



CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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**EVALUATION REPORT**

**STUDY FIELD**

**HISTORY**

at Vytautas Magnus University

**Review team:**

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Report language – English

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## Study Field Data

<b>Title of the study programme</b>	<b>History</b>	<b>East-Central European and Lithuanian Historical Studies</b>
State code	6121NX044	6211NX044
Type of studies	University studies	University studies
Cycle of studies	First cycle	Second cycle
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Full-time studies (4 years)	Full-time studies (2 years)
Credit volume	240	120
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Bachelor's degree in Humanities	Master's degree in Humanities
Language of instruction	Lithuanian	Lithuanian
Minimum education required	Secondary	Bachelor's degree in Humanities, Social sciences or Art studies
Registration date of the study programme	1992 (renewed registration 05/06/2000)	1994 (renewed registration 05/06/2000)

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

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

The study field and cycle is **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 assigned according to the Experts Selection Procedure (hereinafter referred to as the Procedure) as approved by the Director of Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education on 31 December 2019 [Order No. V-149](#). The Review Visit to the HEI was conducted by the team on 2 December 2020. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Review Visit was conducted online using video conferencing tools (MS Teams).

1. **Prof. dr. Jolanta Choińska-Mika (team leader)**, *Professor at the Institute of History, University of Warsaw, Poland.*
2. **Prof. dr. Jörg Hackmann**, *Professor at the Department of History, University of Szczecin (Poland) and Research Fellow at the Department of History, University of Greifswald (Germany).*
3. **Assoc. Prof. Peter D'Sena**, *Learning & Teaching Specialist, Office of the Vice-Chancellor at the University of Hertfordshire, The United Kingdom.*
4. **Mrs. Giedrė Švėgždaitė-Randienė**, *Director of "Ekspomūza", Lithuania.*
5. **Ms. Maria-Giovanna Lotito**, *student of University of Teramo, 2nd cycle study programme in Public Administration.*

### 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 the site-visit:

No.	Name of the document
1.	Virtual presentation (slides and video material) of learning facilities and resources of the Faculty of Humanities at Vytautas Magnus University.
2.	Summary of the results of students' feedback surveys (teaching and learning evaluation; first-year bachelor students; graduates; alumni; employers) conducted by Vytautas Magnus University in the years 2018-2019.
3.	Course descriptors (syllabi) of the main history field subjects of the first and second cycles.
4.	Additional information about teaching staff's professional competences development at Vytautas Magnus University.

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

Vytautas Magnus University (VMU) was established in 1922 and since its re-establishment in 1989 has become closely entwined with developing an understanding of the political and cultural history of the modern Lithuanian state. After the restoration of independence from Soviet domination, it was the only university in the country without any significant vestiges of a Soviet-styled educational experience; and was, from its inception oriented towards the standards more regularly seen in western academic cultures. Since 1989 many former Lithuanian exiles have supported its academic endeavours and as a reflection of their own experiences VMU's Faculty of Humanities saw Diaspora Studies become prominent both as a field of research and teaching. In particular, the Department of History has developed productive collaborations with the Institute of the Lithuanian Diaspora (1994 onwards); and the publication of OIKOS, an important scholarly journal, followed in 2006. Thus, through their research and scholarly activity, the department and its academic staff play an important role in contributing to knowledge and understanding not only within the University, but also nationally.

## II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

History study field and *first cycle* at Vytautas Magnus University is given **positive** evaluation.

*Study field and cycle assessment in points by evaluation areas.*

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

\*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.

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

*Study field and cycle assessment in points by evaluation areas.*

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

\*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:*

#### ***3.1.1. 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.***

The Self Evaluation Report (SER) indicates that the department of history demonstrates a good understanding of the needs of the modern labour market. In both the first and second cycles, students are given opportunities to develop in-depth knowledge through a variety of teaching and learning experiences that would make them appropriate for and attractive to a range of potential employers, from research institutions to others in the public and private sector. The evidence from interviews with the department's social partners also strongly suggests that they are satisfied with the knowledge and skills of students from both cycles. Moreover, the panel are of the view that the department is to be commended for the relationships that have evolved with social partners in the region.

Some of the department's academically successful students go on to study at postgraduate level; others are prepared for work in, for example but not exclusively, the fields of education, heritage, archaeology, museology, and cultural management.

