



STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS

Lietuvos edukologijos universiteto
GEOGRAFIJOS PROGRAMOS (621F80002)
VERTINIMO IŠVADOS

**EVALUATION REPORT
OF *GEOGRAPHY* (621F80002)
STUDY PROGRAMME**

at Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences

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DUOMENYS APIE ĮVERTINTĄ PROGRAMĄ

Studijų programos pavadinimas	<i>Geografija</i>
Valstybinis kodas	621F80002
Studijų sritis	Fiziniai mokslai
Studijų kryptis	Gamtinė geografija
Studijų programos rūšis	Universitetinės studijos
Studijų pakopa	Antroji
Studijų forma (trukmė metais)	Nuolatinė (2)
Studijų programos apimtis kreditais	80
Suteikiamas laipsnis ir (ar) profesinė kvalifikacija	Geografijos magistras, Gamtinės geografijos magistras nuo 2010
Studijų programos įregistravimo data	2001-08-02 Nr. 1187

INFORMATION ON ASSESSED STUDY PROGRAMME

Name of the study programme	<i>Geography</i>
State code	621F80002
Study area	Physical sciences
Study field	Physical Geography
Kind of the study programme	University studies
Level of studies	Second cycle
Study mode (length in years)	Full-time (2)
Volume of the study programme in credits	80
Degree and (or) professional qualifications awarded	Master of Geography, Master of Physical Geography since 2010
Date of registration of the study programme	2001-08-02 No. 1187

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The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education

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I. INTRODUCTION

The external evaluation of the Master study programme in *Geography* at Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences (hereafter, ‘the University’) was initiated by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education of Lithuania nominating the international expert group (hereafter, the ‘expert group’ or ‘assessment panel’) formed by Professor Geoffrey Robinson (University of St. Andrews, Scotland – team leader), Dr. Tomas Butvilas (Department of Education at Vilnius University, Professor Tommi Inkinen (University of Helsinki, Finland), Professor Maris Klavins (University of Latvia, Latvia), Professor Jürg Luterbacher (University of Giessen, Germany) and Dr. Miglė Stančikaitė (Institute of Geology and Geography of Nature Research Centre, Lithuania).

The evaluation of the study programme (‘the programme’) made use of the following documents: Law on Research and Higher Education of the Republic of Lithuania (2009); Order on External Evaluation and Accreditation Procedure of Study Programmes (2011); Methodology for Evaluation of Higher Education Study Programmes (2010); General Requirements for Master Study Programmes (2010); and Geography Study Field Regulation (2004). The basis for the evaluation of the study programme is the Self-Assessment Report (SAR), written in 2011, its annexes and the site visit of the expert group to the University on 17 October 2011. The Department of General Geography and the Department of Geography and Tourism (‘the Departments’), located in the Faculty of Natural Sciences (‘the Faculty’) are jointly responsible for the programme. Several other sections of the University contribute to the programme, notably the Centre for Culture and the Institute of Pedagogy and Psychology. The Division of Studies coordinates the activities of all the contributors. The site visit incorporated all required meetings with different groups: the administrative staff of the Faculty, staff responsible for preparing the self-assessment documents, teaching staff, students of all years of study, graduates, and employers. The expert group inspected various support facilities and resources (classrooms, laboratories, library, computer facilities), examined students’ final works, and various other materials.

After discussions and preparations of conclusions and remarks, the expert group presented introductory general conclusions of the visit to the Department’s self-assessment team. The group subsequently met to discuss and agree the content of the report, which represents the members’ consensual views.

It may be noted that both the Bachelor and Master programmes in Geography are located in the same departments within the same faculty. They share the same facilities; many staff contributes to both programmes, albeit with different loadings; administration and management are essentially the same for both programmes; and employers who met with the evaluation group related to both programmes and interacted at department and faculty levels. The site visit covered both programmes simultaneously and, inevitably, the two evaluation reports have much in common.

II. PROGRAMME ANALYSIS

1. Programme aims and learning outcomes

The programme aims and learning outcomes are consistent with the type and level of studies and the level of qualification offered (master degree). Learning outcomes are well formulated and their relationship to the aims is clear. They appear to be continuous rather than distinctively different between the bachelor and master level programmes, although the programme management asserted to the expert group that pedagogical outcomes are expected to be different; greater emphasis on teaching skills at bachelor level and research at master level are claimed.

