



STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS

ALEKSANDRO STULGINSKIO UNIVERSITETO
(aukštosios mokyklos pavadinimas)
STUDIJŲ PROGRAMOS "AGRONOMIJA"
(valstybinis kodas – 6211IX004, 621D72001)
VERTINIMO IŠVADOS

EVALUATION REPORT
OF "AGRONOMY" (state code – 6211IX004, 621D72001)
STUDY PROGRAMME
at ALEKSANDRAS STULGINSKIS UNIVERSITY
(higher education institution)

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Išvados parengtos anglų kalba
Report language – English

DUOMENYS APIE ĮVERTINTĄ PROGRAMĄ

Studijų programos pavadinimas	<i>Agronomija</i>
Valstybinis kodas	6211IX004, 621D72001
Studijų sritis	Biomedicinos mokslai
Studijų kryptis	Žemės ūkio mokslai
Studijų programos rūšis	Universitetinės
Studijų pakopa	Antroji (magistro)
Studijų forma (trukmė metais)	Nuolatinė – 2 metai, iššęstinė – 3 metai
Studijų programos apimtis kreditais	120 ECTS
Suteikiamas laipsnis ir (ar) profesinė kvalifikacija	Agronomijos magistras
Studijų programos įregistravimo data	2002.06.14

INFORMATION ON EVALUATED STUDY PROGRAMME

Title of the study programme	<i>Agronomy</i>
State code	6211IX004, 621D72001
Study area	Biomedical Sciences
Study field	Agricultural Sciences
Type of the study programme	University studies
Study cycle	Second (Master)
Study mode (length in years)	Full-time – 2 years, part-time – 3 years
Volume of the study programme in credits	120 ECTS
Degree and (or) professional qualifications awarded	Bachelor of Agronomy
Date of registration of the study programme	14.06.2002

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the evaluation process

The evaluation of on-going study programmes is based on the **Methodology for evaluation of Higher Education study programmes**, approved by Order No 1-01-162 of 20 December 2010 of the Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereafter – SKVC).

The evaluation is intended to help higher education institutions to constantly improve their study programmes and to inform the public about the quality of studies.

The evaluation process consists of the main following stages: 1) *self-evaluation and self-evaluation report prepared by Higher Education Institution (hereafter – HEI)*; 2) *visit of the review team at the higher education institution*; 3) *production of the evaluation report by the review team and its publication*; 4) *follow-up activities*.

On the basis of external evaluation report of the study programme SKVC takes a decision to accredit study programme either for 6 years or for 3 years. If the programme evaluation is negative such a programme is not accredited.

The programme is **accredited for 6 years** if all evaluation areas are evaluated as “very good” (4 points) or “good” (3 points).

The programme is **accredited for 3 years** if none of the areas was evaluated as “unsatisfactory” (1 point) and at least one evaluation area was evaluated as “satisfactory” (2 points).

The programme is **not accredited** if at least one of evaluation areas was evaluated as "unsatisfactory" (1 point).

1.2. General

The Application documentation submitted by the HEI follows the outline recommended by the SKVC. Along with the self-evaluation report and annexes, the following additional documents have been provided by the HEI before, during and/or after the site-visit:

No.	Name of the document
1	Study Programme Management Committees

1.3. Background of the HEI/Faculty/Study field/ Additional information

Aleksandras Stulginskis University is managed by the Rector under the governance of the University Council and the Senate. The University has autonomy in its academic, administrative, economic and financial management activities and is governed according to the Bologna Process and the Constitution, Law and Resolutions of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania.

The University has started a programme of updating its facilities and rationalising its structure. It currently comprises five faculties offering higher education in biomedical, technological and social sciences, and the programme belongs to the Faculty of Agronomy. The Faculty of Agronomy delivers 5 first cycle programmes, 5 second cycle programmes and third cycle (doctoral) studies. The Bachelor programme in Agronomy given a positive evaluation by SKVC in 2014 and accredited for further 3 years.

1.4. The Review Team

The review team was completed according *Description of experts' recruitment*, approved by order No. V-41 of Acting Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education. The Review Visit to HEI was conducted by the team on 4th April 2017.

1. **Prof. dr. Ioannis Vlahos (team leader)**, *professor Emeritus of Technological Educational Institute of Crete, Bologna expert at the Hellenic Ministry of Education, Greece.*
2. **Prof. dr. Helena Korpelainen**, *head of the Dep. of Agriculture at of Agribusiness, University of Helsinki, Finland.*
3. **Mr. Kevin Kendall**, *educational consultant, Director of RKK LTD., England.*
4. **Ms. Alina Adomaitytė**, *Managing director at JSC Innoera, Lithuania.*
5. **Mr. Gabrielius Jakutis**, *student of Vilnius University Faculty of Medicine, Lithuania.*

II. PROGRAMME ANALYSIS

2.1. Programme aims and learning outcomes

The Master's Degree Programme in Agronomy is prepared to provide its graduates with in-depth knowledge in agronomy, able to independently solve scientific production problems, plan and conduct scientific research, apply research results, and to conduct scientific, managerial and advisory work. Social and personal abilities are highlighted. Thus, a combination of scientific knowledge and skills to apply results would develop. These are clear general aims. Intended learning outcomes and related subjects are introduced in detail. The programme is in line with second cycle university studies. The aims and outcomes of the programme are publicly available on the ASU website.

