

# IMPLEMENTATION STEPPINGSTONES WITHIN SUSTAINABILITY ORIENTED MASTER STUDY PROGRAM FOR TEACHERS

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## Abstract

The article is the outcome of the research into the national and European documents, regulations and normative acts and carried out analysis concerning context and rationale for creating and implementing an interdisciplinary and sustainability oriented master study program for teachers. By undertaking such a research, it is sought to identify and implement good practice in approaches to teaching and curriculum development; to find out how to embed sustainable development in institutional teaching and learning strategies; as well as assess the support required for widening and deepening this embedding process. The approach adopted throughout the research has been non-prescriptive, open and participatory. The article is an assessment of the current state of teacher education at master's level in two universities of Latvia: the University of Latvia and Liepaja University, hence not a comprehensive review. Nevertheless it represents interdisciplinary and integrated research and its implementation in designing a sustainability oriented master study programme for teachers within in-service teacher education in Latvia.

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**Keywords:** In-service teacher education, Professional Master's Study Programme “Teacher”, sustainable development, epistemological, ontological and axiological aspects, wellbeing and cohesion

## Introduction

A teacher's motivation is not connected only with the motivation to teach, but also the very motivation of being a teacher for all one's life and developing a teacher's career. Lack of intellectual challenge when teaching one and the same subject – without gaining, realising and improving new knowledge, skills and abilities is a demotivating factor. The work of teachers does not offer wide career opportunities, mostly they are limited to the position of school principal or lecturer at a higher education establishment. However, also within the profession, teachers have to constantly improve and develop their professional knowledge and skills and one of the ways could be continuing studies.

The research conducted during the last 3 years at the University of Latvia, Faculty of Education, Psychology and Art and Faculty of Pedagogy and Social Work, Liepaja University revealed that the majority (87% or 261 students out of 300) of the potential pre-service teacher education graduates had not yet decided what to do after graduation. Students do not feel secure about their future in the labour market as employers do not wish to employ specialists with no practical experience just after university. Students, provided they have not

started to work combining it with studies, are not fully aware yet (after 4 years spent at the educational institution) of the specifics of the chosen profession. They are not able to assess their skills and abilities critically. From this point, the number of people willing to obtain a Master's diploma could increase. They would choose to study further to be more competitive in the labour market. However, few graduates (79 out of 300 in the last 3 years; 16 out of 79 English language teachers) had chosen to continue with postgraduate studies in the existing master's programmes. One of the reasons is that the master's studies offered lack the link with teacher's work. Not all graduates of professional teacher education programmes have a wish to continue master's studies deepening their knowledge in educational sciences or education management, not everybody wants to be a researcher or manager. Another reason is the lack of master studies in the teacher's profession in foreign languages and it leads to students giving preference to do their postgraduate studies in another country or university. One third of the respondents (102 out of 300) want to combine master's studies with work in the chosen speciality. More than half of the respondents (59 % or 177 out of 300) would be ready to continue their studies in the subject already chosen to increase their qualification and feel more secure in the potential workplace.

To develop and improve teacher's work as well as to give possibility to develop one's personality and professional identity, to make it more appealing to young people (especially men), it is of utmost importance to raise the prestige of the teacher's profession and opportunities for promotion in the career by improving the system of further education, offering opportunities for cooperation with international and non-governmental organisations, introducing a mentoring system, etc.

A teacher's work would benefit if possibilities of further professional development were offered. A teacher does action research every day to facilitate students' learning, but usually it does not go further than the walls of the particular work place. Master's studies would give teachers the chance to share their experience with other in-service teachers, learn the latest trends in the particular subject area, didactics, classroom management and civic education.

Master studies should be taking into consideration the necessity to improve the overall quality of teacher in-service education as well as trends and opportunities in school and higher education institution optimisation. The decreasing number of students and schools increases the need for teachers who can teach several school subjects. In this situation flexible study possibilities and ways should be offered to students and qualified teachers.

The system inherited from the Soviet times is oriented to separating academic and professional qualifications, and fragmented teacher education in one subject or one education level. In the changeable socioeconomic conditions it has become an obstacle for a teacher's career; the new programme should guarantee holistic solutions of social and professional problems, ensure the development of the teacher's diverse competences integrated in subject, teaching in general and research activities, thus increasing teachers' competitiveness in the labour market. The teacher's work experience and society demands show that nowadays competence in various fields is evaluated higher than fundamental knowledge in one particular sphere. This approves the current trend and the Bologna guidelines – to educate employees in a shorter period of time and in a more flexible way, emphasising the importance of lifelong learning.

