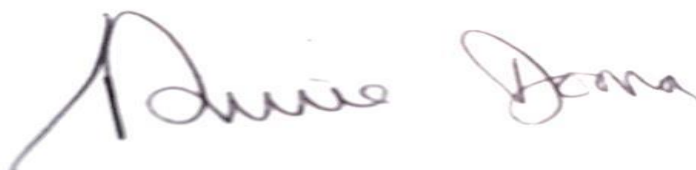|	
Grupės vadovė: Panel chairperson:	Dr. Annie Doona
Vertinimo sekretorė: Review secretary:	Ms. Rowena Pelik
Grupės nariai (kategorija): Panel members (category):	Prof. Ellen Marie Saethre-McGuirk (academic)
	Dr. Anu Allas (academic)
	Mr. Kazimieras Reimeris (social partner)
	Ms. Milda Gineikaitė (student)
SKVC vertinimo koordinatorė Review coordinator at SKVC:	Ms. Rugilė Blusevičienė

2021

Report language – English

CONTENT

I hereby certify that this is the final text of the institutional review report of Vilnius Academy of Arts.

Dr Annie Doona

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The purpose of the external review is to determine the quality of the performance of a higher education institution based on the findings of the external review, to create prerequisites for improvement of the performance of a higher education institution, to promote a culture of quality, and to inform founders, academic community and the society about the quality of higher education institutions.

2. This review report is based on the evidence given in the self-evaluation report, additional evidence requested by the Panel, information provided by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereinafter – Centre, SKVC) and a site visit, where meetings with a wide range of audiences were held.

3. The Panel was composed of the reviewers, following the Experts Selection Procedure approved by the Director of Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education on 31 December 2019 Order No. V-149 and included the following members:

Panel chairperson:	Dr. Annie Doona
Review secretary:	Ms. Rowena Pelik
Panel members:	Prof. Ellen Marie Saethre-McGuirk (academic)
	Dr. Anu Allas (academic)
	Mr. Kazimieras Reimeris (social partner)
	Ms. Milda Gineikaitė (student)
Review coordinator at SKVC:	
	Ms. Rugilė Blusevičienė

4. As a result of external review **Vilnius Academy of Arts** is given a **positive evaluation**.

5. Judgment by the area:

Area	Assessment with points*
MANAGEMENT	3
QUALITY ASSURANCE	3
STUDIES AND RESEARCH (ART)	3
IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	3

*5 points - **excellent**– the area is rated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally;

4 points – **very good** – the area is rated very well in the national context and internationally, without any drawbacks;

3 points – **good** – the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks;

2 points – **satisfactory** – the area meets the minimum requirements, and there are drawbacks that must be addressed;

1 point - **unsatisfactory** – the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental drawbacks.

6. **Two** examples of good practices were found; **eleven** recommendations were made.

II. INTRODUCTION

2.1. Background of the review process

7. The external review of Vilnius Academy of Arts (hereinafter referred to as VAA or the Academy) was organised by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education and carried out in November 2021 by an Expert Panel of international experts (the Panel). It was conducted in accordance with the Procedure for the External Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and Branches of Foreign Higher Education Institutions, Evaluation Areas and Indicators approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania (hereinafter referred to as the Procedure) on 19 of December 2019 Order No. V-1529 and the Methodology for Conducting an Institutional Review in Higher Education approved by the Director of SKVC on 9 of March 2020 Order No V-32 (the Methodology).

8. According to the Procedure the external review consists of the following stages: submission of a self-evaluation report prepared by a higher education institution to the Centre; formation of an expert Panel and analysis of the self-evaluation report; expert Panel visit to the a higher education institution; preparation of the external review report, decision-making on the external review as well as accreditation and publication thereof; follow-up activities aimed at improving the performance of the higher education institution, taking into account the external review report.

9. At the preparatory stage of the external review, the Panel received a detailed self-evaluation report (SER) with 71 annexes. The annexes provided extensive information and supporting data. The Panel requested some additional information, including attendance figures for VAA's in-house exhibitions programme and its Risk Register. SKVC provided to the Panel additional information about the Academy, as set in the Methodology (Chapter 26), including statistical data on students and staff; financial data; findings from the ex-ante and ex-post programme reviews, institutional reviews and evaluations of research and development activities; State-budget allocations for research activities; information on academic ethics from the Office of the Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures of the Republic of Lithuania.

10. The site visit was undertaken after a training Session organized by SKVC staff and preparatory Panel meetings. The Panel conducted a virtual visit to the Academy 16-18 November 2021 where it had meetings with 128 internal and external stakeholders. **Due to the worldwide pandemic situation, the review visit was organised online using video-conferencing tool Zoom** hosted by the Centre. Subsequently, the Panel met virtually to review and agree conclusions and recommendations. The review report was finalised by correspondence and submitted to the SKVC.

11. In line with the Methodology, the external review focused on four areas covered by the evaluation indicators and related criteria: **management**, **quality assurance, studies and research (art)** and **impact on regional and national development**. In analysing the evidence collected, the Panel also gave due consideration to the recommendations of the previous review undertaken in 2013.

12. The review of a higher education institution assesses each of the evaluation areas with one of five ratings: **excellent** – 5 points – the area is rated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally; **very good** – 4 points – the area is rated very well in the national context and

internationally, without any drawbacks; **good** – 3 points – the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks; **satisfactory** – 2 points – the area meets the minimum requirements, and there are drawbacks that must be addressed; **unsatisfactory** – 1 point – the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental drawbacks.

13. The decision on **positive** evaluation is made when none of the evaluation areas is evaluated unsatisfactorily (1 point). The decision on **negative** evaluation is made when at least one of the evaluation areas is evaluated unsatisfactory (1 point).

14. In line with the Methodology, the review report, prepared by the Panel is being reviewed by SKVC and sent to the higher education institution to comment on factual errors and the evaluations based thereon. The Panel revises the report in response to the comments from the higher education institution (if applicable) and submits it to SKVC.

15. The Panel received comments from Vilnius Academy of Arts and considered them. As a result, a small number of minor helpful changes were made to the report.

16. After the Panel considers comments from the higher education institution (if applicable) and finalizes it, the report is being considered by the external Commission of the Higher Education Institutions' Review (hereinafter referred to as the Commission), set up by SKVC. On the basis of the proposal, made by the Commission, provisioned in the Commission's regulations, approved by the order of the Director of SKVC on 8 of January, 2020 order No. V-5, SKVC takes one of the decisions:

- to evaluate the performance of the higher education institution positively;

- to evaluate the performance of the higher education institution negatively.

The decisions of SKVC may be appealed to the Commission for Appeals, formed by SKVC. Subsequently, the decisions of SKVC and the Commission for Appeals may be appealed against in accordance with the procedure established by the Law on Administrative Proceedings of the Republic of Lithuania.

17. On the basis of the external review decision SKVC takes one of the following decisions on the **accreditation** of the higher education institution:

- to **accredit for a period of seven years** if performance of the higher education institution is evaluated positively;

- to **accredit for a period of three years** if performance of the higher education institution is evaluated negatively;

- to **deny accreditation** if the repeated external review results of the higher education institution are negative.

18. SKVC announces the decision on the external review together with the conclusions of the external review and the decision on the accreditation of the higher education institution on it's website. The higher education institution respectively announces the decision on the evaluation of the higher education institution together with the external review report on its website and maintains it until the next external review.

2.2. Background information about the institution

19. Vilnius Academy of Arts is a state higher education institution established by the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania. The Academy is a public legal entity functioning as a public establishment. It traces its foundation to 1793, when the Department of Architecture was established at what is now Vilnius University. VAA is the only specialized higher education institution in Arts, Design, and Architecture in Lithuania.

20. VAA has four geographically based faculties, located in Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda and Telšiai, along with its Institute of Art Research, where art researchers are housed, based in Vilnius. In 2020-2021, VAA had 1563 students, including 30 full-time international students, 337 lecturers (212 Full-time equivalent (FTE)), 17 research staff (12 FTE) and 287 administrative and other support staff (238 FTE). Over the period 2016-2020, a total of 1845 alumni graduated from the Academy: 1278 students completed Bachelor's degrees, 528 completed Master's degrees and 39 completed in doctoral studies in the field of Arts or Research.

21. At the time of the review, VAA offered 44 study programmes in 6 fields of study: Architecture, Design, Art, Media Art, Restoration of Art Objects, History, and Theory of Arts and had offered Management up until 2020. It provided 20 Bachelor's degree programmes, 1 integrated study programme, and 23 Master's programmes. The VAA offers doctoral studies in three fields: Art, Design and History, and Theory of Arts. It also offers a joint programme with the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences in Art Therapy and contributes to the School Pedagogy Vocational Education Studies by training Art teachers at Vilnius University.

22. The Academy owns a museum, galleries and exhibition spaces, a library, a publishing house, art and design laboratories, the Nida Art Colony, a residence in Paris *Cité Internationale des Arts*, a Practice and Recreation Centre in Mizarai, exhibition and museum spaces at Panemunė Castle, and the Art Incubator in Telšiai. It is a shareholder in the Incubator of Audio-visual Arts.

III. ANALYSIS BY EVALUATION AREAS

3.1. Management

Management area is being analysed in accordance to the following indicators and criteria, set up in the Methodology.

