

NATIONAL REPORT ON QUALITY ENHANCEMENT IN LANGUAGE STUDIES

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I. General introduction

The assessment of foreign language studies in the Republic of Lithuania should be started with the comments on some general traits of the Lithuanian educational system, as it seems a necessary prerequisite to dealing with the specific area relating to quality enhancement of teaching and learning foreign languages.

Lithuania with a population of about 3.7 million, compared with the larger nations of Europe, has limited material and human resources. It regained its political independence only ten years ago. The academic institutions of Lithuania couldn't enjoy close relations with the international academic community. Since World War II these relations with the rest of the academic community of the Western world have been denied to Lithuania, having been part of the Soviet bloc.

Lithuania is inhabited by people of 109 different ethnic backgrounds. The most numerous ethnic groups are Russians (8.2 % of the total population), Poles (6.9%), Belarussians (1.5%), Ukrainians (1%), Jews (0.1%), and others (0.7%). Most inhabitants from a non-Lithuanian background live in east and southeast Lithuania, Vilnius, Klaipeda and Visaginas.

Lithuania devotes a great deal of care and considerable resources to bilingual education. There are about 200 secondary schools in which the language of instruction is either Russian, Polish, or another non-Lithuanian language.

There is a number of periodicals published in languages other than Lithuanian. Lithuanian national radio and TV stations regularly broadcast programmes in Russian, Polish, Ukrainian and Belarussian. programmes are also broadcast for the Jewish community.

It goes without saying that any person of an academic or non-academic profession is to a considerable extent bound to view different, unfamiliar circumstances in the light of his own background and experiences. First, it should be noted that the Lithuanian Government and the Lithuanian academic community itself is desirous of reintegration of Lithuanian scholarly institutions into the international academic community. Education institutions enjoy free access to international developments in all major fields of scholarship and scientific work and wish to be a co-operative partner in the international academic community in the endeavour to further Lithuanian academic progress and productivity on the wider international arena.

The present-day Lithuanian educational system covers pre-school development, general child and youth education, vocational & junior college training, higher education and adult education (see scheme below). Education institutions can be State or non-State-maintained. According to the Lithuanian Constitution, education is compulsory until the age of 16 with general education comprising primary (6/7-10/11 years) and lower secondary (10/11-15/16 years) levels. Basic vocational education (stage1 - 2 years) concerns those who have not completed lower secondary levels. Upper secondary schools (3 years) or gymnasiums, which provide an in-deep, specialised general education (4 years) (15/16-18/19 years), grant school leaving certificates. There are two ways for secondary vocational education, one offering only vocational qualification (stage2) and the other offering both Maturity and vocational qualifications (stage 3). These are for students who have completed the lower secondary level. Vocational schools (stage 4) are for students who have completed upper secondary schools and, depending on the profession, provide 1-2 year courses. Junior (Professional) Colleges provide specialisation for students having completed upper secondary or vocational schools (stage 4). Studies last two to four years. Programmes (modules) approved and accredited by an institution of higher education and conforming to the requirements of a Bachelor's degree, may be included in a junior college curriculum. Such curricula (modules) may be transferable if study is continued at an institution of higher education. All State and local government secondary, vocational and higher education schools are free of charge (some amendments to the law will be discussed later). Financing of educational institutions is the prerogative of the State. The funds are allocated for each individual student.

Fehler! Unbekanntes Schalterargument.

The first compulsory foreign language is started at the age of 10, in the last year of primary school. The second foreign language is started two years later. The languages chosen are studied throughout the student's school career, and a centralised examination is taken at the age of 18. At the same time, it serves as an entrance exam to the universities and colleges.

The third foreign language is optional and can be chosen by students in gymnasiums or in schools with humanities profile. Gymnasiums are supposed to provide a higher level of education than secondary schools.

The languages offered as first foreign language (FL1) are English, German or French, English being the leading one. The languages offered as a second foreign language (FL2) are Russian, English, German, French or any other foreign language. Since 1990, Russian has been one of the foreign languages to choose from. Earlier it used to be the first compulsory language, started at the age of 8. A number of students learning other languages is insignificant. It is usually difficult to find a native speaker able to teach Swedish, Finnish, Latvian, Italian, etc., and to ensure continuity after the person leaves, because only teachers of English, German, Russian, French and Polish are trained in Lithuania. The third foreign language offered can be any modern language or Latin. The languages offered at schools depend on the availability of teachers. During the Soviet period, the languages taught were regulated by the Ministry.

10 % of schools offer language studies beginning at the age of 8 and continuing until the age of 18. During the last two or three years of secondary education, schools offer

teaching on the literature, history and geography of the target countries taught in the respective language. The number of subjects is very limited due to the lack of qualified teachers able to teach other subjects in the foreign language.

Students choosing schools with Russian or Polish as medium of instruction have to take the Lithuanian language beginning at the age of 9. The history and geography of Lithuania are also taught in Lithuanian. Other subjects taught in Lithuanian will be introduced gradually.

The Lithuanian Constitution guarantees an equal opportunity for all individuals to attain a higher education according to their abilities. The increasing number of young people strives to achieve higher education. More funds are needed to assure the quality of education provided, and traditionally only State-financed higher education is more and more difficult to be maintained. The requirements to reduce the budgetary deficit at the account of expenses in the public sector make it possible to state that State financing satisfies and will satisfy less and less the needs of higher education system. Even though the budgetary assignments allocated annually for higher education institutions increased in 1993-1998 by more than ten times, they are hardly sufficient for covering wages, social insurance instalments and scholarships. Therefore higher education institutions for the fulfilment of their functions search for additional sources of financing. They conduct research and technological development works to orders, provide paid services to those who want to improve their qualifications. In the past years, higher education institutions started admitting students who are able to pay for their studies. It is considered that student fees would create additional possibilities for faster improvement of studies. Students' personal contribution to higher educational institution financing would encourage a more responsible attitude to studies. It is also probable that students when paying for their studies as well as their parents and other sponsors will focus more attention to the quality of studies and will stimulate higher institutions to work better. Evidently, to increase the number of higher education students in Lithuania would be possible by replacing of the concept of free higher education by the concept of paid studies of students.

In January 2002 some amendments to the Law on Higher Education were made by the Seimas (Parliament). It introduced fixed tuition fees that will come into force in 2003. The amendments ensure that the first semester of studies is free of charge, while starting from the second semester students will have to pay for their studies. Half of the best full-time students and 30% of extra-mural and evening students will be exempt from the payment. The amendments are still hotly disputed in the academic community.