## **Background**

As to Latvia, master programmes can be designed as academic and professional in accordance with the requirements of the Law on Education, Republic of Latvia, Law on Higher Education, Strategic Plan of the University of Latvia (UL) 2010. – 2020., UL Constitution (Satversme), UL Quality Policy and other normative documents. In the academic study programme a student learns and acquires content and methodology relating to one or

several branches of a science. The professional study programme combines study courses and practical learning to acquire content, methodology and skills relating to one or several branches of science and sectors of economy. A master study programme consists of a compulsory and a compulsory elective part. Studies in both parts are organised in the form of study modules or courses. The scope of studies is 80 credit points (one Latvian credit point is 1.5 ECTS, so it makes 120 ECTS), which in full-time studies may be implemented in 4 semesters/2 years. Professional master studies after a student has received the Professional Bachelor degree may be realised for the amount of 40 credit points (60 ECTS/ 2 semesters/1 year). In that case a student is not entitled to professional qualification. To obtain the professional qualification the scope of study programme is 80 credit points (120 ECTS).

Professional master study programmes should follow the regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia No. 481 “Regulations Regarding the State Standard for the Second Level Higher Professional Education”, requirements of the Standard of Profession so that teachers work in their profession in accordance with regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia No.281 “Regulation on the State General Secondary Education Standard and the General Education Subjects’ Standards” and regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia No.530 “Regulation on the State Basic Education Standard and the Basic Education Subjects’ Standards” and developmental trends in the European Higher Education Area.

The Programme should implement the aims and objectives of higher professional education stated in the above-mentioned regulations No. 481, which state that a master’s programme should be created on the basis of academic bachelor or professional higher education study programme, thus the total amount of credit points depending on student’s previous education and expected outcome is either 40 credit points (60 ECTS) equal to one study year or 80 credit points (120 ECTS) leading to two years of studies.

The scope of the master’s programme should be at least 40 credit points (60 ECTS). The compulsory content of a master’s programme shall comprise study courses that ensure the acquisition of the latest achievements in theory and in practice of the field at least 7 credit points (one Latvian credit point is 1.5 ECTS). Compulsory content of a short professional master’s programme shall comprise:

- theoretical and professional specialisation courses of at least 4 credit points;
- research work, creative activity work, design work and business administration study courses of at least 5 credit points;
- education and psychology study courses, at least 2 credit points;
- practice of at least 6 credit points; total practice in the specialisation 26 credit points;
- a State examination, the integral part of which shall be the development and defence of a Master thesis of at least 20 credit points.

The fifth level professional qualification shall be conferred on completion of a short professional programme (Regulations No. 481).

In order to ensure EU-wide comparable professional master's level teacher education, the program should take into account the Latvian National Development Plan in 2014. – 2020 that focuses on the topical and perspective direction in the Latvian society towards sustainable development, the need to raise the status of teacher education and teacher as a profession linking the mission of teacher with the current needs of the individual personal wellbeing and coherent development of society.

### **The European In-service Teacher Education Area**

Changes in the teaching profession require continuous updating of skills and competences from teachers, besides these skills and competences are also constantly changing. That is why in developing teacher education (TE) it is extremely important to take care that teachers get the skills and competences they need during their whole teaching career.

Although the importance of teacher in-service education is emphasized in European documents, there is no clear picture of how the defining of teachers' competences for in-service teacher education have been implemented in different countries. Organising in-service TE seems to be very heterogeneously arranged and it is not obvious how the curricula for this phase have been determined and what the contents of the courses are, or even what the teachers' needs in this phase are in different countries.

According to the questionnaire carried out by the Finnish Institute of Educational Research (FIER), University of Jyväskylä (2009) data, "the responsibility for organising in-service TE is mainly in TE institutions (78%) or in universities (65%). In principle, the contents of teachers' in-service education have been mainly determined at TE institutes (68%) or in universities (61%). Thus, usually the institution which is mainly responsible for providing teachers' in-service education also plans the contents of the education, e.g., skills and competences which should be included in in-service TE".

