

1 LITHUANIAN NATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS GUIDELINES FOR THE VISION OF HIGHER
2 EDUCATION

3 THE CONCEPT OF STUDY QUALITY

4
5 Having adopted the guidelines for the vision of higher education, The Lithuanian National Union of
6 Students states that the purpose of higher education (HE) is to gather, develop and transfer (to
7 future generations) the intellectual and cultural heritage, as well as spread it among society
8 members. ¹ Intellectual potential and cultural heritage are to be preserved, given meaning and
9 developed by the communities of HE institutions through scientific research, which creates
10 opportunities for generating new knowledge and ideas, broadens horizons and has synergy with
11 technology and study programs. The elements of study program plans should aid in transferring
12 erudition from one generation to the next.

13
14 To implement the principle of unity between studies and science, all of the following must to
15 correspond and compliment each other: the HE purpose, the HE institution mission and its
16 implementation mechanisms, the aim of the study program, the elements of the study program
17 plan, target learning outcomes and the study program name. The success of the study process
18 depends on the higher, secondary and primary education synergy, proper preparation for studies,
19 and HE institution's and state's investments in each student and in the creation of a learning
20 environment that promotes development.

21
22 The Lithuanian National Union of Students understands study quality as studies, which
23 appropriately give meaning to the mission of HE. The appropriateness to the mission, as a
24 concept of quality, defines the relationship of mechanisms ensuring the implementation of the
25 study quality vision and the principle of cohesion between the aim of the study program and the
26 elements constituting the study program. The HE institution's mission, the study quality vision and
27 the closely related study program objectives are to implement and supplement the general concept
28 of HE's purpose, the aim of which is to influence the development of society with the help of
29 intellect.

30 ISSUES WITH THE NATIONAL CONCEPT OF STUDY QUALITY AND POLICY
31 FORMATION

32 In Lithuania, there is a lack of a common quality assurance policy, a broad and correct concept of
33 quality and a cornerstone decision on what study quality is in general. The classification criteria for
34 study quality vary throughout Lithuanian HE, there is no unanimous political consensus (decision).
35 Therefore, the factors determining study quality, its assurance and improvement processes are
36 interpreted differently by each interest group. We are lacking cornerstone decisions on what study
37 quality in Lithuania is supposed to be.

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¹Lithuanian National Union of Students long-term position – guidelines for the vision of HE: the purpose of HE,
<http://lss.lt/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/LSS-pozicija-aukštojo-mokslo-paskirtis.pdf>

39 The Lithuanian National Union of Students has to participate in the national policy making
40 regarding study quality and to engage in the ongoing processes having to do with higher
41 education. It is important to participate actively in the national policy making regarding study
42 quality and to use the available recourses efficiently. The education community, together with the
43 general public, should seek to eliminate all social, physical and other barriers impeding us from
44 achieving the required study quality level in higher education.

45 THE ELEMENTS OF STUDY QUALITY

46 According to The Lithuanian National Union of Students, the essence of a successful study process
47 is the student, the teacher and their appropriate relationship. It is the harmony and relationship
48 between these two figures that indicates the real purpose of HE – the transfer of the most recent
49 knowledge from generation to generation and the spreading of knowledge among society
50 members. Only if the two figures in the center of the study process – the student, who is learning
51 and seeking to achieve new competencies, and the teacher, who is a specialist in their field, cares
52 about the student's progress and is an irreplaceable aid for the education-seeking student, – do
53 their work properly, the other elements of study quality become coherent and are given meaning
54 to.

55
56 The following also are important study quality elements defined by the study program concept, its
57 components and the overall unity between studies and science: the study program aim, target
58 learning outcomes, study program grid and management, the study model, the quality assurance
59 system, material resources, social and academic support and continuous updating of study content
60 on the basis of the latest scientific achievements. Another essential element is internationality,
61 which should be one of the most important strategic objectives in the HE institution's activities, as
62 well as another aspect of study quality. Joint study programs should be developed in cooperation
63 with foreign partner institutions, and there should be opportunities created for students,
64 researchers and academic staff to participate in exchange programs, international conferences,
65 projects and other events, generating added value for the HE institution and fostering intellectual
66 potential. These elements create a medium for the proper functioning of the study quality
67 elements and are indispensable.

