

# HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM IN LITHUANIA WITH EMPHASIS ON LITHUANIAN EDUCATIONAL STRATEGY

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## Abstract

Reforms of higher education are influenced both directly and indirectly by global social, economical, cultural and demographical changes in the world and European countries. High schools open to innovations must react to the changes and challenges in their surrounding, as well as get involved into competition in the field of studies and scientific research. Contemporary trends in the process of education management in various countries and regions show that the higher education becomes crucial factor making huge influence on different regions of the world. More and more people come to understanding of modern competence and qualification necessity for innovative knowledge based economy.

Development of higher education in Lithuania has been a complicated and multi-valued process very closely related to other dimensions of the Lithuanian state development – political regime and historical situation, economical and social structure of the country, ideological and cultural changes paradigms.

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**Keywords:** Higher education reform, educational strategy, education management

## Introduction

In retrospective view, development of traditions, institutions and principles of activity of Lithuanian higher education are characterised by some specificity. Lithuanian education policy, having started in 1990 with highly responsible interpretation of national education aims and together democratic values (National school concept, 1988), eventually disclosed itself as clearly oriented towards cooperation with international

organisations, open to international expert evaluations, standardisation and result seeking (European Commission, 2010).

In growing globalisation, Lithuania is becoming more and more involved in international networks, experiences influence of supranational educational powers. As results of two decades of education policy show decisions of quite different directions being more imitative than effective, there exists an apparent need for more clear Lithuanian education policy, separating fruitful tendencies from disastrous ones, showing actions necessary for Lithuanian future to education politicians (Duoblienė, Bulajeva, 2009). The main directions of the EU educational politics became very important though the unified EU educational policy or standards were deemed absent. However, various general documents of the European Union clearly declare recommended priorities for education (Keeling, 2006). All EU education-related documents are being widely spread and creating educational 'vision' of the EU. Following this vision horizontal EU education support programmes are construed. Education politicians in all EU member countries follow those provisions.

The main mission of universities is to spread statements of knowledge-based society. University's teaching and research staff should be involved for this purpose. Students' abilities formed at university should rely on the principles of knowledge-based society. Universities play a vital role in education, research and innovation. Larger investment in university upgrade and quality is a direct investment into the future of Europe and Europeans. The more people gain higher education, the faster economy grows. Education affects labour market and shows ability of an individual to make a strong presence therein (Bileviciute, Zalieniene, 2013). An enterprise hiring a qualified employee hopes to improve its productivity, competence, profitability, and competitiveness in the market. Education affects an internal development of the country, its productiveness (Gižienė at al., 2008).

Lithuanian higher education and its legal regulation are constantly being changed; those changes are both necessary, systemic, well-timed and quite chaotic and fragmentary. Legal regulation of higher education is harmonized and correlates with other state regulatory means - financing, quality assurance measures (licensing, accreditation, and external assessment), formation and development of political action strategy. Recently, many reforms are implemented in the field of higher education, both in relation to higher education funding and in connection with the management, quality control, and with the transformation of state institution impact.

### **Lithuanian Education Strategy and Higher Education Reform**

Development of higher education and growth of students' number show the growth of production and competitiveness of the state. Therefore

we are dealing basically not with universities themselves but with the state strategy, which is based on university as model stalwart of knowledge, intelligence and culture, national identity, traditions and origins of goodness. In our country, universities play a special role exceeding teaching of youth, improving intellectual abilities of the country and reduce social tension. Universities promote origins of national identity and citizenship in order to develop and strengthen the country's culture in a broad meaning. To remain competitive, we must keep following the latest trends in the world of higher education. Higher education is seen as a right of each individual possessing the capacity to study, not a privilege. From the other hand, in a knowledge-based economy, knowledge is essential factor for economic and social progress (Bilevičienė at al., 2012a). At the present, there are as little as 560 thousand people possessing higher education in Lithuania, it makes 16 per cent of all population. This level is very low. Besides that, many of these people are of retirement age, part of their knowledge and skills are morally obsolete, many university graduates have emigrated. Lithuania has recently improved access to higher education and number of students per 10 thousand people reached that of France, Finland, Sweden and the USA. This trend should be maintained. Level of the country is shown by development of its service sectors and a part of GDP that is created in this area. In developed countries, the services sector accounts for 70-75 per cent of GDP, in Lithuania this figure reaches 63 per cent of GDP. The sector includes financial, legal, economic, managerial and other services. National and regional research and education limits are weakening and disappearing. Universities become a part of the world's science and research sector. Together, this means also growing international competition of universities and, on the other hand, there is a clearer trend of cooperation, creation of international university networks. Lithuanian universities must respond to these challenges. Management of universities and studies must be constantly improved, and the state has to support higher education mobility and dynamism to a higher - a world-class. Today more than ever it is important for Lithuanian universities not to compete, but stay united and to cooperate to connect networks. There is no university that can survive alone, without being a member of a global network (Mykolas Romeris University..., 2010).

### ***Grounds and Necessity for the Reform***

Provisions of National Education Strategy for 2003–2012 were approved by the parliament of the Republic of Lithuania on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2003. The following three key aims of developing education are foreseen therein:

1) to develop an efficient and consistent education system which is based on the responsible management, targeted funding and rational use of resources;

2) to develop an accessible system of continuing education that guarantees life-long learning and social justice in education;

3) to ensure a quality of education.

