OVERVIEW REPORT FOR LAW STUDY FIELD

2016

INTRODUCTION

This report is based on the external quality evaluation of the following study programmes in the study field of law in Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions at:

- Vilnius University, Criminal Law (Master Programme), National Code: 621M90028
- Vilnius University, Public Law (Master Programme), National Code: 621M90029
- Vytautas Magnus University Kaunas, International Business Law (Master Programme), National Code 621M90030
- Kazimieras Simonavicius University Vilnius, International Business Law (Bachelor Programme), National Code 612M90009
- European Humanities University Vilnius, International law and European union law, (Integrated study programme), - State Code – 601M90005)
- Lithuanian Business College, Klaipėda, College study programme (Professional Bachelor of Law), State code - 653M90009
- Panevėžys College, Panevėžys, College study programme (Professional Bachelor of Law), State code - 653M90014.

The external evaluations were organised by the Lithuanian Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC).

The external evaluations were performed according to the evaluation areas and criteria: (1) Programme aims and learning outcomes, (2) Curriculum design, (3) Teaching staff, (4) Facilities and learning resources, (5) Study process and students' performance assessment, and (6) Programme management.

Comprehensive external evaluation reports including strengths and weaknesses and concluding with some recommendations were prepared for each evaluated programme and included evaluation marks. This overview focuses on the main findings of the external evaluation of the law field from a general point of view.

All programmes received positive evaluation.

OVERWIEV BY EVALUATION AREAS

The most positive aspects and the areas in need of improvement in the aforesaid six evaluation areas can be summarized as follows:

1. Programme aims and learning outcomes:

Positive: Higher education institutions (HEI's) formulate programme aims and learning outcomes clearly in their documentation. This shows either insight in, and acceptance of, the need to specify these, or else it merely shows effective training of staff to do so; at best, both. In as much as this can be seen as positive (or else: unrealistically exaggerated), universities go into detail, trying to align a complete set of learning outcomes to each course of the programme.

Negative: HEI's tend to be over-ambitious or under-ambitious. Examples for being over-ambitious: In bachelor programmes, specialization (e.g. in international law) is emphasized at the price of ensuring sufficient foundation of learning basic legal issues; in master programmes, bridging research/academic aspiration with the need to train for practical implementation of professional skills can lead to conceptual conflict. Examples for being under-ambitious: Mission statements of universities, but also employers, as well as demands of the Bologna Process call for competencies beyond subject-related issues, such as communication abilities in national and international context, which is not systematically and openly reflected in concrete programmatic aims and learning outcomes.

2. Curriculum design:

Positive: HEI's mostly succeed in designing their curricula to be fit for purpose, i.e. by aligning curricula to the intended learning outcomes, and to do so in a meticulously detailed manner. As was said about programme aims and learning outcomes: This shows either insight in, and acceptance of, the need to consider the link between curricular input and intended learning outcomes in detail, or else it merely shows effective training of staff to do so; at best, both. In as much as this can be seen as positive (or else: unrealistically exaggerated), universities go into detail, trying to align a complete set of learning outcomes to each course of the programme.

Negative: While curriculum design appears to be seen as a matter of detailing the content of each programme module in itself and some consideration is given to the size and sequencing of modules, there could be stronger emphasis on the holistic validity of the programme, e.g. with a view towards the rational choice as regards definition of modules as compulsory or optional, or including specific non-legal modules, e.g. those that foster internationalization, understanding business contexts of law, communication with a view towards negotiation and mediation. Furthermore, over-ambition in terms of definition of programme aims and learning outcomes reflect at the level of curriculum design in that curricula tend to be either overloaded or else certain core elements are not dealt with thoroughly enough. In addition, curricula could strengthen transversal competences, such as

linking legal expertise with negotiation and mediation skills.

Some HE institutions, which have added Law study programmes to other study programmes taught at them, are not paying enough attention to legal contents of the programme of law. The curricula are lacking legal subjects and offering the students general social subjects instead. Consequently the students cannot get complete legal education.

3. Teaching staff:

Positive: Some HEI's match the legal requirements in terms of quality and quantity of staff. Staff are usually keen to make the programme offered a success. Involvement of practitioners can be seen as a positive element (notwithstanding risks, as mentioned hereafter).

