



CENTER FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

OVERVIEW REPORT FOR AREA STUDIES STUDY FIELD

2020 year of the evaluation

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I. INTRODUCTION

The overview is based on the external quality evaluation of the Area studies study field in the following Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions: at *Vilnius University*; at *Vytautas Magnus University*.

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

Comprehensive external evaluation reports including strengths and weaknesses and concluding with recommendations were prepared -separately for first and second cycle field studies and included evaluation marks. This overview focuses on the main findings of the external evaluation of the Area studies study field from a general point of view.

All studies at all HEIs were given **positive** evaluation.

On the basis of external evaluation report of the study field SKVC takes a decision to accredit study field and cycle either for 7 years or for 3 years. If the field evaluation is negative such study field is not accredited.

II. STUDY FIELD OVERVIEW BY EVALUATION AREAS

Overall observations by the expert panel regarding the most positive aspects of the study field in Lithuanian HEIs as well as areas in need of improvement. The analysis covers all 7 evaluation areas.

3.1. Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum

There is a clear outline of the study aims with a good focus on the context of the entire region and good attention paid to the needs of the labour market. The flexibility of the programme enables the students to make informed choices, thereby making them more self-sustained, and the universities try to be competitive with the other regional programmes with great self-confidence.

All the study programmes are coherent and consistent, and good attention is paid to interdisciplinarity and internationalisation. The curricula are well designed and it may be checked that all the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

More teaching hours should be given to native speaker teachers to reduce the gap between internationally mobile students and those required to stay at home, leading to different graduate outcomes.

A specific recommendation concerns the Master programme in Vilnius University: this programme is open to the wider public because there are no prerequisites regarding previous Asian studies, and the programme serves as a lifelong learning opportunity for the public. Therefore, it is understandable that it is considered to be widening rather than deepening knowledge. However, according to the Dublin indicators, second cycle programmes have to develop research skills in their study field and prepare students for doctoral studies. It is recommended to find a compromise between the two alternatives.

3.2. Links between science (art) and studies

The situation in Vilnius University is excellent due to the presence of the Institute of Asian and Transcultural Studies. It should be also advisable to initiate a greater degree of consultation with external stakeholders, so that their expectations and suggestions could be used to improve the content of research programmes. For example, it might make greater use of the ties to the world of politics and diplomacy in the capital city.

In Vytautas Magnus University the link with research is strong and efficient due to the research centre for East Asian Studies, but there is no research centre for Scandinavian Studies ; therefore, it is recommended to create such a centre so that the research profile of the staff can be strengthened.

It is also recommended to increase the number of publications in international reviews and to be more involved in editing and translating foreign primary sources into Lithuanian and/or English.

3.3. Student admission and support

Three positive points: admission criteria are clear for both 1st and 2nd cycle programmes, students are well informed and adequate information is available without much effort, and there is an efficient and consistent academic support system. The procedure of recognition is in line with the rest of Europe, which enables fair access to the HEI.

However a stronger reference to the experience of the students is needed and for this the feedback loop between students and the staff needs closing. In fact, if students meet some difficulty during their curriculum, it is not sure that they can find easily a support from the Faculty or University counselling service. Students unable to go abroad may need special support in order for them to be able to catch up.

3.4. Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment

The teaching/learning approach is student-centred and a vast variety of teaching learning methods is used as well as a lot of different ways to assess students' progress and skills. Alumni could express their satisfaction with the education they have received, and all the employers agreed they have a solid background in language and culture. Graduates have no difficulty in finding a job quickly and in both universities the degree of employability is high. This is due in part to the high language attainment of the graduates.

It appears that students were not eager to receive personal feedback; it would be important to analyse this situation closer so as to understand the reasons for this.

It is also recommended to improve the visibility of the programmes outside the university and strengthen the bonds with the social partners and alumni. For instance, the faculties should set up better communication with employers so that they can engage in careers events.

3.5. Teaching staff

The teaching staffs are highly qualified, very dynamic, enthusiastic and motivated. There are excellent relationships between teachers and students and close collaboration among the teaching staff. The consequence of which is the high degree of motivation and satisfaction of the students.

The rotation of the teaching staffs should be increased, and more attention should be paid to the integration of the PhD students into the teaching staff. It is important that the teaching staff gets younger.

Teaching staffs needs through incentive aids to increase mobility and dedicate more time to research activities

3.6. Learning facilities and resources

Thanks to the priority given to digital resources, information is quickly available when needed and students have no difficulty to find the requested documentation, even if the topic is very specialised.

In Vytautas Magnus University, the Kaunas campus is highly appreciated. In fact, the situation is excellent thanks to the great support provides by the university that considers this aspect as a priority. Both teachers and students agreed that they were working in a very good environment.

In Vilnius University in spite of the difficulties due to the location of the buildings in the historical city centre, the administration does its best to care for people with disabilities and makes use of modern technologies to respond to their needs. Owing to a straightforward collaboration with the Confucius Institute in Vilnius, students have more working spaces and are able to find material in original languages.

3.7. Study quality management and public information

In both universities, the management of study quality is based on the Bologna standards as defined in the Guidelines for Quality assurance in the EHEA. The quality enhancement at programme level is directly inspired by the Tuning approach that may be considered as “the” reference. Consequently, there is a good balance between the different actors involved in the process of quality assurance.

The process could be improved by giving more room to learning-centred questions compared to teaching-centred questions.

III. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

The study programmes in Vilnius are managed directly by the Institute of Asian and Transcultural Studies which creates an optimal connection between academic and study activities. The research activities of the teachers fit their courses and all the specialisations can be regrouped inside the same study programme in which the content is very consistent and of high quality.

In Vytautas Magnus University several final theses are prepared according to request received from social partners; this is a good proof of excellent bonds between academic and employers.

The same course may be taught by teachers of different specialities; this is the best teaching method for interdisciplinarity and intercultural studies, and it shows the diversity and complementarity of the teaching staff.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

MAIN STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT IN AREA STUDIES STUDY FIELD

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

Both student and teaching staff mobility towards Asian regions should be improved.

Provide greater access to native language speakers.

In Vytautas Magnus University try to establish a research centre for Scandinavian studies to improve visibility, and explore the possibility to introduce Danish in the Scandinavian programme.

In Vilnius University, strengthen bonds with social partners and consider the possibility of introducing an optional internship for Master's student not currently in the labour market.

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

Teaching workload should be reduced without loss of pay so that teachers could have more time dedicated to research activities, especially for young teachers who need more scientific outcomes to advance in their academic career. If it is not possible due to national rules, try to make this teaching workload flexible.

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