



STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS

Vilniaus universiteto
JUNGTINĖS STUDIJŲ PROGRAMOS
DARNIOS REGIONINĖS SVEIKATOS SISTEMOS
(628A60001)
VERTINIMO IŠVADOS

EVALUATION REPORT
OF SUSTAINABLE REGIONAL HEALTH SYSTEMS
(628A60001)
JOINT STUDY PROGRAMME
At Vilnius University

Grupės vadovas:
Team leader:

Andy Gibbs

Grupės nariai:
Team members:

Prof. dr. Róza Ádány

Prof. dr. Josep María Antó Boqué

Petra Lindblad

Rūta Tarasevičiūtė

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DUOMENYS APIE ĮVERTINTĄ PROGRAMĄ

Studijų programos pavadinimas	<i>Darnios regioninės sveikatos sistemos</i>
Valstybinis kodas	628A60001
Studijų sritis	biomedicinos mokslų
Studijų kryptis	visuomenės sveikata
Studijų programos rūšis	universitetinės studijos
Studijų pakopa	antroji
Studijų forma (trukmė metais)	nuolatinė (2)
Studijų programos apimtis kreditais	120
Suteikiamas laipsnis ir (ar) profesinė kvalifikacija	visuomenės sveikatos magistras
Studijų programos įregistravimo data	1998 m. birželio 25 d.
Kitos jungtinę programą vykdančios aukštosios mokyklos	Deusto universitetas, Korvinus universitetas, Veronos universitetas

INFORMATION ON EVALUATED STUDY PROGRAMME

Title of the study programme	<i>Sustainable Regional Health Systems</i>
State code	628A60001
Study area	Biomedical Sciences
Study field	Public Health
Kind of the study programme	University studies
Study cycle	Second cycle
Study mode (length in years)	Full-time (2)
Volume of the study programme in credits	120
Degree and (or) professional qualifications awarded	Master in Public Health
Date of registration of the study programme	25 June 1998
Other higher education institutions implementing joint-degree programme	University of Deusto, Corvinus University of Budapest, University of Verona

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The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Vilnius University Faculty of Medicine offers study programmes of integrated medical studies (both in Lithuanian and English) and Odontology, first cycle study programmes in Public Health, Ergotherapy, Kinesitherapy and Nursing, second cycle study programmes in Public Health, Nursing, Rehabilitation, Medical Biology, Medical Physics and Medical Genetics. The Faculty aims to prepare students for work in the fields of health care, disease prevention and curing, and many other medical fields. The Faculty comprises 18 academic units – 4 departments, 12 clinics and 2 institutes, including the Public Health Institute. The primary aim of the Public Health Institute is to train highly qualified public health specialists characterised by modern thinking and understanding of the humanitarian, legal and economic areas. The Institute has been carrying out scientific research, training scientists and implementing public health doctoral studies since 2002. The Institute comprises 29 teachers.

Since 2008, the Public Health Institute has been implementing the Erasmus Mundus second cycle joint study programme *Sustainable Regional Health Systems* (hereinafter – RegHealth) together with partners within 3 countries: Spain (University of Deusto), Italy (Verona University), and Hungary (Corvinus University). This programme aims at covering the niche between health supervision management and planning on a regional level. The consortium of the 4 universities is led and the RegHealth programme is coordinated by the Public Health Institute. Although the programme did not get funding renewal, and no new students were admitted for the 2013 cohort, the Vilnius programme leaders are committed to launch a new edition based on individual fees.

The present review has been carried out under the guidelines and procedures of the Centre of Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereinafter referred as SKVC). This evaluation report is based on the self-evaluation report (hereinafter referred as SER), and on a site visit to Vilnius University on 2nd April 2014. During the site visit, the team had the opportunity to discuss the Programme with Faculty administration, Self-evaluation group, teaching staff, students, graduates, representatives of the University of Deusto, Verona University, and Corvinus University, and social partners. The review team also visited the library, classrooms and offices associated with the programme. After the visit, the review team held a meeting in which the contents of the evaluation were discussed and adjusted to represent the opinions of the whole group.

II. PROGRAMME ANALYSIS

1. Programme aims and learning outcomes

The review team learned from the SER that RegHealth information is provided on a number of websites including the University and Ministry of Education websites as well as a number of other widely disseminated publications. The information available on the internet also includes the Erasmus Mundus Programme as well as a consortium website created specifically for this programme.