68
69 It is important to stress that the list of aspects influencing study quality does not stop with the
70 study program definition and internationality. The learning environment also has a significant
71 influence on study quality – the culture of the HE institution and the community that promotes it
72 (encouragement of the idea of academic honesty), ergonomic study infrastructure with the most
73 modern teaching equipment and a supportive emotional environment, which provides possibilities
74 for further self-development. Although these factors are not the absolute key study quality
75 elements, but without them fulfilling the study quality paradigm would be impossible.

76 STUDY CONTENT

77 Other than the HE institution's mission, the study program name, objective, target learning
78 outcomes and the subjects and modules in the study program grid, the principle of unity that is

79 closely interacting with scientific activity, innovation and the latest technology must be
80 implemented.

81

82 The base of the study program, which acts as a long-term plan, is the aim of the program and the
83 target subject (module) results. It is necessary to ensure that they are clearly defined, understood
84 and applied by all those involved in the study process and are open and available to the general
85 public.

86

87 It is necessary, at the institutional level, to define a unified ECTS concept, based on the harmony
88 between learning outcomes, methods of teaching, learning and assessment and the study time
89 required to achieve target learning outcomes. A unified concept and application of the general
90 principle in calculating the scope of the module in ECTS credits, the precise weighing of the
91 available student's time for task execution and absorption of information would not only determine
92 the study program results but also provide an additional opportunity for Lithuania to compete in
93 European HE.

94

95 The Lithuanian National Union of Students believes that the study program objectives and target
96 outcomes should contain a broad HE purpose and lay the foundation for the study programs, which
97 will not only provide the students their profession and qualifications but will also prepare them for
98 full and effective participation in a democratic society.

99

STUDY MODEL

100 HE institutions must provide students with an opportunity to form their own study model, in order
101 to implement the student-oriented study concept. An explicit and understandably functioning
102 system must be formed for acknowledging non-formal competencies and procedures supporting
103 the system and in turn enhancing study flexibility. Students should have the opportunity to choose
104 their learning style corresponding to the contact and non-contact hour ratio. Therefore, The
105 Lithuanian National Union of Students believes that mandatory lectures and other strict
106 imperatives associated with the learning model implementation are not characteristic features of
107 an innovative institution. Students should have the opportunity to manage their overall study
108 workload and selectively intensify or facilitate certain learning periods. The latter should not
109 change the overall study objective of the program or reduce the potential for successfully
110 achieving the target study program outcomes.

111

112 HE institutions should provide the student with opportunities to change their study form and (or)
113 study program. The student's choice should not affect their position in the financial or legal sense.

114

115 The Lithuanian National Union of Students supports the HE institutions' intention to provide
116 students the opportunity to learn remotely, in sessions, on weekends or in the evening. In order to
117 modernize the study process implementation and make it even more attractive, it is necessary to
118 develop measures to encourage self-directed learning, by implementation of distance learning
119 (MOOC's or massive open online course).

120

121 This flexibility in the implementation of studies increases accessibility of HE for different groups of
122 individuals (the employed, parents with children, people with special needs). On the other hand, The
123 Lithuanian National Union of Students draws attention to the fact that study flexibility cannot be
124 developed in the expense of study quality by reducing opportunities for students to successfully
125 achieve target study program outcomes or by judging them by lower standards.

126 THE STUDENT AND THE TEACHER, THEIR RELATIONSHIP AND INTERACTION

127 The relationship between the teacher and the student is in the center of the study process and is
128 the key element in the formation of study quality. When the teacher and student properly fulfil their
129 duties, their harmony creates conditions for the implementation of the HE purpose. When these
130 two figures do not act properly, other study quality elements are not fulfilled.

