally good, exceeds the defined standards, or can be achieved by few. At the same time it is an aspiration and goal leading towards continuous improvement. Most of researchers, who have studied the concept of *excellence*, acknowledge that there are many various concepts of *excellence*, since this concept is multivalued, contextual, and ever-changing, it is agreed upon and revised in the light of personal and public needs prevailing during a certain period. In higher education *excellence* means a lot of things depending on the context and time, therefore, it is complicated, or maybe even impossible, to find one universal meaning. Moreover, something that is considered to be exceptionally good or unattainable today, tomorrow can be a standard or a rule. Therefore, we should search for a broader, universal concept of *excellence*, which would lead us towards the aspiration of standard exceeding quality in everything that we do.

EXCELLENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF LITHUANIA

The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) is a quality assurance agency in Lithuania with a mission to foster the quality of higher education in the country and the culture of quality, thus contributing to the improvement of the quality of higher education in Lithuania. The branches of activities of SKVC, as a quality assurance agency, include the external assessment and accreditation of institutions and study programmes, follow-up activities and consultancy. The teams of international (predominantly) or local experts are invited for the external assessment of higher education institutions and study programmes.

Though quality assurance in higher education has always been one of the priorities of SKVC since its establishment, discussions about *excellence* in Lithuania are relatively new. Currently we undergo a testing phase and search for the manifestations of *excellence* in higher education in Lithuania. One of the methods is the spread of the concept of *excellence* at the events for sharing good practice. Another method is the examples of good practice or *excellence*

in higher education institution's activities or study programmes. Therefore, SKVC started collecting and analysing the examples of *excellence* in higher education. This review covers the analysis of the examples of *excellence* performed with reference to the international expert findings and recommendations given therein.

INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT: COLLECTING THE EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

During the course of external assessment of the activities of higher education institutions, which took place in 2011–2015, the international expert teams assessed all higher education institutions operating in the Republic of Lithuania and presented recommendations for the improvement of their activities. Higher education institutions were assessed by experts according to the following four areas under assessment: (1) strategic management, (2) academic studies and life-long learning, (3) research and/or art activities, (4) impact on regional and national development. One of the characteristics of assessing the activities of higher education institutions is the examples of good practice distinguished by the experts. Following the assessment of higher education institutions in Lithuania, the experts have identified exceptionally good examples:

- When assessing the **strategic management** area, the experts commended the cooperation of many higher education institutions with social partners, their support in framing strategic plans, and involvement in the internal strategic planning processes.

- In the **academic studies and life-long learning** area the experts distinguished strong, practice-oriented study programmes adjusted according to the ever-changing market, which determine a high student employment level, as well as good relations with students and graduates that are cherished.

- When assessing the **research and/or art activities**, especially high achievements at a global level in the individual research and/or art activities were observed in the isolated cases.

- When analysing the **impact on regional and national** development, the experts observed an active, consistent, and systematic cooperation with various social partners as well as significant impact on them. Final theses of students meet regional and national needs and are based on the interests of business enterprises.

ASSESSMENT OF STUDY PROGRAMMES: EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

The assessment of study programmes takes place by analysing the following six areas under assessment: (1) programme aims and expected learning outcomes, (2) curriculum design, (3) teaching staff, (4) facilities and learning resources, (5) study process and its assessment, (6) programme management.

It is established in the procedure for assessing and accrediting the study programmes that every single programme is assessed according to the aforementioned 6 areas under assessment, whereof each is assessed on a 4-point scale. In this scale 4 points is the highest possible grade. It is given to those areas under assessment, which are **exceptional**. This scale does not have a broader description; therefore, the assessment by giving this grade shall be left for the expert decision.

Since 2014 a new column – the examples of *excellence* – appeared on the Centre's own initiative in the structure of the outcomes near the areas under assessment. The experts are asked to identify the exceptionally good specifics of performance of the programme, which stand out among most of programmes, and to describe them. A qualitative content analysis of the assessment findings was performed in order to identify the most characteristic attributes of study programmes with the examples of *excellence* specified. The analysis was performed with reference to the study programme areas under assessment in relation to the study areas. When analysing the expert assessment findings, all examples of *excellence*, as indicated by the experts, were studied and accordingly attributed to the area under assessment.

Since 2014–2015[1], with the help of the international expert teams, SKVC assessed 335 study programmes, where 29 percent of the expert findings included the examples of *excellence*.

According to the type and cycle, most of the examples of *excellence* (43 percent) were revealed by the experts in professional Bachelor's study programmes, slightly less (33 percent) in the Bachelor's study programmes and the rest (24 percent) in the Master's study programmes.

Most of study programmes, in which the experts distinguished the examples of *excellence*, are performed in the area of social sciences (42 percent). A similar number of such examples were distinguished in the areas of technological sciences (25 percent) and arts (20 percent). The rest of programmes containing the examples of *excellence* are performed in the areas of humanities (5 percent), physical (5 percent), and biomedical sciences (3 percent). Such distribution interrelates with the total number of programmes registered in these areas in Lithuania: most of study programmes are performed in the area

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[1] This review does not cover the study programmes assessed in 2016, since their assessment procedures have not been finished yet.

of social sciences (45 percent), as a result whereof the number of study programmes in this area may be higher as compared to the programmes in other study areas. Programmes performed in other study areas are distributed as follows: technological sciences (21 percent), biomedical sciences (10 percent), humanities and arts (9 percent each), and physical sciences (6 percent).