The title of the Programme is well-tuned with the Learning Outcomes (LOs), content and qualifications to be obtained. The objectives and expected LOs correspond to the strategy of the higher education institute, the academic/professional requirements of a second cycle programme and the level of qualifications in the agronomy field. The objectives and LOs of individual subjects

and their relationship to the whole Programme are listed clearly in the Self-Evaluation Report (SER). However, it is less clear how well those objectives and learning outcomes will be realized during the degree studies (also addressed in chapter 2.6).

The Programme is unique, since ASU Agronomy MSc is the only Master's programme in agronomy in Lithuania. The Programme answers to the needs of the national and regional development, labour market and employers in this sector. It is said that agroecosystems cover 53% of the land in Lithuania, which implies that there is a great need for agronomy specialists, both from the production and sustainability points of view, especially considering the effects of the climate change and changing consumer interests. It is shown that the majority of the graduates find jobs soon after graduation and the jobs are related to their degree. It is obvious that the demand for highly qualified agronomy specialists is great.

It is stated that the Program is revised, if needed, in response to feedback given by students, teachers, employers and social partners. However, it is unclear how effectively feedback is really collected and used to update and improve the programme (addressed in chapter 2.6). Yet, based on the site-visit, students, alumni, employers and social partners were satisfied with the Programme, which implies that it has maintained its relevance in relation to the society and labour market needs. Some issues were raised, primarily English language skills and communication skills in general, and international exposure as well. These were considered being important aspects needed in work life.

Evidently, the Programme is quite popular, as the numbers of applicants are considerably greater than the numbers of those accepted. The admitted pool of students perform well in their studies. The numbers of admitted students have been recently 14 but earlier more. This is a quite small number. It is indicated that the number of state-funded places varies, and that certainly affects the students' interest to apply to the Programme. It is unfortunate that there is such a division between state-funded and non-funded places, including a partly unpredictable element in the numbers of state-funded places. On the other hand, the interviewed employers indicated their interest to provide some financial support through combined work/study/stipend arrangements. ASU could consider this as means to increase the student pool, especially if it is impossible to increase the numbers of state-funded places.

Based on a comparison of ASU Agronomy MSc with other related European and global programmes, it was stated that "the *Agronomy* master's study programme implemented by ASU is unique and different from other study programmes of universities of the country and foreign universities". Of course, any two programmes are not identical, but it still remains unclear what is the uniqueness here when compared to other Master's programmes in the agronomy field.

Especially any positively unique features would have been interesting to be highlighted. Although, the title of the Programme corresponds its content well.

In the previous evaluation in 2014, concerning aims and LOs, the main raised shortcoming was that the Programme is too focused on research careers in the agronomy field. No such issue was identified now, although it is clear that further work skills would be beneficial to be included in the Programme, specifically language and communication skills. The interviewed alumni also mentioned a need for a more global perspective in studies.

Strengths

1. The objectives and LOs of individual subjects and their relationship to the whole Programme are listed clearly.
2. The Programme answers to the needs of the national and regional development, labour market and employers in the agronomy sector. The majority of the graduates find jobs soon after graduation.
3. Students, alumni, employers and social partners appear satisfied with the Programme.
4. The title of the Programme corresponds its content well.

Weaknesses

1. The numbers of graduates are too low to fulfil the needs of the society.
2. It is unclear how well the objectives and LOs will be achieved in reality and how their realization is monitored within the Programme.

2.2. Curriculum design

The study volume of the Agronomy MSc (120 credits, about 27 hours of work per credit) is adequate and follows the general requirements. The content of the Programme is in line with the legislative requirements. The completeness and compatibility of subjects taught and their learning outcomes are assessed by the Study Programme Committee. Subject descriptions are reviewed every two years. Courses are stated to be updated regularly. This is a good approach, but it is unclear how the assessment procedure and recommendations are implemented.

The teaching/learning forms include both contact work and independent work. Contact teaching is provided in multiple ways: lectures, laboratory work, practicals, seminars, consultations and exams. Also varying teaching methods are used otherwise (e.g., case studies and practical problems, teamwork, presentations, classroom discussions). It is evident that a range of active and even innovative teaching/learning methods are used and they support to achieve the intended LOs. Yet, it was also said that traditional lectures are still too predominant. It is unclear, whether only traditional exams (written and oral) or also other examination methods are used. The virtual

learning environment Moodle and an electronic repository enhance students' independent work. Study plans of the programme are published on the ASU website. The students expressed their opinion that Master's studies significantly differ in terms of complexity and depth from the Bachelor's programme.

The sequence of the studies is logical. First, subjects that give knowledge and develop skills, which help to better learn subsequent subjects; second, compulsory subjects of the study field and optional subjects, which bring useful flexibility to the curriculum and deepen theoretical knowledge. There are also studies that students can choose depending on their career interests: either preparing them for doctoral studies or for practical activities. For each course, the prerequisites, objectives, workload, learning outcomes and assessment methods etc. are explained. Evidently, this information is available for students as well.

