CENTER FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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EVALUATION REPORT

STUDY FIELD LITERARY STUDIES

at VYTAUTAS MAGNUS UNIVERSITY (higher education institution)

Review' team:
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Evaluation coordinator - *Mr Eimantas Markevičius*

Report language – English

Vilnius
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Study Field Data*

Title of the study programme	Programme *"Literary Arts, Criticism and Communication"*
State code	6211NX035
Type of studies	University studies
Cycle of studies	Second cycle
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full time, 2 years
Credit volume	120
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Master of Humanities
Language of instruction	Lithuanian
Minimum education required	Bachelor degree
Registration date of the study programme	31 August, 2009

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluation of study fields is based on the Methodology of External Evaluation of Study Fields approved by the Director of Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereafter – SKVC) 31 December 2019 Order No. V-149.

The evaluation is intended to help higher education institutions to constantly improve their study process and to inform the public about the quality of studies.

The evaluation process consists of the main following stages: *1) self-evaluation and self-evaluation report prepared by Higher Education Institution (hereafter – HEI); 2) visit of the review team at the higher education institution; 3) production of the evaluation report by the review team and its publication; 4) follow-up activities.*

On the basis of external evaluation report of the study field SKVC takes a decision to accredit study field either for 7 years or for 3 years. If the field evaluation is negative such study field is not accredited.

The study field is **accredited for 7 years** if all evaluation areas are evaluated as "exceptional" (5 points), "very good" (4 points) or "good" (3 points).

The study field is **accredited for 3 years** if one of the evaluation areas was evaluated as "satisfactory" (2 points).

The study field **is not accredited** if at least one of evaluation areas was evaluated as "unsatisfactory" (1 point).

1.2. THE REVIEW TEAM

The review team was completed according he Experts Selection Procedure (hereinafter referred to as the Procedure) approved by the Director of Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education 31 December 2019 Order No. V-149. The Review Visit to HEI was conducted by the team on *08/12/2020.*

Prof. dr. Andrew Goodspeed (team leader) *Professor at the Faculty of Languages, Cultures, and Communications, South East European University, Macedonia.*

Prof. dr. Elżbieta Anna Skibińska-Cieńska, *Professor at the University of Wrocław, Poland.*

Dr. Kai Mikkonen, *Doctor at the Department of Comparative Literature University of Helsinki, Finland.*

Ms. Aušra Martišiūtė-Linartienė, *Director of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore.*

Ms. Sonata Bortelytė, *Student of Klaipeda University (English and others foreign language (German / French) and business communication (Masters).*

1.3. GENERAL

The documentation submitted by the HEI follows the outline recommended by the SKVC. Along with the self-evaluation report and annexes, the following additional documents have been provided by the HEI before, during and/or after the site-visit:

No.	Name of the document
1.	VMU_pre-visit_questions
2.	ANNEX_LIST_OF_TEACHERS_PUBLICATIONS_CONFERENCES

1.4. BACKGROUND OF STUDY FIELD/STUDY FIELD PLACE AND SIGNIFICANCE IN HEI

Vytautas Magnus University (commonly abbreviated in this report as VMU) was initially established in 1922, and was re-established in 1989. (SER, p. 5) The university is located in Kaunas, Lithuania. It provides degree instruction in all three study cycles, from undergraduate programs through doctoral studies. The university is governed by an established managerial structure; the main figures or bodies with overall responsibility are the Rector, the Council, and the Senate (for university structure, see VMU Statute, and other relevant documents, available publicly on the VMU website: https://www.vdu.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/VMU-STATUTE-EN-2018.pdf).

The program reviewed and assessed in this report is the M.A. program in Literary Studies. The program is administered and delivered by the Department of Lithuanian Studies in the Faculty of Humanities. The program has existed since 1993, although it has evolved in focus and title, thus: 1993-2000 "Lithuanian Literature"; 2000-2007 "Contemporary Lithuanian Literature"; 2007-2020 "Literature and the Press." (SER, p. 6) The program was most recently updated in a process beginning in 2018, resulting in the title "Literary Arts, Criticism, and Communication," and authorized by the VMU Senate (Senate Resolution SEN-012) of 22 April, 2020. (SER, p. 6)

The program is one of only several comparable M.A. literary studies programs available in Lithuania, the others being provided by Vilnius University.

The general aim of the program under review is to provide Lithuanian society with employment-ready graduates of high capability in fields related to literature and the literary arts. The potential social and professional engagements of graduates are therefore widespread, and would include (but are not limited to): writing; editing; teaching; research; proofreading; translating; publishing; reviewing; museum or resource curation; library services; and other allied professions. As many of these professions have been significantly altered by the digital communications revolutions of the last twenty years, the revised program places particular emphasis on the communications and media aspects of the fields being taught.

Although the program is relatively small, it is of a size consistent with comparable programs in European and North American second-cycle Literary Studies programs. Alumni testimony, and employment data, both suggest that there is a labor market for the program graduates: in 2017 the graduate employment rate was 100%, that of 2018 was 80%, and that of 2019 was 75%. (SER, p. 27) The field is generally a small one—as noted in the SER, "the field of literature in Kaunas, and in Lithuania as well, is not large")(SER, p. 26)—yet the public nature of many specializations involved (writing, publication, reviewing, teaching) gives graduates of such programs an amplified presence in the cultural life of the country.

II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

Study field and **second cycle** at Vytautas Magnus University is given **positive** evaluation.

Study field and cycle assessment in points by evaluation areas.

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation of an area in points*
1.	Study aims, outcomes and content	3
2.	Links between science (art) and study activities	3
3.	Student admission and support	3
4.	Studying, student performance and graduate employment	3
5.	Teaching staff	3
6.	Learning facilities and resources	3
7.	Study quality management and publicity	3
	Total:	**21**

*1 (unsatisfactory) - there are essential shortcomings that must be eliminated;

2 (satisfactory) - meets the established minimum requirements, needs improvement;

3 (good) - the field develops systematically, has distinctive features;

4 (very good) - the field is evaluated very well in the national and international context, without any deficiencies;

5 (exceptional) - the field is exceptionally good in the national and international context/environment.

III. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

3.1. STUDY AIMS, OUTCOMES AND CONTENT

Study programmes' aims, outcomes and content shall be assessed in accordance with the following indicators:

- *Evaluation of the conformity of the aims and outcomes of the field and cycle study programmes to the needs of the society and/or the labour market (not applicable to HEIs operating in exile conditions);*

(1) Factual situation

The objective of the study program is to train skilled literary critics and experts of literature for the needs of both the private and public sector in Lithuania. The assessment of the needs and requirements of the labor market is mainly based on close contacts that the staff and SPC members have with the institutions and enterprises where BA and MA students of this program have their practice or where they are employed, including publishing houses, literary magazines, and literary museums. Many teachers of this SP (study program) also work full-time or part-time as editors, translators, book reviewers, or teach creative writing workshops, and thus can support the students' career planning. The recent renaming and restructuring of the SP, including a stronger emphasis placed on communication skills, has shown positive growth in student enrollment. The career portal data (Annex 5) shows that the employability of graduates is good or satisfactory.

The evaluation team (hereinafter the team) noted that the aims of this SP, as stated in the SER and Annexes 1 and 3, emphasize theoretical knowledge, but employment opportunities (editing, publishing, archival work, etc.) may demand more practical subject familiarity that is not clearly part of the curriculum. The team was thus concerned about the way in which the SP can build practical work-skills into the theoretical subjects, and balance theory and praxis in the courses and learning outcomes. The team noted that the individual course learning outcomes reflect the specific learning outcomes of the program, as defined in Annex 1 (Table 1), and that in certain courses, such as "Narrative and Narrative theory," the learning outcomes seem to be carefully balanced between theory and practice. However, with regard to courses such as "Critique of Culture Communication" or "Critics of Cultural and Creative Industries" that heavily focus on theoretical concepts and approaches, it remained unclear to the team what kind of learning outcome was desired and how such courses correspond with the description of learning outcomes in Table 2 of Annex 1.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The team assesses that the conformity of the aims and outcomes of the program with the needs of society and the labor market is adequate.

The team recommends that the alumni and social partners, or potential employers, could be more regularly consulted about the kinds of skills that the SP seeks to develop.