This programme was created through close cooperation of 4 universities with administrative institutions and private enterprises of various European regions, providing a mixed Public Health – Business Administration approach. Graduates of the programme are awarded a joint master's degree, with Vilnius University awarding a Master in Public Health and Verona and Deusto award a Masters in Sustainable Regional Health Systems. The purpose of this study programme is to promote the benchmarking of different health system models, helping to construct a comprehensive understanding of health system management and planning. It aims to spread out the European model of health care and planning, to promote sustainability and the role of health systems in strengthening social cohesion and social capital. According to the SER, graduates can work as middle and upper level managers in hospitals and health services, as well as in regional and national administrative bodies, they will be able to work in the adaptations of health systems to the sociodemographic changes we are living, and introducing the effective advances in medical technologies.

The SER provided information about learning outcomes and competencies which were well described and pertinent. However, taking into account that the majority of students are from developing countries, the evaluation team wonders whether the programme aims and learning outcomes are sufficiently adapted to students' characteristics and needs. The team recognizes that the topic of the study programme probably does not allow using standard professional competences as developed by professional associations for benchmarking. On the other hand, both the current and former students that participated in the meetings during the site visit were unanimously positive about the programme aims and outcomes. The team suggests that additional effort is made to adjust the aims and outcomes of the programme to the needs of the students and that the applicability of the realities in the EU health systems to those in developing countries is formally developed in the programme.

The programme aims and learning outcomes are consistent with the type and level of studies and the level of qualifications offered; however, most of the courses have an introductory/intermediate level (as discussed in 2. *Curriculum design*).

The review team were unanimously impressed by the work of the Vilnius faculty in developing a new programme which offers an attractive, vibrant and internationally relevant curriculum and conclude that the name of the programme, its learning outcomes, content and the qualifications offered are compatible with each other.

2. Curriculum design

RegHealth is a programme comprising 120 ECTS credits. The language of instruction is English. Four universities are involved in the programme, and students have the ability to study at three of them. The programme's modules are delivered by universities with various specialty fields: 1st semester covers macro level management and is delivered by Deusto, 2nd semester consists of micro level management and is provided by Corvinus, the 3rd semester is devoted to specialization either in Verona or Vilnius and the 4th semester consists of the internship and research in any of the four universities.

The review team were confident, following their reading of the SER and discussions with programme team members, that the curriculum design meets legal requirements. As stated in the SER, the Master has mandatory mobility periods for the students guaranteeing that the mobility requirements for the joint study programme are met.

The study subjects are spread evenly, their themes are not repetitive; however, the basic quantitative issues seem to be spread over many different topics without following well defined criteria. For instance, at least three different courses (Meta-analysis, Epidemiology and Computerized Health Planning, Health Technology Assessment and New Health Technologies, Monitoring and Evaluation for Health Systems' Improvement) include contents that are necessary for quantitative understanding of health services but it is not clear that the level and sequence is the right one. Taking into account that a Public Health second cycle study programme is offered in Vilnius University and probably in some of the other participating institutions, offering or sharing courses on quantitative methods could be an option.

Overall, the content of the subjects is consistent with the type and level of the studies though the review team still see some room for more attention to the quantitative methodologies that enable for evidence based planning and management, such as metaanalysis and other quantitative synthesis techniques. Health economics and financing are perhaps a little over dimensioned in comparison to the rest of areas. The team recognizes that some imbalances could be a consequence of integrating 4 different faculties with contrasting backgrounds and teaching portfolios.

Only the Corvinus University has a course in multicultural communication which is offered in the second semester. Taking into account the multicultural background of the students a similar course in the first semester would be very helpful. All the participating universities should be sensitive to this and enable both the faculty and the students to discuss these issues within all courses when needed.

The content and methods of the subjects are appropriate for the achievement of the intended learning outcomes; the scope of the programme is sufficient to ensure learning outcomes and the content of the programme reflects the latest achievements in science. However, the team believe that there are still some opportunities for further strengthening of the content. Some examples of relevant issues in current public health agendas that are not well featured in the programme are: non communicable diseases in developing countries, public health genomics, social networks and health, and the importance of built environments. Advanced methods are not clearly included but this may be a result of the introductory/intermediate levels of most courses, something that is in part due to the broad scope and multidisciplinary nature of the programme (e.g. Meta-analysis, Epidemiology and Computerized Health Planning, Comparison of Regional Health Systems, Strategic Management, Health Planning and Health Technology, Health Economics, Social Policies and Financing Health Care, among others). The overall level of specialization is coherent with the goals of the programme. However, the review team considers that providing the Master students more optional access to advanced level courses would improve the programme.