In Latvia TE has been regulated mainly at national level and universities and TE institutes are mostly quite independent and act quite autonomously, but receive guidelines and main rules from the ministry level. In the current situation in Latvia, higher professional qualification in TE is required in various educational fields, the level of which could be comparable in the context of the EU. In accordance with the Bologna Process, the Professional Master's Programme should apply both the models "3+2" and "4+1" thus giving possibility to graduates of professional higher education programmes to obtain the professional master's education in a five-year time. Unfortunately master level requirements, following up the Bologna process, are not necessary for a teaching qualification in Latvia and it depends on the teachers themselves to continue or not their studies at master's level and in most cases pay for their studies.

Based on the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament "Improving the Quality of Teacher Education" (Brussels, 3.8.2007. COM (2007) 392), Latvia, in accordance with the EC Treaty, is responsible for the organization of education system and content. Communication proposals are made for teachers' knowledge, attitudes and pedagogical skills needed to facilitate the teacher's work and support research in teaching. These proposals meet the Lisbon objectives and promote a common sense of belonging to the European Education Area and foster economic competitiveness and growth.

Teaching is no longer the simple straightforward profession it used to be. Trainers must acknowledge that teaching is a global profession; recognize they are educating teachers for their future, not for the past; and therefore think and act globally in designing and implementing pre-service and in-service professional development programmes (Odina & Kuzmane 2013).

### **The Competences in Education for Sustainable Development**

The quality of TE is regarded as one key factor in determining whether the European Union can increase its competitiveness in the increasingly globalised world. The Competences in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) adopted at the sixth meeting of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development on 7 April 2011 propose "widespread concern that the model of development that is evident across the globe is unsustainable. Education should play an important role in enabling people to live together in ways that contribute to sustainable development. The development of a sustainable society should be seen as a continuous process of learning and change, involving a variety of actors providing guidance and leadership in formal, non-formal and informal learning. This requires a corresponding enhancement in the competences of educators, leaders and decision makers at all levels of education" ("Learning for the future: Competences in Education for Sustainable Development"; ECE/CEP/AC.13/2011/6). Thus it was essential to analyse these

recommendations and pick out topical competences for implementing a sustainability oriented master study programme for teachers. The authors of UNECE have agreed upon 3 characteristics of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD): *holistic approach, envisioning change and achieving transformation* and they have applied the UNESCO (1996) framework: *learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be* to reflect learning experiences.

From the list of 39 competences for educators in education for sustainable development, 20 competences (Table 1.) have been chosen: 5 from the holistic approach – seeking integrative thinking and practice; 9 of envisioning change – exploring alternative futures, learning from the past and inspiring engagement in the present and 6 from achieving transformation – serving to change in the way people learn and in the systems that support learning to build a sustainability oriented master study programme for teachers.

*Table1. The Competences for educators in education for sustainable development (adapted from “Learning for the future: Competences in Education for Sustainable Development”; ECE/CEP/AC.13/2011/6)*

| Characteristics of ESD   | <b>Holistic approach</b>  | <b>Envisioning change</b>   | <b>Achieving transformation</b>   |
|--|---|---|---|
| Learning experiences   |   |   |   |
| <b>Learning to know</b><br><i>The educator under stands</i>                                | - the connection between sustainable futures and the way people think, live and work;<br>- their own; thinking and action in relation to sustainable development; | - the urgent need for change from unsustainable practices towards advancing quality of life, equity, solidarity, and environmental sustainability;<br>- the importance of scientific evidence in supporting sustainable development;  | - how engagement in real-world issues enhances learning outcomes and helps learners to make a difference in practice;   |
| <b>Learning to do</b><br><i>The educator is able to</i>                                    | - connect the learner to their local and global spheres of influence;   | - critically assess processes of change in society and envision sustainable futures;<br>- facilitate the evaluation of potential consequences of different decisions and actions;<br>- use the natural, social and built environment, including their own institution, as a context and source of learning; | - facilitate participatory and learner-centred education that develops critical thinking and active citizenship;<br>- assess learning outcomes in terms of changes and achievements in relation to sustainable development;         |
| <b>Learning to live together</b><br><i>The educator works with others in the ways that</i> | - actively engage different groups across generations, cultures, places and disciplines;  | - facilitate the emergence of new worldviews that address sustainable development;<br>- encourage negotiation of alternative futures;   | - challenge unsustainable practices across educational systems, including at the institutional level;<br>- help learners clarify their own and others worldviews through dialogue, and recognize that alternative frameworks exist; |
| <b>Learning to be</b><br><i>The educator is someone who</i>                                | - is inclusive of different disciplines, cultures and perspectives, including indigenous knowledge and worldviews;  | - is motivated to make a positive contribution to other people and their social and natural environment, locally and globally;<br>- is willing to take considered action even in situations of uncertainty;   | - is willing to challenge assumptions underlying unsustainable practice;  |