131

132 Lithuanian National Union of Students believes that in order to fulfill the study quality concept, the
133 teacher must be both a great specialist in their field and also have excellent didactic skills. The
134 specialist of a specific field has got to possess sound theoretical and practical knowledge on the
135 subtleties of their field, and what is especially important, continuously engage in monitoring of new
136 information and methodological knowledge. The specialist should also constantly improve their
137 professional competencies and gather more practical experience by carrying out scientific
138 research. As the main trait of a great teacher, The Lithuanian National Union of Students
139 distinguishes the purposeful transfer of information to the student in line with the study program's
140 objective and target outcomes, so that the student would understand and absorb the information
141 and know how to apply it practically. In the environment where information is constantly being
142 updated, a great teacher must use innovative methodology, teach only up-to-date, relevant
143 information and be able to motivate the student to be curious. The improvement of the teacher's
144 competence and how the teacher creates an environment supporting and encouraging eagerness
145 to absorb academic knowledge ensures effective teaching methodology. The description of a great
146 teacher is the cornerstone part of a student-oriented study process, with which the student's path
147 toward individual education, and most importantly, implementation of the HE purpose, becomes
148 faster and easier.

149

150 The Lithuanian National Union of Students emphasizes the need to raise teacher awareness about
151 the significance of proper assessment, understanding of methodology and about didactic skills.
152 Qualification improvement programs must be initiated and they should be oriented not only toward
153 the change of study program content but also toward competence development. Strategic
154 guidelines of different HE institutions and their approach to the importance of didactic
155 competencies have a significant impact on the success of qualification improvement and further
156 training. For these reasons, there must be a common consensus and intention among teachers, HE
157 institutions, students and the ministry. The Lithuanian National Union of Students believes that,
158 firstly, there should be open discussions on professional development issues, which would be
159 particularly important to increase teacher motivation. A national teacher competence improvement
160 plan with clear criteria should be established, with which all HE institutions should be required to
161 comply. The emergence of a national policy on this issue would solve many disagreements within
162 the academic community.

163

164 The Lithuanian National Union of Students states that the student, being the consumer of the
165 product that HE institutions offer, should also be obliged to carry out their role in the creation of a
166 high-quality study process. For that to be possible, the following elements are crucial: an
167 exceptionally good prior students' preparation, motivation during studies and the reduction of
168 social factor influence for graduating. During the study process, the student must eagerly seek to
169 achieve the target learning outcomes, as well as be an active participant in the study process: the
170 student must learn, understand, process and evaluate the information given. In order to understand
171 the big scientific picture, the student has to absorb the information obtained not only from the
172 teacher but search for it themselves and delve into today's processes in seeking full knowledge of
173 their field, awareness and ability to apply that knowledge in real-life situations. At the same time,
174 the HE institution care for the student's learning progress, provide the opportunity to gain not only
175 professional knowledge and skills, but also interpersonal skills, developing a well-rounded erudite of
176 the student and fulfilling the HE purpose.

177

178 All other study process parts working efficiently, the relationship created by a great teacher and a
179 great student ensures the target and required study quality. The student and teacher relationship is
180 the essential and irreplaceable center element of the study process. Although The Lithuanian
181 National Union of Students regards positively the various innovation being applied in the study
182 process (e.g. MOOC's), the innovative technology cannot and should not replace the essential
183 elements of study quality and their interaction.

184

LEARNING RESOURCES

185 The Lithuanian National Union of Students believes that the HE institution must supply the
186 participants of the study process with all the teaching and learning resources necessary for the
187 implementation of the study process. The resources can be divided into direct and indirect,
188 according to their purpose.