Later, in the Implementation Programme prepared by the Ministry of Education and Science and approved by the Government on January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2005, three main directions were amended to five, so emphasizing core changes and avoiding duplication of measures (Ministry of Education..., 2012):

- Improvement of management,
- Development of infrastructure,
- Improvement of support,
- Improvement of content,
- Improvement of personnel.

While preparing the new Law on Higher Education and Research (Government Resolution..., 2009), scientists analysed higher education system in Lithuania. It was found that the state of Lithuanian science and studies is subject to growing impatience of society and significantly lag behind European level. It is widely agreed that the following are defects inherent from the system of Lithuanian science and studies:

- society is not satisfied with quality of studies and devaluation of diplomas;
- deprivation of human potential (emigration, weakening of the scientific activity);
- imbalance of universities' and colleges' functions, extensively developed network of high schools;
- non-productivity and simulation of research activities, worsened academic self-control;
- financing does not enhance university competition and student attention;
- lack of factors contributing to the students' responsibility for studying;
- inactive loan system;
- lack of high school academic autonomy and unreasonably restrained economic self-sufficiency;
- rigid state higher education governance system;
- studies bureaucratic regulation not able to ensure systematic quality control;
- scientific degree system inhibitory to dynamism, academic hierarchy impeding shift of generations;
- discrimination of private higher education institutions and their students;

- irrational and corrupt state education funding (Draft Law on Higher Education and Research ...).

Assumptions for existence of Lithuanian higher education system:

- optimisation of market principles and state regulation ration;
- harmonization of market principles and public interest;
- ensuring conditions for system functioning (the environment);
- competitiveness and effectiveness of participants of the system (within the system);
- competitiveness and effectiveness of the system (Lithuanian higher education as state subsystem);
- diversity and uniqueness of participants of the system (Ministry of Education ..., 2006)..

Development of higher education system covers two target areas: internal and external. Externally, the Lithuanian higher education system is focused on its role in the life and development of the state, society and the international community. Internally, Lithuanian higher education system is oriented to its participants, interdependence and integration, behavioural patterns, appropriateness. Internal area covers objectives related to improving system availability, improvement of quality and content of education. While external purposes of Lithuanian higher education system are efficiency and competitiveness in a global context (both directly and through the general competitiveness of the state), internal purposes are Lithuanian higher education system's effectiveness and mutual competitiveness of participants. These two objectives are interrelated - Lithuanian higher education system's competitiveness in both the EU and world depends on the competitiveness distribution within the national system. If high schools compete with each other in good faith, then the whole system will evolve and become competitive in the context of European higher education (Ministry of Education ..., 2006).

The key aims of reformation of Lithuanian education system are as follows:

- world-class Lithuanian research centres;
- high quality of studies:
  - professional lecturers,
  - equipped facilities,
  - guaranteed social support to students,
  - orderly dormitories;
- sufficient financing;
- modern governance of high schools;
- more opportunities to students, teachers and the whole country (Draft Law on Higher Education and Research ...).

In addition to the main goal - study and research quality and overall system capacity to compete in the European Union - the following objectives are set:

- The majority of students and employers welcomes studying opportunity and performance;
- Loan system allows each student to favourable conditions for financial assistance for studies and (or) living;
- significant private business funds invested to science and education, closer collaboration between science and business;
- improved information for school leavers and students, emergence of non-state ranking system of higher education institutions;
- simplified system of state regulation to ensure its efficiency, transparency and results orientation;
- modernization of public higher education institutions governance to ensure their accountability to the public;
- development of academic autonomy, acquired in typical forms of European university tradition;
- a significant reduction in simulation and imitation of scientific activities, research oriented to serve Lithuanian society;
- emergence of principled intolerance to the practice of plagiarism and similar intellectual product counterfeiting (Draft Law on Higher Education and Research ...).

The task of Lithuanian higher education system is to educate person's competence (resources) and values in order to enforce social, political and cultural life of the state and society. The result of Lithuanian higher education system is service to people, society, and state.

***The purpose and main development goals of Lithuanian higher education system***

The following aims are oriented towards social and cultural development of the country and the society:

1. To raise citizens and community leaders - the free and creative people who are able to develop and realize ideas, seeking to understand the processes of human and society change and able to take responsibility for the fate of the nation and the state.

2. to expand access to higher education for all social groups in the realization of lifelong learning.

3. To ensure continuity of the Lithuanian cultural identity and an equivalent expression in the European Union and the world.

4. to design and predict Complexly the evolution of society and to promote the development of civil society.

5. to integrate into the European Education Area by opening the academic market for the EU the scientific community.

Goals oriented towards economic development and competitiveness of the state:

1. To educate knowledge and high-technology based economic entities able to compete in a global labour market and to be able to continuously learn and change with this dynamic economic life.

2. To develop higher education institutions at the regional level, and to increase high school coverage for the local community.

3. To influence Lithuanian economic development in a global context.

4. To provide scientific and methodological grounds for integration of Lithuanian society, the state, and the economic to the EU's social, economic and political systems.

5. To develop scientific research and experiment activity, actively participate in the development and implementation of technological and organizational innovations.

6. To create and develop links between universities and the business sector.

Tasks of Lithuanian higher education system development are as follows:

1. To develop liberal studies aimed at a broad remit, encompassing cognitive and intelligence training.

2. To continuously increase high school openness and accountability to society.

3. To develop a long-term and innovative vision of the future of scientific potential. To create an attractive and conducive environment for the creation of new ideas and the development of study and research.