Recent additions to courses include *Integrated Plant Protection*, *Soil Resources and GIS*, and *Impact of Anthropogenic Activities on the Environment*, all representing very topical subjects. Additionally, the interviewed alumni proposed that the students should gain more knowledge on organic farming, and on current innovations and technologies in the world. However, the review team found that the correspondence between the listed and actually organized courses, and whether taught normally or only/partly through consultations with teachers is not always clear. The inclusion of a course in the list of subjects does not guarantee that the course will be arranged. For instance, *Integrated Plant Protection* evidently has not been taught due to lack of sufficient numbers of students, hence it would be beneficial to include it in the list of compulsory subjects. Yet, overall, the content and scope of the subjects enable to achieve the intended LOs. The content largely corresponds to the latest academic and technological achievements, although there is space for improvement.

Yet, possibilities to specialize in certain agronomic fields, instead of becoming a generalist in agronomy, are insufficiently developed. During the interviews, it was mentioned that students can choose optional courses in a way that leads to a specialization, and also the thesis work guides that. However, the idea of specialization may be difficult for students in practice, since the student numbers are quite small and, therefore, not all listed courses could be actually given, and also without appropriate guidance (given examples of different study lines) the students may not be able to have/make real choices.

The fourth term is said to be designated for preparing the Master's thesis (30 credits). The course Master's thesis lists six steps with their credits. Required and recommended reading is listed, including, e.g., methodological suggestions, experimental design and analysis, and writing tips. Courses Research Work I and Research Work II seem to provide some methodological and writing

guidance to Master's thesis work and beyond, but their connection to the thesis work (timing and content) is not fully clear. Although the fourth semester is designated for preparing the thesis, it is indicated that the thesis research must be conducted throughout the entire period of the Master's studies and summarized in the final thesis. This situation related to scheduling and time allocation to thesis research throughout the studies should be clarified.

The students are supposed to have a topic already early during the Master's studies when they do not necessarily have a clear view of their main interests, so it is not fully clear, how the students will choose their thesis topic. Also, it was mentioned that some students conduct their thesis research on their own farm or at a place where they have a job. In those cases, there is a potential risk that thesis research is not scientifically as rigorous and sufficient supervision may be more difficult to arrange comparing to thesis research taking place at the university. Yet, related laboratory analyses will be performed at ASU.

In the previous evaluation in 2014, the main raised shortcoming was that there was a shortage of studies related to the integrated weed, pest and disease control, and agricultural policy in the EU. As suggested in the SER, *Integrated Plant Protection* should be moved from the list of optional studies to compulsory subjects. The review team did not find EU policy studies as essential for the agronomy MSc. However, further studies in animal science, organic farming, and current innovations and technologies would be useful additions, possibly partly arranged through other study programmes available at ASU.

Strengths

1. Courses are revised and updated regularly.
2. New topical subjects have been added to the curriculum.
3. Relevance to the society is considered in curriculum design.

Weaknesses

1. Some listed courses may not be organized due to lack of students.
2. Possibilities to specialize in certain agronomic fields, instead of becoming a generalist in agronomy, are insufficiently clearly visible as an alternative for those wanting to go deeper into a specific agronomic field.

2.3. Teaching staff

The academic staff (professors, associate professors and lecturers) for the Agronomy MSc is recruited based on scientific, pedagogical and professional competence. The teachers are either from the institutes of the Faculty of Agronomy, or from the Institute of Forest Management and Wood Science or the Institute of Environment and Ecology of the Faculty of Forest Sciences and

Ecology, which guarantees a comprehensive pool of teachers. During the academic year 2016-2017, the program has been taught by 5 professors, 8 associate professors, and 1 lecturer, all with doctoral degrees. The quantity of teaching staff has remained about the same for many years. There are also many other teachers, who, e.g. supervise thesis work, and act as reviewers and opponents. Evidently, most teachers are former ASU graduates, which is understandable considering that this is the only university in agriculture in Lithuania. Yet, it would be beneficial to also recruit highly skilled teachers/researchers that come from elsewhere, even from abroad. In the meeting with students, it was clear that students appreciate the good, informal relationships with teachers. They feel that it is easy to approach teachers and get help.

The description of the time allocation of the teaching staff is a bit confusing (addressed also in chapter 2.6). Anyway, it is clear that all teachers also conduct research and less time is allocated to organizational work. The structure and time allocation of teachers is stated to be in line with the work regulations of ASU. The ages of teaching personnel varies from about 35 years to over 65 years. Overall, the staff is experienced in teaching and supervision, research and other related tasks.

During the period of 2011-2016, the staff participated in many international scientific programmes, which is positive for internationalization. During this period, the staff members published articles in scientific journals and in publications of popular science. The scientific production activity in terms of international peer-reviewed publications is not quite clear based on the description (numbers of publications, numbers of researchers producing those publications at ASU). Based on Annex 4 in the SER, many staff members favour national and regional publications instead of truly international ones. In order to achieve significant scientific impact internationally, publishing in more widely distributed journals should be emphasized. It seems that ASU researchers are presently working towards that, and the most active researchers already have good scientific outputs.

