

Academic integrity initiative in Latvia

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This abstract aims to highlight and ground the initiatives regarding nation-wide awareness of academic integrity importance in Latvia. During recent years at academic society and governmental level, topicality of academic integrity issues has risen in Latvia. Several national-level actions have taken place. The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia encourages higher education institutions to share and to implement good practices of plagiarism prevention and academic ethics. Moreover, the ministry has allocated resources to help higher education institutions to improve.

Activities within European Union Structural Funds Specific Objective 8.2.3 “To Ensure Better Governance in Higher Education Institutions” of the Operational Programme “Growth and Employment” is one of the examples (Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 26, 2018).

This Specific Objective is used as a starting platform for more targeted joint activities on academic integrity matters. The following activities directly or indirectly involving academic integrity are supported within the scope of the specific objective:

- improvement of the content of existing study programmes and its alignment with industry development needs;
- improvement of organizational and governance structures of a higher education institution;
- improvement of the quality management system of a higher education institution;
- development, improvement, and implementation of e-solutions.

The three largest universities of Latvia have signed an agreement to cooperate in academic integrity support and develop an open digital resource with an academic integrity handbook.

During the first activities and discussions between universities, the role of other stakeholders and partners became more clear. It was decided that more organizations should be invited to join the composition of the core team for further discussions. National Library of Latvia and Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia, as well as the Student Union of Latvia, were among the first organization invited.

The legal structure of the organization is currently under consideration. Having in mind the national level of this activity, the Academic Information and Integrity Association is one of the current options used to name the initiative (further on – Association). This is how the Association’s mission, vision, and aims are seen.

Mission

The association serves as the academic integrity contact point in Latvia. It facilitates the culture of academic integrity and ethics, develops recommendations for improvements at the system level and provides informative and support activities.

Vision

The work of the Association helps to improve the implementation of academic integrity management in Latvia and Latvian higher education institutions. As a result, a systematic approach has been introduced at the national level for the electronic storage of theses, access to their information and verification of the originality of the content. The Association's outreach and support activities and training materials help institutions enhance their staff's competence in academic integrity and proactively reduce the likelihood of academic integrity violations.

The aim

Collaborate on the development of a framework for academic integrity at the national level that supports the promotion of academic integrity and control of violations, including plagiarism in all higher education institutions (HEI) theses. In more detail, strategic and tactical goals are set.

Strategic goals:

- to develop a functioning technical solution to ensure plagiarism testing for all Latvian HEI thesis;
- implement a system of academic integrity that defines the basic principles of academic integrity at the national level;
- create a single pool of open access resources to promote academic integrity and support for participants.

Tactical goals:

- become a member of at least one international academic integrity organization;
- (in working groups) to develop at least four thematic materials and recommendations for improvement of the system (at least one report per working group);
- develop and promote the concept of implementation and oversight of academic integrity.

In order to achieve the goals of the Association, the following commissions, or working groups, would be formed, in the work of which the members of the Association delegate experts:

- Content Management working group, which is responsible for:
 - o Development of Institutional Repository System for Higher Education and Science in Latvia

- o Development of recommendations for improvement of legislation and regulations
- Working group on Academic Honesty Educational Work and Methodology;
- Plagiarism Control Research and Development working group;
- Interinstitutional Ethics Commission.

SWOT analysis regarding the Association is carried out. The Association targets the education sector in Latvia with a focus on higher education and science. Expected stakeholders: higher education institutions, colleges, ministries subordinate to higher education institutions, Ministry of Education and Science subordinate institutions (accreditation agency, State Education Quality Service, Diploma Recognition Center), non-governmental organizations (Rectors' Council, Latvian Students' Association, Latvian Employers Confederation, Chamber of Commerce and Industry, College Association). Possible cooperation with general education institutions, industry.

The Association is aimed to be a non-profit organization. Funding obtained and attracted is to be used to maintain and develop the organization and its operations.

The first step towards bringing the Association to life is already done. November 12, 2019, the first information event for all HEIs, the Ministry of Education and Science other stakeholders was carried out and was rather well-attended and successful. Further work includes defining the names of working groups, thematic circles, and institutionalization of the Association.

References

Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 26 Riga, 9 January 2018, Implementing Regulations for Specific Objective 8.2.3 “To Ensure Better Governance in Higher Education Institutions” of the Operational Programme “Growth and Employment” Available: <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/296514>