The Law on Research and Higher Education of the Republic of Lithuania regulates the activities of institutions of higher education. A higher education is acquired after completing one's undergraduate studies, which last four or five years in an institution of higher education. After completing a professional, specialised professional or residency programme, a student obtains a professional (e.g. teacher, advocate, physician, engineer, economist, etc.) qualification. Upon completing a Bachelor's programme, denoting an undergraduate education in a certain field of science, a specialised professional or Master's programme lasting one and a half to two years can be undertaken. Doctoral

studies in Lithuania last for four years, of which one and a half to two years are devoted to preparing for Doctoral exams. A candidate must prepare and publicly defend a Doctoral dissertation in order to be awarded a Doctoral degree.

Institutions of higher education have daytime study as well as evening, extra-mural (correspondence), intensive, etc. The majority of courses are daytime. A considerable part of extra-mural study is devoted to self-education. Extra-mural students have sessions of lectures and examinations for which they actually come to the institutions of higher education to attend classes, consult, take credit tests and examinations.

In order to apply for an undergraduate programme at a Lithuanian institution of higher education, an applicant should have a maturity, junior college or any other corresponding education certificate. The usual admission criterion is a competition rating determined by the secondary or junior college record, final examination mark and results of the entrance examination given by the institution of higher education. Not all programmes have entrance examinations, depending on their popularity and whether the programme selected requires specific abilities (e.g. music, art, etc.). Each institution, in co-ordination with the Ministry of Education and Science, prepares its own regulations for the admission of applicants. Undergraduate admissions at institutions of higher education are usually conducted in July. In order to organise and conduct admissions, the institution's rector forms an entrance commission to handle all issues related to it. Only a fixed number of applicants can be admitted to a specific programme and sometimes, therefore, competitions for certain programmes (e.g. economics, business management, law, etc.) are very keen, with up to ten applicants per place and sometimes even more. Candidates can apply to several programmes or even at several institutions but they can accept entry into but one programme at one institution. If the number of applicants for a specific programme is less than expected, additional admissions are announced immediately before or after the beginning of the term.

Second level programmes admit individuals already in possession of a Bachelor's degree or equivalent professional qualification in the field selected. Second level programmes usually have one or two entrance examinations, but sometimes completely lack them. Admission to an institution of higher education is competitive, i.e. by rating entrance examination results, marks from Bachelor's thesis or final examinations and sometimes the record of the undergraduate courses taken in that speciality. In order to enter a Doctoral programme, an applicant should have either a Master's degree in the selected field or a corresponding education. Admission is conducted without any entrance examinations or upon passing one (very seldom more than one) entrance examination. Admission is carried out by considering the results of the entrance examination, the marks from the Master's thesis, the final grades from certain Master's level courses or the project work done, and the level of scientific work published.

The school year usually begins on the first of September. Studies are divided into two terms: autumn (usually from September to January) and spring (February to June), each covering a period of about 20 weeks. At the end of each semester, there is a period, called the examination session, when students are exempt from attending classes. Every course in a subject is assessed by one of three means: examination, graded credit test or credit test (pass/fail). They can be oral or in writing. Graded credit tests are a vanishing form of

assessment and in many institutions are no longer in use. Students are evaluated using an absolute ten point grading scale. Examinations receiving a "1", "2", "3", "4" are considered failing and must be retaken. Therefore, in reality, a seven-point scale is used.

On January 1, 1999, 15 institutions of higher education in Lithuania (all of them State) were authorised to provide higher education and confer higher education diplomas. Pursuant to the Law on Research and Higher Education (1991), the Seimas (Parliament) is authorised to found, reorganise and liquidate State institutions of higher education subject to a proposal submitted by the Government. Non-State institutions can be founded pursuant to a licence being issued by the Government. Following the resolutions of the Lithuanian Government of 1999, the first licence was granted to a non-public institutions of higher education - Vilnius Saint Joseph Seminary, founded by the Vilnius Archdiocese, and International Higher Business School, founded by the Norwegian Business Institute. In 2000, some Junior Colleges restructured their curricula and changed their legal foundations, thus becoming non-university institutions in higher education. At present there are 7 State colleges providing a non-university higher education in Lithuania. Non-university study programmes should provide higher professional education of a certain area and prepare high-quality specialists for a specific area of work within the shorter period (within the programmes with 120-160 credits in scope).

At present there are 22 State and 13 non-State institution (only private colleges) of higher education in Lithuania. Vilnius University is the largest one, the history of which goes back to 1597. Vilnius University is considered to be the most popular and prestigious university in Lithuania. As of October 1, 2000 the University employs 2.940 people on a full or part-time basis. Of those 1.159 are teaching and research staff while 266 are involved in research. There are 170 professors and 837 associate professors and 12.718 full-time and 3.724 part-time students at the university. The total number of students in Lithuania is well behind other European countries. Only 13.6% of Lithuanians have a higher education. Although there is a tendency for the number of students to increase the State finances only a limited number of seats at institutions of higher education. Such institutions may admit anyone paying for their own education. This number, however, cannot exceed 50% of those awarded State scholarships for that year in that programme (see the amendments to the Law on Higher Education mentioned earlier in the report). State scholarships are granted to Lithuanian students on the basis of attainment and social considerations. Study loans are also available for full-time students. According to a 1996 government resolution, a system of state scholarships was established to support Lithuanian citizens pursuing study or research abroad, as well as foreigners studying or doing research in Lithuania. Scholarships for exchange students are granted for one to ten months, under the terms of bilateral agreements between the countries involved. Foreign students studying in Lithuania are charged tuition fees varying between USD 1 300 and USD 3 000 a year.

Young people studying at all academic levels at higher education institutions total about 2% of the population of Lithuania. Since 1995, the number of students has started to increase. This is linked with the constantly changing social and economic situation and the strong belief that higher education will help to avoid unemployment and ensure better professional career opportunities.

The Lithuanian higher education system started to be reformed after the reestablishment of independence in the country. Attempts were made to restore the unity of science and studies, to legalise and consolidate the autonomy of higher education institutions, to harmonise the system of study programmes, degrees and qualifications awarded with the Western systems, to create the variety of measures for regulation of the economic system of science and studies. The main principles of functioning of the higher education system have been stated in the Law on Science and Studies adopted in 1991. The principle of democracy, autonomy of institutions of science and studies, great confidence in scientists was enforced in it. The Law only in general outline provides a State regulation model of these institutions. It was foreseen that the activities of institutions would be regulated by qualifications requirements determined by the Government, subsidies, State orders, financial agreements and other financial and standard measures.

