„Identifying Barriers in Promoting the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance at Institutional Level"

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National Report of Latvia

Quality and Access

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THE NATIONAL POLICY ON ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN LATVIA

The national policy on access to higher education is based primarily on two laws - Education Law[1] and Law On Institutions of Higher Education [2], as well as the procedure is regulated by the Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers: "Regulation on Requirements, Criteria and Procedure of Acceptance to Study Programmes"[3].

With recent history (after regaining the independence) of quite impressive numbers (both full time and part time) of enrolled students in higher education in Latvia, there are less measures conducted to ensure that different cohorts have access to the higher education. Even at the moment Latvia is among the leading countries on student numbers per 1000 inhabitants in the world.

Therefore the policy of monitoring the higher education sector has been more involved in ensuring that the vast numbers of students do not endanger the overall quality of studies.

The national policy is more about supporting access of different cohorts to non-formal learning activities. When observing the governmental measures of non-formal learning provisions, the following specific target groups can be identified: young people, children, offenders, young mothers, early school leavers, minorities, unemployed persons, disabled persons etc.

With specific governmental activities triggered by the economy crisis, such as e.g. decreasing state budget funding having as a result a limited access to higher education, some measures aimed at leveraging the negative impact (e.g. introduction and subsequent improvement of student loan system) of this decision have been introduced as a consequence.

During economic slowdown changes supporting access of different cohorts to higher education for such cohorts as lower socio-economic groups (which are favored upon cohort of successful learners, when state scholarship is allocated) and unemployed persons (which are able to apply for a voucher covering some sum of tuition fee) have been introduced.

However recently the higher education institutions are facing quite impressive drop in student numbers due to demographic trends, thus within the last five years the student numbers have

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[1]Education Law, 29.10.1998.likums "Izglītībaslikums", 17.11.1998.; Ziņotājs, 24, 24.12.1998.) [stājasspēkā 01.06.1999.]

[2]Law On Institutions of Higher Education, 02.11.1995. likums "Augstskolulikums", 17.11.1995.; Ziņotājs, 1, 11.01.1996.) [stājasspēkā 01.12.1995.]

[3]Regulation on Requirements, Criteria and Procedure of Acceptance to Study Programmes, Noteikumi par prasībām, kritērijiem un kārtību uzņemšanai studiju programmās, Ministru kabineta noteikumi Nr.846, Rīgā 2006.gada 10.oktobrī

dropped by almost 30 000 (reaching the total number of enrolled students - 103 900 in academic year 2010/2011)[4]. An outspoken downward trend is observable among the part time students.

Also other reasons such as more attractive and supportive study environment abroad (Latvian government spends the least money per student in higher education in EU), recent emigration to EU countries (according to preliminary Census 2011, 200 000 persons might have emigrated during the last ten years) channels prospective students from Latvia to higher education institutions abroad.

Therefore issues like the attraction of students and their access to the studies gain more and more interest among the national policy makers. The export of education and consolidation of resources in higher education are the buzz words and anticipated remedies. The foreign students is one of the cohorts, whose access problems to higher education in Latvia is currently researched upon The immigration laws and the regulation that the language of instruction at the state higher education institutions is Latvianare mentionedas main barriers to access in this cohort

But generally speaking each Latvian citizen and persons who have been issued a non-citizen passport of the Republic of Latvia, as well as persons who have been issued permanent residence permits, have the right to study in institutions ofhigher education and colleges, all they need is to have a document attesting secondary education.

However, this is not as simple as it seems. For full-time and part-time bachelor and professional study programmes the admission requirements, one of which is a previously acquired secondary education, students have to be admitted in an open and equal competition on the basis of the results of the centralized examinations, which form part of document attesting secondary education.

The following cohorts have exception to provide the results of the centralized examinations upon submitting application for study: persons who have acquired a secondary education up to 2004, as well as persons who have acquired a secondary education abroad or persons with special needs.

The „Study on access to education of asylum seekers, refugees and persons with alternative status in Latvia[5]" (Latvian Centre for Human Rights 2011) reveals that the numbers of these target groups have been increasing in Latvia in recent years. Even though the 2010 Education Law amendments have significantly broadened the target groups' right to education, including non-discrimination clause for all the groups, the study also uncovers several legal gaps. Persons with alternative status must comply with the requirements provided by the Law On Institutions of Higher Education. However the target groups are very often unable to show any documents of evidence on previous education. It is planned to cover this gap through recent changes in legislation - by creating a possibility to access the national qualifications framework in Latvia through recognition of prior learning schemes.