Negative: In some cases, especially in Colleges, major parts of the programme are run by externals, i.e. practitioners. While this may be an advantage in terms of introducing practical experience and skills, this leads to weakening general legal education and research capacities and with it to difficulties in linking the study programme with research experience of the students, it leads to difficulties in day-to-day availability for student counselling, and last but not least to the need to systematically and regularly train such staff members in particular – as should also be ensured for regular in-house staff – to manage the "shift from teaching to learning" and to "learning-outcome" thinking beyond mere transfer of knowledge (while not saying that the latter is not an essential part of the teaching/learning process). Involvement of practitioners in the teaching process must not – as is the case at some professional colleges – turn the study programme for regular students into study programme for part-time students where the courses begin at 5 PM or even later. The fact that practitioners can teach only after the end of their regular working day cannot contribute to the quality of teaching process, especially if it occurs on regular basis.

4. Facilities and learning resources:

Positive: Some universities are well equipped in terms of space, library supply and internet based texts, court decisions, and legislature. Advisory services are provided to students.

Negative: The level of facilities and learning resources varies considerably between different higher education institutions, both quantitatively and qualitatively. This fact is largely due to funding issues (as is the number of non-regular staff employed for teaching; see item 3 above). This raises questions as to the expediency to maintain a system of higher education which appears to be overstretched in terms of numbers of higher education institutions, namely in areas of private universities and colleges.

5. Study process and students' performance assessment:

Positive: Students' performance assessment aims at a balance between written tests and oral performance, thus trying to capture breadth of competencies ranging from knowledge to presentation.

Negative: As for the oral part of assessment, HEI's should be more fully aware of the need to safeguard transparency and fairness of grading not only de facto (which appears to be the case in general) but also to ensure reasonable documentation of grading in order to be able to justify the grade in case students contest the grade given.

6. Programme management:

Positive: Programme management is seen to cover quality assurance and quality enhancement processes. These are in place throughout, at least as far as routines of student questionnaires and feedback opportunities for students – also by means of regular meetings with students to voice their concerns and recommendations – are concerned, and there is institutionalized responsibility for quality management, usually by means of study committees or similar bodies.

Negative: Quality assurance could go further by including graduates and social partners more systematically. In substance, the quality aspect could be broadened by ensuring that quality surveys add more holistic aspects of the programme to issues of teacher performance at module level, e.g. by scrutinizing and reviewing the overarching programme aims and learning outcomes, the compilation of the programme as a whole with a view to overlap and progression, the admission criteria and processes, the exam system, and the full array of support systems. Furthermore, HEI's should ensure closing the 'feedback loop' routinely and fully, i.e. by addressing all quality issues arising from data and information gathered on a regular, documented base and by informing HEI members of the results and, if necessary, action taken.

MAIN STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF STUDY PROGRAMMES IN LAW STUDY FIELD

Strategic recommendations can be derived from the aforesaid positive and negative aspects:

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

1. Focus more fully, yet within the scope of manageability and realism (also in terms of available human and material resources), on identifying the programme aims and intended learning outcomes in an even more meaningful way.
2. Ensure even more succinct alignment of curricular input to achieve intended learning outcomes while safeguarding student-centred learning and understanding of legal reasoning and systematic expertise in law at the same time; in addition, ensure full closing of the quality loop, ranging from collection of relevant information via addressing issues arising to informing on action taken.
3. Make sure teachers, especially non-permanent staff, are sufficiently prepared for their teaching beyond mere dissemination of knowledge, and make sure there is sufficient research base in teaching.
4. Be critical with yourself as regards the quality and quantity of facilities and learning resources you can offer. It would be highly recommendable to

set clear standards defining minimal requirements regarding permanent teaching staff, library resources etc. as a condition for a study programme to be accredited.

5. Make sure that all exam requirements and the actual assessment processes, including grading, are fair not only in reality, but also that this can be shown through adequate transparency and documentation.

6. Put a holistic quality assurance concept in place which captures issues beyond an emphasis on teacher performance at course level more deeply and more comprehensively.

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

1. Refrain from detailing programme content by means of prescriptive normative regulation.

2. Do not expect over-detailing in outlining the relation between each course module and every learning outcome conceivable.

3. Safeguard full teaching competence especially of non-permanent staff but also of regular in-house staff, in particular with a view towards learning-outcome, student-centred (activating) teaching techniques.

4. Make provision for funding practices which suffice to provide adequate learning resources.

5. Ensure transparency of grading in oral parts of assessments.

6. Encourage higher education institutions to broaden their view on relevant quality assurance issues apart from course delivery.

7. Encourage student and staff mobility.

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