1.1. Compliance of the higher education institution's strategic action plan with the mission, assurance of its implementation:
1.1.1. The strategic action plan is consistent with the mission of the higher education institution, legal acts regulating research and study activities and it takes into account the provisions of the national research and study policy, the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area;   *1.1.2. The parts of the strategic action plan (analysis of the current situation, priorities and aims, objectives of the activities, implementation means, resources, planned performance indicators) are appropriate and justified;*   *1.1.3. Regular monitoring of the implementation of the strategic action plan is carried out and the results are used to improve performance management.*

23. **Alignment of the strategic action plan and mission with relevant reference points.** The purpose of the VAA, in accordance with the requirements of the *Law on Higher Education and Research*, is formulated in the *Statute of the Academy.*

While developing intensive artistic and research activities, enjoying a widely recognized high reputation, the Academy shall pursue the development, improvement and dissemination of knowledge of artistic creation, artistic research, social science and the humanities, the education and training of highly qualified professionals capable of making a significant contribution to Lithuanian and global societies in the future [www.vda.lt/default/lt/dokumentai].

The key internal documents are the *Strategy 2020-2028*, the *VAA Integrated Development Strategy for 2012-2020*, and the *Strategic Action Plan*. The Rector's Annual Report provides updates on progress across strategic priorities.

24. The *Strategy of Vilnius Academy of Arts 2020-2028* defines the vision of VAA "to be among the leading higher education institutions of art, design and architecture globally" and outlines its mission as "to create the future of art, design and architecture in Lithuania and to educate those who create and research these fields".

25. The strategic documents of VAA include key elements that reflect Lithuania's policies as part of the European Higher Education Area and European Research Area. VAA's strategic documents identify the results to be achieved in terms of studies, artistic and scientific research and encouraging students to develop their talents. The mission of the Academy is consistent across its documentation and, in the meetings with the Rectorate and with staff, it was clear that there is a good and shared understanding of the vision and mission of VAA.

26. **Action planning.** In July 2019, a new Rector, Prof. Ieva Skaurone, was appointed following a competitive process. A working group was established by Rector's order in 2019 to prepare a new strategy for VAA following a period of intensive consultation with staff, students and social partners. The new strategy was created with a large group across VAA, working in a team-oriented, inclusive way. The process included a review of *Vilnius Academy of Arts Integrated Development Strategy for 2012-2020* and it was clear to the Panel that this was useful in drawing together the different strands of activity across VAA to enable an institution-wide view of progress to 2020. A SWOT was undertaken of the Academy and is included as part of the new strategic plan. In the meeting with the Rector she stated that VAA had looked at alignment of strategic priorities as they reviewed their outgoing strategy and as they worked on the 2020-28 strategy, looking at what tools they needed, and how they would achieve the intended results. The final text of the *Strategy of the Vilnius Academy of Arts 2020-2028* was approved by Senate and then by Council in December 2019.

27. The 2020-2028 Strategy states the intention of VAA to impact regionally, on the country, and internationally. It is a nine-year strategy supported by an action plan for the first three years. Annual action plans are also drawn up that relate to the 3-year plan. Once the internal processes, e.g. sign off by Council, are complete, VAA submits the draft plans and the financial allocation plans to the Ministry of Finance in Lithuania who then determine the funds provided to enable VAA to deliver on its strategic plans.

28. Within the 2020-2028 strategic plan the key strategic goals are set out under four headings: Value and Quality, Resources, Finance, and Management and Processes. The purpose of the three-year action plan covering 2020 to 2022 is to help VAA implement its overall 2020-2028 strategy. Nine of its strategic objectives were chosen as priorities for this period, designed to increase the value and quality of studies, optimise material resources, allow VAA to secure more substantial funding and achieve better management indicators. Indicators setting out the extent of intended changes are specified within the three-year plan, although many share the same target increases and thus it is hard to know if all are realistic or represent the same degree of challenge. However, *VAA Strategic Action Plan 2020-2022* detailing the results achieved, makes no reference to the measures or assessment of progress against them. The Panel would suggest that connecting the elements of its process and monitoring of progress against targets will be vital to achieving the ambitions the Academy has set for itself.

29. The SER and its supporting documents refer to sustainability as a key strategic goal of VAA and VAA has produced a Green Deal Course document. The Panel heard from the meeting with the Rectorate that sustainably involves a number of measures including reduction of energy usage. The Rector informed the Panel that VAA had gathered a number of institutions together, and was collaborating with a number of other higher education institutions, to discuss and progress sustainability through the exchange of ideas (Swedish, German and UK universities were involved).

30. The Rector has placed an emphasis on the development of equality and diversity as a strategic aim and equality plans have been drawn up to implement changes in the gender balance of staffing, in more equitable remuneration, in response to the 'Me-Too' movement, and in addressing structural issues, such as disabled access to VAA buildings. In the meetings with staff and students and the Rectorate these intentions towards equality were widely understood and commented on favourably. The Panel commended the work initiated by the Rector and the progress made so far seen, for instance, in challenging the basis of salary variation and looking at gender representation in all levels of the organisation, including top management. The Panel would encourage her and VAA to continue to prioritise action in this area.

31. A number of documents used in the strategic planning and action planning processes, including the strategic action plan and the integrated development strategy, were included as annexes to the SER. The Panel heard in the meetings with academic management that individual faculties and departments also produce their own annual strategic development plans that then feed into the Rector's plan which is presented to and discussed at Senate and Council. While mechanisms seem to exist for the development of action plans at Faculty level, these do not necessarily or systematically involve staff, students and especially external stakeholders. The Panel is of the view that many of the mechanisms to enable stakeholder input would benefit from further formalisation. The Panel considered that an abundance of action plans may mean that planning is not efficient and implementation ineffective. There is a risk of matters being prioritised differently, issues not being all followed up or put into a systematic analysis and implementation structure. In terms of resources to implement the strategic plan the panel heard from academic staff that physical and other resources e.g. academic staffing were available and were regarded highly. The management of the Academy, including Deans, Vice Rectors and administrative staff, also informed the panel that they had adequate staff to implement and monitor the strategic plan.

32. **Monitoring and performance management**. Standard procedures for monitoring and implementation of the strategic action plan are governed by the Statute of VAA, the regulations of the Senate and the Council and are in accordance with the regulations of the Government of Lithuania. The annual report required from the Rector is an important document in outlining progress made towards strategic goals. The Rector also informed the Panel that VAA is subject to a series of internal audits on selected areas of activity and these feed into Rector's report as appropriate. The process of internal review and improvement activities was confirmed in the meeting with administration staff from finance and other administrative areas. The panel found that while there were useful internal and external audits in place, measures that underlie the Academy's strategic plans could be linked more strongly and effectively to grounded targets, milestones, benchmarking (or performance indicators), prioritisation and evaluation to enable the Academy to deliver its ambitions.

33. In order to ensure monitoring of the strategic aims, the *Strategic Action* plan contains a series of quantitative targets; examples of quantitative targets include an increase of 20 percentage points over 3 years in areas including the number of students choosing study an internship abroad, the numbers of students applying to each faculty and the number of international academic staff. The action plan contains indicators of success, e.g. academic recognition of foreign qualifications, increases in internships abroad, and ownership which should be useful in helping VAA monitor its targets although the Panel did not see reports which showed evidence of such monitoring.

34. Benchmarking externally is an important component in how a higher education institution understands how it compares internationally and how its strategic aims relate to global issues and developments. The Panel was interested in how VAA benchmarks its provision against others internationally. The Panel heard from staff and students of a range of interactions internationally e.g. the Academy successfully took up the coordinating position of the KUNO network in 2021, having been the KUNO network member since 2003 and a list of European and other projects the VAA is involved in was included in the SER. VAA is also a partner in a number of international bodies including ELIA, KUNO, Cirrus, NBAA and Cumulus. Whilst noting the number and range of partnerships, it was not clear from meetings with staff and management, how partners were chosen, other than through personal connections or through membership of project groups. The Panel acknowledge that international activity at the grassroots level can be a significant strategic tool to help achieve more effective partnerships. However, given that VAA has ambitious strategic aims regarding internationalisation, the Panel recommends that VAA carefully selects benchmarks and identifies institutions as examples of good practice (or as suitable comparators) worldwide with which to benchmark and that it makes a strategic selection of international activity and partnerships on which to focus. The Panel would suggest that to do so would support the Academy in achieving a more strategic and effective internationalisation policy.

35. Overall, the Panel can confirm that the Strategy and strategic action plans are in place and outline a clear path for VAA. The strategy is ambitious and to be commended and the Academy has in place a number of mechanisms to monitor performance against stated aims but the Panel considers that there is a need for greater clarity on how reaching these ambitious goals will be achieved. VAA has developed an extensive array of plans and documents, in the view of the Panel there will be a need to prioritise and focus on key selected goals and actions. The Panel

saw the ambition of the Academy generally but noted that such a broad mission and vision will present a number of challenges, given the size and scale of VAA, unless the VAA strategically prioritises its plans. The Panel would encourage the Academy to reflect on whether it can achieve the range of its ambitions to the standard and quality it desires.

