

Overall Report of Assessment of Religious Programmes at Vilnius and Telsiai November 2010

Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education in Lithuania (SKVC) invited and commissioned international panel of experts to undertake an evaluation of three programs of religious studies. The assessment was carried out in November 2010 and the following institutes were examined:

Telsiai Bishop Vincentas Borisevicus Priest Seminary: *Study program of Religious Sciences (Master's level)*

Vilnius St. Joseph's Seminary: *Study program of Religious Studies (Master's level)*

Vilnius Pedagogical University: *Study program of Catholic Religious Education (Bachelor's level)*

This report is written on a quite general level, like the commission presumes. The details of each particular program can be found from the reports that were written by the members of the External Evaluation Team.

Probably the most important strength in all institutes was the living resources, i.e. committed and exited staff and students. Full time teachers were, without exception, eager to develop their job and themselves as teachers. Another question is how much they really have possibilities to get, for example, further education. And the situation is even worse with part-time teachers.

The external assessment group did not observe lectures or seminars during their visit to institutes. But from the documents it can be seen that the new, student-centred leaning concept and constructive way of processing knowledge have their place in the programs but there is still a lot of things to do with this fundamental sector of teaching and learning processes.

The commitment of the students to their studies seemed to be twofold. The students of both seminaries were boarding school students, the fact that reflects in their studies and lives. University students in Vilnius Pedagogical University were committed, too, but differently. The role of students or their representatives in administration of the programs is one crucial point in all three institutes. In fact, this is near the issue of quality assurance, which is another challenging task for all programs. Transparency, participation and flexibility are the matters that can improve the quality of program management.

One common theme for all programs is internationalization, or should I say, the lack of it. This is a multifaceted question. It appears in administrative, scientific, teaching and human levels. To start from human perspective: Students should be encouraged to use foreign languages and they should be motivated to study abroad. All this requires administrative decisions: Erasmus and other bilateral contracts with other universities. And the contracts usually require reciprocity, so, lectures and exams and text books in foreign languages for the needs of foreign students. There were many good efforts visible: there are students who have studied abroad and teachers who have

been in other universities, but there is still a long way to go before we can call the programs attractive international studying programs. One simple thing is ECTS credits that could help to compare the studies and programs universally. Of course there are good grounds to ask for local – global distinction. What are the needs of native, local education and do they fit to the international purposes.

Orientation to scientific research is one thing the assessment group likes to emphasize. On the way towards high quality European university, there has to be research made by own stuff and publications in refereed journals. Actually, this is a question of internalization as well. Research oriented stuff can easily supervise students to qualified theses. The assessment group noticed that the quality of Bachelor's theses is fairly high but all master's theses were not so high quality. Assessors for example paid attention to the lack of scientific method and the small amount of international literature.

A particular remark concerns the names of the programs. The program of Catholic Religious Education in Vilnius Pedagogical University has that kind of name that corresponds with the contents of the program. The programs called *Religious Sciences* (Telsiai) and *Religious Studies* (Vilnius St. Joseph) do not match with the contents of those programs. They clearly and only represent Catholic Theology. This can confuse an outside reader. The evaluators are aware of the procedure behind the programs' names and still wonder that.

Overall it is obvious that all three programs have many challenges in the future. Globalization and secularization are increasingly present in Lithuania, like elsewhere in Europe. The selection of new religions and world views and ideologies urge old traditions to react to new conditions. Financial facts are always present as well.

And finally, evaluation panel would like to thank the institutions visited for their hospitality and their open attitude. The manner, which we were made welcome and the manner in which our queries and our exploration of various key issues were addressed were really magnificent.

All assessors thank SKVC for giving us the responsibility, and especially warm thanks to Daiva Buivydiene for her invaluable help before, during and after the assessment visit to Lithuania. I, for my own side, would also like to express appreciation to all members of international assessment group for their professional work.

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