



STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS

ALEKSANDRO STULGINSKIO UNIVERSITETO
(aukštosios mokyklos pavadinimas)
STUDIJŲ PROGRAMOS "SODININKYSTĖ IR DARŽININKYSTĖ"
(valstybinis kodas – 6211IX006,621D72002)
VERTINIMO IŠVADOS

EVALUATION REPORT
OF "HORTICULTURE" (state code – 6211IX006, 621D72002)
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>Sodininkystė ir daržininkystė</i>
Valstybinis kodas	6211IX006, 621D72002
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>Horticulture</i>
State code	6211IX006, 621D72002
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	Master 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.	List of student surveys / questionnaire for evaluation of study subjects/ courses
2.	Brochures for the Scientific Events 2017 organized by ASU (Conferences, Seminars, Agricultural fair and other activities)

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

The Aleksandras Stulginskis University (ASU), previously known as Lithuanian University of Agriculture, is a state institution that includes five faculties in the area of Agricultural Sciences (Agronomy, Economics and Management, Forest Sciences and Ecology, Agricultural Engineering, Water and Land Management). The second cycle programme (MSc) in Horticulture, which is being evaluated is the only master programme offered in Lithuania by the faculty of Agronomy of ASU.

The self-evaluation report (SER) of the master's study programme Horticulture was carried out by a self-evaluation team of 7 members comprised of one professor, three associate professors, one lecturer, one (first year) student and a social partner. The SER was written in the period from October 2016 to January 2017 and it reflects the evaluation and data of the period 2011 to 2016. The SER was in accordance with the Methodology for the evaluation of higher education study programmes and the 7 member group worked efficiently to present all the needed data and information. In the SER it is stated that the Programme was initiated in 2011 based on conducted surveys of potential stakeholders that indicated the need for such a programme. There is an extensive reference to the needs for highly specialized horticulturist that will cover the demand in the labour market for the sector. The aims and LOs of the programme, as presented here, justify the development of the MSc in Horticulture which is the only one offered in Lithuanian HEIs.

External evaluation of the Programme is conducted for the first time.

The team of experts, assigned by the SKVC made the site visit in the Faculty of Agronomy in Kaunas. The team of experts reviewed in consecutive order the management and administration staff (on the previous day) and then followed the joint team of the SER group of both the Horticulture and Landscape Management programmes, the teaching staff, students and graduates (alumni) and the social partners/employers. The site visit was terminated with a tour in the premises of the Faculty of Agronomy, visiting laboratories, classrooms, drawing and models exhibition and other facilities used by the Programme.

The team wishes to express its appraisal to the SKVC for the good organization of the visit and the valuable presence and assistance of the evaluation coordinator.

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 5th 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

As stated in the SER, ASU is the only higher education institution in Lithuania implementing the master's programme in Horticulture and which focuses on the formation of specialized knowledge and scientific research work skills, which will allow graduates to conduct research, to form professional thinking and give a broader theoretical preparation forming prerequisites for doctoral studies.

Horticulture is definitely an important branch of agriculture which contributes to the supply of vegetables, fruit, and ornamentals whose production requires high technological and managerial knowledge. Programme Learning Outcomes (LOs thereafter) comply with the requirements of the second cycle university studies and are in line with the provisions of the Order on the Description of Study Cycles. The goal of the Programme is to prepare highly qualified specialists holding a university degree in Agronomy, who are able to independently solve scientific problems of agriculture, apply the acquired theoretical knowledge in gardening and horticulture in research, to successfully implement their achievements in practice, science, education and public administration institutions, also in consulting services. Graduates from the Programme, are expected to be able to work in agrarian science and education institutions, as well as in agricultural businesses and consulting services and related organizations. Having completed Horticulture studies, professional development can be continued in doctoral study programmes in the areas of agronomy or other similar biomedical sciences.

The content and rationale of the LOs comply with Level 7 of the European and Lithuanian Qualification. However, LOs are repetitious and it would be advisable to be more concise and less wordy. There is an over wording, overstated, and repetitious descriptions of the LOs and the link among aims, LOs and study subjects is not always clear.