1.2. Effectiveness of process management of the higher education institution:
1.2.1. A clear structure for governance, decision making and distribution of responsibilities is defined;   *1.2.2. Regular process management analysis is performed, preconditions for process improvement and risk management are planned;*   *1.2.3. Stakeholders are involved in the management process at an adequate level.*

36. **Governance structure and decision making.** The main governance bodies at VAA are the Council, the Senate and the Rectorate. The Council has nine members: one representing the student union, four staff, and four external representatives; they are elected by the Senate. The Senate has 30 members, and is responsible for academic matters: it has six student representatives, elected by a general assembly of the Student Union, and representatives of the academic staff. The Rectorate (or Rector's Office) of eight, consists of the Rector, Vice Rectors, Deans of Faculties and Director of Institute of Art Research. In the meeting with the Rectorate, the Panel heard that the Council is regarded as the governing body of the VAA and the Senate as the academic governance body. The Council has overall responsibility for the direction of the Academy and its financial standing; the Council also monitors its reputation and standing in Lithuania and external relationships. The Senate has more day-to-day responsibility for a range of academic matters.

37. In the meeting with the Council the Panel heard that the functions are prescribed quite strictly by the law, the Council described itself as the equivalent of the upper house of parliament, and that there was a check/balance to the decisions and actions of Rector and of Senate. The Panel did note the large number of meetings that were held by the Council, more than was statutorily required and queried whether these were necessary. The Panel was concerned that more frequent meetings of the Council might be an indication either of the enthusiasm of the Council or of uncertainty of roles amongst the different management bodies of VAA. This was raised with the Rector in the final additional meeting and the Panel was assured that all bodies were clear on their roles and remit.

38. External stakeholders are represented at Council. The Panel met two of these, the Director of a Museum and a Professor from another University. The Panel learned that these external members are able to contribute through formal membership of Council as well as through a variety of informal consultation and information exchange mechanisms across the Academy. One social partner the Panel met, told the Panel that they were happy to be part of the Council and had a long cooperation prior to their membership. They indicated that they raised topical questions, for instance, concerning the training of students, their integration into the labour market etc.

39. The Senate is the governing body for academic matters. It is composed of 30 members elected by the Academy including 6 student representatives elected by the General Assembly of the VAA Student Union; these represent all four faculties of the VAA. The Senate has a number of Committees: Quality of Studies, Arts and Science, Strategic Planning and Economic Affairs, and the Academic Ethics Committee. All Senate committees include student members of the

Senate. The functions and the procedure for the establishment of Academic Council as well as the Council are defined in the Law on Higher Education and Research and the Statute of the Academy. In the meeting with the Senate the staff and students involved had a clear understanding of their role and the students stated that they felt able to be actively involved in the Senate.

40. The SER included a management chart with clearly defined roles and responsibilities and a clear outline of structure. The staff and management that the Panel met seemed broadly clear on the structures and lines of decision making and could articulate their role in that process.

41. The Rector initiated a review of the provision of resources and this review led to significant restructuring in 2020. The Rector told the Panel that this was to ensure that the structures enabled the development of the Academy and the realisation of its strategic aims. A list of programme and structural changes was included in the SER. Major changes included the structuring of faculties by location rather than by programme, and followed the disbanding of the faculty of postgraduate studies in 2019.

42. The Panel heard from a number of meetings, e.g. with staff and social partners, that the organisational changes introduced by the new Rector had resulted in positive impacts and had improved the Academy. Students and staff based in faculties outside of Vilnius did generally feel that they were integrated into the structures, although some participants did say that Vilnius was inevitably the more dominant faculty due to its size. Nonetheless, faculties did generally feel represented at decision-making level and were active in producing their own development plans. Some participants reported that communication with the administration and the Vilnius campus had become better and more efficient, following the increased use of digital communication tools during the Covid-19 related closure. The Panel would encourage VAA to ensure these benefits are not lost.

43. Changes are made on the basis of the analysis of the main lines of action and through a collegial debate. Suggestions are made in various ways, e.g. on the basis of a 'bottom-up' initiative, i.e. considering the proposals of the faculties and their dependent units or from external suggestions. For example, the Panel heard examples of changes being made as a result of matters raised by students e.g. in addressing the start-up problems of a new programme and were informed in the meeting with the Council that, based on an external proposal from social partners, the Ceramic Art Centre and the Argentum Gallery were reorganised in 2020. The Panel could see the evidence of the effectiveness of a number of changes. The Panel especially commends the move to location-based faculties, as well as the bringing together of practical learning resources and laboratories into a shared, rather than departmentally controlled, unit and resource. This had clearly benefited students and their learning.

44. The Panel were also informed that faculties felt part of shaping the strategic goals. One Dean the Panel met told the Panel he sought to introduce the strategic goals to the faculty, then delegated the goals to different areas within the faculty, which then report back on progress against those strategic areas. The Panel were also told that there are mechanisms for reporting upwards and communicating downwards between the different levels. For example, each head of department - both academic and functional - prepares annual performance reports on their area. They are considered by departmental committees and on approval submitted to the Rector for approval.

45. The main qualitative and quantitative data collected include: 1) key activity indicator 2) the results of the implementation of the *Strategic Action Plan*, 3) data on students, including: students' participation in international mobility activities for study and training, and graduates' employment and career data. A report which provides detailed information on the implementation of the *Strategic Action Plan* and the activities of the VAA as a whole, is posted on the VAA intranet and in a separate publication that is distributed to all faculties and departments. Performance indicators are analysed by the responsible functional units and discussed with the study and research units in order to clarify the problems and provide measures to increase operational efficiency.

46. The Study Programme Committees (SPC's), involving representatives of students as well as staff, are an important component of management and of quality. They were regarded as effective by staff, students and management. The committees are guided by Regulations of the Study Programme Committees of the VAA and are accountable to the Vice Rector for Studies.

47. The Student Union (SU) representative's system was understood by them. It was clear to the Panel from meetings that the SU is included in decision-making in the Academy. The SU holds meetings each semester for students from all programmes and departments and encourages students to contact them if they have a problem. However, the Panel also heard that some non-SU students were less clear on the role of the Student Union and how the wider student body engaged with them. Across the Academy, the Panel heard many examples of the ways in which the student voice is heard and how students' views and needs will shape and change provision. The Student Union was aware of its role and generally works well although the Academy could support the Student Union with its communications to ensure that all the wider student body is aware of its role and its representation.

48. The Panel found that the Academy operates a democratic structure with much of the impetus for changes emanating from the programmes and progressing through to the faculty and then to the Rectorate and Senate. The structure was described at various meetings as democratic and organic. These organic democratic structures were seen to be working well by the Academy, but the Panel was of the view that sometimes organic structures can lead to a lack of clarity of reporting and idea generation. To mitigate this, the decision-making process and the roles of those who are involved, as well as how students, staff, and others can appropriately relay their concerns and suggestions into the decision-making process, needs to be clearly documented.

49. **Performance and Risk Management and process improvement.** The management of risk is an important activity for any organisation, not least a university with many obligations to students and society in general. Comprehensive identification and management of risk shows both a self-aware organisation and one building a relationship of integrity with its stakeholders where it shares a true reflection of its external and internal challenges. The Panel was told by the Rector that in VAA risks are managed by different departments, e.g. financial/accounting or by study programme departments.

50. VAA was not able to provide the Panel, when requested, with an appropriately comprehensive risk register. The Panel would highly recommend the design and implementation of a comprehensive risk register, together with a risk ownership and assessment policy, with a process in place for regular review at Rectorate and at Council.

51. **Stakeholders' involvement in management processes**. The involvement of stakeholders is appropriate and adequate and embraces external stakeholders, students and staff. Ground-level voices within the Academy have a means to be heard along with those of with management and leadership roles.

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1.3. Publicity of information on the performance of the higher education institution and its management effectiveness:

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1.3.1. Systematic collection and analysis of the performance data, results (including student employment and graduate career monitoring) is in place, data is used for the improvement of performance of the higher education institution;
1.3.2. Information on the performance of the higher education institution is clear, accurate and accessible to the academic community and the public, and is provided regularly to the founders and members of the legal entity.

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52. **Data collection and analysis and its use for performance improvement.** The last institutional review of the Academy was in 2013, resulting in a series of recommendations. The Panel noted that many of the recommendations have been implemented and improvements have occurred as a result. For example, the previous evaluation report noted that VAA did not have a staff development system in place, and identified the need for a continuous professional development (CPD) policy to be developed, as well as funds allocated for it. In this context, the annual budget of the VAA now includes funds for staff development, in addition to a preliminary annual plan for training, seminars and conferences has been drawn up.

53. The last review also made some recommendations that, in the Panel's view, have not been completely realised. For example, the last review report noted VAA's ambitions regarding internationalisation and recommended the drawing up of an internationalisation strategy. In the meeting with the Rectorate, it was confirmed that VAA do not have a separate internationalisation strategy; rather, internationalisation is part of the integrated corporate strategies. This integration may not be helpful in enabling the Academy to have an overview of progress and to deliver against its ambitions for internationalisation.

54. VAA has in place a number of reporting mechanisms and mechanisms for the collection of data to inform decision making. A key internal mechanism to monitor achievement of objectives and targets is the annual report of the Rector. During various meetings, this report was referred to, and various departments observed that their local reports are used to inform the final content of the Rector's report.

55. The Panel confirmed that there are well established procedures in place to collect student feedback through the use of a variety of student surveys, and that departments and faculties discuss and analyse the findings on an ongoing basis. From the meetings with academic staff and management the Panel noted an over reliance on student surveys to obtain feedback. Low response rates were noted in the SER and the Panel were told of plans to improve these response rates, e.g. making questionnaires simpler, but were not provided with evidence that other mechanisms to gain feedback were being explored e.g. the use of focus groups.

