

THE CONCEPT OF TEACHER TRAINING AT VILNIUS UNIVERSITY

In the Strategic Plan for 2021–2025, Vilnius University (hereinafter the ‘University’) affirmed its commitment to do the utmost to contribute to the creation of the society and the state by taking responsibility for the ideas and future of education in Lithuania and the development of systemic conditions of the 21st-century school. The decision of the University to realise its academic leadership in pedagogy is inseparable from the belief that the field of education will play a decisive role in overcoming the global and local challenges of the modern world. The reality of climate change, migration, epidemics, military conflicts, digitalisation, and the crisis of identities motivates us to reflect on tendencies of education to date critically and introduce such models thereof that could help future generations not only to develop skills needed for wholesome activities of a self-sufficient adult, but also acquire abilities to adapt, to perceive oneself and the world, and be productive in searches for meaning. Accordingly, the University aims to train teachers for a school focused on the concept of a culturally and socially active pupil with civic self-awareness and the capability of learning everywhere and at all times. With its long-term objective of developing the education system, the University is determined to mobilise all available creative, intellectual, and organisational potential to train 21st-century educators – teachers of subjects or specialisations, pupil assistance specialists, and education managers of all levels. The University will be consistently implementing this concept, which is based on the perceived educational challenges, the community-agreed principles of action, and the refined ambitious priorities.

I. ASSUMPTIONS AND PRINCIPLES

By training teachers and enabling their further continuous self-education, the University will base its community’s activities on the following assumptions and principles:

1. Human beings are curious by their nature; consequently, education is the way to create the most favourable environment for cognition and discovery;
2. Learning changes an individual’s relationship with oneself and the world in cognitive, moral, and aesthetic aspects;
3. The essence of the professional educator’s activity is leadership that brings people together and is characterized by social responsibility and personal commitment to the teacher’s mission;
4. Subsidiary cooperation with the field of educational practice and policy is a prerequisite for training and empowerment of teachers.

II. EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES

The University reflects on the diversity and complexity of the challenges faced by the education field, at the same time still realising the necessity to be more precise in making decisions, and chooses the following priorities in teacher training:

1. **Empowered educators** – it defines an attempt to provide teachers with research-based knowledge of neurological and psychological processes of learning, to link this knowledge with academic expertise in the area and with the testing of real educational environments, so that skills and incentives to develop efficient educational strategies through cooperation are gained and sustainable motivation, self-confidence and introspection practices are developed;
2. **School for all** – it defines the introduction of the value of ensuring equal educational opportunities for all and the improvement of methodological tools for individual access so that each learner would reach personal maturity and achieve the best possible results;

3. **Thinking globally, acting locally** – it defines the instilment of the courage to accept and the ability to perceive the multi-faceted global development and the impact of the Anthropocene by focusing on the practical realisation of this interdisciplinary awareness in the immediate environment and education reality;

4. **Technologies that transform education** – it defines an approach to modern media and technologies as the potential for more efficient education and the search for ways to inspire continuous learning, self-control and rebooting sociability;

5. **Purposeful systems of education** – it defines the leadership in integrating political and managerial instruments and academic experience so that the national, municipal and community levels work in a harmonized manner by setting goals for future education, by creating conditions for learning, and by evaluating outcomes.

III. FIELDS AND METHODS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONCEPT

To achieve a qualitative change in school pedagogy, the University organises activities in four main fields, which include education research, teacher training study programmes, professional growth of teachers, and partnerships with the agents of the education sphere. In each of these fields, the objectives that play a key role in the development of teacher training at the University are distinguished. These objectives absorb valuable experience gained in the established centres – the Institute of Educational Sciences of the Faculty of Philosophy in Vilnius and the Institute of Education of Šiauliai Academy in Šiauliai. At the same time, it is considered that a substantial boost in realising the ambition of educational leadership is impossible without the involvement of different subject communities, therefore, particular attention is paid to the institutionalisation of inter-faculty organisational structures and good practice arising from cooperation across academic units. It is also recognised that the network of pedagogy of Vilnius University, as a space for co-working and sharing pedagogical practice among educationalists and researchers of other fields, the University lecturers, and doctoral students, is the most appropriate organisational structure for the development of inclusive teacher training at the University.

1. **Education research.** To expand teaching and learning research as well as other research on education and to develop research-based educational solutions, we prioritise the following objectives:

- 1.1. to bring together interdisciplinary research teams to address educational challenges;
- 1.2. to establish an open doctoral school of educology, which would bring together researchers educationalists, subject didacts and researchers in other areas;
- 1.3. to systematically develop the topic of subject didactics at the doctoral level in fields other than educology, thus enhancing the potential and diversity of education research of the University.

To implement these priorities of the activities, the centres for subject didactics and education issues will be established in the faculties.

2. **Teacher training study programmes.** To train 21st-century teachers and pupil assistance specialists, we prioritise the following objectives:

- 2.1. to increase the diversity of teacher training study programmes and forms and to consolidate the potential of education researchers and practitioners in Vilnius and Šiauliai;
- 2.2. to strengthen the capacities of transnationality, interdisciplinarity, and scientific work in pedagogy studies;
- 2.3. to integrate into studies the development of competencies necessary to comprehend educational challenges;

2.4. to organise regular STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) seminars on subject pedagogy with the aim of expanding the good practice-based teaching of STEM subjects at the University and involving the University lecturers in STEM teaching improvement programs.

To implement these priorities of the activities, we will organise teaching and learning innovation workshops.

3. **Professional growth of teachers.** In promoting the continuous development of school activities and the professional growth of teachers, we prioritise the following objectives:

3.1. to expand the training and consultation offer for the heads of schools and other educational institutions and to prepare instruments for the improvement of activities at the level of the entire school (municipality);

3.2. to produce the offer for the enhancement of teacher qualification, which would meet educational challenges and the needs of future teachers;

3.3. to implement a model practice for the evaluation and recognition of non-formal pedagogical qualifications.

To implement these priorities of the activities, we will employ the teacher qualification centres in Vilnius and Šiauliai.

4. **Partnerships.** To achieve the sustainable contribution of the University to the development of the future school, we prioritise the following objectives:

4.1. to develop partnerships with educational institutions and other public institutions to address educational challenges;

4.2. to institutionalise lecturer, student, and teacher activity research teams (involving foreign partners as well) for the development of teaching innovations;

4.3. to stimulate active interest of pupils in natural sciences and other STEM fields.

To implement these priorities of the activities, we will employ the STEAM centres in Vilnius and Šiauliai and launch and develop the University School Club and the Centre for Educational Partnerships.