5. To develop institutional / software differentiation (diversity) following the direction of high school activities.

6. To develop interdisciplinary approach, in order to properly respond to the demands of modern society.

7. To encourage the natural and exact sciences disciplines ties with the humanities and social sciences, and to exploit them in addressing complex social development issues.

8. To expand career possibilities for young scientists and researchers in Lithuanian and global academic community.

9. To maintain and strengthen the study and research integrity.

10. To strengthen the European dimension of higher education by increasing the comparability of the curriculum by developing and providing common qualification degrees.

11. To increase the "academic" and "vocational" study compatibility by integration of lifelong learning and recognition of non-formal competences acquired.

12. To promote mobility of the all cycles student and staff by using existing and creating new cooperation networks.

13. To install and develop high school internal quality culture and the need for external expertise (accreditation).

14. To expand international relations of high schools and to provide internationally recognized research output quality (Ministry of Education ..., 2006).

Here are principles of the reform:

- Entrants, students and universities are trustworthy,
- Healthy competition is useful,
- Real high school academic autonomy and accountability
- Openness and dialogue with the public
- State support for good learners
- Private sector involvement in the development of science and education (Draft Law on Higher Education and Research ...).

Quality of activities of Lithuanian higher education system, its correspondence to internal and external needs as well as international scientific development trends affect common factors mostly related to the stability in the field of higher education, structural development and changes in Lithuanian higher education in each mentioned activity, interrelated by common provisions as well as provisions specific for different activities (Bilevičienė, Bilevičiūtė, 2012b).

The country's education system is currently facing both the unique, national challenges related to its specific development and goals and the challenges to be dealt with all of the modern society. Unique challenges are as follows: building of modern national identity, self-esteem and self-confidence, improvement the prestige and quality of teaching, adapting to rapid demographic change (decrease in the number of children, aging, migration). The challenge similar to other states is to overcome the inertia of the educational system by reforming traditional educational or training organization into flexible ways consistent with modern learning objectives and the level of technology appropriate for each person's lifelong learning. This makes implementing not only changes of the individual areas of education, but also the global systemic change. National Education Strategy for 2013-2022 should help define the goals for the coming years, the most relevant policies and actions. This publication provides a summary analysis of the underlying strategy – the overview of objectives and their affecting factors, and the most relevant issues (National Education Strategy..., 2012).

The most common national education goals are formulated in two documents - the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania and the Lithuanian progress strategy Lithuania 2030. Relevance to national goals, modernity, contextuality or originality thereof revealed by comparing them with education purposes of the international community and organizations - the European Union, UNESCO, OECD .

The goals of education defined in the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania can be grouped as follows:

- Personal ideal cultivation: to develop a person's values enabling him to become an honest, knowledge-seeking, independent, responsible and patriotically-minded human being;
- Personal skills development: to cultivate the communication skills important in modern life, to assist in internalising the information culture characteristic of the knowledge society, by providing for command of the state language, foreign languages and the native language, information literacy as well as modern social competence and the skills to shape one's own life independently and to live a healthy lifestyle;
- Need or permanent studying cultivation: to identify a person's creative abilities and upon this basis to help him acquire competences and/or a qualification conforming to contemporary culture and technology and assisting him to get established and successfully compete in the shifting labour market; to convey the basics of technological, economic and business culture necessary to ensure the progress, competitiveness and sustainable development of the country's economy; to create conditions for continually satisfying cognitive needs as well as improving oneself through life-long education;
- Education of cultural identity and cultural value transfer: to convey to a person the basics of national and ethnic culture, the traditions and values of the humanistic culture of Europe and of the world, to foster the maturation of a person's national identity, moral, aesthetic and scientific culture as well as personal outlook; to guarantee the continuity of ethnic and national culture, the preservation of its identity and continuous renewal of its values; to promote the country's openness and inclination for dialogue;
- Civic and political education: to ensure conditions enabling a person to acquire the basics of civic and political culture that embody democratic traditions, and to develop the abilities and experience needed by a person as a competent citizen of the Republic of Lithuania, a member of the European and global community as well as of a multi-cultural society;

- Society empowerment: to reinforce the capability of society to ensure sustainable development of the country's economic, environmental and human resources, internal and external economic competitiveness, national security and the advancement of a democratic state.

In Lithuanian progress strategy 'Lithuania 2030', country's and personal development ideals are presented in concise, highlighting orientation to the future and the necessary conditions for that: Lithuania has become a modern, competent, open to the world, and cherishing the own national identity country, which is developed by creative and responsible people (National Education Strategy..., 2012).

Openness, creativity and responsibility in the strategy 'Lithuania 2030' are considered core set of progress values, which are defined in more detail as follows:

- openness to other views, and positive initiatives, dialogue, cooperation, innovation;
- creativity in generating valuable ideas and their implementation by evaluating challenges as the of new opportunities for success; responsibility for their actions, morality, active care of not only themselves, but also their environment, community and the country..

In the most relevant for the education area - intelligent society - three trends are noticed: 1) active, 2) loyal, and 3) learning society.

The European Union in a Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020') addresses the following four strategic objectives:

- Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality;
- Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training;
- Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship;
- Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training. (National Education Strategy..., 2012).

The most relevant resource of educational goals is the vision of the future of the society provided for in the Lithuanian progress strategy 'Lithuania 2030' – it is productive, loyal, and learning society. The details of this vision helps to discover the essential educational factors affecting the success of implementation.