#### ***3.1.2. 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.***

Programmes of both first and second cycles are aligned with the University's vision and ambition. The SER presents this clearly when it states that 'in the spirit of *Artes Liberales*, the mission of the Faculty is to cherish humanistic and humanitarian culture and values; [and] to research the uniqueness of Lithuanian culture and to promote it on an international scale; [and] to nurture civic, national and European self-awareness and to foster Lithuanian studies and multilingual research'. This underpins the objective of working to ensure that students are prepared to become well-qualified, flexible specialists, and be able to adapt to a changing labour market, and to an array of societal needs in and beyond the region.

#### ***3.1.3. Evaluation of the compliance of the field and cycle study programme with legal requirements.***

The aims and outcomes of both programmes meet the legal requirements of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania. They also both comply with and correspond to Lithuania's Qualifications Framework and relevant criteria contained in the Framework for Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area.

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

The aims and learning outcomes of both programmes are constructed in a way which intends to provide students with high quality training. Student knowledge and understanding is



assessed in a variety of ways and the panel were pleased to find evidence of some innovative assessment being carried out by individual tutors, albeit carried out independently in just a few modules.

The expert panel are keen that programmes, as a whole, should be able to benefit from innovative and 'best' practice. However, the department does not currently seem to systematically discuss pedagogic change and development, nor is there a mechanism for coordinating and mapping methods of assessment with a view to facilitating student progression or tracking longitudinal and holistic engagement with graduate attributes. We therefore suggest that a more coordinated approach, deploying, for example, a centralised mapping of assessments over the course of the student experience could be used to create a strategic approach using assessment *for* learning to plan for progression and spread innovative and, where relevant, 'authentic' assessments across modules. [Note: it would be of benefit to students across the whole University if one of the institution's central systems/units responsible for advancing pedagogic development investigate pedagogic strategies such as Assessment for Learning and Authentic Assessment and then disseminate, to staff, ways for them to take theory into their own practice.]

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

In terms of subject content, the expert panel was satisfied that, given the numbers of staff in the department, students in both programmes are given the opportunity to engage with a good chronological and geographical range of materials. Moreover, the subject matter bears a strong relationship to tutor expertise.

The expert panel commend the department for the opportunities they present to students, through an interesting, varied, and engaging curriculum. Most especially, we commend the department on the opportunity they present to students to utilise interdisciplinary perspectives for investigating the past.

Students also benefit from the research and scholarly activity of their tutors through the department's ability to use research-informed teaching. This research-informed approach can be seen both in the overall curriculum design, and in the research-oriented tasks set by some of the tutors in individual modules. For example, departmental specialities in cutting-edge subjects such as diaspora studies feature in the programme and appropriately levelled tasks encourage students to develop their own research skills. From the interviews, the panel could see that students were both aware of and acknowledged the importance of these curricular opportunities, and also expressed strong levels of satisfaction about the ways in which the teaching of contentious subjects in Public History, can support the development of tangible skills, such as debating. They also appreciated the ways in which the programme developed other graduate attributes and so-called soft skills, such as critical reflection and, more generally, the complex role of the historian and their work in broader society.

When appointing new staff in the future, the department should take into consideration the ways in which they would give students a broader range of competences which do not just relate to historical period or geographical region, but are more to do with methods of enquiry

such as the digital humanities. [This aspect of the student experience is mentioned as a desirable area of development in part 3.5.1.]

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

In common with similar programmes across Europe, students are given an opportunity to choose from a range of historical subject matter as they continue through their learning experience. In particular, the dissertation/'capstone' module in both programmes gives students some latitude to negotiate and hence personalise their subject choice.

It is a truism that the availability of (a) modules studied early on in the programme, (b) staff expertise and (c) linguistic competence of students will be key determinants for the potential for students to have the capacity to choose a broad range of subjects when personalising their choices at the tail end of their programme. Consequently, while students meet the intended learning outcomes in each of the programmes, the panel noted that the dominant subject matter of dissertations was somewhat limited by both period and region. We would encourage tutors to support broader intellectual curiosity amongst their students with regards to the regions they choose to research about for their dissertations.

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

Students reported that they can access appropriate support and guidance during the process of researching and writing their thesis. The panel were pleased with the ways in which students had to also give a public defence of their thesis.

Compliance is good and the standard of student work is also good. However, there are always ways for provision to keep pace with changing student needs and learning styles. For example, academic staff may wish to have a department-wide discussion in future to devise a strategy to ensure that all students, not only those who are the most proactive, regularly benefit from support and guidance during the process of researching and writing the dissertation.