Most of the examples of *excellence* were identified in the study programmes performed by the state higher education institutions in Lithuania – 71 percent (22 higher education institutions, 85 study programmes) and the rest – 29 percent (9 higher education institutions, 11 study programmes) – by non-state higher education institutions.[2]

The examples of *excellence* indicated by the experts by the area under assessment have distributed as follows: 27 percent of such examples were distinguished under the study process and its assessment, 23 percent – under the material base, 20 percent – under the programme management, 16 percent – during the assessment of teachers, 8 percent of cases were distinguished in the curriculum design, and the remaining 6 percent – under the programme aims and expected learning outcomes.

During the performance of qualitative analysis of the examples of *excellence* it was observed that some of the experts leaned towards interpreting the concept of distinction of the study programme as an unquestioning compliance with legislation. Other experts, alternatively, leaned towards seeing the compliance of the examples of *excellence* with the requirements of legal acts as a rule, not something of exceptional nature. Such experts gave credit not only to something that met formal requirements for the study programmes, but also to something that exceeded them. Having identified such facts during the course of assessment, the experts leaned to treat them as the examples of *excellence*.

Where analysing the examples of *excellence* in the expert findings, it was observed that a more detailed explanation is missing here and there as to why one area or the other is indicated as exceptionally good. Moreover, certain programme areas under assessment with the examples of *excellence* distinguished also cover the shortcomings and comments as to the improvement of quality of the programme.

The generalization of the results of the analysis of the examples of *excellence* in the study programmes and the examples of good practice of the institutional assessment witnesses that they concur in most cases. This leads to the conclusion that despite the performance of individual assessments of higher education institutions and study programmes, similar tendencies are observed during the course of such assessment.

Below is given a brief analysis of the examples of *excellence* by the study programme areas under assessment.

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[2] There are two types of higher education institutions – state and non-state institutions – operating in Lithuania.

Area under assessment	Examples of *excellence*
Programme aims and expected learning outcomes	• Aims and learning outcomes meet the academic, professional, public, and labour market needs; • Programme aims and learning outcomes are clearly defined, duly framed, interrelated with the learning outcomes, and reflect the interdisciplinary view; • The processes of framing and reviewing of programme aims and learning outcomes involve social partners as well as consideration of their opinion.
Curriculum design	• Present and future needs of the labour market were taken into account during the programme framing process; • The programme itself is perfectly balanced and framed: theory is combined with practice, general subjects – with the subjects of the study field, which contributes to the successful employment of students after graduation; • Some subjects are taught in English; • Various specializations are offered.
Teaching staff	• Teachers are highly qualified professionals in their field, who are actively engaged in their scholarly endeavour, demonstrate high scientific achievements, publish scientific reports in the international magazines, and prepare textbooks or teaching aids for students; • Conditions are provided for the professional development of teachers: improvement of professional and pedagogical competencies; • Significant attention is devoted to the introduction of new teachers to the programme; • Recognized teachers from foreign countries and local teachers at the international level enhance the internationalisation of programmes and offer the latest innovative teaching methods; • Devoted and highly motivated teachers teaching in foreign languages and having experience at the international level; • The efforts of higher education institution to pull in and preserve the top level personnel as well as recognized scientists and teachers.
Facilities and learning resources	• Excellent material resources, which meet high standards and are furnished with the state-of-the-art equipment required for work (buildings, classrooms, workshops, and the overall infrastructure); • High-level, well-equipped modern libraries and logins to the electronic databases; • Excellent student practical training base: all necessary equipment, all conditions for students to have substantial practical training using the equipment of employers and social partners; • State-of-the-art laboratories and equipment, which meet the international standards; • Equipment tailored to the needs of students with disabilities.

Area under assessment	Examples of *excellence*
Study process and its assessment	• Continuous mutual cooperation between the teachers, students, and social partners, good communication, academic and social support; • Skilled graduates, who have no difficulties to establish on a labour market soon after graduation, and knowledge as well as competencies acquired by graduates, which are very much appreciated by employers; • Well and clearly organized study process: integration of new students into studies, possibility for students to choose various learning methods (e.g. distance learning), formation of individual study plan; • Involvement of students with disabilities in the study process; • Motivation of students to participate in scientific and research activities; • Motivation of students to participate in mobility programs; • Clear and transparent system for assessing the students' achievements, possibilities for students to familiarize with the evaluation results; • Enthusiastic, active, curious, highly motivated, devoted, and programme-engaged students.
Programme management	• Involvement of the teachers, students, and social partners in the programme as well as its continuous improvement and assessment; • Cooperation between public and private sectors as well as strong relationship with social partners; • Continuous improvement of the programme by taking into account the recommendations of previous assessment; • Changes in the programme by taking into account the students and graduates feedback results.