56. Given the reliance on surveys to record feedback the Panel noted that considerable attention had been paid to systemising the surveys on an institution-wide basis to ensure their frequency

and to finding ways of increasing the number of respondents. The monitoring of graduates' careers has been strengthened and moved to become the responsibility of central administration.

57. The Panel did not see any formal feedback surveys from social partners but were told by them that they were able to make their views known in a variety of informal ways, e.g. through contacts with staff directly. The views of social partners are gathered through their representation on governance bodies, e.g. Council, but also through their engagement with the VAA in a variety of projects and partnerships, where they feel able to make suggestions. Social partners the Panel met did feel that their voices could be heard, although the Panel noted that this occurs through a range of informal means as well as formal representative bodies, and that for those not on representative bodies a more formal system could be helpful. The Panel recommends that more formal structures be put in place to ensure the views of social partners are gathered systematically.

58. **Accuracy and accessibility of information.** The Panel observed that extensive and detailed data about the Academy presented on its website, including useful information in the English language. Programme information, entry requirements, scholarships, research initiatives, and accreditation status are all clearly presented. The *Annual Activity Report* is published each year and presented to the appropriate bodies and authorities. Reports are presented on developments in key strategic aims as well as information about student successes and participation in projects and artistic activities.

1.4. Effectiveness of human resource management:
1.4.1. Clear and transparent principles and procedures for the formation, management, evaluation of academic and non-academic staff are established and applied;   1.4.2. The higher education institution has sufficient academic (in-house academic staff) and non-academic staff to meet its operational objectives;   1.4.3. The qualifications of the academic and non-academic staff are appropriate for the purposes of the higher education institution;   1.4.4. Conditions are created for the academic staff to improve the knowledge and skills required for teaching and research activities;   1.4.5. Conditions are created for non-academic staff to develop competencies.

59. **Formation, management and evaluation of staff.** Procedures for the selection and recruitment of staff are regulated by the *Law on Higher Education and Research* and other statutory provisions. Roles and responsibilities of staff are outlined in job descriptions, infrastructure and line of accountability.

60. In accordance with its stated static aims regarding equality and diversity, the VAA collects statistics on the gender and age of its staff. In 2016, the teaching staff comprised 40.8 % women and 59.2 % men. In 2020, it was 44.5 % women and 55.5 % men. In terms of age, since 2016 the lecturers in the age group 25-34 and 45-54 have been increasing and those over 65 decreasing. VAA is making efforts to attract more young professionals to take academic careers.

61. Staff working at least half time increased from ca. 60 % in 2018 to 61 % in 2020. VAA stated in the SER that it is seeking a balance between those teaching and those in arts research or activities. The SER lists a number of arts research and art activities being undertaken by staff in VAA.

62. In the meeting with the Rectorate, the Panel was informed of significant change that had been made to the way salaries and workload were calculated. This was commented on favourably by management and by staff as a more equitable process than the previous model and the Panel commend this approach.

63. The VAA has a standard attestation process in line with national statutory regulations where lecturing staff are reviewed every 5 years. The attestation board has members of VAA and other Lithuanian universities on it. Lecturing staff that the Panel met seemed clear on the process and what they were required to do. When asked what would happen if a member of staff failed the attestation, the Panel were told this had not happened. The Panel feels that greater emphasis should be placed on systematic and individually targeted continuous professional development ()to support staff in addressing shortcomings in advance of the process or identified as part of it.

64. An academic staff questionnaire is in use, and the Panel were provided with a copy which included questions on clear study process, infrastructure, information, CPD, research and the lecturers' voice. In meetings with the staff, they did feel that their views were heard, sometimes through informal conversations, at other times through formal upwards processes of department and faculty reports. Non-academic staff are also surveyed and the results of the surveys indicated that non-academic staff felt supported in their roles, and made positive observations on areas such as emotional well-being and opportunities for professional development. Examples to support this, e.g. staff development opportunities were provided to the Panel in the session with non-academic staff.

65. **Sufficiency of staffing.** Data presented by VAA showed that there has been no major increase in staff over the last 5 years. This was explained by the fact that there has been no major growth in programmes or students' numbers. The staff-to-student ratios are very favourable, and were commented on as strength by teaching staff, students, and graduates that the Panel met. The SWOT analysis noted as an area for consideration that administration staff numbers had decreased during Covid-19. The Panel were informed in the meeting with management and the HR team that this had been purely as a result of not needing as many administrative staff in Covid-19 and that this would be rectified.

66. **Staff qualifications**, **improving academic staff knowledge and skills and the competencies of non-academic staff.** During meetings with the Academy's staff, very many positive examples of training and professional supports that are provided by VAA to individuals were cited. As a result of implementing one of the recommendations from the 2013 review, CPD for academic staff had been reorganised. The Panel was informed that the previous administration developed a plan as to how to respond to the recommendations through plans, with indicators and measures. The CPD process started with a teachers' club as a discussion opportunity and developed from there; CPD now has ring fenced its funds, funds that have grown from 4856 euros in 2016, to 7751 euros in 2020.

67. The examples the Panel received of CPD crossed all units of the Academy and staff members spoke of the ease of access to funding, international travel for relevant academic and research activities, or participation in various European initiatives. Support for publishing articles, participating in Erasmus visits, undertaking technical training pertaining to laboratories or specific skills areas were described. In a meeting with administrative staff the Panel heard of their CPD engagement, e.g. legal training and financial training.

68. In common with other universities, VAA had been required to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic and move to remote teaching and learning. The Panel were informed of training that was provided for staff and students, e.g. technical skills. The Panel noted the intention of VAA to offer a blended learning approach in the future for some programmes and would recommend that consideration needs to be given to pedagogical training and instructional design training to support staff in this approach.

69. International mobility opportunities for staff were cited during the visit meetings. The Panel heard examples of conferences, visits, and stays at other universities abroad, both in the region and further afield and a comprehensive list was included in one of annexes of SER. The SER points out that staff in VAA who went to teach, conduct research, or undertake training in international research and higher education institutions is higher than the Lithuanian average. On the basis of this information, the Panel finds that the VAA is successfully utilizing those opportunities made available to them through the Erasmus+ and Nordplus initiatives, which the Panel encourages the VAA continue to do, preferably as part of a revised, concrete internationalisation strategy.

1.5. Efficiency of financial and learning resource management:
1.5.1. Financial resources are planned, allocated and used rationally; *1.5.2. Various financial resources for the implementation of higher education activities are attracted;* *1.5.3. Learning resources for provision of studies and research (art) activities are planned and used rationally;* *1.5.4. Learning resources for conducting studies and research (art) activities are appropriate, sufficient and available.*

70. **Financial planning, the use of resources and range of resources.** The management of VAA's financial and physical resources are regulated by the *Law on Public Sector Accountability of the Republic of Lithuania*, the public accounting and financial reporting standards. VAA uses a budget accounting and payments system managed by the ministry for strategic budget planning and centralized payments, and, since 2021, the public sector financial accounting common information system. These systems provide VAA with monthly, quarterly, and annual financial reports. The Rector confirmed that financial information can be made available to her at short notice, if needed.

71. The main source of financial planning in VAA emanates from the draft annual *Strategic Action Plan*. This outlines the strategic objectives for the year and the human resources and financial requirements to deliver them. At the beginning of each year, the working group of the Senate's committee on strategic planning and affairs draws up estimates of funds needed and, working jointly with the Rectorate, draws up proposals. These are submitted to the Senate for consideration and are then presented by the Rector and signed off by the Council. The VAA receives funds primarily according to numbers of students, together with its own funds, project funds, including European funding, and sponsorships and SER includes a list of funded European projects.

72. The SER included an analysis of income and expenditure from 2018-2020. The biggest increases in income came from special purpose funds, projects etc. There was also a breakdown of funds according to units, e.g. faculty publishing house income etc. The documentation shows

the financial situation as good. The Panel did note however, that VAA is facing a demographic challenge in the numbers of young people projected to be entering higher education. The SER notes the need to increase non-state funded sources of income. It was suggested in the SER that one way to do this was by increasing the number of international students. The Panel heard that increasing the number of visiting staff and increasing the number of courses taught in English were strategies to help increase the numbers. VAA had provided a list of 13 optional courses taught in English which included calligraphy, printmaking, and history of Lithuanian art. The Panel finds that a more strategically developed plan for increasing international students that can be linked to an institutional internationalisation plan as well as a benchmarking plan, would be of great use for the institution to achieve these goals.

73. Some of the students and graduates met suggested that more core courses are needed in English, although they did, this seemed to operate well at individual level, with students saying that staff responded well to English speakers and adapted their approach. Some students commented on the fact that some key support staff were also English or Russian speakers, which they regarded as helpful. In addition, students and graduates with international backgrounds or experience were positive towards the support they received by the teaching and administrative staff in these regards. Although the arrangements were working well, the Panel did not consider that they would be sustainable if VAA succeeds in increasing its international students and exchanges to the intended levels. Students also reported that non-Lithuanian speaking students would turn to them to help summarise lectures delivered in Lithuanian and it was evident that this was neither sustainable nor reliable.

74. Funding is assigned to faculties according to numbers of students, number of artistic and scientific activities planned, and the needs of the estate and infrastructure. The Panel heard from the Rectorate and from the finance team that funding is planned based on the number of students and the art results, projects and activities with social partners etc. The Panel learned in these meetings that this ensures VAA can deliver its mission to develop and train young artists.