#### ***Recommendations:***

- 1. The department should, generally, have stronger leadership which demonstrates the capacity to coordinate departmental activity. Under such leadership, for example, the department should specifically develop a system for mapping student assessments over the course of their programmes to create a strategic approach in planning for progression.*
- 2. When appointing new staff in the future, the department should consider candidates with expertise in the digital humanities.*
- 3. The department should devise a strategy to ensure that all students regularly and systematically benefit from support and guidance during the process of researching and writing their dissertation.*
- 4. A strategy to increase students' opportunities for learning foreign languages should be devised. Competence in the English language is strong, but, ideally, there should be greater*

*engagement with other languages. Increasing capacity in this way would help students to increase the range of their historical research in and across the region.*

### **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:***

#### ***3.2.1. 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.***

The department consists of a number of tutors who are recognised, respected and published with distinction in their fields of historical enquiry; and, as a department, their contribution to scientific activity in the field of historical studies is sufficient. Moreover, they find success in competing for externally funded projects; and they participate in collaborative research. The fruits of their research are often published not only in Lithuanian, but also in other languages.

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

Lectures and reading lists for students are refreshed and updated in order to take into account the perspectives of the broader academic community and resources acquired by the central University library reflect these developments within their budget's capacity. There is a well-developed and important focus on taking their historical research about Lithuania, diaspora studies (as mentioned above) and, more generally, the History of East Central Europe into the curriculum.

However, in addition to this undoubtedly important focus on their disciplinary/historical centres of expertise, there is also scope for greater attention to be paid to creating a community of practice in the department which is concerned to value and learn about the latest developments in teaching, learning and assessment in higher education. The expert panel were particularly concerned that amongst some more established staff there seemed to be some indifference about engaging with their own continuing professional development with regards to systematic personal improvement in methods of teaching, learning and quality assurance. Hence, the expert panel are of the opinion that the department can further improve its capacity to link the latest developments of science, art, and technology with the content of what is studied by paying greater attention to the ways in which historians use educational theory to inform their professional practice. With this in mind, it is very important to note that the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) has gathered pace in all disciplines, especially history, over the past two decades; and departments in many comparator institutions both in Lithuania and abroad are acknowledging the importance of SoTL's work for their own practice in higher education's ever-evolving landscape. Increased and effective engagement with best practice in teaching, learning and assessment will improve linkage and bring benefits to the student experience; and, for example, a better knowledge of the complex skein of the research-teaching nexus and the diverse strategies for

progressively taking it into practice will be of obvious benefit to a research-intensive department.

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

The intention of both programmes is that students gain familiarity, progressively, with regards to methods of historical enquiry and research. The overall objective, at both levels, is for students to be able to carry out research projects in an independent manner. The point is made, elsewhere in this report in greater detail, that mapping progression would be of benefit to both staff and students.

The panel were encouraged to find that some students benefited from being involved in research projects being carried out by their tutors, but the panel would suggest that the department consider ways in which such opportunities can be simulated more broadly across the cohort.

#### ***Recommendations:***

*5. The expert panel recommend that the department has stronger leadership and devise ways to encourage greater collaboration within and across the history group in order to define, own and gain a greater collective view about approaches to teaching, learning and assessment.*

*6. In particular, tutors should endeavour to learn more about, what in SoTL, is known as the research-teaching nexus; and, additionally, more about different forms of assessment, including authentic assessment and assessment for learning, in order to plan strategically for students' progression over the course of the programme.*

*7. The University should also work to encourage greater collaboration within the history group so that it can move forward to define, own, and gain a greater collective view about approaches to teaching, learning and assessment across the programmes.*

## **3.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT**

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

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

For both the first and second cycles/programmes, the procedures for admissions have been approved by the University and meet all the national rules of transparency and equity. Access to both programmes is through public competition. In the event that applicants have the same grade point average, the discriminating factor is the University's assessment of their motivation to study. The expert panel are satisfied that the University's procedures are appropriate.

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

For both cycles, recognition of academic qualifications is based on national and international requirements. Additionally, VMU has a specific procedure managed by the International Co-operation Department which is based on the recognition and conversion of the acquired evaluation of ECTS. The department is also responsible for the evaluation of competences acquired in formal and non-formal learning. One other matter to note: in the past three years there were no foreign students. The department may wish to initiate an internal discussion to know whether there should be a strategic approach for addressing that situation.

