

European Policy Statement 1999

The University of Latvia (UL) is the only classical and the largest institution of higher education in Latvia, where the leading study and research potential in natural sciences, humanities and social sciences of the Republic of Latvia is concentrated and developed.

A special emphasis in the international cooperation policy over past ten years was put on the improving the efficiency and effectiveness of training and research at the UL, including the following aspects: the restructuring of curricula, introduction of two-step academic and professionally oriented curricula, retraining of academic and administrative staff and upgrading teaching facilities.

The **mission** statement and Academic Development Concept of the UL reflect the main goals of the university strategic development:

“ the UL should make a competitive offer of study and research opportunities by standing out against the other best European universities of the same type with its ability to present cultural values of Latvians and historical minorities living in Latvia; the future development of the UL is connected with the needs of Latvian economy through producing graduates with European (worldwide) outlook and internationally competitive skills and improving the knowledge and understanding of foreign languages and cultures in order to promote tolerance and future Latvia's European integration; the structure of the UL should be different from the present academic model and should be closer to that of the European universities”. These objectives correspond to the perspective aims of higher education and the University of Latvia in particular, formulated in the Law on Higher Education Institutions and National Concept of Latvian Higher Education as well as in the approved by the UL Senate “ Strategy of International Cooperation”.

To achieve this goals UL must continue the reform process making use of the best available experience. This process is aimed on further development of interdisciplinary approach in academic work and continuation of integration of studies and research. In the future it is planned to continue the internationalization of the curricula by creation new **international study programmes** and intensive courses, including European modules, the multitude of languages and cultural traditions. The existing multidisciplinary programme “Baltic Studies” and Master's degree programmes “European Studies”, “Environmental Science and Management” based on European experience, courses in political science, law, economics and management offered by the visiting lecturers at EuroFaculty, Faculty of Foreign Languages, offered both for domestic and international students, could be a good example. The established forms of international collaboration (32 bilateral cooperation agreements with European institutions of higher education, participation in cooperation networks both regional and subregional, e.g. Utrecht Network-within TEMPUS programme exchange of staff and students; EUPEN-European Physics Education Network- a consortium of more than hundred Physics departments in European institutions of higher education, ENIRDEM-European Network for Improving Research and Development in Educational Management, Baltic University-international cooperation programme within the Nordic countries as well as different other international and European projects, e.g. TEMPUS programme- UL participated in 25 projects out of 52 in Latvia) will be gradually evaluated with the aim of further integration of European dimension into teaching activities by introducing European topics into curricula.

Research work is mandatory for each academic staff member and is carried out as part of the research projects, based on grants, bilateral agreements and contracts. During the last years numerous research institutes of former Latvian Academy of science were integrated into the UL becoming the important component of the

academic structure ensuring unity of studies and research necessary for academic and higher level professional education. The University of Latvia already has considerable experience with international research programmes: within 4th RTD Framework Programme of the European Union in the fields of physics, mathematics, biology; within NATO and Nordic projects in the fields of biomedical research and chemical physics; projects financed by Volkswagen Fund in the fields of economy, biotechnology, Visby programme projects in different fields, etc. It helps considerably to prepare a new generation of academic staff and to develop centres of excellence. In the future it is planned to increase the number of projects in humanities and social sciences as well as to work out a new scheme for Doctoral studies. Cooperation with European universities will help to implement innovative activities, such as the development of the planned Latvian Technology Park.

Quality of teaching and research is mainly dependent on **the quality of staff**. The UL suffers a shortage of young and middle-aged academic staff as for the last 5 years they seek for better paid jobs outside the University. Thus the main task is to solve this problem by introducing a more efficient system of payment and quality management. International cooperation helps to improve efficiency and professionalism of performance, quality and methods of teaching. Staff mobility (in 1997 227 UL lecturers visited many European countries within different types of international activities and 149 visiting lecturers from European universities came to UL, 126 TEMPUS IMGs were used by university academic staff (out of 298 in Latvia) with European partners will help to maintain quality of teaching within market pressure.

Support for **student mobility** (in 1997 262 students have visited European universities within different forms of cooperation and 52 visiting students have been studies at the UL) is the important part in encouragement the spreading of knowledge and raises the general level of learning. Step by step student and staff mobility will integrate European and international aspects into the overall university profile making them an integral part of all main activities. For this purpose special efforts have been made in development free flexible foreign languages teaching modules.

University concept on teaching **foreign languages** has been approved by the Senate several years ago. It puts several aims: to use modern technologies (Language teaching laboratory was established in 1995, cooperation with Latvian TV), introduce additional language courses into the part C (free choice courses in all study programmes), to guarantee possibility to learn the majority of European languages at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, to encourage innovatory language-teaching methods, to increase the amount of teaching in foreign languages by visiting lecturers. A certain result has been achieved: rather many university students know two foreign languages. Proficiency in languages helps to build up the feeling of being European with all its cultural wealth.

Mutual academic recognition of diplomas and study periods promotes a successful cooperation between universities. The UL has introduced credit system into study programmes, has participated in PHARE Multi-country project on ECTS and has participated in EC, Council of Europe and UNESCO pilot project "Diploma Supplement". These measures help to fulfil the nominated aim of the Academic Concept of the UL: all studies completed by students abroad will be fully recognized as an integral part of their home degree. It will facilitate student mobility. The aim of the further UL efforts in this field is to contribute into the development of tools, joint standards gradually in all study fields.

The UL has been always committed to the principle of equality for female and male staff and students. Special university scholarships are granted to disadvantaged students. The investment project for 1999 has been worked out to improve university facilities for the disabled people. All UL study programmes are

going through accreditation process with the obligatory participation of European experts, election of new professorship in 1998 has been implemented under the supervision of Habilitation and Promotion Boards with participation of international experts, the example of EuroFaculty Academic Advisory Board is being used at all UL study programmes, a Consultative Board on internationalization will work within the Senate Strategic Commission. All these initiatives guarantee quality control and evaluation measures for cooperation activities. This year the University of Latvia has participated in the two-stage evaluation procedure- self-evaluation and external evaluation- within PHARE Multi-country programme in higher education ZZ-95.20 Quality Assurance in Higher Education (see www.lu.lv) with attention also to the development of international cooperation. The University of Latvia has always supported

financially bilateral cooperation activities with allocating special budget. It is planned to set up a special SOCRATES fund within the budget of the University. International activities are also supported financially at the faculty level, especially inviting visiting lecturers.

The current application within all planned activities will influence the positive further development of cooperation with the European universities, will help to achieve and maintain the highest international standards, to enhance the European dimension in teaching, to prepare better human resources through qualitatively improved education and to become well-prepared to respond the increasing demands of our society. All in all it will facilitate Latvian integration into European Community, as the leading Latvian institution of higher education- University of Latvia - is an integral part of Latvian society.