The factor encouraging the reform is the Convention of the Council of Europe and the UNESCO on the Recognition of Qualifications Related to Higher Education in the States of the European Region ratified by Lithuania. Lithuania was obligated to follow the principles and procedures for recognition of diplomas and qualifications regulated by the Convention.

The most important achievements of the reform carried out until recently is that higher education has been liberated from strict State and political-ideological control, with the academic freedom principles enforced. Due to it the institutions of science and studies updated and modernised the contents of study programmes, especially great changes occurred in the social sciences and the humanities. New study programmes and even entire study trends have been created. Studies have become more internationalised, gradually the main higher education programmes of the European Union have been joined. More favourable conditions have been created for recognition of academic degrees and professional qualifications abroad. Many young specialists prepared at Lithuanian higher education institutions more easily join the European education programmes and labour market. An assessment system of institutions and study programmes is being implemented.

The principal strategy of higher education institutions is to invest in long-term research programmes, systematically involving larger institution units and structures as well as outside partners, to create new ones of cross-disciplinary nature and to promote pioneer pilot-type innovative projects of potential value. Much attention is to be paid at strengthening the capacities for technological application and transfer of applied research.

However, quite numerous problems that were inherited from the past remained unsolved and in some cases became even more acute. For example, hasty implementation of unprepared study programmes, weak academic competition, being the principal force of innovations, decreased social security of students and teachers, irrational financing system of scientific activities and studies, too frequent changes in the governmental structures regulating science and studies, insufficient co-ordination and identification of the rights, powers and responsibilities of all decision-making institutions as well as expert-advisory institutions.

At present the quality of doctoral studies is under supervision of the Lithuanian Scientific Council, assessment of other study programmes is organised by the Council for Assessment of Scientific and Study Institutions and the Centre for Quality Assessment. The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education - is a State budget institution, organizing the assessment of scientific and pedagogical activity of research and higher education institutions, assessment of qualifications of higher education and giving information about the recognition of qualifications. The Centre is established by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania. The Centre co-ordinates its programme of expert work with the Department of Science and Higher Education upon the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania. Fulfilling its tasks, the Centre co-operates with the Science Council of Lithuania, the Lithuanian Academy of Science, conferences of heads of research and higher education institutions, vocational and employment associations and other public institutions. The basic goals of the Centre are as follows:

- ❖ to co-ordinate and methodically guide the regular self-analysis process of scientific and pedagogical activity of the State and Non-state institutions of research and higher education, to organize the expert evaluation of that activity, to accumulate and publish information about the quality of that activity, to offer suggestions about the improvement of that activity;
- ❖ to evaluate qualifications of higher education acquired abroad, to give information on all questions regarding the recognition of higher education.

The Government of the Republic of Lithuania or the Ministry of Science and Education may initiate the quality assessment of the activity of research and HE institutions, and to commit to execute it to special expert groups or the Centre indicating concrete aims and order of assessment.

The major purpose of the quality assessment is to stimulate institutions of HE and research, their subdivisions and all the scientists to seek a clear perception of the needs of Lithuania, the mission, objectives and tasks of the institution, to facilitate for the institution to reveal of its weaknesses and strengths, and to provide for raising its work efficiency. The quality assessment is intended to determine whether the institution of research and HE meets the qualitative requirements formulated in the legal acts approved by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania and the Ministry.

The quality assessment has to provide information about the work efficiency and level of activities (in comparison with the international level) of institutions of research and HE, about the recommended state measures for improving the system of research and HE, and about the quality of study programmes. The quality assessment consists of two parts - an internal quality assessment (a self-assessment) of an institution, and its external quality assessment (peer review) 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. A HE institution performs its self-assessment at regular intervals of time. A self-assessment is to be carried out before each external quality assessment.

External quality assessment is organised by the Centre according long term (a few-year) and annual external assessment plans. Long-term plans establish which subject areas are to be evaluated in respective years, while annual plans are intended to schedule the evaluation of study programmes, institutions and their subdivisions. 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.

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

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

The main procedures of external quality assessment are the following:

- ❖ Experts' analysis of the self-assessment of an institution of research and higher education,
- ❖ Experts' site visit for obtaining information about the unit being assessed,
- ❖ Formulation of the experts' report and discussing it with the representatives of the institution of research and higher education,
- ❖ Publication of the summarized final assessment report in an informative issue of the Centre.

Experts are proposed to the Centre by the institutions of research and HE, the Science Council of Lithuania, the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, boards or councils of professional societies (e.g. doctors' unions, engineers' unions, scientists' unions, students' unions of research and higher education institutions), creative organisations, ministries or other state institutions concerned with higher education or research, and scientists and other experts with experience of evaluation. The Centre can invite foreign experts who work together with the Lithuanian experts or forms separate groups.

The Lithuanian Centre for Quality Assessment in HE fulfils information exchange within the European National Information Centres for Academic Recognition and Mobility (ENIC/NARIC) network. It is a member of International Network for Quality Assessment Agencies in Higher Education, International Association of Education and has representatives in European Association for International Education. The Study Quality Assessment Centre participates in international programmes in the field of quality assessment of higher education and recognition of qualifications.

Meanwhile, numerous study programmes including some foreign language ones, even though they were temporarily recorded in the State Register, have not been assessed by experts and no one has accredited them. According to the plans of the Study Quality Assurance Centre, the foreign language study programmes will be evaluated in 2002.

There is a big scope of work to be done with respect to quality assessment of studies in general, and, in particular, in language studies. The majority of higher education institutions have a lot of ideas, but their plans relating to quality measures are often not fully developed. Therefore, the feedback received was insufficient, and in many cases there were no responses at all.

The information available is based on the reports from Lithuanian educational institutions, on-site visits, web sites and interviews. Here is the list of institutions contacted or visited:

1. Vilnius University, Faculty of Philology, Institute of Foreign Languages, Departments of English, German and French Philology
2. Vilnius Pedagogical University, Faculty of Foreign Languages
3. Vytautas Magnus University, Faculty of Humanities
4. Siauliai University, Faculty of Philology
5. Klaipeda University, Faculty of Humanities
6. Kaunas Technological University, Department of Foreign Languages
7. Vilnius College in Higher Education, Department of Foreign Languages
8. Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Lithuania
9. Study Quality Assessment Centre

II. Quality measures relating to defining and designing courses and programmes in the area of languages

While the quality of language programmes is initially related to the staff quality and the teaching methods used, it is also highly dependent on the quality of goals or objectives of the language courses and programmes. In this respect the formulation of state policy is of great importance. The severe economic situation in Lithuania and the absence of relevant information make it very difficult to prioritise objectives. The analysis is needed especially in order to have regional and sectoral information on unemployment and long and short-term research in order to identify the demand for foreign language specialists. This work could resolve current difficulties in identifying which skills should be prioritised and covered in the contents of goals or objectives of the programmes. The assessment and enhancement of quality should involve the study programmes, which are based on clear principles and well-defined objectives.