Information on the Programme and the awarded qualification is published in AIKOS database, an open system for information and guidance of applicants to universities. Information is also provided in the publications "Admission to Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions" and "Studies at Aleksandras Stulginskis University", and the University's website.

The number of students applying for the programme when it started in 2011, was 16 but 7 were admitted, while in 2014, there were 9 applicants and 7 of them were admitted. Both in 2011 and in 2014, the Programme was allocated 6 state funded places. These are extremely small numbers in order to justify a second cycle programme. The number of state funded places (only 6) is definitely a drawback for students who wish to follow this Programme.

The discussions the review team had with the groups of employers and other stakeholders from Research centers, Botanical Gardens, and companies, revealed that they consider the Programme valuable for the Lithuanian horticulture and local economy, however they emphasized

the need for more practical training and development of social communication skills for the students. Graduates of the Programme stated that all are employed after graduation in research institutes or working in their own farms. Practical training is to be strengthened as both alumni and stakeholders noted during the interviews.

The SER states that several MSc Horticulture programmes from other European Universities were taken into consideration when organizing the Programme, and a lot of common elements are identified with other master's programme in Horticulture. However, most of those programmes have a clearer direction towards a more specific target area (e.g. Vegetable Olericulture, Pomology, Ornamental Horticulture, Sustainable horticulture, etc) combining modern technologies in plant propagation techniques, integrated plant protection, ecological horticulture, etc. Such a concise direction is not evident in this Programme as it is rather wide based and dispersed in a variety of topics and subjects areas that are in a great proportion covered in the BSc programme of Agronomy. Study outcomes of certain study subjects tend to duplicate those of subjects already taught in the first cycle of Agronomy. Therefore the team suggests to the management to consider developing a programme with a stronger identity which can be obtained by substituting some of the courses with others that will narrow the area of specialization giving the Programme the uniqueness it needs.

Strengths

The programme's objectives and aims are considered very valuable and needed for the local agricultural industry and is greatly supported by the social partners.

Weaknesses

The Programme, although satisfies alumni and employers, needs a clearer identity and specialization that will ensure graduates with the necessary knowledge and expertise for horticultural topics that need to be developed in the country. This may increase the number of applicants wishing to apply and attend the programme.

The LOs of certain study subjects, as described in the SER, are a bit repetitious and do not differentiate from those subjects that are similarly taught in the first cycle of Agronomy.

2.2. Curriculum design

The curriculum structure of the Programme conforms to the ECTS system, meets the legal requirements and it complies with the General Requirements for Master Degree Study Programmes. The programme is offered in 4 terms (full time mode) or in 6 terms (part time mode), both with 120 ECTS workload. The 120 ECTS are distributed evenly (30 credits/semester) in 4 semesters for the full time mode and 37-42 credits per year for the part time mode (6 semesters, 3 years). The ECTS credits are allocated accordingly among the problematic/innovative subjects, the general studies, the

optional study subjects of the study field and those for the final thesis. Although, the term “problematic” would better be referred as “problem solving”.

Courses are distributed over the four semesters in a logical sequence providing possibilities for optional courses to be selected by the students according to their intended orientation (doctoral studies or practical work). The content focuses on a wide spectrum of horticultural courses, available either as compulsory or optional which prepare students also for research and data analysis. The teaching methods employed in the programme include lectures, labs, independent work, consulting and exams. The Internal System of Study Quality Assurance of ASU is responsible for the accreditation of the subjects taught as well as the competence of teachers and research conducted.

The requirements and procedures for the final master thesis are clearly described however it should be clear how the thesis topic is selected. It is mentioned that a scientific article based on the conducted research can be published in the publication “*Jaunasis mokslininkas*” (“*Young Scientist*”), which is a positive requirement. It was also stated that it is common practice for students to undertake their thesis topic on their first semester, (although the fourth semester is designated for preparing the thesis), so that that the thesis research is conducted throughout the entire period of the Master’s study programme. It is not clarified how the students choose their thesis topic and the review team thinks that if they choose a topic so early in their Master’s studies they may not necessarily have a clear view of their special interests.