The main academic exchange is carried out via ERASMUS. ASU is also a member in the Network of Baltic Veterinary, Forestry and Agricultural Universities (BOVA) that cooperates with the Nordic Forestry, Veterinary and Agricultural University Network (NOVA), which allows ASU students and teachers to take part in courses with the Nordplus support. During the period of 2014-2016, the Faculty of Agronomy had 8 visiting lecturers from 3 countries. Their lectures were attended also by the Agronomy MSc students. During the same period, 8 lecturers of the Faculty of Agronomy visited foreign universities in 5 countries under the same exchange programme.

During 2011-2016, the teachers of Agronomy MSc participated in 41 international conferences abroad and 12 international conferences in Lithuania, 2 long-term and 12 short-term internships abroad and 1 long-term internship in Lithuania, 12 courses and seminars abroad and 31

courses and seminars in Lithuania. These activities indicate the presence of a good and evidently improving effort for international activities. The teaching staff also take part in many national and international agronomy-related organizations and serve in editorial boards of many journals. However, information provided in the SER is partly unclear.

In the previous evaluation in 2014, the main shortcoming concerning teachers was an international aspects and English language skills. It is clear that the Faculty has taken seriously the mentioned shortcomings and recommendations. For instance, English courses for advanced students and beginners are organized at the University on an annual basis, and the teachers are encouraged to take part in international events and programmes, and to improve their professional qualifications in general. Yet, it is unclear to what extent the staff members have a possibility to participate in language courses or other training at ASU or elsewhere during their working hours, and how widely such training is used. It is evident that limited English skills are still a shortcoming.

Strengths

1. The number and experience of the teaching staff is good.
2. Students have good, informal relations with teachers. It is easy to approach teachers and get help.
3. Internationalization is developing.

Weaknesses

1. Some staff members still favour national and regional publications instead of international ones.
2. It is unclear to what extent the staff members have possibilities and interest to participate in language courses or other professional training.
3. Too many staff members are former ASU graduates.

2.4. Facilities and learning resources

The lecture rooms and teaching laboratories are located in the Central Building of ASU, at the Experimental Station of ASU, and in the Eighth Building of ASU. These facilities are in the open-access Joint Research Centre of Agriculture and Forestry (JTC, opened in December 2012), which is a component of the Nemunas Valley and a division of research infrastructure of the Lithuanian Agriculture and Forestry Research Centre. During 2011-2014, the buildings were renovated and equipped with new furniture, research and demonstration facilities, IT equipment (internet connections also in dormitories), etc. Teaching laboratories are spacious and very well equipped with facilities needed in laboratory instruction and research, including Master's thesis research. A phytotron greenhouse (400 m²) for experiments has been built near other units. The

facilities are upgraded regularly. The computer classrooms offer a good selection of software. Additionally, there is access to other premises at ASU, other institutes, businesses and to private farms for the purpose of practical work and research. To support teaching and learning, ASU utilizes the Moodle platform to provide access to lecture presentations, assignments, literature for independent work etc., and the teachers can instruct students remotely using Moodle. However, the interviewed students mentioned that not all teachers use Moodle.

Both the staff and students have an easy access to appropriate library services, including the collections of the Central Library and the Library of Educational Literature. Each year, the holdings are supplemented with new publications. More recently, electronic materials have become a more important part of library services, and a good number of electronic materials are being subscribed. Students and staff can use them through VPN connections. Since 2016, Master's theses and doctoral dissertations have been uploaded in the eLABa system and ASU electronic repository. The Libraries also have work places and rooms for teamwork, and internet, copying, printing and scanning services. The ASU library system is a member of the Global Agricultural Libraries Network (AGLINET); thus, students and staff have an opportunity to receive copies of scientific articles and borrow books from other agricultural libraries free of charge. The libraries also arrange training in the use of information services. In all, the library services are very good and easily accessible; although it would be useful to have some signs in English as well (a leaflet with basic instructions is available in English).

As noted in the previous evaluation in 2014, due to quite recent improvements and upgrading, the facilities are very good for the implementation of the Programme. The equipment is very modern, and there are good conditions for studies and master's research work at ASU. However, a concern was raised by the review team regarding the use of the modern and abundant equipment: it was unclear how effectively the equipment is actually used by students and staff. Some equipment looked little used. For instance, the very good greenhouse appeared like not being used very much, primarily for some ornamental plants but little for plants used for food production. Also, the students raised an issue that parts of the teaching materials utilized in classes are outdated and, thus, not optimal to support studies.

Strengths

1. Lecture rooms, laboratories and computer classrooms are spacious and very well equipped.
2. Library collections and services are good.
3. Digitalization in studies is developing well. The virtual learning environment Moodle is used.

Weaknesses

1. The Moodle platform could be utilized to a wider extent.
2. It is unclear how effectively the modern equipment is used by students and staff. Some equipment looked little used.
3. Some teaching materials used in classes are outdated.

