

EQUIPE PROJECT

Case Study

The quality assessment in institutions of research and higher education in Lithuania

1. The education of adults is divided into two parts: formal and non-formal. Non-formal adult education includes the education of the general culture of a person and the development and improvement of necessary knowledge and skills for vocational work. Non-formal adult education is often called the popular adult education, which enables the person to develop him/herself, his/her creativity, talent, initiative and feeling of social responsibility.

Formal education is general education, vocational, college and university education or parts of it, which are regulated and supervised by the state or state authorised institutions. Formal vocational education and training is concentrated in vocational schools, colleges and in the labour market training centres. There are no separate departments in vocational schools for working adults. But colleges have operating adult education departments, where students usually take distance education.

Our Universities developed a new in-service training infrastructure, too. They have established different schools, continuous education centres and business training centres. Another possibility for continuing education is to take separate modules, part of study programme or even full programme at the university. The growing demand for continuing education influenced Universities administration and academic staff to develop study programmes adjusted for professional skills development.

2. The quality assessment in institutions of research and higher education in Lithuania is organized and performed by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education.

The Lithuanian Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education is the institution which co-ordinates the regular self-analysis process of research/development and pedagogical activity of the State and Non-state research and higher education institutions. It organises expert assessment, accumulates and publishes information about the quality of that activity and offers suggestions about its improvement. The Lithuanian Centre for Quality Assessment gives information, consultations and recommendations on recognition of qualifications concerning higher education.

Rules of quality assessment for institutions of research and higher education are approved by Order No. 1055 of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania on June 28, 2001.

The quality assessment consists of two parts - an internal quality assessment (a self-assessment) of an institution of research and higher education, and its external quality assessment performed by expert groups.

Self-assessment is the basic part of any assessment. An institution evaluating its own activities formulates its objectives and tasks, analyses its activities applying different approaches, reveals its activity problems and foresees the ways of resolving them.

A self-assessment is regulated by the senate (council or academic council) of an institution of research and higher education. A head (or senate) of an institution appoints officials that are continuously responsible for the institution's activity quality and its evaluation. An institution of research and higher education performs its self-assessment at regular intervals of time established by the senate (council or academic council). A self-assessment is to be carried out before each external quality assessment.

External quality assessment is organized by the Centre according to long term (a few-years) and annual external assessment plans. Long-term plans establish which subject areas of research and higher education are to be evaluated in respective years, while annual plans are intended to schedule the evaluation of study programmes, institutions and their subdivisions (indicating the year quarter). The Centre in co-ordination with the Rectors' Conference of Lithuanian Universities, Directors' Conference of Lithuanian College's, the State Research Institutes Directors' Conference and the Science Council of Lithuania prepares the draft plans. Long-term and annual external assessment plans are to be approved by the Minister of Education and Science (hereinafter – the Minister).

The time of any scheduled external assessment (the term to bring a self-analysis to the Centre) is to be known to an institution of research and higher education to be assessed not later than three months before the external assessment.

The Ministry forms an Expert Council for activity assessment of research and higher education institutions (hereinafter – the Expert Council), to coordinate the quality assessment process of research activity and study programmes in research and higher education institutions, to summarize conclusions of the assessment. The Expert Council is acting according to regulations approved by the Department of Science and Studies under the Ministry of Science and Education (hereinafter – the Department).

External quality assessment is planned on the basis of three streams:

- a) Evaluation of study programmes (covering all study subject areas over 8 years);
- b) Research and development evaluation (covering all research areas over 8 years);
- c) Qualitative assessment of research and higher education institutions (covering all the higher education institutions over 8 year).

If quality of any evaluated unit (a study programme, a research and development or an institution of research and higher education) is unsatisfactory and competent State institutions or founder does not take a decision to stop the activity of the unit, the Centre has to organize a repeated assessment of the unit after one or two years.

The procedures of external quality assessment are the following:

- a) Experts' analysis of the self-assessment of an institution of research and higher education,
- b) Experts' site visit for obtaining information about the unit being assessed,
- c) Formulation of the experts' report and discussing it with the representatives of the institution of research and higher education,

d) Delivery of the external assessment report to the assessed institution of research and higher education and the Centre,

e) Assessment report (summarized by the Council of Experts if needed) delivery to the Department,

f) Publication of the summarized final assessment report in an informative issue of the Centre.

After receiving the external assessment report, an institution of research and higher education examines it according to its internal regulations, and not later than in three months works out its action programme based on the experts' recommendations. This programme is presented to the Centre and the Department.

Every year in February the Centre renders an account to the Department on external quality assessment of research and higher education institutions during the past calendar year

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