3. Staff

The SER provided sufficient information to confirm that the study programme is provided by the staff meeting legal requirements. The review team concluded that the qualifications of the teaching staff are adequate to ensure learning outcomes. The international design of the programme has facilitated that the staff are experts in their respective fields, including strategic

planning (University of Deusto), health economy (University of Corvinus), and public health (Vilnius University and University of Verona). Importantly, the staff is enriched with participation of policy makers and health professionals. The fact that 70% of the teachers are holders of a PhD degree and that all them are involved in research gives further evidence of the staff quality.

Whilst accepting that each university can present the cvs of their faculty in its preferred format, a clear, consistent, internationally recognised approach to cv presentation would be helpful, ensuring that the academic qualification, rather than the academic title was indicated. During the review the team did not have access to information about participation in research sufficiently edited and with appropriate internal benchmarking as to help in judging how much the teaching staff of the programme is involved in research directly related to the study programme being reviewed. The evaluation team was concerned that some of the teachers in Verona University did not speak English and that translators were needed.

The review team noted from the SER that the mobility of faculty members, apart from those of the University of Deusto, was insufficient. In this respect, it would be important to ensure that Vilnius University secures the conditions to promote international mobility and the professional development of the teaching staff necessary for the provision of the programme. In this programme, specific knowledge and collaborations with academic institutions in developing countries would be very valuable.

The review team could not obtain evidence that formal policies for strategies that are relevant to support professional development like mentoring and sabbaticals are in place. These policies if established and supported by the leadership would substantially reinforce the faculty capacity building.

4. Facilities and learning resources.

The premises for the RegHealth programme at Vilnius University are adequate both in their size and quality. The number of classrooms, computer rooms and laboratories of the Public Health Institute and of all faculty is sufficient to arrange the optimal timetable.

The teaching and learning equipment at Vilnius University are adequate in quality but not enough in size. Since the last evaluation the facilities have been greatly improved according to the recommendations – all the rooms for studying have the necessary equipment, are renovated,

have new furniture. 3 computer classrooms have been established. New computers were purchased in 2011-2013, as well as the software. Wireless network is available in the Faculty.

There are only 3 computers in the Reading room (Room 131) that are not used for lectures and seminars and can be used for individual work. This problem has been tried to be partially solved by introducing wireless network to the faculty, so that the students would be able to use it via their laptops but the Internet access does not solve the computerized learning problem because the necessary software and access to the necessary databases exist only in the computers of the University. Although for the development of practical skills new computer software is purchased continually, which can be used during the time of practical work, it is very limited due to the number of licences and computers. The team also noted from the SER team that the number of SPSS licenses for statistical analysis was not enough for the number of users in the programme, which has created difficulties.

In Vilnius University, the students of the RegHealth programme share the learning equipment with students from other programmes of the Faculty. As the RegHealth programme is rather small in comparison with the other programmes, the priority to the access to the learning equipment is also given to the students from other programmes.

Multimedia equipment and computers with the necessary software in the classrooms enable teachers and students to use modern and various teaching methods such as PowerPoint presentations, simulation of situations, data review and case studies.

Teaching materials are adequate and accessible. The students use the Library of the Faculty of Medicine and the Reading room nearby, as well as the Library of Vilnius University and the Reading rooms nearby, and the Library of the Ministry of Health and its reading rooms. Some literature needed for the studies is provided by the lecturers from the Library of the Public Health Institute. The students and the academic staff have the opportunities to use the computer search systems. The software used is modern and legal. The variety of teaching materials is efficient to fulfil the aims of the programme. The holdings of the Library of the Faculty of Medicine are supplemented and restored yearly with 2000-6000 publications. Textbooks and methodological literature every year are supplemented with newly published literature, taking into account the remarks made by the students and the teachers. The students are asked (question No. 11 in the Questionnaire) to evaluate the accessibility of necessary textbooks of the library during the survey at the end of every semester but the response to the questionnaire is low. The University

Library regularly sends textbooks from relevant databases to teachers for testing and then funding is allocated for subscription to the selected textbooks.