75. A common procedure is in place, all needs are gathered and collected from the ground and then passed on to the Rector's office based on the strategic priorities of VAA, and if possible, these needs are addressed. The cost estimates are developed, and the budget established for the next year. Funding is received from the state and distributed to each department in line with the budget. The staff and heads of units confirmed that each year they broadly know their likely expected budget. This enables them to draw up plans on what they can purchase.

76. In the meeting with heads of units the Panel was told that, once allocated funds have been received, the Dean decides on their distribution according to the objectives set in the Strategic plan and the priorities of the programme. This confirmed to the Panel that a funding structure is in place and works sufficiently, as well as confirming that the heads of units are aware of, and constructively participate in, the VAA attaining its strategic goals.

77. Staff and management told the Panel that they were clear on the process for the allocation of funds. The administrative staff was able to articulate the process and how decisions were made. Based on information in the SER and meetings, good financial systems seem to be in place. Staff appeared to be content with the level of resources they received to run their programmes and they knew of the mechanisms for asking for funding.

78. **Learning resources.** The Academy's building and facilities are managed under a lease agreement. The management of these is described under the *Procedure for the use of funds and the management and disposal of assets of VAA*. The SER details some examples of major infrastructure projects over the past few years, including adaptations to make some buildings more energy efficient, in some cases including the installation of solar Panels in accordance with the plans on sustainability the Green Deal plan.

79. The issue of accessibility is regarded as important by VAA and was mentioned to the Panel in the Sessions with students and with staff. The SER gives examples of renovations on buildings to make them more accessible including the studio buildings at 2 Muitinės Street, Kaunas, and the Nida Art Colony buildings. The Panel heard from the Rector, from the administration and from students and graduates that there are still accessibility issues, in particular in buildings which have protected status for example buildings that are objects of cultural heritage or stand in the zone of cultural heritage (oldtown).

80. Students did say that staff did their best to help students who had accessibility issues in their programmes, but that the state of some buildings could be a barrier to some students attending VAA. The library indicated its ongoing work with improving the availability of its services to students and staff with different disabilities.

81. In terms of the general access to and quality of resources at VAA, the Panel found very favourable accounts of these from staff, students, graduates, and social partners. The library was universally regarded as excellent by staff and students, with responsiveness to requests for purchases especially valued and the addition of new electronic databases was welcomed. The helpfulness of library staff was also commented on by students and alumni. Studio spaces, laboratories, and teaching spaces were highly regarded by students and graduates, and students especially noted how the laboratories were available to all across campuses and faculties. Students commented that they especially valued the access across different faculties, the access to laboratories in all disciplines as well as the availability of studios (including individual studio space) and of materials. All facilities were available if students could travel to them. Technical staff confirmed in their meeting the processes of ensuring health and safety training and adherence at the laboratories. Some students and graduates, e.g. jewellery, did comment that some of the material they had to supply for their projects e.g. gold and silver was expensive, but regarded this as part of being a jewellery student.

82. Gallery spaces and publishing houses are highly regarded and seemed to work well. The publishing house was regraded highly by staff, doctoral students and graduates.

83. **In summary,** the purpose of the Management section of this review is to assess whether and how the strategic planning and management of the Academy is being analysed by the VAA in accordance with the appropriate indicators and criteria. Based on the evidence given in the *Self-Evaluation Report*, additional evidence requested by the Panel, information provided by the SKVC, and the on-line site visit where Sessions with a wide range of stakeholders were held, the Panel found the VAA to be active in systematically developing its management. Although the Panel did not identify any major drawbacks, it did identify a number of areas that require further development and has made a series of recommendations in this regard.

84. **Judgment:** the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks and is given three points.

85. **Recommendations for the area:**

- The Panel commends the ambition of the Academy as set out in its mission and plans, however, it would recommend that it ensures that the planning and measures that underlie its strategic plans are linked more strongly to grounded targets, milestones, benchmarking (or performance indicators), prioritization and evaluation to enable it to deliver its ambitions. The Panel would suggest that VAA begins to consider how it will specify its vision in future to balance breadth and distinctive strengths, noting that some hard decisions may be necessary.

- The Panel noted the strength of VAA's international ambition and breadth current levels of international activity and recommends that, to enable it to achieve its plans, an overall separate strategy for internationalisation be developed to include the use of international benchmarks, a clear rationale for partnerships and clear milestones. *The Panel identified challenges around the achievement of the Academy's international ambitions in connection with all areas of the report and this recommendation should be read in connection with the matters highlighted under Quality Assurance, Studies and Research and in regard to Impact.*

- The Panel recommends that VAA draw up a clear plan for diversifying future non-state income sources, with targets and milestones.

- The Panel recommends VAA develops further its approach to strategic risk through the development of a comprehensive risk register with clear ownership of risk, planned mitigations and regular reporting to review and update the register.

- Many of VAA's strengths have the potential to become weaknesses and the Panel recommends that the Academy keeps the balance between its breadth and its ambition under close review in its strategic planning. *This recommendation links particularly to matters such as the balance between traditional and digital skills, resources and ways of thinking, in light of what designers and artists need to operate effectively in the second quarter of the 21st Century.*

3.2. Quality assurance

Quality assurance area is being analysed in accordance to the following indicators and criteria, set up in the Methodology.

2.1. Implementation and effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system:
2.1.1. The higher education institution has approved and made publicly available internal quality assurance documents that are consistent with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area; *2.1.2. Internal quality assurance measures of planning, implementation and improvement are appropriate, applied periodically and ensure the involvement of the whole institution and stakeholders;* *2.1.3. Processes for planning, implementation, monitoring, periodic evaluation and development of activities are specified;* *2.1.4. Students and academic and non-academic staff of the institution receive effective support;* *2.1.5. Provisions and procedures for academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination, appeal and ethics are specified and applied;* *2.1.6. The results of the external review are used to improve the performance of the higher education institution.*

86. **Publicly available internal quality assurance documents consistent with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG).** The VAA has approved and made publicly available formal internal quality assurance documents that are consistent with the ESG. This information is primarily available in Lithuanian on the VAA website, while the SER (including material in its annexes) and additional documents further explained the VAA's quality assurance work to the Panel.

87. **Internal quality assurance measures of planning, implementation and improvement are appropriate, applied periodically and ensure the involvement of the whole institution and stakeholders.** The Panel found a number of shortcomings in terms of this criterion.

88. Firstly, the VAA's full use of the ESG was not evident to the Panel. ESG 1.1 presents a two-pronged expectation of the institution. It states that institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management, and it also states that internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders. The *VAA Integrated Development Strategy for 2012-2020* (from Dec. 2012) very briefly mentions the implementation of the VAA's current quality assurance system, however, there is insufficient information in that document as to what this system comprises at a meta level. The *Strategy of VAA 2020-2028* (from Dec. 2019) identifies quality as one of four strategic goals, however, it does not clearly explain how quality assurance will link up to the institution's main strategy. Furthermore, the recent *VAA Quality management manual* (from Dec. 2020), where the Panel would expect the quality assurance system to be presented in detail, does not sufficiently bring this system to light.

89. Although the quality assurance system and its processes are presented in the *VAA Quality management manual* the Panel did not find the material on the procedural measures of planning and collecting information from the broad range of stakeholders, including external non-graduate stakeholders and, hence the implementation of the quality assurance actions, sufficient. For example, while the introduction of the manual states that "*the mainstay of the Academy's quality assurance system is internal quality assurance based on the recognition and implementation of the principles of academic ethics (academic honesty, respect, active citizenship, personal responsibility)*", it was difficult for the Panel to assess whether it was the Senate or the Quality office that systematically took an overview of the outcomes of programmes and study areas, in order to identify generic strengths and areas for action – or if indeed either did – and how the input of external stakeholders was formally included in this work. Further examples of shortcomings in the approach to quality assurance were seen in annexes to the SER, one provided basic data on graduate surveys but did not demonstrate what conclusions are drawn from the information or what actions are taken as a result. Another presented data of the questions asked to academic staff, but did not conclude with results, nor analysis, any indication of actions, continuing process, or explanation as to how this information loops back and informs quality assurance processes. Analysis of the student feedback survey completed in the Autumn semester 2017/2018, despite being titled "analysis" is data given in percentages, and does not explore trends, messages, actions etc., which would be expected as part of a quality assurance and improvement system.

90. The template for annual reports by the academic department is a tool to gather a significant amount of important information, but the Panel noted that it does not draw on sources of feedback or, following up feedback or inquire as to how the department has responded to

feedback. The SWOT that forms part of the template could mitigate this shortcoming somewhat, but not in full.

91. The Panel noted that the SER states that, as of 2020, the VAA Studies Office conducts the graduates' feedback surveys, which is an *"important source of information for developing strategies for the VAA activities, assessing the quality of studies, and identifying directions and measures for their improvement."* This Office has taken over this responsibility from the Study Programme Committees (SPC) that had previously been responsible for conducting the surveys. However, it is the same SPCs who are otherwise responsible for the study programmes run by the VAA, in that they develop and improve the content of the programmes, assess their quality, and supervise the quality of the delivery of study programmes.

92. Secondly, the Panel did not find the SER nor the manual to adequately show how the quality assurance system worked in practice. Largely descriptive, both the SER and the manual failed to satisfactorily analyse and offer examples as to how the quality assurance processes take place. Exactly how the collected material is used, in practice, to drive improvement by feeding into the reviewing of plans and informing the implementing of revised plans, and furthermore how necessary changes were later evaluated and fed back into the planning system as a continuing quality assurance and improvement process, was not sufficiently documented. Furthermore, staff met by the Panel were unable to articulate the nature of VAA's approach to quality or the basis for its approach.