Learning of languages in Lithuania is reinforced by the current processes of economic and political integration as well as by the growing need for intercultural understanding. The steady advance of information and communication technologies facilitates the considerable expansion of various types of networking and other linking arrangements among institutions. All higher education institutions strive for such an international co-operation, which is based on partnership and the collective search for quality and relevance in language learning. Besides, international co-operation helps to cope with the deteriorating economic conditions of Lithuania in which higher education institutions function.

Higher education institutions providing language studies are thinking of being better adjusted and more responsive to the demands of times where new opportunities are accompanied by new challenges. There is a need for higher education to re-examine, in view of its relations with society and particularly with the economic sector, its institutional and organisational settings, funding arrangements and management. Higher education institutions face the need to develop a comprehensive vision of their goals, tasks and functioning.

The principal strategy of the universities is:

- * to improve the language skills for mutual understanding, employment and mobility;
- * to motivate all young people to learn languages and raise their awareness and competence in several languages;
- * to support lifelong language learning as a way of responding to economic, social and cultural changes both in Lithuania and Europe.

Although the universities, which cherish their long-established traditions, are somewhat resistant to change, higher education as a whole and the policy on foreign languages in particular have undergone a far-reaching transformation in a relatively short period of time.

Languages are taught as main subjects, minor specialities (e.g. a person majoring in primary school teaching might have an English speciality) or obligatory courses. The specialities are centred round one language (e.g. French philology, English language and Literature, etc.). Practically all courses are delivered in the target language, except general subjects. The second foreign language is compulsory for all students majoring in languages.

Foreign language is an obligatory course for all specialities. The length of the course varies from speciality to speciality, from institution to institution.

The learning outcomes are defined in the programmes. They reflect what a student should be capable of after completing a certain course or a programme. Some HE institutions combine language studies with a specific professional profile (e.g. pedagogical university or Master's studies for interpreters). Language studies, which are compulsory for all specialities are supposed to be profession-oriented and students are engaged in activities that lead to the language competence significant for their specialities. It has already been mentioned that school leavers take an examination, which defines the level of proficiency and performance in a certain language. At HE institution a student is supposed to advance in the language. The expected outcome is expressed in either formally acknowledged levels or in fulfilment of specified goals and objectives.

All higher education institutions have contacts with Western-European or American universities ranging from contacts on the personal level to joint development of courses and programmes or research work on a larger scale. All members of the academic staff have a research component as part of his/her position, i.e., which is included in the salary. Research projects are usually initiated by the individual departments. In some projects the participants are exempt from teaching or their hours are reduced in order to carry on with

their research. The allocation of Sabbatical terms or years is decided by the Faculty Board on the basis of proposals from the departments. As a result of such a research work new courses are being proposed, e.g. British Studies, American Studies, Canadian Studies, Turkish Language Studies, Italian Language Studies etc. Such courses are usually of one semester length and are addressed to the students in the status of electives thus ensuring the courses' integration into the regular degree programmes. A great contribution in designing and implementing such courses is done by such institutions as The British Council, American Centre of Culture, French Centre of Culture, Goethe Institute, Italian Centre of Culture, Dante's Aligheri Society, etc.

Answering the needs of market economy the idea to create the double degree programmes where one of the languages will be less spoken EU language or language & field of specialisation is under consideration at the Vilnius University.

Lithuania also attracts students from other countries. One important programme is concerned with inviting foreign students of Lithuanian origin to study in Lithuania.

Lithuanian courses are taken by young people from Poland, Russia, Belarus, Iceland, Sweden, Finland, the USA, Great Britain and other countries. The objective is teaching practical Lithuanian to foreign students and organising Lithuanian studies of various duration and levels.

In the last few years internationalisation has been put at the core of the curriculum of the majority of universities. One of the most effective means of internationalising higher education is through student and teacher mobility. This policy has been carried out through a number of programmes and study modules taught through foreign languages. Currently, almost all universities offer study modules in foreign languages, usually English. In a relatively short period of time the universities have managed to create wide international contacts and the range of courses taught through foreign languages has grown significantly. However, there are no criteria based on which such programmes would be evaluated, particularly from the linguistic and communicative perspective. It is essential to analyse the value of such programmes, their advantages and disadvantages, their strengths and weaknesses in the Lithuanian institutions of higher education with the aim to improve the quality of such programmes.

A number of new programmes, especially in non-university higher education colleges, such as foreign language teacher training for primary schools, in-service teacher retraining (in-service trainees doing a two year course to become English/German language teachers), foreign language translator-reviewer training, foreign language interpreter-office administrator training, etc. have been introduced. New programmes often do not have the resources necessary to ensure minimum quality standards. The staff composition and qualification in some institutions is insufficient to ensure good quality teaching, poor compensation makes it difficult to recruit and retain qualified personnel. The fiscal constraints faced by the Lithuanian Government, coupled with increasing demand, lead to overcrowding and deteriorating infrastructure, lack of recourses for non-salary expenditures, such as textbooks and laboratory equipment might result in a decline in the quality of teaching and research activities and it is a major constraint to improvement.

An increasing number of factors have an impact on the need to modify the programmes and can therefore affect their quality: the knowledge explosion and the emergence of new disciplines, the increasing need to adopt a trans-disciplinary approach in order to understand natural and social phenomena, diversification of education courses, the desire for greater social relevance in a changing world, the needs analysis of different actors - students, teachers, social partners. These factors compel higher education institutions to make qualitative changes in their curricula - changes in goals, in methods as well as in the structure of programmes. As is seen from the needs analysis, carried out by some higher education institutions, reviewing the goals and standards is encouraged by employers and in rare cases by students themselves. They say that the training must not be viewed simply as the accumulation of knowledge but must be directed at acquiring skills enabling the students to mobilise their knowledge and related skills in order to analyse complex life situations, resolve the problems they pose, be capable of teamwork, be capable of providing logical justification for their choices and show foresight.

To ensure that such education and training are of high quality, it is important for them to be rooted in real-life settings and not to be just a formal exercise that has no meaning and is non-transferable. The place where training takes place and its immediate environment are the initial means of exercising the aforementioned skills and attitudes and thus of responding to the needs of the environment.

