Overview Report for the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education

Expert Panel for Pedagogy: Fine Art and Technologies 2009

1. Provision of Programmes and Educational Rationale

1.1 The need for an effective form of art, design and related technology education at the secondary school level is recognized by all European countries, and Lithuania is no exception in this regard. There appears to be good programme provision in the Country for educating teachers of art, design and technology, situated within both colleges and universities. However, the Panel is of the view that too many programmes exist, resulting in fragmentation of provision, with some programmes isolated and underdeveloped. The setting up of the college sector has given rise to a number of new programmes that are not meeting the required standards, and, in addition, the Panel found one established university programme that failed to meet the criteria set out by the Centre for Quality Assessment. It is reasonable to suggest that at a time of diminishing resources it would be sensible to consolidate provision in those centres that are functioning efficiently and meeting the demands of preparing educators and practitioners to professional levels of attainment.

1.2 A number of programmes function on the basis of providing fine art and technologies education; indeed this is the most common format. The Panel believes that in some cases the content of the technologies element is seriously out of step with contemporary trends in technology education. For example, some programmes contain what may be best termed handicraft activities - in textiles, wood and metal - that are increasingly becoming obsolete and that do not meet the level of knowledge and skills associated with degree-level study. These activities may still be included in the secondary school curriculum in Lithuania, but in keeping with developments across Europe it is likely that their presence will diminish in time. Looking to the future, therefore, it seems out of place to include lower-order activities in teacher education programmes. Alternatively, in the Panel's opinion, attention needs to be given to the subject makeup of programmes in order to emphasize the interrelatedness of *art, design and technology*. The present system was conceived in the early 20th century but now must be made fit for purpose for the 21st century. Consideration should be given to the subject mix and nomenclature of programmes, for example, the following designations would have the virtue of placing *design* at the centre of provision as well as emphaising both creative practice and education:

- *Art and Design Practice and Pedagogy*
- *Design and Technology Practice and Pedagogy*

2. Quality Assurance

2.1 The Panel found varying standards of and commitment to self-assessment and quality control within the institutions and programmes. Whilst all institutions conducted a self-analysis, a common deficiency lay in the nature of the scrutiny applied, which tended to focus on quantitative data and descriptions of programme systems and activities rather than on **critical reassessment** of the philosophy, framework and operation of programmes. Generally, the absence of active-reflection and critical stance meant that the self-assessment reports failed to provide the kind of essential and decisive commentary on strengths, weaknesses, outcomes and actions that is necessary within the context of quality assurance and the promotion of change. The Panel is of the opinion that training in the area of quality assurance purposes and methods needs to be put in place for management and review groups.

2.2 In recognition of the efforts made by individual institutions to analyze the nature of their work within the review process, the Panel feels that it would be timely for there to be a comprehensive debate on art, design and technology education in the school curriculum and in teacher education. In this regard the Panel recommends that a suitable agency take on the task of coordinating such a debate, perhaps initially organising a National Conference on the subject. The objective would be to re-examine existing provision and formulate a new vision for the subject based on student expectation and relevancy to the contemporary world.

3. Programme Structure

3.1 The approach of requiring all programmes to be structured in the same way (general education subjects, subjects for the acquisition of professional qualifications, professional practices, thesis, specializations, electives etc.) is probably over restrictive and counter-productive, especially when viewed from the perspectives of diversity of provision, innovation and change. The overriding impression at present is one of conformity, with little scope and enthusiasm for actions that could lead to the transformation of programmes.

4. Pedagogy and Teaching Placement

4.1 Within an improved overall rationale and framework for the areas of art, design and technology, attention to a well structured and supported system of teaching practice should be a matter of priority. The Panel found that school placement and supervision of teaching to be one of the most under-developed aspects of the programmes. This is especially worrying since teaching practice is not only where students learn to perform basic teaching skills, but also where they gain a deepening understanding of the teaching process and context. In particular, the Panel wishes to stress that initiation into the profession needs to provide students with opportunities to experiment and innovate and to function as part of a learning community of peers and cooperating mentor teachers. This degree of involvement requires greater time in schools on teaching practice than is currently the case and, in addition to increased time for teaching and other school-based work, there is a real need for increased supervision of teaching by programme tutors, from both education studies and studio disciplines.

4.2 On foot of the recommendations mentioned in 4.1 above, it can be argued that increased time in schools (from year one) and enhanced supervision would provide a better platform for the kind of constructive self-critical reflection that is at the core of professional development. Generally, there needs to be a better balance between the analysis of teaching and school experience and that of theoretical study, which tends to dominate students' written work at present. The goal should be one of basing student learning on the practical experience of teaching informed by acts of reflection and theorizing about teaching and education.

5. The Use of ICT

5.1 More use can be made of ICT, though the Panel is mindful of the cost implications of new technologies. However, it feels that much good work could be achieved by tapping into students private use of technology, especially their use of interactive social networking sites and mobile technologies. The panel recommends that consideration be given to incorporating the use of a virtual learning environment (VLE) and the use of the Web 2.0 environment in order to drive changes in the way students participate in programmes, especially in order to foster a collaborative, interactive approach to learning. Perhaps there is not sufficient appreciation as yet of the potential of new electronic media to alter the ways in which students locate and access information and communicate with and learn from each other. In its many discussions with students the Panel found that, as elsewhere in Europe, students employ new media for social networking on a regular basis; these online spaces can be utilized in the interests of organised action and course development as well as students peer-to-peer and tutor-to-student mentoring.