93. While it was clear that changes indeed did take place at the VAA, these seemed to stem from informal views expressed at local level. As such, the baseline for the quality assurance work seems at the risk of being arbitrary, and where changes made are not subject to systematic evaluation. Together, this insight indicates a reactionary approach as opposed to systematic approach to quality assurance. This was confirmed in meetings with the stakeholders, where issues for example relating to securing sufficient feedback from staff and students were not sufficiently answered. Largely, this insufficiency seemed to the Panel to be linked to the predominance of informal information sharing over formal structures at the grassroots level, an over-reliance on feedback questionnaires (as opposed to including a wider range of methods such as, for example, interviews with focus groups), and the Academy's overall understanding of how notions of quality and its approach to quality can be significant strategic tools (based on information from the above Sessions).

94. Lastly, this issue links up with ESG 1.7, which states that institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities. While the Panel found a broad range of evidence that the VAA collects quality assurance information and that quality-related changes are made, a significant amount of central material on quality assurance such as the *VAA Quality management manual* is descriptive on a meta-level, rather than analytical and used in relation to the VAA as a particular institution. Furthermore, there was little triangulating evidence of a unified place where records are made available to students or to staff for analytical reasons, making the possibility of a systemised schedule of periodic review unclear.

95. While the VAA partially meets criteria in 2.1.3, the Panel noted that, while these processes are specified at a superficial level, they are not sufficiently detailed and nor are they sufficiently implemented; indicating a possible (future) major drawback.

96. **Students and academic and non-academic staff of the institution receive effective support.** The Panel found ample evidence of VAA both organising and offering effective support in terms of resources, for example: access to technology, access to laboratories, access to library services, along with effective support to use these services. However, some informal information structures seem to create difficulties in presenting these opportunities reliably to all students. For example: access to the laboratories after hours is possible, but students the Panel met did not seem to know how to access/arrange this. In terms of services, the same issue was seen in how students did not feel that psychological support was available to all students independent of campus/faculty, even though the VAA had made provisions so that these services would be available to them, if on a different basis through remote means.

97. However, while technological factors were present in the VAA's PEST analysis in its *Strategy of VAA 2020–2028*, the Panel found little evidence of sufficient and effective support related to the link between technological development and pedagogical teaching developments and contemporary demands. Overall, the Panel did not find sufficient evidence of, or concern about support for, pedagogical support and development in relation to on-line learning environments, digital learning, and teaching strategies, even though staff seemed able to find informal possibilities for Academy pedagogy development. Furthermore, and in relation to this, the Panel did not find sufficient evidence of support for academic staff prior to and following after the attestation. This shortcoming also links up with the quality assurance system as mentioned above.

98. **Provisions and procedures for academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination, appeal and ethics are specified and applied.** VAA seemed to have made significant progress for greater gender equality, however, as was clear from several Sessions, this work has just begun. Work is progressing on accessibility for those with physical disabilities. The Panel was able to confirm that provisions and procedures for academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination, appeal, and ethics are in place. This was confirmed by the Session with students, as well.

99. **Results of the external review are used to improve the performance of the higher education institution.** The Panel found evidence that the VAA had used its last external review to improve its performance. It was clear to the Panel that several actions had been taken, but central areas which have not been sufficiently addressed and progressed as fully as expected are internationalisation and risk (this matter is also discussed above). While these are separate areas, as many other areas covered in this review, they are linked. The underdevelopment of internationalisation and risk, for example, are both associated with the VAA's lack of external (international) benchmarking and reference points for further, strategic development.

100. **In summary,** the purpose of the Quality Assurance section of this review is to assess whether and how quality is being analysed by the VAA in accordance to the appropriate indicators and criteria set. Based on the evidence given in the *Self-Evaluation Report* and its annexes, additional evidence requested by the Panel, information provided by the SKVC and the on-line site visit where Sessions with a wide range of stakeholders were held, the Panel found the VAA to be active in systematically developing quality and, furthermore, the quality assurance work of the VAA is without any major drawbacks.

Nonetheless, while the Panel found that the VAA collects material linked to quality assurance processes, the extent to which this material is collected and the methods by which the VAA both collects, analyses and uses the material in order to improve quality, should be improved.

In its approach to quality assurance, VAA offered a number of examples showing that information is gathered, some evaluations are made, and changes take place, as well as support being offered and provisions in place. However, overall, the Panel found many of these processes to be informal and not systematically applied. There were furthermore some incongruities as to how the quality assurance system works both in structure and in practice. A greater emphasis on pedagogical support would benefit the students and staff, and make it easier for the VAA to reach its overarching strategic goals. This would also be made more attainable through further development and action within internationalisation and risk, as well as benchmarking. These are important issues that must be addressed moving forward.

101. **Judgment:** the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks or and is given three points.

102. **Recommendations for the area:**

• The Panel recommends that VAA further formalises its quality improvement processes to enable it to systemise the evaluation and planning of change.

• VAA should continue to strengthen its feedback systems, to ensure that the feedback obtained provides a sufficiently robust basis for action and that a wider range of voices are heard. This entails continued emphasis on more student feedback through established feedback systems, and includes reviewing the variety of mechanisms by which feedback is collected, analysed, and used.

• VAA should consider additional ways to integrate and to take an overview at institutional level of the outcomes of annual quality monitoring processes, to help it plan overall and strategic changes. This should include departmental processes, student, staff, and external stakeholder feedback, detailing the role of each element within the VAA's institutional level and strategic quality improvement process and linking the quality improvement process with benchmarking and performance measures.

• That VAA defines its approach to quality and model of quality; specifically articulating, as needed, the place of quality assurance, quality compliance, and quality enhancement within the institution's approach, as well as analysing risks to quality and using that risk analysis for quality development. In support of this recommendation the Panel suggests that VAA should consider engaging further with external reference points for quality and different approaches to and concepts of quality.

3.3. Studies and research (art)

Studies and research (art) area is being analysed in accordance to the following indicators and criteria, set up in the Methodology.

3.1. The level of research (art), compatibility of studies and research (art) and its compliance with the strategic aims of activities:
3.1.1. The study and research (art) activities carried out and their results are consistent with the mission and strategic aims of the higher education institution; 3.1.2. The level of research (art) activities is sufficient for the ongoing studies of the higher

103. **Study and research activities consistent with the mission and strategic aims**. The VAA has a unique position in its local context as the only academy for fine arts, design and architecture in Lithuania. Therefore, its mission is defined broadly: To create the future of Lithuanian art, to provide university-level education of international standing in art, design and architecture, and research these fields. Both study programmes and research activities cover a wide area of art, design, architecture, restoration, art history and theory.

104. Teaching staff and researchers are engaged in developing new courses, study programmes and research fields. They feel that their voice is heard within the VAA and they have institutional support for initiating change and improvement. The role of quality assurance and CPD in teaching and research is partly, but not consistently understood among teaching staff and researchers. The principle of person-centred (or student-centred) learning that is stressed in the SER is mainly defined as small study groups that enable each student to get individual attention and learn from practitioners.

105. Students valued the opportunities they have to use all of the laboratories and resources of the Academy, not only those within their own discipline. The Panel considered this, and the breadth of traditional and newer technologies to be a distinctive feature of the study experience provided by VAA. The students appreciate the opportunity to initiate new optional courses and a programme giving small grants to support student projects was rapidly established following the suggestion from students. The graduates that the Panel met all had jobs related to their studies or were self-employed artists or designers. The Panel did ask about business skills in the curriculum with graduates and students, and there was a generally positive response. However, social partners queried the extent to which VAA was effectively developing graduates' digital thinking. Despite the value of the breadth of resources the Panel suggests VAA gives further consideration to the sustainability of its approach and whether it is providing the right balance for the future of Lithuanian art.

106. Both studies and research are supported by a responsive library and purchase policy that appeared to enable students (at all levels) and staff to gain access to the information they required to pursue their research.

107. The VAA's vision is to be among the best universities of art, design, and architecture in the world, but it remains unclear exactly how it is intended this goal is achieved and how progress towards it will be measured.

108. **Level of research is sufficient for the ongoing studies of the higher education institution**. Research activities cover a wide range of topics and researchers are involved in many cooperation projects with institutions outside of the VAA. The VAA regularly organises conferences, seminars, and workshops, and supports research events and publications. There is enough evidence of the high level of some research and its local impact, with members of staff declaring over 1000 artistic outputs each year between 2017 and 2020. These include, exhibitions, curatorships, publications and commissioned works with a number being recognised with prizes and awards. The sustainability of research activities is supported by the student

research projects supported by the Lithuanian Research Council and other programmes. Research staff regularly make research trips and attend international events, but the number of active participation (e.g. conference presentations) is rather low (eight over a five-year period), especially in light of VAA's vision.

109. The yearly number of defended doctoral dissertations is high, with between six and nine each year from 2016 to 2020, and would compare favourably with other art schools in the EHEA and several graduates have won scholarships for postdoctoral training. The PhD programme in artistic research is thoroughly developed although not yet formally recognised within the wider research system in Lithuania. Some of the graduates of the programme teach at the VAA, but its research staff is still mainly composed of art historians. Artistic researchers are valued within the VAA, but they also are not fully recognised by the wider research system. Therefore the role of a doctorate in the careers of people with PhD in art, design, or architecture remains unclear, even if efforts have been made by the VAA (negotiations with Lithuanian Research Council) to gain wider recognition for artistic research.