- *Evaluation of the conformity of the field and cycle study programme aims and outcomes with the mission, objectives of activities and strategy of the HEI.*

  (1) Factual situation

  As stated in the SER, the aims and outcomes of this SP conform, on general terms, to two of the five major fields of objectives listed in the VMU strategy for 2012-20: being a socially active and responsible community, and creating opportunities that are favorable for the students' unfolding talents and personalities.

  The team agrees that the SP performs well in these areas of VMU strategy, but also notes that neither the SER nor the other provided materials, or the online meetings, give a clear idea of how the SP seeks to meet the other three major VMU strategic goals (being an internationally reliable partner, achieving the highest level of science, and creating a harmonious and creative environment.). The team observed, nonetheless, that the SP has all the potential to be a reliable international partnership, that research is carried out in this unit on the highest national level, and that the SP is determined to create a safe, harmonious, and creative environment.

  (2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

  The team assesses that the study program adequately conforms, in general terms, to the stated goals and intentions of the VMU strategy. The team encourages the SPC to seek opportunities to make the study program accord more closely with the three identified VMU strategic goals (being an internationally reliable partner; achieving the highest level of science; and creating a harmonious and creative environment).

- *Evaluation of the compliance of the field and cycle study programme with legal requirements;*

  (1) Factual situation

  The composition and the study plan of the SP, and the qualifications for a master's degree are in conformance with general requirements of studies for the second study cycle.

  (2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

  The team agrees that the SP meets all the necessary legal requirements, and notes positively that the student workload and ETCS allocation are periodically reviewed and adjusted.

- *Evaluation of compatibility of aims, learning outcomes, teaching/learning and assessment methods of the field and cycle study programmes.*

(1)   Factual situation

The expected learning outcomes of the SP, including the ten outcomes defined in Annex 1 Table 1, are evenly and well covered by the courses that are offered in this program, with the possible exception of outcome 8 that has received only "sufficient" (SER, p.9) attention.

The team would like to suggest that the SP clarifies the definition, and reconsiders the relevance and function, of the outcome 8 ("to adapt and rearrange the form and way of presenting the results of literary research taking into account the addressee's literary competence and situation"). In addition, the team then suggests that this outcome would be better incorporated in the courses and the program plan.

The team found some potential problems concerning overall constructive alignment, meaning the compatibility of teaching goals, learning outcomes, teaching and learning methods, and assessment, in the courses. It was brought to the team's attention that the assessment method has not always been aligned with the teaching methods and goals, and the grading criteria has not in some cases been sufficiently explained to the students, and furthermore, that in some courses there may be a lack of coherence pertaining to the criteria of assessment. The team thus recommends that more attention be given to the important role of feedback and assessment in constructive alignment.

The team noted that with regard to the course example "Narrative and Narrative Theory" (Annex 3), the given assessment methods remain very general and somewhat unclear. While the learning outcomes and the teaching and learning methods seem quite compatible in this course, the team expects that more information should be given about the assessment methods, i.e. about the way in which student achievement is assessed, how the students are familiarized with these criteria and learning standards, and how the methods of assessment comply with the set outcomes. Moreover, the team would have liked to hear how feedback or feed-forward are incorporated in the course, how the students take advantage of feedback, and whether the course involve any peer assessment, or forms of collaborative learning, among the students. In this case, the course description is also not quite clear about the way in which the written assignments ("articles") are supervised, how students' questions for discussion are processed, and how the discussions are organized and possibly assessed during the course. In general, there could be a better description of the course activities, and not just about the topics, that the students should engage in.

(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis

As noted above, the general compatibility of aims, learning outcomes, and teaching/learning assessment methods is adequate. The team recommends a stronger focus upon a thoughtful and logical alignment among teaching goals, learning outcomes, and assessment methodologies, and that these must particularly be consistent and harmonized in cases where courses are taught by more than one instructor. Additionally, the team recommends that

careful attention be given to the quality, variety, and appositemess of feedback provided to students.

- *Evaluation of the totality of the field and cycle study programme subjects/modules, which ensures consistent development of competences of students.*

(1)   Factual situation

The main compulsory study subjects in the SP reflect the three larger themes that are essential to the program plan (literary art, communication, and criticism).

The team thinks, however, that the description of the totality of the study field, including especially the relationship, and the unifying concept, behind the three larger themes could be made clearer and more coherent.

Moreover, it remains unclear in the SER what is meant by "etic" and "emic" approaches with regard to literary art, how literary communication is understood, and why the SP focuses on the specific fields of diaspora literature and mythopoetic discourses. The team does not think that there is anything questionable about such research themes and fields, but it is not evident from the SER how these themes are similar to large topics such as "Methods for Literary Research" or "Comparative Literature".

The team would like to see a more comprehensive description of the generic skills and professional competencies that the students accumulate and develop over the course of their studies. This involves, especially, the communication skills that are central to the very profile of this SP, but also how the students' learning and the development of their professional skills can be grounded on research-based teaching. Furthermore, there could be examples in the SER of team work and collaborative learning strategies, ways of developing critical and creative thinking, kinds of sources and technologies that are learned, or types of self-regulation and taking responsibility of one's activity that are developed in the courses.

The team would also like to recommend that the SP makes it more evident how it acknowledges and accommodates the heterogeneity of the students' background. This could include seminars, workshops, or other services that assist individual students who come from other backgrounds than philology.

(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The team assesses that the totality of the program leads to adequate development of student competences as expected within the field.

The team recommends that a more precise description of the skills intended to be developed be identified and made public, particularly in regard to communication skills. The team additionally recommends that the program could benefit from a more clear development of

seminars, workshops, and other team-learning opportunities to build collaborative educational possibilities across the areas of student undergraduate specialization.

- *Evaluation of opportunities for students to personalise the structure of field study programmes according to their personal learning objectives and intended learning outcomes.*

  (1)   Factual situation

  The SP has increased opportunities for its students to individualize their studies since its structural renewal in 2020, This is done mainly by including more optional courses and subjects. The options become available provided that there are more than 5 students interested in a given course.

  The team is concerned whether the student's "individual" choice has been possible in practice, given the requirement of more than 5 students per course, and whether the SP can thus effectually guarantee a practice that allows students to negotiate their own study paths and define their own learning outcomes. The team is also concerned whether the SP takes into consideration student obligations outside the university, including full-time jobs, or family responsibilities, to accommodate the students' varying schedules and external responsibilities.

  (2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis

  The team notes with approval that the general intention of the study program seems to be to encourage personalization and individualization, particularly through the availability of selected electives. The team observes, however, that these electives may not be available in practice, given the size of the program and the need for at least five students to sign up for them. If possible, flexibility of selection should be provided to the students whenever practicable.

- *Evaluation of compliance of final theses with the field and cycle requirements.*

  (1)   Factual situation

  The preparation and defense of MA thesis is regulated according to the VMU Study Regulations and the evaluation criteria are set by the SP itself.

  The team notes that the evaluation of final theses complies with the field and cycle requirements, and also that the production of MA theses in the SP has been consistent over the recent years. The team also thinks that the criteria for assessment are well defined and the defense of the theses is well organized. However, it remains unclear to the team how the assessment criteria are applied in the supervision process and explained to the students during the MA thesis project. The team is concerned whether the students in the SP must

face the same uncertainty. In addition, the team is concerned about student's right to appeal and how it may be justified that the decision-making of the thesis evaluation and grading cannot be appealed.

(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The team assesses that the evaluation of final theses are compliant with the field and cycle requirements. The team recommends that close attention be given to the explanation of the assessment criteria to students during the supervision and defense-preparation periods. It is also recommended that students should be permitted to appeal the thesis evaluations in circumstances where the result is negative. The SER (p. 11) notes that "thesis evaluations may not be appealed, except in cases of procedural irregularities"; if the team understands correctly, the thesis is inexplicably thus the only graded work by the student throughout the program that is prohibited an appeal.

Recommendations for this evaluation area:

1) The team recommends that the alumni and social partners, or potential employers, could be more regularly consulted about the kinds of skills that the SP seeks to develop.
2) The team recommends a stronger focus upon a thoughtful and logical alignment among teaching goals, learning outcomes, and assessment methodologies, and that these must particularly be consistent and harmonized in cases where courses are taught by more than one instructor.
3) The team recommends that a more precise description of the skills intended to be developed be identified and made public, particularly in regard to communication skills. The team additionally recommends that the program could benefit from a more clear development of seminars, workshops, and other team-learning opportunities to build collaborative educational possibilities across the areas of student undergraduate specialization.