The review team suppose that there should be at least a couple of courses delivered in English provided that students are required to have a good knowledge of this language. Additionally, a course of horticultural terminology in English should be included to the Programme.

According to the study plan, students take the so called “problematic” courses in the first year whereas in the second year they can choose optional courses and courses intended for doctoral studies preparation. The scope of the Programme, as declared in the SER, is focused in mastering the latest knowledge in gardening and horticulture and prepare graduates to undertake practical activities and also prepare them for continuing studies in the doctoral programme. However, the scope is not clearly realized as more attention should be given to the selection of study subjects in the field of horticulture in order to meet this aim.

It was evident for the review team that there is a discrepancy between the listed and the actually delivered courses (also mentioned in chapter 2.6). During the review visit, the team did not meet any of the students of the Programme but information from the teaching staff made it clear that due to the very low enrolment of students, several of the optional courses were seldom taught narrowing the specialization areas.

The experts suggest that the whole curriculum needs to be reviewed with the participation of academic staff, students and alumni as well as the social partners and redesign the content of the curriculum, by either eliminated some of the courses that have proven not to be attractive to students,

or substitute compulsory courses with optional ones and vice versa. As an example some optional courses, could be included in the compulsory group replacing other that may not be considered so essential for the Programme (e.g. Organic Horticulture replacing Alternative Olericulture). The whole Programme could become more attractive and specialized if for example focuses on specific fields of Horticulture such as Floriculture and/or Vegetable Growing, Biological /Sustainable Horticulture, Biotechnological methods in Horticulture, and others that may be appropriate for the needs of the Lithuanian Horticulture that has the potential to be developed (Greenhouse cultivations, in vitro production, etc) and as such to attract more students. Even though the notion of a wide specialization in Horticulture may be practical for students and staff, the Study Programme Committee could consider such modifications in the curriculum. It is generally accepted that the success of any graduate programme depends largely on its updated and modern curriculum that ensures good employment prospects for the graduates.

Strengths

The courses taught in the Programme are distributed over the four semesters in a logical sequence and provide possibilities of optional courses to be selected by students according to their orientation.

Weaknesses

The curriculum needs to be reviewed in order to become more attractive and better suit the needs of the market.

Due to the low number of students, not all courses (optional) can be delivered, thus limiting students' choices.

The scope of subjects taught is rather wide and do not provide a strong background on specific topics.

Internationalisation of the curriculum/research papers in English is needed.

2.3. Teaching staff

The teaching staff who is involved in the delivery of courses of the Programme is recruited according to the law (Description of General Requirements for Master's Study Programmes). According to the data provided in the SER, there are 4 professors, 11 associate professors and 2 lecturers, who have taught in the period 2011 to 2014. These numbers have fluctuated slightly in recent years. The average age of the majority of the teaching staff is 50+ years. All teachers have a doctoral degree with many years (over 15 years) of pedagogical and research experience which is very positive.

Teachers have sufficient experience to achieve Programme aims and LOs as their areas of scientific activities are in line with the subjects they teach. A weakness of the teaching staff is that the majority of them share the same background, having acquired their graduate degrees (MSc and PhDs)

from the same University and having work experience in almost the same establishments. This means a lack of diversity which is an essential element in providing an open and diversified education to students.

It is stated in the SER that all teachers have taken part in international conferences and research projects and have written books, monographs and scientific articles. This is a worthy effort that increases the professional development of staff members and should be further encouraged. However, their research activities and outcomes should be more expanded, as they are rather limited in the national and regional areas.

The mobility of staff is limited, with a few exceptions. Academic exchanges are mentioned as part of Erasmus and a good number of outgoing teaching staff as well as a number of incoming visiting staff is mentioned. These data however refer mostly to the staff of the Agronomy faculty in general and it is not clear if the teachers of Agronomy that have participated in the Erasmus teaching visits are those teaching also in the Horticulture programme.

Teachers participate actively in several national and international organizations and take part in seminars and conferences in Lithuania and other Baltic countries. However, efforts should be made to participate and publish in well-known journals with significant impact factors. Possibly, the language competence of teachers should be improved thus allowing their participation and activities in a more international environment. Motivation for international cooperation and language competence should be encouraged strongly. A high quality teaching and research staff is a prerequisite for a successful second cycle programme.