The following factors shall be considered the most important educational factors affecting implementation of educational purposes:

- 1) The quality of education, including:
  - education, training, study content, i.e. curriculum and its implementation;
  - learning resources and the environment;

- experience excluded of the formal curriculum, but acquired in school or outside, but organized by the school.

The quality of education is evidenced by the results.

2) Features of teaching staff:

- demographic characteristics - age, gender ratio;
- teacher training and professional development.

The quality of teaching staff is evidenced by working methods and the results.

3) Inclusion in education, including:

- accessibility of education, i.e. providing the conditions of learning in formal and (or) non-formal for everybody;
- a variety of different, i.e. adaptation of the system for different educational needs;
- recognition and validation of competences, regardless of method of acquisition.

Inclusion in education is evidenced by the extent of participation in education.

4) Culture of education (system), the essential elements of which are as follows:

- arrangements for the development direction and principles, and compliance;
- school autonomy, self-management, leadership, i.e. a confidence in them and the freedom of the delegation;
- grounding an activity by monitoring and analysis, and evidence-based reporting on it.

Appropriate characteristics of educational culture are public confidence in education and the sense of satisfaction of the educational community itself.

Prestige of higher education in Lithuania is high - as evidenced pretenders to study in higher schools. In 2011.number of people involved in the general entering was the largest comparing the three years of the reform of higher education. The 66 per cent of that year graduates began to study. Due to the high demand for higher education, students are not very demanding for its quality, but its shortcomings are apparent when mobile students compare studying in Lithuania and abroad, and high school graduates are not employable.

Quality of studies is the learning outcome and the ways to achieve it (the process) and the acceptability of the conditions. It relates to expectations - the higher the expectations, the higher the requirements for the quality, and can be seen subjectively (customer perspective) and objectively (external independent evaluators approach). In Lithuania, an external evaluation is performed by the Quality Assessment Centre that accredit programs. There

are few other representative researches of quality of studies performed in recent years. Following the data of one rare research - study of Lithuanian high school first year students (MOSTA, Sprinter studies, 2009-2010), 66 per cent university freshmen and 74 per cent of college students were satisfied with the studies. About two thirds of employers consider the knowledge, skills and competencies of Lithuanian high school graduates appropriate to their business needs (research "Employers' attitudes towards Lithuania and Europe changes taking place in higher education", 2010). However, unlike the students, their teachers and high school principals, and employers are not likely to consider general skills (communication, decision making, creativity, analytical activity) of graduates of the last three years equivalent to eight or higher mark. (research „Trends in Higher Education: approach by interested parties “, 2012).

In order to achieve clear and equitable distribution of funds for education and school quality, demanded by the stimulus of customer choice, at all levels of education, school funding has been shifted to the voucher basis. However, the application of this principle is not so simple and unconditionally effective as it looked at the commencement. In the system of general education, vouchers ensure payment of teachers salaries, but does not encourage schools to improve work where customers can not select them. In higher education system, the need to attract students can encourage high schools to improve their image, but not the quality of studies. For school funding to be not only transparent and fair, but also effective, permanent high school and employer interaction is highly needed, as well as the best possible supervision of quality of study, and applicants information about the quality of studies (National Education Strategy..., 2012).

Higher education voucher was introduced in 2009 when high school program funding was abandoned, it was replaced with the funds distribution by groups of study areas, and this related to the selection of entrants and granting the financing to them following the best secondary education graduates results. In tis way, competition of high schools for the best students was reinforced. Students' choices revealed the most popular programs, the school has responded to this challenge by improving the quality of education, cooperation with employers, and together, and the most popular specialty programs content as well as increasing the number of places not subsidized by the stat therein.

Raising of school autonomy and responsibility is a way to achieve renewal of education without losing quality. Public school activity regulation in Lithuania is being gradually liberalized, and schools are gaining more powers to make decisions. However, the procedure of budget planning and performans limits the possibility of educational institutions for independent and efficient management, dampens motivation, and inhibits initiative. While

increasing school autonomy, the question of why, how and how much they should account for performance should be answered, currently the announcement thereof is not universal.

Higher education institutions have become public enterprises since 2009 and gain greater freedom to dispose of property, to have own property. In order to increase the high schools' responsibility and accountability to the public the supervisory procedures are being developed providing for a larger degree of publicizing of high school's performance, to implement preventive measures to avoid violations (National Education Strategy..., 2012).

Juozas Rudzevičius analyzes the evolution of higher education and university activities as well as methods and instruments for assurance of quality of studies affected by the globalization and internationalization processes crucial to global economy and the various fields of activity. Based on scientific literature, summary of foreign and Lithuanian higher education practice and the results of author's conducted study, features of Quality Management Systems (QMS) and other management tools and implementation thereof are disclosed, problem areas and possible interferences for an effective QMS are highlighted. The model of factors and measures for fruitful development of study organization is also provided (Rudzevičius, 2007).

According to a new wording of the Law on Higher Education and Research (Law on Higher Education and Research..., 2009), and implementing legislative acts, an external evaluation consists of the following: assessment of high school self-report summary, group of experts visit to a high school and announcement of evaluation results. The purpose of external evaluation is to create conditions for high school activities improvement as well as to promote the culture of quality, to evaluate the basic financial needs in terms of performance, to inform the founders (legal persons), the academic community, and the public about the quality of higher education, to make recommendations for high school performance development on the basis of the assessment results (Government Resolution..., 2010).