3.2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENCE (ART) AND STUDY ACTIVITIES

Links between science (art) and study activities shall be assessed in accordance with the following indicators:

- *Evaluation of the sufficiency of the science (applied science, art) activities implemented by the HEI for the field of research (art) related to the field of study.*

(1)   Factual situation

The study field of literary studies belongs to the scientific field of Philology in the scientific area of Humanities. The second cycle study program "Literary Arts, Criticism and Communication" is carried out by the Department of Lithuanian Studies at the Faculty of Humanities; its aim is to prepare skilled literary critics able to understand literary phenomena and processes and act professionally in modern field of literature and culture. Such aims require competences from various fields of knowledge, which results in an

important place of interdisciplinary elements in the program. Thus, although the main body of teaching staff of the program are researchers of philology, some delve also into the field of interdisciplinary research, especially in the field of social sciences. They are members of the cluster (i.e. active research groups from various fields who carry out joint research, integrate studies and science, combining the scientific potential of several departments formed at VMU) "Connections between Literary Texts and Cultural Processes". The activities of the cluster aim to use the results achieved by researchers to search for the practical application of literature and to find and apply various strategies for dissemination of literary research results in different groups of readers. These aspirations are also reflected in the content of the program updated in April 2020.

According the SER (p. 13 sq), different forms of evaluating research and development (R&D) implemented by the Lithuanian government and conducted in recent years show that the teachers of the program carry out high quality research : the research field of philology in terms of research and experimental development activities was evaluated with the same points as Vilnius University research field of philology; of the seven research fields of philology evaluated in different Lithuanian higher education institutions presented in the MOSTA 2018 summary, the positions of VMU and VU are the highest and evaluated equally (4.15). According to the evaluation scale of the evaluation areas of the research field of study, the evaluation 4 (very good) shows that "the area is evaluated very well in the national context and in the international space, without any shortcomings". The high quality of their academic work is evidenced also by their expert activities (in the Research Council of Lithuania), membership in editorial boards of academic journals, membership of foreign societies, associations and networks.

The data given in ANNEX 6. LIST OF TEACHERS IN FIELD OF STUDY and the ANNEX : LIST OF TEACHERS IN FIELD OF STUDY (given as response to a pre-visit question) details their achievements (publications, conferences) and confirm that they are active participants of international scientific life : they take part in the international conferences abroad (Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Poland) and publish in foreign (English, German) languages by Lithuanian and foreign academic publishers (among others : Brill, Routledge, Peter Lang) and nationally and internationally recognized peer-reviewed journals.

Researchers use their competences during delivered courses, such as Narrative and Narrative Theory, Drama and Performative Literature, Comparative Literature, Mythopoetic Discourses, Diaspora Literature. They also prepare students for scientific work at seminars where each student does his proper research ("Research Project: Practicum of Literature Criticism"; "Master's Thesis"). Their achievements contribute to ensure high level scholarly content of the program.

The involvement of teachers from other departments in the program contributes to the strengthening of its interdisciplinary nature whereas the participation of professionals

(writers, editors, critics, etc. – SER, p. 30) provides students with the practical qualifications needed to achieve the objectives of the program.

(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The evidence given in the SER, in the ANNEX 2. STUDY FIELD PROGRAMME PLAN, the ANNEX 6. LIST OF TEACHERS IN FIELD OF STUDY and the ANNEX: LIST OF TEACHERS IN FIELD OF STUDY allows the conclusion that the relation between the research and the teaching carried out by the staff members is adequate.

● *Evaluation of the link between the content of studies and the latest developments in science, art and technology.*

(1)   Factual situation

According to the SER (p. 14), the program, updated in April 2020, takes into account the recommendations of the "Comparative Expert Assessment of R&D Activities (2018)" by focusing on interdisciplinary research methods of literature and migration, understanding the need for practical application of knowledge in the age of new technologies, paying attention to the connections between academic, creative and practical aspects, analyzing not only Lithuanian but also world literature fields. New courses, such as Drama and Performative Literature, Poetry, Poetics and Rhetoric or Creative Writing: Essays and Publicistic Texts have been designed.

The integration of the developments in the scientific area of Humanities is ensured also by the fact that the courses of the program are taught by subject specialists and active researchers (see above). Thus, they have the opportunity to share and employ their scientific interests and knowledge, especially during seminars where, under their supervision, students conduct their proper original research (Master's Thesis). As shown in the ANNEX 4. LIST OF FINAL THESIS, 2018–2020, the subject matter and issues of research undertaken by students correspond to the topics of research carried out by the teachers of the Department of Lithuanian Studies (evidenced in Annex 6 and additional Annex).

(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The evidence given in the SER and the ANNEXes allows the Team to conclude that the relation between the research and the teaching carried out by the staff members is adequate. However, it must be noted that some of the new courses were implemented only in April 2020 and the results of their introduction could not be verified yet.

● *Evaluation of conditions for students to get involved in scientific (applied science, art) activities consistent with their study cycle.*

(1)   Factual situation

According to the SER (p.14-15), students of the program have various opportunities to engage in research. (1) In order to involve students in research activities, from 2011 the annual scientific conference "Narratological Readings" is organized; all students present their research on the chosen narratological issue prepared during the course Narratology/Narrative and Narrative Theory. Also students from other study programs, study cycles and universities participate, alongside with teachers, in this interdisciplinary conference. (2) Students are also involved in the organization of scientific conferences; they can become members of organizing committees and/or present their papers or individual or group projects. (3) The results of the students' research are published in VMU scientific journals *Darbai ir Dienos*, *Oikos* or in cultural weekly newspapers and magazines (*Šiaurės Atėnai*, *Nemunas*, *Literatūra ir menas*, et al). (4) The academic cooperation of students and teachers is also reflected by the participation in the EU SF-funded project "Lithuanian Academic Scheme for International Cooperation in Baltic Studies".

The program students, together with the teachers, have organized several public creative writing workshops. They are also involved in the organization of an international literature festival in Kaunas - European Capital of Culture 2022.

(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis

Data given in the SER and in the Annexes clearly show that students are given good opportunities to develop their research skills and competences; conferences they took part in and the published works confirm that the program creates an appropriate environment conducive to the development of their research and scientific competences.

Recommendations for this evaluation area:

1) The team recommends continuing to explore the interdisciplinary elements of the program, particularly in regard to media applications of Literary Studies.
2) The team recommends that vigilant attention be given to those courses that have only recently been implemented, as their recent inclusion into the curriculum has not yet generated significant data of student achievement or satisfaction.

3.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT

Student admission and support shall be evaluated according to the following indicators:

● *Evaluation of the suitability and publicity of student selection and admission criteria and process.*

(1)   Factual situation

According to the SER (p.17), admission policies are based upon the Republic of Lithuania Law on Higher Education and Research; the VMU Statute; and the VMU Study Regulations. Admission to the program is not restricted to graduates of undergraduate programs in philology. Applicants are also (potentially) admitted whose undergraduate

specializations were in the broader fields of arts, social sciences, or the general humanities. Admission is also possible for those whose undergraduate degrees were in fields outside of these general areas of humanities studies, provided that the applicant had a minor study in philology, or has passed bridging courses.

In practical terms, these admissions criteria are rather broad. This wide definition of acceptable backgrounds raise two potential difficulties: 1) students from outside the general field of literary studies may not have the necessary basic knowledge to thrive in a second-cycle program, and 2) the diversity of student preparation may result in an unbalanced classroom, in which some students have extensive undergraduate subject knowledge, whilst others in the same room have been accepted on the basis of minor studies or bridging courses. Yet according to the discussions that the team had with both students and staff, these concerns are recognized by the institution, and application preference is given to those with a background in philological studies if two applicants are otherwise roughly comparable candidates. The team is therefore satisfied that the program's basic application structure is academically justifiable, provided that rigorous attention is maintained to support students with non-humanities undergraduate specializations, and to conduct classes at a level that neither leaves them behind nor impedes the progress of those who had undergraduate specializations in philology.

The program applies an application acceptance methodology that gives varying weights to various application materials, such as (among other criteria) performance in bachelor's studies, a motivation latter, and the grade of the bachelor's thesis. This seems a reasonably balanced method of obtaining a holistic portrait of the potential student, and to estimate in an objective manner her or his suitability for the program. The staff mentioned (in discussion with the team) that the application procedure used to involve an interview, but that this has been discontinued, in favor of the motivation letter. Given the relatively small size of the program, it might be wise to reinstate the interview as well, in order to have as complete a picture of the applicant as is reasonably possible, particularly in regard to students with a non-philological undergraduate background.

