

Transformations in Higher Education as Lithuania Integrates into the European Higher Education Area

Ale Murauskiene

Marijampole University of Applied Sciences, Marijampole, Lithuania

Prof. dr. Valdone Indrasiene

Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius, Lithuania

Abstract. To form the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) one of the oldest universities in Europe, the University of Bologna, signed the Bologna Declaration "European Higher Education Area" in 1999. Lithuania is also a signatory to this declaration, committing itself to implement the activities set out in the process: the creation of a clear and comparable system of degrees, a two-cycle system of studies, a system of study credits, cooperation in quality assurance, support for mobility and better social conditions.

At the same time, Lithuania is undergoing a reform of higher education, from a dual system of higher education to a binary system, with the emergence of two types of higher education institutions, the traditional universities, and the newly established colleges. New challenges must be overcome to integrate the closed national system into the emerging pan-EHEA system. This presentation will present the transformation of the higher education system and the establishment of colleges, look at EU legislation and national documents governing EHEA, analyse practical experiences that can be drawn upon by other countries seeking to cooperate with EHEA, and explore the dynamic processes of this system.

Keywords – binary higher education system, Bologna Declaration, college, non-university studies.

I. INTRODUCTION

Today, Lithuania is a member of the European Union (EU) and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), actively participating in the Bologna process. There are two types of higher education institutions in the country: universities and colleges. The Law on Higher Education of the Republic of Lithuania of 2000 introduced a binary system of higher education, while at the same time Lithuania was preparing for integration into the EU. To meet the requirements and standards set by the EHEA, Lithuania planned to reform its higher education system. In preparation for the reform, a lot of attention was paid to the analysis of the education system in European countries. The ongoing reform of higher education influenced the change of universities and post-secondary schools, based on which collegiate-type higher education institutions were created. Much attention has been paid to the preparation of the higher education reform, the discussions between the parties involved, the preparation of the legal framework, and the practical work. On the one hand, efforts were made to comply with the standardisation processes of the EHEA: compliance with international classifications, the introduction of two levels of degrees (bachelor and master), and the introduction of a standardised system of credit calculation. On the other hand, the aim was to preserve the educational identity of the country and to shape the Lithuanian concept of non-university higher education. The state model of regulation of colleges is being developed in a planned manner: the objectives of establishing colleges are being envisaged, the legal framework is being formed, the requirements for higher non-university programmes are being developed, the projects of the college network are being drafted, and the steps of establishing colleges are being forecast. At the same time, the Bologna process is developing dynamically, and Lithuania is joining in. How is the integration into the EHEA taking place according to the State model of higher education reform and what lessons does this process of change offer us?

II. IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM AND ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN PROVISIONS

The main objective of this paper is to examine the transformation of higher education as Lithuania integrates into the European Higher Education Area.

To reveal the main aspects of this problem, the methodological approach chosen is the method of contingent analysis, which is based on the examination of the documents of the Republic of Lithuania and the European Union (European Commission pacts, Bologna process declarations, laws, governmental resolutions, ministerial decrees, strategic educational documents, and scientific sources) regulating the system of higher education and the dynamics of its change. The chosen research method enabled us to reveal both the changes in higher education and the trends of EHEA development by suggesting the following concept: the greater the difference between the national education system in Lithuania and the EU, the more problematic it is to implement the planned changes.

A. *The Bologna Process and the preconditions for higher education reform in Lithuania*

At the end of the 20th century, with the intensive expansion of the network of EU countries and the strengthening of integration processes, Lithuania is preparing to join the EU. These trends in the country have led to a discussion on the reform of the education system and in particular the higher education system, and integration into EHEA. A wide range of education professionals, from policymakers to practising university lecturers, are taking part in the discussion. Visions for higher education studies are developed and scenarios for the development of education are modelled. The country's higher education transformation processes have coincided with Lithuania's integration into the EU and EHEA.