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[4]Central Statistical Bureau, http://www.csb.gov.lv/notikumi/par-aktualitatem-izglitibas-statistika-20102011-macibu-gada-31940.html

[5]Pētījums par patvēruma meklētāju, bēgļu un personu, kurām piešķirts alternatīvais statuss, piekļuvi izglītībai Latvijā, Latvian Centre for Human Rights, published: 30.06.2011

For citizens of the states of the European Union and their children who acquire an education in Latvia the payment for the education shall be specified and covered according to the same procedures as for Latvian citizens. Even though the state covers the tuition fee for some of the study places, the language of instruction there is usually Latvian. This results into some difficulties for students of European Union' s background, who usually do not know Latvian language at the necessary level to access the few study places funded by the state and very often the tuition fee payment is the only option for them.

The third country nationals who have not been issued a permanent residence permit face more strict rules when aiming to be admitted to Latvian institutions of higher education and colleges as full-time students. The documents of prior educationhave to conform to the standards of Latvia, they need to have a sufficient knowledge of the languages in which studies take place (prior to the start of the studies) and pay the study fees (usually at a higher rate than Latvia' s and EU nationals);

An institution of higher education in coordination with the Council of Higher Education may specify the procedures by which persons that have not completed centralized examinations are admitted to such study programmes. In agreement with the Council of Higher Education, an institution of higher education may determine the additional requirements regarding special prior education, particular suitability and preparedness or compliance with other conditions.

ANSWERS TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the institutional policy on access? To what extent does your institutional policy align with national policy? How is information made available to the secondary sector?

The institutional policy of admission relies on National regulations as far as the requirements of preliminary education or non-discrimination of people for ethnic origin, the native language, gender or other individual characteristics are concerned. In general, the admission is done on the basis of graduation marks of centralized exams or – where these are not present – marks in Secondary Education Certificate. Each institution can define additional requirements or additional bonuses to account for closer relation to the field of studies chosen by the applicant.In state-owned HEI for each study programme the number of budget places has been defined at the National level, and in addition to that each institution allows for a certain number of self-paying students, taking into account the available infrastructure and other study resources (private institutions rely solely on paying students). The information on study programmes and relevant information is published at institutional web sites and advertised in central newspapers or distributed in general public information events; regional and more specialized HEI also use direct contacts with the potential applicants through specific events and activities such as "open doors", school visits, social networks.

2. What data do you collect on offers/enrollments/non-completion/graduates? Within the student profile of your institution, can you disaggregate this data to provide information on different cohorts (e.g. mature learners, learners with disabilities, different ethnic groups)?

All the applicants fill in the forms concerning their personal data, such as the birth date, gender, passport data, home address, contact data, institution where the previous education has been acquired, and the language of instruction. So in principle it is possible to collect data on mature learners or learners with disabilities after the admission or at non-completion or graduation. However there is no policy on regular analysis of these data in institutions. Information on belonging to specific ethnic groups normally is not among the data that are collected. The exceptions are data on foreign students (different ethnic group than the native population) and on part time students (usually mature students that are working).

3. What is done to support the admission and progression of distinct cohorts of students? How does this vary by academic programme? Distinct cohorts might include:

- Lower socio-economic groups
- From ethnic minorities
- Non-native language speakers
- Mature students
- Students with disabilities

As mentioned above, these data do not have an influence on the admission process, which is carried out strictly on the basis of academic achievements. Depending on the HEI there are some measures to support students from lower socio-economic groups for the distribution of scholarships (in state-owned institutions) or in reduction of tuition fees. The academic record, however, is always the decisive factor. Non-native language speakers that are permanent residents of Latvia usually are fully integrated into the society and do not need specific support. Foreign students are treated differently and there are specific services provided by the institution and by student self-government to help them better integrate into the student society. In smaller institutions mature students (who are also working) can get support in terms of planning the schedule of lessons (organizing lessons after normal office hours). In specific study fields that are more practice-oriented there are special computer systems or specialized equipment to account for needs of persons with disabilities.

4. How has the pattern of enrollments changed in the last decade (by academic programme/cohort)? What are perceived to be the main drivers of change?

There have been no distinct changes for patterns of enrollment during the last decade, except that the population of applicants has gone through a maximum 4 years ago and thus also the total number of students. Somewhat unexpectedly, the financial crisis of the last 3 years has not shown a pronounced effect either, except that the number of budget students has decreased due to reduced budget at the beginning of crisis. During the last decade there is a permanent increase of foreign students due to better information policy (this concerns both full length studies and exchange students). Business administration is permanently at the top of the list of popularity, but there is a notable increase of interest to natural sciences and technical directions.