The main concern regarding this program and its student selection and enrolment arises in the data for 2019, when the program did not run. The team is satisfied with the institutional explanation that this largely resulted from the lack of availability of state-funding for students in that application cohort. It will be necessary for the program management to remain vigilant to maintain sustainable application numbers; yet the team notes with approval that more recent trends indicate both an increase in student signed study contracts in 2020 (7 state-funded and 7 non-state funded), with close similarities in the entrance competition score averages when compared with the years 2017 and 2018 (SER, p. 18, Tables 3 and 4).

(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The team assesses this category as being adequate.

The program is based upon reasonable application and admission procedures, which are designed to encourage those best prepared to make the substantial commitment to a second-cycle studies program, and to identify those whose backgrounds may not have prepared them for participation in the Literary Studies program. It may be worthwhile to consider, as a point of future development, aiming to recruit only those students with a strong undergraduate background in philology, but in present conditions that restriction may not result in a sustainable cohort intake.

The team also notes that it concurs with the statement in the SER that "the field of literature in Kaunas, and in Lithuania as well, is not large." (SER, p. 26) Although the program under review is a relatively small one, it seems adequate in size and scope to the relative demand, in terms of the society's needs, labor market demand, and student desire (based upon team discussions with students, teachers, alumni, and social partners, 9.12.2020).

- *Evaluation of the procedure of recognition of foreign qualifications, partial studies and prior non-formal and informal learning and its application.*

  (1)   Factual situation

  The recognition of foreign qualifications, partial studies and prior non-formal and informal learning are regulated by the VMU Description of the Procedure for Recognition of Learning Outcomes; the VMU Study Regulations; the Description of the Procedure for Assessment of and Recognition of Competences acquired through Non-Formal and Informal Education; the VMU Description of Organization of Non-Formal Adult Education; and by the International Cooperation Department, for recognition of foreign qualifications (SER, pp. 18-19, with links to individual policies provided to the team). The procedures appear appropriate, and are centrally formulated, although the application of the procedures seems rightly devolved down to the faculty level.

  The procedures appear well-designed and are clearly structured, allowing for recognition of foreign studies undertaken, non-traditional learning, or other work-based achievement that may bear upon student accomplishment. Yet it must be noted that these policies largely regulate circumstances that do not commonly arise in this program. The team notes that this circumstance seems to be largely the result of low student mobility (see below), as well as of the low number of program applicants from outside Lithuania.

  (3)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis

  The team assesses this category as adequate.

  The team notes with approval that central policies and procedures exist for the recognition of foreign or non-traditional academic achievement, and assesses that the policies are adequate for the purposes of the program.

- *Evaluation of conditions for ensuring academic mobility of students.*

(1) Factual situation

VMU participates in the Erasmus + mobility program, and opportunities exist for students of the Literary Studies program to undertake this opportunity. Their participation is to be regulated by a learning agreement between VMU and the hosting university. The number of participating students—or foreign students enrolling in full-time studies in the VMU Literary Studies program—is discouragingly low. In the period under review, one student (from Latvia) enrolled as a full-time student in the Literary Studies program; another from Brno undertook an internship in the Literary Studies program; and of VMU Literary Studies "home" students, one undertook studies of 18 credits at International Birch University in Bosnia and Hercegovina, and another undertook an Erasmus + internship for 10 credits for approximately two months at the University of La Rioja in Spain. (SER, p. 20)

Because student mobility is a central pillar of contemporary European higher education, the team closely inquired of the teachers, students, and alumni as to why both incoming and outgoing student mobility is so low (multiple discussions, 9.12.2020). Their answers were consistent: the "common" student in the Literary Studies program has a job and a family, and cannot easily remove herself or himself from those professional or familial obligations for any extended period of time. This was verified in discussion with the students with whom the team spoke (9.12.2020).

The institution appears to make reasonable efforts to promote and advertise Erasmus + opportunities. The International Cooperation Department leads this effort, with field-specific assistance from the Faculty. The SER also notes that "VMU Erasmus" days are undertaken for promotion, and notices posted on the VMU website. (SER, p.20).

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The team assesses this category as adequate.

The team believes that student mobility is a desirable and attainable element of the VMU Literary Studies program, yet also accepts the consensus opinion that the Literary Studies students are commonly too busy with professional or family obligations to participate. It would be desirable to identify limited-duration mobility opportunities (particularly of the nature of brief, credited internships such as several students have undertaken) as possible options for students with restricted mobility availability. Of course, any students who may have the scheduling flexibility to participate in a longer program—of, say, a semester abroad—should be strongly encouraged to apply, and given faculty or program assistance to do so.

It is also recommended that the Literary Studies teaching staff contact their international colleagues to make known in the colleagues' home universities (or institutions) that the VMU Literary Studies program is a welcoming and attractive destination for incoming mobility. If such contacts were based upon already existing academic contacts, be they official or informal, it might ease the difficulty of the

incoming student having to navigate the arrangement of the learning agreement, housing during the mobility, and other associated logistical obstacles.

- *Assessment of the suitability, adequacy and effectiveness of the academic, financial, social, psychological and personal support provided to the students of the field.*

(1)   Factual situation

Based upon the discussions the team had with Literary Studies representatives, the main academic diffusion of information comes in two forms: electronic (largely through the Moodle system and VMU website), and personal contact. The electronic notifications are generally those of University-wide relevance or relate to policies (or changing of policies) and scheduling, whilst the program-specific information is commonly transmitted by personal contact with academic staff. Based upon discussions with the teaching staff and students, this provision of information is effective. Academic staff are required to be available at regular periods for student consultation and academic advice.

Student financial support takes multiple forms, including (but not restricted to) state funding; University postponement of tuition fees or housing costs; reimbursement of conference attendance costs; etc. (SER, p. 21) Multiple groups with which the team spoke (9.12.2020) noted that finances are difficult across the University, and are not specific to the Literary Studies program; this is consistent with the concerns now facing many European and North American higher education institutions. Several students in the program have won scholarships or awards for their excellence in scholarship.

Student support for social, psychological, and personal support seem bifurcated: there are multiple resources available on a University-wide basis (i.e. the VMU Student Affairs Department, the VMU Psychology Clinic, the VMU Student Council, the VMU Career Center), and on a personal basis. It was the impression of the team that in terms of practical academic or logistical assistance, students relied primarily upon personal contact with their individual instructors, or associated administrative staff (multiple discussions, 9.12.2020).

(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The team assesses this category as adequate.

The team believes that student support is generally solid on both an institutional and program level. The formal and informal resources available to students are appropriate for basic student assistance, and to provide aid (of a financial or psychological character) in cases of unexpected financial need, or extreme stress.

The team would like to note, however, that certain elements of student support identified during the review process may deserve program attention. Student mobility remains low, and the available resources and opportunities could be better promoted. Similarly, laudable efforts have been made within the program to modify scheduling to

accommodate students with irregular schedules, although it may be necessary in the future to consider late-evening or weekend classes. Finally, the team was uncertain about the activities and effectiveness of the VMU Career Center. The team makes no formal recommendation regarding the Career Center, but the team's impression is that the Center may not adequately promote the resources or assistance available to students (specifically, in this report, students of the Literary Studies program).

- *Evaluation of the sufficiency of study information and student counselling.*

  (1)   Factual situation

  As noted above, the team identified a bifurcated information distribution structure: there is general information available through electronic means (Moodle, the VMU website, etc.), and more program-specific information available through direct contact with instructors, or through their electronic communication (emails, social media, etc.). This also appears to apply to more specific academic counselling. In general terms, matters such as tuition postponement, or international mobility, are largely decided outside of the program structure, whilst individual student concerns or questions are addressed directly to instructors, administrators, or program management.

  The program management and teaching staff emphasized that the size of the program makes individual contact both reasonable and desirable. As noted in the SER (pp. 22-23), "the groups of master students are small, therefore the teachers of the department   devote a lot of time for individual consultations, which take place according to individual needs." The team received confirmation from teaching staff and students that this does indeed occur.

  (2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis

  The team assesses this category as adequate.