189

190 Direct resources are teaching and learning materials developed on the basis of science and needed
191 to acquire the basics and to deepen knowledge in a certain field. Their purpose is to ensure fluency,
192 efficiency, and quality in the implementation of the study process and not to allow science to
193 regress. Study quality is directly dependent on the scientific progress, so direct resources are the
194 key tool to achieve this. Indirect resources include the elements of learning environment
195 infrastructure. Such resources remove obstacles which may prevent full participation in the study
196 process. Their purpose is to provide the opportunity to learn and create or to facilitate the entire
197 study process.

198

THE GRADUATE

199 The Lithuanian National Union of Students believes that the HE institution must prepare a
200 qualified specialist who is able to use (adapt) the acquired knowledge and continue to self-learn
201 and improve, who has critical thinking skills, is fully educated and makes a positive impact on
202 economic growth and sustainable state development. Studies must provide the graduate with
203 interdisciplinary knowledge and skills that focus on the public, scientific and business needs and

204 their fulfilment, and to enable the student to apply that knowledge. The graduate must be ready
205 for competition and able to assess their acquired, existing and required competence level.

206

207 Lifelong learning is one of the important tools enabling the graduate to adapt to the quickly
208 changing needs of the labor market. Therefore, The Lithuanian National Union of Students
209 encourages continuation of the lifelong learning idea promotion, thus increasing the graduates'
210 personal and professional development opportunities throughout their careers.

211 STUDY QUALITY ASSURANCE

212 The Lithuanian National Union of Students recognizing the importance of proper study quality
213 assurance in HE institutions, stresses that there should be processes and procedures in place,
214 which enable to properly analyze, monitor, evaluate, and improve the components of a quality study
215 program and their cohesion. In assessing study quality, it is necessary to take into account the
216 student's needs, the given subject content and the teacher and student relationship. It is important
217 that the HE institution create the right conditions for the two parties to act properly. All study
218 quality assurance processes must be open to the public from the beginning to further actions and
219 changes. The external study quality assessment system must properly assess the program's
220 purpose, target learning outcomes, the program grid, academic staff, material, teaching and
221 learning resources, the study process and program management and analyze how all of these
222 components complement each other and meet the quality studies concept.

223

224 The Lithuanian National Union of Students believes that the cornerstone element of the internal
225 study quality assurance is a fully functioning mechanism for benefiting from feedback. When
226 gathering information in order to initiate significant changes, the beneficiaries of the study
227 process – the students – are the most capable at indicating what is the most relevant and critical
228 in that process. To improve the study quality assurance systems in HE institutions, The Lithuanian
229 National Union of Students sees the need to focus more on research about graduate satisfaction
230 in their studies after graduation. It is imperative that such a survey is national and independent, the
231 collected information is accessible publicly, not only to within the HE institution, and easy to find.

232 RATINGS

233 Both national and international HE rankings have become a part of the quality assessment
234 mechanism, enabling institutions to compare the efficiency of the studies they provide and the
235 research they conduct. On the other hand, The Lithuanian National Union of Students would like to
236 draw attention to the tendency among HE institutions to focus only on meeting the rating criteria
237 and not the quality of their actual work. The Lithuanian National Union of Students believes that
238 the ratings provide HE institutions with a platform for self-evaluation and that high positions in the
239 ratings indicate the institution's overall quality. However, the institutions should naturally and
240 incidentally obtain high positions while improving study and research quality rather than by
241 intentional improvement of certain processes.

242

243 It is essential to note that the majority of ratings are often more focused on the quantity and
244 quality of the ongoing research processes and do not adequately assess and show the study

245 quality. At the same time, the ratings cannot and do not assess the results achieved by each
246 individual student. For these reasons, The Lithuanian National Union of Students disagrees with
247 the use of ratings as an absolute quality measure.

248 ADMINISTRATION

249 HE institutions should have a clear system, providing students all the necessary and relevant
250 academic, social support and assistance. It is important to distinguish and make clear the
251 functions and responsibilities of each infrastructural department, so as to avoid providing recurring
252 information. Information dissemination methods and the use of a wide variety of communication
253 platforms attractive to the younger generation should provide an easy access to information.
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