Study programmes with the overall assessment totalling no less than 22 points (out of 24 possible) and no area under assessment given 2 points by the experts may also be deemed to be the examples of *excellence*. To generalize the data of 2010 – 2015, 69 study programmes with the overall performance score of 22 and more were assessed during this period. The number of highest rated study programmes totals 6 percent of all study programmes assessed over the last 6 years. Out of all 45 higher education institutions currently operating in the Republic of Lithuania, study programmes of 18 higher education institutions were given highest ratings. According to study areas, most of programmes, which were given 22-24 points, are among social sciences – 30 programmes (i.e. 7 percent of all study programmes registered in this study area), which forms quite a big gap with respect to other study areas. Other study areas range as follows: biomedical sciences (11 programmes, 9 percent of all programmes in this area), arts (11 programmes, 9 percent of all programmes in this area), tech-

nological sciences (9 programmes, 3 percent of all programmes in this area), physical sciences (5 programmes, 6 percent of all programmes in this area), and humanities (3 programmes, 3 percent of all programmes in this area).

GENERALIZATION

Though the quality assurance in higher education has always been one of the priorities of SKVC since the establishment of the Centre, discussions about *excellence* in Lithuania are relatively new. Currently we undergo a testing phase and search for the manifestations of *excellence* in higher education in Lithuania. In order to identify the concept of *excellence* in the context of Lithuania, SKVC started collecting and analysing the examples of *excellence* in higher education.

Following the assessments of higher education institutions and study programmes, it was observed that in most cases the examples of good practice of the institutional assessment concur with the examples of *excellence* identified at the study programme level, which leads to the conclusion that despite the performance of individual assessments of higher education institutions and study programmes, similar tendencies are observed during the course of such assessment.

Following the analysis of the examples of *excellence* in study programmes and the review of study programmes, which were given the highest rating (no less than 22 points), it was observed that most of such examples were discovered in the programmes within the area of social sciences. Such distribution interrelates with the total number of programmes registered in these areas in Lithuania: most of study programmes are performed in the area of social sciences, as a result whereof the number of study programmes in this area may be higher as compared to the programmes in other study areas.

To generalize the results of the analysis, it could be concluded that the concept of *excellence* is influenced not only by the assessment experience of the experts, but it also depends on the personal subjective experience of the experts. On the other hand, we can find the examples of *excellence*, where high rating of study programmes is based analytically and systematically by presenting a detailed description as well as analysis of quality indicators of the programmes. So far it is complicated to precisely distinguish between the examples of *excellence*, since the concept of *excellence* itself has not been crystallized and specified yet, therefore, the experts commonly refer to their personal experience and consensus by indicating what, in their opinion, is exceptional in the programmes. When there are more examples collected and more extensive experience acquired, we will be able to more specifically define the *excellence* and to select the examples of *excellence*.

13/06/2016

QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF STUDY PROGRAMMES ACCREDITED TWICE IN SUCCESSION FOR THREE YEARS OF STUDY IN THE PERIOD 2010-2014
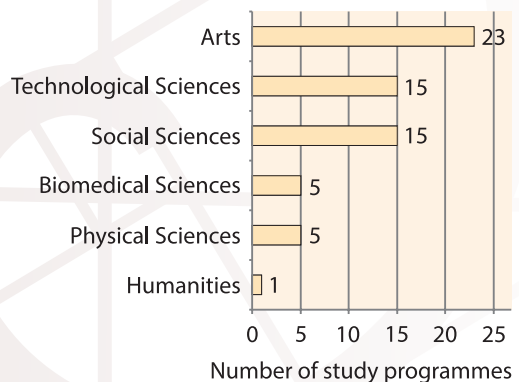
GENERAL STATISTICS

In the analysed period, **64** study programmes were accredited twice in succession for three years of study. In this period **467** study programmes in total were accredited for three years. The study programmes repeatedly accredited for three years of studies make up approximately 14 percent of all study programmes accredited for three years of study in the period 2010-2014.

The largest number **(19)** of study programmes repeatedly accredited for three years of study, by higher education institution, are implemented at **Klaipėda University**. Since the largest number of study programmes accredited twice for three years of study are in the Arts study area, also a large number **(8)** of such study programmes are implemented in the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre.

Fig. 1. Number of study programmes repeatedly accredited for three years of study, by study area

The largest number of repeatedly accredited study programmes for three years of study by type is in the **second cycle of studies:**