At the same time, the EU's higher education policy marked the beginning of the Bologna Process, which had its origins in the Sorbonne Declaration, signed in Paris in 1998 by the French, Italian, UK, and German ministers responsible for higher education [1]. In 1999, ministers from 29 European countries sign the Bologna Declaration, discuss the prospects for higher education, and set a target of creating a European Higher Education Area by 2010



Figure 1. Bologna Declaration Signatory Countries 1999

The main principles of the Bologna Declaration are:

1. The introduction of undergraduate and postgraduate levels of study, with a minimum of three years for a bachelor's degree.
2. Establishment of a credit system.
3. Introduction of diploma supplements.
4. Increasing academic mobility.

5. Cooperation between institutions, development of integrated studies, internships, and joint research and study programmes.

6. Cooperation between quality assessment bodies. [1]

The Bologna Declaration has been widely accepted by European countries, has developed rapidly, and has become the basis for the development of higher education institutions. Recognising that the creation of a common area of the education system will require continued support, Ministers of Education agree to meet every two years to discuss developments and outline new lines of action and to increase the number of European countries participating in the process. This brings the total number of participants to 40 countries in 2003 and 45 in 2010 and continues to expand successfully [2]. In 2001, the following lines of action are outlined: lifelong learning, the involvement of academia, and the enhancement of EHEA's attractiveness.

To ensure that the principles of higher education have an impact on each country, documents covering the whole of EHEA have been developed. The Lisbon Convention, which provided for the recognition of foreign qualifications, was drafted and signed in each country. [3]

The fundamental changes taking place in the European Higher Education Area and Lithuania's integration into the European Union posed new challenges for higher education and accelerated reform changes throughout the education system. To harmonise the qualifications offered in Lithuania and the EHEA, there is a discussion on the reform of higher education and the establishment of two types of higher education institutions: colleges and universities. An analysis of higher education, international trends, and the possibilities of establishing colleges are being presented in the form of a study on the establishment of colleges in Lithuania [4]. This trend is becoming a global phenomenon, with the non-university higher education sector, which has been expanding in most EU countries since the 1970s, changing traditional forms of study, struggling for its status, prestige, and legal recognition [5]. The sector has thus gained international and legal recognition and, since 1973, OECD standardisation, which provides for three types of non-university educational institutions:

Type 1: the multipurpose model, which corresponded to community colleges;

Type 2: the specialised model, which is shorter, vocationally oriented studies;

Type 3: the binary model, providing qualifications at a lower level than universities. [6]

Lithuania is integrating into the AEME and reforming its higher education by adopting the binary model of higher education.

B. *Implementation and dynamics of a binary higher education system*

In the process of developing a binary higher education system in Lithuania, the base of higher education institutions was chosen for the newly established colleges. These schools had curricula for secondary education, but their diplomas did not meet ISCED-97 standards, so after the reform, they had to acquire a new status and reach ISCED level 6.

The existing structure of the education system puts upper secondary schools on a similar level to higher education institutions. Let us look at the possibilities of reconciling these studies. According to the approved qualification requirements for higher and post-secondary education, some common trends emerge. Comparison of study programmes and qualification requirements (Figure 2).

Comparison criteria	In HEIs	In Colleges
Study programme volume	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> at least 6400 student hours; four years of study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> at least 4800 student hours; three to four years of study
Study facilities	classrooms, laboratories, experimental and practice facilities, library and its educational and information technology facilities must meet the requirements of the study programmes	classrooms, laboratories, library and specific teaching equipment and teaching conditions
Teaching staff qualification requirements	at least 50% of the teaching staff of the HEI must be scientists.	teaching staff must have a higher education qualification and at least two years of practical experience.

Figure 2. Key differences between higher and post-secondary education

The data show that the biggest differences were in the qualification requirements of lecturers, the duration of studies, and the size of the study programme. However, it was the closest link in the education system that was able to

achieve the requirements of the Bachelor of University Studies and successfully integrate into the EU Higher Education Area and reflect the emerging changes of the Bologna process.