5. Have any of these developments altered the approach to the way that your university manages quality?

The quality management is gradually progressing, but that is not dependant on the picture of admission. The quality issues are gaining the importance at the National level and also the awareness of students and employers towards quality is improving, and that is being reflected in the behavior of institutions.

6. Where does responsibility lie for ensuring and monitoring access?

Formally in each institution the overall responsibility for access lies with the vice rector for academic matters. Depending on the size of university there is also a specific structural unit dealing with the technical organization of the admission process and/or an administrative body such as the admission committee. To some extent all the staff of faculties or departments is aware of the process of admission and follow the results. Normally the admission is organized through an automated system that practically excludes personal influence on the selection process in any unauthorized way. In each institution there is a system to solve the disputes (including the ones concerning the selection process).

7. Are there any problematic issues surrounding access and quality in your system?

One of the problem issues is the high number of self-paying students at the first year of studies in some study programmes. Combined with the proportion of applicants with low marks at graduation of the secondary school and some problems with quality of teaching of 'difficult' subjects at some schools (notably in rural areas), the first study year at some study programmes is populated by students with rather insufficient previous knowledge. This is the general signal coming from several HEI and from lecturers working with the first year. It practically alleviates after the first year of studies because the progression to the second year is strictly controlled by the general automated system. The issue therefore is restricted to lecturers and assistants working with the first year students, and it is being balanced out by regulating the workload so as to leave room for more individual consultations and extra contact hours. In some study programmes where there is an influx of applicants from the developing countries a visa problem is mentioned, and this is not an easy problem to be solved by institutions (it is one of the issues that is a concern at the National level).

CONCLUSIONS

The policy of monitoring the higher education sector in Latvia in the recent decades has been more focused on the maintaining and/or increasing the quality of studies (to challenge the effects of massification of higher education), rather than on promoting access of different cohorts to the higher education.

During economic slowdown changes supporting access of different cohorts to higher education for such cohorts as lower socio-economic groups and unemployed persons have been introduced.

Due to the limited possibility to expand in the local market, the export of education seems to be the only possible remedy to the dropping numbers of student population in tertiary education in the years to come, i.e. increase of foreign students in Latvian HEI.

Cohorts and barriers:

To the cohort of foreign students the immigration laws and the regulation that the language of instruction at the state higher education institutions is Latvian is regarded as the main barrier. There are specific services provided by the institution and by student self-government to help foreign students better integrate into the student society. The non-native language speakers from third world countries have to pay an essentially higher tuition fee, which could be regarded as barrier to access, however aimed at letting only the most motivated to study

through.

In general students of high performance can be defined as a distinctive cohort whose access is promoted.

Non-native language speakers and ethnic minorities that are permanent residents of Latvia usually are fully integrated into the society and do not need specific support.

In smaller institutions mature students (who are simultaneously working) can get support in terms of planning the schedule of lessons (organizing lessons after normal office hours).

The main quality issue surrounding access is connected to a problem of national system of education at its lower levels. The option to choose the subjects that the pupils would like to follow in depth at secondary school level, and skipping as a result other subjects for the sake of subjects taught more intensively leads to several problems of access and quality of studies at the tertiary sector.

The system of centralized examinations requires a rather late start of the admission to the studies, due to the long process of checking the many pupils' tests, resulting in danger that the most entrepreneurial students will already receive acceptance letter from higher education institutions abroad, while the higher education institutions in Latvia only start accepting and evaluating the admission documents. This works as a barrier to Latvian HEIs, reducing their competitiveness compared to HEIs in Western Europe or USA

Recommendations (national)

*work at a national level on increasing the prestige of programs that are less popular choice of students (but not by trying to decrease the prestige of the popular programs, e.g. there are too much economists for the labour market to be able to adopt)
*research on experience of other countries on the dismatch of study field and later occupation (maybe not that bad after all as promotes in the fast changing labour market (small country) adabtability and employability)
*work at a national level on increasing the prestige of vocational education (but not by trying to decrease the prestige of the higher education, like "there are so many unemployed graduates of higher education", when in fact the percentage of persons unemployed with the higher education is the smallest across the groups)

Recommendations (EU)

*be prepared and have measures in mind to address the negative effects of rankings becoming

popular in the society, e.g. all HEIs that are not on the league tables are not worth investing in, etc.