Strengths

The academic staff is very qualified having adequate professional and teaching experience.

Weaknesses

The publications and conference participation at international level is limited.

Competence in English is lacking in many of the staff members thus limiting their interest in mobility and international contacts.

2.4. Facilities and learning resources

The lectures and laboratories are taught in the premises of the Faculty of Agronomy in the Central Building of ASU which are renovated and furnished adequately. For conducting research, the Pomologian Garden, greenhouses, scientific research base of Nemunas valley are used. Computer labs with internet access are also available for use. The computer classrooms offer a good selection of software. Student dormitories have an Internet access as well. The University has a wireless Internet connection, thus students can search the information and work using their personal computers after lectures.

Students carry out scientific research and practical work in Laboratories of the Institutes of the Faculty of Agronomy, Laboratory of Food Materials, Agronomic and Livestock Research, Institute of Horticulture of the Lithuanian Research Centre for Agrarian and Forestry Sciences, farmers' farms, and the Pomologian Garden. Ample laboratory equipment is available in all facilities that are used for the needs of the Programme and up to date new equipment has been added recently.

The facilities are upgraded regularly. 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. Students of the Programme are able to use a renovated Library building with adequate facilities, internet access, and electronic and virtual library. Students of the Horticulture programme may use books and various learning materials contained in the library holdings. There are numerous books and learning materials, published within the last 10 years, contained in the library of University that are recommended for *Horticulture* master's degree students. 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).

The recent improvements and upgrading have made the facilities 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. In general, there seems to be a very well organized modern facility that provides students and teachers with the required literature information and learning material. The SER also states that there is a good variety of fruit trees and shrubs in the farmland of the institute and at ASU.

However, the review team expressed a concern regarding the efficient use of the ultramodern and abundant equipment as it was not evident how effectively the equipment is actually being used by students and/or staff. Some pieces of equipment were not being used at all (at least till the time of the visit). Additionally, the modern glasshouse which was recently constructed seemed not to be used efficiently enough and not taking advantage of the possibilities it offers for growing and experimenting with plants. The team observed a few, mostly ornamental, plants were grown. Growing vegetables and ornamentals, which are the main horticultural products, need to be fully practiced for the benefit of the students.

Strengths

Excellent laboratory equipment and classroom facilities.

Ample farm area for production.

Very satisfactory ICT services and Library organization and services.

Weaknesses

Indications of not efficient use of modern equipment by staff and/or students.

Greenhouse facilities not efficiently utilized for production or experimentation.

2.5. Study process and students' performance assessment

The requirements for admission are clearly indicated, for students coming from Agronomy (BSc) as well as for students from other faculties. Graduates with a BSc degree in Plant Sciences, or other Life /Biological Sciences can be eligible to apply. However, the Programme Committee may decide to require from the applicants to obtain extra ECTS credits, judged on an individual basis, before they register. All admission requirements are published in special promotional information leaflets and on the ASU website. The calculation of grades, as criteria for admission, based on the cumulative competitive grade (CCG), is rather confusing and needs to be reconsidered so that it becomes more transparent and clear. Furthermore, some additional entrance requirements could be considered, such as motivation or recommendation letters, personal interviews, and proof of competence in a foreign language.

The number of students in the Programme is quite low (6), all state funded, but the percentage of graduated students both in 2011 and 2014, is quite satisfactory (85%).

Student mobility mainly through Erasmus is limited (almost none existing) for practical reasons, mainly: small number of students, language barriers, economic reasons and work obligations. It is mentioned in the SER that since 2012 the Programme is taught in English and Russian languages. Also, inviting foreign teachers for lecturing would be advisable, provided the language competence of students is acquired.

During the interview, staff members clarified that it refers only to the possibility of offering a course in English or Russian (on an individual tutoring mode) in the case of a foreign student attending the course. This should be mentioned clearly as such, otherwise it is misleading to potential entrants.

For practical reasons, classroom meetings are held on two days only (Thursdays and Fridays) for 8 to 11 hrs. This is not considered the best academic practice and if possible should be distributed to at least three days in a week, although it is understood this has practical difficulties due to the fact that most of the students are working.