  Given the size and scope of the Literary Studies program, the study information and student counselling are adequate. A reliance upon personal contact may prove difficult in the event of program expansion, but at present the staff and students engage in sufficiently close contact so that information and consultation are available.

  The team therefore makes two suggestions, not based upon any current failings of this communication approach, but simply to prevent potential difficulties in the future: 1) it might be wise to ask teaching staff to quantify how often they post materials for students on electronic media, or answer student emails (to identify staff who may be under-responsive to student needs or inquiries), and 2) to institute a means of identifying students who may need additional consultation or assistance, if those students do not self-identify and request help.

Recommendations for this evaluation area:

1) The team recommends that strong efforts be made to increase student mobility, even if for a highly limited time (such as one week).

2) The team suggests that the interview for applicants from non-philological undergraduate backgrounds may usefully be reinstated.
3) The team recommends that vigilant attention be paid to maintaining sustainable enrolment rates, and preventing subsequent student withdrawals.

3.4. STUDYING, STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

Studying, student performance and graduate employment shall be evaluated according to the following indicators:

- *Evaluation of the teaching and learning process that enables to take into account the needs of the students and enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes.*

(1) Factual situation.

According to the SER (p. 24), in the second-cycle study program, literary arts, criticism and communication teaching and learning process is based on active forms of involving students in the study process through discussions, public presentations of case studies and completed tasks during the seminars and lectures. Students are encouraged to get involved in scientific activities, participate in scientific conferences, and contribute to their organization.

In each study course, students independently prepare written works, write analysis of problematic issues, in addition to the above-mentioned academic texts, they also work on artistic, critical, and analytical texts, prepare practical projects (during the course "Cultural Media," students prepare and edit radio interviews). Not just the student's independent work, but also the ability to present his or her academic or creative research results to others is evaluated. Students are asked to present their work in the classroom. Internships is one of the most important segments of the program. Based on students' surveys, the program committee changes, adjusts, and adapts the internship to the needs of students (the SER "Areas for Improvement" offers a practical example: "The updated course Research Project: Practicum of Literature Criticism combines both theoretical and practical aspects. Following the future students' survey, the nature and content of the course may change. Still one of the objectives of this course (and other courses as well) should be to ensure more consistent links between separate individual work (done during internships and other study activities) with the topic of student's future master's thesis. In order to achieve this, a closer monitoring, timely advice, and consultations with a thesis supervisor at the beginning of the second semester will be needed.")

The graduates of the program can continue their studies in doctoral studies in the field of philology (three (3) graduates have been studying for a doctorate in the field of philology at VMU, entering the PhD study program in 2018, 2019 and 2020).

The graduates of the program gain adequate qualifications to work as literary critics, reviewers, and editors in mass media and publishing—as literary agents; coordinators and organizers of literary activities in various organizations for the dissemination of literary works (museums, creative organizations, and non-governmental institutions), cultural and educational institutions (libraries, archives, schools, cultural centres); researchers and pedagogical staff in academic institutions (universities and research centres); field analysts

for the dissemination of literary works in state institutions; they can also initiate and carry out independent projects for the dissemination of literary works (organize festivals, discussions, and other events.

(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis.

According to the SER and data provided in ANNEX 5. EMPLOYABILITY OF GRADUATES AND GRADUATE CAREER TRACKING and Annex 1. LEARNING OUTCOMES, the small groups of students (in 2017—5, in 2018 —8, and in 2019—10) enable to individualize teaching and learning process and to take into account the needs of the students, empowering them to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Students appreciate the university environment, the quality of the courses, the skills acquired during the internship, and the communication of the teachers with the students.

Students prepare for possible doctoral studies and research activities. Three (3) graduates of the program (2018, 2019, 2020), who study for a doctorate in the field of philology at VMU, testify to the good results of teaching and learning process in academic field.

Data provided in Annex 5. EMPLOYABILITY OF GRADUATES AND GRADUATE CAREER TRACKING (Table 4) allows to conclude that the evaluation of preparation for the labour market has become higher: in 2019 the evaluation, which was "good," gained only 28.57% (2) and in 2020, which was also "good," reached 60% (3).

- *Evaluation of conditions ensuring access to study for socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs.*

(1)   Factual situation

According to the SER (p. 24-25), socially vulnerable groups and the students with special needs are given the opportunity to study according to an individual study schedule. Socially vulnerable groups (orphans, people with disabilities, students from large families and low income families) receive different discounts on tuition or dormitory fees. Such students are also provided with the scholarships.

Following the needs of the students with disabilities, the University's buildings and equipment are constantly maintained and updated. The students are allowed to park their cars near the buildings, their access to the buildings is maintained; the necessary equipment is established for the disabled in libraries. The classrooms are furnished with the suitable furniture, the students can settle in dormitory rooms which have been specially adapted for their needs, if necessary, with an accompanying person. The study process is organized according to the individual needs of the students. The individual counseling is provided when necessary. Data on students with disabilities is integrated into database systems, thus facilitating the learning process for the students with disabilities.

(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The conditions ensuring access to study for socially vulnerable groups and the students with special needs is adequate.

● *Evaluation of the systematic nature of the monitoring of student study progress and feedback to students to promote self-assessment and subsequent planning of study progress.*

(1)   Factual situation

According to the SER (p. 26), the monitoring of student learning progress is regulated by VMU Study Regulations and the Description of Procedure for Student Learning Achievement Monitoring and Assistance. The University departments monitor learning achievements regularly. Students themselves are invited to self-monitor their progress in studies and follow the processes of studies: to register for studies, adjust their study plans, observe evaluations of their own learning and make improvements, get acquainted with the results of surveys for quality improvements, and so on.

(2)   *Expert judgement/indicator analysis*

The systematic nature of the monitoring of student study progress and feedback to students to promote self-assessment and subsequent planning of study progress is adequate.

● *Evaluation of the feedback provided to students in the course of the studies to promote self-assessment and subsequent planning of study progress.*

(1)   Factual situation

According to the SER (p. 26), the number of students in the course group is small, therefore a close contact is established with the teachers. They meet and communicate every week. A cumulative score system is applied in each study course, i.e. students are constantly given a variety of practical assignments that are assessed and discussed with students, highlighting both strengths and areas for improvement. These weekly assignments allow students to provide feedback not only during midterms or exams, but throughout the entire study process.

(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The feedback provided to students in the course of the studies to promote self-assessment and subsequent planning of study progress is adequate.

● *Evaluation of employability of graduates and graduate career tracking in the study field.*

(1)   Factual situation

The University monitors the employment and career of the VMU graduates. The main sources of information are the VMU alumni survey, statistics provided by the Employment Service and by the Government Strategic Analysis Center.

The collaboration with the VMU alumni is intense, taking place through the Department of Lithuanian Studies, Faculty, Alumni Club, and professional/personal contacts. Members of the Alumni Club attend the University events organized to develop students' professional and employability skills, as well as to get acquainted with the career opportunities. The Alumni Club members also organize various events (lectures, discussions, informal meetings, field trips, excursions to various companies employing university alumni, and etc.), actively participate as consultants and experts in study programme committees and study quality assessment groups.

The VMU Career Center does not mediate between the students and companies on employment issues. According to the SER (p. 27), each year, the Career Center performs an online survey for the alumni one year after their graduation.

Most graduates find employment by specialty. In the last four years, the graduates have been working as organizers and managers of cultural activities in public libraries, literary museums, schools and gymnasiums, educational institutions, editorial offices and publishing houses. According to the SER (p. 27), during the last three years, the employment rate of the VMU graduates of the program (seven (7) students graduated in 2016, five (5) in 2017, and six (6) in 2018) and the average monthly insured income one year after the graduation of the employed graduates have decreased in the assessment period. In 2017, the employment rate was 100% (income 1,017 EUR), in 2018—80% (796 EUR), and in 2019—75% (722 EUR).

(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The VMU Career Center must include more activities oriented towards the students and consult them about real possibilities to find the job.

● *Evaluation of the implementation of policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination.*

(1)   Factual situation

The principles of integrity are defined in the VMU Statute, the Code of Ethics of VMU, the. VMU provisions on prevention of plagiarism in student written works and VMU Study Regulations. Non-discrimination measures are regulated by the Code of Ethics of VMU. Teachers and students have the right to appeal to the University's Academic Ethics Commission, which makes final decisions on academic integrity. During the 3-year period, there had been no cases of violation of the principles of academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination

(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The implementation of policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance, and non-discrimination is adequate.