The aims and outcomes are orientated towards public needs and labour market demands for teachers with higher qualifications. The main goal is to train specialists who will be able to gather high-quality geographical information and analyse and interpret it in light of the latest scientific knowledge and contemporary educational philosophy. Learning outcomes include the acquisition of geographical knowledge, formulated in terms comparable to those found in the bachelor programme. Three other sets of outcomes fall into cognitive, practical and general (transferable) skills and consequences. Although one or two outcomes are expressed in terms a little different from those in the bachelor programme, the general impression is one of similarity rather than distinctiveness of the two levels of programme. The expert group considered that additional deepening of students' knowledge and practical skills would add greater transparency to the different aims and outcomes that characterize the two programme levels.

The labour market sector at which the programme aims is, as stated above, teaching. A satisfactory proportion of graduates from this programme secure teaching positions and, with higher qualifications, it would appear that a high proportion progress to senior positions in education. Of positive note are that many include the further training of teachers in their employment responsibilities and demand for master graduates is, reportedly, increasing in gymnasia. The demand for entry to the programme is not great however. Typically only seven to 13 each year enter the programme, but few places are state funded and all these are taken up. A positive feature is that the competitive scores of the entrants have recently increased and the impression is of a small but well-motivated complement of students. The skills they acquire are valued outside teaching, being crucially important in independent and lifelong learning. It will be in the interest of sustaining the programme, however, that the departments continue to monitor the state of the demand for the higher-qualified teachers.

Main strengths and weaknesses

Strengths

The programme aims are well defined, clear and publicly accessible.

The programme includes a strong set of transferable skills, versatile competences and abilities that can be used in a variety of employment and are important in independent and lifelong learning.

Weaknesses

The learning outcomes lack transparency in the distinctiveness of the Bachelor and Master programmes in Geography.

2. Curriculum design

The curriculum design satisfies all legal requirements. The content of the courses and modules is consistent with the type and level of the studies and meets the requirements of master studies in geography.

The programme is divided into three parts, subjects of general education, subjects of pedagogical studies and subjects in the field of geography, each of them enabling the achievement of a specific set of learning outcomes. In total, the scope of the programme may be considered sufficient to ensure all the intended learning outcomes. Courses are spread evenly over the two-year period, and are logically linked. Scientific research work is an essential feature of the curriculum as early as the programme's first semester. There are adequate opportunities for practical work, and research study is of particular importance for preparation of the master thesis. Research practice, linked to the master thesis theme, is conducted mainly in educational institutions, in keeping with the programme's aim to develop teachers. The most significant modification of the programme that took place from 2010 (following new Ministry requirements) is that there are now no freely elective subjects, although there is an optional geography subject, chosen from five options. The small number of students necessitates that in most years a collective rather than individual choice has to be made.

Main strengths and weaknesses

Strengths

A structure that promotes and facilitates the acquisition of a broad knowledge of geography and practical and research skills in education.

Weaknesses

In compliance with recent regulations of the Ministry of Education and Science, the new study programme does not offer freely optional study subjects (i.e. from anywhere in the University) and which the expert group regards as a retrograde development; the small numbers of students following the programme necessarily restricts the choice of optional subjects that are offered.

3. Staff

There is 17 staff who contributes to teaching the programme; 14 are professors or associate professors, and three lecturers with doctorates. They meet all legal requirements and are well qualified to educate appropriately a future generation of teachers with second-level geography qualification. The full-time teachers on the programme make up 92 per cent of the total staff of the two departments. In addition, teachers from other faculties and other institutions with particularly extensive research experience, contribute to the programme. All positions of teachers and research workers are subject to legal acts and regulations governing appointments and reappointments by competition; the turnover is low. The staff teaching loads are comparatively low on this programme, but most staff also teaches on the bachelor programme where teaching loads are high.

Many teaching staff engages in research directly related to the two study programmes. They discuss scientific results with staff from other universities, attend conferences, participate in international exchanges through Erasmus, prepare methodological publications related to the programme and pursue personal staff development. Some staff members are active in collaborative projects mainly in Lithuania, but on the whole the level of scientific activity among the staff is rather low. This situation is not attractive to foreign scientists and limits the possibilities to exchange ideas and work collaboratively. A major issue is the small number of publications in international peer-reviewed journals (only 23 are reported for the period 2005–2010); in particular, top-level scientific research is very low, with only three international ISI publications for the same period. Also related to these issues is that the University does not offer a doctoral study programme in the field of Geography. This is a definite hindrance to developing research and teaching in the subject field to international standards. The expert group was pleased to note that a joint submission with the University of Klaipeda for a joint doctoral programme in *Social Geography* has been made to the Ministry. It is observed, however, that the degree qualifications that result from the two geography programmes are in *Physical Geography*. The implementation of the suggested doctoral programme will have considerable resource planning and staffing implications.