The Institutional Case studies in Latvia

SOME FACTS ABOUT THE ANALYZED HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

LatvijasUniversitāte (LU) – University of Latvia

According to student numbers – the largest higher education institution in Latvia, 21% of all students study at the University of Latvia

Full time students: 14959

Part time students: 4641

Teaching staff: 861-elected

Staff in total: approx. 2026

Faculties: Faculty of Biology, Faculty of Computing, Faculty of Chemistry, Faculty of Economics and Management, Faculty of Education, Psychology and Art, Faculty of Geography and Earth Sciences, Faculty of History and Philosophy, Faculty of Humanities, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Physics and Mathematics, Faculty of Social Sciences, Faculty of Theology

RēzeknesAugstskola (RA) – Rezekne Higher School

According to student numbers – 8th largest among 19 public and 12th largest among all higher education institutions of Latvia

Full time students: 1568

Part time students: 690

Teaching staff: 114-elected (41% with Doctoral degree, 53% with Master's degree, 6% professionals)

Staff in total: approx. 2000

Faculties: Education and design, Humanities and legal sciences, Engineering, Economics

LatvijasJūrasakadēmija (LJA) –Latvian Maritime academy

According to student numbers – among the 6 smallest public higher education institutions of Latvia

Students: approx. 880

Staff in total: approx. 150

Departments: **Maritime Transport Department, Marine Engineering Department**

BiznesaAugstskolaTurība (BAT) –School of Business Administration Turiba

According to student numbers – the largest among private higher education institutions of Latvia

Students: approx. 5800

Teaching staff: approx. 150

Staff in total: approx. 350

Faculties: Business Administration, Law, International Tourism, Public Relations

Table 1. Summary of Characteristics of the Analyzed Higher Education Institutions

Analyzed Higher Education Institution	Public	Private	Small	Large	Situated in the Capital	Situated regionally	Broad field of studies	Specialized field of studies
University of Latvia	x			x	x		x	
School of Business Administration "Turība"		x		x	x			x
Latvian Maritime Academy	x		x		x			x
Rezekne Higher School	x		x			x	x	

ANSWERS TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

University of Latvia

1. What is the institutional policy on access? To what extent does your institutional policy align with national policy? How is information made available to the secondary sector?

The policy is practiced through Regulation on admission[6]; it contains the same requirements and restrictions as defined by National policy. In general, the admission is done on the basis of graduation marks of centralized exams or – where these are not present – marks in Secondary Education Certificate. The list of subjects whose marks are accounted for is made on the basis of proposals from each faculty. There are certain bonuses added to applicants that have participated in competitions, and these are also defined by the faculties. For each study programme the number of budget places has been defined at the National level, and in addition to that, UL authorities define the permissible number of self-paying students (on the basis of proposals from faculties taking into account the available infrastructure and other study resources). So, although the budget places are limited, the access is available to practically all successful applicants. The information on study programmes and relevant information is published at university web site and advertised in central newspapers.

2. What data do you collect on offers/enrollments/non-completion/graduates? Within the student profile of your institution, can you disaggregate this data to provide information on different cohorts (e.g. mature learners, learners with disabilities, different ethnic groups)?

All the applicants fill in the forms concerning their personal data, such as the birth date, gender, passport data, home address, contact data, institution where the previous education has been acquired, and the language of instruction, but not the ethnic group or social status or any other; there are fields that can be checked if the applicant is an orphan or disabled person[7]. These data are considered at the admission stage, but they are analyzed by the Institutional student service and in principle they are available for analysis at the National level.
When the selection process has completed, the applicant is registered to studies on the basis of another form with more personal data and with questions for his choices and needs for future (such as – what foreign language he/she wishes to study, what sports activities to participate, and whether he/she needs a dormitory place)[8]

3. What is done to support the admission and progression of distinct cohorts of students? How does this vary by academic programme? Distinct cohorts might include:
- Lower socio-economic groups

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[6] Uzņemšanas noteikumi Latvijas augstskolās un koledžās 2011

[7]Pieteikuma veidlapa vienotā uzņemšanā pamatstudiju programmās

[8]LatvijasUniveristāte. Reģistrācijas veidlapa pamatstudijām

- From ethnic minorities

- Non-native language speakers

- Mature students

- Students with disabilities

As mentioned above, these data do not have an influence on the admission process, which is carried out strictly on the basis of academic achievements. There have been attempts to give preference to students from lower socio-economic groups when distributing the stipends, however last year this measure has been disputed by the student self-government as not appropriate for the university. At present this can be taken into account only for borderline cases where two or more students have the same academic score, but one of them is a disabled person or from the lower socio-economic group.