2.5. Study process and students' performance assessment

The entrance requirements are stated otherwise clearly, but the eligibility of applicants with a degree from elsewhere in Lithuania or abroad should be specified. Applicants with agronomy or applied plant science BSc degrees from elsewhere may have a satisfactory background to be accepted to the Agronomy MSc. Calculations of grades should be specified better as well, if external graduates are eligible. The admission procedure, which is described on the ASU website, apparently is clear for those with bachelor's degrees at ASU, but for others perhaps not. Yet, it is positive that admittance is not restricted to only Agronomy BSc graduates. In general, the admission procedure should be made transparent and clearer. It also could be considered whether the admission procedure should include other elements than just grades, for instance, a motivation letter.

The ratio of admitted and graduated students has varied quite a lot between years. For instance, among those admitted in 2013 and 2014, the percentages were only 56.5 and 64.6%, respectively. These percentages may increase when some of the slower or part-time students finally graduate. The reasons are explained. Yet, there is space for improvement, e.g. measures to improve motivation. It is unexpected that some students are removed based on poor performance, when the admittance is relatively competitive.

The Master's thesis is prepared on the basis of experimental fundamental or applied research, and each Master's student must independently carry out research on a specific question. Additionally, each student has to make a presentation and publish at least one popular-science publication before the defense of the final thesis. In the course of the studies, Master's students participate in research projects conducted by staff researchers and teachers, sometimes leading to joint publications, scientific or popular-science ones. It was also mentioned in the part 2.2 that it is quite common to conduct the thesis research on an own farm or as a part of work outside ASU. In those cases, appropriate supervision and the quality of research should be guaranteed and monitored.

Master's students have possibilities for mobility, primarily through ERASMUS. However, it has not been especially popular, since during recent years only one student used it to go abroad (Czech University of Life Sciences, Prague in 2012). The number of incoming students is greater (4

students during 2011-2015). Participation in mobility should be encouraged, even though students may have reasons, why such mobility does not feel attractive. Students can get support from the ASU Department of International Affairs, and information on mobility possibilities and application processes is available on a website. ASU has bilateral ERASMUS agreements with 93 European universities and with 15 other countries, which should provide ample possibilities for mobility. Many ASU students have satisfactory language skills for international studies. At ASU, having more teaching in English would be attractive for international students. Greater mixing of local and foreign students would benefit both the visiting students (integration) and local students (language proficiency).

ASU provides support and information to students in different matters. Key information is said to be available on websites, but some information in the Dean's office or on the notice board of the Dean's office. It would be good to be sure that all important information of courses, exams, etc. is in an electronic form and with an easy access.

The Career Centre provides training and career management services, and coordination and cooperation with employers and social partners. It also monitors graduates' career development. Additionally, the Career Centre provides psychological assistance, while other health care services are elsewhere. The presence of career-related services is highly important. The ASU Centre of Physical Training and Sports offers students good possibilities for physical training, and there are also different cultural activities.

There are different scholarship possibilities for students. They are granted on a competitive basis according to study outcomes or based on other selection criteria, which are explained clearly. Besides public funding, students may receive support from private companies or other organizations. The students are able to receive a loan for covering living expenses, tuition fees and partially studies abroad. However, the feasibility of the loan option is unclear: many potential students are unwilling to study without state funding and international mobility is low.

Methods and criteria for the evaluation of students' achievements are listed for each course, and teachers explain them to students at the beginning of each class. The assessment uses a 10-point system based on achievement evaluation criteria, which are directly related to the LOs. The students get information about exam results no later than within 3 working days after the day of the exam, and also receive other feedback. This is a very short time, but apparently doable, since the numbers of students are small. The students indicated that assessment is generally fair.

The evaluation of Master's theses is conducted by an Evaluation Commission consisting of 5 members, including also a social partner. Members of the Commission evaluate the theses based on evaluations and opinions by the peer-reviewer, opponent and thesis supervisor, the quality of

presentation and ability to respond to questions asked by the Evaluation Commission. During recent years, the weighted average of exam grades of master's students has been increasing. Hopefully, this reflects improved performance and not a change in evaluation criteria.

After the previous evaluation in 2014, the study process and assessment issues are well taken care of, except for minor shortcomings or unclarities. However, it would be beneficial to increase international mobility, which is also desired by the employers.

Strengths

1. Assessment in studies is generally fair.
2. Master's thesis research is generally well organized and it offers good learning possibilities, including scientific communication.
3. ASU students have good possibilities for international mobility.
4. Student services are comprehensive.

Weaknesses

1. The admission procedure may seem unclear for applicants coming from elsewhere than ASU.
2. Graduation rates are quite low.
3. Mobility abroad remains quite low and lack of courses taught in English may limit mobility.
4. English language skills and communication skills in general are not up to a most desired level.