Whatever means can be employed should be used to encourage scientific activity amongst the staff and raise the research profile of the departments. More international participation in interdisciplinary programmes and more scientific peer-reviewed publications should be envisaged for the future. This in turn would impact on teaching activities and would give students new opportunities to contribute to current research themes.

Main strengths and weaknesses

Strengths

Extensive pedagogical experience of the staff.

Pedagogical and research activities, and national and international mobility amongst some staff, provide new opportunities to strengthen their participation in the education process.

Weaknesses

Staff teaching loads are generally high and the research profile and international visibility of the departments are low.

4. Facilities and learning resources

The Faculty where the programme is delivered is located in spacious premises convenient for learning and research. The auditoria and classrooms are more than adequate in size and number for the small class size of the master students. The expert group, however, considers the available technical equipment very limited to satisfy the needs of the number of students following the two programmes, as well as students following other programmes in the Faculty, even allowing for the students' ownership of computers: the SAR lists only seven computers, three multimedia sets and five projectors in total. Equipment for GIS studies has been strengthened recently and practical equipment and facilities for fieldwork training appear adequate, although the future of the training base in Tamošava is uncertain. Arrangements for

research practice – scientific and pedagogic – are good. Students have practice opportunities in administration, business and education institutions in Vilnius. Social partners are instrumental in providing some of these research opportunities.

Library and reading room accommodation is good. There is a serious lack of book resources and international scientific literature, including publications in the English language. Access to electronic databases is not an adequate alternative: the lack of references to international publications in their theses is evidence that students are not making adequate use of the databases. The assessment panel did note with approval the growing accessibility of virtual learning environments and would encourage the acceleration of the use of electronic teaching and other methodological aids. Their implementation does impose initial time demands upon staff, but can be looked to as a means of freeing up time for research.

Main strengths and weaknesses

Strengths

Spacious premises where renovation in progress should improve still further the accommodation.

Weaknesses

A general lack of modern equipment and aids for teaching. Classes in preparatory rooms have only the most elementary visual equipment and materials available.

Lack of international textbooks and scientific publications.

Inadequate funding to renew material resources, given that geography is a subject that requires training not only in fixed facilities but also and especially in the field. The uncertain future of the Tamošava facility is a particular concern.

5. Study process and student assessment

The admission requirements meet all legal requirements. Admission is by competition, which includes variations to cater for non-standard entrants. Currently, only seven places are state funded; these places are always taken up. Other numbers have fluctuated, the general economic situation being a factor in the number of unfunded entrants. Students are highly motivated to choose this programme. They take part in various competitions and other science-based events that the departments conduct, to increase awareness of and stimulate recruitment to the programme.

Studies appear to be well organised, ensuring an adequate provision of the programme and the achievement of intended learning outcomes. All necessary information about the programme as a whole and about individual courses is made available in a variety of ways and at appropriate times. Classes are timed to enable attendance by students who are also in employment. Timetabled activities allow adequate spare time for independent learning, including research work that they begin early in the programme. Students who met with the expert group greatly value the practical experiences upon which the departments lay much store. Practice placements are of undoubted importance to the programmes and to future employment. All stakeholders assert their high satisfaction with this aspect of the programmes.

Assessments include mainly tests, quizzes, colloquia and traditional end-of session examinations, scheduled to give adequate time for student preparation. Individual assignments are carried out and marked accumulatively during the course of the academic sessions. The balance of assessment modes for a particular course is determined to suit the intended learning outcomes. Colloquia, quizzes and tests prevail in physical and human geography subjects; discussion and teaching observation in the subjects of pedagogic training. The combining of marks for these various assessment and end of course examinations is carried out according to University procedures. Students are well informed about the assessment methods and are content with their implementation. The arrangements for preparing and presenting the final theses for examination are clear and rigorously followed. The expert group was concerned, however, by what it considers is a generally lower standard than is expected in comparable institutions elsewhere in Europe. Although students do gather and work with real data, the theses are generally descriptive; the analytic approach that is a legal requirement at master level was not evident to the experts. Assembly of a student portfolio was introduced in 2010, based on documents verifying learning achievement, observation of learning activity, discussions with mentors (during practice) and self assessment. The portfolio system is perhaps worthy of review in terms of staff workloads and their necessary time management.