1. Bachelor's degree programmes – 23;
2. **Master's degree programmes – 33;**
3. *College study programmes – 8.*

Summary: The study programmes repeatedly accredited for three years of study account for approximately 14 percent of all study programmes accredited for three years of study in the period 2010-2014. **Study programmes in the Arts study area** make up the largest number of study programmes accredited twice in succession for three years of study. **Study programmes in the Humanities study area** are the fewest in this respect. The largest number of repeatedly accredited study programmes for three years of study is implemented in **Klaipėda University.**
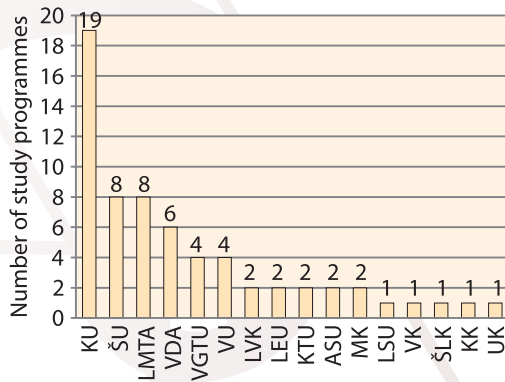
Fig. 2. Study programmes repeatedly accredited for 3 years of study, by higher education institution*
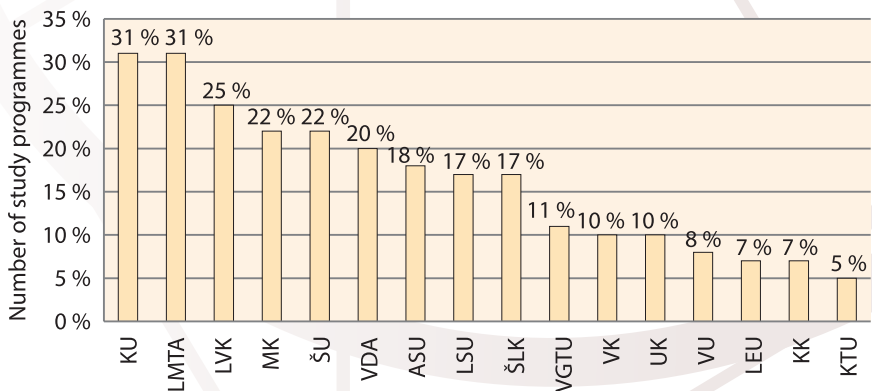
Fig. 3. Study programmes repeatedly accredited for 3 years of study as a percentage share of all programmes accredited for 3 years of study at the higher education institution
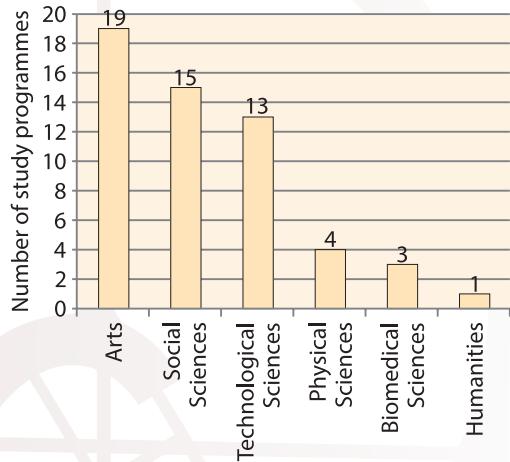
QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE REASONS THAT DETERMINED THE REPEATED ACCREDITATION FOR THREE YEARS OF STUDY

Quantitative data:
1. Attribution of score '2' increased after the second external evaluation in 19 study programmes;
2. **Attribution of score '2' decreased after the second external evaluation in 32 study programmes;**
3. Attribution of score '2' remained the same after the second external evaluation in 13 study programmes.

55 study programmes that have been evaluated are characterised by the fact that score '2' remained the same in the areas of evaluation (regardless of the fact whether the overall number of attributions of score '2' increased or decreased). The largest number of such study programmes is found in the Arts study area, and the smallest number – in Humanities study area.

Fig. 4. Study programmes where score '2' remained the same after both evaluations in the same areas evaluated, by study area

As more than one half (55 out of 64) of the study programmes accredited twice for three years of study are characterised by a repeated score of '2' in the same areas of evaluation, the basis for the qualitative analysis of repeated accreditation for three years of study is the evaluation areas in which the assessment score of '2' remained the same after both the first and the second external evaluation.

Quantitative data:
The most common reasons that determine the repeated score '2' in areas evaluated are the following (*in order to determine the main reasons, all the relevant areas of evaluation have been reviewed):*

1. Recommendations from the previous external evaluation remained not implemented. Most of the time the Review Panel would give the same score for the area's evaluation;

2. In the second external evaluation the Review Panel identified more weaknesses in the same area than in the previous evaluation;
3. The most common weaknesses in terms of the programme aims and intended learning outcomes are related to:
   a. programme aims and intended learning outcomes that are not well defined – inaccurate definitions, resulting in difficulties in evaluating whether the intended learning outcome will be achieved;
   b. inappropriate relation of programme intended learning outcomes and study subjects intended learning outcomes;
   c. labour market demand analysis which is not made;
4. The most common weaknesses in terms of the curriculum design are related to:
   a. a mismatch between the content of the study subjects and intended learning outcomes of the study subjects, including the study subjects not matching the study cycle;
   b. a mismatch of the study subjects to the latest technology, science and art achievements in the subject's area;
   c. outdated reading resources in the descriptors of the study subjects;
5. The most common weaknesses in terms of facilities and learning resources **(especially in the Arts study programmes)** are related to:
   a. buildings that are not appropriate for studies;
   b. laboratory and other study-related specialised equipment that does not correspond to the modern trends as well as insufficient number of it;
   c. lack of reading resources in the libraries and failure to update them.
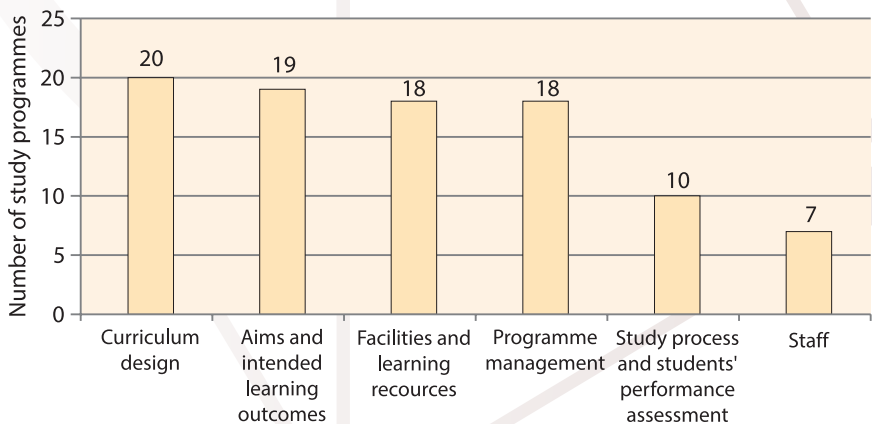
Fig. 5. Repetition of assessment score '2', by evaluation area

