



## OVERVIEW REPORT FOR *MUSIC* STUDY FIELD

Year of Evaluation  
**2015**

### INTRODUCTION

This report is based on the external quality evaluation of the following study programmes in the study fields of *music and pedagogy* in Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions: at *Kaunas University of Technology – Music Technologies*; at *Klaipėda University – Performance Art, Singing, Wind and String Music, Piano Pedagogy*.

The external evaluation (-s) was/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 music study field from a general point of view.

All programmes received *positive* evaluation.

### OVERVIEW BY EVALUATION AREAS

### PRELIMINARY REMARK

Although the programs visited by the expert team were situated in various sub disciplines (Bachelor, Master, music, music pedagogy, technology), the following summary does not make distinctions between them. They can be read in the detailed reports per program. The summary also does not summarize these individual reports; they are extensive, very detailed and targeted on each evaluated program with great precision in the different findings. This overview includes common aspects, general conclusions and some overarching advices which are of general interest for all the programs, and even for the situation of Higher Education in Lithuania as a whole.

## INTRODUCTION

A process of accreditation through the composition and reading of a Self-Evaluation Report (SER), the site visits and the reporting afterwards is not an easy, but rather intense and painstaking trajectory. The hosting party is in effect doing an exam with all the stress connected to that, the expert team arrives with their different contexts, experiences and visions in a for them new environment, with its own principles and circumstances. On top the team has to build up at least some common points of departure and cohesion in a very short amount of time. So risks are at stake.

The expert team for the accreditations at the universities of Kaunas and Klaipeda has cooperated very well, always in a good spirit and with the intention to listen, to agree, to speak with one voice, and to serve the programs under investigation. Also a critical, but always fair, judgement was and is meant to stimulate improvement, not to make a program impossible. This countenance to provide good advice, to encourage and to show alternative possibilities has been the core mentality of the team.

This all was helped through the good organization by the agency and the institutions, by the warm welcome we received. Also the fact that representatives of the institutions, alumni and social partners, despite difficulties, legal constraints and slow bureaucracy, were very proud of their programs, was felt as a very positive element.

The core of accreditation processes is twofold: find out whether the institution is in control, and performs/executes what it promises (or not). Given the fact that all decisions of the expert team were positive one can conclude that both elements were well taken care of.

The team was in general impressed by the SER's, apart from some technical and editorial mistakes. They were extensive, complete, offered lots of details and showed clearly how the study programs and their facilitations were in agreement with the current legislation and other formal obligations. We assume that the institutes in this respect have benefitted from clear instructions and feedback from the SKVC.

The discussion with the many leaders, professors, students, alumni and social partners confirmed what was written in the SER's, which was a very reassuring situation for the panel. We were impressed by the number of and variety among the social partners, how deep their relation with the institutes seemed to be and how they saw the presence of the study programs as vital for both institutions, companies and industry, and for the local, regional and national society as a whole.

Some complications arose because of -in many cases- the lack of fluency in the English language. Many hours were lost through the need for translations; also those who spoke in English met sometimes difficulties when expressing views on specialized subjects, which limits the intensity of the discussions. It would be good to encourage a nationwide upgrade of this deficiency.

## **PROGRAMME AIMS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Mostly the Aims and Learning Outcomes were clear, well communicated and targeted to participation on the labour-market as performer/teacher/ creator/facilitator. Sometimes there is the tendency to serve all areas and aspects, to run for a kind of ‘completeness’. Institutes’ leadership should consider to focus on well-chosen specialties and/ or study paths, where applicable and /or appropriate. It is e.g. not realistic to sustain on the long term an orchestral program without sufficient students for all the relevant instruments. It is -then- better to concentrate on ensemble-playing, also in bigger ensembles which can play extremely important and rewarding repertoire.

The best examples in this evaluation area were descriptions in which there was a clear cohesion between Learning Outcomes, content of the program and the qualifications needed for the final examination and the profession.

Another good example is the mentioning of the yearly implementation of necessary improvements in the Aims and Learning Outcomes on the basis of contributions of teachers and social partners.

An important warning was expressed in this part of the criteria concerning the abilities to write research papers on Master-level. They require by their nature an inspiring research question, in- depth research activities and coherent conclusions, describing also the newly acquired knowledge, and this all logically related. Here is work to do.

## **CURRICULUM DESIGN**

In all variations the expert team was faced with the universal problem of the curriculum as a many-headed dragon: the big risk of the additive curriculum and l’embarras du choix when judging what can be deleted when new subjects are coming in. This is not solved in the current situation. There are processes whereby students, alumni, teachers, employers are in the position to advice about curriculum review. One sees additional subjects, in pedagogy, playing second instrument, Information and Communication Technology, management, writing projects, stress-handling, knowledge of and more proficiency in other languages, and even wishes for more electives; but also to keep what is working well. If -on top- there is the need for new and innovative literature in the bibliography of the master theses; to express the multifaceted role of musicians in solo, ensemble and symphonic work; as well as complaints about a too high concentration on the final examination instead of paying attention to the regular processes; and too big an overload of theoretical, academic subjects and electives, there is only one way of solving these problems: draft freshly a curriculum-

and of course in very close cooperation with users and stakeholders- with a clear distinction between compulsory subjects, free electives and optional extras. Basic needs and specific demands from the profession can then be combined in an effective and workable program. However, such an operation asks for a lot of out-of-the-box thinking and a substantial amount of time.

In the SER's the expert panel found a number of remarks referring to nearly yearly curriculum-updates; it would be worthwhile to investigate the possibilities for a complete re-evaluation as in the above, with involvement of all relevant partners.