In this respect colleges in higher education are more flexible than universities in introducing institutional as well as system-wide improvement measures with respond to the changing needs. Colleges maintain closer direct relations with the organisations for which they train future employees. The co-operation focuses on matching the needs and skills and building new curricula. Each programme is reviewed by the appropriate employer organisations. The colleges try to adjust their programmes to new requirements of employers. Placement of students for practical training in their organisations contributes much to the development of the learning goals and then to the conversion of these objectives into a coherent programme or a new set of courses.

In 1995 the Phare programme established the National Standards Development Group to define National Standards for vocational education and to develop the structure of non-university higher education and competence levels in Lithuania, based on the level systems existing in EU countries. The group comprised the representatives of the Ministries, education policy-makers, heads of education institutions, and in 1997 it was recognised by the Government as a permanent National Advisory Group within the Ministry of Education. It pursues the aim to analyse the situation in higher education, to provide suggestions for improvement with national authorities. At the moment the Group is involved in developing the standard of a foreign language teacher. This is believed to bring qualitative changes in identifying the required skills and attitude profiles which will furthermore imply meaningful measures for defining a systematic policy of language studies including coherent language programmes.

III. Quality measures relating to the process of teaching and learning

The most common current approaches and methods used in foreign language teaching are various: the communicative learner-centred approach, the audio-lingual method, the grammar-translation (as a supplementary one) and others. Learner-centred philosophy is also a key element of evaluation policies within the institutions where language programmes are taught. Learners, particularly adult learners, who are aware and evaluative in relation to their own progress, are likely to be valuable sources of feedback on the "product". This feedback can enhance the quality of programmes and methods used, and thus, the success of the institution in two ways: in the market place and in achieving or maintaining recognition by the professional bodies.

The interactive method using small group work, discussion and design teams has become common practice on foreign language teaching courses, which aim to encourage reflective practice of the participants. The horseshoe sitting is being strongly encouraged and frequently implemented

The developing of language skills includes reading, listening, speaking and writing, and the developing language knowledge comprise vocabulary, grammar, discourse and pronunciation. On designing the learning tasks the teachers usually observe the system of grading, inter-grading and sequencing. The modes of study cover group discussions, individual assignments and projects.

The descriptions of study programmes and courses of language learning comprising the structure of a study programme or course, degrees offered, academic calendar, modes of assessment and grading, etc. are available at any higher education institution.

Teachers are supposed to provide students with procedural information during the first lectures. It includes assessment procedures, a framework of classroom activities, examples of topics, language areas, study skills, self-access facilities, etc.

The official language of instruction at the institutions is Lithuanian. The requirement of a good command of the Lithuanian language, spoken and written, essential for all students does not apply for the exchange students. However, in the departments of foreign language philology practically all the courses are taught in the target language. In some courses a substantial proportion of specialised literature is in English, German or French, therefore a good knowledge of these languages is also required.

Distance teaching at present does not play an important role in language learning because there are not enough distance teaching materials available. Two new distance learning centres are being established: one at Vilnius University, the other at Kaunas Technological University, with three other distance learner support centres in Vilnius and Kaunas affiliated with them. The centres are supported by the multi-country PHARE Distance Education Project. They will be equipped with computers, CD-ROMs and modern language multimedia learning packages.

There is only one self-access in Vilnius, provided by the Public Service Language Centre. There is a great demand for this kind of establishment all over the country. Most of the population in Lithuania have a good command of Russian, but they need to improve their

English, German or French. There are few possibilities for autonomous learning because there is no choice of learning materials produced by Lithuanian authors, whether for English, German, French or Lithuanian. All the materials presented in the centre are foreign.

Lithuanians, however, tend to take private courses and brush up or start foreign languages. Everybody understands the necessity of a foreign language in the times of change for Lithuania and in our strive to become a member of the EU.

Today one will have difficulty finding a teacher anywhere in Lithuania, especially the one teaching a foreign language for special purposes, who has not been faced or threatened with the notion of change. Change and innovation have become words that policy makers seem to love and teachers seem to dread. Educational innovations are planned to bring about improvement in classroom practice with the aim of enhancing student achievement. The major changes involved:

- ❖ change or revision of teaching materials, syllabi or curricula;
- ❖ changes in teacher behaviour (new techniques, approaches or activities);
- ❖ changes in beliefs and principles underlying new materials and approaches.

The process of implementing innovations started to become a concern, which offered the first glimpses into the complexity of the change process - the lack of material resources, shortage of textbooks, poorly equipped libraries. Lithuanian teachers have at their disposal less equipment, in particular, personal computers than one nowadays consider normal at most Western universities. The design of materials as well as editorial work are very time-consuming aspects of the overall activities. The individual working situation and the work on institutional level (e.g. in connection with projects involving a number of people) could be facilitated and more economically performed if more computer equipment were made available. The financial and social aspects of changes of this kind are also important. Therefore teachers wholly or partly resist or even reject or transform innovations. Sometimes they exhibit a token adoption - they profess to have changed their practice but in reality carry on as before.

Changes must occur at all levels if it is to have an effect in classroom and on students. If you change the teaching approach you must revise the curriculum, syllabus and develop or use new textbooks. Otherwise the chances of achieving the intended outcomes become drastically reduced. Changing teacher's attitudes is only a small minor step towards a successful educational reform that is still going on in Lithuania. It is the culture of education institutions that first and foremost must change; even if the teachers revise their attitudes in line with the spirit of the innovation and become active inquirers and agents of change (which is usually the case with the foreign language teachers) they still have to operate within a system that may be essentially conservative and intractable to change. All education institutions must therefore develop the capacity to deal with, manage and thrive on change.

Teachers must become life-long learners capable of developing their ability to raise questions, to reflect upon and evaluate their own practice - the methods and materials used - with a view to constantly improving it. Teachers need to be able to cope with change, need to be open to change and make change an integral feature of their working

environment. The British Council in Lithuania devotes active attention to developing communicative network between teachers of English. It provides workshops and seminars, establishes working groups of teachers, where teachers regularly meet to discuss their practices, identify problems, jointly develop action plans and pedagogical concepts, clarify the meanings of the innovation and identify its workable and unworkable aspects. This enables the teachers to overcome initial humps of implementation and increase their confidence and provide essential information to managers make the innovations more compatible to the needs of teachers and to the realities of the classroom context.