110. **Studies are based on research (art).** The importance of research as a basis for studies is stressed in the SER and student research activities are encouraged and supported in many ways (such as the recent introduction of small scholarships), but VAA would benefit from a more strategic approach. Studies are informed and developed by research mainly through individuals who integrate their research outcomes into the courses they teach and PhD students they supervise. This makes the relationship between studies and research arbitrary and heavily dependent on individual interests and activities (and on students' personal motivation to engage in research). Research fields in humanities are described very broadly; in artistic and practice-based research no focus areas are defined. Identifying more specific areas of competence that would bring together a group of scholars would help with more systematic student engagement, development of new study programmes and research fields.

111. **Consistent recognition of foreign qualifications, partial studies and prior non-formal and informal learning is performed.** Recognition of foreign qualifications, partial studies and prior non-formal and informal learning is clearly described in the SER, well organised and appropriate for a higher education institution.

> *3.2. Internationality of studies, research (art):*
>
> *3.2.1. The higher education institution has a strategy for internationalisation of research (art) and study activities (including indicators of internationalisation), means for its implementation, and measurements of the effectiveness of these activities are performed (not applicable to colleges unless provided for in its strategic documents);*
>
> *3.2.2. The higher education institution integrates aspects of internationalisation into the content of studies and research (art) activities.*

112. **The higher education institution has a strategy for internationalisation of research and study activities, means for its implementation, and measurements of the effectiveness of these activities are performed.** The Panel was not provided with an internationalisation strategy, even if aspects of internationalisation are integrated in many other documents, for instance, its importance is stressed and international activities are described in the SER. International mobility is supported by a well-functioning Erasmus+ programme; international

cooperation is strengthened by participating in networks and associations like KUNO, CIRRUS, NBAA, ELIA and CUMULUS. There is strong evidence that both teaching staff and researchers work internationally, but these activities are mostly either carried out individually or stem from informal contacts and networks without a more systematic institutional approach. The possible key partners for developing certain study fields or research areas are not identified, even if lists of numerous partner institutions are provided.

113. The percentage of outgoing and incoming students is relatively low compared with EU norms (around 5-6%). Those students who have spent a semester abroad highly value the experience and said that the programmes are well organised and students may also be engaged in various international projects organised by the VAA. International teaching staff and researchers are welcomed and appreciated. Compared to a strong local impact, the number of international publications and conference presentations is relatively low: defined plans to raise these numbers would support VAA to make progress towards its strategy to 2028. VAA undertakes a wide range of international activities, but without a more strategic and selective approach it is difficult to measure their impact and sustainability.

114. **The VAA integrates aspects of internationalisation into the content of studies and research activities.** Aspects of internationalisation are integrated into the studies and research. However, this did not appear to be supported by a consistent approach to the curriculum or an articulated pedagogy. For instance, a definition of what internationalisation means for study programmes or an approach that ensures that all students gain insights into leading international debates and practices in their discipline. The Panel were told that doctoral students in history and theory were required to have an international paper before being able to progress to their defence; but that there was no equivalent requirement for practice-based doctoral work. The Panel would suggest that debate about the purpose of international engagement in contemporary practice in arts and design in doctoral studies be given further consideration by the Academy. Without a more strategic approach it is difficult to measure impact and sustainability.

115. **In summary,** there are clear strengths by these are partially undermined by the reliance on an informal culture that can result in arbitrary results. Both studies and research activities are developed on high level and have a strong local impact, the teaching staff and researchers are active and engaged, the students appreciate the opportunities, skills and personal approach in teaching offered by the VAA, but many processes are undermined by the lack of strategic planning (especially internationalisation) and rely on informal procedures.

116. **Judgment:** the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks and is given three points.

117. **Recommendations for the area:**

- The Panel recommends that VAA continues to work toward the wider recognition of artistic research in order to help create a career path for artists, designers and architects with PhDs, to enable them to carry out post-doctoral and further research projects and become a part of researchers' community both in the VAA and internationally.

- The Panel considers that VAA's approach to the development of research is too broad and recommends the key areas of research focus are identified and defined; it recommends that these are then developed in relation to studies and international partnerships and would

encourage the formation of research groups and collaboration between theoreticians and practitioners.

118. **Good practice examples:**

- Students are exceptionally well supported in terms of resources: the laboratories are easily accessible for everyone, the library swiftly orders materials necessary for research and other projects, the students can apply for small grants to pursue particular projects, including to make short study visits.

3.4. Impact on regional and national development

Impact on regional and national development area is being analysed in accordance to the following indicators and criteria, set up in the Methodology.

4.1. Effectiveness of the impact on regional and national development:
4.1.1. The higher education institution carries out an analysis of national and (or) regional demands, identifies the needs to be met and foresees the potential impact on national and (or) regional development; *4.1.2. The monitoring, analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures on national and (or) regional development are performed.*

119. **VAA carries out an analysis of national and regional demands, identifies the needs to be met and foresees the potential impact on national and regional development; monitoring, analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures on national and regional development are performed**. In line with its strategic objective to *"strengthen the Academy's impact in the field of culture and art on a national and international scale"* and as one of the main higher schools of art, design and architecture in the Republic of Lithuania, VAA has a strong influence on the national cultural field. In the SER VAA detailed the work and activity undertaken by each of its four faculties, by the Nida Art Colony and Panemunė Castle indicating impacts locally, regionally and nationally. However, in the view of the Panel VAA could exploit its potential to have a social impact more fully. Greater opportunities for synergies between faculties are clearly visible. For example, there could be a greater dissemination of professional art through traveling exhibitions, many of which are in Vilnius and few in Kaunas or Klaipeda (developing relationships with local organisations where faculties do not have galleries), as well as increasing the accessibility of Academy publications to residents of other cities than Vilnius. The Academy should also not miss the planned implementation of the BIM standard in Lithuania, preparing architects and designers for these digital challenges in a timely and appropriate manner (and linking both the curriculum and lifelong learning with its ability to respond to needs). Fuller and more strategic use of the very important role of the Alumni should be made and used more carefully as a vital link between the real and the academic world.

120. The detailed information in the SER on the range of activity conducted by VAA was reinforced during the meetings, especially with social partners. Partners illustrated the strong and symbiotic relationship with a number of organisations and the especially important role of VAA in Telšiai through its faculty there. Many examples could be cited of close partnerships and interesting outputs, some of these are: important international research on Lithuanian Jewish Synagogues; VAA's work with leading organisations (such as acting as the coordinating

institution together with its Lithuanian Cultural Research Institute and the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre in a joint doctoral programme); the work of the Telšiai Gallery and Kauno Fotografijos Galerija; of the Design Innovation Centre; and 'Laisvės kariai – dizaino tyrimo pristatymas' *('Freedom Soldiers: A Presentation of Design Research')* the Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania and the Lithuanian Council for Culture.

121. The Panel were especially impressed by the work and activity of the Nida Art Colony. This includes the residency programmes and the opportunities provided to students, researchers and artists. The Nida Art Colony is a unique and, in the view of the Panel, special resource that the Academy would be well served to celebrate and promote more widely. Panemunė Castle is also worthy of note both as an attraction and venue in itself (with over 20,000 visitors a year) and through the opportunities it provides for students, particularly in the field of restoration. These examples and wider evidence in the SER illustrate the active role of VAA in its communities, its local and national impact.

122. The Academy seeks to have a broader influence, it states: The VAA is not limited to the cities or regions where its Faculties are located. It is an active participant in the cultural, artistic and scientific field, influencing and contributing to change in the Baltic, Central and Eastern European regions. It was evident that the work and potential for cultural influence of VAA goes further than the regions or cities where the VAA faculties are located through its participation in work across the wider region. VAA staff spoke of the region to the east of Lithuania (Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan) as "mentally close" and to which international cooperation is directed.

123. On a wider level, the most visible international recognition achieved is VAA Nida Art Colony's curation of the Lithuanian national pavilion at the Venice Art Biennale in 2019 and award of the Golden Lion. VAA staff and doctoral students were also represented at the 56th and 57th Biennales.

124. Students and graduates met by the Panel valued the opportunities provided to work with a range of partner organisations and to gain experience be it to exhibit as artists, to take up internships or to work on restoration projects. Graduates continue to benefit from opportunities directed to them by VAA staff and expressed the wish for such opportunities to be extended after the studies.

125. In general the SER tended to list projects rather than to detail their contribution to change or quantify impact. The mechanism and monitoring system for measuring and improving social impact are not defined or evidenced with an absence of structured process of monitoring, assessing and for anticipating. Planning appeared to be carried out as always ways has been and in a fragmented or reactive rather than systematic and strategic way. Processes mainly seemed to rely on personal contacts and initiatives and through informal relations although the VAA's *Strategy 2020-2028* clearly identifies social influence and prioritisation of that field. As a consequence the Panel considers that VAA could better exploit its existing resources and potential to have a social impact. Here, as elsewhere, these reactive and somewhat arbitrary ways of working reinforced the view of the Panel that VAA needs to develop a fuller range of international benchmarks to enable it to assess the impact of its activities and to direct its efforts strategically and with greater discrimination.