The most important aspects of external quality assessment of higher education are as follows: 1) curriculum, 2) high school performance (performance audit), 3) high school accreditation. Quality assessment indicators analyzed in the external assessment are established by the Ministry of Education. External evaluation of the study curriculum is an analysis of a study program and quality of its execution in the context of national and international experience as well as presentation of recommendations to improve the the study program (Order of Minister of Education..., 2009). External evaluation of study programs finishes with curriculum accreditation. Ongoing accredited study programs are provided for external

assessment, where high school is not accredited the intended study program shall be also provided for external assessment. Accreditation goal is to ensure that high school performance quality is in line with the state and other stakeholders' requirements and to provide higher education institutions with the guidelines and criteria on which they base continuous quality improvement. Intended to commence and already existing degree programs can be accredited. Higher education performance assessment (performance audit) ends with institution assessment. The purpose of performance audit is performance improvement in order to provide feedback to a high school senior management about the organization's strengths and areas requiring improvement in order to improve the functioning of the institution and inform the public. In the evaluation, high school's activity's compliance to the set objectives is analysed, in this case institution's activity's compliance to its mission is measured. External assessment of high school activities includes all activity areas provided for in the statute (regulations), and is based on the following criteria: activity compliance to the mission specified in the statute (regulations), to international level of science and study, eligibility of studies results evaluation, execution of requirements of academic ethics and procedures, the use of state budget efficiency and performance, and activity's compliance with legal requirements. Activity of high school is evaluated following the procedures specified in performance evaluation methodology and publicly available. Evaluation is based on real high school resource assessment, the target evaluation, self-evaluation report and other documents of a high school, data obtained during a visit to a high school, and the findings of the previous assessment and recommendations as well as on the data on the progress of implementation of the recommendations and results, and other information about the high school activities. High school is evaluated positively or negatively. In the event high school is evaluated negatively a re-evaluation shall be taken in two years.

Quality-related information system at each high school will vary depending on local conditions, but should include at least the following issues: students' progress and performance indicators, data on study programs, employability of graduates, students' satisfaction with their programs, teaching quality, diverse data about students, learning resources available and their price, high school key indicators.

The more of this information (other than personal data and copyright works) is available to the public, the more transparent a university will be. Information technology in addition to information storage and management functions carry out increasing importance of modernizing the teaching process. Universities are increasingly using innovative information systems (eg Moodle) to facilitate teaching, learning, student and faculty interaction, consultation and evaluation processes (Bilevočienė, Bilevičiūtė, 2012c).

## **Implementation of Lithuanian Education Strategy**

Lithuanian Government approved the Strategy in the five reform areas: governance, infrastructure, support, content, staff improvement. During the period of implementation of the national education strategy, responsible management system based on the analysis of the state of education levels was introduced in the system of education: system for educational monitoring and analysis and the education management information system (EMIS) have been developed, educational policy decisions tended to be based on information from national and international student achievement researches, researches of educational status, policy analysis and other reports. Governance of education has been commenced to decentralise and deconcentrate: more power to make decisions given to the founders of schools and communities gradually began to increase community ownership of schools. All levels of education introduced strategic planning, contemporary internal and external culture. Purpose of the implementation of the strategy has been to encourage private investment in education. More private educational institutions established are established. Financing principle "money follows the student" implemented in all spheres of education. General education pupil voucher increased each year and has helped to ensure a stable teacher salaries and education availability to all children of the country, regardless of their place of residence. The aim is to shift to education funding from several sources, the use of EU structural projects funds, financially-based education innovation - it helped make education relevant and funding of priority areas during economic downturn. While there has been significant work done, it is still necessary to improve all levels of education quality. International and national student achievement tests and school external evaluation results show that the educational process is still dominated by the teacher, not the students' activities based on active learning methods, more attention given to knowledge and understanding, rather than the *application of knowledge in practice* (Ministry of Education, 2012).

### ***Implementation of the Strategy in the field of higher education (Lietuvos Respublikos švietimo ir mokslo ministerija, 2012)***

**I tikslas.** To develop an efficient and consistent education system which is based on the responsible management, targeted funding and rational use of resources.

During the period of implementation of the strategy, responsible management system was introduced in the system of education. It is based on the analysis of the state of education levels: education monitoring and analysis system and the education management information system were developed, education policy decisions tended to be based on information

from national and international student achievement, the state of education research, policy analysis reports, and so on.

*Education monitoring system for data-based management.* Implementing the Strategy, attempts were made to develop an efficient, sustainable and based on responsible management education system. Higher education system and quality of study programs are supervised by Centre for Quality Assessment.

*The funds allocation principle “money follow a child, pupil, student”* must provide conditions for efficient use of funds allocated for education, create more transparent funding system, more rationally manage education network and enlarge financial independence of schools at all levels. The principle has been applied in higher education since 2009.

While implementing the strategy, much attention was paid to encourage *private investment to education*. As from 2003, citizens of Lithuania can allocate 2 per cent of income tax to various institutions including educational. More and more funds are attracted to high and vocational education schools from abroad legal persons and individuals. Private investment to education increased from 0,54 per cent of GNP in 2003 to 0,76 per cent of GNP in 2011.

*Financial ground of education innovations.* In the field of higher education, support of European Union structural funds was used for study programs and renewal of higher education infrastructure, implementation of higher education management models, and application of information technology to the students’ registry, managing of loans and social support system, encouraging of internationality of studies. This assists in ensuring funding of relevant and prioritair areas.

**II tikslas.** To develop an accessible system of continuing education that guarantees life-long learning and social justice in education.