Student assessment based on LOs and a 10 point system, is clearly defined and made clear to the students in the beginning of the course. Student knowledge and abilities are evaluated based on tests, independent and practical work. It should be mentioned, however, that due to absence of the students from this Programme at the meeting with the review team, the review team couldn't determine whether the students understand the assessment system. There is an interim assessment of

students' knowledge in all the subjects using the 0-1-2 point system. The consolidated report of interim assessment is reviewed at the meeting of the Dean's office and during personal discussions with students who can appeal if not satisfied with their grades. Again, such evidence was not possible to attest, as the review team did not have the possibility to interview the students of the Programme. The students are required to publish a scientific article based on the results of the research work they undertake during the study time, by participating in scientific research and projects carried out by the institute. The evaluation of the MSc thesis is done by a 5 member committee and the average grade achieved was 9 which is generally an indication of good achievement. On the other hand, this average is based on a small number of students and it may also reflect an inflated grading system.

It is mentioned that research work for the MSc thesis is conducted throughout the two years of study, assuming they have already decided on the topic of their thesis upon entering the Programme. This is not considered as best practice, because the students have not followed and completed any of the Programme courses yet which will give them insight to their specialized interests. Furthermore, the fact that some of the students conduct their thesis research on their own farm or at a place where they already work is not considered scientifically a good practice and the supervising academic staff should encourage more students to do a research thesis in the university labs or other Institutes or research centers.

Though the employment rate of graduates is very satisfactory, the number of graduates on which this data is based is very low (11) and furthermore it is mentioned that they were already working in the field of their expertise before graduation. The stakeholders or social partners interviewed expressed their satisfaction with the employed graduates of this programme, but stressed the need for more practical experience and development of communication skills so that they can deal with international contacts and undertake EU programmes.

The University provides all necessary information, such as documents needed, scholarships, course descriptions, evaluation systems, etc, on the website and also on the notice board of the Dean's office. The Career office also helps students find employment, and monitors their career. Social support is provided to low income student or students with disabilities whether state funded or not. They are also offered psychological support and support for participation in sport and cultural activities. The best performing students receive grants as dictated by the Regulations of Incentive Scholarships of Students of Aleksandras Stulginskis University. The ASU students can apply for loans to cover living expenses and can be accommodated in dormitories at the University campus. All of the above academic and social support provided by the University to the students of the programme were mentioned in the SER and the review team had no way to verify them by interviewing the students since they were not present (only alumni) which was a serious drawback in the process of the interview (also mentioned in chapter 2.6).

Strengths

The system for monitoring, assessment and support of students is quite satisfactory.

Average graduation rates are satisfactory.

Weaknesses

Quite low student mobility abroad.

Low enrolment of students.

Early decision on the thesis topic (upon entering the Programme).

None of the Programme students were present at the meeting with the review team.

2.6. Programme management

The management of the Programme, regarding the decision making and the responsibilities for the implementation and development of the Programme, are distributed on several management levels. The Vice Rector is responsible for the studies organization and quality assurance at the ASU level. The Department of Studies coordinates quality assurance activities and provides assistance to academic departments. At the faculty level, Deans and Vice Deans are responsible for the implementation, monitoring and quality assurance of study programmes, such as Horticulture MSc.

The Study Programme Committee (SPC) has an important role: it assesses the Programme (e.g., an internal assessment every year) and is responsible for improvements of quality assurance along with the Vice Deans of the Faculty. 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. In all, the Study Programme Committee has a big role in the management of the Programme. Yet, its composition, recruitment procedure and conflict mitigation aspects are not made clear. All the pathways for final approval of changes, LO, teaching of courses, etc. by the different University bodies (directors, Deans, Councils, Senate, etc) as described are quite complicated and bureaucratic, even redundant. It is understood however that the allocation of all responsibilities relating to the study process and changes in the Programme are dictated in the University Statute and the Agronomy Faculty Regulations.