The establishment of colleges in Lithuania is the result of a long and complex process, involving the whole sector of higher education and vocational training, from the representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania to the teachers and support staff of higher education institutions.

During this period, new study programmes have been developed for graduates of secondary schools, teachers have been attested, an extensive programme of qualification improvement has been implemented, changes in teaching methodologies have been initiated, teaching materials have been prepared for studies, the material base of schools has been modernised, and international projects have been participated in.

These developments have influenced the perception of the establishment of a non-university higher education sector in Lithuania but have not had a direct impact. The establishment of colleges is a completely new stage in the development of the Lithuanian education system, for which thorough preparations have been made: the experience of foreign countries has been analysed, new study programmes have been developed, the material-technical base has been improved, the identity of the Lithuanian college has been formed and the necessary legal acts have been prepared.

The establishment of colleges is initiated and managed by the Ministry of Education and Science, it prepares documents regulating the establishment of colleges, which present the assessment scheme for non-university studies, and establish the procedure for the establishment of Higher Education Institutions, covering all stages of establishment from the submission of an application to the approval of the Government.

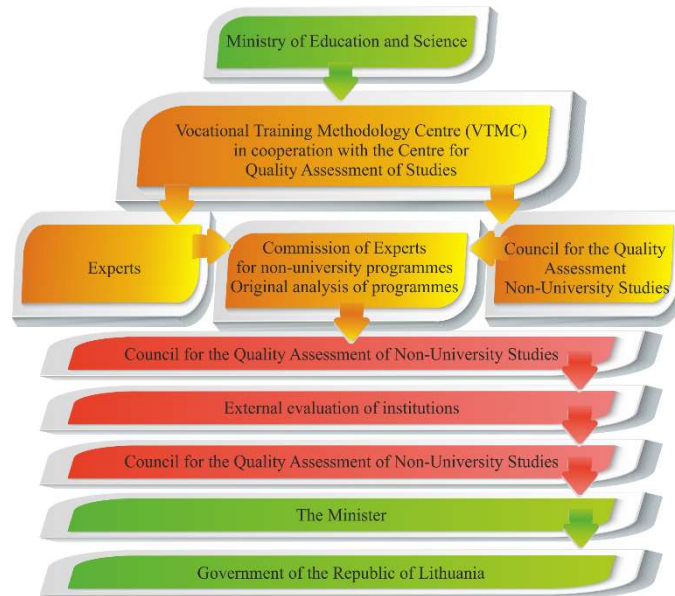


Figure 3. Scheme for assessing readiness for non-university studies.

When analysing the overall process of the establishment and development of colleges in the Republic, the five stages of development are relatively distinct.

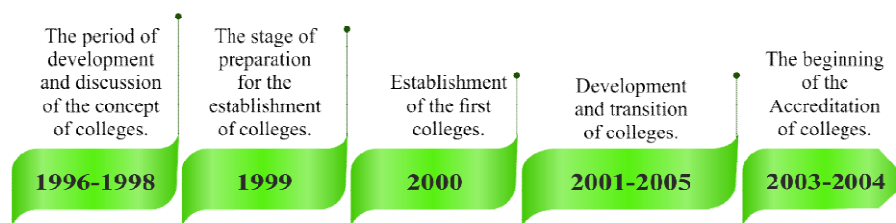


Figure 4. The main stages of establishing colleges in Lithuania

An analysis of the strategy, legal framework, and key developments in the establishment of non-university higher education has identified the key stages in the process. Each stage has an objective, specific features, and implications that influence the start of the next stage.

C. A period of development and debate on the concept of colleges.

This phase aims to develop the concept of non-university higher education (in an open context of debate) and to prepare for the change and legalisation of the legal framework for this sector.

The first impetus for the creation of colleges on a republic-wide scale was the conference "Higher Non-University Studies in Lithuania and Europe", organised by the Association of Directors of Lithuanian Higher Education Institutions on 2-3 May 1996. It provided perspectives, recalled the strategy, and raised issues to be discussed in the development of the higher non-university sector in the Republic.