Summary: After the repeated external evaluation (only evaluations related to the accreditation for three years of study have been taken into account), the areas' assessment by score '2' has lowered in one-half of the study programmes (32 out of 64). Still, in as many as 55 study programmes the assessment score '2' remains in the same evaluation areas after the repeated external evaluation. The largest number of such repetitions has been recorded in the areas 'Programme aims and intended learning outcomes' and 'Curriculum design', the smallest number – in the 'Staff' area. It should be noted that the majority of the study programmes in which the same evaluation areas received score '2' in both first and second evaluations were in the Arts study area. 'Facilities and learning resources' was the area most often receiving score '2' in the evaluation of the Arts study programmes. Notably, it has come to light upon completion of an analysis of the relevant evaluation areas that in most cases **the same issues were identified by the Review Panel in both first and second external evaluations.**

*Abbreviations:

KU – Klaipėda University
ŠU – Šiauliai University
LMTA – Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre
VDA – Vilnius Academy of Arts
VGTU – Vilnius Gediminas Technical University
VU – Vilnius University
LVK – Lithuania Business University of Applied Sciences
LEU – Lithuanian University of Education
KTU – Kaunas University of Technology
ASU – Aleksandras Stulginskis University
MK – Marijampolė College
LSU – Lithuanian Sports University
VK – Vilnius College
ŠLK – Northern Lithuania College
KK – Kaunas College
UK – Utena College

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS' EXTERNAL EVALUATION CONCLUSIONS PUBLICITY OVERVIEW

PUBLICITY OF CONCLUSIONS OF STUDY PROGRAMMES' EXTERNAL EVALUATION IN LITHUANIA

In July – August 2015, the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereinafter referred to as the 'Centre') gathered information on the methods of publicity used by higher education institutions for the results of their study programmes' external quality evaluation and accreditation. In the data gathering process, websites of all the higher education institutions have been reviewed and enquiries have been sent asking to specify where and by what methods the information on the publicity of external evaluation conclusions was publicised[1]. The Centre had gathered analogous information on the publicity of external evaluation conclusions in 2011 and 2013. An overview presented below analyses changes in the publicity of the external evaluation results over the past five years in Lithuania and identifies European trends in this area.

According to the **Law on Higher Education and Research**, a higher education institution must inform its founders, members of a legal entity, and the public about the results of the quality assessment and accreditation of its study programmes. The **Procedure for the External Evaluation and Accreditation of Study Programmes** also states that a higher education institution or its branch must publish, on its website or by other appropriate methods, the results of a study programme's external evaluation received from the Centre or another higher education quality assessment agency included in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (i. e. an evaluation conclusion or its summary with recommendations) and a decision on the accreditation of the study programme within 10 days from the date of receipt of the results.

> A higher education institution must publish the received results of a study programme's external evaluation (i. e. an evaluation conclusion or its summary with recommendations) and a decision on the accreditation of the study programme within 10 days from the date of receipt of the results, on its website or by other appropriate methods.

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[1] Enquiries were sent only to those higher education institutions the websites of which do not contain information about the external evaluation results.

The expert evaluation conclusions must be clearly formulated, published and available to the academic community, external partners and other stakeholders as this information is useful for both future and current students as well as graduates and the public at large. Where an official decision on accreditation has been adopted on the basis of the external evaluation conclusions, such decision must also be published together with the evaluation conclusions as stated in the updated *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* approved by the EHEA Ministerial Conference in Yerevan in 2015.

It has been established, upon a review of the websites of all the higher education institutions in 2015, that **8 higher education institutions** (Lithuanian Sports University, Lithuanian University of Health Sciences, Aleksandras Stulginskis University, Vilnius Academy of Arts, Lithuanian Maritime Academy, Vilnius College, International School of Law and Business, and Vilnius Design College) *published the evaluation conclusions or a conclusions' summary with recommendations and the decision on accreditation* (in 2011: 5; in 2013: 10 higher education institutions had properly published the evaluation results). Mention should be made of the following higher education institutions the evaluation results of which are readily accessible and clearly presented: Lithuanian Sports University ('LSU'), Lithuanian University of Health Sciences ('LUS'), Vilnius College ('VC'), International School of Law and Business ('ISLB') and Vilnius Design College ('VDC'). The external evaluation conclusions and accreditation terms can be found on these institutions' websites upon passing two or three levels of links from the homepage, for example, upon selecting *Studies – Quality of Studies – External Evaluation* (ASU), *Quality Assurance – Study Programmes Accreditation Terms* (VC) or *Studies – Quality of Studies – External Evaluation of Study Programmes* (VDC). Descriptions of the internal quality assurance systems, results of students' feedback, and documents useful for employees, students and candidates are also published on the websites of these higher education institutions.
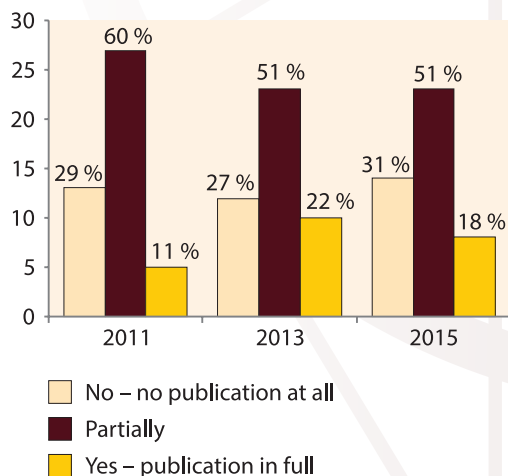
While both national and international documents obligate higher education institutions to publish external evaluation results, the information gathered by the Centre in 2015 shows that not all the institutions comply with this publishing requirement. An analysis of the information gathered has shown that in 2015 **14 higher education institutions did not publish** any, or published very little information on the external evaluation results even though, according to the results of the survey conducted by the Centre[2], as many as 70 %