The four steppingstones to be taken into account: (1) sustainable development, (2) philosophical perspective, (3) wellbeing and cohesion, (4) glocalization. So it was decided to create the concept of sustainability oriented master study programme for teachers where the orientation of competences for educators were towards teaching about sustainable development; where learning outcomes would have philosophical perspectives in terms of epistemological, ontological and axiological guidelines. The meta-content and study courses of the programme should highlight wellbeing and cohesion in the content as well as in the results; should cover global and local contexts. To conclude, the graduators of the programme – teachers should act as agents of change.

### **The Concept of A Sustainability Oriented Master Study Programme for Teachers**

Based on the country background and situation analysis, the *Programme* had to be designed concerning students' previous education and experience, practice at educational institution and characteristics of the changing target audience as well as taking into account various needs and specialisations of the target audience. The programme should give the chance to the teachers with various academic Bachelor's (or Master's) degrees to obtain teacher's qualification to teach the respective school subject or professional Master's degree as well as for teachers who already have a higher professional education to obtain a professional Master's degree in education or a professional Master's degree and qualification of teacher of another school subject.

**The aim of the programme** is to ensure professional Master's studies in teacher education that are directed to personal wellbeing and the coherent development of society encouraging development of both interdisciplinary pedagogical competence and independent integrated pedagogical and research activity which would be – sustainable-development-oriented, and providing an opportunity to obtain qualification as a subject teacher.

### **The objectives of the programme:**

- To ensure critically reflective understanding of education and pedagogical activity to facilitate personal wellbeing and coherent development of society as well as the competence of implementing it in professional practice;
- To facilitate the development of professional competence in connection to labour market and global social needs, and applying it in critically reflective professional practice;
- To ensure the improvement of research skills directed to sustainable development and integrate them in one's own pedagogical practice in diverse social environments;
- To educate the fifth-level teacher professional qualification specialists thus facilitating their competitiveness in the changeable local and global socioeconomic conditions;
- To facilitate a sense of belonging to the common European education area and acquiring the skill of critically evaluating its diversity, thus, improving professional practice in national cultural environment and advancing responsibility for one's own professional development in the context of life-long education and life-long learning.

### **The anticipated results of the study programme:**

The Professional Master's competence is to be formed by three interrelated sets of study results: (1) the epistemological aspect of professional competence in cognitive activity; (2) the ontological aspect of professional competence in integrated pedagogical practice and research and (3) the axiological aspect of professional competence in pedagogical practice directed to personal wellbeing and coherent development of society. This classification is conditional, however it deepens understanding and facilitates the multi-faceted development of teacher's professional competence. Each set of competences includes general study results that characterise the entire Master's Study Programme. These study results are specified in learning outcomes that describe what a learner is **expected to know, understand and be able to**

**demonstrate after successful completion of a process of learning.** They are statements of **concrete and verifiable signs** that witness/certify how the planned competences, including the required levels of knowledge, are being developed or acquired and they ensure consistency and integrity of the entire master's study programme.