Foreign language learning in Lithuania is also considered as intercultural learning. Intercultural communication within the new Europe is based on the idea that cultural and language learning interconnect. The learners use the opportunity offered by various European programmes to spend at least six months at various European and world education institutions. They can be exchange students who are admitted to such institutions under the auspices of one or another exchange programme (e.g. Socrates) or bilateral agreement. One can be a free mover who arranges his/her studies himself. Such a student spends a study period at a certain university abroad not leading to either degree or professional qualification. Almost all higher education institutions in Lithuania made a decision to gradually implement European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) into student mobility activities. The ECTS, developed by the Commission of European Communities, providing common procedures and transparency to guarantee academic recognition of studies abroad was fully applied to all outgoing students, i.e. the workload of 60 ECTS credits has to be undertaken by the exchange student during the whole academic year and 30 ECTS credits during one semester. One national credit (one week=40 hours of work) is equal to 1,5 ECTS credit. This kind of co-operation brings rich rewards in terms of foreign language proficiency, careers, education and personal development. A language course abroad is the obvious choice for rapid improvement where formal training in the classroom is strengthened through contacts with other people and total immersion into the different cultural environment. It is expected to give new impulses and assistance in quality assurance, among other things.

IV. Quality measures relating to the training of teachers and trainers professionally engaged in the area of languages

In the universities mentioned above the teaching staff involved in foreign language teacher training consist of:

- professors (full professors)
- associate professors
- lecturers (assistant professors)
- assistants (teaching assistants)

Actually, the composition of staff positions of the department or faculty lecturers should depend on the study organisation needs rather than the titles of the existing staff, since the qualification is more reliably shown by the lecturer's creative production (scientific inventions, new research programmes, publications) rather than the previously earned

pedagogical scientific titles. In order to identify the rational staff structure and avoid the appointment of very qualified lecturers for the study areas, where lower qualifications would be sufficient, it was decided to fix which level of lecturers is needed for the studies. For example, *professors* are necessary for methodical guidance of the university study trend, doctoral studies and scientific work, lecturing for a major part of master studies and running some courses of the basic studies; *associate professors* - for part of doctoral and master studies, lecturing for a major part of the basic studies and guiding part of the exercises of the basic studies; whereas a major part of the exercises and laboratory work of the basic studies should be guided by *lecturers*, *assistants* and even doctoral students having pedagogical practice. This makes it easier to guarantee that lecturers scientists would not be loaded just with lecturing, they could allocate a sufficient part of their time to scientific activities, that the academic pedagogical workload of higher education institution teachers would not exceed the following norms: professor's - 6 hours per week, associate professor's - 10 hours per week.

The provided list of pedagogical staff positions is good both for universities and colleges. But for colleges positions of professors and associate professors are needed less (at the moment there are no professors involved in lecturing at colleges) because non-university study programmes contain less theoretical subjects, for teaching of which scientists are necessary. In general, there still seems the greatest challenges of updating and upgrading the staff of Colleges, teaching foreign languages for specific purposes, on the new demands derived from transformation processes. The problems are related both to social and economic factors. Although the system of education can never have sufficient financial means, now that the college (non-university higher education) system reform is under way, financing has become the main problem in the area. Low wages of pedagogical workers, the decreasing prestige of teachers and poor financial state of colleges threaten the quality of studies.

To ensure the quality of the pedagogical staff, all the positions must be occupied by way of competition. Competitions are open, making it possible for any person prepared to participate in it. There are some qualification requirements established for candidates to these positions, for example:

the position of professor may be occupied by a scholar conducting research actively and efficiently, a candidate should somehow reveal his/her ability to fulfil the functions of professor - this can be similar to the habilitation in some countries when the ability to teach, guide the studies is recognised rather than the second scientific degree (habilitated doctor).

the position of associate professor may be occupied by a person with a scientific degree and actively participating in scientific research or a highly qualified professional with a Master's academic degree and a long-term professional experience, necessary for deep understanding of the practical subject taught.

the position of lecturer may be taken by a person with scientific degree or with a Master's academic degree and having very good teaching experience of the subject.

The position of assistant may be occupied by a person with a Master's academic degree and having started participating actively in scientific research (within a fixed time he/she should either prepare and enter the doctoral studies and prepare the doctoral thesis without attending lectures) may be noted for very qualified development of some practical skills of students and take the position of lecturer. Such a lecturer is usually given a one-semester period of work on probation. If in three years a person fails to enter the doctoral studies he or she can't expect to be attested.

A higher education institution concludes an employment contract with the winner of the competition. Upon the termination of the established (five years) period the lecturer should be attested. During the attestation it should be made sure that the lecturer's activities within the last term of his/her office comply with the requirements set for the position occupied. Each higher education institution has its own standardised form of criteria designed for assessment of the teaching staff academic performance. They may include:

- compulsory performance (scientific work, teaching)
- optional performance (methodological work, guidance of scientific work, upgrading courses, reports and presentations at the conferences, administration and expertise)

The Attestation Commission with references from the Departments and Faculty Councils make a decision which could be aimed at: a) attesting a lecturer; b) postponing the attestation up to one year, indicating the necessary corrections in the lecturer's activity; c) not attesting a lecturer. An employment contract should be terminated with the not attested lecturer at the end of the semester and a competition should be announced for taking the position of that lecturer.

All higher education institutions should regularly improve the quality of teaching and take every opportunity for renewal and improvement of the teaching staff. According to the recent Government regulations the lecturers' positions at a higher education institution may be commonly occupied by persons not over 65 years. The status of *professor emeritus* is also accepted which creates favourable conditions for retired professors to further participate in studies and research.

It is worth mentioning about the policy on teaching staff development at Vilnius University. Vilnius University while developing the teaching staff policy and strengthening its European dimension will articulate the value of the European involvement in academic staff recruitment, promotion and assessment. The strategy of open national competition for academic positions will be further developed and in some academic areas including foreign language studies the address will be extended to foreign academic personnel. The involvement of the academic staff in teaching abroad and work at home with international students, as well as in joint curricular and research development, in European networks and associations will be considered as an indicator of international nature in the internal quality assessment of individual academics, departments and faculties. Doctoral studies will remain the main forge for training a new generation of academics. The studies will be further strengthened by systematising the recruitment of doctoral students, introduction of strong European dimension into the study content and the system of the evaluation of the study results. With the medium-term goals of policy on teaching staff the University aims:

- ❖ to achieve that every second Ph.D. student should be provided with the opportunity to spend at least six months in the prestigious European and world research centres.
- ❖ to reach that Sabbaticals abroad and other means of staff development through international staff mobility schemes will become a norm for each academic of Vilnius University.

All higher education institutions recognise the international co-operation as an important lever in both developing a balanced view on the world around them and enhancing their own academic prosperity, quality and reputation. Lithuania has signed inter-governmental co-operation treaties in the sphere of education, studies, science and culture with many countries. In 1999, new interstate agreements have been prepared and are co-ordinated, including the project of the common higher education space of the Nordic and Baltic countries. In 1998-2000, 24 competitions on the studies, scientific missions in foreign countries were announced. More than two hundred and fifty teachers participated in them.