4. How has the pattern of enrollments changed in the last decade (by academic programme/cohort)? What are perceived to be the main drivers of change?

There have been no distinct changes for patterns of enrollment during the last decade, except that the population of applicants has gone through a maximum 4 years ago, and thus also the total number of students. Somewhat unexpectedly, the financial crisis of the last 3 years has not shown a pronounced effect either, except that the number of budget students has decreased due to reduced budget at the beginning of crisis. As the budget places are awarded in bulk, without specification by study years, the admission figures are fluctuating in accordance with the dropout at later study years. Some changes have been introduced in order to better regulate the flows of applicants, and make the admission process more predictable, namely, several universities, including the University of Latvia have agreed on a common application, in which the applicant marks in an order of his/her preference the institutions and study programmes to which to be admitted, and also whether only to a budget place or also as a self-paying student. For the UL this has resulted in reduction of the workload without a loss of quality   of   applicants.

4. Have any of these developments altered the approach to the way that your university manages quality?

The quality management is gradually progressing, but that is not dependant on the picture of admission

5. Where does responsibility lie for ensuring and monitoring access?

The admission is done through an automated system that practically excludes personal influence on the selection process in any unauthorized way. The student service is managing the admission process assisted by faculty technical staff, and there is no procedure that could be denoted as supervision by some central authority. In the case of disputes, a general procedure common to any processes is applied where the first instance is the Dean of the Faculty, then the Vice-rector, then the Arbitrage.

6. Are there any problematic issues surrounding access and quality in your system?

One of the problem issues is the high number of self-paying students at the first year of studies in some study programmes. The interviews performed at random with several lecturers working with the first year students and with the Dean of one faculty show, however, that this does not have an influence on general approach to quality management, and it practically alleviates after the first year of studies because the progression to the second year is strictly controlled by the general automated system. The issue therefore is restricted to lecturers and assistants working with the first year students, and it is being balanced out by regulating the workload so as to leave room for more individual consultations and extra contact hours.

RēzeknesAugstskola (RA) – Rezekne Higher School

1. What is the institutional policy on access? To what extent does your institutional policy align with national policy? How is information made available to the secondary sector?

The institutional policy on access does not differ substantially from what the national policy on access is. The institutional policy on access is based on respective national legal regulations – laws and Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers. There are internal enactment laws created to serve the needs of the institution and serve basically the internal organisation matters.

According to the national policy on access the institutions of higher education and colleges have to, up to the current 1 November, notify the Educational Content and Examination Centre and have to publicize (also on the Internet homepage) the admission requirements of study programs for the following academic year. Each year the Cabinet of Ministers has to determine the initial time period for the registration and admission of entrants in the first year after the acquisition of secondary education. An institution of higher education has not have the right to enter into agreements related to studies with the potential entrants prior to the initial term of admission.

The following such rather strict policy is required since the potential entrants need to know in advance the admission requirements for each study program. This will enable them better

preparing for the centralized examinations that are listed as prerequisite for the access and first of all serve the needs of comparing the student performance prior to the study commencement. This allows the comparison among the candidates and distribution of the state budget funded study places in the first year of studies to the best students available.

With many of the students coming to study at the Rezekne Higher School from the local neighborhood, the advertisement is mainly using regional news channels; however national platforms are used as well. The Rezekne Higher School is participating in annual national exhibition "Skola", organizes "open doors", is active in visiting schools and informing pupils directly about policy on access and admission requirements.

2. What data do you collect on offers/enrollments/non-completion/graduates? Within thestudent profile of your institution, can you disaggregate this data to provide information on different cohorts (e.g. mature learners, learners with disabilities, different ethnic groups)?

The RA used to survey the potential entrants, however due to the unified online application procedure this year (several higher education institutions have entered into agreement to have a common online application procedure with the aim of offering a better service to the students) the administration of RA decided not to survey the potential students.

The RA surveys the freshly enrolled students on reasons for choosing to study at the Rezekne Higher School. Recent surveys show that the applicants come to RA based on recommendations of friends that have studied at the RA. Also, lately, more and more applicants come to RA from the region.