- *Evaluation of the effectiveness of the application of procedures for the submission and examination of appeals and complaints regarding the study process within the field studies.*
(1)   Factual situation

Procedures for appeals and complaints of the study process are regulated by the VMU Description of Procedure for Appeal Investigation, the VMU provisions on prevention of plagiarism in student written works and VMU Study Regulations. During the 3-year period, no appeals or complaints had been made.

(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The effectiveness of the application of procedures for the submission and examination of appeals and complaints regarding the study process within the field studies is adequate.

Recommendations for this evaluation area:

1)To include social partners from gymnasia and secondary schools and to create opportunities for teachers of Lithuanian language and literature to study the didactics of literature on a higher level (currently, the teachers of Lithuanian language and literature have the opportunity to study only in the BA program).

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3.5. TEACHING STAFF

Study field teaching shall be evaluated in accordance with the following indicators:

- *Evaluation of the adequacy of the number, qualification and competence (scientific, didactic, professional) of teaching staff within a field study programme(s) at the HEI in order to achieve the learning outcomes. entrance requirements are well-founded, consistent and transparent.*

(1)   Factual situation

According to the SER (p. 30), in the period under evaluation (2017–2020), both compulsory and optional courses has been taught by 11 lecturers, including those who worked part-time (less than 0.3 part of the post). After the updating of the program, from the autumn of 2020 optional courses are taught by teachers from other fields, parts of the individual subjects in the program are also taught by professionals (e.g: lectures and practical classes of Drama and Performative Literature given by theater director), and almost all the courses are taught by 2 lecturers (as understood during the meeting with the managerial staff, the teaching staff

and students, one person is responsible for the theoretical aspects, while the other - for developing the skills of their practical use in writing form).

The qualification of the teaching staff corresponds to the Chapter VI "Teachers and material resources" of the Order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania "On Approval of the Description of General Study Requirements" (No. V-1168, 30 December 2016) 1: 90, 91% of the teachers have an academic degree and more than 20 percent of the volume of subjects in the field are taught by professors.

As the SER states (p. 30), since autumn 2020, 8 teachers work at least half of teaching post: 3 professors, 4 associate professors and 1 lecturer as an associate professor. A more detailed list of teachers with information about their status (full-time/ part-time/ external practitioner) and number of courses and hours delivered given as the response to a pre-visit question shows 9 full-time employed persons, 7 part-time and 2 external professionals. Among teachers working in part-time two works both at VMU, and an research institution (Lithuanian Culture Research Institute; Lithuanian Emigration Institute). The number of part-time teachers is significant, but it guarantees diversity and allows to achieve both the theoretical and professional learning outcomes.

The stability of the teachers in the program is quite high. Most of the teachers have more than 20 years of work experience, they are specialists in their field. The largest part (46%) of the teaching staff are teachers, aged 40-50; there are 36% are teachers aged 51-70 and 18% of those under 40 years of age. In the period 2017-2020 a natural turnover of the teaching staff : retirement; promotion; arrival of young teachers has been observable. The youngest teachers, who defended their PhD Thesis recently, are also teachers-practitioners : they are active literary critics who publish literary reviews and articles in the cultural press or have professional experience of editor in a publishing house.

As there is, on average, 16 (first and second year) students in the Programme, the average ratio between the number of teachers and the number of students studying is 1 teacher to 2 students.

ANNEX 6. LIST OF TEACHERS IN FIELD OF STUDY gives elements about the teachers' workload but the need of an explanation was expressed by the team in a pre-visit question. The response to it indicates the normative workload of contact hours, according to the position (Professor : 550 hours per year ; Associate Professor 600 hours per year ; Lecturer : 650 hours per year ; Assistant : 700 hours per year). These hours may include lectures, seminars, consultations, proofreading of written assignments, supervision of course paper, research paper, final theses, supervision of doctoral students, etc.

As explained, during the meeting, by the Senior administration, the normative workload results from the policy of the VMU adopted for financial reason (which is also the cause of poor exchange of visiting teachers from other Lithuanian research institutions, and small

proportion of teaching delivered by professionals). The explanation given during the meeting are not clear enough to conclude whether the hours indicated above include also the research or administrative and organizational work. During the meetings with the teaching staff it became evident that workload of teaching – element strongly conditioninig the professional development - is a wider university problem. The teaching load of the staff members being high, therefore they seem to carry out their research activities mostly during their free time.

The research qualifications of the teaching staff is presented *supra*, in the part : 3.2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENCE (ART) AND STUDY ACTIVITIES.

(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The data given in the SER, the Annexes and answers to pre-visit questions allows to conclude that the teaching staff consists of people of different formal status and form a heterogeneous group whose aims and needs can be various and sometimes divergent, and the personal involvement in the program is not the same. Although the diversity of staff can be seen as a strong point (allowing the interdisciplinary nature of the program and the ensuring the practical qualifications), it is also a reason of some difficulties and inconsistency in the practical realization of the assumed goals. This could be stated during the meeting with students who spoke about the inconsistencies or discrepancies of the criteria for the evaluation of written work; also some teachers mentioned this problem.

The matters included in the program are taught by academics with 10 and more years of pedagogical experience, and by young specialists involved who bring also professional, non-academic experience; this certainly contributes to the general level of the quality of lectures delivered in the program, as does the diversity of the overall teaching staff in terms of their interdisciplinary qualifications. The natural turnover of the teaching staff, especially the arrival of young teachers, in recent years, allows the prediction of a certain stability of the core staff, which is the condition to ensure teaching quality. However, the need to reach for teachers from other departments and from outside (professionals) poses some risk which should be taken into account in the program management.

Also, the heavy workload might be a matter of concern. Even if it corresponds to the rules and policy adopted at the University, which was confirmed during the meetings with Senior administration and the teaching staff, it can hinder scientific development of the academic staff. Nevertheless, as seen supra, the teaching staff do manage to produce research, and it would do better if they are given better conditions.

● *Evaluation of conditions for ensuring teaching staffs' academic mobility (not applicable to studies carried out by HEIs operating under the conditions of exile).*

(1)   Factual situation

According to the SER (p. 31), the VMU academics improve their research and pedagogical competences by participating in Erasmus+ programs : they can go to VMU partnership universities for Erasmus+ teaching or training visits. There are also possibilities offered by the project "Promotion of Cooperation between Foreign Baltic Centers and Lithuanian Research and Study Institutions" [No. 09.3.1-ESFA-V-709-01-0002]. Using this opportunities in the last 3 years, teachers of four subjects went on 9 internships abroad (Germany,Poland, Finland, Latvia, Czech Republic); the visits last 1 week. During their stay, teachers not only gave lectures, but also have made new contacts, has sought opportunities for joint projects and research with colleagues; some use the opportunity to supplement also their course study material.

(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis

As stated in the SER, in the table closing this part, where expert recommendations provided during the last external evaluation related to Teaching staff are given (p. 33), one can read that the stimulation of the teachers' mobility was recommended, and that has really intensified over the last three years. However, while reading the data given at the p. 31, one find only the names of three teachers, from which one made six visits, one – three, and one – one. Two of them are professors with more than 20 years of academic experience and one might think that they are taking advantage of their position and previous relationships with foreign partners in this way. It is striking that younger staff members do not participate in these exchanges. The previous recommendations therefore remain valid.

● *Evaluation of the conditions to improve the competences of the teaching staff.*

(1)   Factual situation

As the SER states (p. 32), the VMU academics can improve their competences according to rules of the Description of Procedure for Professional Development at VMU (2018). They can participate in training courses (University-provided as well as ones organised by Lithuanian or international institutions for professional development) in 8 groups of competences: higher education didactics competences, digital competences, research competences, management competences, foreign language competences, intercultural competences, subject-related competences and personal competences. The University-provided possibilities for professional development are free of charge for VMU teachers. Those who choose professional development possibilities regarding their teaching and research interests organized outside the University can apply for support from their department, research clusters or use other potential opportunities.

Program teachers participate in the courses organized by VMU Innovative Studies Institute (on work using Moodle, Adobe Connect), VMU Institute of Foreign Languages (English language development courses), in other trainings conducted by foreign university specialists (e.g., "Teaching and learning for student engagement") at VMU, and also in other

seminars held at other universities (e.g., KTU seminar "CULT - the search for creativity in the 21st century").