## **TEACHING STAFF**

There is a general satisfaction with the teaching staff and the variety in their praxis, in and outside the institutions. There are opportunities for Professional Development on the one side, on the other the need is felt to be able to work on the basis of a strategic plan or another mean to modernize the human relations management.

More concerns came to the fore concerning the overall situation: the average age of teachers being very high and what policies to deploy when recruiting new ones.

Featured facets should then be: the availability of pedagogical, didactical and research skills, apart from up-to-date knowledge of the state of the art in compositional, performance and teaching practices in the given subject.

Obviously there is great demand for new teachers, because in the coming five years many of the current professors will start to enjoy their pension leave.

Short and un-bureaucratic procedures should be called upon to solve this urgent problem in the most amicable way.

There was a strong communis opinio concerning the compulsory introduction of a 'Certificate for Teaching in Higher Education'.

## **FACILITIES AND LEARNING RESOURCES**

Overseeing all five programs there are sufficient conditions to perform them decently to the satisfaction of all parties involved. In this area one always ends up with lists of subjects and items which require further investments such as:

- more books in English;
- more data bases, scores and sheet music;
- more equipment;
- more software applications;

- redecoration of classrooms;
- creation of a collection of instruments;
- more smaller studio's and ensemble rooms;
- also other incidental remarks concerning the maintenance of instruments, the availability of sufficient standard audio and visual equipment and the like.

## **STUDY PROCESS AND STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT**

This criterium shows a consistent picture in all programs at both Universities. On the one side Quality Assurance systems are on place, changes in the curriculum are clearly communicated as well as the feedback on results, and information on all aspects of the study programs is widely available. Students are in the position to give their feedback and give recommendations. On top there are ample opportunities for the students to participate in projects, competitions, festivals, concerts, masterclasses, seminars with satisfactory artistic, academic and social support. After graduation employment is in general terms not an issue: one finds his/her way, possibly also thanks to the existence of a Career Center.

On the other side there are three main issues of real concern:

1. the low number of students, due to legal constraints, entrance examination-systems and financial issues (see below under Recommendations).

2. the low rate of outgoing students in the framework of the Erasmus programs; this is caused by language and financial issues, burdensome bureaucratic procedures, the (understandable) feeling not wanting to leave the section/ the department/ the own group. Here should be argued that an outside visit of 3/6 months not only enriches the student but in return often brings professors from the host institutions as a return into the Lithuanian institutions. The expert team learned about this in a number of cases and good examples during the visit. It is strongly encouraged to stimulate the implementation of 'Erasmus' university-wide.

3. the level of the MA-theses, the final research work. The problems here are as follows:

- the priority in the final year is strongly in the musical outcomes, the concert presentation; the written work suffers from that;
- elements as problem solving, innovation, acquiring new knowledge and integration with related and/ or other disciplines require substantial deepening and reflection;
- the content is in quite a number of cases too light;

–the lack of English, even in summaries, and deficiencies in the knowledge of English in general have a negative influence on the final results.

The expert team asked itself if this problem is unique for the programs under study, or that here is a general problem in Higher Education in Lithuania.

## **PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT**

This criterium met great enthusiasm within the expert team. Quality Assurance takes place at all levels in both Universities. There is ample opportunity for professors and students to be involved in processes of evaluation and change. This is also the case with alumni and the social partners. There are also a large quantity of forms used, there are group discussions, the processes are well-organized, information is widely communicated. The QMS is completely in place. As a consequence, necessary and agreed upon revisions of curricula can be implemented on a yearly basis.

Many discussion partners stressed here the importance of the presence of the universities, including the programs under study, for cities and regions, for the local infrastructure and as core elements for civil society. The expert team noticed here unanimous and unisono expressions of opinions and views, which was most reassuring.

## **MAIN STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF STUDY PROGRAMMES IN *MUSIC* STUDY FIELD**

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

- Intensify the attention for the use of the English language at all levels and in all branches within the universities.
- Stimulate more intense international co-operation and expertise exchange through greater participation in the Erasmus frameworks.
- Encourage and deepen the research components, especially at Master's level, and liaise with the burning discussion on 'research in and through musical practice', now so prominent all over Europe. The level of academic writing should rise.
- Be aware of the risks of the 'additive curriculum' (more and more subjects) and consider to layer curricula in three parts: compulsory, free electives and optional extras.
- Read each other's SER's, because one or the other might contain inspiring themes, descriptions, self-criticisms and proposals which could again serve other departments.
- Improve and supplement facilities, equipment, ICT-aspects, instruments, library collections and the like on the basis of continuity.

- Implement a ‘Certificate for Teaching in Higher Education’

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

- The whole system of Higher Education has a negative influx especially in the Higher Education in the Arts. As a consequence student numbers are too low, there is a serious drop-out, and many artistically talented youngsters leave Lithuania in order to study abroad.
- In the first place the system of Entrance Examinations should be based upon the artistic/ musical talent and not on the final scores in the High School or College examinations. High marks for mathematics, biology and/or languages do not say anything about the artistic talent and potential.
- Secondly: the number of subsidized ‘places’ (89 for Lithuania as a whole) is by far too low. The group of highly talented young artists in Lithuania is much bigger than the actual limit suggests and it is a tremendous loss if they are not in the position to study in the local Institutes for Higher Education in the Arts.
- In the third place there is a much too high tuition fee for students for whom there are no subsidized places available. For many it is virtually impossible to raise the funds in order to be able to study in the program of their expertise and preference. Also, this element has as a consequence that many talented young artists study abroad, or leave the local universities after one year of study, just because of a lack of money.
- The expert team holds a strong plea for a revision of these systems in the near future. In every discussion, with all groups, during the whole length of the visit this problem was raised by representatives of all layers from the universities, as well as by employers and social partners.

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