The SER was very thorough and covered in detail all the necessary information needed by the experts for understanding the factual and qualitative aspects of the Programme. The required data for the preparation of the self-evaluation were collected from documents of the University and its departments, survey summaries, conducted studies and analyses. During the interviews it was made evident that the procedure for the SER gave some insight to staff members for the need to improve and focus on the areas of practical training, thesis topics selection, involvement of employers, etc.

Although the SER tries to describe the division of responsibilities between the management roles, in certain places there are overlapping responsibilities in the managerial level. Similarly, besides the self-evaluation of teachers, it is not clear who has the responsibility of their selection, appointment, and assessment. It was stated however that the results from the student surveys were utilized for the assessment and subsequent promotion of teachers. Students have the right to express opinions, anonymously, in a survey “Study Subject through the Eyes of Students” electronically on a voluntary basis, but the number of students is so small and not all have participated in the survey so results cannot be considered significant. During the interviews the students of the Horticulture Programme were not present, and no explanation was given at the time. Also, general feedback for the whole Programme was not clearly available. All in all, the review team didn’t find evidence that the quality loop is working in practice properly and efficiently.

From the interviews it also was understood that the workload of the academic staff is rather heavy and care should be taken by the management to ease their load for the benefit of the educational procedures. Furthermore, the team of experts noted that not all courses listed in the programme were actually taught. This is a serious discrepancy and the management should take care of this issue for the programme to be more efficiently implemented.

The Expert Team interviewed the social partners who expressed their support to the Programme and were quite satisfied with the skills of the graduates. However, they also pointed to the need for extended period in practical training, sufficient knowledge of the English language and better communication skills. As stated in the SER, similar conclusions were drawn during the internal programme assessment, based on the analysis of data collected from student, graduates, and employers’ surveys, and plan to be used to improve the Programme.

Strengths

Practices for the management and organization of the Programme and the implementation of quality assurance seem to conform to the University rules.

The Programme has a good reputation and is well connected with the society.

Weaknesses

The distribution of responsibilities among the administrative bodies is, in many cases, overlapping and should be made more distinct and less bureaucratic.

The procedures for monitoring of the curriculum seems not be as effective (not all courses listed in the programme were actually taught).

The effectiveness of the quality procedures is questionable due to the low enrolment of students, who do not seem to be actively involved in enhancing the quality of the programme.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The curriculum needs to be redesigned omitting subjects that tend to overlap those taught in Agronomy BSc programme, substituting with others and /or exchanging from compulsory to optional in order to give a distinct horticultural identity to the Programme.
2. The programme needs to establish a more distinct and specialized identity, perhaps, changing its title, to become more attractive and appealing to prospective students.
3. Student enrolment should be enhanced, by all means. The State should support more state funded places.
4. Expand publications in internationally acclaimed journals with high Impact Factor.
5. The curriculum should be more “internationalized” by delivering some lectures in English for all students.
6. Recruitment of new staff members with research and professional experience from abroad would be an important way of enhancing quality of the Programme.
7. Research must be supported and encouraged provided that teaching hours and administrative workload for staff could be lessened.
8. The staff and students should try to make the most of the available modern laboratory facilities and equipment not only for educational but also for research purposes.
9. The Vice Dean of the Faculty and the Study Programme Committee should be the major actors in the management of the Programme, provided the pathways to final approval of changes become simpler and less complicated.
10. The organization of studies has potential to be improved in order to meet the real needs of the society and economy of the country.

IV. SUMMARY

The MSc programme in Horticulture which is the only one offered in Lithuanian HEIs was initiated in 2011, and aims to provide specialized knowledge in the field of Horticulture, an important branch of Agricultural sciences. Surveys of potential stakeholders affirmed the need for such a programme. The Programme however needs to obtain a more specialized identity narrowing the topics of instruction in areas of specialization that fit and promote the Lithuanian horticultural industry. If the Programme becomes more focused and specialized it will be more attractive to prospective students whose number at present is very low.

Strong points for further development of the Programme are its qualified and experienced teaching staff, the very well equipped laboratories, the ICT services, and the other facilities (classrooms, library, farm and greenhouse). The good relations between staff and students are other strong point. The mobility and international contacts of both staff and students needs to be expanded; their competence in the English language would greatly enhance these shortcomings. Furthermore, the instruction of some courses in English, possibly by invited lecturers from abroad through the Erasmus programme, would be a good practice that will promote internationalization.