**The epistemological aspect** of a moral theory focuses on how people figure out what is right and wrong, or good and bad, rather than the set of facts that actually makes these judgments true. It covers the questions of reflection, knowledge as such (the methods and means of singling out and cognizing a definite object, their adequacy, the truth or falsity of self-reflection, etc.). The questions to be asked: *What is the nature of knowledge? How do we come to know? How do we know what a child knows?*

The learning outcomes concerning **the epistemological aspect of professional competence in a cognitive activity** would mean that a student:

- Can find, obtain and select information in accordance with particular pedagogical aims;
- Analyses, synthesises and evaluates the information obtained in accordance with particular pedagogical aims and objectives;
- Can communicate the information clearly and convincingly based on both cognitive and affective processes and taking into account the characteristics of the target audience in various social and cultural contexts;
- Can enlarge one's knowledge and understanding by carrying out research and studying in foreign languages;
- Demonstrates deeper interdisciplinary knowledge and its critical understanding obtained in research and pedagogical practice;
- Demonstrates deeper knowledge and critical understanding of national characteristics and developmental trends of education in the common European education area.

**The ontological aspect** is related to questions of being (such as what exists, where, how, why), concerned with the nature of reality and raises the questions of the assumptions researchers have about the way the world operates and commitment held to particular views. The questions to be dealt with: *What issues are related to nature, existence, or being? Is a child inherently evil or good? How might your view determine your classroom management?*

According to **the ontological aspect of professional competence in integrated pedagogical practice and research** as learning outcomes, the student:

- Demonstrates skills of planning and implementing one's pedagogical practice in connection to requirements of labour market, social needs and innovative trends in education science and practice; taking risks to implement new solutions;
- Implements positive interaction and demonstrates a positive attitude in diverse social environments ensuring pedagogical process;
- Demonstrates an innovative pedagogical approach to dissemination and implementation of the results of solving problems connected with well-being and coherent development of society;
- Participates in research activities improving one's professional practice;
- Works together with other professionals in a team;
- Demonstrates skills of adapting to new situations and ensuring pedagogical practice in changeable social conditions;
- Can evaluate one's own professional competence; can plan and direct one's own education in the context of life-long learning.

**The axiological aspect of professional competence in pedagogical practice directed to personal wellbeing and coherent development of society** raises questions: *Is morality defined by our actions, or by what is in our hearts? What values should be taught in character education? What values should one live by? What do I value? How do I value, and how do I make value decisions?*

Axiology is the science of inquiry into human values. This inquiry enables people to

identify the internal valuing systems that influence their perceptions, decisions and actions to clearly understand.

It is expected that the student:

- Demonstrates deeper knowledge and critical understanding of the contribution of education to ensuring wellbeing and coherent development of society, and to sustaining and improving quality of life for one's own and the following generations;
- Demonstrates skills of solving problems connected to well-being and coherent development of society as well as taking responsibility about personal input in problem solving during pedagogical practice;
- Is aware of contribution of one's professional practice to solving problems connected to well-being and coherent development of society.

The above-mentioned anticipated results should be reflected in learning outcomes of every course of the programme. Having defined the aim, objectives, learning outcomes, and the audience of the possible master study programme for teachers, the next step is to decide about its structure

### **The Structure of a Sustainability Oriented Master Study Programme for Teachers**

Based on the needs analysis, a professional master's study programme should be considered for two target groups:

1. *Students with higher education.* Students of this group will study for a professional Master's degree in education as well as master specialised knowledge of content and psychology and pedagogy in the particular subject; will gain understanding of regularities and scope of teacher's work; will be able to work professionally and apply the gained theoretical knowledge and skills in the particular school subject.
2. *Students with higher pedagogical education – teacher's qualification.* Students of this group will master competences necessary for a professional Master's degree in education or knowledge and competences necessary for a professional Master's degree and for the teacher of the selected school subject.

Completing the requirements of the Programme, the students will obtain professional qualification, which will give them the chance to teach the particular subject at the educational institutions implementing programmes of basic education, minority education, professional education, and general education, and a professional Master's degree in education allowing them to continue their studies for doctoral degree.

The chief innovation (Figure 1.) is the modular structure of the program, flexible time of studies, bilingual studies – in the Latvian and English languages thus ensuring integrated studies of the foreign language and course content, interdisciplinary approach; facilitating link of the anticipated results with the professional specialisation of the students; integration of didactics and research improving the research skills and managing learners' research process and works.