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[2] Every year the Centre conducts a survey the purpose of which is to improve the external evaluation of study programmes. The questionnaire is sent to representatives of higher education institutions the study programmes of which had been subjected to evaluation, asking for their opinions about the process of preparation of the self-assessment summary, areas under evaluation, evaluation criteria and evaluation conclusions and their proposals for the improvement of the Centre's work in the field of evaluation of study programmes.

of the higher education institutions stated that the evaluation results and the proposals and recommendations received were useful in the improvement of their study programmes. ***23 higher education institutions publish the results in part***, i. e. either only part of the conclusions (e. g. the summary score of the programme areas under evaluation or the recommendations) or only information about the accreditation of the study programmes. Often such higher education institutions' websites contain links to the Centre's website or the Open Information, Consulting and Guidance System ('AIKOS') or information notices of past or future evaluations.

> In 2015, 8 higher education institutions published evaluation conclusions or a conclusions' summary with recommendations and accreditation decisions. 14 higher education institutions published no (or almost no) information about the external evaluation results.

Upon sending of the afore-mentioned enquiries, the majority of higher education institutions updated information on the evaluation results' publicity on their websites or published the results (either full text of conclusions or a summary with recommendations) if such information had not been published before. Out of the 14 higher education institutions that, prior to the enquiry, had not published information about the external evaluation results, or published very little information, only a few have not published the evaluation results: only the accreditation decision is published on their websites but no evaluation conclusions or their summary with recommendations.

The situation in terms of publicity of evaluation results in 2015 has remained quite similar to that observed in 2011 and 2013 (Figure 1). It has been found, upon analysis of the information provided by and the websites of the higher education institutions, that about **one-third of the higher education institutions had not published the evaluation results** either this year or two or four years ago (13 in 2011; 12 in 2013; and 14 in 2015). The majority of the higher education institutions have been publishing only part of the conclusions or an accreditation decision, i. e. just partial information, since 2011 (27 in 2011, and 23 in 2013 and 2015). The remaining higher education institu-

Fig. 1. Publicity of results of the external evaluation of the higher education institutions' study programmes in 2011, 2013 and 2015

Legend:
- No – no publication at all
- Partially
- Yes – publication in full

tions publish the evaluation conclusions in their entirety or the conclusions' summary with recommendations and the accreditation decisions (5 in 2011, 10 in 2013, and 8 in 2015).

In publishing the evaluation results, the higher education institutions usually provide the information by the following methods: pub-

Fig. 2. Publicity of results of the external evaluation of the higher education institutions' study programmes by publishing method (July – August 2015)

lishing of the entire text of the conclusions, accreditation orders, certificates of external evaluation of study programmes, information notices of past or future evaluations etc. A review of the higher education institutions' websites made in July and August 2015 has led to a conclusion that the higher education institutions usually publish **summaries of conclusions including recommendations** (such information was found on the websites of 31 higher education institutions). Many higher education institutions publish **certificates** of external evaluation of study programmes (23 higher education institutions) and **accreditation decisions** (19 higher education institutions). Relatively small part of the higher education institutions publish **evaluation conclusions in their entirety** (7 higher education institutions). Websites of 11 higher education institutions contain **other information** such as links to the Centre's website or AIKOS, or information notices of past or future evaluations (Figure 2).

It was hard to find the information on the evaluation results in the websites of some higher education institutions as it has been posted at the institution's documents, operating information etc. Sometimes there is no access to the published information at all (the links are not working; a message saying that the information is under preparation). An analysis of the institutions' websites has also revealed a lack of uniformity in the publication of the evaluation results: there is a full text of conclusions at some study programmes, just a summary at others, and some study programmes have no evaluation information attached. Part of the higher education institutions that had responded to the Centre's enquiry stated that all interested parties may familiarise themselves with the evaluation conclusions at the relevant departments or upon logging in to the website of the institution.