The staff should be allowed more free time for research, besides their teaching duties, utilizing the excellent laboratory equipment which does not seem to have been used effectively enough. Furthermore, the development of international contacts and cooperation at European and /or international level, will lead to increased scientific publications not only in national but also in international journals. There also seems to be a need to provide students with up to date teaching material that will support student learning more effectively. Furthermore, students should be encouraged to do their research theses projects in the University facilities or other research centers and not in their own farms or workplaces.

Social partners are actively involved and support the Programme and are satisfied with the employed alumni, however they stress the need for introducing an extended practical period that will strengthen the competences of graduates in their specialized field and also develop their communication skills. The support that the Programme offers to students, regarding admission, assessment and quality assurance are considered satisfactory as it conforms to the general University rules.

The applied feedback system that aims to improve and update the Programme through student surveys is not deemed effective as it is not available for all subject courses. The low enrolment of students in the Programme makes the effectiveness of these procedures questionable. A curriculum modification in order to obtain a distinct horticultural orientation, along with the promotion of the programme in order to attract more students with the support of staff, alumni and stakeholders, will definitely ensure the development of the Programme.

V. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The study programme *Horticulture* (state code – 6211IX006, 621D72002) 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	2
3.	Teaching staff	3
4.	Facilities and learning resources	3
5.	Study process and students' performance assessment	2
6.	Programme management	2
	Total:	15

*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

Gabrielius Jakutis

**ALEKSANDRO STULGINSKIO UNIVERSITETO ANTROSIOS PAKOPOS STUDIJŲ
PROGRAMOS *SODININKYSTĖ IR DARŽININKYSTĖ* (VALSTYBINIS KODAS –
6211IX006) 2017-06-14 EKSPERTINIO VERTINIMO IŠVADŲ NR. SV4-125 IŠRAŠAS**

<...>

V. APIBENDRINAMASIS ĮVERTINIMAS

Aleksandro Stulginskio universiteto studijų programa *Sodininkystė ir daržininkystė* (valstybinis kodas – 6211IX006, 621D72002) vertinama **teigiamai**.

Eil. Nr.	Vertinimo sritis	Srities įvertinimas, balais*
1.	Programos tikslai ir numatomi studijų rezultatai	3
2.	Programos sandara	2
3.	Personalas	3
4.	Materialieji ištekliai	3
5.	Studijų eiga ir jos vertinimas	2
6.	Programos vadyba	2
Iš viso:		15

* 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

Sodininkystės ir daržininkystės magistro studijų programa, kuri yra vienintelė tokia Lietuvos aukštojo mokslo institucijose, buvo pradėta vykdyti 2011 m., jos tikslas – suteikti specializuotų žinių sodininkystės ir daržininkystės srityse, kurios yra svarbios žemės ūkio mokslo šakos. Universiteto atlikti tyrimai apie potencialių socialinių dalininkų nuomonę, patvirtino, kad tokia programa yra reikalinga. Visgi, programai reikėtų suteikti labiau specializuotą tapatybę, susiaurinant dėstomas temas specializacijos sriyse, kad atitiktų bei skatintų Lietuvos sodininkystę bei daržininkystę. Pakeitus programą į koncentruotesnę ir labiau specializuotą ji taptų patrauklesnė būsimiesiems studentams, kurių skaičius šiuo metu yra labai mažas.

Studijų programos stipriosios pusės yra kvalifikuoti bei patyrę dėstytojai, labai gerai įrengtos laboratorijos, IKT paslaugos bei kita infrastruktūra (auditorijos, biblioteka, ferma ir šiltnamis). Kita stiprybė – geri studentų ir dėstytojų santykiai. Reikėtų padidinti dėstytojų ir studentų judumą bei išplėsti tarptautinius ryšius, jų anglų kalbos žinios padėtų kompensuoti šios trūkumus. Be to, jei kai

kurie dalykai būtų dėstomi anglų kalba, galbūt net kviestinių dėstytojų iš užsienio pagal „Erasmus“ programą, tai sudarytų puikią praktiką, kuri skatintų tarptautiškumą.