**Professional Master’s Study Programme TEACHER**

| <i>Result</i>  | <i>Structure of Programme</i>  |  |   |  | <i>Parts of prog.</i>  |
|--|--|--|---|--|--|
| <b>Master’s degree in education</b><br>*   | Master’s courses ** 14 CP  |  |   |  | <b>Part A compulsory</b><br>40 CP  |
|  | Master’s Practice in Research 6 CP   |  |   |  |  |
| <b>Teacher’s qualification</b>   | Master’s Thesis 20 CP  |  |   |  | <b>Part B compulsory elective</b><br>(depending on chosen qualification) 16 CP |
|  | Teaching Practice III 8 CP   |  |   |  |  |
|  | Subject teaching/learning methodology I 8 CP   |  |   |  | <b>Part B elective part</b><br>(depending on previous education) 24 CP         |
|  | Education sciences courses 12 CP   | Subject content I 12 CP  |   |  |  |
| Teaching Practice I 6 CP<br>Teaching Practice II 6 CP  | Subject content II 12 CP   |  |   |  |  |
| <b>2nd teacher’s qualification</b>   |  |  | Subject teaching/learning methodology II 12 CP  |  |  |
| <b>*Study plan 1</b><br>Without teacher’s qualification  | <b>Study plan 2</b><br>Choice from 27 qualifications   | <b>Study plan 3</b><br>Choice from 30 qualifications   | <b>Study plan 4</b><br>Choice from 4 pairs of qualifications  |  |  |
| <b>Previous education</b><br>– 2 <sup>nd</sup> level higher professional pedagogical education (or comparable higher education) with teacher’s qualification | <b>Previous education</b><br>– Bachelor’s or Master’s degree (or comparable higher education) <b>related to</b> the obtainable qualification of subject teacher. | <b>Previous education</b><br>- 2 <sup>nd</sup> level higher professional pedagogical education (or higher education that is comparable to this) that entitles to teach subject of <b>different</b> scientific field from the qualification | <b>Previous education--</b><br>2 <sup>nd</sup> level higher professional pedagogical education (or higher education that is comparable to this) ‘that entitles to teach Science and subject of related field to the obtainable qualification, if the applicant has completed study courses in at least two of the following fields -<br>Chemistry , Physics, Biology or Environmental Studies, the volume of which is at least 5 CP in each field |  |  |
| Total in Study Programme <b>40 CP</b>  | Total in Study Programme <b>80 CP</b>  | Total in Study Programme <b>80 CP</b>  | Total in Study Programme <b>80 CP</b>   |  |  |

Figure 1. Structure of Study Programme.

\*\*CP – credit points

## **Self-evaluation of the Concept and Structure of the Master Study Programme for Teachers**

The created master study programme has been implemented and SWOT analysis has been carried out to explore the strong points of the programme, things to improve, what one should be conscious of and what the opportunities are.

### **Strengths**

- The structure and the anticipated results of the study programme, as well as master's courses in education and their learning outcomes are oriented towards sustainable education;
- The integrated aspect of sustainable development is ensured by the academic staff, researchers and non-governmental organisations involved in the programme and it characterises national and global topicalities in education and teaching/learning methodologies;
- The content and anticipated results of master's courses are characterised by the integration of interdisciplinary pedagogical, qualitative and quantitative research with ICT competences;
- The study courses are delivered bilingually – in Latvian and English thus ensuring integrated acquisition of content and the foreign language;
- The study courses are provided in MOODLE e-learning platform;
- The study courses have been planned to be delivered cooperatively by 2-3 lecturers;
- The programme has got a new approach to master's practice in research that can be conducted in the wider community apart from schools – universities, non-governmental organisations, local community, etc. and involves more extensive dissemination of research results participating in the conference, methodological board, etc.
- In the Master's thesis students can chose the most appropriate approach: monodisciplinary, multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary approach in order to design new strategies to foster personal wellbeing and coherent development of society outlining main priorities and offering action points for implementing the strategies.
- The study courses are combined in flexible elective modules;
- There are versatile possibilities to select the most appropriate and desirable teacher's qualification;
- There is on-going collaboration of academic staff to ensure further development and improvement of the programme.

### **Weaknesses**

The programme (Figure1.) has got a lot of study plans: 4 study plans with 62 options and all offered as full-time and part-time studies. So it is difficult to guarantee quality assurance in all sub-programmes of teacher qualification. The organisation of the programme is partially oriented to foreign students, not all sub-programmes can be offered in foreign languages, part of academic staff have only average level of knowledge of foreign languages especially English as well as ICT competences.