In fact, 1996 was the year of a breakthrough and decision on the establishment of the higher non-university sector in Lithuania:

- A working group was set up in the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania to examine the development of non-university higher education in Europe and to draw up proposals for the establishment of this sector in Lithuania. (This experience is subsequently summarised in the publication "Study on the Establishment of Colleges in Lithuania").

- A group of experts from the Science Council discussed the possibilities of organising non-university higher education in higher education institutions

- The directors of the strongest higher education institutions are taking an active role, and experts from foreign countries are invited.

At this stage, an experiment in evaluating the performance of higher education institutions was carried out, which concluded that some higher education institutions can already qualify for college status.

D. Preparation for the establishment of colleges.

In 1999, a new phase of preparation for the establishment of colleges in Lithuania was launched, to develop a strategy for non-university higher education and prepare for the establishment of the first colleges providing non-university higher education.

At the end of the first phase of discussions, a common concept of non-university higher education was agreed upon and formulated in the "White Paper on Lithuanian Higher Education" (1999)

The White Paper formulated the concept and strategy for the establishment of colleges. The following points can be highlighted in the analysis of the above-mentioned sources.

The White Paper states for the first time that it is appropriate to provide two types of higher education: university and non-university studies.

The strategic rationale for the creation of a completely new education sector in Lithuania is presented in the form of the objectives for establishing colleges:

1. To enable all those who can acquire higher education and professional qualifications that meet the needs of the Lithuanian economy and the modern level of science and technology.
2. To bring the Lithuanian higher education system closer to the higher education systems of other European countries, thereby facilitating international recognition of diplomas and achieving equivalence of professional qualifications.
3. To create conditions for a more balanced economic and cultural development of Lithuanian regions.
4. Establish centres for applied research, dissemination of new technological knowledge, and cultural focal points for regional development.
5. To create a higher education sector that can and must respond quickly to the rapidly changing needs of the economy, and to train specialists prepared to implement new technologies.
6. Make higher education more accessible to people from different social backgrounds and people living in remote regions.
7. Create a more flexible and diversified system of studies for people of different age groups and facilitate the implementation of the concept of lifelong learning in the regions.
8. To meet the increased aspirations of people to pursue higher education and to achieve this through the more rational use of budgetary resources.

Reform the training system so that the level of education provided by higher education institutions is in line with the requirements of jobs in the economy [4].

The implementation of these objectives will lead to the establishment of a completely new, modern non-university higher education sector in Lithuania, which will meet European standards and will essentially cover all regions of the Republic.

The Higher Education Strategy describes the types of higher education institutions: universities and colleges and outlines the structure of Lithuanian higher education.

At this stage, the main criteria followed in the design of the college network structure are set out.