Vilnius University library orders Lithuanian and foreign medical journals, subscribes to scientific journal data bases: Annual Reviews (USD); BMJ Journals; Cochrane Library; Lippincott Williams & Wilkins Custom (via OVID); MD Consult (7 bases); Nature Publishing; PubMed Central; Health Source - Consumer Edition (EBSCO); The Biomedical & Life Sciences Collection; Science Direct (SciVerse); Springer LINK; Taylor&Francis; Vilnius University Bachelor and Master theses (ETD). The databases ordered are accessible to the students from Vilnius University computers or from personal computers after downloading the VPN programme. The students use data from different databases for their literature review in their final theses.

Though the facilities and learning resources discussed above are common with the other second cycle programmes at Vilnius University, the RegHealth programme has particular characteristics. The programme has a dedicated room with well equipped technology and internet access but there is only one computer with the necessary software in this classroom. This problem has been tried to be partially solved by introducing wireless network so that the students would be able to use it via their laptops but the Internet access does not solve the computerized learning problem because the necessary software and access to the necessary databases exist only in the computers of the University. The SER provides evidence that the material facilities at all program universities have the characteristics and the availability as to support adequately the needs of the students.

A second important limitation is related to international mobility of the students. The review team noted from the SER and the meetings with both current and former students that the institutions involved in the programme offered support for the students' mobility. However, taking into account that students should settle in three different countries during a period of two years makes logistic support for accommodation of strategic importance. As some students noted the effort and time devoted to finding accommodation is high and goes in detriment of the learning outcomes.

The team urges both the programme and the institutional leadership to address these problems.

5. Study process and student assessment

Students holding a bachelor degree are eligible to study in the study programme. According to the SER, this programme is oriented to holders of a university degree in Sociology, Psychology, Law, Political Science, Anthropology, History, Medicine, Social Work, Social Education, Nursing, Public Health etc. who want to specialize in the scope of health. Students with experience in health administration are given priority. The number of students admitted in the five cohorts has been 15, 20, 17, 16 and 16. For the four initial cohorts all but 2 admitted students obtained the Master degree. The wide representation of students from non European countries including those coming from developing countries is a strength of the programme; however, there are too few European students enrolled in the programme – something that should be balanced in further cohorts.

The review team was informed about the study process and student assessment through the SER and the various meetings with the programme coordinators, the faculty and current students. Students are evaluated according to different national grading systems and the main forms of assessment are examinations at the end of the semester. During the second year the students prepare their research thesis which is defended at the end of the programme. The students were in general satisfied with the examinations and the feedback received though this is very heterogeneous and depends on each course and teachers. So far, according to the SER, four students' cohorts have already graduated. The overall performance of these cohorts can be judged by the students' survey suggesting that knowledge and skills acquired through the programme were very useful for alumni and had great impact on their academic and personal career – a message that should be taken with caution due to the limited response rate of the surveys. In a meeting with the former students (a group of 6) they expressed their satisfaction with the professional activities and confirmed that their expectations were met. They mentioned that the multidisciplinary knowledge provided by the programme was very useful for them in responding to professional challenges. The team was very impressed that most of these students hold relevant professional roles in both developing and affluent countries, including some international health organizations, or were starting research careers. Overall, the final theses were of good quality, addressing relevant issues and based on international literature reviews.

Regarding the examinations, the students confirmed that they are informed about requirements for assessment and that the assessment system of students' performance is clear, adequate and publicly available. Further discussion with students and teachers indicated that there is no clear

and consistent approach in ensuring that the mode of assessment is aligned with the skills that the students will need to acquire during the programme, for example teamwork. The programme team recommend that as part of a written and agreed strategy that has aims, timelines and actions, the assessment strategy is reviewed and developed to ensure that learning outcomes, learning methods and assessment approaches are constructively aligned. Constructive alignment is a recognised educational strategy which seeks to ensure complementarity between all aspects of curriculum design.

The evaluation committee realized that the students were very active, reflective and positive. They seemed very mature and interested in being a part of the quality assurance process both in commending the programme for all the good in it as well as suggesting changes.

6. Programme management

The review team had the opportunity to review the programme management through the SER and the meeting with the programme leaders and considered that the organization and the management process are appropriate. Vilnius University is the overall coordinator of the programme including being responsible for the finance administration and submitting all required reports and for reporting to the European Commission and the Educational, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency. The Secretariat, on behalf of the Consortium, has developed and maintains the website for the programme.