There are two lacks: lack of cooperation with similar study programmes in Latvia and internationally and lack of state financed study places that can result in students having to look for work which will affect both process and quality of studies, as well as the number of students can decrease due to the high study fee. And finally, Master's degree does not have an impact on a teacher's salary thus teachers do not have motivation to obtain master's degree.

## **Opportunities**

The encouraging things about the created Master Study Programme for Teachers are connected with the staff available and internationalisation activities carried out at universities. The possibility to use staff and students' mobility and involve guest lecturers from other countries is the opportunity for programme to develop, as well as experience of international projects and professional networking ensures the improvement of students' and staff competences. Competent staff is flexible to adapt the content of the study programme to the changes in labour market and they can offer study courses in MOODLE environment thus ensuring qualitative studies also to students with an individual study plan. Another opportunity is also the focus on the development of students' professional competences focusing on practical classes, seminars, discussions, workshops in small groups.

## **Threats**

Main threats to the Programme are connected with the policy and reforms of higher education and teacher education in Latvia that are inconsistent and ambiguous. There is also low prestige of the teaching profession and a decrease of prestige of higher education in Latvia. The procedure of employing foreign guest lectures is rigid as documentation should be managed in the official language of the State and the salary of foreign guest lecturers might be inadequate and uncompetitive.

## **Potential Strategies for the Implementation of a Master Study Programme for Teachers**

There are several initiatives how to develop the programme – they can be called as a strategic plan for the following 3 years where the main foci will be: public relations, cooperation, development of staff, and quality assurance:

- Advertise the designed mission and vision of the study programme with its unique characteristics; thus facilitating its recognition and competitiveness in Latvia and abroad;
- Design and distribute advertising materials of the study programme;
- Design and apply strategies to adapt the programme to studies in English, which would be more open to foreign students and facilitate export of the study programme;
- Translate and publish the latest scientific literature on newest trends in education;
- Enter negotiations on cooperative organisation of the study programme with other Latvian institutions of higher education;
- Research the situation and design strategies of cooperating with other educational establishments to facilitate increasing prestige of the teacher's profession;
- Diversify approaches, methods, techniques and aids applied in study process;
- Facilitate the integrated evaluation of results of common exams of study courses that are combined in study clusters;
- Link the design and organisation of bachelor-master-doctoral inter-programme in cooperation with other study programmes;
- Design and apply strategy to facilitate students' active involvement in decision making concerning study process;
- Design and apply strategy to facilitate cooperation with graduates and employers;
- Get feedback from students and academic staff by more structured evaluation of the study programme organised as discussion of the involved academic staff;
- Facilitate improvement of English and ICT competences of the academic staff in seminars and sharing experience;
- Continue mentoring to educate new specialists to ensure organisation of the study programme;
- Organise experience exchange of academic staff on diversification of study process as well as other issues concerning study programme, its organisation and evaluation;

- Organise improvement of staff competence on IT including online environment to ensure its application in study programme;
- Organise seminars for academic staff to facilitate learning of English which is based on pedagogical terminology;
- Continue purposeful orientation of the study programme to sustainable development, further integration of sustainable development aspect in the content of study courses especially subject methodology, content and achievable results as well as ensure link of study courses with the regional and national economic, natural, social and cultural environment.

## Conclusion

The Professional Master's programme *Teacher* is envisaged for students who have a Bachelor' degree or the second level professional higher education (or the comparable education) to obtain a Professional Master's Degree in Education and, by choice, teacher's qualification specialising in one of the school subject fields. Upon completing Master's studies in education, graduates have an opportunity to continue their studies in the PhD programmes – Education Management and Pedagogy both in Latvia and abroad.

Several considerations:

- Students who have obtained academic education in science and want to work or already work at schools, but have not got teacher qualification, have an opportunity to obtain teacher qualification;
- As the society changes, so do the attitude and requirements for teachers. Teachers should possess high professional competence that balances knowledge, skills and experience which correspond to the requirements of contemporary society;
- Upon starting studies, the previous education and teaching experience of students with higher pedagogical education are taken into account and qualification of another subject teacher can be obtained in a shorter period of study time;
- A Master's degree will facilitate students' competitiveness in the changeable local and global socioeconomic conditions; professional responsibility for self-education in the context of life-long education and life-long learning.

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