### ***3.3.3. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring academic mobility of students.***

In both the first and second cycles there is the potential for students to study outside Lithuania. This is facilitated by international mobility programmes such as Erasmus+ and other bilateral exchange programmes. It is worth noting, however, that few students take up the opportunity to travel because of domestic and work commitments that mean that leaving home for prolonged periods of time are not feasible for them. However, being able to supplement and enhance learning through study abroad, is highly desirable. If the department and, more generally, the University wishes to increase internationalisation then strategies to develop 'virtual mobility' may well be worth pursuing. This innovative approach may not be a complete substitute for study abroad, but could begin to address the issue of low student participation in regular mobility programmes.

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

Students studying in both cycles are entitled to claim financial and social support of various kinds and as well as the history department, the centrally located units such as the Student Affairs Department take the lead on some of the specific responsibilities for administrative and financial problems. For example, there are centralised units catering for counselling and careers needs. In addition, the students' representative body also has ways of supporting those in need. However, the University does not have a specific survey to evaluate the level or quality of the services offered to the students and so there is no systematic or accurate evaluation of student perceptions about them.

Some students expressed a concern that there were sometimes difficulties in taking up an internship (work placement), because many of them, possibly a third from interview evidence, need to maintain other, part-time employment in order to keep themselves in a financially stable position. It would be advisable for the department to hold both internal conversations and discussions with the appropriate central unit within the University to consider a strategy to support students so that their personal financial situation does not militate against equal access to the opportunities presented by internships.

During the online visit, the students interviewed confirm that pastoral support was received from staff and that staff were approachable. Additionally, with regards to pastoral support, student knowledge about specific procedures for accessing different types of support seemed to be patchy; and their general inclination was to try to solve their problems personally rather than seek guidance through institutional channels.

### ***3.3.5. Evaluation of the sufficiency of study information and student counselling.***

Each year, the University's Student Centre and the Students Affairs Department organises a week-long, 'Introduction to Studies' event. There is evidence that the information from this induction event is also made available after the event. Interviews with students of both study cycles indicated that they were happy with the ways in which they could access academic and other support specifically from tutors. They were less knowledgeable about how to access the University's central support systems for counselling.

The availability of support from the department is appropriate and students recognise the helpfulness of tutors. However, disseminating information about the University's central support systems could be carried out not only initially, on induction, but also routinely each semester, for example, when information about new modules is distributed.

#### ***Recommendations:***

*8. We would recommend that the department liaises with the University's central services to co-operate in strategising to further improve take-up of international mobility opportunities; and consider the potential for technology to provide virtual mobility. Commensurately, we also recommend a more strategic approach for attracting foreign students.*

*9. We recommend that the department liaises with the requisite University central service to create a strategy to allow students with part-time employment and other constraining commitments to ensure equal access to the opportunities afforded by internships.*

## **3.4. STUDYING, STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT**

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

### ***3.4.1. 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.***

In the interview with students, the expert panel noted that students expressed a strong degree of loyalty to the history department and, importantly, they showed appreciation of their tutors' work to support them both in intellectual and personal terms. In the discussion their suggestion was that some students were far less motivated than others to be actively engaged in classroom activities and this could sometimes be an impediment to the group dynamic. If, after internal departmental discussions, this is considered to be an issue, then pedagogic strategies should be developed to address it.

Suffice to say, that whether tutors are working online or face-to-face, presenting students with opportunities to be actively engaged as participants in their own learning is of great importance. We would therefore recommend that when undertaking discipline-specific pedagogic training, attention is given to interrogating ways in which 'research-tutored' and 'research-based' teaching can be brought to the student experience to inculcate participation aligned to historical enquiry. With specific regard to research-informed teaching, we suggest that staff would be able to better understand the principles and strategies for taking

pedagogic theory into practice through engagement with increased training in the scholarship of teaching and learning. (For a detailed commentary supporting the rationale for this approach, please see section 3.2.2, above.)

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

The University's regulations, as referred to in the SER, permits students with particular needs, ranging from those associated with illness, to others with disabilities, to benefit from pauses to their studies.