The RA does not collect any data on the minor part of drop-offs that are "disappearing" and not to be contacted. However the majority of non-completers of the study program, that are organized enough to come to the Student Office to interrupt the studies in the proper way are surveyed on the reasons of non-completion. This is also the moment when alternative solutions to the issues that have provoked the student to the intention of non-completion of the studies, are offered by the employees of the higher education institution, if not already done before. Lately the leading reasons for non-completion are the financial and family matters.

Even though it is possible to disaggregate the data to provide information on the mature students as a cohort, this is (in a way at a national level) not done. Instead it is more usual to speak about the part time students and full time students as two separate cohorts, where the main characteristics of the part time students are their rather mature age and employment, run simultaneous to studies.

Taking into account the rather small size of the higher education institution - there are not so many students with disabilities at the RA, to disaggregate it as a separate cohort.

Of course the nationality is one of the bits of personal data that are required by the student to state when registering for studies the first time. The Ministry of Education and Science requires regularly informing about the number of foreign students per nationality enrolled at the higher education institution. However there are not so many ethnic groups in Latvia (and they are usually quite well integrated in the society of Latvia) and it could even be stated to be a national practice – not to disaggregate the student body according to the ethnic background and not to treat different ethnic groups in an individual way.

3. What is done to support the admission and progression of distinct cohorts of students? How does this vary by academic programme? Distinct cohorts might include:

Lower socio-economic groups

From ethnic minorities

Non-native language speakers

Mature students

Students with disabilities

In general students of high performance can be defined as a distinctive cohort (e.g. winners of school Olympiads), since the admission procedure for them is easier and they get the tuition free study placements.

The recent amendments in national legislation make the progression in studies more supportive for lower socio-economic groups, providing them with preference when allocating the state grant over students of high performance. Also the administration thinks of different ways to alleviate the financial burden related to covering the tuition fee, offering e.g. a cheaper Master level studies if the Bachelor has been successfully awarded at the RA already, cheaper studies for members of the same family.

There are no special measures undertaken to support the admission and progression of ethnic minorities and non-native language speakers (non Latvians) of Latvia, since such ethnic minorities as Livs, Poles, Jews etc. are mostly already very well integrated and speak Latvian perfectly. However the Student Council of RA is very actively taking care of integrating foreign students by organizing different extramural events and activities for them.

To support the admission and progression of mature students - different study forms – such as part time studies (lectures on weekends) are offered, this allows combining studies with professional activities. Since the older the student gets, the more probable is that he will have a job to attend during the day, the RA organizes the lectures for Master degree students in the evening.

There are no organized measures undertaken to support the admission and progression of students with disabilities. However the RA is discussing on individual basis with the disabled person the possibility to support his/her admission and progression in studies at the RA, in cases when such wish is expressed by a prospective candidate.

4. How has the pattern of enrollments changed in the last decade (by academicprogramme/cohort)? What are perceived to be the main drivers of change?

In the last several years the student numbers are dropping due to both financial situation and demographic changes. The business administration studies are still among the most popular study programs.

5. Have any of these developments altered the approach to the way that your university manages quality?

The RA regards the dropping student numbers as the possibility to make an audit of the teaching staff, with the prospect to answer the challenge of letting the least competent lecturers go and the most competent stay at the RA. The mass approach in student service is turning to a more individualized one, allowing e.g. an individual approach when setting the tuition fee payment scheme for a person.

6. Where does responsibility lie for ensuring and monitoring access?

The responsibility for ensuring and monitoring access lies with vice rector for study affairs, that appoints the admission commission.

7. Are there any problematic issues surrounding access and quality in your system?

The main quality issue surrounding access is connected to a problem of national system of education at its lower levels. The option to choose the subjects that the pupils would like to follow in depth at secondary school level, and skipping as a result other subjects for the sake of subjects taught more intensively leads to several problems of access and quality of studies at the tertiary sector.

Very often the pupils tend to choose the "easier" human sciences over natural sciences. The schools have to follow the choice made by the pupils, however sometimes the individual pupils are "forced" to follow the subject that has been chosen by the majority of pupils or that can be offered by the respective school (provided they have the teacher of the subject).

The option that promotes skipping certain subjects that are still important for the overall development of the personality (e.g. physics or history) renders students that are often not only lacking essential basic knowledge, but also student body that is quite unevenly prepared in general knowledge, because is lacking the knowledge in many differing subjects.

Sometimes in the course of time the pupils have changed their mind and become interested for studies that require the centralized examination results in the subjects they decided or were "forced" to skip at the secondary school level.