2.6. Programme management

The Vice Rector, responsible for the studies, is in charge of the organization and quality assurance of studies at the University level. The Department of Studies coordinates quality assurance activities and provides assistance to academic departments. At the faculty level, Dean and Vice Deans are responsible for the implementation, monitoring and quality assurance of study programmes, such as Agronomy MSc. In addition, there is an administrative body called the Programme Committee. It assesses the Programme (e.g., an internal assessment every year) and is responsible for improvements. Its composition and the Chairman are approved by the Board of the Faculty of Agronomy. A representative of employers (social partners) is responsible for the assessment of the Programme in relation to changing needs of the society and the adjustment of students' practical skills. A student representative is also included in the Committee.

However, the overall management has certain shortcomings. During the review team visit, it was not clearly identified, who has the operational responsibility for managing the Programme. The recruitment procedure and conflict mitigation aspects of the Programme Committee are unclear. Also, the management organization appeared unnecessary bureaucratic with many different types of commissions.

Besides Internet-based information, measures to attract students to the Agronomy MSc programme are being carried out, for instance, in connection to the annual ASU exhibition and other fairs for higher education. It is important to continue such actions in order to improve the visibility and popularity of the Programme. In order to increase the relevance of the Programme in the labour market, employers and other stakeholders are involved (training, feedback) to an increasing extent in its implementation. Based on the meetings with alumni and social partners, it was evident that the Agronomy MSc has a good reputation and is well connected with the society. Potential employers are keen on hiring its graduates.

On the other hand, there is no visible strategic plan that a certain percentage of Agronomy BSc graduates (and other students with a relevant background) would continue in the MSc. Considering the importance of the field and ASU being the only University in Lithuania giving Master's education in agronomy, it is expected that it would be beneficial that a good proportion of the Agronomy BSc graduates would continue their studies to gain a deeper knowledge in the field and research skills. It is also unclear how the realization of the programme objectives and LOs is monitored.

Students are represented in all major administrative organizations of ASU. Also, the Programme students may express their concerns and discuss them in the Dean's office at any time. Communications with the Dean's office were told to be very good. The review team found that although students are represented in many University-level committees, yet their input at the Programme level is available primarily through surveys, with evidently limited participation.

During the interview, the question was raised that teachers' time allocation to research is insufficient (unknown whether a common issue). Since teachers are expected to conduct research (not only student supervision), satisfactory possibilities to conduct research should be guaranteed. After all, university teaching is supposed to be based on research and provided by those active in research.

In the previous evaluation in 2014, the main raised shortcoming concerned the study quality assurance system, which was determined to be insufficiently efficient. Despite good intentions to develop the study quality assurance system, there are still problems to be solved. For instance, student feedback was found not to be collected for all subjects, and it is unclear, whether general feedback for the whole Programme, including monitoring on LOs realization during the studies, is collected regularly. It is also unclear how effectively feedback from the staff and stakeholders is collected and used. Additionally, it would be beneficial to include also open questions in the questionnaires in order to collect concrete suggestions and points of improvement. It should be mentioned also that information provided in the SER is partially unclear and somewhat redundant.

The review team didn't find evidence that the quality loop is closed and works in practice efficiently.

Strengths

1. The Programme has a good reputation and is well connected with the society.
2. Feedback systems are developing and there is evidence of changes being made in response to collected feedback.

Weaknesses

1. Operational responsibilities for managing the Programme are insufficiently clear.
2. The recruitment procedure and conflict mitigation aspects of the Study Programme Committee are insufficiently clear.
3. Student feedback was found not to be collected for all subjects, and it is unclear whether general feedback for the whole Programme is collected regularly.
4. It is unclear, how regularly feedback from the staff and stakeholders is collected.
5. It is unclear how effectively feedback is used to update and improve the Programme.
6. There is no clear strategy and systematic mechanism for programme's monitoring in terms of realization of the objectives and learning outcomes.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Improve monitoring to guarantee that the learning outcomes match the objectives set for the Programme.
2. More training in English language and general communication skills.
3. More international staff recruitment.
4. Improve possibilities for specialization as an alternative for a generalist training.
5. Improve matching between the listed and organized courses. *Integrated Plant Protection* to be moved from the list of optional studies to compulsory subjects. More emphasis on studies in current innovations and technology in the agronomy field would be beneficial.
6. More international publishing activity for all researchers.
7. Enhance use of new equipment and modern teaching tools, updating of teaching materials.
8. Encourage international mobility.
9. Enhance student recruitment.
10. Simplify management structures to make processes more effective and transparent.
11. Improve quality assurance: regular feedback from all subjects and the whole Programme, inclusion of open questions; a clear path to implement changes.

IV. SUMMARY

The Master's Degree Programme in Agronomy provides its graduates with in-depth knowledge in agronomy. The programme is well in line with second cycle university studies. The Programme answers to the needs of the national and regional development, labour market and employers in the agronomy sector. Students, alumni, employers and social partners are satisfied with the programme, and the majority of the graduates find jobs soon after graduation. On the other hand, the numbers of graduates are too low to fulfil the needs of the society. Also, it is unclear how well the objectives and learning outcomes will be achieved in reality and how their realization is monitored within the Programme.