Staff members spend considerable time with students and staff-student relations are excellent, evidenced by surveys of students and recent graduates. This greatly assists in the monitoring of students' progress and provision of an adequate level of academic support. Students' collaborative participation in staff research projects provides strong learning opportunities for those involved and constitutes a particular kind of academic support. Social support is provided by several University facilities, including a Pastoral Care Centre and other centres for Sports, Culture and Languages. There are various measures to help students financially, such as by scholarships and discounted hostel accommodation for part-time students.

Students have opportunities to participate in student mobility programmes, the main one being the Erasmus programme. Very few master students take part, however. Most of them work in education or administration and cannot be absent for a lengthy period of time. Since 2007, two students each year have joined the study programme for one semester, all of them from Poland; in addition to some common cultural and ethnic factors, several of the programme staff had a good command both of English and Polish languages. There is no doubt that a low level of English language among students, coupled with the delivery of all lectures in Lithuanian and the poor provision of English language scientific materials are obstacles both to outward and inward participation in wider exchanges.

In general, the students, graduates and employers who met with the expert group were 'happy' with the programme. This is evidenced not only by annual surveys of current students but also of recent graduates. A survey of graduates from previous years is also current and the assessment panel acknowledge the concern of the programme committees to be aware of continuing developments in the workplace and to maintain the up-to-date relevance of the programmes to employment opportunities.

Main strengths and weaknesses

Strengths

A good proportion of the studies is in practical classes and practice placements.

Excellent staff-student relations and the small class size underpin the high level of academic support given to students.

Weaknesses

A low participation rate in international mobility programmes, both outward and inward, and a low standard of final thesis.

6. Programme management

Responsibilities for decision making and monitoring of the programme are clearly allocated at programme, faculty and university levels. Immediate responsibility for running the programme lies with the programme committee, which regularly gathers and analyses information on the programme's implementation. Evaluation and improvement processes involve representatives from students and social partners in the fields of educational and specifically geographical education methodology. Employers appreciate the good contacts they have with staff and the programme committee. Good staff-student relations allow timely intervention if necessary in local issues. More formal quality assessment and assurance processes are conducted by the programme committee and at faculty level. All measures appear efficient and, except for the securing of improved funding, effective.

As for the bachelor programme, the quality and size of the well-prepared and presented SAR indicates an enormous amount of work and shows that the external Quality Assessment exercise has been taken seriously. It is evident that the programme management team is concerned to deduce any need for changes in the programme, whether arising from previous assessments, this one or better still from their own experience of conducting the self assessment. Many enhancements have taken place over recent years; several more are in process currently.

Main strengths and weaknesses

Strengths

The SAR is well prepared and presented. Its quality and size testify that the quality assessment exercise has been taken seriously.

Quality assurance procedures are inclusive, taking cognisance of inputs from all stakeholders; they are efficient and largely effective.

Employers and other social partners eagerly participate in departmental events and joint projects.

Weaknesses

The departments have been unable to find adequate funding to sustain the material resources of the programme.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Review the formulation of expected learning outcomes so that they clearly reflect the programme content and ensure the distinctiveness of the Department's Bachelor and Master programmes in Physical Geography is transparent.
2. When regulations allow, restore freely optional study subjects to the curriculum.
3. Encourage and facilitate greater staff participation in international research and teaching activities.
4. Secure more funding, or change spending priorities, to enable investing in more and better teaching aids; improving other material resources, including laboratory, field and computing equipment, and providing adequately for their maintenance and replacement; and improving the library provision of books and of other scientific publications, especially in the English language.
5. Encourage a higher participation rate by students in international mobility programmes.
6. It should also be noted that if plans to establish a doctoral programme in Human or Social Geography in cooperation with Klaipeda University come to fruition, which would greatly enhance the subject field, then the weaknesses in material resources and scientific activity of the staff would require still further attention.

IV. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The study programme Geography (state code – 621F80002) is given **positive** evaluation.

Study programme assessment in points by fields of assessment.

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation Area in Points*
1.	Programme aims and learning outcomes	3
2.	Curriculum design	3
3.	Staff	3
4.	Material resources	2
5.	Study process and assessment (student admission, study process, student support, achievement assessment)	3
6.	Programme management (programme administration, internal quality assurance)	3
	Total:	17

*1 (unsatisfactory) - there are essential shortcomings that must be eliminated;

2 (satisfactory) - meets the established minimum requirements, needs improvement;

3 (good) - the field develops systematically, has distinctive features;

4 (very good) - the field is exceptionally good.

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