Also the system of centralized examinations require a rather late start of the admission to the studies, due to the long process of checking the many pupils' tests, resulting in danger that the most entrepreneurial students will already receive acceptance letter from higher education institutions abroad, while the higher education institutions in Latvia only start accepting and evaluating the admission documents.

Another access and quality issue is linked to the current system of funding the higher education in Latvia. If the student has not performed well enough to gain a study place (whose tuition fee is covered by the state) at a program that he is really motivated to attend, due to the rather high tuition fees he/she may choose to study in another program, where the tuition free study places are easier to access because of less popular study subject. This leads to less motivated students in the program or even students that in their overall performance are doing worse than in the more popular programs.

Therefore the rather hard to predict final selection of the program by the prospective student makes it hard for the higher education institution to conduct preparatory courses. Also the financial issue – the expenses of such preparatory courses should be covered by the prospective students themselves, which is especially of the problem in Latgale (poor region in Latvia, with high unemployment rate), where the RA is situated.

The RA addresses these issues by a more active involvement in secondary level of education, participating in projects such as creating quality teaching material, organizing state level Olympiads in school subjects, allowing pupils to benefit from the laboratories and equipment of RA in project weeks, as well as offering programs aimed at improving the school teachers' skills.

LatvijasJūrasakadēmija (LJA) –Latvian Maritime academy

1. What is the institutional policy on access? To what extent does your institutional policy align with national policy? How is information made available to the secondary sector?

The institutional policy on access is based on the national legal regulations. The internal enactment laws define the admission requirements in details.

LJA organizes additionally entrance exams in maths and Latvian for students that have no results in centralised examinations because they have finished secondary school before year 2004, or that have been awarded certificate of secondary education abroad. Persons that have no mark for physics in their secondary school certificate (e.g. had not chosen the subject at school) have to pass the entrance exam in Physics.

The admission competition procedure is different for candidates having secondary general education and secondary professional education (pupils having finished the Marine Schools).

The admission requirements of study programs have to be published annually, as stated by the regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers.

The admission to part time studies, where all students pay tuition fee, requires that no mark in secondary education certificate is less than "4-satisfactory", the centralized examinations are not required to be passed, however the student has to prove professional experience in the field of studies.

The admission to Master studies is alleviated for LJA graduates and employees, persons able to certify paedogigic and research experience, professional experience in the field of studies.

2. What data do you collect on offers/enrollments/non-completion/graduates? Within thestudent profile of your institution, can you disaggregate this data to provide information on different cohorts (e.g. mature learners, learners with disabilities, different ethnic groups)?

Due to the rather small number of students – around 900 it is not regarded as very important to disaggregate the data to provide information on the different cohorts, which would be statistically small, even though it is possible. As cohorts of special interest for the sake of maintaining an acceptable level of internal quality culture are regarded students that have performed well at school, and international students. No special data on prospective students are currently collected. The LJA keeps track of regional background of enrolled students, as this helps planning the strategy of prospective student attraction measures.

3. What is done to support the admission and progression of distinct cohorts of students? How does this vary by academic programme? Distinct cohorts might include:

  Lower socio-economic groups

  From ethnic minorities

  Non-native language speakers

Mature students

Students with disabilities

In general students of high performance can be defined as a distinctive cohort. LJA supports the best three students by allocating the grants offered to them by the Association of Ship Owners of Latvia for them.

The recent amendments in national legislation make the progression in studies more supportive for lower socio-economic groups.

The study programs offered by the LJA are all related and all rather specific and there is no outspoken difference for different cohorts to prefer one program over the other. Except maybe the Port and Shipping Management, that has no study places, where the tuition fee would be covered by the state. Therefore this program could be less attractive for students from lower-socio-economic groups. However the most motivated might apply for (national, not offered by the LJA) student study loan to cover the study expenses.

There are no special measures undertaken to support the admission and progression of ethnic minorities.

The studies for non-native language speakers from third world countries have to pay an essentially higher tuition fee, which could be regarded as barrier to access, however aimed at letting only the most motivated to study through.

To support the admission and progression of all students, especially the ones that are "mature" and combine studies with the work, or students with disabilities, LJA offers also the possibility to access and use for study purposes and "hands-on" experience the study equipment, e.g. 3D simulator of ship engine room, online from anywhere in town.

There study informative system WinStudents-A ensures that both regular and students with disabilities are able to monitor own performance, follow the study plans, submit documents and get all essential information by through Internet. This is among measures that support their admission and progression.

4. How has the pattern of enrollments changed in the last decade (by academicprogramme/cohort)? What are perceived to be the main drivers of change?