Personalui, be dėstymo pareigų, reikėtų suteikti daugiau laisvo laiko moksliniams tyrimams atlikti naudojant puikią laboratorijų įrangą, kuri nebuvo pakankamai efektyviai naudojama. Be to, tarptautinių ryšių plėtra ir bendradarbiavimas Europos ir (ar) tarptautiniu lygiu sudarytų galimybę skelbti daugiau mokslinių publikacijų ne tik nacionaliniuose, bet ir tarptautiniuose žurnaluose. Taip pat kyla poreikis studentams suteikti atnaujintą dėstomąją medžiagą, kuri padėtų mokytis efektyviau. Be to, studentus reikėtų skatinti atlikti savo baigiamųjų darbų projektus universiteto patalpose ar kituose mokslinių tyrimų centruose, o ne savo ūkiuose ar darbo vietose.

Socialiniai partneriai aktyviai dalyvauja ir remia programą, jie yra patenkinti įdarbintais absolventais, tačiau pabrėžia, kad kyla poreikis įvesti ilgesnį praktikos laikotarpį – tai pagerintų absolventų kompetenciją jų specializacijos srityse ir tobulintų jų bendravimo įgūdžius. Programoje teikiama parama studentams dėl priėmimo, vertinimo ir kokybės užtikrinimo laikoma pakankama, nes ji atitinka bendrąsias universiteto taisykles.

Taikoma grįžtamojo ryšio teikimo sistema, kurios tikslas – tobulinti ir atnaujinti programą pagal studentų apklausas, nėra veiksminga, nes ji netaikoma visiems studijų dalykams. Mažas apklauose dalyvaujančių studentų skaičius kelia klausimą, ar šios procedūros veiksmingos. Pakeitus studijų turinį taip, kad jis įgytų išskirtinę sodininkystės bei daržininkystės orientaciją, taip pat, jei programą padėtų reklamuoti personalas, absolventai ir socialiniai dalininkai siekiant pritraukti daugiau studentų, be abejo, užtikrintų programos tobulinimą.

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III. REKOMENDACIJOS

1. Pertvarkyti programos turinį neįtraukiant tuos dalykus, kurie persidengia su dėstomais agronomijos bakalauro studijų programoje, pakeičiant juos kitais ir (ar) keičiant juos iš privalomųjų į pasirenkamuosius tam, kad studijų programai būtų suteikta atskira sodininkystės tapatybė.
2. Programai reikėtų nustatyti labiau individualią ir specializuotą tapatybę, galbūt pakeisti jos pavadinimą, kad ji taptų patrauklesnė būsimiesiems studentams.
3. Visomis priemonėmis skatinti studentų priėmimą į programą. Valstybė turėtų finansuoti daugiau vietų.
4. Reikia didinti publikacijų skaičių tarptautiniu mastu pripažintuose žurnaluose, kurių poveikio faktorius aukštas.
5. Programos sandarą reikia labiau „internacionalizuoti“, visiems studentams kai kurias paskaitas dėstant anglų kalba.

6. Naujo personalo iš užsienio, turinčio mokslinių tyrimų ir profesinės patirties įdarbinimas būtų svarbus programos kokybės tobulinimo būdas.
7. Reikia palaikyti ir skatinti mokslinius tyrimus su sąlyga, kad personalui bus mažinamas dėstyto valandų skaičius ir administracinio darbo krūvis.
8. Personalas ir studentai turėtų pasistengti kiek įmanoma daugiau išnaudoti turimas modernias laboratorijų patalpas bei įrangą ne tik švietimo, bet ir mokslinių tyrimų tikslais.
9. Fakulteto prodekanas ir studijų programos komitetas turėtų labiausiai rūpintis studijų programos vadyba, kad galutinis pokyčių patvirtinimas taptų paprastesnis ir ne toks komplikotas.
10. Studijų organizavimas galėtų būti tobulinamas taip, kad atitiktų realius šalies visuomenės ir ūkio poreikius.

<...>

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)