(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The information given in the SER show that the HEI institution develops various forms of helping teaching staff to develop or improve pedagogical and research competences. However, this part of the SER is quite vague and does not contain any specific figures or other information about the actual use by the teaching staff of the possibilities offered. During the meeting with the group responsible for facilities presentation the interest of the teaching staff for various trainings of new technologies' use was stressed, but it included teachers of others programs too. (2) During the meeting with the staff it became evident that conditions for the research development of the teaching staff is a university-wide problem. The teaching load is high, therefore, they carry out their research activities mostly during their free time. The possibility of applying for sabbatical leave was mentioned during the meetings with Senior administration and teaching staff but not in the SER.

The SER does not mention any financial help to the research from VMU. Nevertheless, the teaching staff do manage to produce research of good quality, and it would do better if they are given proper conditions (more time should be given for research).

Recommendations for this evaluation area:

(1) Given the heterogeneous nature of the teaching staff, proper coordination of didactic work should be the subject of utmost attention. The Team would strongly recommend to step up the communication and cooperation between all staff members.

(2) During the meeting with the staff it became evident that conditions for the research development of the teaching staff are a university=wide problem. The teaching load of is high, therefore, they carry out their research activities mostly during their free time. Nevertheless, the teaching staff do manage to produce research of good quality, and it would do better if they are given proper conditions . The Team would strongly recommend to give more time for research.

(3) The most common form of staff mobility is that provided by the Erasmus programme. Still the potential of the different Erasmus programs is not fully exploited. The Team would strongly recommend to reinforce mobility for teachers, especially younger.

3.6. LEARNING FACILIETIES AND RESOURCES

Study field learning facilities and resources should be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- *Evaluation of the suitability and adequacy of the physical, informational and financial resources of the field studies to ensure an effective learning process.*

(1) Factual situation

Regarding physical resources, the SER states that the SP's subjects usually take place in the Faculty building which is located in the Multifunctional Centre for Studies and Research. The HEI's buildings are adapted for the needs of the disabled: accesses to elevators, special wheelchair lifts, libraries include special workspaces, too. The premises are equipped with computers, projectors, internet connection, and other audio and video equipment. In cases when additional equipment is required, it is provided according to the organization of a specific study subject and its application of study methods.

For the virtual learning environment and collaboration, systems such as *Outlook*, *Moodle* platforms are used, there was also current facilitation of teachers' and students' work was implemented: platforms *Adobe Connect, BigBlueButton, Office365 Teams* are used. The HEI's physical infrastructure of the library service units creates conditions for the members of the University community to visit the library physically. The library uses self-service facilities of borrowing and return of books. It is also equipped for visitors of special needs with various computer software, a Braille device, keyboards for the visually impaired, and adjustable furniture. The SER also mentions the importance of access to traditional and electronic information resources and that the demand for the electronic information resources has grown. Therefore, the electronic information resources for studies and research are available via subscribed databases, VDU CRIS (since 2019), VMU Virtual Library.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The team assesses this category as adequate.

During the discussion with the learning facilities' representatives, the team was assured that the new premises suit the needs of the academic community better than the premises used to before. The demand for knowledge in IT and ITC systems has grown and therefore a number of seminars on ITC systems' technicalities are organized in accordance to the request of the head of the department. In addition, the information resources that have already been accessible to the academic community tend to serve all the needs and no additional subscriptions or improvements were requested currently.

- *Evaluation of the planning and upgrading of resources needed to carry out the field studies.*

(1) Factual situation

The HEI upgrades computers (about 20 percent every year), and purchases projectors in accordance to the resource needs plan provided by the Faculty. The software is updated or

supplemented every six months. Regarding the information resources relevant to the studies, the teachers responsible for the study program and subjects maintain contact with the library and express their need for documents for the study program.

(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The team assesses this category as adequate.

During the discussion with the learning facilities' representatives, the team was informed that due to moving to another building, now each staff member (academics) has their own personal computer which was not present during the previous visit. Even though it was not possible to visit the site of the HEI, the review team was assured that the moving is seen to be affecting the study and research processes positively.

Recommendations for this evaluation area:

1) The team recommends that close collaborative contact be maintained between the program's academic staff and the library/information resources staff, to ensure continuing and up-to-date access to relevant materials.

3.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLICITY

Study quality management and publicity shall be evaluated according to the following indicators:

- *Evaluation of the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system of the studies.*

    (1)   Factual situation

    The evaluation of the effectiveness of internal quality assurance of the studies is based upon multiple guidelines or policies, as assessed and addressed by decentralized (faculty or program level) bodies. Thus, the main quality assurance guidelines utilized are the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area; the VMU Statute; the VMU Study Regulations; the Description of Procedure for Study Quality Assurance at VMU; the Description of Procedure of Feedback for Improvement of Quality of Studies at VMU; and the Description of Procedure for Study Course Attestation at VMU. (SER, pp. 38-39) Most of these internal VMU documents were revised and/or updated in 2019, with the VMU Statute being revised in 2018. These policies and procedures seem consistent with good practice in quality assurance and maintenance, and are comparable with the practice of other comparable institutions.

    The main implementation of quality assurance in the Literary Studies program lies with the Faculty Council, the Study Program Committee, the Faculty Dean, and the Department Head. Although each of these bodies or individuals has some oversight regarding program

quality assurance, the main responsibility appears to lie with the SPC. The membership of the SPC consists of eight members, of whom five are teaching staff, two are social partners, and one is a student representative.

The SPC monitors program adequacy and effectiveness through multiple mechanisms, both formal and informal; it was reported to the team that many comments, suggestions, or complaints are dealt with in a relatively informal and personalized manner (multiple discussions, 9.12.2020) There are also anonymous student surveys conducted, as well as teacher surveys; graduate exit surveys; and alumni surveys.

There thus appears to be an effective division of quality assurance methodologies and mechanisms to make useful interventions in program deficiencies, or to exploit areas of opportunity.

(2) Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The team assesses that the general quality assurance approach of the Literary Studies program is adequate. good and responsive. It utilizes multiple surveys to obtain student and teacher input, and both teachers and students verified that these surveys are treated seriously by the responsible management of the program. They also verified that the personalized, often informal, interaction of teachers and students has proved effective in dealing with most concerns (such as, for example, scheduling difficulties). The team encourages the continuation of these policies, with one gentle note: as noted in the SER (p. 40), students often raise questions or concerns "in direct discussions with teachers"; this is admirable when it works, but it also requires student courage to raise complaints directly with teachers, and additionally requires an openness to criticism or suggestion on the part of the teaching staff. This does not appear to have been problematic thus far, but it is always possible that students may need additional encouragement to raise problems or comments directly to teaching staff.

- *Evaluation of the effectiveness of the involvement of stakeholders (students and other stakeholders) in internal quality assurance. Evaluation of the planning and upgrading of resources needed to carry out the field studies.*

(1) Factual situation

As noted above, the main program responsibility for quality assurance lies with the SPC, the membership of which contains a student representative, and two social partners. They utilize multiple mechanisms of quality assessment, most notably surveys conducted with the students, teachers, graduates, and alumni. Stakeholders are therefore appropriately represented in the SPC.

It is unclear to the team, however, how effectively social partners and other stakeholders are used outside of the SPC, and excluding the generally informal discussions that take place

between teachers and students. In conversation with the alumni and social partners (9.12.2020), it was uncertain how these stakeholders were involved in the recent program restructuring. The involvement of these stakeholders seemed largely informal, and without clear guidelines or articulated outcomes.

The stakeholders repeatedly expressed admiration for the program, the teaching staff, and the students. Additionally, they stated their willingness to be involved on both informal and formal levels. The team must again note, however, that a substantial program restructuring took place without clear input from social partners. Most of the comments received by the team were positive reflections on previous iterations of the Literary Studies program.

(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The team assesses this category as adequate.

The team assesses that there is positive formal and informal stakeholder involvement in the Literary Studies program. It is appropriate to have a student representative on the SPC, and the presence of the two social partners is also desirable. The team additionally believes that there is a willingness amongst the teaching staff and management of the program to utilize stakeholder suggestions or expertise, such as implementing student suggestions, monitoring the skills required by the job market, and creating and/or hosting internship possibilities.