In the last year the LJA experienced a 9% drop in first time admitted student numbers which is to be regarded as still a rather moderate drop if compared to several other higher education institutions in Latvia. The student numbers are dropping both due to financial situation and demographic changes. There are less mature students and more students that could be defined as coming from lower socio-economic groups (or experiencing currently some financial problems). Therefore the programs where the tuition fee of some study places is covered by the state has experienced minor, nevertheless some increase in interest within the last years. The number of foreign students has slightly increased, however still has to be regarded as rather minuscule.

5. Have any of these developments altered the approach to the way that your universitymanages quality?

The developments in the pattern of enrollments has not changed the approach to managing the quality. In fact the number of bachelor students this and the last year is even at 40 % higher than in years 2006, 2007 and 2008. However the LJA plans to increase the number of international students, but it is part of the strategy of the higher education institution.

6. Where does responsibility lie for ensuring and monitoring access?

The responsibility for ensuring and monitoring access lies with vice rector and the admission commission. Of course all units are involved to some extent in the process.

7. Are there any problematic issues surrounding access and quality in your system?

The secondary education system' s feature that allows often still indecisive and immature pupils to skip subjects should be abandoned. At least it became possible several years ago to introduce math as subject that pupils obligatory have to pass and get result in centralized examination, next to Latvian. That has improved and enlarged rather significantly the pool and quality of prospective students.

BiznesaAugstskolaTurība (BAT) –School of Business Administration Turiba

1. What is the institutional policy on access? To what extent does your institutional policy align with national policy? How is information made available to the secondary sector?

The institutional policy on access does not differ substantially from what the national policy on access is. However due to the fact, that BAT is a private higher education institution, it is more free to instruct in foreign languages and therefore it is easier to attract international students as a cohort.

The BAT participates in exhibitions both local and international, conducts school visits, next to traditional distribution channels applies more innovative, social networks such as youtube, twitter etc.

2. What data do you collect on offers/enrollments/non-completion/graduates? Within thestudent profile of your institution, can you disaggregate this data to provide information on different cohorts (e.g. mature learners, learners with disabilities, different ethnic groups)?

The students that would like to interrupt the studies have to submit a paper, where the reason for doing so should be stated. The employees of the Study Information Centre are talking to these students and try to solve the problems that the student faces. In case that the issue lies within the competence of the higher education institution, the available individual solutions are offered. The students that have financial issues are offered alternative, cheaper forms of study, e.g. e-studies or studies at the Business Education Centre.

Even though it is possible to disaggregate the data to provide information on different cohorts, actually only foreign students as a group are more closely inspected. However the data is collected the same for all students, with no specific cohort in mind.

3. What is done to support the admission and progression of distinct cohorts of students? How does this vary by academic programme? Distinct cohorts might include:

    Lower socio-economic groups

    From ethnic minorities

    Non-native language speakers

    Mature students

    Students with disabilities

There are 12 different programs through which the students may apply for a tuition fee reduction.

Already for two years a reasonable tuition fee discount (50%) is offered to students coming from families where several family members are studying in BAT at the same time. 25% tuition fee reduction is offered to the students of excellence, up to 40% tuition fee reduction can be assigned to students that have promoted the popularity of BAT, up to 100% tuition fee reduction can be assigned to students that are members of Basketball team supported by BAT, etc.

However none of the tuition fee reduction programs is aimed to attract students of the abovementioned cohorts directly.

The Student Council of BAT is very actively helping the responsible employees of the higher education institution in taking care of integrating international students in Latvia and in BAT by organizing different activities.

4. How has the pattern of enrollments changed in the last decade (by academicprogramme/cohort)? What are perceived to be the main drivers of change?

In the last several years the international student numbers have increased, partly due to marketing activities. Among foreign students more and more are interested in Master degree studies, but apropos the study programs – the tourism and entrepreneurship studies are still on the top of the list for both prospective and enrolled students.

5. Have any of these developments altered the approach to the way that your universitymanages quality?

The BAT has not undertaken special measures to alter the quality approach due to the changes in student numbers. The quality of studies has always been on the agenda of the higher education institution, irrespectively any external factors.

6. Where does responsibility lie for ensuring and monitoring access?

The responsibility for ensuring and monitoring access lies with every employee, but in general with vice rector.

7. Are there any problematic issues surrounding access and quality in your system?

The evaluation of foreign students coming from third world countries sometimes can be problematic due to the visa issues.