Courses taught in the programme are revised and updated regularly, new topical subjects have been added to the curriculum, and the relevance to the society is considered in the curriculum design. However, not all listed courses are organized due to lack of students, and it is unclear how the assessment procedure and recommendations for the curriculum are implemented. Possibilities to specialize in certain agronomic fields, instead of becoming a generalist in agronomy, are insufficiently clearly visible. English language skills and communication skills of students in general are not up to a desired level.

The volume and experience of the teaching staff is good. Students have good, informal relationships with teachers, and it is easy to approach teachers and get help. However, the time allocation of the teaching staff is unclear (e.g. possibilities to conduct research). Many staff members still favour national and regional publications instead of truly international ones. It remains unclear to what extent the staff members have possibilities and interest to participate in language courses or other professional training. Evidently, too many staff members are former ASU graduates; thus, there is insufficient external recruitment that would widen the expertise of the staff.

Lecture rooms, laboratories and computer classrooms are spacious and very well equipped, and library collections and services are good. Digitalization in studies is developing well, for instance, the virtual learning environment Moodle is used widely. Yet, some teachers are not willing to use new technologies. Also, it is unclear how effectively the modern equipment is used by students and staff, as some equipment looked little used. Some teaching materials used in classes are outdated.

Student services are comprehensive. Many aspects of the study process are good, for instance, student assessment is generally fair, and Master's thesis research is mostly well organized and offers good learning possibilities, including scientific communication. Yet, graduation rates are quite low. Although ASU students have good possibilities for international mobility, those

opportunities are used quite little, and lack of courses taught in English limits mobility to ASU. The admission procedure is unclear for applicants coming from elsewhere than ASU.

The division of management tasks at ASU is generally plausible. However, there are some weaknesses: the composition, recruitment procedure and conflict mitigation aspects of the Study Programme Committee are insufficiently clear. Although feedback systems are developing, it is unclear how effectively feedback is collected and used to update and improve the Programme. For instance, student feedback was found not to be collected for all subjects, and general feedback for the whole study programme is not clearly available. It is also unclear, how feedback from the staff and stakeholders is collected and used.

V. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The study programme *Agronomy* (state code – 6211IX004, 621D72001) at Aleksandras Stulginskis University is given **positive** evaluation.

Study programme assessment in points by evaluation areas.

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation of an area in points*
1.	Programme aims and learning outcomes	3
2.	Curriculum design	3
3.	Teaching staff	3
4.	Facilities and learning resources	3
5.	Study process and students' performance assessment	3
6.	Programme management	2
	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.

Grupės vadovas:

Team leader:

Ioannis Vlahos

Grupės nariai:

Team members:

Helena Korpelainen

Kevin Kendall

Alina Adomaitytė

Gabrieliūs Jakutis

**ALEKSANDRO STULGINSKIO UNIVERSITETO ANTROSIOS PAKOPOS STUDIJŲ
PROGRAMOS AGRONOMIJA (VALSTYBINIS KODAS – 6211IX004) 2017-06-14
EKSPERTINIO VERTINIMO IŠVADŲ NR. SV4-123 IŠRAŠAS**

<...>

V. APIBENDRINAMASIS ĮVERTINIMAS

Aleksandro Stulginskio universiteto studijų programa *Agromomija* (valstybinis kodas – 6211IX004, 621D72001) vertinama **teigiamai**.

Eil. Nr.	Vertinimo sritis	Srities įvertinimas, balais*
1.	Programos tikslai ir numatomi studijų rezultatai	3
2.	Programos sandara	3
3.	Personalas	3
4.	Materialieji ištekliai	3
5.	Studijų eiga ir jos vertinimas	3
6.	Programos vadyba	2
	Iš viso:	17

* 1 - Nepatenkinamai (yra esminių trūkumų, kuriuos būtina pašalinti)

2 - Patenkinamai (tenkina minimalius reikalavimus, reikia tobulinti)

3 - Gerai (sistemiškai plėtojama sritis, turi savitų bruožų)

4 - Labai gerai (sritis yra išskirtinė)

<...>

IV. SANTRAUKA

Agromomijos magistro studijų programoje absolventams suteikiama išsamių žinių apie agromomiją. Programa gerai atitinka antrosios pakopos universitetinių studijų lygį. programa tenkina nacionalinės ir regioninės plėtros, darbo rinkos ir agromomijos sektoriaus darbdavių poreikius. Studentai, alumnai, darbdaviai ir socialiniai partneriai šia studijų programa patenkinti, dauguma absolventų randa darbą greitai po studijų baigimo vos baigę studijas. Kita vertus, absolventų skaičius per mažas visuomenės poreikiams tenkinti. Taip pat nėra aišku, kiek iš tikrųjų bus pasiekta tikslų bei studijų rezultatų, taip pat kaip stebimas jų realizavimas vykdam programą.

Programos dalykai reguliariai atnaujinami ir peržiūrimi, į programos sandarą įtraukta naujų dalykų, o projektuojant programos sandarą atsižvelgiama į tinkamumą visuomenei. Tačiau ne visi sandaroje išvardyti studijų dalykai organizuojami, nes nesurenkamas reikiamas norinčių jų mokytis

studentų skaičius, taip pat nėra aišku, kaip įgyvendinamos vertinimo procedūros ir rekomendacijos programos sandarai. Nepakankamai aiškiai nurodytos galimybės specializuotis konkrečiuose agronomijos srityse, o ne tik mokytis ir tapti universaliu agronomu. Studentų anglų kalbos ir komunikavimo įgūdžiai bendrai neatitinka pageidaujamo lygio.