The team was somewhat concerned, however, by the apparent lack of concrete engagement by the social partners in recent program developments. The alumni, social partners, and students all expressed willingness to be involved in the program, particularly in relation to structure, labor market assessment, and practical work experience. The alumni and social partners are also willing to give formal or informal guest lectures (indeed, some mentioned having done so).

It is therefore the recommendation of the team that external stakeholders, particularly social partners and alumni, be more actively and formally engaged in quality assurance procedures and decisions regarding the Literary Studies program. This recommendation applies generally, but is particularly pointed in regard to any future program restructuring or realignment, when formal stakeholder involvement would be a significant asset.

- *Evaluation of the collection, use and publication of information on studies, their evaluation and improvement processes and outcomes.*

    (1)   Factual situation

    The collection, use, and publication of information on studies and their evaluation/improvement processes is a procedure that occurs at regular intervals. Course specific evaluations are conducted after each course (thus, at the conclusion of the semester), while broader assessments (teacher performance review, etc.) are annual,

Instructors are able to access the anonymous survey results for their classes, and to implement changes or suggestions as may be necessary.

General program review is annual, as part of these periodic surveys and teaching evaluations. This is formally overseen by the SPC, in coordination with the Faculty Dean and the Department Head. Again, it was emphasized in conversation with the team (9.12.2020) that the size and informality of the progam permit the offering of suggestions or requests in a conversational milieu, so that many of the improvements or modifications based on student requests may not formally come to the notice of the SPC through their surveys or data analysis.

It is the general perception of the team that these processes are almost exclusively internal. For example. it is unclear to the team what external body or bodies the SPC reports to in regard to the solicitation and response to evaluations. This may not be a program fault, but it remains a point of perplexity to the team as to whether the SPC, or perhaps the Faculty Dean, is also required to explain or justify their decisions to act, or not to act, upon the evaluation mechanisms available.

(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The team assesses that the general collection, use, and dissemination of program information, evaluation, and development is adequate. By their own testimony, it meets the needs and desires of the majority of the teachers and students. The survey system seems to be widely understood and implemented, and the teaching staff particularly noted that the results are valuable.

It is a comment of the team, however, that most of these evaluation processes seem highly or exclusively internal. However objective and dispassionate the SPC may wish to be in analysing data, it might be useful to include more formal outside comment, particularly through the involvement of alumni or other social partners. Such engagement has already occurred, beneficially: in 2019, discussions with social partners identified project-based skills as being a deficiency of the Literary Studies graduates, as a result of which a new elective course—"Project Management Basics"—was created to address that gap (SER, p. 40) Such additional inclusion of social partners and external partners and stakeholders is a potential benefit to this program.

● *Evaluation of the opinion of the field students (collected in the ways and by the means chosen by the Centre or the HEI) about the quality of the studies at the HEI.*

(1)   Factual situation

As previously noted, current students are surveyed at the end of each semester for their opinions, impressions, suggestions, and criticisms of each course taken. The surveys permit "open-ended" responses. Additionally, students are asked to undertake an Exit survey when

they graduate, which attains an admirably high participation rate of "about 75% of students." (SER, p. 41) Finally, alumni are contacted one year after graduation by the Career Center to comment upon their employment status and other related job market questions. (SER, p. 27)

The program management, teaching staff, and students all verified (multiple conversations, 9.12,2020) that the comments of students, staff, and alumni are all treated as being valued and potentially beneficial to the structure and/or organization of the Literary Studies program.

(2)   Expert judgement/indicator analysis

The team assesses this category as adequate.

The team is satisfied that the students and the alumni are surveyed for their perceptions, and that the survey results are genuinely 1) anonymous, and 2) considered sincerely.

The team recommends, however, trying more strenuously to incorporate alumni into the academic life of current students. The alumni with whom the team spoke (9.12.2020) noted repeatedly that they are willing to serve as guest lecturers, program advisors, internship hosts, or general professional "mentors," and this should be encouraged. It is the assessment of the team that program graduates represent a strong, but at present under-utilized, asset to the Literary Studies program, and incorporating them formally is encouraged.

Recommendations for this evaluation area:

1) The team recommends that external stakeholders, particularly social partners and alumni, be more actively and formally engaged in quality assurance procedures and decisions regarding the Literary Studies program. This recommendation applies generally, but is particularly pointed in regard to any future program restructuring or realignment, when formal stakeholder involvement would be a significant asset.

IV. EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENCE

Core definition: Excellence means exhibiting characteristics that are very good and, implicitly, not achievable by all.

Explanatory context Excellence enshrines one meaning of quality: a traditional view that associates quality with the exceptional.

- The team commends the Literary Studies program staff members on establishing and maintaining their serious research profile, and publishing their work in thoughtful, international, peer-reviewed publications (or with reputable academic publishers of international reputation).

- The team commends the breadth of participation in the teaching delivery of the program, notably the inclusion of instructors from other departments, or external experts providing guest lectures. Additionally, the team is encouraged by the clear forward-planning evidenced by the development of younger/junior staff members, as they indicate the long-term stability and deliverability of the program.

  - The team recognizes and encourages the efforts being made to encourage personalization in the program; this applies both to the range of options available to students of the program, but also to the increasing opportunities for staff members to develop their competencies.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS*

1, Improve and increase internal coordination

The team is concerned that there is inadequate informational coordination among the staff members, with students, among teachers (particularly regarding assessment principles) and with alumni and other social partners. It is the opinion of the team that there is a worrisome lack of informational coordination in this program, and that information distribution could be strongly improved.

2. Attempt to increase student mobility

As noted in the report, the team accepts the fact that many program students are unable to participate in mobility opportunities because of family or professional obligations. Yet it is highly desirable to promote mobility opportunities for those who may be capable of undertaking them. Incoming mobility could also be improved.

3. Monitor teaching workloads

The team is somewhat concerned that the teaching hours and other academic workloads are quite high in this program, leaving the staff with little time available for research and other responsibilities outside of their general teaching and consultation obligations.

4. Attempt to avoid repetition or redundancy between B.A. and M.A. programs

The team is aware that students are allowed to apply and enrol from different undergraduate backgrounds, which leads to second-cycle student bodies with significantly different levels of field-specific preparation. Yet it is the understanding of the team that those who have come up through an undergraduate program sometimes cover in the M.A. program material or themes already covered by their undergraduate work. This should be minimized wherever possible.

*If the study field is going to be given negative evaluation (non-accreditation) instead of RECOMMENDATIONS main **arguments for negative evaluation** (non-accreditation) must be provided together with a **list of "must do" actions** in order to assure that students admitted before study field's non-accreditation will gain knowledge and skills at least on minimum level.

VI. SUMMARY

Main positive and negative quality aspects of each study field evaluation area at Vytautus Magnus University higher education institution.

As noted throughout this report, the program is a reasonable and appropriately structured program to meet a small but valuable need in society and culture. The fields available to graduates of the program incline to those areas of outsized public impact, such as writing, editing, reviewing, and other public-facing professions.

The program has a diverse and collaborative staff, with laudable encouragement for upcoming junior staff, which implies the long-term stability of the program. The team is also supportive of the willingness/availability of social partners to participate, and would urge the program management to make more use of this valuable opportunity.

The team is of the opinion that this program is well-aligned and designed to achieve the intended learning outcomes, and believes that a motivated student could receive a solid education within it. It seems to the team to be congruent and comparable with similar European and North American programs (in terms of material covered, outcomes desired, and student autonomy promoted).

The weaknesses of the program have been noted in the report, but are addressable. None of the weaknesses are disqualifying for the program. The most notable areas to be addressed would include the need to increase and improve coordination of information and assessment throughout the program; increasing student mobility (outgoing and incoming); and addressing the potential overload of instructor teaching and consultation hours. Other additional recommendations are contained within the narrative body of this report.

The team thanks all the VMU Literary Studies management, staff, administrators, students, and social partners who participated in this process; their contributions and candor enabled the team to formulate a clear picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the Literary Studies program, and the team here formally recognizes their contributions and effort.

Expert panel signatures:

1. **Prof. dr. Andrew Goodspeed (team leader)** *academic,*
2. **Prof. dr. Elżbieta Anna Skibińska-Cieńska,** *academic,*
3. **Prof. dr. Kai Mikkonen,** *academic,*
4. **Ms. Aušra Martišiūtė-Linartienė,** *representative of social partners'*
5. **Ms. Sonata Bortelytė,** *students' representative.*