During the period of implementation of the strategy the acceptable and socially fair education system has been developed for continuous education and life-long learning. The aim was to ensure a minimum conditions for learning and study by provision of education and social assistance, or material support: increased scale of transporting pupils to and from school, increased budgetary expenses for school meals; funds were assigned for renewal of high school dormitories (50 million Litas in 2009-2010), students were provided with government loans or government-backed loans to compensate for their studies.

Inclusive teaching ideas continue to be implemented: only 1.2 per cent of special needs students are educated in special institutions or classes (EU 27 average - 2.3 per cent), improved conditions for training of disabled in vocational schools and higher education.

According to the European Commission's Communication on European education and training systems and equity in education, 2006, educational equity is defined as a scale to which people use education and training services, assessed by aspects of learning opportunities, access, treatment and outcomes. High primary and secondary educational attainment indicators show the relatively good conditions to gain the desired degree of general education and vocational training institutions. However, the rate of gaining post-secondary education is deteriorating. This might have been affected by increase in migratory pressure, grown foreign high school popularity and the economic downturn.

*Accessibility of studies.* Graduates share of persons aged 30-34 in 2003 grew almost every year and in 2011 accounted for 45.4 per cent. This Lithuanian index exceeds the EU objective for 2020 (40 per cent) and the EU average (34.6 per cent). Access to higher education level (number of entrants compared to the number of graduates) had grown until 2008, and in recent years, has been falling. In 2003, 69.1 per cent of the same year abiturients joined Lithuanian high schools, in 2008 this rate concluded 78.6 per cent, and in 2011, it made 66.1 per cent (for more details see objective 6).

Accessibility and equity of studies are ensured maintaining one channel entrance system, related with the state maturity exam and based on the best entrants queue for the state funded places by the secondary education results. Failed to get to state-funded places young people can choose paid studies, for which it was possible to obtain a state loan until 2009, and now the state-sponsored loan is available. The adoption of the new Law on Science and Studies of the Republic of Lithuania (2009) introduced a voucher principle for the regulation of state-funded places. In 2011-2012v state-funded places counted 57.7 per cent of college and 44.4 per cent of university students.

Although the availability of studies is high due to large part of the state-funded places, accessibility is reduced by relatively high cost of non state-funded places compared to the income of the population as well as low Lithuanian students' income (including subsistence), which is the lowest in Europe: an average of 276 euros per month. Half of them are families spending, about 30 per cent are earnings. Public support makes at an average 8 per cent of students' income (for more information see objective 6).

Increasing access to studies, the strategy has been planned to develop extramural and evening studies forms (currently part-time studies are launched thereinstead). This aim has been implemented by accepting students who pay for their own studying. In Lithuania, 40.2 per cent of students were studying in evening and extramural form in 2003, in 2011, part-time studies mode was chosen by 29 per cent. This is less than the

strategy has foreseen (45 per cent in 2012.), but it is one of the largest in comparison with other European countries.

*Education of people with special needs.* The Law on Education (2011) provides the much broader definition of special educational needs than the previous wording of the Law on Education: Special educational needs considered as need for assistance and services in the course of the training process, arising not only from congenital or acquired disorders but also from person's exceptional capabilities or adverse environmental factors. Due to this there arised sharp increase in needed assistance and a variety of services for all age persons having special educational needs.

Relatively small proportion of students with disabilities study in higher education institutions, but now the schools are prepared to accept them, and number of such students in recent years has been increasing. In 2011-2012, 467 and 352 people with disabilities having special educational needs studied in universities and colleges respectively.

**III tikslas.** To ensure a quality of education which is in line with the needs of an individual living in an open civil society under market economy conditions, and the universal needs of society of the modern world.

When implementing the Strategy, in 2008, Formal educational quality assurance concept was approved, where the definition of educational quality was provided for all general education levels, the conceptual model of quality assurance in education and general education quality assurance principles are formulated.

Provision of the Strategy for good knowledge of two or three foreign languages becoming a natural part of higher education, has not been implemented. During the period under question an average of one-fifth of students studied two or more foreign languages.

Per 2003–2012 metus pertvarkyta švietimo kokybės užtikrinimo sistema: pereita nuo inspektavimo grindžiamos švietimo priežiūros prie švietimo įstaigų įsivertinimo ir išoriniu vertinimu grindžiamo švietimo kokybės užtikrinimo.

Aukštojo mokslo kokybė užtikrinama studijų programų ir aukštųjų mokyklų veiklos išoriniu vertinimu. Per 2003–2011 metus išaugo užsienio ekspertų grupių vertintų vykdomų studijų programų skaičius ir dalis. 2011 metais akredituotų ketinamų vykdyti studijų programų buvo daugiau nei neakredituotų (atitinkamai 162 ir 133).

*Entrepreneurship and financial wisdom.* In 2003–2012 much attention was given to encourage entrepreneurship and to develop financial wisdom at school. Development of initiative and entrepreneurship competences is integrated in all subjects in basic education.

During implementation of the strategy period, the European Union's Structural Funds financed projects where students were taught for

entrepreneurship. High schools provide an opportunity to choose management or business degree programs concurrently to study model. It is particularly well adapted for colleges - almost all degree programs.

*Renewal of the curriculum.* To ensure the quality of education in line with modern society and the labor market needs, Lithuania general curriculum is continually assessed, revised, selected, supplemented and (or) adjusted. The main goal of this upgrade is the education paradigm shift from the traditional (impact) to the learning paradigm, which means moving from knowledge and understanding to the development of competences.