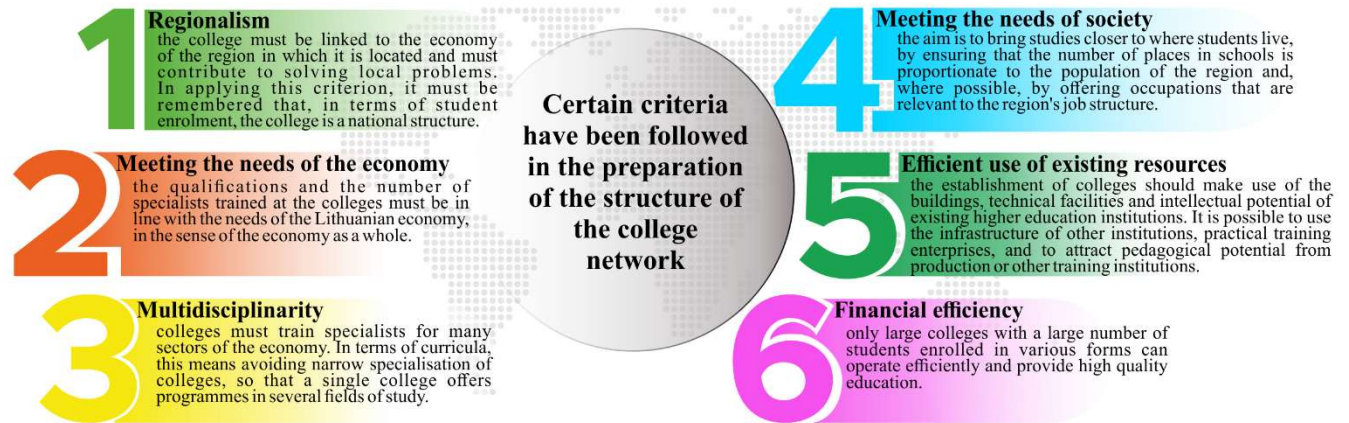


Figure 5. Basic principles of college networking.

It is obvious that these criteria should be applied to the establishment of colleges in Lithuania after analysing the experience of Western European countries and considering national specificities.

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In analysing the concept of establishing colleges, it is possible to identify the main areas where higher education institutions need to meet certain requirements to move into the non-university higher education sector.

CURRICULUM: new requirements. They must have a strong link to the labour market, and the formulation of the objectives of study programmes is moving away from defining them in terms of the knowledge to be provided, towards a detailed listing of the qualifications to be provided, which will later be formalised in the vocational training standards.

STUDY LENGTH: In Lithuania, a compromise solution of 3 to 4 years is proposed.

STUDY BASE: It is necessary to strengthen the base used for the study process and practical activities, and to create the conditions for students to work independently. To this end, it is planned to modernise and computerise libraries and to store learning materials prepared by college lecturers.

QUALITY ASSURANCE OF STUDIES: Each college must establish an internal quality assurance system that guarantees the achievement of the study objectives.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION: This is another condition for the establishment of colleges, which must include not only the exchange of teachers but also of students.

REQUIREMENTS FOR TEACHERS: a minimum requirement for those working in the colleges is that they have a master's degree, but there is no strict requirement for a degree.

RESEARCH: Colleges have requirements for research, as do universities, but it can be applied.

During the transition period, a constituent board of colleges and a college evaluation office are established.

E. Establishment of the first colleges.

This phase aims to legalize non-university higher education (through the adoption of the Law on Higher Education of the Republic of Lithuania and the drafting of normative acts on the establishment of colleges) and to establish the institutions providing this education - the first colleges in Lithuania.

A college is a higher education institution where non-university studies are predominant and most students are enrolled in non-university study programmes, where applied research and/or applied scientific activities or professional arts are developed. [9] This Law regulates the main objectives of the College and defines non-university studies.

It is the first time that the status of colleges is legally defined and that studies and research directions are provided. This essentially implies the concept and specificity of a college (compared to universities).

As already mentioned, colleges are established based on basic principles.

1 September 2000. The first 4 public and 3 private colleges started to operate in Lithuania.

VILNIUS COLLEGE	UTENOS COLLEGE	KAUNAS COLLEGE	ALYTUS COLLEGE
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Electronics Technology. 2. Computer Technology. 3. Programming for Computers. 4. Banking. 5. Bookkeeping. 6. Finance. 7. Insurance Management. 8. Institutional Administration. 9. Catering Business Organisation. 10. Advertising Management. 11. Tourism and Hotel Administration. 12. Business Management. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Accounting. 2. Business Management. 3. Law. 4. Embroidery Technology. 5. Tourism Administration. 6. Business Information Technology. 7. Social Work. 8. Social Pedagogy. 9. Occupational Therapy. 10. General Nursing. 11. Dental Care. 12. Dental Technology. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Accounting. 2. Business and Office Administration. 3. Law 4. Manufacture of Furniture and Wood Products. 5. Automated Management. 6. Computer Network Administration. 7. Publishing and Printing. 8. Tourism and Hotel Management. 9. Business Management. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Business Management. 2. Business Administration. 3. Carriage by Road. 4. Technical Operation of Cars. 5. Information Systems Administration.

Figure 6. The first state colleges established in Lithuania and their study programmes.