The state scholarships for studies abroad are strictly regulated by the resolutions of the Government. Scholarships are granted by way of public tender. Agreements are signed with persons who are granted scholarships for studies abroad as regards their coming back to Lithuania and the work in Lithuania after their studies abroad. This is due to the fact that many perspective young people upon completing their Master's or Doctoral studies abroad prefer to stay there thus bringing no added value to the quality of foreign language teaching and learning in Lithuania.

The higher education institutions of Lithuania have drawn joint programmes with higher education institutions of other countries to carry out external research and ELT projects. One can mention such institutions as Uppsala University (Sweden), University of Surrey (England), University College Galway (Ireland), Aalborg University (Denmark), Lund University (Sweden), Heidelberg Higher Pedagogical School (Germany), Limoges, Le Mano Universities, (France), Erfurt University (Germany), Eger Pedagogical Institute (Hungary), University, Mainz Johannes Gutenberg University (Germany) and others.

A considerable contribution is also made by the successful European Union programmes - Tempus, Phare, Leonardo and Socrates, including the Erasmus sub-programme. The implementation of the European projects in the area of university education makes a very big impact on the quality assurance of the foreign language studies and the teaching staff involved by means of upgrading teachers' qualifications, drafting of new curricula, preparation of training packages, improvement and organization of the training process, identification of the training documentation according to the EU standards, development of education policy and dissemination of the results, etc.

Apart from the EU programmes, a very big contribution to organization of refreshment courses for foreign language teachers has been made by the British Council, Goethe's Institute, Center of American Culture, Center of French Culture, etc. The British Council devotes active attention to English for special purposes enabling the English teachers to participate in various seminars, workshops and conference thus enhancing the quality of teaching at different levels of educational institutions.

The training of teachers teaching languages for specific purposes is somewhat complicated. There are no degrees or special programmes designed to prepare such kind of teachers (there do exist studies for interpreters and translators, but graduating students tend to be engaged in spheres other than teaching). Many teachers go in for teaching specialized languages without any previous education how to do that. Having in mind that they still teach a language, they consult subject teachers, trying to assess students' specific needs, design authentic material, attend courses, pass on ideas, techniques and practical activities to other colleagues.

Within the present Lithuanian university system, the teaching of foreign languages for special purposes appears to be accorded great importance. The number of teachers in these special purpose departments surpasses the number of teachers in the regular departments of English philology. A system of this kind is understandable, perhaps even necessary, in a situation where most students only know one foreign language (Russian) really well, where there is a shortage of appropriate textbooks, where the means to travel abroad are scant, but where there is no shortage of man-power.

Recent developments in the Lithuanian high school system show that Russian is gradually losing ground to English in particular, and other Western European languages (German, French) are also becoming increasingly popular with the new generations of Lithuanian higher school students

As a result of exchange programmes, some institutions of higher education, including Vilnius University, Vilnius Pedagogical University, made a decision to gradually implement European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) into student mobility activities. This will create more favorable conditions for co-operation of higher education institutions, in case it is needed by university or college students to change the programme or higher education institution, to re-qualify or improve qualifications, to continue studies according to the programmes of other level studies, etc. In addition it stimulates higher education institutions to prepare and teach in foreign languages some subjects in the basic studies and some study programmes in master or doctoral studies.

It is expedient to strengthen relations with all European countries while implementing diploma recognition, higher education quality assessment, restructuring of studies, mutual information, lecturer and student exchange, inter-university projects and other programmes. Only just due to financial difficulties most students and lecturers can not take sometimes a unique opportunity to study, go on probation or improve their professional qualifications at the foreign study institutions. In the nearest future, striving not to lose the opportunity to strengthen both the intellectual potential in the country and foreign language studies in particular, necessary resources should be found.

At the moment, continuing education is conducted in different types of educational institutions. However, the training continuation sector has not yet been fully described in terms of statistical reports, and there is not enough information on the matter. Bearing this in mind, a sociological research has been done with the aim to define the needs for foreign language teachers at the level of secondary education. The needs analysis revealed that 49.9%, 41.4% and 16.4% of English, German and French teachers, respectively, had no professional qualification. In our country with rapidly growing demand for foreign

languages, English in particular, there is an increasing tendency to put untrained "teachers" into classrooms, especially in rural areas. Appointments of untrained teachers are being made in basic education as well as at the secondary and vocational levels of education. The effects are devastating not just on the quality of teaching but also on the education budget. The shortage of foreign language specialists can be accounted for by the unwillingness of young qualified specialists to work at secondary schools, lack of financial and material resources and low pay. At the moment, the greatest contribution to continuing education is done by the In-Service Teacher Training Institute and the Institute of Foreign Languages under the Vilnius University. The latter offers a Bachelor's programme lasting for three years (142 credits) and ensures a high level professional qualification.

Some higher education institutions offer Master studies for lecturers recruited for their subject expertise and having no previous teaching qualification. The studies last for two years.

V. Quality measures relating to the organisation and management of the process of teaching and learning

Quality has become a major concern in higher education. This is because meeting society's needs and expectations towards higher education depends ultimately on the quality of its staff, programmes and students as well as its infrastructure and academic environment.

The principal objective of quality enhancement measures in higher education should be institutional as well as system-wide self-improvement. The quality of the physical and academic infrastructure of HE (higher education) is important for its teaching, research, service functions and institutional culture. Capital investment in infrastructure should be seen as public works forming an integral part of the overall efforts towards the modernisation of the economy-linked infrastructure.

Language studies in Lithuania are organised in different ways. It might comprise faculties, departments and centres/institutes. There exist separate faculties of foreign languages (e.g. Faculty of Foreign Languages at Vilnius Pedagogical University or Faculty of Philology at Vilnius University) or language departments might be included in faculties of Humanities (e.g. Kaunas Technological University, Vytautas Magnus University). If languages are majors, faculties have departments for particular languages or their different specialisations (e.g. Department of English Philology, Department of English Didactics, etc. at Vilnius Pedagogical University, Department of Slavic Philology, Department of Slavic Literature, etc. at Vilnius University). They cover mainstream language courses (undergraduate and postgraduate). Some faculties have departments dealing with languages for specific purposes. Specialised language teaching might be the prerogative of Foreign Language Centres or Institutes at different HE institutions. In Vilnius College there is a department of Foreign Languages comprising

teachers of all 5 faculties. Our college does not prepare language specialists (language majors), therefore, languages are taught in accordance with the special needs of students.