In addition to these types of issues faced by students, it would be worth the department considering carrying out a learning needs audit of students on entry to ascertain whether there are vulnerabilities wrought from different learning styles. Even if educationalists cannot agree that gauging learning styles is a cut and dried science, it would be accurate to say that some students will have preferences for both absorbing and transmitting information. In the sense that these differing, individualistic styles constitute a form of special needs, it would be worthwhile for the department to investigate ways in which teaching, learning and particularly assessment can be honed to accommodate variety. The writing of essays is a traditional and important component of most history provision, but they tend to militate against people with certain styles who, otherwise, might have the capacity to become excellent historians. In short, students are likely to come in with a broad range of special needs, but unless the department carries out an audit and reflects on how assessment can accommodate a range of learning styles, some may struggle to keep pace with the rest of the cohort despite their intellectual capacity.

#### ***3.4.3. 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.***

The expert panel used portions of the interviews with both tutors and students to enquire about the ways in which monitoring and feedback to promote self-assessment and planning was systematised. Responses revealed, as one might expect, the use of formal, summative feedback and less formal feedback most routinely given when requested by students. Importantly, students reported that when informal, mid-module feedback was requested, it was useful, professional, and supportive.

However, the panel observed that assessment tended to be 'exam heavy' and summative. This report gives recommendations, elsewhere, about how strategies to create a climate for change in this regard can be developed.

In addition, it is worth stating here that cohorts in any programme will generally comprise students with diverse learning needs and styles. In the past few years, educational research has indicated that formative assessment (which can, if desired, contribute to the final, summative grade) can motivate, engage, and inform this array of students about their progress. During the interviews with students, they suggested that formative assessments were infrequent and often informal. Importantly, what also emerged is the feeling that tutors

were routinely very supportive to them during modules. We therefore recommend that the department looks to develop opportunities to adjust the imbalance between summative and formative assessment with a view to increasing the systematic flow of information to students about their progress during, rather than at the end of modules; and, at the same time, consider the ways in which formative assessment can partially contribute to the final grade and motivate increased engagement.

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

As stated above, experts based their evaluation on a combination of sources: the SER; and tutor and student interviews. The interviews with the students displayed the type of self-reflexivity which supports the critical evaluation of one's own learning. It is, however, impossible to know how representative this sample of students is of others in the two cohorts.

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

In common with other surveys about post-qualification employment, data collection is not precise as alumni, once departed from the institution, do not always respond to requests for information. There is, however, the maintenance of contact between individual members of the department and alumni. Hence, there is the potential to develop a more formal, department-wide strategy for systematic communication and collaboration. At one level, this may improve data collection by encouraging greater participation in surveys; and at a deeper level, facilitate more ongoing collaborative working with the department and maybe even between alumni. The panel quickly gained the view, from the interviews with alumni and social partners, that there was the potential for vibrant community connections that might even be alumni-led. Certainly, the interview revealed that alumni and social partners displayed high levels of satisfaction with the knowledge and skills of graduates and a spirit of loyalty to the history department both of which suggest that a department-wide initiative would be worth exploring.

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

The overarching principles concerning academic integrity are defined by the University: procedures to prevent and address plagiarism set out by the University's regulations; and issues of discriminatory practice regulated by a Code of Ethics. The Self Evaluation Report noted that some cases of academic dishonesty had been registered in relation to the programmes of study, but none for discrimination. The panel were also satisfied that, with regards to informing tutors about breaches of academic integrity, the University utilises software to analyse student submissions. In common with other higher educational establishments, the University places a strong emphasis on maintaining standards of academic integrity, tolerance, and anti-discriminatory practices. The expert panel could see from the SER that breaches of University codes and regulations were taken seriously.



### ***3.4.7. 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.***

The procedures for student appeals and complaints are determined by the University's regulations. The panel noted that for the period of time covered by this Self Evaluation Report, no formal appeals or complaints had been registered against the history programmes or the department. The panel was interested to know more about the mechanisms for informing students about the requisite procedures; unfortunately, the students interviewed were not cognisant about procedures. We would therefore recommend that, if mechanisms are communicated to them, that it is given greater prominence and referred to, even if only very briefly, in routine module documentation.