VILNIAUS COLLEGE OF MANAGEMENT	VILNIUS COOPERATION COLLEGE	KAUNAS BUSINESS COLLEGE
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Business Management. 2. Business Information Systems. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Accounting. 2. Business Management. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. International Business Management 2. Law. 3. Institutional Administration 4. Tourism Administration.

Figure 7. The first private colleges established in Lithuania and their study programmes.

F. College development and transition

The objectives of this phase are: to form a regionally based network of colleges; to adjust the documents regulating the establishment and operation of colleges, the development of study programmes, and the assessment of the quality of studies; and to allow for the evaluation of all higher education institutions applying to become colleges.

Following the establishment of the first colleges in Lithuania, the legal framework affecting the establishment of colleges, the development of study programmes, and the evaluation of the quality of studies are being adjusted.

Colleges are expanding rapidly. The network of state colleges is being formed on a regional basis, with the aim of ensuring that colleges are evenly distributed throughout the territory of Lithuania. In 2001, 3 new state colleges and 6 non-state colleges were established. In the following academic year, 8 more state colleges are added to the college sector.

Thus, the collegiate sector is expanding rapidly: within two years, a network of 24 non-university higher education institutions is established, meeting European standards, and integrating into EHEA.

How does the non-university higher education sector look in the context of the Bologna process?

In line with the Bologna Declaration of 2002, it is necessary to introduce professional bachelor's degrees in Lithuania and, in the future, professional master's degrees, which would allow college graduates to enter university without any restrictions. Most European countries have such degrees.

While the Bologna Declaration has achieved many successes, it has also highlighted some weaknesses in higher education which hinder integration into the future European Higher Education Area. These include the system of transferability between two levels of non-university and university education and the models for combining bachelor's and master's degrees. According to the Berlin Conference, a European Master's degree must have 300 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) or 200 national credits. Therefore, the most appropriate models for combining bachelor's (BA) and master's (MA) degrees in Lithuania would be those of the European Union.

The ongoing expansion of colleges in the Republic is creating a new sector of non-university higher education and, at the same time, posing new challenges for the harmonisation of these higher education systems.

G. *Accreditation of colleges.*

This is a period in the near future. Its aim: to accredit colleges with provisional non-university higher education status.

The provisions of the Pre-establishment Provisions for the accreditation of colleges "foresee that the accreditation of colleges will start after the implementation of the non-university higher education programme and the first batch of graduates, but no later than four years after the start of the college's activities. The accreditation of colleges will be carried out by a study quality assessment body authorised by the Government. [7].

III. CONCLUSIONS

At the beginning of the 21st century, the countries of Western Europe are creating a single European Higher Education Area. The Bologna Declaration, signed in 1999, provides for basic and post-graduate levels of study; the creation of a credit system; the introduction of diploma supplements; the increase of academic mobility; cooperation between institutions, the development of joint study and research programmes; and cooperation between quality assessment bodies.

Lithuania's ongoing reform of higher education coincides with its integration into EHEA, adopting European standards for higher education.

EU integration calls for the need to harmonise qualifications for the training of professionals according to ISCED standards, which form the basis of the non-university higher education sector.

A strategy for the establishment of colleges is being developed, a network of colleges is being envisaged, and requirements are being set out for: study programmes, size of colleges, duration of studies, teaching staff, study facilities, and international cooperation.

The preparatory phase highlights the key differences between colleges and universities and the specificities of the sector: standards, quality assurance system, etc.

In the second phase, the concept and strategy for the establishment of colleges are developed, as formulated in the publications Lithuanian Higher Education The White Paper [8] and the Study on the Establishment of Colleges in Lithuania [4].

In the third stage, the status of non-university higher education is formalised in the Law on Higher Education, which sets out the essential features of colleges. The first colleges are established at this stage.

The fourth phase establishes a network of colleges in Lithuania, with 24 colleges, and the college accreditation phase provides for the accreditation of colleges with the temporary status of a higher non-university institution.

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