It should be noted that each higher education institution has the right to decide where and in what form the information on evaluation results will be provided, however, the information should be readily accessible and understandable to all interested parties. Higher education institutions normally publish the study programmes' evaluation results under such headings as *Studies, Quality of Studies, Studies Quality Assurance, Evaluation and Accreditation of*
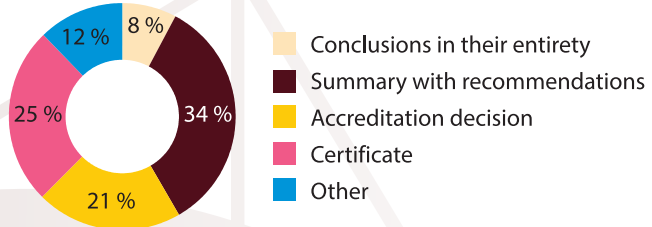
Study Programmes, Study Programmes, Accreditation, or *Results of External Evaluation of Study Programmes.* It is **recommended** that higher education institutions should publish the external quality evaluation results on their websites and not just in the departments or in the intranet so that the information is readily accessible to all. It is also proposed that higher education institutions should publish the information on evaluation results under the headings of *Studies Quality Assurance, Quality of Studies,* or *External Quality Evaluation* and not at documents or operating information, which makes the search difficult. The institutions should also make sure that the information is updated on a regular basis, the links work, and the information is complete, i. e. access to both the evaluation conclusions or a summary thereof with recommendations and the decision on the accreditation of the study programme has to be ensured. Attention is also required for the explanations of the terms of the external evaluation and accreditation and information on the length of accreditation of the study programmes in place.

> It should be noted that each higher education institution has the right to decide where and in what form the information on evaluation results will be provided, however, the information should be readily accessible and understandable to all interested parties.

> The institutions should also make sure that the information is updated on a regular basis, the links work, and the information is complete, i. e. access to both the evaluation conclusions or a summary thereof with recommendations and the decision on the accreditation of the study programme has to be ensured.

## PUBLICITY OF EXTERNAL EVALUATION RESULTS IN OTHER COUNTRIES

The importance of publication of external evaluation results is widely recognised in other European countries. In 2013 - 2014, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (*ENQA*) implemented, jointly with other quality assurance agencies, a project under the title *Transparency of European higher education through public quality assurance reports* (EQArep)[3], the main objective of which was to improve conclusions of external evaluations and to identify the needs of the readers of the conclusions as, along with

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[3] For more details on the results of the project please visit ENQA website: http://www.enqa.eu/index.php/transparency-of-european-higher-education-through-public-quality-assurance-reports-eqarep/

an increasing interest in higher educational institutions' activities, insufficient dissemination of information has become a challenge across Europe. Thus conclusions of external evaluation as one of the main transparency tools under the Bologna process contribute to both the transparency of higher education in Europe and the reliability of information provided to stakeholders. The project has revealed a considerable need for an increase in the visibility of and access to the evaluation conclusions. While the majority of target groups such as in higher educational institutions, students, quality assurance agencies and government authorities have expressed similar opinions on the benefits provided by evaluation conclusions, some doubts have been raised by employers. In their opinion, external evaluation conclusions is an undoubtedly valuable information source, however, due to their large scope they become 'unsurmountable'. One of the key proposals made by employers is that the external evaluation conclusions should consist of easily understandable and comparable information which must be published on the websites of both higher educational institutions and quality assurance agencies.

Thus higher educational institutions should be encouraged to publish evaluation conclusions, doing this in a way that ensures easy access for and understanding by all stakeholders.

> External evaluation conclusions should consist of easily understandable and comparable information which must be published on the websites of both higher educational institutions and quality assurance agencies.
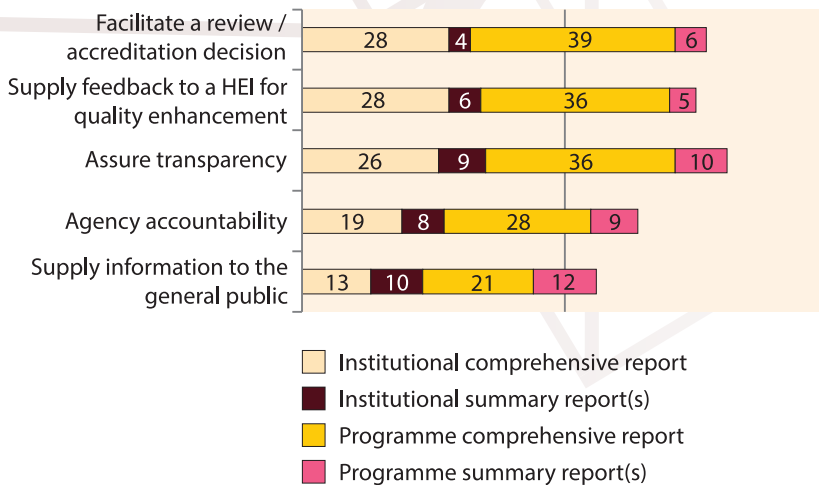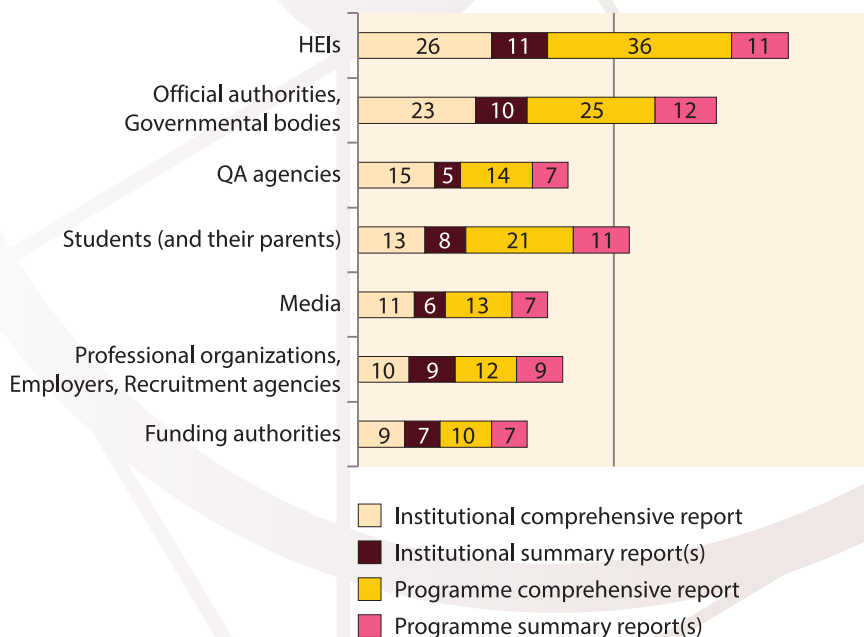