#### ***Recommendations:***

*10. The expert panel recommends that a system for collecting destination statistics after graduation be devised. The data that is consequently generated could be used to inform the department's thinking about how best to develop graduate attributes across the curriculum.*

*11. The department should create strategies for increasing variety in the types of assignments carried out by students during the course of their programmes. The objectives for this should include a general move away from 'exam heavy' assessment; an intention to more accurately assess students with a range of different learning styles; improve student engagement through authentic assessment; and more fully utilise formative assessments to inform students about progression.*

*12. That to better capitalise on the department's strong research profile, to learn more about the many strategies for taking research-informed teaching incrementally and progressively forward in the student experience.*

*13. To routinely inform students about the various channels of support that are available to them.*

## **3.5. TEACHING STAFF**

***Teaching shall be evaluated in accordance with the following indicators:***

***3.5.1. 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.***

The levels of staffing, both in terms of numbers and academic quality, are suitable for the delivery of the programmes of both first and second study cycles. Staff are, as stated above, highly respected in their fields of historical enquiry and students appreciate the opportunity to be taught by leading experts. There is diversity, in terms of age, gender and experience amongst departmental members.

In the interviews, tutors agreed that they felt pressured to research and publish. Hence, there was the dominance of a culture that disproportionately valued research over teaching, and staff did not see the relevance to develop their teaching skills. Moreover, they claimed that the University's centralised programme for developing teaching has a tendency to be focused on operational matters and the use of IT systems, rather than an understanding of pedagogic theory and its relationship to practice.

The panel gained the strong impression, from the interviews with tutors, that the pressure to research and publish has developed a tendency for staff to work as individuals rather than as a cohesive unit; and that there was a lack of coordination and strong leadership. Therefore, while there is evidence of pockets of excellence in terms of teaching and learning, there seemed to be no mechanisms for cascading best practice across the department. A case in point is the department's low-level use of the digital humanities in teaching and learning. It exists in small pockets, but in most parts of the programme is neglected. Here, there is a case for staff development and a more coherent approach across programmes, not only in order to benefit the student experience, but also to keep abreast with comparator institutions.

### ***3.5.2. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring teaching staffs' academic mobility.***

With regards to the mobility of tutors, the panel were pleased to find that each year several academic staff made use of Erasmus monies to fund outward mobility, in order to take up short-term teaching and research opportunities in HEIs in mainland Europe. This picture improves when data includes other activities, such as conference participation. Additionally, the department occasionally welcomes international scholars to contribute seminars and lectures.

### ***3.5.3. Evaluation of the conditions to improve the competences of the teaching staff.***

The University's documentation made some claims about the development of the teaching competences of the teaching staff. For example, it was claimed that: 'the training has a direct impact on the professional career of the teachers'; and that 'professional development of the staff is an important part of VMU policy'. The expert panel were keen to see whether these claims were evident from other evidence, such as the experiences of staff themselves and so these matters were explored in the interviews. The meeting with the authors of the Self Evaluation Report (SER) confirmed their assertion that there was little engagement and continuing professional development by academic staff with pedagogic training. However, training associated with furthering research capacity is valued. The panel found that the training that does exist for developing staff knowledge and understanding of pedagogic initiatives was underfunded by comparison with other training courses and, in their opinion, more oriented towards learning about operating IT systems. The SER mentioned a pedagogy training course offered by the University of Warwick, but the staff interview revealed that nobody had taken the opportunity to take part in it due to other work pressures. The University claims, in its documentation, that its central units deliver pedagogic training that provide far more than technology-oriented competencies. However, it is probably the case, especially given the circumstances created by the pandemic, that academic staff are likely to be more concerned with availing themselves of the types of support that improves their

personal engagement with Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL). Nonetheless, it is for the University to ensure that other pedagogic training is still important in order to take the student experience forward. The panel recognise that engagement with pedagogic training can benefit staff through pay-related compensations. Such training should ultimately bear fruit in helping to transform the student experience. [Specific recommendations are made elsewhere in this report about how that might look with regards to aspects of teaching, learning and assessment.]