4.2. Assurance of conditions for lifelong learning:

4.2.1. The higher education institution monitors and analyses the need for lifelong learning;
4.2.2. The higher education institution anticipates the diversity of forms and conditions of lifelong learning and ensures their implementation;
4.2.3. The higher education institution performs the evaluation of assurance of conditions for lifelong learning.

126. **VAA monitors and analyses the need for lifelong learning, anticipates the diversity of forms and conditions of lifelong learning and ensures their implementation; provides a diversity forms and conditions of lifelong learning; and performs the evaluation of assurance of conditions for lifelong learning.** The main audience VAA targets in creating opportunities for lifelong learning are those children and adults seeking to acquire experiences or knowledge in the fields of art, design and architecture [*VAA Strategy 2020-2028*]. The VAA's *Strategy 2020-2028* clearly indicates expected prioritisation in its lifelong learning offering. Lifelong learning and specialised programmes (courses, camps, competitions) are, however, given 3, the lowest level of priority.

127. The Open School of Art, Design and Architecture (ADDAM in Lithuanian) is the principal programme through which lifelong learning is offered. A wide range of art, architecture and design expression courses are held by VAA in the evenings and on weekends in Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda and Telšiai. ADDAM is presented by VAA as one of the key ways it delivers lifelong learning opportunities.

128. Information about ADDAM is readily accessible through VAA's website. In Vilnius individuals may register via the website with contact details provided in VAA's other locations. The main goal of ADDAM is to help prepare prospective students for admission to VAA. This may extend participation by those who would not otherwise have studied arts and better prepare them for degree-level study, and the availability of courses at each of VAA's sites across Lithuania is a strength, but is not lifelong learning in the sense of wider community learning and or leaning for individual enrichment.

129. The ADDAM programme is accessible to people with disabilities, but the number of people with disabilities enrolled in the program is not high ranging from 3 to 6 enrolments annually out of total enrolments of over 500 and has declined. Set against national data the decline could be significant, although it may have been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, the Panel considered that VAA should seek to ensure that it has clear actions in place actively to promote the opportunities it provides to disabled audiences to ensure that the decrease is reversed.

130. VAA offers other forms of lifelong learning. Individuals may study as a free mover. The Academy has made it possible for free movers to attend selected study subjects; after completing and passing an exam, free movers receive a certificate of academic giving the evaluation of subjects studied and the number of credits obtained.

131. VAA website also indicates another form of lifelong learning in the form of additional studies at Master's level. These are paid studies for those able to demonstrate sufficient competencies i.e. the attitudes, skills and knowledge required for successful studies at master's level.

132. Educational activities are offered at VAA's unique and historic sites such as at Panemunė Castle and at The Telšiai City Public Library, which carries out joint educational projects with the city's educational institutions, or the Telšiai City Business Incubator.

133. More broadly, in 2019-2020, VAA provided educational services through a Culture Passport programme supported by the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Lithuania. These educational activities were booked by schools all over Lithuania.

134. The VAA seeks to monitor and analyse the need for lifelong learning by collecting information through surveys and informal forms of feedback. In meetings the Panel heard that the Academy emphasised that it conducts an assessment of the provision of lifelong learning conditions through informal communication. However, the Panel considered that were VAA to develop a stronger structure for its lifelong learning initiatives it could extend its links into the community and, from surveys and interviews based on what graduates and established practitioners need, it should be able to loop back and proactively strengthen its study programmes, equipping students with industry/sector-needs, especially in terms of digital technologies.

135. The VAA does not have a performance evaluation system in place for lifelong learning, it relies on fragmented feedback surveys (i.e. not delivered or utilised systematically) and informal communication. Courses appeared largely to be long-standing, to reproduce and continue what had been delivered previously with the course structure formed from the past, thus the Panel was not convinced that VAA could demonstrate that it monitors and analyses the need for lifelong learning, anticipates needs or evaluates effectiveness in meeting the needs or the diversity of lifelong learning.

136. The general picture gained by the Panel is that many good activities are carried out, but many are isolated or fragmented, without a unified strategy. Fragmented or partial communication was also evident. For instance, the Panel heard that graduates found that communication with the alumni is mainly through personal initiatives from the alumni themselves, or from department heads or lecturers [evidence collected during interview with alumni, there are few closed Facebook groups with alumni for some departments]. This approach can be beneficial for some but it lacks transparency and may deny opportunities to others. Graduates expressed a strong interest in particular areas of development, especially linked to business skills. The Panel considered VAA has considerable potential to strengthen its position as a continuing education institution for active artists/designers/etc.

137. Assessing some of the uncertainties and inconsistencies in the evidence, the Panel concluded that the VAA does not have a clear strategy for Lifelong Learning and that its approach is underdeveloped. Some shortcomings in the ongoing programmes were evident, such as the potential for more active participation of wider groups of people and communication failures.

138. **In summary,** there is strong evidence of the local/regional and national impact of VAA, many examples of activity were provided in the SER and confirmed by interviews, much of it outstanding. However there is an absence of structured process of monitoring, assessing, anticipating. Planning is carried out 'as always', in a fragmented way. Processes mainly rely on personal contacts and initiative rather than being systematically approached.

139. **Judgment:** the area is being developed systematically, without any major drawbacks and is given three points.

140. **Recommendations for the area:**

- A systematic approach to lifelong learning is needed and the Panel would recommend that VAA develop a structured approach to the more active participation of wider groups of people, including those with disabilities, and to develop a clear plan to promote lifelong learning to the communities in which it works.

141. **Good practice examples:**

- The Panel regards the Nida Art Colony and its residency programme, as well as its curation of Lithuania's pavilion at the Venice Biennale, as an example of outstanding national and international practice well worthy of wider promotion internationally.

IV. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

The Panel identifies the following examples of good practice in:

Studies and research (art):

- Students are exceptionally well supported in terms of resources: the laboratories are easily accessible for everyone, the library swiftly orders materials necessary for research and other projects, the students can apply for small grants to pursue particular projects, including to make short study visits.

Impact on regional and national development:

- The Panel regards the Nida Art Colony and its residency programme, as well as its curation of Lithuania's pavilion at the Venice Biennale, as an example of outstanding national and international practice well worthy of wider promotion internationally.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCEMENT

The Panel's recommendations for further enhancement are:

Management:

- The Panel commends the ambition of the Academy as set out in its mission and plans, however, it would recommend that it ensures that the planning and measures that underlie its strategic plans are linked more strongly to grounded targets, milestones, benchmarking (or performance indicators), prioritisation and evaluation to enable it to deliver its ambitions. The Panel would suggest that VAA begins to consider how it will specify its vision in future to balance breadth and distinctive strengths, noting that some hard decisions may be necessary.

- The Panel noted the strength of VAA's international ambition and breadth current levels of international activity and recommends that, to enable it to achieve its plans, an overall separate strategy for internationalisation be developed to include the use of international benchmarks, a clear rationale for partnerships and clear milestones. *The Panel identified*

challenges around the achievement of the Academy's international ambitions in connection with all areas of the report and this recommendation should be read in connection with the matters highlighted under Quality Assurance, Studies and Research and in regard to Impact.

- The Panel recommends that VAA draw up a clear plan for diversifying future non-state income sources, with targets and milestones.
- The Panel recommends VAA develops further its approach to strategic risk through the development of a comprehensive risk register with clear ownership of risk, planned mitigations and regular reporting to review and update the register.
- Many of VAA's strengths have the potential to become weaknesses and the Panel recommends that the Academy keeps the balance between its breadth and its ambition under close review in its strategic planning. This recommendation links particularly to matters such as the balance between traditional and digital skills, resources and ways of thinking, in light of what designers and artists need to operate effectively in the second quarter of the 21st Century.

Quality assurance:

- The Panel recommends that VAA further formalises its quality improvement processes to enable it to systemise the evaluation and planning of change.
- VAA should continue to strengthen its feedback systems, to ensure that the feedback obtained provides a sufficiently robust basis for action and that a wider range of voices are heard. This entails continued emphasis on more student feedback through established feedback systems, and includes reviewing the variety of mechanisms by which feedback is collected, analysed, and used.
- VAA should consider additional ways to integrate and to take an overview at institutional level of the outcomes of annual quality monitoring processes, to help it plan overall and strategic changes. This should include departmental processes, student, staff, and external stakeholder feedback, detailing the role of each element within the VAA's institutional level and strategic quality improvement process and linking the quality improvement process with benchmarking and performance measures.
- That VAA defines its approach to quality and model of quality; specifically articulating, as needed, the place of quality assurance, quality compliance, and quality enhancement within the institution's approach, as well as analysing risks to quality and using that risk analysis for quality development. In support of this recommendation the Panel suggests that VAA should consider engaging further with external reference points for quality and different approaches to and concepts of quality.

Studies and research (art):

- The Panel recommends that VAA continues to work toward the wider recognition of artistic research in order to help create a career path for artists, designers and architects with PhDs, to enable them to carry out post-doctoral and further research projects and become a part of researchers' community both in the VAA and internationally.
- The Panel considers that VAA's approach to the development of research is too broad and recommends the key areas of research focus are identified and defined; it recommends that these are then developed in relation to studies and international

partnerships and would encourage the formation of research groups and collaboration between theoreticians and practitioners.

Impact on regional and national development:

- A systematic approach to lifelong learning is needed and the Panel would recommend that VAA develop a structured approach to the more active participation of wider groups of people, including those with disabilities, and to develop a clear plan to promote lifelong learning to the communities in which it works.