Dėstančiojo personalo skaičius ir patirtis pakankama. Studentai palaiko gerus neformalius santykius su dėstytojais, todėl lengva su jais susisiekti ir gauti pagalbą. Tačiau dėstančiojo personalo laiko paskirstymas nėra aiškus (pvz., galimybės vykdyti tyrimus). Daugelis personalo narių renkasi leisti nacionalinio ir regioninio lygio publikacijas vietoj tarptautinių. Neaišku, kiek personalui suteikiama galimybių ir kiek jis domisi dalyvavimu užsienio kalbų kursuose ar kituose profesinio mokymo kursuose. Aišku, kad per daug personalo narių yra ASU absolventai, taigi įdarbinama nepakankamai personalo iš išorės, kas būtų išplėsta personalo kompetencija.

Auditorijos, laboratorijos ir kompiuterių klasės yra erdvios bei puikiai įrengtos, bibliotekoje didelis leidinių pasirinkimas ir teikiamos geros paslaugos. Studijos gerai skaitmeninamos, pavyzdžiui, plačiai naudojama virtualiojo mokymosi aplinka *Moodle*. Visgi kai kurie dėstytojai nepageidauja naudotis naujomis technologijomis. Taip pat nėra aišku, kaip efektyviai studentai ir personalas naudoja modernią įrangą, nes kai kuri įranga atrodo mažai naudota. Kai kuri auditorijose naudojama dėstomoji medžiaga yra pasenusi.

Paslaugos studentams yra plačios. Dauguma studijų proceso aspektų yra geri, pavyzdžiui, studentų vertinimas bendrai yra sąžiningas, o magistro baigiamųjų darbų moksliniai tyrimai gerai organizuojami bei teikia geras mokymosi galimybes, įskaitant mokslinę komunikaciją. Tačiau baigiamieji vertinimai yra gana žemi. Nors ASU studentai turi gerų tarptautinio judumo galimybių, jos gana mažai išnaudojamos, o anglų kalba dėstomų dalykų trūkumas riboja ASU judumą. Priėmimo procedūra kandidatams ne iš ASU nėra aiški.

ASU vadybos užduočių paskirstymas, bendrai, yra tinkamas. Tačiau yra keletas silpnųjų: nepakankamai aiški Studijų programos komiteto sudėtis, įdarbinimo procedūra ir konfliktų mažinimo aspektai. Nors grįžtamojo ryšio sistemos tobulinamos, neaišku, kiek veiksmingai renkami atsiliepimai bei kiek jie naudojami programai atnaujinti ir gerinti. Pavyzdžiui, buvo nustatyta, kad ne apie visus studijų dalykus buvo renkami studentų atsiliepimai, taip pat bendri atsiliepimai apie visą studijų programą nėra aiškiai prieinami. Taip pat neaišku, kaip renkamas ir naudojamas personalo bei socialinių dalininkų grįžtamasis ryšys.

<...>

III. REKOMENDACIJOS

1. Tobulinti stebėseną, kad būtų garantuojama, jog studijų rezultatai atitinka studijų programai nustatytus tikslus.
2. Daugiau mokyti anglų kalbos bei bendrųjų komunikavimo įgūdžių.
3. Įdarbinti daugiau personalo iš užsienio.
4. Studentams suteikti daugiau galimybių įgyti specializaciją kaip alternatyvą universaliajam mokymui.
5. Pasirūpinti, kad į sąrašą įtraukti dalykai būtų organizuojami. Dalyką pavadinimu „Integruotoji augalų apsauga“ iš pasirenkamųjų studijų sąrašo reikėtų perkelti į privalomuosius dalykus. Būtų naudinga daugiau dėmesio skirti dabartinėms agronomijos srities inovacijoms bei technologijoms.
6. Visi moksliniai darbuotojai turėtų aktyviau publikuoti savo straipsnius tarptautiniuose šaltiniuose.
7. Naudoti daugiau naujos įrangos ir modernių mokymo priemonių, atnaujinti dėstomąją medžiagą.
8. Skatinti tarptautinį judumą.
9. Skatinti didesnę studentų priėmimą.
10. Reikėtų supaprastinti valdymo struktūras, kad procesai taptų efektyvesni bei skaidresni.
11. Gerinti kokybės užtikrinimą: reguliariai reikalauti grįžtamojo ryšio apie visus atskirus dalykus ir bendrai apie studijų programą, įtraukti atviruosius klausimus; tai – atviras kelias pokyčiams įgyvendinti.

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Paslaugos teikėjas patvirtina, jog yra susipažinęs su Lietuvos Respublikos baudžiamojo kodekso 235 straipsnio, numatančio atsakomybę už melagingą ar žinomai neteisingai atliktą vertimą, reikalavimais.

Vertėjos rekvizitai (vardas, pavardė, parašas)