### **Recommendations:**

*14. We recommend that departmental staff, including established, experienced staff, become far more actively engaged with both generic and discipline-specific pedagogic training offered by the University and elsewhere in order to support best practice in teaching, learning, assessment and curriculum design.*

*15. We recommend that the University's senior staff create and implement a strategic plan for pedagogic training to ensure that academic staff become more effectively engaged in and value continuing professional development in learning, teaching and assessment. The University should provide stronger leadership from the centre to ensure that academic staff understand the importance of pedagogic training and engage more effectively with the scholarship of teaching and learning, not just operational training, in order to enhance their pedagogic practice and the student experience.*

*16. The University's central unit for advancing pedagogic development should investigate pedagogic strategies such as Assessment for Learning and Authentic Assessment and then disseminate, to staff, ways for them to take theory into their own practice.*

## **3.6. LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES**

***Learning facilities and resources should be evaluated according to the following criteria:***

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

The SER indicates that the University upgrades the infrastructure of the study systems, technological facilities, and the availability of academic literature. Hence, students in both programmes can avail themselves of both traditional, hard copy resources and e-resources to support their learning. For example, students have access to an array of databases. There are also good resources for historical enquiry in and around the region and it is certainly possible for staff to access them in pursuit of their research.

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

The history department makes an effort to upgrade resources needed to carry out teaching and learning. Resources are monitored, with the intention of ensuring that they are aligned to

students' needs. The University is able to access inter-library loans. Staff are able to request resources.

The SER states that the department will continue to pay attention to improving both traditional and electronic learning resources to support the student experience and this will be done in a number of ways: by liaising with the University Library in order to increase the stock of relevant resources; and by supporting ways in which improved search systems can be used to access a broader range of literature.

### ***Recommendations:***

*17. The panel recognised that the University has a good repository and would encourage these further developments in order to keep pace with the growth of published materials being made available in and around the region.*

## **3.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLICITY**

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

### ***3.7.1. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system of the studies.***

The expert panel saw, from the SER, that there is a well thought-through set of systems to ensure the maintenance of quality assurance. The University's centralised units scrutinise the work and consistency of the departmental committees through the reports that they submit. Quality Assurance, from the top down, is seen to be based on robust principles. Furthermore, the SER (p.52) gives detail about the collection of data from students, including feedback from them about the quality of teaching and learning.

The SER states that the University has a dedicated project to support the implementation of quality assurance systems. In History, the panel observed that with regards to quality assurance, processes and procedures were delegated to a mixture of individuals, groups, and departmental and Faculty committees. Roles and responsibilities for programme management were consistent with national guidance, with, for example, the department's Study Programme Committee comprising representation from the professoriate, the social partners, and the student body.

### ***3.7.2. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the involvement of stakeholders (students and other stakeholders) in internal quality assurance.***

For both cycles, a centrally managed, end-of-semester survey is issued with the objective of capturing student feedback about their experience in modules. Another survey, for students graduating, aims to capture opinions about the whole programme. Furthermore, a survey for alumni, one year after graduation, seeks to investigate their conditions of employment and the discipline's relationship to their developing professional skills. The Self Evaluation Report and other evidence revealed that graduates were substantially satisfied with both programmes.

First cycle students are presented with a survey in their second semester, but the uptake is too poor to yield any conclusive findings. Consequently, improved data collection and systematic analysis and discussion would be necessary in order to inform any appropriate actions. Additionally, and commendably, the University conducts a survey of employers' perceptions in order to evaluate the quality of student work during internships. The panel commends the use and structure of this survey, which incorporates open-ended responses that have the potential to inform tutors about subject-specific improvement.

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

For both cycles, the Study Programme Committee prepares an annual programme analysis based on survey data received from students, academic staff, and other stakeholders. The Self Evaluation Report confirms that this information is published on the University website, e-mailed to students and staff, and stored in other channels such as Outlook folders.

### ***3.7.4. 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.***

In the interviews, tutors implied that the informal feedback from students was of as great if not greater use to them, for informing their practice, than the analysis of formally collected student survey data. The panel were given the impression that quality assurance of the latter kind was perceived by them to be more of a bureaucratic exercise and are therefore concerned about whether and how survey data is analysed and communicated back to students. While the panel agrees that informal feedback can be enormously valuable and in keeping with the University's spirit of liberality, students should also receive a comprehensive analysis of the cohort's data.

#### ***Recommendations for this evaluation area:***

*18. Strategies for increasing student engagement with surveys should be developed and implemented. The data from student surveys should be analysed and discussed by academic staff and the principal findings and projected outcomes communicated to students. This will ensure consistency with quality assurance processes set out by the Bologna Agreements and the European Standards and Guidelines (2015).*

## IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The University should support the development of stronger departmental leadership with an objective of creating and inculcating a sense of collective identity amongst academic staff and hence greater interest in and coherence and coordination for developing and implementing change in teaching, learning and assessment (as identified and enumerated in the report as specific recommendations for change).