Fig. 3. What is the main purpose of evaluation reports? [4]

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[4] Source: "Transparency of European Higher Education through Public Quality Assurance Reports (EQArep)", 2014

Nearly 50 quality assurance agencies were surveyed during a project implemented by ENQA, asking them about publicity, purpose, structure and contents of external evaluation conclusions. An analysis of the survey results have shown that the agencies carryout both institutional and study programme evaluations. On completion of evaluations, experts or representatives of the agencies prepare evaluation conclusions either in detail or in a summary format. Obviously, the conclusions are prepared for various purposes, however, the prevailing purpose is to use the conclusions as a basis for the making of an accreditation decision (see Figure 3). In the agencies' view, it is also very important to inform the public and to ensure transparency, therefore, evaluation conclusions are published.

The majority of the surveyed agencies agree that evaluation conclusions should be available for use to all stakeholders, i. e. higher education institutions, students, employers, quality agencies etc. The results of the survey show that higher education institutions, government authorities and quality agencies are parties most interested in the evaluation conclusions (see Figure 4).

Publicity of evaluation results plays an important role also in the context of monitoring of the Bologna process implementation. It is stated in *The European Higher Education Area in 2015: Bologna Process Implementation Report*


Fig. 4. Stakeholders that use evaluation reports [5]

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[5] Source: "Transparency of European Higher Education through Public Quality Assurance Reports (EQArep)", 2014

that increasing transparency and accountability is one of the main aspects of quality assurance, therefore, publicity of evaluation results (both positive and negative) is becoming increasingly significant along with changes in the quality assurance systems requirements. According to the report, publishing of positive evaluation results is simpler and most higher education institutions do this, however, a tendency toward more frequent publication of critical and negative results is observed. Figure 5 shows the publication of negative and critical results by higher education institutions in 2013-2014. Only a small part of them publicised such results in 2012, and now the number of such institutions has doubled.

To sum up the information collected by the Centre and the results of the ENQA project, one may conclude that dissemination and publicity of external evaluation results is gaining importance, and this trend will continue as the results are used by increasingly larger numbers of stakeholders: from higher education institutions, quality assurance agencies and students to the mass media, employers and professional organisations. In addition, external evaluation results are not just the basis for the making of an accreditation decision; they are also one of the means to ensure greater transparency and to increase public awareness.
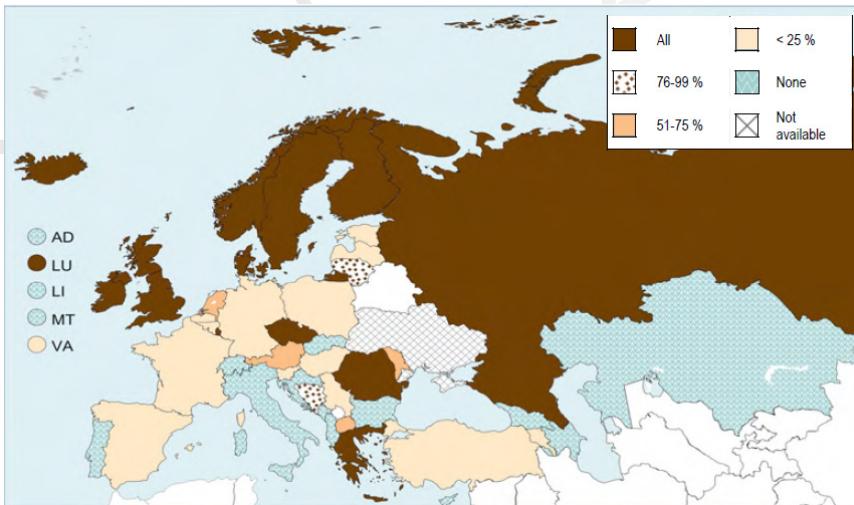
Fig. 5. Publication of critical and negative results by higher education institutions, 2013/14[6]

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[6] Source: *The European Higher Education Area in 2015: Bologna Process Implementation Report*