At universities, where languages are main subjects, the degrees are awarded at the Bachelor (4 years), Master (2 years) and Doctoral (additional 4 years) levels. In other HE institutions languages are compulsory courses and form a part of the curriculum. Language centres might offer degree programmes, a variety of courses (intensive, short-term, long-term, different levels, courses that prepare for internationally acknowledged certificates) or might just serve as a resource centre.

Courses are rated in accordance with the Credit Accumulation and Transfer System to facilitate transfer to other institutions and students may obtain credits for prior academic work. Credits are supposed to reflect a full student workload and are not restricted to contact hours. The workload comprises lectures, practical work, seminars, self-study and any assessment activities.

Different organisations of language studies in different institutions affect the monitoring of the whole teaching and learning process. Authorities, such as deans in faculties, heads of departments or directors of centres are people responsible for the organisation and coordination of the academic and scientific work, motivation of teachers and students, study quality assurance, etc.

A part of their responsibilities is taken up by vice-deans or specially appointed people assisting in day-to-day organising of the studying process. Allotment of tasks and responsibilities to staff members and certain teachers serves well in trying to achieve a better interaction between authorities and teachers and among teachers themselves.

A warm atmosphere always enables teachers and students to be open to discussion. Problem spotting and solving does not seem as dreadful as it has been before. Key issues are discussed and dealt with at regular departmental meetings or faculty board meetings with student representatives.

Some teachers are appointed to different boards or committees inside the institution, nation-wide or even abroad. Their experience is a great contribution to the overall studying process. New ideas and innovative methods are always welcomed.

Management information systems are being introduced, but this area needs to be worked on and developed. Institutions keep track of the academic achievements of the students, the development of student numbers in courses or programmes, etc. It's all related to the students within the institution, but almost nothing is known about the students after their graduation. Surely, management information systems will improve a lot with the coming years.

Management in a most effective way does not only mean good internal communication and allocation of administrative tasks. They are really important, but there is much more to it. Allocation of the workload (teacher/student), recruiting the best teachers, designing entire programmes, acquiring appropriate material, monitoring of teachers' performance are just a few things to be considered in order to ensure study quality.

Individual teachers are devoted to their tasks. However, there is a noticeable discontent with working conditions-the usual heavy teaching load, lack of equipment and books-especially among younger members of the academic staff who evidently feel that they are not provided with the opportunities necessary to develop their professional qualifications to the advantage of the institution whose employees they are.

The appraisal process requires teachers to take on tasks additional to their normal work and may be seen as added workload. Quite often the conditions in which teachers work are perceived by them to have a negative impact on their ability to deliver quality teaching (e.g. salaries may not seem to be an adequate reflection of the demands of the job).

Teachers should be motivated to expand their knowledge about teaching and learning and to enhance their skills. They should be given additional opportunities for self-development (e.g. in-service training) or other possibilities to gain further qualifications (participation in conferences or network with other professionals).

No formal mechanism for obtaining feedback from teachers about the problems they faced existed in the past. Teacher's interests, their special skills were not systematically known by those in management.

The institutions are supposed to define quality standards and criteria to assist in the monitoring of a teacher's performance. Faculties in our college, for example, have inner quality assurance groups. They circulate questionnaires among students finishing a course, analyse the results and see if students are satisfied with the content, delivery of the course and the competence of a teacher. If not, further measures are being taken.

Quality assurance can be guaranteed in many different ways. The process may be centralised in a government sector. The Ministry of Education has been working to improve the quality of higher education through

- ❖ improving the legal and regulatory environment for the creation of new institutions and programmes in the public and private sectors for university management and quality evaluation
- ❖ creating incentives and supporting initiatives and investments which will increase the efficiency and quality of institutions
- ❖ improving the allocation of resources within universities

The Ministry of Education is the principal policy mechanism for controlling higher education whose chief functions are to approve the charters of new institutions, accredit courses, set tuition fees and enrolment levels.

The shift to formal systems of quality assurance is among the most significant trends affecting HE over the last five years. Today Lithuania has some organisations responsible for conducting quality assurance reviews of academic institutions (see much more on this in chapter 1).

Study programme to be assessed means not only a programme description, but it also includes a programme realisation or ability to realise it (in a case of new programmes) in an institution of higher education. External (expert) assessment of a study programme may be exhaustive or partial. A planned exhaustive external assessment is to be preceded by an exhaustive internal assessment.

The task of a partial assessment of a study programme is to find out whether it satisfies the requirements of sequential study programmes regulations approved by the Minister. For a partial external assessment, experts only consider the submitted internal evaluation material and present their critical remarks and conclusions on it.

An additional task of an exhaustive assessment of a study programme is to reveal its strengths and weaknesses, the shortcomings and their causes in realising the programme as well as to publish the quality assessment of the programme and to recommend ways of its improvement. For an exhaustive assessment, an experts' visit to a higher education institution as well as a discussion of the assessment report with the study programme leaders are required.

When assessing a fresh study programme proposed, it is to be determined whether a proposed new programme is needed and whether an institution proposing the programme is capable of realising it successfully. Proposing a new study programme an institution of research and higher education has to present all study programmes of that subject area that are active in the institution. The Department takes the decision proposing the Ministry to register a new study programme, which was evaluated positive.

Universities carry out their internal evaluation in order to provide the documentation required by CEC (Central Evaluation Commission). Internal evaluation serves to check the validity of the programme's objectives, identify problems and bring about improvements, especially in relation to a teacher's competence. Evaluation process generally analyses past experience as a means of identifying future direction and strategy.

Self-evaluation may involve a broad look at all aspects of the language centre: goals, curriculum, teaching and learning as well as at one or two specific issues that are causing concern to programme personnel, e.g. the student dropout rate, dwindling financial resources or student placement procedures.

The accreditation of graduate programs is the result of an analytical process carried out by external evaluators. They study the information provided by postgraduate programmes, conduct site visits and issue recommendations. Accredited programmes are evaluated periodically to verify whether their quality has been maintained or improved.

Entire programmes are reviewed and evaluated by employer organisations that have a clear vision of what training their future employee should get. Language is not an exception. Every employer understands the necessity of proficiency in a foreign language nowadays. Employees with a good command of a foreign language are greatly valued and can be offered better jobs.

The overall teacher's work as well as courses are evaluated by students. Certain staff members circulate questionnaires and students can give their opinion on the teacher's competence, performance and course effectiveness. These questionnaires have become very popular and tend to be more objective with every year. Students perceive that their opinion is valued. Therefore, they try not to please teachers while answering anonymous questionnaires.