*[please see more detailed recommendations no. 7; 12; 15; 16; 17]*

2. Academic staff, at all levels of seniority and experience, should engage more fully and effectively in continuing professional development with pedagogic training in order to inform curriculum design and their own development. The University should ensure that this engagement is valued and recognised, rather than neglected, and cater for pedagogic training of this kind.

*[please see more detailed recommendations no. 1; 5; 6; 10; 14]*

3. The appointment of new staff should take into account broadening the offer that can be made to students in the programmes of both first and second cycles by, for example, bringing in a person with expertise in teaching digital history.

*[please see more detailed recommendations no. 2; 4]*

4. The department and University should create strategies for improving student opportunities for participation in internships and international mobility.

*[please see more detailed recommendations no. 8; 9]*

5. The flow of information to students should be improved in the following areas: in informing them about their academic progression through the better use of formative assessments; about the support services available to them; and about actions taken in response to data generated by student surveys.

*[please see more detailed recommendations no. 3; 11; 13; 18]*

## V. SUMMARY

The Department of History at Vytautas Magnus University is comprised of academic staff who make a strong academic contribution to the nation's understanding of its past and identity. Teaching staff have good academic qualifications; and their research and publications, particularly those relating to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and diaspora studies, are very well received in and around the region and highly respected by their peers. The expert panel noted, from the interview with students, that they, too, were proud of their tutors' status within the profession, appreciative of the one-to-one and small group support they offered to them and, more generally, conscious of the opportunities proffered by other local cultural repositories and institutions. Additionally, both students and staff demonstrated, from the conversations in their interviews, that they embraced the University's principle of *Artes Liberales* and looked to it to inform their intellectual pursuits.

The expert panel were particularly impressed by the connections and relationships that the department has built and continue to nurture with local and regional social partners, academic institutions, and employers. This is a significant part of departmental provision, as it provides a route for work-based learning and, in some cases, future employment. In the interview social partners demonstrated that working with the University creates a platform for two-way developmental learning. The expert panel are keen for these relationships to be further developed, so that even more students can be afforded the opportunity of placements.

While we rightly acknowledge the department's undoubted strengths in this report, the accompanying recommendations are intended to give a clear steer about the ways in which they can, both as a group and individuals, work to improve the student experience. The purpose of this section is to only provide a summary; consequently, there is no intention to reiterate, in detail, the report's specific recommendations. Suffice to say, here, the expert panel are very keen to ensure that the fruits of the department's research (and the research and scholarly activity of others) are more effectively presented to students using the types of best practice increasingly being deployed elsewhere in the higher education sector. To that end, it is of enormous importance for **all** members of the department, whatever their level of experience or seniority, to be far more pro-active in developing their knowledge and understanding of innovative practice in teaching, learning and assessment. In this regard, the University's central systems and personnel also have a part to play: the provision of educational training needs to be made more relevant and its value, as an essential component part of the academic professional's portfolio, raised. A more informed and engaged department should then, as we recommend, be co-ordinated and strategic in their approach to taking pedagogic theory into practice when, for example, integrating more varied assessments into their programmes. We also recommend a number of other ways in which the department should both seek the support of or work with the University's central systems. For example, it would be worth lobbying for funding to create a discrete post for a teacher of digital history; this, the expert panel feel, would be of great benefit not only to the students by improving the

breadth and relevance of their curriculum, but also to staff, many of whom should be looking to utilise digital resources and methods more fully in their practice.

Finally, the expert panel would like to thank members of department and others in the Faculty of Humanities for all of the hard work that inevitably went into the preparation and writing of the Self-Evaluation Document. Moreover, and most especially, we would also take this opportunity to thank all of the staff, students, social partners and administrators involved in the interviews. We want to assure everyone concerned that we have endeavoured to be scrupulous in our scrutiny of the evidence presented to us, and we have discussed and deliberated over our recommendations in great depth. They are presented with the sole intention of supporting the Department specifically, and the University, more generally, to work towards taking the student experience forward.

**Expert panel signatures:**

1. Prof. dr. Jolanta Choińska-Mika (panel chairperson), *academic*
2. Prof. dr. Jörg Hackmann, *academic*
3. Assoc. Prof. Peter D'Sena, *academic*
4. Mrs. Giedrė Švėgždaitė-Randienė, *representative of social partners*
5. Ms. Maria-Giovanna Lotito, *students' representative*