The review team had the opportunity to review the programme management through the SER and the meeting with the programme leaders and considered that the organization and the management process are appropriate. The main characteristics are: Vilnius University is the overall coordinator of the programme, the RegHealth Academic Committee and technical managers evaluate and update the programme and the Consortium applies a sound organisational structure. The role of the Academic Committee is of particular importance as achieving the necessary level of commitment in each university has proven difficult. Taking into account the important role of the Academic Committee it is crucial that a sufficient number of meetings is well planned and that the agendas and agreements are carefully conducted. The review team has observed that the coordinators have established an open and constructive relationship with the students which has contributed to identifying difficulties and finding solutions. It is evident that the staff has put a lot of thought and energy into developing the programme according to the

students' needs. The Vilnius programme coordinators are to be commended on their commitment and leadership in developing this programme.

According to the SER, the consortium has created three types of surveys to evaluate the teachers, the modules (each of the four semesters) and the overall programme. It is clear both from the SER and discussions with the students and the faculty that the outcomes of internal evaluations of the programme are used for the improvement of the programme. For example students had raised and the programme team responded to the issue of introduction and orientation to differing universities and how this could be improved by rescheduling the timing of some activities. However, as noted in the SER, although surveys are conducted, they should be more systematic and a set of quantitative and qualitative standardized indicators should be used both for monitoring and benchmarking.

Regarding the funding of the fellowships for the students the fact that the programme was not renewed as an Erasmus Mundus programme makes its financial sustainability challenging. One of the main strengths of the current programme is its capacity to attract internationally brilliant and motivated students. Unfortunately it is not obvious that such attractiveness could be maintained without the funding provided by the Erasmus Mundus accreditation.

The team heard that the status of Corvinus University had changed with regard to the joint programme agreement. This change in status had taken place at beginning of the implementation of the programme. It was noted that Corvinus does not award a degree, does not sign the diploma and the credits are transferred to Deusto. Whilst this is an acceptable arrangement, it is not reflected in the original 2007 joint programme agreement. The University is reminded of the need to make sure that the changes in partnership which also affect the study process and award of the degree are clearly indicated on the agreement and that all information required by the General Requirements for Joint Study Programmes is sufficiently covered in the agreement.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The team recognizes the value of the RegHealth programme and supports the plans of the programme leaders for a future cohort. However, the financial sustainability of the programme should be carefully considered.

2. The team suggests that additional effort is made to adjust the aims and outcomes of the programme to the needs of the students and that the applicability of the realities in the EU health systems to those in developing countries is formally developed in the programme.

3. The programme could benefit from giving more emphasis to the quantitative methodologies that enable for evidence based planning and management. Offering or sharing courses on quantitative methods could be an option. More emphasis on public health and health systems in developing countries is also recommended.

4. Regarding the facilities, the fact that due to the characteristics of the programme the students should settle in three different countries during a period of two years makes logistic support for accommodation of strategic importance. Currently, effort and time devoted by the students to finding accommodation is high and goes in detriment of the learning outcomes. Sufficient support to the logistics of travel and accommodation should be guaranteed in the future.

5. The career development support to the staff of the programme should be reinforced with formal policies like mentoring and sabbaticals. These policies if established and supported by the leadership would substantially reinforce the faculty capacity building.

IV. SUMMARY

The second cycle programme *Sustainable Regional Health Systems* started as an Erasmus Mundus funded programme showing its innovative multiuniversity character. The programme is well designed with an appropriate correspondence between competences and learning outcomes but further adjustment to the needs of the students should be considered, taking into account that the majority of students are from developing countries.

Overall, the content of the subjects is consistent with the type and level of the studies though the review team still see some room for more attention to the quantitative methodologies that enable for evidence based planning and management as well as for additional attention to advanced methods.

Regarding the mobility of the students, though the programme offers substantial, this was not sufficient and unevenly distributed among the different universities. Improvement of material resources especially those for computing should also be addressed.

The review team were unanimously impressed by the work of the Vilnius faculty in developing a new programme which offers an attractive, vibrant and internationally relevant curriculum. That the programme did not obtain renewal of the Erasmus Mundus funding is a major limitation. The team recognizes the value of the RegHealth program and supports the plans of the programme leaders for a future edition. However, the financial sustainability of the programme should be carefully considered.

V. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The study programme *Sustainable Regional Health Systems* (state code – 628A60001) at Vilnius University is given **positive** evaluation.

Study programme assessment in points by evaluation areas.

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation Area in Points*
1.	Programme aims and learning outcomes	3
2.	Curriculum design	3
3.	Staff	3
4.	Material resources	2
5.	Study process and assessment (student admission, study process student support, achievement assessment)	4
6.	Programme management (programme administration, internal quality assurance)	4
	Total:	19

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

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

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

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

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