*Curriculum differentiation and individualization.* At the national level, the curriculum was differentiated and individualized providing pupils with the opportunity to choose religion or ethics, introducing in secondary education subjects in general and advanced courses, developing training modules. It is also the opportunity for schools to differentiate themselves and personalize the curriculum according to students' education (learning) needs. Methodological tools were published for curriculum customization and differentiation practices dissemination in the school. In higher education there is an opportunity to choose from a variety of adjacent modules.

*Higher education quality and its assurance.* The basemet for higher education quality assurance is a public regulation of high school establishment and authorization to carry out studies, the internal quality control system and the requirements for higher education as an institution. Centre for Studies Quality Assessment (CQAHE) regularly carry out an external evaluation of the quality of study programs. During the 2003-2011 years CQAHE assessed a total of 854 programs. As from 2008 education quality evaluation methodology has been changed. Over the past four years (2008-2011) quality of the majority (99 per cent) of academic programs has been evaluated positively (programs accredited for six or three years). Only a very small part of degree programs was evaluated negatively - 1 per cent of non-accredited degree programs (see Figure 16).

During the period of implementation of the strategy, the number and share of studies assessed by international expert groups has been growing (see Figure 17). In 2011, the majority (about 89 per cent) of study programs were evaluated by international experts groups, while in 2003 such programs were only about 33 per cent, compared to all study programs assessed in those years. During the years 2003-2011, the number of assessed intended study programs has been very volatile. He grew the most in 2011. The growth in the number of study programs can partly be attributed to the ameded curriculum evaluation procedure, a high-school competitiveness, the desire to increase the diversity of degree programs, but the real reason for this phenomenon could be revealed only by comprehensive high schools activity research.

In 2009, after adoption of the Law on Science and Studies a development of national high-school institutional assessment methodology started up. In 2010, when Lithuanian Government approved external evaluation of higher education institutions and higher education accreditation routines, higher education institutional assessment methodology has been developed. In 2010, a new type of external evaluation started to organize, it aims to create conditions for high school activities to improve and promote the quality of the culture. In 2011, 8 assessments in higher education institutions were started. In December of 2011, another 10 high school assessments were initiated.

The most attention in evaluation of higher education in the world is focused to two ratings: ARWU (Academic Ranking of World Universities), and WUR (World University Ranking). According to ARWU ranking, in 2011 none of Lithuanian universities was included to the top 500 universities in the world list, while the following WUR in 2008-2010 only Vilnius University was among the first 600 top universities.

In assessing the quality of higher education subjective approach of both employers and students is important (Hill, 2004). In 2010, Education Exchanges Support Foundation and the Public Institution of Social Information and Training Agency conducted a study "Employers' attitudes towards Lithuania and Europe taking place in higher education changes". In this study, in general, employers are quite satisfied by the knowledge, practical skills and general competences of the higher education graduates compliance to the company's requirements. Very few of the manufacturing sector employers believe that the Lithuanian high school graduate and postgraduate students' knowledge fully meet the needs of businesses, service sector employers consider the same a lot more often. The best evaluation of bachelors' knowledge was given by private companies, cooperatives and insurance companies, budgetary institutions representatives, the worst assessment was given by respondents from companies and public institutions (Bilevičienė, Bilevičiūtė, 2012c).

In 2009, Science and Higher Education Monitoring and Analysis Centre ordered a research "Motives of choice, expectations, and quality assessment of study: students' attitude", the majority (67 per cent) of university and college students participated appreciated their studies, 25 per cent of the respondents were neutral, and only a very small proportion (6.5 per cent) of students were dissatisfied with their studies. As a key determinant of the quality of education students named the teacher and the teaching (43 per cent), then followed personal development opportunities (27 per cent), and only then came learning infrastructure (11 per cent).

*Vocational training qualifications compliance to the labor market needs.* Vocational training qualifications compliance to the labor market

needs is shown by graduates' employment success. From 2004 to 2006 number initial vocational training and higher education graduates registered with the labor exchange declined, however, starting with 2007 before the start of the economic crisis in the country, and during this crisis, was rapidly growing. The largest number of higher education graduates registered with the labor exchange (10 per cent) over the period of 2003 to 2011 was in 2009, and initial vocational training graduates (23.3 per cent) was registered in 2010. In 2011, when the economic situation of the country stabilised, this index was slightly lower, but compared to 2004 was five times higher. Moreover, in 2011, the number of vocational training graduates registered with the labor exchange was 3.5 times higher than high school graduates.

It is rather difficult to assess whether vocational training qualifications provided during the implementation of the Strategy period get in line with the country's economy needs due to the high emigration of young people from the country at the end of 2007 and during the economic downturn. However, data suggest that the economic recovery in the post-crisis period graduates of high schools in the labor market channel are more demanded than vocational training institutions.

#### **Social conditions for studies and learning for all persons**

During implementation of the higher education reform, scholarship scheme was amended - more focus given to material support of students, differentiating students in public and private institutions, thus facilitating access to higher education to a higher proportion of the population. Law on Higher Education and Research of the Republic of Lithuania (2009) provides for a number of state budget allocation forms, which increases the availability of studies of students with different abilities and social status. According to the Law, state budget funds for studies shall be appropriated for the following:

- to cover the cost of studies in student places which are funded by the state;
- to compensate a tuition fee paid by the students who achieved the best results of studies in the student places which are not funded by the state;
- for targeted funding of studies;
- state loans or state-supported loans;
- social scholarships and other support.

Students may get state loans or state-supported loans:

- to pay the tuition fee;
- for living expenses;
- to pay partial studies pursuant to international (interdepartmental) agreements.

According to State Studies Foundation, the amount of loans for high school students in 2011 increased up to 44 million Litass. As from 2010, loan provision system has been changed – instead of public loans launched state-sponsored loans. In 2010–2011, compared to 2003, number of contracts for loans for tuition increased, but the number of contracts for living expenses covering declined.

### ***Accessibly of studies***

Lithuanian graduates ratio in 30-34 years old population is one of the best in Europe (45.4 per cent) and higher than the EU objective for 2020 (40 per cent).

In the Strategy, increase of inclusion of part-time students was metioed as a key measure for improving accessibility of studies. Coverage had been increasig up to 2008 and accounted for nearly half of all high school students. In the meantime, a third of all students has chosen part-time form.

Compared to other countries, an inherent desire for Lithuanian students is to enroll in higher education the same year as the acquisition of secondary education, as well as young age and relatively high dependence on their parents' financial support. Lithuanian students' income is the lowest in Europe. Although according to the study coverage, Lithuanian higher education system seems to be open to all, the social mobility of students is one of the lowest in Europe.

The share of graduates in 30-34 years old population in 2011 accounted for 45.4 per cent, since 2003 this ratio has improved almost every year (see Figure 54). One of the main objectives of the strategy is a share of university or non-university-trained young men exceeding 60 per cent has not been implemented, however level reached by Lithuania is now exceeding the EU objective for 2020 (40 per cent) and the EU average (34.6 per cent ) and Lithuanian youth education attainment level rise since 2003 was very sudden. On the other hand, there are some European countries, which also aim to move above the EU objective, and the ratio therein is similarly large: Ireland - 60 per cent, France - 50 per cent, Belgium - 47 per cent.

Access to higher education level (number of entrants compared to the number of graduates) has been growing until 2008, since then decreases. However, colleges enroll to study a number of vocational training institutions graduates. In 2008, high schools were joined by 78.6 per cent of the abiturients of the year, in 2011 - 65.8 per cent (see Table 28). Earlier graduates who enter higher education also decreased: the total coverage in 2008 was 120.8 per cent compared to the number of graduates of that year, in 2011 this umber was as low as 80.7 per cent, but slightly higher than in 2010.

During the implementation of the Strategy period, part of entrants to high school decreased due to removal of the partially state-funded student

places for more money for one funded student places. Since 2008, the number of college freshmen studying at their own expense fell by about 2-fold and 1/3 in both university levels (see Figures 57, 58 and 59.). The changes in number of state-financed study places associated with the changing capacity of the state to finance their studies and the new Law on Higher Education and Research (in force from 2009-05-12). Therefore state education funding methodology has been changed: targeting high school program funding was denied, it was replaced by the allocation of funds to the areas of study, and this related to the accession selection according to the best secondary education graduates queue. For both reasons, the number of admitted to the first year reached the highest level in 2008-2009 and rapidly decreased up to 2010-2011, and only in recent years has stabilized. Number of colleges freshmen during that period fell by about 30 per cent, university - 35 per cent.

When the number of students studying at their own expense significantly decreased, in colleges and universities grew the second cycle of state-funded places students in freshmen parts. In colleges, the proportion was lowest in 2008-2009 - about 43 per cent, while in 2011-2012 it has accounted for about 55 per cent in universities, in state-funded places of stage I students, it has been the lowest in 2009-2010 - 43 per cent; in 2011-2012 it slightly increased - to 45 per cent. In the second cycle of university students such share rose from 42 per cent in 2008-2009 to 54.4 per cent in 2011-2012.

Increasing access to studies, the Strategy was intended to encourage students to study in higher education for evening and extramural form study forms (later both were replaced with the form of extended studies). The aim for the year 2012 i.e. 45 per cent, was reached in 2007 and 2008, recently this figure reduced up to 32.7 per cent (see pic. 60). However in comparison with other European countries, in Lithuania, not permanent (part-time) studies share is one of the largest – it is higher only in Poland.

### **Conclusions**

Essential demographic, economical and political changes require improvement of management methods of the European Union and Lithuanian higher education. European Union over the last five years has adopted a number of program instruments on high education reform. Accordingly, in 2009, Lithuania began reform of higher education and adopted the new Law on Higher Education and Research. World and Lithuanian Higher Education Area must change and allow innovation to internal management of universities. Competition in higher education, new challenges have arisen due to the fact that the universities adjust their management. Managerial business management techniques, leadership,

payback criteria, investment, marketing strategies have become commonplace in higher education.

Implementation of new approach university strategy must ensure for the students the highest international standard of knowledge and competitiveness of Lithuania's specialty in international markets, the increased availability of studies, flexible payment, technical and technological measures, human values-based learning environment, fully interesting and meaningful socio-cultural living environment. The teachers and staff should get the appropriate conditions to disclose the highest level of professionalism, implementation of package of stimulus and motifs, allowing to feel competitively in Lithuania and foreign labour market, humanic and academic values-based community environment, ensured social security.

At the present, all universities are being forced to innovate, introduce advanced management techniques for internal management following the globalization needs. For example, the MRU was implementing the project "*Improvement of Internal Control in Mykolas Romeris University*". The project team carried out the SWOT analysis based on the proposals of university strategy development. Since universities can not stop responding to the challenges of our time, such studies have become very important for the development of quality in higher education area.

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